



# FEMALE FOOTBALL PLAYERS AND FANS

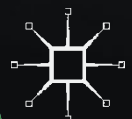
Intruding into a Man's World

*Edited by* GERTRUD PFISTER  
*and* STACEY POPE



FOOTBALL RESEARCH IN  
AN ENLARGED EUROPE

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Gertrud Pfister • Stacey Pope  
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# Female Football Players and Fans

Intruding into a Man's World

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Football Research in an Enlarged Europe

ISBN 978-1-137-59024-4

ISBN 978-1-137-59025-1 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59025-1>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018930343

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Cover illustration: Cultura RM/Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature

The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd.

The registered company address is: The Campus, 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW, United Kingdom

# Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we would like to express our thanks and gratitude to the authors who have contributed to this edited collection.

We are also indebted to the 'FREE project' (Football Research in an Enlarged Europe) which was funded by the Seventh Framework Programme for Research of the European Union (Project Reference: 290805 (<http://www.free-project.eu/Pages/Welcome.aspx>)). Findings of this project were presented at the conference 'Women's Football: Played. Watched. Talked About', which took place at the University of Copenhagen in 2013. Many of the presentations and ongoing discussions following this conference focused on the topics of this book and some of the presenters were recruited as authors of the chapters.

We are grateful to Professor Albrecht Sonntag and Dr David Ranc for the invitation to contribute to FREE book series and to Palgrave for their assistance with this publication. We would also like to note our thanks to Kate Petty for her attention to detail in the proof reading of the text and to Dr Aage Radmann for the support he has offered with this book.

Finally, we are grateful to the following publishers for permission to use copyright material that has previously been published.

Chapter 2 was originally published as:

Scraton, S., Fasting, K., Pfister, G., & Bunuel, A. (1999) "It's Still a Man's Game": The Experiences of Top Level European Women

vi      **Acknowledgements**

Footballers', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 34 (2), pp. 99–111. Copyright © [ISSA and Sage Publications]. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications.

Chapter 3 was originally published as:

Pfister, G. (2013) 'Women, Football and European Integration. Aims and Questions, Methodological and Theoretical Approaches', *Annales Kinesiologiae*, 4 (1), pp. 29–43. Available at: <http://ojs.zrs.upr.si/index.php/AK/article/view/19/>

Portions of Chap. 8 originally appeared as:

Pope, S. & Williams, J. (2011) 'White Shoes to a Football Match!: Female Experiences of Football's Golden Age in England', *Transformative Works and Cultures* 6. Article <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0230>. URL: <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/230/204>

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
	<i>Stacey Pope and Gertrud Pfister</i>	
<b>Part I</b>	<b>Women's Football and Female Players</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>It's Still a Man's Game? The Experiences of Top-Level European Women Footballers</b>	<b>19</b>
	<i>Sheila Scraton, Kari Fasting, Gertrud Pfister, and Ana Bunuel</i>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Women, Football and European Integration: Aims, Questions, Methodological and Theoretical Approaches</b>	<b>37</b>
	<i>Gertrud Pfister</i>	
<b>4</b>	<b>The Beginnings of Women's Football in South-Western Germany: From a Spectacle to a Sport Event</b>	<b>55</b>
	<i>Markwart Herzog</i>	



<b>5</b>	<b>Women's Football Leagues in Europe: Organizational and Economic Perspectives</b>	77
	<i>Marie-Luise Klein</i>	
<b>6</b>	<b>Outsiders on the Inside: Integrating Women's and Men's Football Clubs in England</b>	103
	<i>Jo Welford</i>	
<b>7</b>	<b>'Who Could Name an England Women's Footballer?': Female Fans of Men's Football and Their Views of Women's Football in England</b>	125
	<i>Stacey Pope</i>	
<b>Part II</b>	<b>Female Football Fans and their Experiences</b>	155
<b>8</b>	<b>A Socio-Historical Account of Female Experiences of Football's Golden Age in England</b>	157
	<i>Stacey Pope and John Williams</i>	
<b>9</b>	<b>Is There a Life Beyond Football? How Female Fans Integrate Football into Their Everyday Lives</b>	185
	<i>Verena Lenneis and Gertrud Pfister</i>	
<b>10</b>	<b>'One Is Not Born, But Rather Becomes a Fan': The Socialization of Female Football Fans—A Case Study in Denmark</b>	211
	<i>Gertrud Pfister, Svenja-Maria Mintert, and Verena Lenneis</i>	
<b>11</b>	<b>Women's Football Supporter Culture in Sweden</b>	241
	<i>Aage Radmann and Susanna Hedenborg</i>	
<b>12</b>	<b>Challenging or Accommodating the Football System? A Case Study of Female Football Supporter Communities in Spain</b>	259
	<i>Ramón Llopis-Goig and Helena Flores</i>	

<b>13</b>	<b>Gender, Play and Identity: A Longitudinal Study of Structure and Agency in Female Football Fandom</b>	<b>279</b>
	<i>Cornel Sandvoss and Emily Ball</i>	
	<b>Index</b>	<b>309</b>

# List of Tables

Table 6.1	Explanation of club categorizations	110
Table 9.1	Details of the interviewees	192
Table 10.1	Socio-demographic data of the interviewees	219
Table 11.1	Percentage of female attendants in European countries	242

# 1

## Introduction

Stacey Pope and Gertrud Pfister

### Introduction

In many countries and regions of the world football (better known in the United States as soccer) is the most popular sport; it attracts millions of participants and billions of people who are interested in the game. Football plays a crucial role in the everyday lives of many fans who identify with their clubs, teams and players. Numerous fans attend football games in the stadium, and some may even plan their everyday lives around the match schedules of their teams. But football is not only important to those fans who (can) attend matches in the stadium, but also to billions of people who watch the game on television or via live streaming on their digital devices, which allow football fans to follow football from wherever they are.

Players have also become increasingly accessible and recognizable to football fans—even to those with no interest in the sport. Whannel

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(2002, p. 108) showed how transformations of the media industry led to changes in the nature of sport stardom between 1945 and 1965 and describes how the rise of television coverage was crucial in this process: television brought ‘the faces of the famous’ directly into the home and ensured that male football players acquired a ‘celebrity’ status. In recent times, web 2.0 technology, global media and new networking sites have helped to make football and football players even more accessible. Current players can, for example, use social media such as Twitter and Instagram to intensify old and build new relationships with supporters and fans and also to connect with others involved in the sport including coaches, referees, pundits and former players (see The Football Collective 2016).

Besides being the most popular spectator sport with billions of fans, football is also the most popular sport by participation. Although the game is still predominantly played by boys and men, the number of female players is continuously increasing. Whereas a FIFA survey in 2006 estimated that 26 million girls and women played football worldwide, both as registered and as occasional players (Kunz 2007), the FIFA Women’s Football Survey 2014 showed that the number of girls and women who play this game had increased to over 30 million, and that over 4.8 million players were registered (FIFA 2014). In Europe, statistics have also shown that there has been an increase not only in the numbers of female players, but also in the number of coaches and referees in recent years (UEFA 2017).<sup>1</sup> Although some caution needs to be exercised around how these statistics have been compiled, especially when estimating the numbers of female participants (see Williams 2014), there is no doubt that football is the most popular sport in the world in terms of both participation and spectatorship (Bridgewater 2014).

It is not surprising, therefore, that there are innumerable popular and academic texts about football which cover a multitude of aspects—from the knee injuries of the forwards to the love affairs of popular players. Football fans, too, gained and continue to gain increasing attention among scholars. In particular, the appearance and the behaviour of various men’s fan groups, such as hooligans and ultras, were and still are at the centre of attention, not only of scholars but also of journalists and the general public (e.g., see Armstrong 1998; Braun and Vliegenthart 2008; Rookwood and Pearson 2012; Spaaij 2008; Stott and Pearson 2007).

However there are numerous questions which have not even been asked, let alone answered, and this refers in particular to female football followers and fans.

What motivates so many men and a growing number of girls and women to spend time at the stadium or in front of TV screens following men's teams and male players? What are the women's experiences as fans in a men's world and what benefits do they gain? Does football create a bonding and an understanding among fans from different countries and cultures or does it create tensions and animosities between fans of different teams? Does football contribute to the development of a European identity among the people living in various countries and regions or does it create or increase animosities? These and other questions motivated a group of scholars from eight countries to apply for a research project on 'Football Research in an Enlarged Europe: Identity dynamics, perception patterns and cultural change in Europe's most prominent form of popular culture'. This project focused on football and fandom in a European context and explored among other issues the social and sport-related backgrounds of football fans, their roles and behaviour at the stadium, as well as their social relations in and beyond the boundaries of their countries. In short: the FREE project—Football Research in an Enlarged Europe—investigated fandom and its influences on cross-cultural dialogues in Europe. One of the six sub-projects had a focus on the role of girls and women in intercultural dialogues of fans and was conducted by one of the editors of this book, Gertrud Pfister, and a PhD student. The questions addressed in this sub-project included the initiation of girls and women into football fandom, their roles in the fan communities and the integration of fandom in their everyday lives. These issues were explored via a survey, qualitative interviews and participant observations.

Some of the results of the FREE project are presented in the contributions of Pfister, Lenneis and Mintert in this book which contains an edited collection of football studies. It includes not only results of the FREE project, but also some of the presentations given at a conference on the topic of 'Women's Football: Played. Watched. Talked About' which was organized by three sociologists and football researchers working at the Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports at the University of Copenhagen in 2013. *During* this event one of the conference organizers,

Gertrud Pfister, and Stacey Pope, one of the keynote speakers, conceived the idea of publishing a book to include not only some of the conference presentations, but also studies based on research and discussions that followed the conference. We chose a provocative title: *Female Football Players and Fans: Intruding into a Man's World* because we wanted to emphasize that, despite the recent gains girls and women have made in the various fields of this sport, football remains a largely 'male preserve' (Dunning 1994; Magrath 2017).

Some of the articles of this book draw upon the extensive body of work on female football players, but focus on new aspects of, and perspectives to this topic which has already attracted the interest of a number of scholars (e.g., see Agergaard and Tiesler 2014; Caudwell 2004, 2012; Dunn 2016; Dunn and Welford 2015; Williams 2003, 2007, 2013). In addition, the book addresses the dearth of research on female football fans and provides insights into gender issues which have not been addressed in the existing fan studies (e.g., see Cere 2012; Dunn 2014; Jones 2008). Although there has been a growing interest in female fans (e.g., see Cere 2012; Dunn 2014; Jones 2008; Lenneis and Pfister 2015; Pfister et al. 2013; Pope 2011, 2016, 2017), many issues and perspectives of this phenomenon have not been the focus of the—mostly male—football researchers. In contrast to the large body of knowledge about male football supporters, studies on female fans are at present still few and far between and there is still much work to be done to redress the underrepresentation of women in research on sports fandom (Mewett and Toffoletti 2011). As Pope has argued in a recent book, there is a need for research on sports fans in general to incorporate women's experiences 'rather than either: ignoring women and focusing solely on issues which are not relevant for women (as has been the case in the body of work of fan rivalry and hooliganism), labelling women as "inauthentic" supporters; and/or "adding" female fans to research which is primarily focused upon male fans' (Pope 2017, p. 4).

Furthermore, this edited collection of studies on female fans is also of considerable importance because football has become an increasingly popular spectator sport for girls and women. Pope (2017) has argued that there has been a *Feminization of Sports Fandom* in contemporary society which indicates the increasing numbers of female fans and their

opportunities to become involved in football, one of the most popular sports (although it is still dominated by men). This development is confirmed by statistics which show that in some countries women and girls make up an integral component of the sports crowd in football stadiums. For example, in the United Kingdom and in Germany, around 20–30 per cent of fans of Premier league and of Bundesliga teams are women (Premier League 2017; Fürtjes 2012, cited in Lenneis and Pfister 2015). Thus, although the majority of European women may not be very interested in football, there is a number of female fans who need to be included in academic research and publications on sports fans.

Pope theorizes that this process of feminization began in the 1990s and identifies two main factors for this development. First, there have been major transformations in women's lives—at least in Western countries—which have enhanced their opportunities to engage in leisure activities, including sports fandom. Such changes began with the women's liberation movements of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and had a large influence upon women's lives up until today. These changes occurred in the spheres of work and employment, education, and health care, with greater access to contraceptives providing women with influence on fertility and family size which, on average, has subsequently declined. From the 1990s there has also been a major structural shift in gender relations which has changed the balance of power between the sexes, allowing women a measure of freedom and control over their lives. These societal changes enhanced women's autonomy and opportunities to engage in leisure activities, including those activities which were traditionally reserved for men, such as football fandom.

Second, major changes occurred in professional sports with regard to the stadiums and facilities. This included the move to all-seater stadia, which were introduced in the United Kingdom in the 1990s after the Hillsborough disaster of 1989. A similar process of modernization has also occurred in stadia in other European countries; Paramio et al. (2008) define football grounds built after the 1990s as 'postmodern stadia'. Such modern stadiums have to be built according to strict safety regulations, meaning that there is more numbered seating accommodation in stands as well as increasing standards of comfort and security. These changes have arguably created a welcoming environment for women and



a 'female-friendly' atmosphere, which led to an increase in the numbers of female spectators. These changes coincided also with major changes in women's lives (e.g., with increasing numbers of women working outside of the home) and in women's 'typical' life cycles (e.g., with family size declining), but also with an increased media and social media coverage of men's professional football which may have introduced this sport to new groups of female (and male) fans.

Further research and new publications on topics related to female football players in Europe (and beyond) are also necessary because of the recent rises in the numbers of women and girls involved in this sport. In addition, there have been major developments in women's football at the elite levels of the game. Klein's chapter in this book focuses on how as a consequence of the increasing numbers of female players and women's teams, the numbers of women's football leagues in Europe have increased and national championships have been established. Klein notes that nearly all of the 54 member associations of UEFA have established a national championship competition for women's football teams, although there are considerable variations between the leagues in the different countries, in particular in terms of the level of their performance.

The growing interest in women's football has led to increasing numbers of fans watching the sport—both in the stadiums and on television, as well as engaging with women's football through traditional forms of media and/or social media. Although the numbers of fans at women's matches are small in comparison to men's football, there has been a slow—and in some countries continuous—rise of interest in female players and women's teams. For example, in England the average attendance at top national league matches increased from 200 in 2011/12 to 1058 in 2016/17 and in France attendances increased from 400 in 2011/12 to 1000 in 2016/17 (UEFA 2017). The growing interest in women's football is mirrored by the numbers of viewers of televised women's matches; for example, just under 328 million people watched at least 20 consecutive minutes of the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup in Canada, with the final between the United States and Japan reaching a global home audience of just over 60 million (FIFA 2015).

Most publications on women and football focus either on the game and its players or on the fans. One of the strengths of this book is the

coverage of women's experiences both as players and fans in a range of European countries, including the United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Spain. With the exception of Toffoletti and Mewett's (2012) edited collection *Sport and Its Female Fans*, most of the existing books and articles on female fans have tended to focus upon women's experiences in one country. This has also been the case for many—though by no means all—of the studies which have explored the situation of women's football. In this book, the richness of insights gained from information about the game and its female players and fans in specific countries is combined with an overview of a range of European countries, allowing comparisons to be made across different cultural contexts and thus enabling an analysis of similarities and differences with regard to issues of gender inequality that girls and women continue to encounter in various ways.

The various chapters of this book highlight not only the progress of women's football in Europe, but also ongoing challenges, including the low salaries of female football players and the financial difficulties of women's football clubs, poor media exposure of the women's game, negative stereotypes of female football players and issues of sexism encountered by female fans. Thus, whilst it is important to consider differences in the experiences of female players and fans in different countries and indeed, the different ways in which gender intersects with other forms of inequality such as social class, sexuality and race and ethnicity, there is one issue which female football players and fans in Europe and worldwide have in common: they are still widely perceived to be *intruding into a man's world*, as the subtitle of this book indicates.

The book mostly includes original contributions, drawing upon research findings from the contributors. It also includes some reprint texts which have been published previously. These texts have been reprinted because they contribute important information and help to provide a coherent overview about women and football. The chapters draw upon different scholarly disciplines, in particular on sociology, history and economics. The contributions in this edited collection cover key issues of the main topic, women and football, and draw on different theoretical approaches to gender, football and fandom. But we acknowledge that there are other researchers who have undertaken important

studies on women and football and have also covered topics which, due to restrictions of space, we have not been able to include.

The book is organized into two parts: Part I is dedicated to women's football and female football players, Part II explores and describes women's experiences as fans. Part I about 'Women's Football and Female Players' begins with a reprint of an 'inaugural' text on the topic, with a study of Sheila Scraton, Kari Fasting, Gertrud Pfister and Ana Bunel addressing: "It's Still a Man's Game?": The Experiences of Top-Level European Women Footballers' (Chap. 2). Scraton et al. draw on interviews with top-level women footballers in England, Germany, Norway and Spain to investigate national similarities and differences with respect to how women gained access to the world of football and the extent to which gender relations continue to impact on their opportunities in this sport. This study was conducted at the end of the twentieth century and Scraton et al. found a range of issues and even barriers for women entering the 'man's game', including the role of males in first encouraging women to play football, the obstacles women had to overcome to gain access to this sport, and how playing this sport challenged traditional notions of femininity and created tensions for female players around physicality, lesbianism and homophobia. As some of the chapters in this book highlight, many of these issues are still very relevant for female football players today.

In Chap. 3, Gertrud Pfister presents some considerations derived from the FREE project which has been introduced above. The title 'Women, Football and European Integration: Aims, Questions, Methodological and Theoretical Approaches' indicates the content. Pfister argues that there is a need to discuss if and how women can participate in European football cultures and contribute to a European identity. Drawing on theoretical approaches to national identity, gender and socialization as well as on the analysis of various intersections between gender, football and fandom, she confirms the outsider status of female football players and fans and concludes that there is a need for further studies about women's changing involvement in the game and their (potential) roles in European football discourses.

Markwart Herzog (Chap. 4) examines: 'The Beginnings of Women's Football in South-Western Germany: From a Spectacle to a Sport Event'.

Drawing upon a range of historical sources, Herzog reconstructs the origins of women's football in the country and explores the numerous struggles that women faced to be able to play the game—in spite of a law of the German Football Association (passed in 1955) which prohibited football clubs to support female players or teams. This chapter provides unique insights into the barriers women had to overcome when they wanted to play football in Germany and the initiatives of players and their male supporters which eventually were successful: the German Football Federation had to give in; in 1955 women were 'allowed' to play the game.

In Chap. 5, 'Women's Football Leagues in Europe—Organizational and Economic Perspectives', Marie-Luise Klein offers an analysis of the strategies and measures of national football associations to optimize the structure and organization of their top women's leagues and the implications of these measures for players and clubs. Klein also examines national football associations' strategies for increasing the sporting performance of the women's leagues in their countries. She concludes that whilst the financial situation of top women's clubs has improved and the numbers of semi-professional female players have increased, women's football is still a long way off the men's game in terms of public interest, attendances, media coverage and revenues.

In Chap. 6, 'Outsiders on the Inside: Integrating Women and Men's Football Clubs in England', Jo Welford presents the findings of 10 case studies and 12 interviews to examine the relationships between the men's and the women's football clubs by considering financial arrangements, club development and perceived status. She argues that there are numerous ways of cooperation between the men's and the women's clubs and that both—a separation of men's and women's organizations and an integration—can have advantages but also can lead to problems.

In Chap. 7, "Who Could Name an England Women's Footballer?" Female Fans of Men's Football and their Views of Women's Football in England', Stacey Pope explores the attitudes towards and the opinions about watching women's football. Drawing on 51 interviews, Pope provides insights into the long-lasting stereotypes about female players and women's football—presented even by women who have a high level of involvement in the sport (played by men)—but she also found positive

attitudes. Pope also examines the (lack of) media coverage of women's sport and its impact on fans and she argues that the negative perceptions towards women's football have been to some extent shaped by the limited and largely negative coverage.

Part II of this book focuses upon 'Female Football Fans and their Experiences'. In Chap. 8 Stacey Pope and John Williams provide 'A Socio-Historical Account of Female Experiences of Football's Golden Age in England', a period which stretches from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. The authors argue that women fans have been largely ignored by male sociologists and historians in their accounts of football fandom. Drawing on interviews with 16 older female fans of Leicester City Football Club, Pope and Williams offer in-depth insights into women's experiences in the football stadium, the styles of women's support and their relationships with and perceptions of football players.

Chapters 9 and 10 present some of the findings of the group of scholars working on one of the research strands of the FREE (Football Research in an Enlarged Europe) project, which explored women's attitudes and practices with regard to football and their engagement as players and/or fans (<http://www.free-project.eu/research/Pages/feminisation.aspx>). Chapter 9 is entitled: 'Is there a Life Beyond Football? How Female Fans Integrate Football into their Everyday Lives'. The authors, Gertrud Pfister and Verena Lenneis conducted observations in the stadium and interviews with 12 female fans in Denmark to explore how dedicated female supporters balance watching football with the competing demands of work, family and leisure activities. Their findings show how women's fandom is influenced by their (gendered) life circumstances.

In Chap. 10, "One is Not Born, but Rather Becomes a Fan": The Socialization of Female Football Fans—A Case Study in Denmark', Gertrud Pfister, Svenja-Maria Mintert and Verena Lenneis share their insights into how girls and women developed an interest in the game and how they became fans of men's football. Drawing on interviews with 21 female fans in Denmark, they identify the processes, events, in particular attending games in the stadium, and significant others which inspired girls and women to follow men's football and become dedicated fans.

Chapter 11 by Aage Radmann and Susanna Hedenborg provides information on 'Women's Football Supporter Culture in Sweden', a

country which has received little academic attention in relation to research on female fans. They draw upon gender theories to understand how women in this country experience and perform fandom in a society with a high degree of gender equality. Radmann and Hedenborg examine in particular how female fans develop strategies to gain respect in supporter cultures and how football fandom provides an arena in which gender norms can be transgressed, allowing women to engage in behaviours that challenge traditional notions of femininity.

In Chap. 12, “Challenging or Accommodating the Football System?”: A Case Study of Female Football Supporter Communities in Spain’, Ramón Llopis-Goig and Helena Flores describe how football can be ‘empowering’ for members of women’s ‘peñas’ in Spain. Peñas’ are groups of women who carve out opportunities to enjoy watching football games together. The authors draw on seven interviews with women belonging to women-only peñas and they argue that membership in these groups provide women access to football as well as a position of recognition in this space. However, discrimination against women continues to be an issue in Spanish football.

In Chap. 13, Cornel Sandvoss and Emily Ball discuss: ‘The Limits of Appropriation: Female Football Fans, Media and Identity’. Drawing on fan studies and various sociological theories, they explore women’s fan practices which provide meaningful identity positions that may help overcome gender inequality. Among other issues, the authors explore fandom from a gender perspective and discuss their findings which showed that there were no differences between men and women in the intensity of their engagement as fans. The authors also consider the role of significant others (especially fathers and brothers) in first initiating the interest of girls and women in football. However, Sandvoss and Ball also argue that access to the game does not automatically lead to changes of the gender order.

The contributions in this book expand our knowledge on women and football, on female teams and players as well as on female football fans. It is hoped that this book will be useful to both scholars and students with an interest not only in football and football fans, but also in gender issues and—more generally—in sport sociology. We also hope that this volume will prompt further academic inquiry into the topics of both female football players and fans as well as of football and gender.

## Note

1. The numbers of girls and women participating in football are still significantly lower than the numbers of boys and men. For example, the 2006 FIFA survey estimated that there were 26 million female participants in comparison to 239 million male participants (Kunz 2007). More recently, in 2014 FIFA estimated that there were 30 million girls and women playing football worldwide (FIFA 2014). Thus, despite the numbers of female participants being lower than the numbers of male participants, there are still a high number of females playing football and the numbers of female participants have been steadily increasing over time. In Europe, a recent UEFA report shows that football is the number one team sport for girls and women in 20 of its 55 member associations (UEFA 2017). The number of registered female players in UEFA's members associations is currently 1.27 million (Masson 2016).

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# **Part I**

## **Women's Football and Female Players**

# 2

## It's Still a Man's Game? The Experiences of Top-Level European Women Footballers

Sheila Scraton, Kari Fasting, Gertrud Pfister,  
and Ana Bunuel

### Introduction

This chapter investigates national similarities and differences with respect to how women enter the world of football and whether gender relations continue to impact on both their access to and opportunities in the sport.

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Chapter 2 was originally published as: Scraton, S., Fasting, K., Pfister, G., & Bunuel, A. (1999) "It's Still a Man's Game": The Experiences of Top Level European Women Footballers', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 34 (2), pp. 99–111. Copyright © [ISSA and Sage Publications]. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications.

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G. Pfister, S. Pope (eds.), *Female Football Players and Fans*, Football Research in an Enlarged Europe, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59025-1\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59025-1_2)

The data comes from 40 semi-structured interviews with top-level women footballers in England, Germany, Norway and Spain. Early male influences are discussed in relation to existing work on socialization into sport, notions of femininity and the different cultural contexts. The organization of youth sport is identified as a crucial factor in influencing girls and young women's opportunities to play football. Furthermore, although men continue to have a considerable influence on the women's game, even when women have no conscious intentions of resistance, they incorporate their own meanings into the sport.

## **Sporting Women: From Equity to Diversity**

Although change has been slow, the opportunity for women to engage in a range of sports and physical activities has become available throughout Europe, Australasia and North America (Hargreaves 1994). Women's access to football can be seen as a political outcome of a liberal-feminist discourse that centres on equal opportunities, socialization practices and legal/institutional reform. However, during the past two decades an accurate and well-rehearsed critique of liberalism has emerged, questioning the weakness of the concept of equality in accepting the gender-linked values of mainstream sports while failing to acknowledge or understand broader structures of power. Increasingly, feminist sport sociology has focused on sport as a site for relations of domination and subordination and the reproduction of gendered power relations (Hall 1996; Hargreaves 1994). As this critical work on sport has developed, the debate has moved beyond the early determinist accounts that placed men and women in a straightforward oppositional model of oppressor/oppressed, to questions of resistance, agency and empowerment (Birrell and Therberge 1994; Gilroy 1997; Whitson 1994); men and masculinities (Messner and Sabo 1990; Nauright and Chandler 1996); and differences between women in relation to age, class, ethnic identity, sexuality and dis/ability (Dewar 1993).

More recently, the assault on modernist analyses by postmodern and poststructuralist theorists has further shifted the debate to accounts that focus on gendered identities, subjectivities and female sporting bodies as the sites for contestation and struggle (Cole 1994; Grosz 1994). As such, the emphasis appears to have moved back towards analyses of individual

women but on very different theoretical terrain to early liberal-feminist discourse. Rather than the essentialism of a 'fixed' identity, gender is cast as an act or performance which is complex, shifting, plural and discursively constructed (Butler 1990). A fundamental aspect of this shift has been a move away from understanding power as something possessed by certain groups involving relations of domination and subordination, to power defined as 'a dynamic or network of non-centralized forces' (Foucault and Sheridan 1979: 138). Poststructuralist analyses emphasize sport as an important arena for the disruption of the binary oppositions of masculinity/femininity and the emergence of potentially transgressive forms of sporting femininities (Blinde and Taube 1992; Halbert 1997).

The disruption of gender boundaries has been explored most extensively within the context of sporting forms traditionally associated with and defined by hegemonic masculinity such as bodybuilding (Kuhn 1988; Miller and Penz 1991; Obel 1996) and boxing (Halbert 1997). Normative ideals about female bodies and 'ideal' femininity have become severely disrupted as women have moved into traditionally male-only sports. However, these accounts are not simply about transgression or the blurring of traditional gender boundaries; they also involve evidence of conformity and contradiction as some women appear to comply with certain 'norms' of traditional femininity.

Obel's (1996, p. 185) research is interesting in that she argues that 'bodybuilding is a challenge to categorical ways of thinking about femininity, masculinity and the body'. Agreeing with Kuhn (1988), she argues that the muscular body of the female bodybuilder disrupts the binary oppositions of masculine/feminine and nature/culture. However, she goes on to differ from Kuhn's 'reading' of bodybuilding in that she views this disruption as not necessarily threatening to the gender order. She bases her arguments on the fact that so many of the analyses of bodybuilding rely on textual analysis or readings made by the researcher, rather than the experiences as articulated by the bodybuilders themselves or the language and practices of competitive body building. Obel (1996, p. 188) argues that if you shift the focus to the experiences of individual female bodybuilders 'their discourse constitutes masculinity and femininity in opposition'. Drawing on interviews with women bodybuilders, she argues that their emphasis is on diffusing the tension between muscularity and what is viewed as 'safe' femininity. These women bodybuilders continue to reassure that women's bodybuilding is compatible with an attractive and acceptable heterosexual femininity. Obel's

research reflects the tensions that exist between structuralist accounts, which continue to focus on wider structures of power (hegemonic white, heterosexual masculinity) grounded in material ‘realities’, and poststructuralism, which emphasizes deconstruction, a sensitivity to a multiplicity of meanings, with gender a ‘performance’ actively constituted and plural.

## Women in Football

Our own research set out to explore some of these theoretical debates, grounding our analysis in empirical data on women’s entry into and experiences with football, which is one of the fastest growing sports for women in Europe. In 1996 women’s football was played for the first time at the Olympic Games, with the USA defeating China for the gold medal. Women’s football continues to grow and flourish with an estimated 20 million players now actively competing around the world (FIFA 1994). However, there remain some barriers to the development of the women’s game. One key obstacle is the association of football with male sport that contains the conventional stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity in western culture. For women to enter the powerfully male-defined and controlled world of football, they have had to challenge dominant notions of ‘appropriate’ female sport.

## Methods

In agreement with other scholars, we stress the importance of qualitative accounts that allow sportswomen to articulate their own feelings about being women who play and enjoy sport (Lenskyj 1994; Talbot 1991; Wright and Dewar 1997; Young 1997). In addition, we are mindful that discourses around gender must be historically and culturally located. Although we recognize the positive contribution of postmodernism and poststructuralism to our understanding of gender, we remain concerned that many of these accounts reject or ignore structural and cultural contexts. Our research explores ‘difference’ in relation to individual subjectivities, as well as across national boundaries.

We draw on interview data from a research project which investigated the experiences and meanings of sport in the lives of women in England, Germany, Norway and Spain. As part of the study we conducted ten in-depth,

semi-structured interviews with top-level footballers in each country. All interviewees played in the highest league in their country, with some having gained national honours. The majority of the English players came from working-class backgrounds and were employed in clerical or service industry jobs; only two had obtained further or higher education qualifications. The German women worked in a range of jobs (banking, painter and decorator, sales) with half having some further education. The Norwegian players came from a range of backgrounds with no clear class location as defined by occupation, educational qualifications, housing or parental background. The players in Spain defined themselves as middle class, with the majority having higher education qualifications. All the players interviewed were white. This reflects the under-representation of black and minority ethnic women in football in all the countries studied. Their absence from top-level women's football, particularly in Britain (where black male players have made a significant impact over the past decade in top clubs and the national team) is an example of the continued discrimination some black women and women of colour face in many countries in competitive sport (Birrell 1990; Zaman 1997).

The interviews were structured around six key themes: sporting biography, social networks, daily life, gendered identities, the body, sport and life plans. These themes provided a comparative framework for all the interviews, while also allowing the women some freedom to explore areas of their choice. The following discussion focuses on data relating to how these top-level players entered football and their experiences in a male-defined sporting world. By focusing on in-depth, individual experiences in different national and cultural contexts, we explore theoretical debates around universal structures of power, differences between women, and the significance of the 'contextuality of meaning' (Bordo 1993, p. 24).

## Results

### Becoming a Footballer

#### Kicking About with the Lads

All of the interviewees began playing football when they were quite young. In England, Germany and Norway the average starting age was



between four and six years, whereas the Spanish players were older, at 11 years of age. These early experiences were generally in informal spaces within local neighbourhoods. In talking about their first experiences many of the women recounted the significance of the street and parks as the spaces where they began their footballing careers:

I just started to kick a football in the back streets, it was great fun. (Jane, England)

I really wanted to play soccer. I thought that was the most fun. Besides I have always played soccer with the boys on the streets. (Berit, Norway)

In his research into sport and masculinity in the USA, Messner's (1992) interviewees revealed that their childhood experiences of sport occurred in an exclusively male world. It is at this stage that masculine identities and an early commitment to sport become tightly interrelated. It would seem that the majority of the footballers in our research gained access to the male sporting world of the streets and parks through male contacts and support. Even at this early age, the opportunities for girls to choose their physical activities were largely dependent on male encouragement and approval. Many of the women in our research were encouraged by fathers, brothers or male friends to step into this 'boys' space' and thus gained entry into the informal male football culture.

There were, however, some cultural differences in relation to how the women began playing football. As mentioned earlier, the Spanish footballers began to play when they were older. Although streets and parks were mentioned in these interviews, in contrast to the women in the other three countries, female friends were highlighted as the most significant people in encouraging them to play. It may be that access to open space is more restricted for young girls in Spain up to the age of 10 or 11 years. Transgressing the boundaries of gendered space may be more difficult in some cultural contexts. This suggests the cultural specificity of gender, yet also confirms the ability of some girls and women to negotiate gendered expectations, albeit at different times and in different contexts.

The importance of streets and parks for the early football experiences of top-level players is interesting if we reflect on changing patterns of childhood play. In England, for example, the 'moral panics' associated with recent cases of child abduction and murder, are likely to result in a more

rigorous control of children's street activities. Together with globalization and developments in technology, such as computer games and satellite television, this potential move towards more home-based recreation and leisure for young people may result in street games and park visits being things of the past. If so, then the opportunities for sport participation offered by formal institutions (e.g., schools, clubs and leisure centres) may become even more important in the future for girls' and young women's access to sporting opportunities.

### **Only Boys Can Play**

At school some of the women faced major barriers to their participation. There are interesting differences here relating to how sport is organized in each country. Since sporting opportunities for young people in Germany and Norway are based on a club system, players from these countries did not identify the school as having had a significant impact on their early experiences of competitive sport. Although some had struggled to find female soccer teams, several had played on boys' teams until the ages of 12 or 14. In both Germany and Norway it was the players themselves who were active in setting up girls' teams and putting in place the club system that exists today:

We had much fun playing with the boys ... I had problems when I was 14 because then I had to leave the boys' team. I could not play on a woman's team, you had to be at least 15, so they wrote a call for girls in the newspapers and we organized a girls' team. (Ingrid, Germany)

We had to organize ourselves, get a coach and trainer. We were not accepted in a club at that time. We managed to get a coach and get started as a girls' team. (Jorun, Norway)

In England the story was somewhat different. The players indicated that their first real barriers to participation occurred when they entered the schooling system. At primary school (5 to 11 years) there are no legal restrictions on girls competing in football, although most of the women either were not allowed to play with boys or had to battle for opportunities:

I wasn't allowed to play at school so I just had to kick a ball about when I got the chance. (Karen, England)

I only played at break and lunchtime. I used to play then; I wasn't allowed to play in the boys' team or anything like that. (Kim, England)

The barriers faced by the English players were exacerbated when they transferred into secondary school at 11 years of age. All the interviewees commented that they were not allowed to play at school, even those who had obtained access at a younger age. A major problem was the continued division of the girls and boys into 'sex-appropriate' activities:

When I went up to senior school there was nothing ... that was the attitude that they had to it. The girls and the lads are kept separate for sports. I hated secondary school because at dinnertime we just sat and did nothing whereas at junior school we used to be out playing football. (Jan, England)

In England, the few women who did manage to play some football at school still had to negotiate attitudes suggesting that football was inappropriate for girls. This supports the findings by Scraton (1992) and Flintoff (1993) that gender ideologies remain firmly embedded within the content and teaching of physical education. The Spanish respondents talked very little about their early playing experiences. They had no opportunity to join club teams until they were 14, 18 or in one case 22 years of age. Like the English players, they identified the school as the key institution for providing opportunities for sport participation and competition. These occasions were gender-specific with little or no access for girls to play football.

### **Gendered Sporting Identities**

Although we are cognizant of the critique of the early social psychological work in the 1970s and 1980s on the perceived conflict between sport and femininity and gender role socialization (Connell 1983, 1987; Hall 1996), issue relating to the women's self-perceptions of their gendered identities was a strong theme among the interviewees. All of the women

talked constantly about themselves as being 'other' to female or feminine, particularly when describing their childhood experiences:

I was like a tomboy. I spent a lot of time together with the boys. It was fun and a little rough. (Inger, Norway)

I've always been a tomboy. I can remember me and my Dad playing and then wanting to join in with the boys at junior school. (Jenny, England)

I always wanted to be a boy because girls are not allowed to climb trees, to be a member of a gang, to play cowboys and Indians, to play soccer and to be involved in all these exciting adventures. (Gudrun, Germany)

I was a tomboy, a tough guy, climbed trees and did many bad things. I preferred to play cars instead of dolls and I loved ice hockey ... girls were stupid, they always started to cry, they could not run. (Andrea, Germany)

In these expressive, almost sad quotes, the women are relationally constructing a self via what they consider themselves not to be—that is, girls. They distance themselves from anything that they define as feminine, almost to the point of misogyny. The majority defined themselves as 'tomboys'. Hall (1996) provides a thorough discussion and feminist critique of the term 'tomboyism', problematizing its use in developmental psychology, biology and sociobiology. Research in these fields has focused on how girls and young women act 'too much like a torn, or a man ... a spirited young girl who behaves like a boisterous boy' (Hall 1996, p. 16). Such girls are viewed as deviant, other than the feminine norm. The use of the term 'tomboy' supports the 'naturalness' of the dualities of male sport/female sport and masculinity/femininity thus reducing cultural and social constructs to biological fact.

Most of the women did not suggest that their performances as 'tomboys' created any conflict for them as girls; in fact, they saw it as a positive aspect of their identity. This is unsurprising given that the dominant cultural definition of 'tomboy' is a girl who displays masculine attributes, particularly those valued most highly in the sports world (e.g., competitiveness, aggression, boisterousness and active physicality). As mentioned earlier, almost all the women named their brothers, fathers and/or male friends as being highly significant in their early years. For these significant others, the girls were displaying positive behaviour and characteristics that complemented a sporting identity. However, some of the German

women did suggest that even at this early age they had found it difficult identifying as 'tomboys', 'sporty' or girls. These women talked about their struggles as children in relation to the 'ideal' expectations of femininity. Some commented on how they had wanted to be a boy or like a boy; others had used boys' clothes and were proud to be identified as boys. One German player reported that she fitted in so well with the boys that 'there were many that did not even know that I was a girl!' (Andrea, Germany).

'Doing' gender is not about acting out a fixed role, although as Butler (1990) argues, failing to 'do gender right', or the act of 'performing one's gender wrong', can initiate punishment. To 'do gender right' means to conform to dominant cultural expectations about femininity. Although these can change over time and context, there was a need for the women to define themselves (as girls and young women) in opposition to femininity in order to gain entry into the footballing world. In football, the women were performing their gender as self-defined 'tomboys' in ways that transgressed dominant notions of young female behaviour. Yet, this act of self-definition valorises masculinity, it does not transform gender relations. The language the women used to communicate their experiences leaves no doubt about their perceptions of masculinity and their views that men and boys are dominant and more highly valued. By perceiving themselves to be 'like boys', they reinforce and reproduce, rather than challenge, the power relations between male/female and the binary oppositions of masculine/feminine and men's sport/women's sport.

As the women talked about their development as footballers it became apparent that, for many of them, their identities as gendered sports-women became more problematic in adulthood. A full discussion of this area is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is important to note that there would appear to be a complex relationship between their identities as female footballers and dominant notions of femininity and sexuality, particularly in relation to 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich 1981). As hegemonic ideals of femininity are constructed from a white, middle-class stereotype of heterosexual attractiveness, there are considerable ambiguities and tensions for the footballers around active physicality, lesbianism and homophobia from both outside and within the game. Football is an arena that can provide a relatively safe, shared space for

lesbian women, but can also produce hyper-femininity as a strategy of resistance and negotiation with homophobia. As the following player commented:

I like to get really muddy and do what the heck I like on the football pitch but I sometimes get really dressed up at night. I think I get fed up being labelled-you know she plays soccer so she's butch. (Kim, England)

### **A 'Female World'?**

Although women's football appears to be one of the fastest growing sports for women in all four countries studied, the game remains heavily influenced and controlled by men. There are qualitative differences between the countries, with women's football being least culturally marginal and contested in Norway, while both Germany and Norway provide more material support (Laur 1997). However, it remains the case that women's football remains dependent on the male sporting world for its survival in all four nations. Facilities and financial resources seem routinely worse for women and there is recognition that the development of the women's game relies on integration into men's football. In none of the countries has it been possible for women to 'go it alone' (Lopez 1997). The reasons for this are complex, but clearly reflect the legacy and continued existence of powerful ideologies surrounding women's participation that impact on the public perception of the game and structure the sport. As one of the Norwegian players stated:

Women's soccer is still very young. If you look at the audience, we don't take in much money, because it is not as popular as men's soccer. We therefore only have to accept that we are second stringers. There is nothing we can do about that. This is just the way it is. Women's soccer is never going to be accepted in the same way as men's soccer, I believe ... never. (Wenche, Norway)

Nevertheless, the women in our research have overcome many obstacles to their access and are now experiencing the game of football for themselves. Although playing football has different meanings for different women, there are some shared meanings and values identified by all

the players. For example, they all derived a tremendous amount of pleasure from playing the game and feeling in control and the excitement of 'being physical'. Probably the most frequently mentioned aspect of their experiences was the pleasure they gained from being together, their connectedness as women and as a team:

They are the best group of lassies, like a family. It's the social side I like best. I know everyone so well, you look after each other. (Sue, England)

... if you play an individual sport you can only be glad for yourself. If you are in a team, this is a wonderful feeling if you have an important game and if you get a goal. It doesn't matter who makes the goal, but if the ball is in the net, we all throw ourselves on the ground—we embrace each other—that is great, this being together. (Petra, Germany)

Words such as 'togetherness', 'social' and 'belonging' dominated the interview transcripts. Women's football, although controlled by male football organizations, is a female space that the women enjoy together as a team. There would appear to be a female football culture that cuts across national boundaries. These shared meanings were expressed in relation to the pleasures of an active physicality experienced by the players:

... the sensations of movement, the energy that it gives. (Maria, Spain)

... playing soccer you can find out what you and your body can do, what you can do with a ball, to juggle with a ball, to let it fly in a high angle. (Ingrid, Germany)

... getting muddy, diving here, there and everywhere. There's nothing better than making a save. It's brilliant; you're flying through the air. (Jenny, England)

A key concern about women entering 'male' sports such as football is the possibility that this will simply reproduce the dominant masculine values that have become central to the game (e.g., competition, aggression, 'win at all costs'). Our research just begins to touch on some of these issues. The female players found active physicality to be both positive and pleasurable. They attached values to the game that are closely associated with being female such as connectedness, sharing and supporting each other. Hargreaves (1994, p. 252) argues that: 'it is inevitable that if men have so

much influence, they will impose on the women's game their own values and practices, and women footballers are being effectively schooled to copy what men do'. Our research would suggest that, although men do have considerable influence on the women's game, even when women have no conscious intentions of resistance, they do incorporate their own meanings into their activities. Women play with aggression, skill, determination and competition; yet they also articulate a central concern for cooperation, support, connectedness and fun. It is these values that the women stressed almost unanimously during the interviews and were most significant to them.

## Conclusion

Females are participating in football in increasing numbers in some European nations, especially in Norway and Germany. The rate is somewhat slower in England and is just in the 'kick-off' phase in Spain. We can conclude that the liberal-feminist agenda of increasing access to sporting opportunities has opened up football to more female players in all four countries. Our research shows that many of these women have had to overcome barriers that the male world of soccer continues to impose. The development of a well-organized youth policy for girls and young women would seem to be crucial in increasing female participation rates. Such policies are better established in Germany and Norway, with the benefits highlighted by the female players in relation to their early opportunities to participate. The school systems in England and Spain do not provide the encouragement that is needed for young women to fulfil their footballing potential, particularly while the schools continue to be inscribed by powerful gender ideologies.

Our research findings reflect—to a certain extent—the complexities and contradictions of gender relations in the 1990s. Images of femininity are diversifying in sport as women gain access to traditionally male-defined activities. But just how far women are actually transgressing the boundaries of acceptable femininity is debatable. Women who play football and exhibit strength, get muddy and dirty, and engage in physical contact would seem to be demonstrating a shift in what is deemed to be acceptable female behaviour. As girls and young women, they challenge conventional standards of femininity by positively associating with and



defining themselves as boys or 'tomboys'. However, this does not present a major challenge to the obdurate masculine/feminine dichotomy. Rather, these women have simply crossed gendered boundaries in order to access a sport that is associated with masculine traits. This act does not help to redefine hegemonic notions of femininity, as these women simply become 'tomboys' or 'token boys' for a period of their lives. If anything, they rarify masculinity by their aspirations to be 'like a boy'. And in order to do this, they have the support of significant men and boys in their lives.

It has been recognized for some time that girls and young women are accommodated, and sometimes almost encouraged, to cross this boundary. It makes them lively, spunky and even adventurous. These qualities are accepted and often admired in pre-pubescent girls. However, adult femininity incorporates a dominant notion of heterosexuality, so transgressing boundaries becomes more problematic (Maynard and Purvis 1995). By displaying qualities usually associated with masculinity, adult women face tensions between their active physicality as footballers and what is deemed 'safe', heterosexual femininity. Homophobia is evident within football and female players' responses to it are an important area for further in-depth, ethnographic research.

Although some aspects of the binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity are disrupted by strong, physically active women playing a sport defined traditionally as male, there is little evidence in our research that women's football provides a serious threat to the gender order. While many of the players have benefited from less gender-stereotyped childhoods (which is central to a liberal-feminist agenda), structures of power still remain in the hands of men and 'compulsory heterosexuality' continues to be a pervasive ideology. This is by no means total or uncontested—some of the women in our study did challenge dominant assumptions about femininity and female sexuality.

Our research has highlighted the need to recognize differences both among individual women and across different national contexts. It has been important to look outside the narrow confines of our own countries in order to share and learn from existing 'good practices' and successful initiatives elsewhere. However, a total concentration on difference and diversity fails to recognize the similarities that emerge between women footballers in different contexts. These include some of the experiences women have of playing football, the values and meanings they attach to

these experiences, and the continued impact and control that men have within football in each country. Although more women are receiving greater opportunities, their life chances are still determined by the gender regimes that exist in both school and community-based sport programs. As women's football develops, it will be interesting to note whether women 'buy into' the competitive, commercialized and commodified men's game or try to construct their own values and meanings. Hargreaves (1994, p. 252) describes the radical challenge in a football club in London, England, which has written a constitution stating that women must have complete control, and is trying to develop creative ways of playing the game which they call 'a woman's philosophy of football'. This is the 'catch-22' for women: if they take control then they have to exist within a world where men continue to hold ideological and material power. As the women in this research argued in all four countries, they remain dependent on the male sporting world to provide the opportunities that they need at a top competitive level.

In summary, the experiences of women playing in traditionally male-defined sports need more in-depth analysis. Theoretically, we must move from a simplistic understanding of socialization processes or the dualities of masculinity and femininity and towards an understanding of the complexities and ambiguities of women's experiences. These experiences must be located in specific contexts and recognize the continued significance of gendered structures of power. Researching women's experiences of playing a 'traditionally' male sport such as football is an important way to begin qualitative investigations into experiences of sport that move beyond participation rates and begin to explore some of these current theoretical concerns.

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# 3

## Women, Football and European Integration: Aims, Questions, Methodological and Theoretical Approaches

Gertrud Pfister

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Since its ‘invention’ in the nineteenth century in England, football developed from a boy’s game to one of the most popular sports which is played and watched all over the world. Currently, the football fever has gained new dimensions particularly in Europe as football supporters and fans follow the game not only in the stadiums or via newspapers and TV, but also via the new media on the internet, where numerous websites offer the latest football news.<sup>2</sup> Before the internet era and the globalization of football news, the game was in the focus of local and national audiences and triggered their emotional attachment to as well as identification with ‘their’ clubs and national teams. Football provided and still provides the opportunity to demonstrate and act out nationalist leanings and emotions.<sup>3</sup>

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Chapter 3 was originally published as: Pfister, G. (2013) ‘Women, Football and European Integration. Aims and Questions, Methodological and Theoretical Approaches’, *Annales Kinesiologiae*, 4 (1), pp. 29–43. Available at: <http://ojs.zrs.upr.si/index.php/AK/article/view/19/>

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G. Pfister, S. Pope (eds.), *Female Football Players and Fans*, Football Research in an Enlarged Europe, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59025-1\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59025-1_3)

Sportification processes, in particular, the striving for a permanent increase of performances, led not only to a continuous advancement of training, technique and tactics, but influenced also the transfers of players. Clubs buy and sell players in order to improve the performances of their teams and football stars can negotiate salaries which endanger the club's financial standing. However, before 1995 the assignment of foreign players was restricted.

The European integration after World War II and the emergence of the European Union as a political and economic community as well as a common labour market had a large impact on sport, in particular on football. The 'Bosman ruling' in 1995 allowed the free movement of professional footballers in Europe and Europeans who moved from an European club/country to another were now no longer considered 'foreigners' (e.g., Penn 2006). This rule opened up the market and increased the influx of non-European players, for example, in England, Belgium and Italy, and also in Germany (<http://www.football-observatory.com/IMG/sites/mr/mr12/en/>). At the same time, large European clubs, such as Real Madrid, Manchester United or Bayern München, began to attract an international fan community which follows their teams via traditional and new media. Currently, numerous fans 'split' their loyalty between their local club and one of the legendary clubs abroad such as Real Madrid or Manchester United.

Women's football which had been banned by the Football Federations until 1970, experienced in this time period a considerable upswing in particular in Western countries, later also worldwide (e.g., see Williams 2007; Pfister 2008). In the 1990s famous football clubs such as Paris Saint-Germain, Chelsea FC or Bayern München founded (and supported) women's teams. In addition, independent women's clubs were founded, for example, the highly successful German club Turbine Potsdam, which is still today one of the leading clubs of the country. In 2001, the UEFA cup for women was established, a competition which became the UEFA Women's Champions League in 2009. However, the upswing of women's football did not put the game and its players in the lime light. Women are still a small minority among the players and, as a rule, women's games do not attract large audiences.

The 'outsider-status' of women in the world of football can be explained by various reasons, ranging on the one hand from the tradition and the image of the game, to the activities and practices of players and fans. On the other hand, women's 'normal biographies,' as well as the current gender ideals, norms and rules have to be taken into consideration. However, playing football is not per se an activity which excludes females as the growing numbers of female players clearly demonstrate.

The popularity of men's football is based on the identification of the 'supporters' with clubs and players whereby multiple loyalties facilitate cross-border networks, trigger European football dialogues and create imagined communities of the predominately male fans who choose their favourite players and teams in Europe and worldwide (e.g., Sandvoss 2005; Sonntag 2008). In this way football audiences and fans are groups who via their identification with foreign clubs or players and via cross-border communication, for example on the new social media, may contribute to the development of a European identity which cannot replace but can complement the identification with their nation states.

The impact of football on European dialogues and transnational identities has been explored by a group of scholars who collaborated in an international and interdisciplinary research study. The 'FREE project' 'aimed at an understanding of the impact of the most popular and most widely shared of all expressions of popular culture, football, on identity dynamics, perception patterns and cultural change in Europe. /.../ The overall objective of the FREE project is to develop a better understanding of football as a highly relevant social and cultural phenomenon in contemporary Europe.'<sup>4</sup>

The scholars working with this project are very well aware that in football, the players as well as the consumers and fans are predominately men and that European dialogues with a focus on football exclude those women who are not interested in 'football talk' (e.g. Pfister 2013).

In spite of the dominance of men in this game, one of the six 'working packages' of the project focuses on women. The aim of this research strand is 'to study the extent to which football's strong tradition of discursive gender construction is being challenged today by what could be termed the 'feminization' of football. This 'feminization' finds its causes and expression in the growing number of female fans and increased interest



for women's football.<sup>5</sup> The FREE project thus poses the question: 'How and to what extent do women actually participate in the transnational football encounters and dialogues?' The methods of this project have been a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, specifically surveys and interviews in various European countries. More information is available on the FREE website (<http://www.free-project.eu/Pages/Welcome.aspx>).

In this article I will provide insights into the opportunities and challenges of women in the world of football. In addition, I will present the theoretical approaches used in the project such as gender concepts, social constructivism or approaches to identification. Moreover, the backgrounds, developments and current issues of both women's football and women's fandom will be outlined. Some of these issues will be explored in the current project; others will become the topics of future research.

## **Theoretical Approaches, Main Questions and Methods**

### **Football Research in an Enlarged Europe: The FREE Project and the Subproject: Feminization**

Everyday knowledge and the available studies show that football is still a male domain. The overwhelming majority of the players and the fans are boys and men. Drawing on constructivist approaches to gender and identity, football can be described as a bastion of manhood, an arena where diverse forms of masculinity and male identities are constructed, performed and re-produced, not only on the field but also on the stands (e.g., Lenneis and Pfister 2015). Male fans play in the stadium 'serious games of men' displaying and defending their masculinity (Bourdieu 1997). From this perspective, men's football and the discourses and practices of male players and fans can be considered as gender presentations whereby playing and watching football is always also 'doing gender.'

In the recent decades, women's football has gained a measure of acceptance in Europe and beyond. Particularly in countries with strong women's football teams, such as in Germany or Scandinavia, the 'important'

games and tournaments such as the Women's World Championship in 2011 or the European Championship in 2013 attract large audiences who follow the matches in the stadiums or in front of the TV screens (Pfister 2013).

Here several questions emerge: Does the attention paid to attractive international tournaments enhance interest in women's matches on local, regional and national levels? Do fans, both men and women, follow and support women's teams? Is the number of women who join the ranks of football supporters increasing, and do they watch the game from the fan zones? From the perspectives of the participants in the FREE project, the question must be asked: Are women participating in European football dialogues, and in which way do they do this?

There are a considerable number of studies on fans, predominately the fans of male players and men's teams. However, little is known about the fans supporting women's football. All available information shows that female players and teams do not have many fans nor do they receive much media attention. As women form also a minority among fans (of men's teams), it can be assumed that they experience and act out fandom in specific ways, that they have to deal with the sexism in fan groups dominated by men, and that they integrate their attachment to football in diverse 'gender projects' (see Lennis and Pfister 2015).

The results of the FREE project provided information to the issues raised above. A strong focus was on women's contribution to a European football dialogue, on their participation in Europeanization projects and on European identity adoption via football. These questions must be discussed in the context of the 'nation building' enterprises of both genders. The methods used in the FREE project are observations, online surveys, population research and various forms of qualitative interviews.

## **Gender, Sport and Trans/national Identities: Theoretical Considerations**

Building and representing a nation or a continent as an 'imagined community' seemed for a long time to be not only a men's endeavour but also a focus for male scholars. This changed in the 1990s, when Yuval Davies,

among others, emphasized the crucial, complex and contested inter-relationships of doing gender and building a nation, highlighting women's contributions not only to the biological, but also to the cultural and symbolical reproduction of a society (see Yuval-Davis 1997).<sup>6</sup>

Currently, there is a consensus that gender and nation intersect and interact and that gender relations are key dimensions of nation-building projects (Sluga 1998; Nagel 1998). The same is true of projects of Europeanization, which refer to the development of common paradigms, norms, rules and practices based on and driven by dialogues and identification processes of both genders and resulting potentially in a redefinition and repositioning of national and regional identities within a European context.

Numerous studies indicate the importance of men's sport and men's football for national representation, identity formation, as well as for a common passion and a potential attachment to Europe (see Sonntag 2008). However, international events such as the Olympic Games and international tournaments such as the Champions League not only serve as demonstrations of the—imagined—strength of the participating nations but enable also transnational identification processes with outstanding athletes and players (see the contributions in Kreisky and Spitaler 2006; Fritzsche 2010). Up to now, little attention has been paid to the intersections of sport, gender and national or regional identities and to the question whether and how sportswomen and female teams, as well as female fans, may foster identification, represent their nation and, at the same time, contribute to transnational dialogues and European integration.

The focus on gender and its impact on national or European identities/subjectivities raises first of all the question about the meaning of both concepts. From the perspective of cultural studies, identity is continuously created and re-defined in and through interactions within multiple discourses and practices (Davies 2000). According to Eley and Suny (1996, p. 10) 'the multiplicity, fluidity, contextual and contested qualities of identities that studies of gender have highlighted have undermined any notion of a single, all-embracing primary identity to which all others must be subordinated at all times and costs.'

Gender theories, too, have 'taken on the most naturalized of all categories, gender, and destabilized our understanding of the 'natural' roles and capacities of women and men' (Eley and Suny 1996, p. 10). Lorber (2005, p. 6; see also Lorber 1994) emphasizes the importance of gender categories in societies and understands gender as 'a binary system of social organization' which is embedded in subjectivities, presented in social encounters and 'embodied.' Drawing on Connell, gender has to be considered as 'social embodiment,' where bodies are both objects of and agents in social practice (Connell 2002, p. 47). Gender researchers agree that gender is not something we are or we have, but according to Rakow (1986, p. 19), 'something we do and something we think with, both a set of social practices and a system of cultural meaning.' By doing gender and thinking in terms of gender we re-produce gender differences in everyday life, and 'once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the 'essentialness' of gender' (West and Zimmermann 1991, p. 24). Sport is a concept and a practice which systematically identifies and 'naturalizes' differences, including differences between women and men. Doing sport and/or acting as fan is always also doing gender.

Fandom is appropriated in lifelong gendered socialization processes which begin with the initiation of children, boys as a rule, into the brotherhood of predominately male fans (Pfister 2007; Lennis and Pfister 2015). Theoretical approaches to socialization can provide a framework for an understanding of fan biographies and fan behaviour (Pfister 2013).

Doing sport and identifying as a fan are always presentations of oneself as man or as woman. Although in most sports men and women do not compete with each other, gendered hierarchies emerge. There is 'real' football and women's football, which is often portrayed as a less attractive copy of the men's game. 'Real football' is still a display of masculinity staged for a male audience. It is an open question whether the increasing interest of women in playing and consuming football will change the gender order on and off the football field. Although women's football experienced a considerable increase of public attention in the context of international tournaments; studies have revealed that this enthusiasm has not necessarily been transferred to women's football league matches, which still receive little public attention and very limited media coverage. Football is still a man's affair.

## Results of and Approaches in Available Studies

### Football and Gendered Fan Communities

As stated above, men's football developed from a pastime of English school boys into a spectacle which has an unequalled capacity of mobilizing the masses throughout Europe. The game promotes commonly shared symbols and values, addresses and triggers various forms of involvement ranging from active participation to consumption and from a slight interest to fan-atic identification. Studies indicate that identification with clubs, men's teams and male players is one of the main motives for watching football and joining a fan community or a 'neo-tribe' in the sense of Maffesoli (1996; see also Pfister 2007). The discursive establishment of emblematic in- and out-groups, as well as the overlapping of 'tribal' affiliations, provide opportunities for demarcations and multi-layered identification processes, where loyalties to intersecting communities such as clubs, regions or nations are negotiated and displayed. Kreisky and Spitaler (2006, p. 33) describe football communities as fraternities with hierarchic structures, specific rules and rituals, inclusion and exclusion processes, as well as anti-feminist, sexist and homophobic orientations.

Football is a combat sport, where fighting for possession of the ball and powerful and aggressive actions among players—and also among fans—are appreciated. Marschik (2003) claims that football is staged and perceived as a surrogate war and an arena for acting out men's (the players' and the fans') alliances and conflicts. Players and fans participate in the 'serious games' of men, who display masculinities in their fights for hegemony (Bourdieu 1997). Gender studies also provide insights into masculinity constructions on the football ground and in the fan stands (e.g., Connell 2002). They draw attention to the fact that 'men's serious games' only make sense when women represent the 'other sex' and, using the terminology of Bourdieu (1997), act as 'flattering mirrors.'

Scholars agree that football is a demonstration and celebration of hegemonic masculinity—on and off the field—although the members of the different fan cultures, such as Ultras or Hooligans, may use different scripts for their performances, present different forms of masculinities and identify with different players and teams (see the articles in Kreisky and Spitaler 2006).

Whether and, if so, how male and female fans react to and identify with female players has not (yet) been an issue of football research, although it must be emphasized that most football studies are gender blind: football scholars describe football and fan cultures in a 'gender neutral' way that is, without noticing that they deal with a homosocial world of men.

## Transnational Fandom

Some decades ago sport was an important arena for staging and re-producing national, regional and local identities. This may still be the case, but football and football teams are today a common topic of men in Europe which triggers multiple loyalties and complex identification processes. The rising power of UEFA, the popularity of the Champions League, migrating players and transnational markets are causes and effects of the Europeanization of men's football. Football matches are multicultural events which reach transnational fan communities via old and new communication technologies. The media provide narratives about players, matches, teams and clubs which gain increasingly attention and meaning outside of their national or local contexts (e.g., Ranc 2012).

However, players and teams convey different images in their own country and abroad, and provide different identification patterns for local supporters and for transnational fans who also identify with their local clubs and national teams. In addition, a large number of fans develop an attachment to foreign clubs not because national/local ties, but because of the charisma of players and teams. Today, multiple and intersecting loyalties of fans are the rule and not the exception.

Fans communicate and interact in a virtual multi-national arena and construct virtual 'tribes' of Bayern München or Manchester United fans (Maffesoli 1996). These tribes are transnational as their members live in different countries and environments. They are connected by their love to a specific team. Can football thus be used as material for constructing a European sense of belonging? In addition, the question arises whether and how women can and want to be part of these transnational fan communities.

## Female Fans in a Men's World

Relatively few studies focus on female fans, who are clearly a minority among football audiences. A representative survey of the German population revealed that around 5 per cent of the female and 21 per cent of the male population had watched at least one football game in the stadium in the last 12 months. A total of 15 per cent of the women and 55 per cent of the men are intensively interested in football (Hansen 2010; see also Pfister 2015). Studies in other countries indicate similar or even larger gender differences among football supporters and fans (e.g., see the articles in Kreisky and Spitaler 2006).

Numerous questions are waiting for answers: How do female fans deal with the male fan cultures? Do women play specific roles among fans and behave differently than men? How do female fans react to the sexism and homophobia in football stadiums?<sup>7</sup> Several studies reveal that there are various groups of female fans, as well as diverse motives for and many ways to engage in fandom. Some women watch the game because they enjoy the company of their husbands or friends; the 'groupies' attend a game because they admire an attractive player; but the majority of female football supporters are 'serious fans' who love the game. The atmosphere in the fan community and the loyalty among fans may be further incentives to watch football for men and women alike. According to Fritzsche (2010) and others, football does not only convey traditional gender ideals and practices but also provides the opportunity to make fun of or even reverse the gender order (Selmer 2004; Sülzle 2005, 2007; Selmer and Sülzle 2006; Pope 2010).

We do not know whether women are fans of foreign players and teams and whether or how they engage in a transnational fan community. Are they 'travelling' fans identifying with teams and players in other countries? Do they use websites and the internet to gain information about foreign players and matches abroad? Is football a topic of cross-cultural dialogues among women?

It may be assumed that the answers to these questions depend, among other things, on the football and fan cultures as well as on the situation of women's football in the various countries. The 'feminization' of football (including fandom) may have the best chances in

countries with a long tradition and a strong support of women's football such as, such as the Scandinavian countries, as well as Germany and France.

## Women's Football Still a Contested Issue?

As stated above, football was 'invented' by men for men, who used the game as a homosocial arena for re-producing masculinity or, as Dunning (1986) phrased it, as an enclave where men could still be men. In some European countries such as England, women began to found football clubs already at the beginning of the twentieth century, but they had to face the resistance of men, in particular, of the football federations. In other countries, for example Germany, there were very few (and unsuccessful) attempts by women to play football (Pfister et al. 1998). However, in the 1950s, several professional women's football teams emerged in Europe and even competed in international matches organized by business men with a view to exploit the voyeurism of the male audiences (Pfister 2011b). Despite the increasing quality of the games, professional women's football disappeared when the interest of both the media and the audiences decreased. In Germany and other European countries, Football Federations ignored women's football and even forbade men's football clubs to give female players access to their fields and resources (Hong and Mangan 2004; Pfister 2006). Opponents of women's football put forward numerous arguments relating to a dichotomous gender order based on biologist discourses. Female bodies and minds as well as women's 'destiny' were used as arguments to prevent them from participating in an exhausting and rough game which was reserved for men displaying their physical and mental superiority. In addition, until quite recently women were considered and treated as the 'other sex.' Their roles and duties, in particular their responsibilities for home and children, impeded their involvement in numerous activities ranging from politics to employment and, last but not least, to sport.

As stated above, the ban of women's football was lifted in 1970, which marked the beginning of a steadily increasing women's football movement. In 1984, women competed for the first time at the European level



in a first European competition; in 1991, the first world championship for women's teams was held; and in 1996, women's football even became an Olympic event. In 2000/2001, a UEFA Women's Cup was introduced which responded to the growing interest in and importance of women's football in Europe. In 2009/2010 this event has been re-branded as the UEFA Women's Champions League.

Today, girls and women play football all over the world; however, the percentage of girls and women varies depending on the country. Among all members of football clubs, girls and women represent 22 per cent in Norway, 21 per cent in Denmark, 15 per cent in Germany, 5 per cent in England and France, 2 per cent in Italy and 1 per cent in Greece (Pfister 2011a; since then these numbers have considerably increased). In many countries, for example in Norway and the UK, football is among the most popular women's sport (Pfister 2011b).

Currently, women are increasingly accepted and even appreciated by national football federations and also by the UEFA which finances studies about women's football and supports women's games on the European level. The reason for this interest may be self-serving, among other things aiming at an increase of members and fans. But this does not matter: the federations' support has contributed to the rise of a European women's football movement which includes—besides players and fans—journalists and administrators, as well as scholars conducting research on women's football. However, women's football is still the 'other' game.

Jeanes and Kay (2007, p. 109) claim that 'femininity in football continues to be constructed as subordinated, stigmatized and marginalized /.../ Research offers compelling evidence of the power of football to retain its masculine status.' Female players seem to challenge notions of male hegemony, but as Harris (2005, p. 1) states, 'their acceptance of the male game as being more important, and their adopting of discourse and ideologies emanating from the male model of the sport, means that they are also colluding in the (re)production of masculine hegemony' (Harris 2005, p. 1).

As stated above, migrating players may contribute to the globalization of the game. Research in labour migration of athletes which has emerged in recent decades focuses almost entirely on men, mostly male football players. According to current studies, among others studies conducted in Scandinavia, female players, too, travel to foreign countries and find jobs in clubs; but their salaries are low and only very few players are offered a

long-time perspective. The ‘migrants’ come with various motives, among others to get better training and living conditions. In particular, clubs in Scandinavia and Germany are transnational organizations with international women’s football teams (e.g., see Botelho and Agergaard 2011). Nevertheless, it is an open question whether the foreign players and the multi-national teams contribute to an international or even European identification of the spectators.<sup>8</sup> The lack of interest in female players and teams may restrict the impact of the internationalization of women’s football.

## Women’s Teams and Their Fans

As it has been pointed out above, women are still the ‘second sex’ in football, not only with regard to spectators, public attention and media coverage, but also with regard to sponsors and financial resources (Pfister 2006). With few exceptions, female teams attract only a small number of spectators. In Germany, the average number of fans attending a women’s game is less than 1000. Even female football stars do not earn enough to make a living. Observations during the last women’s world championship showed that although there was considerable media interest in the games, football was also accompanied by gendering and sexualization processes. The journalists even discussed whether women’s football can be considered ‘real’ football. The defeat of the German team in the 2011 World Championship had a negative impact on the public attention and enthusiasm in Germany. This impeded the development of women’s football in one of the most important ‘football countries.’

The question arises as to whether—and when—women’s clubs and female players attract fans from abroad, become an issue in European football discourses, and provoke transnational identification processes. This is still to be explored.

## Conclusions and Perspectives

Currently, men’s football seems to be one of the few activities which addresses and attracts transnational communities. Football grounds and football games can be interpreted as activities and spaces, which have an

impact on perceptions, experiences, embodiments and identities of the various populations in Europe and beyond. Football may contribute to European integration based on cross-cultural interests and dialogues. The question arises as to whether—and how—women, both female players and female fans, participate in these transnational communication and identification processes.

To answer these questions we must explore the role of women's football in European football discourses, investigate the potential of women's games and female players to attract female and male fans and trigger transnational communication. In addition, we need to ask to what degree and in which way migrating players, men and women, can contribute to these integration processes being ambassadors of their respective countries.

A major area of the research will be the relatively unexplored field of female fans. What are their backgrounds, motives and behaviour patterns, as well as their roles in fan cultures dominated by men? How do female fans adapt to and/or resist men's supremacy? How do they use fandom for their gender projects and how do they position themselves in the European football scene? Female fans of women's teams will be an important issue since it can be assumed that identification with players of the same gender provides specific opportunities to enjoy football and participate in the creation of transnational football spaces.

It may be assumed that the increasing number of women among football crowds and their consumption of football as mass entertainment have an impact on gender constructions, relations and negotiations on and off the football ground. This also raises questions not only about men's and women's patterns of identification and emotional investment, but also about the impact of women engaged in football on the existing gender order. A comparative analysis of football cultures will provide an insight into the involvement of women and show similarities and differences in various countries. The FREE project and its research groups will explore these questions by conducting surveys and interviews in seven countries.

A specific focus will be placed on general populations in the participating countries and their interest in and attachment to football—not only in 'their own' but also to foreign clubs, teams and players. Do they, that is the men and the women, take part in the European football discourses and do these discourses trigger 'Europeanization' processes.

## Notes

1. This is a reprint of a text which was published in *Annales Kinesiologiae* vol. 4, no. 1 (2013) <http://ojs.zrs.upr.si/index.php/AK/article/view/19>. We want to draw your attention to the journal, but as it may not easily be accessible, we decided to publish a reprint in this book.
2. See the literature on football consumption and fans in the bibliography.
3. On the history of football fandom see Hargrave (2007).
4. <http://www.free-project.eu/> with more information on the project.
5. <http://www.free-project.eu/research/Pages/Research.aspx> for an overview of research.
6. For theoretical approaches to nationalism see Day and Thompson (2004).
7. See the texts about female fans in this book. There also current literature is provided.
8. The webpage 'diasbola' is the platform of European dialogues about female football players with a specific focus on migration (<http://www.diasbola.com>).

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# 4

## The Beginnings of Women's Football in South-Western Germany: From a Spectacle to a Sport Event

Markwart Herzog

### Introduction

On 30 July 1955, the General Assembly (*Bundestag*) of the German Football Association (DFB—*Deutscher Fußball-Bund*) passed a law which banned women from playing football. The clubs organized in this association were prohibited from establishing leagues for women's football, incorporating women's football teams that already existed and making fields available for women's football. Furthermore, the regional associations (*Landesverbände*) were instructed not to make referees and referee's assistants available for games between women's teams (Deutscher Fußball-Bund 1956, pp. 13, 129).

In this chapter I will analyse the main obstacles women's football was confronted with and will shed light on the main driving forces who asserted women's football as a socially accepted game. Financial and political issues will also be discussed. The geographical focus of this study lies

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on South-Western Germany, and in particular in Wörrstadt, Bad Neuenahr and Kaiserslautern, as the efforts of officials from this region decisively contributed to lifting the ban on women's football in the DFB in 1970.

## 1954: The 'Miracle of Berne' and the Initial Euphoria for Women's Football

The reasons leading to the above-mentioned ban were ultimately rooted in the greatest success of the German men's national team up until then: their victory in the World Cup of 1954 dubbed the 'Miracle of Bern'. The success engendered an increasing popularity of the game. The football euphoria of that time not only captivated men who previously had not been football fans, but also captivated many women (Raithel 2004, pp. 119–121; Brüggemeier 2006, p. 35; Herzog 2014). They not only wanted to watch, but they also wanted to play football.

Among them was Bärbel Wohlleben, one of the most enthusiastic pioneers of women's football in Germany in the 1960s and 1970s (Schmidt 2010, p. 93, cf. p. 112). Already at the age of ten, Wohlleben was highly impressed by the success of the German national team and wanted to play football herself. With the active support of her father, she succeeded in becoming a member of a football club (SpVgg Ingelheim) and played in male youth teams between 1954 and 1958. This was very unusual for that time (Kieffer 2011, pp. 48–52).

Women who were enthusiastic about football during this era and followed the success of the men's national team organized some matches through their own initiatives, whilst other matches were organized and staged by men pursuing commercial interests. These women's football games were occasionally played against international opponents in front of large audiences (Hennies and Meuren 2009, pp. 16–9, 26–30). In view of this development, the DFB felt that not only was its monopoly over the organization of football under threat, but also the cultural values of the game. At that time, the game was still regarded as a combat sport reserved exclusively for men. Furthermore, the Association was still attached to the so-called German *Sonderweg* (special path) (Eggers 2010,

pp. 221–43) characterized by a thoroughly hypocritical amateurism. Women playing football matches which yielded a profit, thus constituted a double breach with the principles upheld by the DFB. According to a widespread legend, a DFB official expressed this adverse attitude in the following statement: 'At that time a bunch of managers travelled around the country making money with women shaking their breasts' (cited in Fechtig 1995, p. 25). However, the officials did not seem to comprehend that it was the DFB itself which drove the women into the hands of commercial profiteers. Moreover, the DFB rejected women's football for aesthetic and physiological as well as ethical and psychological reasons and embraced the arguments of medical scientists who claimed that not only football, but competitive sports in general, would have a negative impact on fertility, pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding (Brüggemeier 2004, pp. 205–8; Pfister 2006, p. 100; Langen 2013, pp. 285–8).

In addition, availability of and access to playing grounds were also decisive factors in the struggles around women's football. The access to fields was controlled by football federations—as an instrument of power not only by the DFB, but also by the English Football Association (FA), for example, to impede women's football which had flourished during the First World War. In 1921 the FA prohibited football clubs from making fields available for women's football matches. This ban was not removed until 1972 (Williams 2007, pp. 128–9). It was very effective as the clubs administered most football fields in both countries. However, in Germany the fields and stadiums which were owned by the municipalities were an opportunity for women to play the game (Schmidt 2010, pp. 70–1). The sport administration of Berlin and Munich made municipal football fields available for international women's football matches in 1957. The German Association of Cities (*Deutscher Städtetag*) also supported women's football, not least because these games were a substantial source of financial income for the municipalities. However, the DFB forced the municipalities to back down, with the threat of not receiving an allocation of future international matches (Hennies and Meuren 2009, p. 16).

However, in the 1950s opinions on women's football were divided within the football association. In 1957 there were six Bavarian sports clubs with women's football teams which played friendly matches. One of these associations was the SSV Jahn Regensburg. Hans Huber, the

director of the Bavarian Football Association (BFV), defended the authorization of women's football with the argument that the DFB was best able to organize and control football (Schmidt 2010, p. 71). However, most regional associations strictly followed the policy of the DFB whose Advisory Council ultimately endorsed the ban on 16 November 1957 (Hennies and Meuren 2009, pp. 15–6).

The DFB management hoped that women's football would not be able to sustain itself in the long term without a financial basis and organizational structures. It stuck to its hard-line policy, in particular when women teams 'officially' asked for access to places. However, in practice the DFB had to pursue a more flexible strategy, because the municipalities continued to make football fields available for female football players and thereby undermined the policy of the federation. In the early 1960s there were several women's teams in men's football clubs. Their games were occasionally authorized by the regional DFB associations, whose administrators pursued the goal that the sports clubs could claim the entrance fees (Schmidt 2010, p. 74).

## Pioneers in the South-West Ignore the Ban

The number of girls and women playing football continued to increase in the 1960s. More and more sports clubs, among them the SC 07 Bad Neuenahr and the TuS Wörrstadt, clubs affiliated to the DFB, supported women's teams and ignored the policy of their federation. In the 1970s these sports clubs had the strongest women's football teams in Germany.

The founding process of women's football teams sheds significant light on the motives of the establishment. For example, the festivities for the 50th anniversary of the founding of the football section provided an occasion for the creation of a women's team in the TuS Wörrstadt. There were plans for a match between women's teams (Schmidt 2010, pp. 79–80, 155), which should be a form of amusement as was common at village festivals, parish fairs and carnivals or other festivities and jubilees. The wives and girlfriends of the men's team played in the very same positions as their male partners in the Wörrstadt women's team. Before the anniversary match the Wörrstadt women played a trial match against a team from Dorn-Dürkheim, which had agreed to be the opponents for the

anniversary event. The return match on the club's anniversary on 2 August 1969 is regarded as the date of birth of women's football in Wörrstadt. However, no one expected that this match would trigger such a movement, which would ultimately lead to climactic events such as winning the first official women's football championship in 1974.

The 1. FC Kaiserslautern (FCK) was the first football club in the *Bundesliga* (German Federal Football League) to create a team, initially, and then a section for women's football. The foundation of this team was announced by the daily newspaper *Die Rheinpfalz* on 28 April 1970—ten months after the introduction of women's football in Bad Neuenahr and Wörrstadt and approximately half a year before the official removal of the ban on women's football. One month later, the women's football section in the FCK was established (1. FC Kaiserslautern 1970, p. 8).

However, the first public women's football match in Kaiserslautern was a public relations event for the men's FCK *Bundesliga* team. In the final home game of the 1969/1970 season on 25 April 1970, FCK played against the 1. FC Köln (Cologne) in Betzenberg Stadium. The result of this match was of no significance from a sporting perspective for either club. FCK thus feared that the match would only attract a small crowd and meagre income. The management board looked for ways to increase the attractiveness of the event to entice paying spectators. For this purpose, two women's teams were invited to Kaiserslautern to play a match during the preliminary programme of this final *Bundesliga* home game of the 1969/1970 season. The opponents were a team of the ASV Landau and a team from Augsburg (Herzog 2013b, pp. 88–91).

As the DFB had allowed women's football matches in exceptional cases if they improved the financial standing of the organizing clubs (Schmidt 2010, p. 74), the FCK organized its first public match in Kaiserslautern. This club was perhaps more open-minded towards women's football than other *Bundesliga* clubs, because some of its officials already advocated competitive sports for women during the Weimar Republic, under National-Socialist rule and in the late 1940s in the Federal Republic of Germany. One of these men was the sports physician Willi Pfeifer, who supported the FCK's female footballers in all their medical needs (Herzog 2009, pp. 225–7; Herzog 2013b, pp. 98–108). Pfeifer was the FCK team doctor for three decades and, in the 1960s, was a member of the Kaiserslautern city council for the Social-Democratic Party (SPD).

## From Amusement for Men to a Competitive Sport

The women's football match between ASV Landau and a team from Augsburg was divided into two 25-minute periods and it caused a great sensation. Journalists from all over Germany came to report on the event. However, the regional daily newspaper *Die Rheinpfalz* hardly mentioned the match in its post-game coverage, but did report thoroughly about the players. Just like the press, the nearly 20,000 spectators of the game on 25 April 1970 in Betzenberg Stadium were less interested in the competition; instead, they were keen to watch the female players and their curves (Anonymous 1970). However, the event achieved its objective: due to high attendance, FCK received sufficient entrance fees. Nevertheless, women's football was not taken seriously by many at this time.

There were other football games that were played 'for fun' during this time period, in other cities. However, organizers of these matches were more interested in producing spectacular entertainment, as well as an increase of the number of spectators and the ticket sales. This interest in entertainment and fun can also be seen in the functions of the people in the respective clubs who became involved in women's football. For example, Philipp 'Fips' Scheidt became responsible for the women's section of the TuS Wörrstadt as early as 1970. He had previously been a director of the carnival department and a member of the club's management board (Kieffer 2011, p. 33). In Kaiserslautern too, the long-term 'entertainment supervisor' of the FCK, Erich Schicketanz, was involved in the organization of the women's matches.

The women's team of SC 07 Bad Neuenahr has a similar history (Kieffer 2011, pp. 16–7). This team was founded in 1969 by a men's team named *König Stube* (King's Pub). The wives and girlfriends of the players gathered for training and for matches and thus had a reason to visit a pub after the games. They were incorporated as members into the club at the initiative of its managing director Heinz Günther Hansen on 5 October 1969. The club membership had the great advantage that women were given accident insurance against injury. In November 1969, the SC ladies played their first game against a women's team from the SV

Ochtendung, a small municipality in Rhineland-Palatinate with around 4000 inhabitants. This match attracted 600 spectators.

The fact that the women's team of the SC 07 Bad Neuenahr emerged from a pub team is an excellent example of the fruitful symbiosis between sports and pubs, restaurants and breweries, which was immensely important in the history of men's football in Europe (Eggers 2001, pp. 154–8; Havemann 2005, pp. 68–72; Collins and Vamplew 2006, pp. 5–38; Havemann 2013, pp. 133–6).

The formation of a women's team by the football club SV Spesbach also provides evidence that women's football teams were originally seen more as a joke than serious sports competitors. During Carnival season in 1969 a spontaneously formed women's team met for a match against a male team in the hope that this event would entertain and amuse the village inhabitants. However, this game gave the impetus for the creation of a ladies' football team within SV Spesbach which found opponent teams through radio appeals. Among the opponents was also the FCK, which met the Spesbach ladies for two matches on 15 August and 3 October 1970. However, this team existed only from 1968/69 to 1971 (Margit Banse, interview, 31 January 2011).

## DFB Officials and Politicians as Pacemakers for Women's Football

The strongest teams during the early era of women's football in Germany were the TuS Wörrstadt supported by the board member Philipp 'Fips' Scheidt, the SC 07 Bad Neuenahr supported by Heinz Günther Hansen, and the women's team of the shooting club Oberst Schiel, which was coached by 'Ferdinand' Stang. This team played its first match as early as 30 June 1968 (Thoma 2013, p. 71). The women's team of the FCK was not among the top teams though, as they did not succeed in winning the regional championship of the South-Western German Football Association a single time, which would have qualified them to play in the German championship matches (Herzog 2011).

The fact that the DFB went ahead with women's football, despite all the prejudices they encountered, could be largely traced back to the commitment of officials from South-Western Germany. In particular Scheidt and Hansen pushed the DFB to change its position. They 'proverbially bombarded the DFB with letters' during the early years of women's football, as Maria Breuer, a player for Bad Neuenahr, recalls: 'The decisive advancements in the early years of women's football can be attributed to their dedication and tenacity' (Schmidt 2010, p. 211; cf. Kieffer 2011, pp. 30–5). In September 1969, the DFB Advisory Council decided to review the matter of women's football. To this end, a small commission was established to weigh up the pros and cons of women's football and to adopt a position in the association's interest. This point of view was largely drawn up by commission member Hansen.

The commission, consequently, recommended that the DFB allowed the regional associations to introduce women's football, and that games should be played based on special rules (Schmidt 2010, p. 83 fn. 409). At a conference of the regional associations on 6 and 7 March 1970, the course was set for a meeting of the DFB Advisory Council. Eventually, the Advisory Council passed a resolution on 21 March 1970 which advocated lifting the ban on women's football.

A staunch supporter of women's football within the DFB Management Board was Hermann Neuberger, who as Vice-President of the DFB had previously rejected and opposed women's football (Havemann 2013, p. 359; Schiller 2014, pp. 58–66). He reported various reasons for changing his position (Schmidt 2010, pp. 83–6). First, he wanted to prevent women's football associations from emerging as opponents of the DFB. Furthermore, Neuberger hoped that the football clubs could make a name for themselves as 'family clubs' through the stronger participation of women. This strategy corresponded to the general objective of the DFB (Havemann 2013, pp. 43–53) of addressing and attracting people of different ages and professional and social backgrounds. In addition, women's football provided an opportunity to broaden its membership and to prevent female players from joining other sporting associations such as, for example, gymnastics clubs. Based on these considerations, the DFB saw positive aspects in incorporating women's football. After the above-mentioned vote of the DFB Advisory Council on 21 March 1970,

the removal of the ban and the authorization of women's football at the upcoming DFB General Assembly on 31 October 1970 in Travemünde, was ultimately a mere formality. It was clear that women's football had developed as an independent system outside the DFB, into whose structures it was, however, incorporated after long disputes and struggles.

Neuberger's support for women's football in the late 1960s was not a flash in the pan. He continued to promote women's football in the years afterwards (Herzog 2013a, pp. 19–20; Westermeier 2013, pp. 230–1). Under his presidency (1975–1992), the DFB took decisive steps towards promoting girls' football, starting in October 1979 by means of educational initiatives in schools (Weigelt-Schlesinger 2013, pp. 192–4). As the change of attitudes with regard to women's football reveals, Neuberger was willing to critically assess and examine his positions.

## Support from the Mass Media

The media, including daily newspapers, magazines, radio and television, were an important driving force for the recognition of women's football. They generally reported positively and fairly on the new sport as its coverage in Bad Neuenahr as well as in Wörrstadt reveals (Schmidt 2010, pp. 100–1, 104–5, 138–9, 144–5, 157). They made people aware of women's football and motivated girls and women to create teams and play matches.

Beyond the media's role as a catalyst for the change in the DFB's position, the pioneers of women's football point to an additional reason. At this time, the association was preparing to host the men's FIFA World Cup in 1974. Women's football provided an opportunity to increase the spectator potential of the World Cup (Schiller 2014, p. 40) and, in view of the increasing numbers of women playing football, to attract more females to the stadiums where the World Cup finals were being held. This was supposed to generate additional income for the DFB (Schmidt 2010, pp. 87, 154, 157).

During the period leading up to the removal of the ban, the positive coverage of women's football in the press, radio and television exerted pressure on the DFB and on the regional associations, whose impact



should not be underestimated (Schmidt 2010, pp. 70–76). In Kaiserslautern, as was the case in many other cities, the media also contributed very significantly to generating enthusiasm for women's football. In particular, the local media reported on the women's matches in a fair and objective manner.

The national media—in particular the daily tabloid *Bild*—was committed to women's football, whereas *Der Spiegel*, a critical and investigative news magazine, covered women's football games with ridicule and mockery. The conservative newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, by contrast, followed the rise of women's football with great admiration from the very beginning and explicitly encouraged readers to rethink their positions with regard to stereotypical gender roles (Westermeier 2013, pp. 225–6).

A television report in Kaiserslautern about the previously mentioned football game, held on 25 April 1970 between ASV Landau and a team from Augsburg, attracted great interest among girls and young women and considerably increased awareness of the event among broader segments of society (television broadcast '*Blick ins Land: Frauenfußball: Landau-Augsburg*', 1970, Direction: DRA Frankfurt, screenplay: Fritz Danco, 701367, Bayerischer Rundfunk). Girls and women from Kaiserslautern and its surrounding areas bombarded the FCK office with requests to establish a women's team. This ultimately resulted in the previously mentioned creation of the football section of FCK immediately after 25 April. The newly elected FCK President Willi Müller, 'who is viewed as the founder of women's football in the 1. FCK' (Herbrand 1977, p. 43), recognized the signs at the time and counteracted the DFB's ban on women's football. Müller was friends with the then Prime Minister of Rhineland-Palatinate and later Federal Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, who was a supporter of women's football and stood up against its numerous opponents among the DFB officials (Kieffer 2011, pp. 90, 114, 121, 125; Herzog 2013a, p. 20; Schmidt 2013, p. 15).

In autumn 1970, the football section of the FCK announced its 'admiration for the ball-kicking Amazons' (cited in Herzog 2013b, p. 99). The noun 'Amazons' was frequently used for female football players (Güldenpfennig 2013, pp. 34–6). It was clearly a declaration of sympathy, but it also signalled a certain distance from women's football. It could have

indicated that women's football is a transgression of cultural boundaries and gender norms. However, the attitude towards women's football soon changed and the women's game was accepted as athletic competition. This is evidenced by readers' protests against a malicious newspaper article in the daily newspaper *Die Rheinpfalz* which reported about 22 'maidens who had grown out of their baby fat age', blustered spitefully about the 'the ball-kicking Amazons', insulted them as 'ballerinas' and degraded them as 'leather actresses' (Kauer 1972).

The editorial board of the *Rheinpfalz* subsequently received letters from protesting readers, who would have wished for a focus 'more on athletic aspects' in the coverage of the game (Anonymous 1972). Such protests show that derogatory articles about women's football were no longer accepted by everyone. With some exceptions, the fans were interested in the game the women played and not their appearance.

## Motives, Sexual Orientation and Social Life

Did women become excited about football because they were fascinated by the sport, or did they strive for 'emancipation'? In her unpublished graduate thesis, Anne Schmidt in 2010 searched for answers to this question by conducting and evaluating interviews with former football officials, coaches and players from TuS Wörrstadt and SC 07 Bad Neuenahr. Based on her research, women's football 'primarily took on a dynamic of its own [...] for athletic reasons'. The players did not pursue any political or emancipatory motives. For them it was about the right and opportunity to play football, 'above all for the fun and joy of exercising this type of sport' (the previous quotes in: Schmidt 2010, pp. 3, 77, 111, 112). Interviews conducted with former FCK players, snippets of which are included in this chapter, also indicate that they were only interested in the sport.

Many female pioneers of women's football were already interested in the sport in their early youth. They played football with their brothers or boys from the neighbourhood on streets and meadows. However, they were still refused access to the fields managed by football clubs. They were allowed to participate in gymnastics and athletics or team handball

(Schmidt 2010, pp. 93–4, 177, 180; Kieffer 2011, pp. 49, 117–8, 122), even though handball is a competitive team game. In terms of toughness, it is similar to football, although in its original, less physically aggressive form it was invented and designed as a game for women. Numerous first-generation female football players were members of handball teams and sections of sporting clubs. Approximately 50 per cent of women of TuS Wörrstadt not only played football, but handball, too. When Petra Ziller was unable to train with her football team because she was deployed to locations outside Kaiserslautern as part of her career training, she remained in shape for the weekend football games through athletics and handball. Margot Siebenlist's career as a football player took a different turn. She initially played field hockey with TSG Kaiserslautern and then switched to the FCK women's football team. However, her parents banned her from playing football, because it was 'unbecoming' (*unschicklich*) for a young woman. Thus, she was forced to return to handball (Petra Ziller, interview, 14 January 2011). Mothers' discouraging their daughters from playing football is an issue in current research on the history of women's football (Pope and Kirk 2014).

The primary motivation for women to become involved in football resulted from their fascination for the sport and was only seldom connected with the pursuit of women's emancipation. Football was particularly attractive for lesbian women, because they could meet other lesbian women in the teams. This definitely applies to the first decade of women's football in Kaiserslautern, Wörrstadt and Bad Neuenahr. For example, former players from the TuS Wörrstadt referred in interviews to the free spaces that the women's teams provided them to live out 'bisexual and homosexual inclinations' (Hartmann, cited in Schmidt 2010, p. 168). Hans-Erwin Hartmann, top coach of the TuS women's team for many years, and Bärbel Petzold, a 'player from the very first minute' made numerous statements along these lines. Accordingly, women's football provided possibilities 'to meet "likeminded" women' (Hartmann, cited in Schmidt 2010, p. 168). 'The personal inclinations were accepted along with the recognition of football achievements' (Hartmann, cited in Schmidt 2010, p. 168). This also included the 'tolerance for lesbian inclinations' and the fact that the 'players shared apartments' (Hartmann, cited in Schmidt 2010, p. 168). The football teams at that time appear to

have been social spaces for the lesbian women, a 'haven, in which being different was accepted' (Pfister 1999, p. 163), where 'women suddenly had girlfriends' or 'had the possibility to live out their sexuality quite openly' (Petzold, cited in Schmidt 2010, p. 186).

However, the players did not make a big deal of these relationships. Petzold, who was only 18 years old when the women's team of TuS Wörrstadt was created, 'only learned later about these interactions' (Petzold, cited in Schmidt 2010, p. 186). 'Coming out' was not an option at that time because homosexuality was still a taboo (Pfister 1999, pp. 159, 162). Therefore, the young players were not aware of the bisexual or homosexual orientation of the older women. Petra Ziller recalled that she did not know about the homosexual relationships among her teammates for a long time after joining the team as a 15-year old. Just as in the TuS Wörrstadt, a high percentage of lesbian women played for the FCK. According to interviews with former players they accounted for approximately 30 per cent of members of the women's section of the FCK in the 1970s. The national team player and coach Tina Theune determined that in 1980 approximately 30 to 40 per cent of the players were homosexual, in some teams over 50 per cent (Theune-Meyer 1980, pp. 131–6; cf. Fechtig 1995, pp. 68–82; Pfister 1999, pp. 155–66).

Some mothers of young players were worried that their daughters could give in to the temptation of cigarettes and alcohol, as well as homosexuality (Pfister 1999, pp. 162–3). In the FCK, the worries about alcohol were not entirely unjustified, because after the games the women partied hard, reportedly with plenty of vodka. They also loaded their trunks with cases of beer for away games (Petra Ziller, interview, 14 January 2011).

The joy of playing the game, physical exercise and success in the competitions were clearly the most important motives for the young women to play football. Another attractive reason for joining a football club was a sense of community and the social life with other players, both on and off the field. In this respect, women's football did not differ from men's football. Joint leisure activities, football tournaments in Germany and abroad (Lenk 1979; Kieffer 2011, pp. 67–8, 71–2), and the occasional excessive celebration with alcoholic drinks were part of football as a game and a form of social get-together. At that time, women were often barred

from visiting bars without male company and only did so in exceptional cases (Pfister 1999, pp. 225–6). Through football though, visiting bars became a social practice, which was synonymous with relaxation, enjoyment, entertainment and social contact with teammates.

The motto of the women's section of the FCK was 'win and swig' (*siegen und saufen*). Nevertheless, this led to tension. Those players, for whom the sport and winning were important, seldom went to the pub, whereas, the players who partied frequently weakened their physical condition and hence the performance of the team in the next game. This conflict also occurs in men's football because football is not only a sport but also a form of social bonding (Herzog 2008, pp. 135–7). The third article on women's football published in the FCK members magazine already noted that the 'women [...] not only can play football, but are developing a keen sense for social get-togethers' (Geislinger 1971).

## Spectator Numbers, Ticket Sales and Finances

From a financial perspective, the situation of women's football differed in Kaiserslautern, Wörrstadt and Bad Neuenahr. For the FCK, women's football was a loss-making business during its 16 years of existence. Nevertheless, the club under the leadership of President Müller strived to provide a favourable framework and good conditions for the women's section. The club did not demand an admission fee from the 'football girls' and even provided their football attire and gave them a little pocket money. These benefits demonstrate how important women's football must have been for FCK President Müller. For many players who lived outside Kaiserslautern, travelling to practise was costly in terms of time and money. Although the club at least partially reimbursed them for kilometres travelled, playing football was still a matter of idealism—at least for women. The female players enjoyed these favourable conditions under President Müller, who held this office until 1977. Afterwards the conditions deteriorated and the section was dismantled in 1986 (Anonymous 1986).

From an economic standpoint, women's football in TuS Wörrstadt and SC 07 Bad Neuenahr initially generated significant income (Schmidt

2010, pp. 96, 137, 139, 160, 196; Kieffer 2011, pp. 31–4). The mayor of Bad Neuenahr even viewed women's football as an effective factor in promoting his spa town (Schmidt 2010, pp. 88, 101). However, women's football also had considerable support among the local population. This had a positive effect on the spectator numbers and the income through admission fees.

As early as 1971, not only friendly matches, but regular league football games took place in the area covered by the South-Western German Football Association. The first official German women's football championship was carried out in 1974—in a time period where the focus of women's football was already on the battle for goals, league table positions and championships in female competitions.

However, once women's football had shaken off its reputation as a novelty, the number of spectators in Wörrstadt and Bad Neuenahr declined. The many curious onlookers, who initially came to the matches primarily because women's football was something new and spectacular, stayed at home, and the number of those who were interested in women's football as an athletic competition was relatively small (Schmidt 2010, pp. 99–100, 145–6, 162, 181).

A similar development could be observed in the women's football teams. Numerous girls and women played for enjoyment and had genuine enthusiasm for the sport and were willing to endure great physical stress during practise. However, there were also players who were only interested in football for fun and were not seriously involved with the sport. They were described by their more sport-oriented teammates as 'typical ladies' who did not want to 'torment themselves' (Renate Lutzi interview, 4 April 2014). With the increasing performance orientation, the number of players declined in Wörrstadt and Bad Neuenahr (Schmidt 2010, pp. 163). A similar situation occurred in other clubs. Within FCK the enthusiasm for women's football was initially so great that 'over 70 football-hungry young ladies' (Butzke 1970, pp. 13) reported to FCK. In November 1970 this number declined to 40. The trainer attributed this rapid decrease in the number of female players to the fact that 'the training sessions were rigorous and intense for female standards' (Butzke 1970, pp. 13). Former players also recall

nowadays that the ‘typical ladies’ back then were not willing to ‘overcome their “weaker self”’ (*den inneren Schweinehund überwinden*) and so were eliminated (Renate Lutzi, interview, 4 April 2014). Regular training twice a week became obligatory. The less talented players were sorted out from the good and more motivated female players. In autumn 1973 there were only 16 active female players remaining (Herbrand 1973, pp. 19). In 1978/1979 the then coach Horst Ruelius, an engineer, only had 14 to 15 female players at his disposal (Horst Ruelius, interview, 13 January 2011). Occasionally the FCK were only able to take part in association games with nine or ten players. This was a problem which many teams in Western Palatinate struggled with from the mid-1970s onwards. Time and time again, not having the necessary number of female players, they were forced to withdraw their teams from ongoing competitions.

## Conclusions

In the 1960s more and more women became interested in the beautiful game of football. Business-minded entrepreneurs organized competitions which were driven by commercial interests. They came up against the DFB, which aimed to protect the game as an exclusively male domain and, for many years, to prevent the commercialization and professionalization of the sport. When the creation of women’s football associations seemed to be an increasingly realistic prospect and the danger existed that other sporting associations would allow the women footballers to join as members, the warning bells began to ring at the national football association. The association wanted to maintain its monopoly over the organization of football and was forced to react by removing the 1955 ban and legalizing women’s football. At the same time, the integration of women’s football coincided with the association’s interests, to the extent that the DFB was thereby able to significantly broaden its membership and develop new areas for organizing and marketing football. Among the people within the DFB clubs who pushed the Advisory Council of the national football association to lift the ban on women’s football, were dedicated officials from Wörrstadt and Bad Neuenahr. In addition, FCK

was the first *Bundesliga* club who was a prominent supporter on the side of the advocates of women's football.

Competitive women's football also received support from some medical doctors, for example the sports doctor and Social Democrat Willi Pfeifer in Rhineland-Palatinate. In the early 1970s there were also influential advocates of women's football among conservative politicians, including Helmut Kohl, the Prime Minister of Rhineland-Palatinate at that time. Overall, the women's football movement was supported by heterogeneous social forces and people with different political attitudes. Ultimately, renowned print media were decisive in the struggle for enabling the allegedly 'weaker sex' to participate in organized football. By contrast, several influential liberal daily newspapers and weekly magazines initially distanced themselves from women's football and viewed it with ridicule and mockery (Hennies and Meuren 2009, p. 255; Westermeier 2013, pp. 225–6, 234).

Women's football was supported by important persons and various groups and it is not possible to align the cultural and social driving forces of women's football and its advocates with certain philosophical beliefs or (partisan) political orientations. Yet this also applies to football in general. Football organized by the DFB became such a bonding and integrative force for all groups of society because it was able to remain largely outside political and ideological conflicts over time. Women's football ultimately benefited from this potential. Its pioneers conquered the game for athletic or sporting motives, and not for political aims. The societal sub-system of women's football increasingly gathered steam in the 1960s and developed in parallel to DFB-organized football. After a decade-long struggle for recognition, women's football was finally integrated into the system of mainstream football.

**Acknowledgements** I wish to thank Michael Dobbins (Konstanz) for his translation of the text. My thanks are also due to Stacey Pope (Durham) and Gertrud Pfister (Copenhagen) for the invitation to the FREE conference in Copenhagen. Not least I wish to thank Geoff Hare (Edinburgh), Heiner Gillmeister (Brühl), Manfred Lämmer (Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln), Eric Lindon (Kaiserslautern) and Petra and Harry Blandfort (Kaiserslautern) for their manifold comments and helpful suggestions.



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# 5

## Women's Football Leagues in Europe: Organizational and Economic Perspectives

Marie-Luise Klein

### Introduction

In the last two decades women's football in Europe has developed considerably in terms of both quantity and quality. Today around 1.2 million female players are registered in European football clubs (UEFA 2016, p. 3). The highest numbers of females playing football in clubs are registered in Germany, the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, France and England.

In parallel with the increasing numbers of registered female players and senior women's teams, more and more women's football leagues have begun to be established in which the best-performing clubs in each country compete for the national championship title. These leagues arose at different times in the various European countries, with the Scandinavian countries emerging as pioneers of this development. In Denmark, the 3F league was established as early as 1971 as the top women's league while the Norwegian national football association introduced their highest

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division for women players in 1984. The Swedish *Damallsvenskan* followed in 1988. In Germany the *Frauen-Bundesliga* was launched in 1990, and two years later the English Football Association (FA) introduced the Women's Premier League (since 2011 the Women's Super League [WSL]). In the same year the *Championnat National 1 A* (since 2002 *Division 1 Féminine*) was founded in France (Magee et al. 2007; Wikipedia 2017).

Today, almost all of the 54 member associations of UEFA have set in place a national club competition system for women's football: in the 2014–2015 season 50 associations (UEFA 2015, p. 16) had this in place and in the 2015/16 season 49 associations had this (UEFA 2016, p. 3). It may be assumed, though, that the leagues which exist in the various countries—analogue to the diverging paths of development of women's football—vary considerably with regard to their degree of differentiation and the strength of their sporting performance. Nevertheless, the very introduction of leagues into women's football is itself a sign that football associations do not confine themselves to the activities of their women's national team and participation in international competitions, but attempt to support and strengthen women's club football from the roots upwards.

In the past decades, the leading European football associations particularly have started to compete in the field of national women's football leagues, just as they did in men's football. They have increased their efforts to develop the sporting performance of their highest women's leagues and professionalize not only female players, league organization and club management, but also the marketing for league matches. The objective of this chapter is to describe and evaluate the strategies and measures national football associations have implemented to improve and optimize the structure and organization of the top women's leagues in their countries and to discuss the consequences of these measures for the players and the clubs.

With regard to the theoretical background, the literature on the organization and economics of professional team sport leagues provides relevant categories for the analysis of the structure and governance of women's football leagues. Studies in this area analyse and discuss the characteristics of league organization and the strategies of their governing bodies that aim to ensure exciting league matches in order to maximize both the fans' interest and the revenues from TV coverage and sponsors (see, e.g., Andreff 2011; Noll 2003; Ross and Szymanski 2010; Daumann 2011).

The data for the analysis of the current situation, organization and governance of European women's football leagues and clubs are derived, on the one hand, from facts and findings of existing studies which analyse the situation prevailing in a specific country, such as Dunn and Welford (2015) for the WSL in England, or Klein (2009) for the German *Frauen-Bundesliga*. On the other hand, sources like UEFA evaluation reports, documents from national football associations or other national studies provide important information about various dimensions of women's football which will be integrated into this chapter. Furthermore, information from internet sources is included.

In the following chapter, the current situation of women's football leagues is shortly described and discussed, the emphasis being placed on attendance at women's football games and the clubs' financial viability. Then, national football associations' strategies for increasing the sporting performance of their domestic women's leagues are analysed with a focus on league formats and structures, on regulations governing the licencing criteria and distribution of resources as well as on league marketing measures.

## **The Current Situation of Elite Women's Football Leagues and Clubs in Europe**

In the following, an account is given of the extent to which women's leagues in Europe (and in particular the clubs in the top leagues) have succeeded in creating a greater demand for women's football matches and in building up a wide base of fan support. Further, the question of the budgets available to women's top league teams is looked into, as well as the impact which the varying financial resources have on clubs' competitiveness and the professionalization status of the players is studied.

### **Attendance**

Attendance at elite women's football matches is a significant indicator for the popularity of the game. In the 2015/16 season, the average number of spectators at women's first-division matches in the 49 UEFA countries

was 319 (this and the following figures are according to UEFA 2016, p. 12ff.). This figure does not point to a particularly great demand among spectators for games of top women's leagues; however, average attendance differs significantly across European countries. Only in six countries do 1000 spectators or more attend women's league matches on average. The French *Division 1 Féminine* (1800), the English WSL (1029) and the German women's *Bundesliga* (1019) have the highest average numbers of spectators per match. In the southern European nations of Italy, Portugal and Spain, women's football match attendance is also around 1000 on average and in Sweden around 800 (UEFA 2016, p. 12ff.). It cannot be verified whether the numbers of spectators in the UEFA report, provided by the national governing bodies of the women's leagues, are entirely correct. In the case of Germany, England and Sweden, the internet platform 'Weltfussball.de' provides similar data.

Nevertheless, these average attendance figures at elite women's league matches across Europe obscures the large differences between the fans' interest in the various teams of a country's women's league. An analysis of the number of spectators of each team in the German *Frauen-Bundesliga* in the 2015/16 season reveals that—with an average of 1019 spectators—only a small group of teams is able to attract a crowd of 2000 or more while most teams are watched by roughly 500 to 800 spectators, or even less. This gap between the clubs' average attendance also exists in other European women's leagues. In the English WSL, for instance, the average attendance at home games during the 2014 summer season ranged from 503 to 949 (Football-Lineups 2016).

Thus, in spite of slightly increased numbers of spectators in recent years, the interest in attending women's football games remains generally very low in European countries in comparison with men's football. Moreover, there does not appear to be any stable linear upward trend, as Meier et al. (2016) have found in their statistical examination of the German women's *Bundesliga*. Even hosting the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2011 led to only a temporary rise in spectator numbers in Germany (Pfister et al. 2014). Similarly low increases in attendance figures at women's league games, as well as a discontinuous development in spectator demand, are often to be found in other countries, too. Spectator demand for matches between women's teams is dependent on, among



other factors, the socio-economic and cultural conditions of a country, the image of women's football and the population's habits with regard to playing and in particular to watching football. Hence, it is of some interest to know more about the audiences attending women's league games.

As far as the author is aware, data on the socio-demographic structure of spectators at women's league games are only available for Germany. It is surprising that the games of the German *Frauen-Bundesliga* apparently attract more men than women: according to a survey of *Frauen-Bundesliga* audiences carried out at home matches in the 2013/14 season, only a minority of 39 per cent of the spectators (older than 15 years) were girls and women (Klein and Zimmermann 2014). Thus, in spite of the increasing number of girls and women who play football, it seems that this is in no way linked to any great interest in watching women's league games at the stadium. On the contrary, it is men's football that has profited from this growing interest for football among the female population. And, indeed, the percentage of women attending men's first-division games has risen significantly in many European countries in recent years. Not unsurprisingly, several studies have now addressed the phenomenon of female football fans, among others Pfister et al. (2013), Dunn (2014) and Fürtjes (2014).

In the German *Frauen-Bundesliga* the percentage of men attending women's football games is especially high in towns in which the women's team is the only football highlight of the area; in other towns, however, men's first-class professional football absorbs all the male audience (Klein and Zimmermann 2014). Furthermore, *Frauen-Bundesliga* games have a greater attraction for older people than for younger people. This is especially true of the male spectators surveyed, whose average age was 48.8 years, in contrast to the 35.6 years average of the women spectators attending these games (Klein and Zimmermann 2014). 'Customer loyalty' is high among spectators of women's football, attested to by the 60 per cent who watch *Frauen-Bundesliga* matches in the stadium regularly (Klein and Zimmermann 2014; Meier et al. 2016). Thus, at least as far as the German *Frauen-Bundesliga* is concerned, it can be assumed that the women's teams have a solid base of fan support. In terms of numbers, however, this base is very small and bears no comparison with the millions of fans of men's football who regularly attend matches.

## Club Budgets

Let us now take a look at the financial resources available to women's league teams for taking part in the season's games schedule and at the revenues which go to make up the clubs' budgets.

Since neither detailed nor differentiated data exist on the financial situation of women's first-division teams in Europe, we must build up a picture from individual club data from different sources. Nor is there any consistent information about the sources of revenues of women's football teams. In professional men's team sports, the 'big five' European League clubs' revenues are mainly generated by broadcasting, sponsorships, match-day and gate takings, merchandizing and the sums paid for players' transfers (Deloitte 2016). In women's football revenues from sponsorships remain the teams' principal resources due to the fact that, firstly, match-day takings are low (low attendance numbers and therefore low gate receipts); secondly, they receive at best only small fees from broadcasting (a mere 29 per cent of national FAs have any income from broadcasting rights related to women's matches, UEFA 2015, p. 34); and, thirdly, they receive no significant transfer fees for players.

In respect of the size of their budgets, then, it can be said that the financial resources available to Europe's best women's football clubs are not in any degree comparable with the multi-million euro budgets of European men's clubs. The average revenues of Premier League clubs in England, for example, amounted to €220 m and those of the German *Bundesliga* clubs amounted to €133 m in the 2014/15 season (Deloitte 2016, p. 9). It must be noted, however, that club budgets in women's football differ considerably depending on the international performance of the teams in the UEFA Women's Champions League and the popularity of women's football in the country.

An insight into the size as well as the heterogeneity of club budgets is given by the Women's Club Football Analysis published by the European Club Association. This brochure provides information about the budget distribution of a sample of 22 top women's football clubs from 20 national associations from the 2013/14 season. Only three of these clubs have a budget of more than €1 m per year; five between €500,000 and €1 m; four between €250,000 and €500,000; three between €150,000 and

€250,000; and seven less than €150,000 (ECA 2014, pp. 14–15). Women's teams with comparatively high budgets are mainly from French, Swedish and German leagues, like Paris St. Germain (€5 m), Olympique Lyon (€3.5 m) and FC Rosengard (more than €2.1 m) (Radio Sweden 2015). According to sports journalist K. Steinbichler, the *Frauen-Bundesliga* clubs' budgets doubled between 2007 and 2013 to an average of €1 m, and in the 2013/14 season the yearly budgets ranged from €500,000 to €1.7 m (Steinbichler 2013). Since then a further rise in the budgets of the leading teams has taken place, with the women's team of the *Bundesliga* club VfL Wolfsburg currently as the top earner with a budget of €3.5 m (Handelsblatt 2014).

The great differences between the clubs at the top of the league tables and those in the middle and lower places lead to a 'three-class society' in German as well as other European women's football leagues: a group of three or four well-off clubs dominate the domestic and the Champions leagues, followed by a group of clubs with medium-sized budgets in the middle ranks of the league tables with little opportunity of participating in the financially profitable European championships. Last but not least, there is a group of relatively poor clubs which may recently have been promoted from lower divisions and have not (yet) gained any solid fan base or sponsoring opportunities.

Because of the increasing expense of running a team in the top women's football division, it is becoming more and more difficult for teams of independent women's clubs or of clubs with amateur teams to stay in the top division. At the same time, a growing number of clubs with a first-division men's team and a large budget have decided to run a women's team in the first division as well (Dunn and Welford 2015, p. 37ff.), and it is these teams that currently dominate the national women's leagues. This development is observable in England, Germany and France. In the English WSL five out of eight teams (62.5 per cent) were associated with a men's club in the 2015 summer season. In the 2015/16 season in Germany the *Frauen-Bundesliga* was made up of seven teams connected with a professional men's football club (58.3 per cent), three women's clubs and two teams attached to non-professional football clubs. In the French *Division 1 Féminine*, the corresponding figure was 42 per cent. By contrast, only 8 per cent of women's teams are part of an elite men's football club in the Swedish *Damallsvenskan*.

The budgets of women's teams affiliated with professional men's football clubs comprise the financial resources for paying the players' wages and the costs of away matches. Additionally, women's teams can take advantage of the men's club's infrastructure and its organizational and marketing expertise. However, only a few football clubs such as Paris St. Germain, Olympique Lyon and VfL Wolfsburg support their women's team to any great extent; in other clubs women receive limited financial support. Moreover, in some cases the professional men's clubs' commitment to women's football has been short, with the support given to a women's football team seemingly dependent on the sporting success and financial situation of the men's team. In the case of relegations and/or financial problems, clubs have terminated their cooperation with their women's team (e.g., Hamburger SV in Germany). Thus, despite its advantages, joining the women's team of a professional men's club poses a risk for female players.

Except for the small number of European women's football clubs with multi-million euro budgets described above, few clubs' budgets allow them to pay their players' salaries from which they can earn a comfortable living, let alone become top earners. The non-representative survey of the European Club Association mentioned earlier provides an illustration of the variety of female players' earnings for two different club categories. Clubs with a budget of over €250,000 report average monthly salaries of €1515 for their players (ranging from the lowest at €330 to the highest at €18,000) while clubs with a budget under €250,000 report average monthly earnings of €545 (with a minimum of €40 and a maximum of €5000) (ECA-WFC 2014, p. 19).

In view of these low average salaries (which may sometimes be topped up by advertising revenues and bonuses), even for women playing in their country's top league, it is understandable that the degree of professionalization of women players is still very limited. Almost all the top divisions in women's football are amateur or at best semi-professional leagues. Surprisingly, UEFA's report for the 2015/16 season gives a total of 2219 female professionals in 145 clubs in 23 countries (UEFA 2016, p. 4). But it is important to note that although the term 'professional player' is defined in FIFA's statutes, there is room for interpretation, and it is likely

that associations use different parameters when determining who is or is not a professional player (UEFA 2015, p. 16).

Generally speaking, it can be said that the marketing opportunities—and thus the revenues—of the top women's leagues in Europe, at least in the leading women's football nations, have slightly improved in recent years. This is especially true of a number of French, German and English top clubs. But, for the great majority of women's teams, which do not take part in international competitions and thus receive little attention from the media, it is still difficult to achieve a continuous increase in income from gate receipts or from media and advertising rights. This increased income is essential in order to meet the rising costs of playing matches and to have a certain freedom of choice when engaging new players. Name recognition and 'brand awareness' with regard to both clubs and players are lacking, as is the demand for women's league games generally. The holding of international competitions (the European Cup in England in 2005 and in Sweden in 2013 as well as the World Cup in Germany in 2011) provided the top women's league clubs in each of the countries involved with more media attention in the run-up to and during the events themselves (as well as temporarily generating an increase in membership and attendance figures). However, this has had scarcely any positive long-term effect on the marketing potential of the national women's football leagues (Bell 2012; Coates 2013; Dunn 2016; Pfister et al. 2014).

## **The Football Associations' Strategies for Furthering Women's Football Leagues**

The following section explores and evaluates the national football associations' strategies for developing their domestic elite women's leagues. Presupposing that the organization and management of a league system follows general principles in amateur as well as professional sports, this analysis makes use of selected categories from the literature on the organization and governance of professional team sports leagues (Noll 2003; Daumann 2011). The following questions guide the analysis and the

discussion: which competition formats, league sizes and season schedules have the governing bodies selected to guarantee competitive national women's football club competitions? And how are the governance instruments (e.g., licencing systems) constructed with which to develop the performance of the teams and players and to promote the publicity of the women's leagues?

## League Formats

### Competition Formats

The most common competitive format for women's as well as men's team sports in Europe is an open annual promotion and relegation system. This means that teams transfer between two divisions or league levels based on their performance during a season. The best-ranked team or teams in a lower division are *promoted* to the next higher division, and the worst-ranked team or teams in the higher division are *relegated* to the next lower division or league (Szymanski and Valletti 2010).

In the 2014/15 season 27 out of 50 UEFA member nations with a women's league have adopted this competition system, along with the promotion and relegation format, including England, France, Germany and Sweden. Fourteen European football associations run closed women's leagues with fixed teams as members. Ten associations have more than one league at a national level and use both of these structures (UEFA 2015, p. 16). In one of the strongest women's football countries, England, the promotion and relegation system only exists in the WSL divisions 1 and 2, but not between the WSL and third-highest division, the women's Premier League (Dunn and Welford 2015).

Economists discuss the advantages and disadvantages of open and closed league systems controversially. For amateur leagues, the promotion and relegation system is regarded as the best competition format since, besides continuously motivating teams and players to be promoted to a higher league level, it offers exciting matches for the spectators at every league level. But for teams or clubs mainly financed by match-day, broadcasting and sponsoring revenues, like professional men's football

clubs, this system involves high economic risks. If teams are relegated, they usually lose a large part of their revenues. Closed league structures have the advantage that accredited teams stay in the league, and the clubs as well as their sponsors can reckon with the team's membership in the league over a long period of time (Buzzacchi et al. 2010). However, a closed league can be withdrawn in the short term if it does not fulfil the expectations of the main stakeholders (national football associations, club members, club owners, broadcasting companies or sponsors) of attracting large crowds and recouping their investments. This was the case with the short-lived US women's soccer leagues Women's United Soccer Association, which was in operation from 2001 to 2003, and the Women's Professional Soccer League, which existed from 2009 to 2011. These leagues were suspended because expenditures were much higher than revenues, and the investors of several clubs decided to withdraw their women's team from the league with the result that there were too few teams to keep up its operations (Congdon-Hohman and Matheson 2013, p. 347). It is questionable whether the closed English Women's Soccer League (WSL), as well as other closed or partly closed women's football leagues in Europe, can stand the test of time, in particular with regard to their cost-profit, or rather cost-benefit, ratios. The English WSL, for example, has introduced salary caps for the players, a popular strategy in closed leagues in order to avoid overinvestment and prevent a division's collapse on financial grounds, as has happened twice in the USA (Dunn and Welford 2015).

### **Numbers of League Levels, Divisions and Teams**

Establishing a league system involves the football association's decision on the number of league levels, divisions and teams per division. Setting up a high *number of tiers and divisions* presupposes that there is a sufficient number of registered teams whose sporting abilities enable them to play at a certain league level over a long period and, if warranted, to be promoted and hold their own in a higher division. Due to the relatively low state of development of women's football, the league pyramid structure in many European countries is scarcely differentiated, so that it

sometimes consists of only one or two divisions. By contrast, there are committed and ambitious national football associations which over many years have built up a greater number of divisions or league levels in a multi-tier hierarchy; the German women's football league system consists of six league levels but has a total of nine divisions, including the two- or multiple-tier competitions. The Netherlands has nine, Norway eight, the Republic of Ireland eight, England seven, Sweden seven, Finland six, and Denmark and France five levels in the football pyramid (UEFA 2016, p. 12ff.). In Germany, for example, women football's top league and first division is the *Frauen-Bundesliga*. This is followed by the 2. *Bundesliga*, which is divided into North and South divisions. Below this level there are five regional leagues and, a further step below, 20 association leagues (*Verbandsligen*). At the lowest level of the pyramid are the county and district leagues.

An important decision that national football associations must make is whether the top league should have one or two divisions. The German *Frauen-Bundesliga*, founded in 1990, was originally divided into North and South leagues, but in the 1997/98 season it transformed into a one-tier league (DFB 2017). In Sweden (since 1988) and France (since 1992), too, the highest national division in women's football has always been a one-tier league. As with the women's 2. *Bundesliga* in Germany, the English FA created a lower league in 2014 (the WSL 2, in short WSL2) to increase the opportunity for a greater number of clubs to play in a league at a higher level (Dunn and Welford 2015, p. 32ff.).

From a marketing perspective, a one-tier league has advantages since the best clubs and players then compete for the national championship, making the league a unique brand and highly attractive for sponsors. However, there are also advantages in a two-tier structure as the relatively short distances between the venues may lead to lower transportation costs for the clubs and may also attract fans from additional areas. Thus, brand marketing strategies, which favour a competition system with one elite division, have to be balanced against financial considerations of higher costs for travelling.

Increasing or reducing the *number of teams* in the top leagues is a commonly used instrument by national football associations to influence the leagues' and clubs' performance levels as well as the public awareness of



and interest in their sport. On the one hand, first divisions or top leagues consisting of a large number of teams mean that clubs present themselves to the public by playing quite a number of home and away matches, which increases their opportunities of competing against other teams and enhances the presence of the club in the public eye. On the other hand, if a league includes only a small number of the very best teams in the country, the high quality of the matches makes the league's brand particularly valuable. However, due to the relatively small number of matches played, it can be assumed that the opportunity for the clubs to gain public attention and earn money from home matches by attendance, TV coverage and sponsors is relatively limited. When deciding on the number of teams in a league, football associations have to weigh the advantages and disadvantages for the teams and women's football in general.

UEFA's women's football report 2014/15 (UEFA 2015, p. 43ff.) shows that the number of teams in Europe's first divisions ranges from 5 to 16; the most popular are leagues with eight or ten teams. The *Division 1 Féminine* in France, the *Frauen-Bundesliga* in Germany and the *Damallsvenskan* in Sweden, consist of 12 teams. By contrast, the English WSL 1 only consisted of eight teams until 2015 due to the relatively small numbers of elite clubs and female players in the country:

One reason the first division remained at eight teams when the competition expanded to two divisions this season (there are 10 teams in WSL2) was a recognition that there was not enough native talent to support more elite clubs. Kelly Simmons, director of the national game and women's football, said: "It is getting a balance. When you talk to the [English] players, they want a strong competitive league that will help them develop as players and at international level, but you have to make sure English talent coming through has the chance to get games." (Moore 2014)

The English FA's policy of limiting the number of teams to eight for the WSL1 was strongly criticized by both clubs and players. Finally, the FA conceded to their wishes and has now decided to extend the league structure to include nine teams in 2016 and ten teams in 2017.

The same discussion arises periodically in Germany with regard to the *Frauen-Bundesliga*, but no changes have yet been made to the league size.

The German Football Federation (DFB) intends to reduce the number of teams in order to guarantee a higher quality of *Bundesliga* matches and to accredit only clubs which can meet the high organizational and financial standards of first-division membership. The clubs, on the other hand, demand that the 12 team minimum should be retained or that the number be increased to 14 or even up to 18 teams (Fussball 2015; Obliers 2015).

The existence of one- and two-track systems of divisions in the top European leagues, together with the varying numbers of divisions and teams, makes clear that in women's football there are no definite rules governing either league structure or size. Nor can the question of an ideal structure or size be answered with any certainty. In establishing the present league systems, not only was the strength of women's football in a particular country taken into consideration, but also the experience of other countries with their league systems. They are ultimately the result of consultations and—sometimes quite heated—negotiations between national football associations and the representatives of women's football teams from the top and lower leagues.

## Seasons

Also of importance besides the league format is the organizing and scheduling of games, which also takes marketing aspects into account. The UEFA women's football brochure provides information about the women's football seasons in the various countries: 32 women's football leagues are organized during the winter, 18 during the summer season (UEFA 2015, p. 16). In most countries, women's league matches are scheduled in the same time periods as the men's matches, meaning that women's football simultaneously competes with the men's game for public interest, media coverage and sponsorships. Only a few FAs organize women's matches outside the men's season: in England, for example, up to the 2016 season, WSL1 matches mainly take place in the summer break of the men's Premier League. However, as the average attendance figures at WSL1 matches show, this does not have any substantial positive influence on numbers of spectators at the stadium (UEFA 2016, p. 25). Critics have argued, since WSL1 games are scheduled in the summer season, a

discrepancy arises between the schedules of the matches at the top and at the lower league levels:

This situation is compounded by the game's structure: there is a startling lack of cohesion across women's football. These problems begin at the top with the WSL itself and cascade downwards. The league's format, with fewer than 10 home games and an extended mid-season break, discourages habitual attendance. Moreover, while the WSL has a summer season, the rest of the sport—from the second-tier WPL to grassroots' under-9s—is played during the winter. (McKevitt 2015)

Dunn and Welford, too, have criticized the scheduling of WSL1 games and provide further arguments for changing the women's football schedule:

The summer programme has to take a break for women's international tournaments, leaving it disjointed with inconsistent schedules—following a women's game cannot become a weekly habit. It also has to compete with men's international tournament every two years that provides just as much competition as the Premier League does. But most importantly, the summer league structure marginalises the women's game. It keeps it outside of what football 'is' to many people in England—a sport played through the autumn, winter and spring with a break in summer. Practically, it is scheduled outside of the regular season, but more importantly, culturally it is pushed outside of the football arena. (Dunn and Welford 2015, p. 91)

After years of controversial discussions, the FAs finally have announced plans to run the WSL in the winter months from 2017/18 (BBC 2016).

## Regulation

The attractiveness of women's league games depends not only on competition formats and the player's sporting performance, but also on the financial situation of the teams and their clubs. This raises the question of the extent to which football associations endeavour to consolidate these various factors and conditions. In this respect, do the instruments put in

place in men's football (such as the enforcement of licensing systems, player market regulations and revenue sharing) find application in women's football?

## Club Licensing Systems

An important instrument of league governance is the club licensing system, which is intended to ensure minimum standards, for example, with regard to the financial situation of the clubs, average attendance figures, stadium infrastructure and the number of employed staff. These regulations are aimed at facilitating a competitive balance within the league and contributing, generally, to a professionalization of club work (Buzzacchi et al. 2010).

The UEFA report reveals licensing systems for women's football in 31 per cent of countries (UEFA 2015, p. 28). Some of these systems cover only the first division (e.g., in Sweden) while others extend to other divisions. In England, for instance, to fulfil WSL licensing requirements, the club must draw in at least 350 spectators every week. Besides, there is a minimum budget specification for WSL clubs: 'Eight teams make up the division, with each having a minimum budget of £140,000, of which £70,000 must be generated by the club with a further £70,000 supplied by the FA' (Garrity 2013). The licensing requirements for the German *Frauen-Bundesliga* include, among other things, certification of the economic viability of a club—although there is no specification in terms of budget size, simply of its technical and organizational capabilities. For example, clubs whose women's teams wish to play in the *Frauen-Bundesliga* must have access to a stadium with a capacity of over 2000 spectators and with partially covered stands. In addition, they must employ at least one coach with an A licence as well as a full-time director (DFB 2014, p. 6ff.)

UEFA favours the introduction of licensing regulations for participation of women's teams in the top leagues of a country in order to motivate clubs to create and ensure good training and employment conditions for players, as well as improving the comfort of spectators in the stadium. Those who advocate these regulations, however, fail to take adequate account of the fact that these might impede the development of women's football since all too strict criteria would exclude many clubs and teams

from the league. Dunn and Welford see the stringent requirements for clubs' participation in the WSL, as well as those of further FA regulations, as a great problem since these not only reflect but also consolidate the English FA's power over women's football:

[The FA] has ultimate control over the league and its clubs—they must comply with the FA regulations ... and there is little space to challenge these. If they disagree with the licensing system, the summer league, format, or any other aspect, clubs are welcome to leave the WSL. To be on the inside you have to buy into the WSL product, the culture and the structure. The FA are defining what the future of women's football will look like, what form it will take, and clubs and players have little or no influence on this. (Dunn and Welford 2015, p. 95)

Kjaer and Agergaard (2013), who have studied the licensing regulations in Swedish and Danish women's football, see these procedures, moreover, as an attempt by national football associations to run women's football like a commercial undertaking using management methods. They regard such regulation strategies as the first step taken by FAs towards introducing a 'new professionalism' into women's football:

Professionalism has become a goal in itself and an ideology for women's soccer in Denmark and Sweden, and, as a consequence, women's soccer is in the process of becoming a regulated and rational business structure in Scandinavia due to the implementation of national licence manuals. (Kjaer and Agergaard 2013, p. 816)

## Player Market Regulations

The promotion and relegation system of the European team sports leagues is connected with the so-called open transfer market, where players and clubs negotiate and agree upon the terms of players' employment and work (Buzzacchi et al. 2010). The transfer market in Europe is restricted solely by regulations with regard to the number of non-European players in a team. Twenty-six of the 50 UEFA member federations with women's leagues in the 2014/15 season introduced restrictions on the number of non-European players in women's teams (e.g., England, France and

Germany) while 24 have no restrictions (e.g., Sweden) (UEFA 2015, p. 40ff.). According to UEFA's 2014-15 annual statistic review, 88 foreign professional footballers play in the *Frauen-Bundesliga*; the Swedish Football Association reports 61, the English Football Association reports 41 and the French Football Association reports 26 (UEFA 2016, p. 12ff.). Whereas foreign players seem to be welcome in most countries, the English FA tries to restrict the number of foreign players in order to give English women players the opportunity of furthering their careers by playing in the WSL1 and also in order to avoid the financial collapse of clubs due to the higher salaries paid to foreign players than those paid to English women players. Added to this, is the WSL's attempt to reduce costs by introducing a kind of salary cap that was mentioned earlier. This regulation states that no club should pay more than four of its players £20,000 or above.

The idea is not to have a benefactor coming along and paying high wages to attract all the best players, as Fulham did a decade or so ago ... The salary cap should help spread the top players around to make matches more even. (Conn 2011)

Moreover, in the FA WSL, a central contract system for national players, has been established aiming at building a closer affinity of English national top women players with their domestic league. A BBC journalist describes the FA's intentions as follows:

By rewarding England players with central contracts, the FA believes it can grow the game in a sustainable way. It also keeps England players in the country, therefore helping to develop the domestic league. Jodie Taylor is the only player in England's World Cup squad to be playing outside the country. (Magowan 2015)

## Revenue Sharing/Redistribution

A characteristic of European professional men's team sports leagues is to be seen in the collective sales of TV rights and a sharing of television income; little or no sharing of league gate revenues; and some sharing of

gate revenues from cup competitions (Buzzacchi et al. 2010, p. 178ff.). In women's football similar principles and patterns of revenue sharing have emerged. Football associations are willing to distribute an equal share of TV rights fees for women's football to the clubs. However, only 29 per cent of the national football associations have contracts with broadcasting companies in which the TV coverage of women's football involves any financial benefit (UEFA 2015, p. 34). Therefore, few European women's leagues and their clubs have been able to profit from this revenue sharing concept. Moreover, it can be assumed that the revenues from TV rights fees for women's football coverage are quite limited. According to available information, only the German *Frauen-Bundesliga* and the English WSL distribute any money from TV revenues (mainly generated from broadcasting the national women's teams matches) to the first-division women's football teams. The DFB pays €180,000 per year to each of the 12 *Frauen-Bundesliga* clubs. This money is strictly dedicated to the employment of (at least) one full-time coach and a marketing manager to support the professionalization of women's football (Steinbichler 2013). The English FA spends a minimum of £70,000 per club and year for women's football (Garrity 2013). It supports the clubs by paying the salaries of the national players in their teams, which reduces the clubs' wage costs for their squad (Moore 2014). According to Dunn and Welford (2015, p. 90), the investment of £1 m in the FAWSL is not a significant amount of money compared with the women's clubs' turnover and only a tiny sum relative to the English FA's total turnover.

## League Marketing

The development of women's football is influenced by the strategies and activities of FAs to promote and profile their women's football leagues. The most important instrument in improving awareness of and interest in women's football matches is *TV coverage*. According to UEFA's 2014/15 women's football report, 76 per cent of member associations point to some form of television coverage of women's football and corresponding TV contracts in their country. In the case of 23 per cent of these associations, this involves the transmission of highlights of decisive league

matches, and in 8 per cent of the cases complete matches. Fifteen per cent of national associations have ‘regular exposure’, defined as weekly coverage of league matches (UEFA 2015, p. 34).

In most European countries women’s football matches are covered by free TV; in seven countries—including England, France and Sweden (UEFA 2015, p. 34)—there are transmissions of women’s games on pay TV. In Germany, from the 2013/14 season onwards, at least one women’s league match per week has been broadcast live on the free sports channel Eurosport. Women’s league games also appear on free regional TV stations which may show highlights or complete matches of teams located in their (restricted) broadcasting area.

To make up for the low extent of TV coverage and also to target new consumers, UEFA has explicitly called on national FAs to expand the digital exposure of women’s football, in particular of the league matches, on the internet (UEFA 2015, pp. 34–5).

A further marketing strategy of FAs to increase both the awareness and the revenues of women’s leagues is to win over large companies for a *league sponsorship*. However, at present only the German *Frauen-Bundesliga* (Allianz) and the English WSL (Continental) have key sponsoring partnerships. The German insurance company Allianz recently announced that it intended to end its sponsorship of the German national men’s and women’s football teams in order to form a closer partnership with the *Frauen-Bundesliga* and its clubs so as to have a greater presence in local markets (Sponsors 2016). Concentrating on women’s football will probably also be less expensive for the company. Whatever the case, attracting large national or international companies for a sponsoring partnership is still a difficult business, not only for the national women’s teams but also—or even more so—for domestic women’s football leagues because of the small number of consumers in this market.

## Conclusion

From a sports management perspective, I have highlighted some aspects of the current situation of women’s football leagues and their first-division clubs in Europe, especially those of Germany and England. Despite the



fact that the financial situation of top women's clubs has partly improved and the number of semi-professional female players has increased all over Europe (and probably worldwide), women's football is still very far away from attracting the same public interest, attendances, media coverage and revenues as the men's game. Furthermore, the ongoing professionalization process with regard to players, trainers, clubs and league management is restricted to a small number of countries and clubs.

Because of the increasing expenditure of operating a team in the first division, the organization of women's football teams has changed over the last decade. As a consequence, women's football culture has changed, too. Today most women playing in the top leagues belong to teams of professional football clubs, yet they are mostly employed on non-professional contract terms. The FAs foster these changes in the organizational structure of top women's football teams since they wish to work with professional partners to achieve their goals of raising the standard of performance and increasing the popularity of women's football. Their primary aim is to consolidate the national women's teams in order that they become (or stay) successful in international football tournaments.

To be competitive at an international level and to improve levels of performance in the women's game generally, national football associations use instruments of league management that are familiar from men's professional football such as making structural changes to the league, implementing licensing procedures and distributing overall league revenues among clubs (although this last named measure only happens on a small scale at the moment). However, it appears as though the leading European associations' top-down and rational business-like development strategy for the women's game does not adequately respect the interests and restricted capabilities of the majority of amateur football clubs. Thus, a strong democratic culture in governing women's football leagues would be the first step in recognizing and meeting the expectations of the women's teams and their players. Gender equity policy is also needed in order to change the male dominance of football federations and the governing bodies of the leagues.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the situation of women's leagues, teams and players in football is very similar to that of other team sports such as handball, volleyball and basketball. In these sports, too, the

relevant federations have begun attempts to improve sporting performance and increase marketing opportunities in the top women's leagues through structural changes and governance initiatives. And, indeed, in some areas this is happening with even greater success than in women's football, as documented in Mielke's study of the women's handball *Bundesliga* with regard to attendance figures and budgets (Mielke 2010). Cross-national studies taking account of the different traditions of the various team sports in the countries studied (e.g., women's handball in Denmark) would undoubtedly provide new knowledge and interesting insights into this area of sports management.

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# 6

## Outsiders on the Inside: Integrating Women's and Men's Football Clubs in England

Jo Welford

### Introduction

There is a long history of debate around the issue of men's and women's integration in the sporting context. For liberal feminists, the drive for equality pushed the issue of women's integration, arguing that as long as women's sport remained separate and different from their male counterparts it would always be perceived as inferior. Yet radical feminists in contrast suggest that men's sport organizations and structures are so well established that gender equality is not possible and integration can only result in a comparison with men's sports that will be to the detriment of women. Thus, the only way for women's sports to truly grow and be respected in their own right is to develop as separate entities. The independence of women's sports organizations would also allow the development of female-dominated spaces where the rights of women can be prioritized.

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Women's football in England provides an excellent example of the debate concerning the integration of men's and women's sports. Scholars have expressed competing perspectives as to the extent to which women's sport, in particular women's football, should integrate with that of men's football organizations (e.g. Lopez 1997; Williams 2003). This chapter will outline how tensions have developed in English women's football as a direct result of the integration of women's clubs and men's clubs.

## Integration and Separation in Women's Sports

Debates within feminist theory are useful in helping to understand the complicated position held by women in football as men's football structures have been traditionally hostile to women's involvement. Although women and girls are playing football in increasing numbers they are still significantly under-represented in decision-making and leadership roles (see e.g. Fielding-Lloyd and Meân 2008; Williams 2003). In particular, the success of the liberal feminism movement in increasing the numbers of women and girls involved in football contrasts sharply with calls by radical feminists for separatism, who highlight the marginalized position women continue to hold in traditionally male sports.

Caudwell (2011b) proposes that although feminists highlight the complexity of gender relations in football, feminist theoretical developments remain useful for an analysis of the issues of sameness and difference that remain pertinent to the role women play within this sport that 'is at once similar to men's football and different' (Williams 2003, p. 104).

Early feminist movements grew out of demands for women to have equal rights to those that men held 'naturally' in society, with liberal feminism focussing on equality of access and opportunity (Lloyd 2005). Liberal feminists aim to improve the position of women in society via changes in the law and in educational practices, advocating for 'women's greater involvement in social life by enhancing their opportunities to join existing structures' (Thompson 2002, p. 109) and arguing that change has to be achieved from within, that is, within sport (Weedon 1999). Gains in participation numbers that women and girls have made in traditionally male sports such as football have arguably been a result of

advances of liberal feminists who challenged discourses of inherent biological differences between the sexes in an attempt to create spaces for equal access. For women's football, the equality of opportunity discourse has been strongly evident throughout the modern (twentieth century and beyond) development of the game as women have fought to be given the right to participate in football (see e.g. Lopez 1997).

A more radical approach to feminism developed out of the politics of the late 1960s that directed an increasing amount of criticism at the oppressive structures and processes in society (Hall 1990). Radical feminists are concerned with how women are controlled not only in work, leisure and schooling, but also in sport and how their oppression is linked to underlying structural power relations, believing that male domination forms the basis of all social organizations (Scraton and Flintoff 2002). Therefore, they argue that it is not enough to add more women to existing structures—such as increasing the number of women as players, coaches and so on—as it is these structures that perpetuate gendered ideologies and marginalize women (Lenskyj 1994). This perspective criticizes the notion of sameness, understanding the liberal gains made by women in football as superficial and failing to fundamentally challenge the deeply gendered structure and culture of the sport.

In the football context, there exists a conflicting relationship between understandings of sameness and difference between men and women. Expressions of gender difference are combined with the desire of the players to be taken seriously in the same way as men and boys are (Williams 2003). Female footballers can also assign different values to their football experiences as men, such as participation and enjoyment (Scraton et al. 1999). However, alternative values are often used to trivialize women's sports as inferior versions of 'real' (men's) sports (see e.g. Theberge 1997).

Tied closely to discourses of sameness and difference, and central to this chapter, is the issue of integration and separation. Again, liberal and radical feminist positions draw upon opposing discourses regarding this issue. Liberal feminists propose that women should work towards gaining opportunities within existing sporting structures. But critics of this position highlight that despite the success in increasing the numbers of women participating in sport, integrating women into existing structures



involves the (often unquestioned) acceptance of male defined norms and values (Thompson 2002). However, specific structures just for women limit their potential to challenge norms defined by men, but separatist experiences are very difficult to achieve especially in highly visible and culturally powerful sports such as football (Caudwell 2006). Both liberal and radical feminist approaches are important in assessing the complex and often contradictory position of women in football as simultaneously integrated within (due to perceptions of sameness) yet situated outside of the dominant (men's) football context (due to perceived differences).

## The Integration of Men's and Women's Football in England

Historically, women's football has had a fractious relationship with men's football structures. Although there was a boom of women's football during WWI and women's football matches drew significant crowds—for example, 53,000 watched Dick, Kerr Ladies beat St Helens in 1920—a 1921 resolution passed by the Football Association (FA) banned women from playing on football league grounds. Giulianotti (1999, p. 153) comments that 'there is clear evidence from the inter-war years that the football authorities saw the rise of women's football as a threat to the male game'. This ban not only limited the opportunities for women to play football but also marginalized the sport socially, culturally and economically (Williams 2004).

Despite this exclusion and separation, women's football continued to grow. Forty-eight member clubs formed the Women's Football Association (WFA) in 1969, with no formal sanction from the FA. Tensions over the direction the women's game should take were central throughout the history of the WFA, with an emphasis on increasing participation conflicting with a more competitive, professional approach (Williams and Woodhouse 1991). This conflict is closely linked to the integration/separation issue. To establish a competitive pyramid model of football clubs (a wide base and an elite peak, with promotion and relegation between different levels) that is taken seriously in European football, advocates

were pushing for integration with existing men's football structures, reflecting a liberal approach, but those who preferred an emphasis on increased participation were more aligned with radical feminist ideals of separation.

In 1993 the FA formally took control of the women's game, although this came more than 20 years after FIFA recommended that governing bodies should take responsibility for running women's football in all member states. From this takeover, women's football began to reflect the organizational structure of the men's game. Around this time, Doncaster Belles, arguably the most successful women's club at the time (Davies 1997), began to see their domination challenged by other clubs such as Fulham, Charlton and later Arsenal—teams affiliated with men's football clubs. The FA perceived independent women's clubs as 'extremely low priority'; Doncaster Belles had financial support withheld as they were not linked to a men's football club despite their unrivalled success in the sport (Williams 2004, p. 120). Yet alongside the FA drive for integration was the frequent withdrawal of funding from men's clubs. The case of Charlton Ladies has been the most high-profile example of this practice; the men's club Charlton FC stopped funding their very successful women's section after their relegation from the English Premier League in 2007 (Kessel 2007). The infancy and amateur status of women's football combined with the well-established and dominant structures of men's football means that most women's clubs become affiliated with men's clubs to gain access to the required facilities and resources, regardless of the level they play at (Williams 2003). However, at the elite level of women's football, where financial support is advantageous, integration is even more essential.

In 2011 the FA Women's Super League (FAWSL) was launched, a semi-professional league where clubs must meet strict criteria concerning financial resources and business management, commercial sustainability, marketing and quality of facilities that are very difficult to achieve without the support of a men's professional football club. The FAWSL winners have all had strong links to successful men's football clubs (Arsenal, Liverpool, Chelsea and Manchester City). Klein's chapter in this book (Chap. 5) provides further details on women's football leagues in Europe.

Despite the importance of the football club as a highly visible site for examining the integration of men's and women's sports, little is known about this process in practice. Thus, although the academic attention given to women's football is growing, there is a need for more research that considers gender relations in football beyond the playing experience (Caudwell 2011a). Research has shown how female football coaches struggle to be accepted in the male coaching structure, maintaining their position on the periphery (Fielding-Lloyd and Meân 2011). In the sport of rugby, research has highlighted the tensions and inequities that can result from women being integrated to varying extents into the men's clubs and into organizational structures which do not provide equal access to facilities and the limited potential for resistance to male norms (Carle and Nauright 1999). Researchers have paid no attention to this process of integration in women's football. Given that a great deal of women experience football within men's clubs, football seems to be a key area for the study of male/female integration in sport. Therefore, the focus of this chapter is to examine the tensions that can occur when women's clubs integrate with men's clubs.

## Methods

This chapter is part of a PhD study that aimed to explore the position of women within the football structures (Welford 2008). A mixed-method approach was adopted for the PhD project. Phase one involved a survey of 55 of the 105 registered football clubs in one regional area of England, and this data provided a context to women's football's integration with male structures. Ten clubs were selected for further investigation in phase two, using non-probability sampling in order to identify cases specific to the needs of the research study such as the inclusion of clubs playing at different levels of the game. The clubs were selected to explore a variety of organisations; however, all clubs except one were classed as 'amateur grassroots' clubs (a term used to describe clubs on the lower, 'participatory' levels of the game in the UK). Twelve interviews were conducted with women from the ten clubs. At the time of the research, 10 of the 12 women interviewed were club secretaries;

some held other positions (e.g. treasurer, manager, coach); five were FA qualified coaches, and eight were still active players. The interviews were transcribed and then subjected to a thematic analysis, following steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). These steps included data familiarization (transcription and re-reading); generating initial codes; searching for themes amongst the codes; reviewing themes by looking for combinations, repetitions or the need for sub-division; and defining and naming themes. This resulted in an analytic narrative that goes 'beyond description of the data, and make[s] an argument in relation to your research question' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 83).

## Results and Discussion

Initially the ten clubs were categorized as independent (running entirely on their own, with no links to a men's football club), linked (associated/affiliated with a men's football club) or in a partnership (regarding their club as an integrated/mixed-sex club).

### Categorizing Club Relationships

After considering each club as independent, linked or in a partnership, due to the variance amongst clubs who were linked to a men's club, the categories were revised. The 'linked' category was subsequently split into three sub-categories to analyse the variance that occurred within this category (see Table 6.1).

Grouping clubs in this way was an attempt to broadly conceptualize similarities; it is not to propose that there are rigid categories that clubs will exclusively fit into. In fact, there is a great deal of overlap between different positions, and separation and integration can exist simultaneously. Similarly, although the ordering of the categories represents a continuum of separation through to integration, clubs in the study did not occupy fixed positions, or move linearly between them. The potential for fluid movement, multiple and often contradictory positioning, and overlapping across differing positions is demonstrated throughout the discussion

**Table 6.1** Explanation of club categorizations

Club categorizations	
Category	Main features
Independent (two grassroots clubs)	No links to a men's football club Had to find its facilities Financially independent Committee dominated by women Strong participatory environment Rejected attempts by men's clubs to link with them
Linked A: Linked, separate, static (two grassroots clubs)	Links to a men's football club, but still a separate club Some sharing of facilities, but also use of some facilities elsewhere Financial independence No committee links Very little or no integration/involvement with the men's club Very little or no attempt to alter the situation Previously linked to a different men's club
B: Linked, separate, evolving (two grassroots clubs)	Links to a men's football club, remains a separate club Some sharing of facilities, but also use others Financial independence No committee links but desire to make links Very little integration/involvement with the men's club Some fluidity—intention to move towards a partnership Previously linked to at least two different men's clubs
C: Linked, separate, involved (one academy club)	Independent section within men's club structure Do not share facilities Financial independence, but receive donations Female representation on men's club committee Support from the men's club Female section formed within men's club/academy
Partnership (three grassroots clubs)	Integrated mixed-sex football club Shared facilities, jointly owned Financial integration Joint men's/women's committees Strong focus on young players Senior men's team only loosely linked to club Women's section formed within men's clubs

and is fundamental to the overall debate in this chapter. Those at either end of the scale, independent or partnership clubs were relatively easy to identify and understand; those clubs who fell somewhere in-between were involved in more complex relationships with the men's clubs.

## Examining Club Relationships

The club categories in Table 6.1 were used to examine in more detail how women discussed their experiences depending on the type of their club. Three themes will be examined to demonstrate the impact of club structures on the experiences of the women in the club: financial arrangements, club development and perceived status of the women's team. These will be discussed separately, although they are inter-related. Where interview data is available, the club category is given with the quote to provide context.

### Financial Arrangements

The seven independent or linked clubs recognized the importance of retaining financial independence. For independent women's clubs, control of their finances was seen as a major benefit.

Any money, or any fundraising, always goes back into, the kids or the coaches ... financially I just think, if we run our own business, we spend it back in the club, and it will not go to somebody else.

Independent

None of the five clubs with links to a men's club received specific financial assistance; although the women acknowledged that help would be very beneficial, they recognized the importance of not being reliant on funding.

None of us [female academy staff] are paid by the [men's professional] football club, so if anything ever happened in terms of, if they went into admin[istration], if we'd been paid by them we'd have been the first ones out the door, so, we're safe basically, which is one advantage they have over the lads because the lads aren't at all, and the academy staff for the lads aren't either, we're a lot, safer.

Linked, separate, involved

Retaining financial independence is not perceived as a negative lack of assistance, but reconstructed as an advantage in that the women's section is at much less risk than the men's section that relies on funding from the

professional football club. This is a clear benefit of separatism—that it can avoid the risks associated with reliance on established structures, particularly the reliance on men's football clubs who often struggle financially to generate enough income to cover their costs.

All of the women in this study had experiences with trying to secure funding, and believed that getting financial support is more accessible for men's clubs if they have women's or girls team(s). For the clubs who were trying to become closer to their men's club, the women recognized how this could be utilized to their advantage in 'selling' the financial benefits of having a women's team.

They [men's club] said to us, what can you offer us [women's club], and they've actually got plans as well to get a second pitch, to extend the clubhouse, we've said you can use us to get extra grants, for having a ladies team, and also we'll bring extra revenue behind the bar [by socializing in there after matches/training].

Linked, separate, evolving

Obviously, this interviewee understands the financial value of a women's team to a men's football club, and she has used this to her clubs advantage. But, however positively the women perceived this 'advantage', there were risks involved in having links to a men's club and the risk to be exploited did not go unnoticed.

We had the problem with [men's club], that they got funding for the women's team, and didn't give us a penny of our funding, they didn't give us transport, they didn't give us training facilities, we were meant to get all that as part of the funding, we didn't get nothing [sic], [club manager] then decided, we're not affiliated with them anymore, but we are, because obviously we've still got the name, so we're still seen to be with them, but they did us out of nine grand, we could have had so much better, so we fund ourselves.

Linked, separate, static

This demonstrates the complexity of issues surrounding agency when women are integrated into existing men's structures. Although being exploited financially, there is little desire from these interviewees to

challenge the situation. But the relations of power with the women's club were severely imbalanced not only being restricted in access to financial and material resources but also with regard to feeling that this imbalance should not be challenged. It appears that this interviewee retains very little control over her own club, corresponding with a criticism of the liberal agenda that questions how much ownership and control women have over their sporting experiences if they integrate into established men's structures (see e.g. Lenskyj 1994). However, the enforced separation due to the lack of support and interest provided by the members of the men's club may actually allow the women to maintain a large amount of control over their organization, not just in retaining financial independence but in having the potential to preserve a specific culture for women and girls to experience football. Integration and separation can overlap, and despite suggesting a relationship with a men's club, this women's football club is actually much more of a separate entity than its name (the same as the men's club) implies.

One strong indicator of being a partnership club is financial integration. In these three partnership clubs there was a cooperation between the men's and women's teams rather than the separation that was common at all other clubs. Yet the success of this model of financial integration may have at least in part stemmed from the men's senior team being only loosely connected to their partnership club. In all three partnership clubs, the football club was considered a junior club, with boys and girls teams, and either there was no men's senior team at the club, or if there was, they used the pitch and other facilities but had their own committee and decision-making processes. Without a senior men's team, it seemed that this partnership club retained more control over their junior (boys and girls) teams than other clubs in the study.

Even in strongly integrated clubs, combining finances with a senior men's team can create problems regarding the distribution of funding and equal contributions.

They [senior men's team] was [sic.] separate, then they joined with us, but it was then, financially, they had coaches to go to the away games, their referees, two linesmen, you know, and parents were saying, oh, our kids are paying match tax, the men are taking it all.

Partnership



In order to be successfully integrated and to minimize potential conflicts, particularly in financial terms, these clubs' separation from senior men's teams was considered beneficial.

## Club Development

A significant feature of the independent women's and girls' football clubs was that all interviewees felt that they had created a space where their club could develop and promote their own values. Choosing separation allowed individuals at these clubs to foster the type of environment they believed to be the most beneficial for developing women's football. Success appeared to be understood more in terms of promoting values such as involvement and participation than competitive success.

I'd say we're [football club] successful in running a big family, we've had a couple of [junior] teams who've done [won] the league and cup double in their first season which I also think is successful. We've been able to give everybody a chance to play, whatever their ability, it doesn't matter if you can't kick a ball, we still get them involved. And that's what I think it should be.

Independent

Although success in terms of achievement is still important, it is mentioned as secondary to the participatory 'family' environment this interviewee feels her club has developed. She appears to be resisting an elitist model of success at all costs in favour of providing football opportunities for as many girls in the local area as possible. This liberal understanding of equality of provision and access existed alongside normally oppositional radical notions of difference and separation. Such radical notions were drawn upon in describing how girls should be provided with their own independent, female-only space, in order to ensure priority of access to facilities, coaches and so on. However, the interviewee later described the difficulty in taking these values outside of her club context, as other teams would be more competitive and emphasize success over participation; these club ideals can still conflict with discourses of achievement and success *outside* of their environment.

For the two clubs who had links to a men's club but remained separate, discussions surrounding the development of football for girls were the main concern.

They just don't seem to have any 'oomph' [passion] to develop anything, for girls. You know, fair enough, it's their club, maybe it is a boys club, I dunno, but I think it's a just shame that there isn't that link there that they want to see us develop. It's a shame that the [women's team's] progression that's been seen on the pitch hasn't been followed by them [men] going 'hey, you're actually getting really good, let's get on the bandwagon'.

Linked, separate, static

The separate and inferior status the participant feels has been assigned to girls and women is highlighted strongly in the comment: 'it's their club, maybe it is a boys club'. When questioned as to whether this concern had been raised with the men's club representatives she responded: 'I don't think we'd want to ruin anything', suggesting that the relationship is delicate and they do not want to risk what little help that they do get. This suggests that being linked but separate can be problematic for female players and teams because links are always at risk of being severed, reflecting a lack of control for women's teams. Women can be denied a voice in this type of relationship and offered little alternative to accepting the status quo which favours men.

Despite this difficult position, it was indicated that links with a men's club, however separate they remained, could assist with the development of the women's club.

The name [of the men's club] attracts a lot of people to us... it gets us players, and it gets us top dollar [high-quality] players, you know, from right, very young players.

Linked, separate, evolving

Having the same name as a professional men's football club is seen here to be beneficial to the women's club as it will attract high-quality players that will contribute to the competitive success of their team. Integration in this case is not necessary, but carrying a recognizable name that *suggests* links with their men's counterpart is of high importance. Clubs can therefore

portray integration to help their exposure yet retain separate structures. For the highest ranked women's club in the study, an academy club at a male professional football club, development was measured in terms of success, and links with a men's club were perceived as vital.

We've seen an opportunity to push a women's team to the top level, and hopefully, with the support and the staff that we've got, we should be able to do that, which, as a local club it's harder to do, but if you look at all of the women's teams that are involved at the higher level, they've all got the backing of their men's club... we need to, and we should, in six years, have a team that's competing with Arsenal.

Linked, separate, involved

For a women's club with ambitions of playing at the very top level, support from men's football clubs is considered imperative. It is important to note that the interviews were undertaken prior to the establishment of the FAWSL, membership of which requires financial and structural support to be demonstrated by clubs wishing to participate at the highest level.

## Perceived Status

Being independent was seen by some of the interviewed women as a chance to create an environment where girls could hold priority status at their own club, in their own space, without being in the shadow of men's and boys' teams. However, for one club, in order to have access to facilities they had to link with a privately owned sports club. But being linked to the club—and as a result, the wider sporting structure—created a relationship that conflicted with the aim to make girls' and women's football a priority.

They [sports club] don't let us hardly ever use the senior pitches, that's for the blokes. They got another two full pitches and two mini pitches, off the back of being a club that offers everything [football opportunities for boys, men, women and girls]. Yet we can't train down there, because the dog shows are on, it's like, you've just had two hundred and fifty grand to build extra pitches for girl's teams, and we can't train on it six months of the year because it's got caravans on it.

Independent

The women's club's low status is not simply in relation to other (men's) teams who also play at the club, but also other commitments, such as providing spaces for dog shows, which take priority over the girls' and women's football teams. Again the interviewee emphasizes clubs benefiting financially from having females affiliated with the club, but the girls and women do not directly benefit from this. Despite having financial independence (they raise their own money through subscriptions, fundraising and securing sponsorship), they do not have control over the external funding awarded to their club. Clubs with a 'linked but separate' relationship reported similar issues.

If there's the slightest dampness on it [main pitch] they don't want two games on it, or if they've played on a Saturday they don't want it used on a Sunday. But the [reserve pitch] is just a bog, so if it's not allowed to be played on the main pitch then quite often it's too boggy on the reserve pitch as well, so we can't play at all.

Linked, separate, static

The fact that the women's leagues in England all have fixtures scheduled on Sunday afternoon is an indicator of how women's football is fitted around the more established structure of the game played by the men. Thus, a women's team who use the facilities at a men's club are automatically assigned last place for the pitch in the order of play at the weekend—often behind junior men's teams—reinforcing the inferiority of women's teams and the low status of women's football in general (Williams 2003). Both interviewees at this club felt that they had made progress with their male counterparts in that they had recently been given priority over boys' teams at the club. Their low priority regarding pitch access is accepted by both interviewees to the point that they *expect* very little, supporting criticisms of 'adding' women to existing sporting structures. The privileged access of boys and men to football resources serves to maintain the 'naturalization' of men and boys with football and reinforces the role of women as inferior.

For the one interviewee who did feel involved with her men's club, part of her role was to ensure that the girls' academy was run in as similar way as possible to the boys' academy. This demonstrates that she places a

strong emphasis on notions of sameness. Despite working towards equal access between the girls and the boys, the inferior status of the women's section of the club was still difficult to avoid.

In terms of facilities and stuff, we can't get down here [men's academy pitches], there's no way, but, it's understandable, and in all fairness, the women's game isn't professional at the minute, so obviously the lads here are gonna take priority, that's fine, I can appreciate that... we're trying to be seen as on, a bit more of an even par [level terms], although it'll never be exactly the same.

Linked, separate, evolving

Despite attempts to provide girls with the same opportunities and standard of facilities, the inferior status of women's football in society in general automatically situates female teams at the club as inferior and prevents equal access. This interviewee feels that this is justified through using her understandings of naturalized male dominance and their 'right' to the sport because they have the potential to earn revenue for the club.

For those interviewees who were members of partnership clubs, integration encouraged the interviewees to understand their status as equal to that of the men's teams at the club.

Why should I give one team more than the other team, no, everybody's equal and it's all football.

Partnership

The basis of this integration is equality; the term 'everybody's equal' is a rejection of difference and a liberal understanding of equality based on the premise of sameness. This is a much more positive attitude towards integration than the attitude of clubs where women's teams had joined an established men's club. The 'football club' with boys and girls sections rather than separate men's and women's clubs was not just referred to directly as one and the same club, but also constructed indirectly through reference to 'kids', 'junior section'—gender-neutral terms—and 'we' and 'our club' by interviewees at all three partnership clubs.

## Conclusion

A major aim of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the extent to which women's clubs were linked to men's clubs, and to examine what the relationships were like. Even this small-scale investigation has shown that these can take many forms. Five of the ten clubs in the study were categorized as existing in between the two extremes of being an entirely independent female-only club (separation) and a mixed-sex partnership club (integration). Across the five linked clubs, a great deal of variance was found, demonstrating the complexity of understanding the relationships between men's and women's football clubs.

By exploring how the interviewees discussed the three dominant themes, it has become clear that the numerous ways of cooperation between the two extremes of separation and integration can be problematic for women's football clubs. This was the type of relationship where women appeared least able to resist dominant discourses of men's dominance and exclusionary and inequitable practices. In these clubs, the gender relations, although varying, were the most fragile and as a result, the women in these clubs demonstrated very little potential to challenge the unbalanced relations of power that had very negative consequences for the female players, such as restricted access to quality facilities, exclusionary practices, limited influence in decision-making processes and even financial exploitation. Being linked to a men's football club was understood by the interviewees as a necessity, but this did not result in any form of gender integration as the men's and women's spheres and activities remained significantly separate.

The combination of discourses of necessity and separation can lead in some cases to a loss of measure of independence with very little gain in return; women's clubs can become reliant on support that can create significant problems if withdrawn. More concerning was the acceptance of these unbalanced relations by the women in the study, echoing findings that women in traditionally male sports can accept a lower status due to the belief that they are participating in a female (and worse) version of the 'real' sport (see e.g. Carle and Nauright 1999). The difficulties that the women in this study encountered demonstrate the complex 'outsider on the inside' (Crosset 1995) position that women can occupy in male-dominated sporting structures.

In considering the implications of these findings, the different views, options and choices of the interviewees indicate that the FA encouragement of integration could be exploited by men's clubs for financial gain. Similarly, it could also be utilized by women to challenge gendered practices and improve their own situation. This involved promoting their women's clubs to be a benefit to men's clubs, which has the potential to shift power towards women's clubs as they can 'bargain' for better access to resources and begin to challenge discourses of male superiority at the club. However, these practices do not instigate integration and/or a movement towards an equitable environment. Achieving greater benefits may improve the position of the women in the short term, but their position remains separate, and at risk of the well-documented limits of 'adding' women to existing established contexts, where gendered structures are maintained (Scraton et al. 1999; Welford 2011). The potential for financial exploitation of women and their clubs coupled with the tentative men's-women's club relationships seriously questions the foundations of any drive for men's and women's football clubs to become linked, particularly at the grassroots participatory level.

There is an important difference between the three partnership clubs. For the five women's clubs which were linked to but remained separate from a men's football club, the links came from the joining of two independent clubs, whereas the partnership clubs grew from *within* an existing men's club. This may be the ideal that the FA is striving for, and findings from this study suggest that a partnership can indeed develop an environment where both boys and girls can experience football in a positive way. However, the interviews also suggest that the majority of men's-women's club relationships outside of the top leagues do not develop in this way and the alternative has a much greater risk of creating an inequitable (and unsustainable) relationship.

## **Endnote: Looking to the Future**

The structural changes to elite women's football in England since the undertaking of these interviews with women involved in football—the FAWSL and the increase in support offered to female clubs from their

male counterparts—underline the importance of a better understanding of the relationship between men's and women's football clubs. The findings of this study suggest that there are a number of issues that women's teams can face if they are linked with a men's club, yet this is very much the future: FA General Secretary Alex Horne stressed that the involvement of men's professional clubs will play a huge part in encouraging more participation in women's and girls' football (The Premier League 2013). The FA also previously stated that the evolution of a professional league would depend, to an extent, on the commitment of top clubs where the enthusiasm for women's football is mixed (Gibson 2012). It would be very interesting to examine whether the concerns highlighted in this study are also evident at the elite level, where financial and developmental support is essential. The FA claim that the semi-professional FAWSL has increased the quality and attendances of elite women's football as well as attracting more media coverage and commercial sponsorship, but the demands placed on clubs can also have a potentially negative effect.

The 2013 FAWSL was won for the first time by Liverpool Ladies—who had finished bottom of the league for the previous two seasons—and their rapid ascent to champions was undoubtedly a result of significant investment and support from the men's club (see Kessel 2013). Manchester City WFC, newcomers to the FAWSL in 2014 and also receiving significant financial support from the men's professional club, won the league in 2016. However, here some issues begin to show; their place in the FA Women's Super League 1 (FAWSL1) was at the expense of the longest running top-flight team, Doncaster Rovers Belles, who operate independently of the men's club—a decision that has angered the club and its fans who launched unsuccessful protests and appeals and attracted a reasonable amount of media attention in the process (Cloake 2013). A similarly unpopular decision has been the rebranding of Lincoln Ladies as Notts County Ladies for the 2014 season, a move deemed necessary to meet the FA application requirements (Lincoln did not receive the required support from their men's club), but this has been severely criticized by the local fan base Lincoln had managed to grow. This situation has been compared to the highly controversial decision in men's football to allow Wimbledon FC to move to Milton Keynes and become MK Dons (for further details, see Joyce 2006; Riach 2013), suggesting that developing closer links with the



men's structure of football—in this case increasing professionalization—may lead to an increase in the negative and controversial aspects of the male game creeping into the female game. As outlined at the start of this chapter, women's football has always had a turbulent relationship with men's football, and this looks set to continue as the elite structures in particular become more closely aligned.

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# 7

## 'Who Could Name an England Women's Footballer?': Female Fans of Men's Football and Their Views of Women's Football in England

Stacey Pope

### Introduction

Research on sports fandom has largely centred upon male fans of men's sports. In football (soccer), scholars have typically constructed the archetypical 'White', working-class male fan as the 'default fan', with the behaviours of male fans widely regarded as the most 'authentic' (Jones 2008, p. 517). Given the lack of research on female sports fans of men's sports it is perhaps unsurprising that barely any studies have focused on the views of women towards women's sport. This chapter offers new knowledge and insights into this area and makes a useful contribution towards addressing the largely neglected topic of spectators of women's sport.

The focus of this chapter is on women's perceptions of watching women's football in the UK. The research draws upon feminist thinking, building upon existing feminist studies on female spectatorship of women's sport and on gender, media and sport. But I also found Glaser and

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G. Pfister, S. Pope (eds.), *Female Football Players and Fans*, Football Research in an Enlarged Europe, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59025-1\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59025-1_7)

Strauss's (2008) 'grounded theory' a highly useful theoretical tool for data collection and analysis, so this approach was used to interpret and present the empirical findings. My findings draw on 51 semi-structured interviews which were conducted with female fans of men's professional football in England. Meier and Leinwather (2012) in research on television viewers of German national team football matches bemoan the lack of research on the reasons *why* there is such a poor female reception of women's football, but this question was not addressed in their research study due to the quantitative nature of the research design. The qualitative nature of my study therefore facilitates a deeper understanding of women's interest (or lack of interest) in watching women's football and can be used to supplement the available quantitative research findings.

I begin this chapter by overviewing the history of women's football and spectatorship in England, before referring to the existing literature on female fandom and studies on the marginalization of women's sport in the media. I provide a summary of the research methods that were employed in my study, before exploring the diverse views my interviewees addressed towards women's football. I examine three main themes that emerged from my research: the positive attitudes some women expressed towards women's football, the (lack of) media coverage of women's football and its impact on fans, and the negative perceptions some women expressed towards women's football and women's sport more generally, which have arguably been in part shaped by the poor media coverage of women's sport.

## Literature Review

### A Brief History of Women's Football and Spectatorship in England

During the First World War, Pfister et al. (2002) describe how women's football developed into a popular sporting event in England. The women who replaced men in the factories sought recreation in the game of football and were also supported by their employers to participate as this was viewed as a means of maintaining the health and fitness of workers.

Women's football also proved popular in this period because money raised from matches was donated to charity. The numbers of spectators grew so rapidly at this time that matches took place at professional men's football stadiums, with packed terraces turning out to support women's matches (Williamson 1991).

By 1921 there were around 150 women's teams in England. A good example of the popularity of women's football in this period is when the Dick, Kerr Ladies, the most successful team of the time, played in front of a capacity crowd of 53,000 spectators at Everton's Goodison Park in 1920 (see Lopez 1997). However, Pfister et al. (2002) describe how following the First World War there were calls for a return to 'normality' in the gender order. Women's football did not meet with approval from those who felt that this challenged traditional gender roles and women's 'natural' role in the domestic sphere. Medical arguments were also made against women's football, with claims that playing football was 'dangerous' for female players and would have detrimental effects on their health (Pfister et al. 2002; Newsham 1994). Newsham (1994, pp. 60, 63) also suggests that resentment was building up within the men's football establishment because of the size of crowds that women's football was attracting—it is claimed that these were higher than those for men's games. In 1921 the Football Association (FA) decided on measures against women's football which revealed sexist attitudes towards women playing football, with the FA preventing women's teams from using FA (men's) football grounds and also stipulating that: 'The game of football is quite unsuitable for females and ought not to be encouraged' (quoted in Williamson 1991, p. 69).

This FA decision initiated the decline of women's football in England and little is known about women footballers in the years that followed this ban (Pfister et al. 2002). The England men's team winning the 1966 World Cup tournament, which was also hosted in England, has been argued to have stimulated the rebirth of the women's game in England, prompting more women to play the game (Lopez 1997; Ward and Williams 2009). However, caution needs to be exercised over the extent to which this event transformed women's football; for example, Williams (2003, p. 38) suggests that following this tournament there was no pivotal change in women's attitudes towards football and that this change occurred more gradually. Williams (2003, p. 45) also discusses how

despite the alleged upsurge of interest in women's football following the 1966 World Cup, there was a movement away from women's football as a spectator sport in this period. Women's football as a 'spectacle' or form of 'entertainment' for spectators was gradually replaced by the sport being viewed as a 'leisure activity' for participants.

In 1969, the Women's Football Association (WFA) was founded in England which allowed women's teams' permission to apply for affiliation to the FA. But when the WFA requested a formal association with the FA in 1971 this was rejected (Williams 2007). In the same year, UEFA had agreed that its national associations should accept women's football and take control of this (Williams 2013) so the FA's actions showed that the federation continued to resist this recommendation (Dunn and Welford 2015). The FA did, however, overturn its 1921 ban on women using FA affiliated pitches (Williams 2013) and formerly took control of women's football from the WFA in 1993 (Lopez 1997; Dunn and Welford 2015).

Although women's football in England has since never regained the popularity it had around the time of the First World War, an 'unofficial' World Cup in Mexico in 1971 gained high television audiences and also attendance figures of over 100,000. However, the motives of the (mostly male) spectators attending to watch this sporting event are somewhat questionable. Williams and Woodhouse (1994, p. 97) describe how the women players, 'played into pink goal frames, beauty parlours were installed in dressing rooms, and some teams were encouraged to wear hot pants and blouses'. This focus on the heterosexual attractiveness of players is also illustrated by how a charity women's match in London in the same year was advertised as a clash between 'the world's most beautiful players' (Woodhouse and Williams 1994, p. 97). As Knoppers and Anthonisson (2003) have suggested, being commercially attractive to male supporters may offer women's football a chance to survive and this economic imperative may help to explain the significant role that sexuality has played and continues to play in women's football. For example, Kane et al. (2013, p. 275) discuss the taken-for-granted assumption that sexually provocative images will promote women's sport. They describe football players appearing in erotic poses for the German edition of *Playboy* before the Women's World Cup in 2011 as an example of 'selling sex' in

women's sport. However, as Pfister (2015) notes, these players were unknown young players rather than members of the senior national team. Reducing female athletes to sexual objects rather than focusing on women's sporting achievements and athletic competence (see, e.g., Messner et al. 2003; Harris 2004; Kane et al. 2013) serves to undermine women's football as a serious sport.

My focus upon the views of women's football in England is especially pertinent given the establishment of the semi-professional FA Women's Super League (FA Women's Super League) in March 2011. The league was initially restricted to eight clubs, with matches scheduled over the summer months at a time when there is less competition from elsewhere in football (Dunn and Welford 2015). From 2017/18 the FA Women's Super League is running from September to May, which the FA hopes will increase participation and attendance figures and will also bring this league in line with other women's divisions in Europe (BBC Sport Football 2016). Dunn and Welford (2015) also describe how the FA introduced a salary cap for players competing in the FA Women's Super League of up to £20,000 per player, with a maximum of four players at each club allowed to exceed this figure. This was to try to prevent the league from collapsing on financial grounds and was also intended to spread the talent across the FA Women's Super League clubs in order to ensure that the league is competitive (Dunn and Welford 2015; see also Klein 2017, chapter in this book). Media exposure for FA Women's Super League matches was secured when the pay-for-TV broadcaster ESPN initially bought rights to televise selected live matches, and BT Sport currently has exclusive rights to televise FA Women's Super League matches (Media Centre 2016).

The women's football tournament at the London 2012 Olympic Games was also a significant event in the development of women's football in England. This tournament saw high attendance figures for women's matches; for example, 80,203 spectators watched the USA beat Japan in the final (The FA 2012). The FA (2012) suggested that these high attendances were evidence of the quality of the women's game and proposed that 'there has never been a better platform on which to build women's football in England'. The federation outlined plans to further grow the women's fan base for England and FA Women's Super League



teams by increasing media exposure of women's football, creating a calendar of events to showcase the sport and by promoting female athletes as role models.

In order to further develop women's football, the FA has also expanded the FA Women's Super League; a second division was launched in 2014 which includes ten clubs (FA Women's Super League 2) and the top division (FA Women's Super League 1) was expanded from its original eight clubs to ten clubs from the 2017 season (see Chap. 5 for Klein's detailed discussion of women's football leagues in Europe). The FA Women's Super League 1 average attendance increased from 550 in 2012 (The FA 2012) to 1128 in 2016 (The FA 2016), although figures show there are wide variations in attendance figures between clubs. For example, the title winners of 2016 Manchester City Women averaged attendances of 2253, whereas for Sunderland AFC Ladies the average attendance figure was 710 (Aloia and Garry 2016). Average attendances for FA Women's Super League 2 matches in 2016 were 443 and the FA seeks to double these attendance figures for Women's Super League matches by 2020 (The FA 2016).

Although the data which provides the material for this study was collected shortly before the FA Women's Super League was established (Pope 2010), the findings are useful to unravel some of the problems when attempting to recruit more fans to women's sport. I will now consider important studies on female fans before presenting existing literature on the media coverage of women's football and women's sport.

## Research on Female Fans

Women's marginalized position in sport is reflected in research on sports fandom which has typically focused upon the importance of sport for men, with women's voices, behaviours and attitudes largely neglected (Pope 2013, 2017). Women have been excluded from male-centred research studies, in particular the large body of work on male hooligan cultures and/or issues around fan rivalry (see, e.g., Armstrong 1998; Murphy et al. 1990; Spaaij 2008). In more recent years, there has been a growing body of research on female football fans (see, e.g., Pope 2013,

2017; Pfister et al. 2013; Jones 2008; see also the chapters in this book on female fans of men's football). Nonetheless, there is still a need to redress the under-representation of women in existing sports fan research (Mewett and Toffoletti 2011).

Given the lack of research on female fans of men's sport, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is a dearth of research on the views and perceptions of women towards women's sport. Some popular accounts have assumed that women will automatically be interested in women's sports and so should be the target market. According to Whiteside and Hardin (2011, p. 122), when the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) was launched in the USA in 1997, the league set out to target women as a fan base. Here, the underlying assumption from the league was that "everyday" women and moms' would follow this league. Whiteside and Hardin (2011, p. 123) critique the common assumption made popular in the mainstream press, 'that women, and especially women who play or have previously played sports themselves, should—and will—watch and show an interest in women's athletics; in other words, participation will drive spectatorship'. They argue that whereas millions of boys in the USA participate in sports and many go on to become spectators of men's sports, millions of girls during the past three decades have also participated in sports but have not gone on to become women's sports spectators. Whiteside and Hardin (2011) undertook qualitative focus groups to explore the relationship between women and mediated sports. They targeted heterosexual married women, who were likely to be mothers who had young children at home, as this is a sought after viewing group by sports programmers. The women involved in the research were aged between 26 and 43 years to ensure that their sporting experiences took place after Title IX was introduced in 1972—a law which ensured equal funding and opportunity for girls and women in sports at federally funded education institutions.

Findings from Whiteside and Hardin's (2011) study showed that although some of the women were former athletes; this previous involvement in organized sports did not transfer into becoming spectators of women's sport. These women were ambivalent about watching women's sports and generally saw little value in following women's sport. Instead they preferred following traditional, mainstream men's sports as a way to

spend time with their husbands and families (see also Farrell et al. 2011). Although some women described how they enjoyed watching certain sports, they often described their fanship, team affiliation and viewing habits as centred on their husbands so, 'ultimately their sports preferences were largely dictated by the men in their lives' (2011, p. 133). In Germany, Klein (see Chap. 5) has also found that women's league matches attract more men than women so the increasing numbers of girls' and women who play football has not transferred into watching women's league games.

This raises complex issues around building a fan base for women's sport and targeting females as the main audience—especially if they are less likely to follow women's sport than men. On the one hand, women could be seen to represent a largely unused fan base for women's sport, so by targeting female fans this could help to generate revenue and audiences for the women's game. For example, the FA Women's Super League has recently identified 9–15-year-old girls as its primary target group (Williams 2013). But, on the other hand, if women's interest in women's sport is generally more limited than that of men's, this could lead to football federations and media coverage targeting a predominantly male audience by focusing on the 'sexiness' and 'femininity' of female players, as has been used by the German football association, and this sexualized representation of female players is also apparent in German tabloid media coverage of women's football (see Meier and Leinwather 2012; Pfister 2015).

Farrell et al. (2011) explored the reasons why women attend men's but not women's collegiate basketball games in the USA and critiqued that little is known about the interest and motives of women for watching women's sport. Female respondents in this study were typically socialized into sports fandom by males (see also Mewett and Toffoletti 2011; Pope 2017) and so Farrell et al. (2011) claim that women will follow men's sport because they are influenced by males who presume that only men's sport is important and worth watching. When questioned about their lack of interest in women's basketball, many respondents also pointed to the lack of media coverage of the women's games. Women have typically been under-represented in the media as athletes and where they do appear they are typically 'belittled' (Eastman and Billings 2000, p. 209), which has been used to explain the relatively small numbers of followers of women's sports (see also Whiteside and Hardin 2011). These issues are explored briefly below.

## The Marginalization of Women's Sport in the Media: An Overview of the Existing Literature

The mass media play a crucial role in framing opinion and shaping attitudes (Harris 2004) so it is vital to consider how female athletes and women's sport are portrayed in the media as this is likely to influence attitudes towards women's sport. Numerous studies have shown how female athletes have historically—and still are—under-represented in the media (see, e.g., Duncan and Messner 1998; Eastman and Billings 2000; Kane and Greendorder 1994; Messner et al. 2003; Kian et al. 2008). My research draws upon a feminist theoretical framework and so I build upon the existing studies in the area of gender, media and sport, seeking to 'add' to the limited work on women's spectatorship of women's sport in my findings and discussion.

Despite the recent success of British sportswomen at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, coverage of women's team sport in the UK press continues to be extremely limited with women's sport making up just seven per cent of all sport media coverage in the UK (Women in Sport 2015). In Norway, a country with a high degree of gender equality, Skille (2008) discusses how football is the most popular sport for both sexes, but men's domination in media coverage is still prevalent. In sports coverage, only ten per cent of the space is dedicated to women's sport and this limited coverage on women's sport is often a 'trivialization' of women's achievements in comparison to men's sport.

The presentation of women's sport by the media has been argued to provide a 'highly stereotypical feminized view—one that tends to sexualize, commodify, trivialize and devalue (through marginalization) women's sporting achievements' (Kane and Greendorder 1994, p. 36). Christopherson et al. (2002) have summarized four primary ways in which the media construct gendered commentary in the coverage of sport. Firstly, media commentary tends to reduce female athletes to sexual objects (see, e.g., Duncan and Messner 1998; Harris 2004; Messner et al. 2003) rather than simply reporting on their athletic skills and sporting accomplishments. The sporting achievements of women can also be downplayed by emphasizing their familial roles, for example, Eastman and Billings (2000) found that in reporting on CNN and ESPN sports

programmes, commentators were more likely to refer to the dating habits and families of sportswomen than those of male athletes.

Secondly, Christopherson et al. (2002, p.172) discuss how media coverage of women's sports often includes 'ambivalent language'. For example, Duncan and Messner (1998, p. 175) describe how in men's and women's competitions, commentators will use attributions that suggest strength ('powerful', 'confident', 'dominant') and weakness ('weary', 'panicked', 'dejected'). Commentators describing men's sport were far more likely to use strength attributions, whereas commentators describing women's sport used both strength and weakness attributions. Thirdly, media prioritize women's sports that emphasize traditional aspects of 'femininity' such as grace and aesthetics. This has important implications for the media coverage of sports such as football which may not be perceived as appropriate for females. Finally, Christopherson et al. (2002, p. 173) consider how it is vital for a discussion of gender and sports to include the accompanying structural issues of race, class and sexuality of female players. For example, the racial identity of African-American female athletes has been typically rendered invisible due to the media focus on the differences between men and women rather than the differences within gender (see Edwards 1999).

In research on media coverage of basketball, Meân (2012) has undertaken a content analysis of the official websites of the women's (WNBA) and the men's (NBA) US professional basketball leagues. This study is significant because it compares coverage of men and women in the same sport and on the same performance level. Meân (2012) found that the levels of production, amount and nature of the content on the men's basketball website presented this sport as exciting and action packed and thus fulfilled the expectations of knowledgeable sports fans and addressed the users as experts and 'real' sports fans. In contrast, the women's basketball website positioned women's basketball as less exciting and less newsworthy than its male counterpart. There were low production values which could be seen through the lack of action shots and commentary pertaining to a 'win', and this framed the website as not worthy of substantive attention and not having any action or updates worth reporting.

The low production values and limited participatory opportunities (through forums for fans to participate and interact) constructed the

women's basketball website as a less serious sports text for fans, implying that its audience was less sophisticated in comparison to that of the men's website. Meân (2012, p. 171) argues that female fans especially may be 'turned off' by sites or texts that 'trivialize' their sport fandom. Thus, female fans of men's sports are perhaps unlikely to follow women's sports if the media coverage does not offer them the sorts of content that they are accustomed to and would expect as sports fans as this information would help them to 'perform' authentic fandom in a predominantly male domain (Pope 2017).

Clearly, there is an extensive body of existing research on the media coverage of women's sport. This chapter extends this research and makes an original contribution to the field by considering how the marginalization and trivialization of women's sport in the media impact upon women's attitudes towards women's football in the UK. I focus upon women who are fans of men's football (who are often highly committed fans) in order to examine their perceptions of women's football and the reasons for their interest—or their lack of interest, which may be attributed to the poor media coverage of women's football. In the following section, I will briefly overview the methods that were employed for the research before moving on to introduce my findings.

## Methods

The findings have been extracted from a wider, comparative study of 85 semi-structured interviews female fans of men's professional football (Leicester City) and rugby union (Leicester Tigers) in the English East Midlands city of Leicester (Pope 2010). In this chapter, I draw primarily on the data from the female football supporters, but I do make some reference to the wider study where appropriate. The men's football club in Leicester (Leicester City Football Club) currently competes in the Premiership or top tier of English football. The women's football club (Leicester City Women Football Club) was one of 16 clubs to apply for a position in the FA Women's Super League which was launched in 2011 (Williams 2013) and also bid for FA Women's Super League status when plans were announced to introduce a second division in 2014, but was

not successful in its application. The women's club currently competes in the FA Women's Premier League Northern Division. On the FA's women's football pyramid this division (along with the Women's Premier League Southern Division) is directly below the highest levels of women's football in England (the FA Women's Super League 1, the FA Women's Super League 2 and the FA Women's Super League Development league) (The FA 2017).

My findings draw on 51 interviews conducted with female football fans (Pope 2010). The sampling frame used to select football respondents was a postal questionnaire survey (Williams 2004). Potential interviewees were divided into three age groups using the age delineations from the survey and systematic sampling techniques (selecting every fifth questionnaire return) were used to select potential respondents. This made it possible to compare responses from different generations of female fans. The final sample was made up of three broad age groups: 10 'younger group' fans aged 20–27 years, 25 'middle group' fans aged 28–59 years and 16 'older group' fans aged over 60 years. Drawing on existing literature, I designed an interview schedule which was divided into eight different themes or issues. This covered topics such as how interviewees first became a fan, their experiences of attending matches and their views on women as fans. The interview schedule included questions on whether interviewees watched or played women's football and this generated discussions around female fans' attitudes towards women's football that forms the focus of this chapter.

The interviews were semi-structured to ensure that important topics would be covered that could be compared across interviewees, whilst also allowing flexibility to pursue topics initiated by the interviewee (Berg and Lune 2012). The interviews were usually conducted in the homes or workplaces of the interviewees and averaged around two hours in length. I used Glaser and Strauss's (2008, p. 1) 'grounded theory' as a tool for the data collection and the data analysis so there was an emphasis upon the 'discovery of theory from data'. After transcribing the interviews I coded the data by drawing upon the 'constant comparative method' (Glaser and Strauss 2008, p. 101). This is an analytic process whereby: 'each incident in the data is compared with other incidents for similarities and differences', allowing the researcher to identify different themes and properties

specific to each theme (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 73). I aimed to reach a point of 'theoretical saturation' whereby the categories or themes are well developed and further data gathering adds little or nothing new to the conceptualization (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

All of the women who participated in the research were heterosexual and all were fans of men's football. Many were season ticket holders so attended all of the men's Leicester City Football Club matches, others were club members who attended the majority of home matches of this team and some of the interviewees occasionally attended live matches. Only one respondent of the 51 interviewees had any experience of watching local women's matches; the other respondents only had experiences of watching women's football on television. Pseudonyms are used to protect anonymity. My findings focus upon three main areas that emerged from the data: positive attitudes towards women's football, the (lack of) media coverage of women's football and its impact on fans, and negative perceptions towards women's football and women's sport in general.

## Results and Discussion

### Positive Attitudes Towards Women's Football

Opportunities to watch women's team sport are extremely limited—usually to the four-yearly television coverage of various Olympic ball sports, and an occasional coverage of international women's football matches at championships. Sky Sports' live coverage of women's netball (a sport usually played by females and which is similar to basketball) and BT Sport's coverage of the FA Women's Super League present new possibilities to promote women's sport to wider audiences even if a subscription fee is required for these channels. However, as discussed previously, coverage of women's team sport in the media continues to be minimal (see Women in Sport 2015).

Some respondents discussed that they enjoy watching televised women's football and that they would like to watch a Leicester City women's team live. A small number of interviewees even preferred the women's game to matches of men because of the commercialization of English



football that has occurred since the formation of the FA Premier League (now Premier League) in 1992 (Gibbons and Dixon 2010). Millward (2011) describes how after the Premier League was established, BSkyB won the contract to screen games domestically and internationally. Both the number of matches televised and the fee BSkyB pays for each match have grown rapidly since 1992 and the English Premier League is now said to be 'the most lucrative league in the world' (2011, p. 22). One of the interviewees who preferred watching women's football was Janice who had been an elite football player in her youth. She explains her preference for women's matches as follows:

I watched some really good football matches. I thought: "They're every bit as good as the men." The thing with the ladies game, I found, [was] it was slower, but I found it better to watch [be]cause it was so free flowing. Not like the men's football now, I hate it because it's stop start, there's too many free kicks. There's too much money in [men's] football now, I think. I just think there's so much at stake that the professional foul has got worse. (Janice, age 53)

Other interviewees with a positive attitude to watching women's football also had experience of playing the sport. Lopez (1997) found that some male fans, too, view the relatively slow pace of women's football as reminiscent of the men's game before it allegedly became professionalized and commercialized. Harriet's enjoyment of women's football was also linked to the notion that the women's game was somehow a 'purer' version of the sport because it is not as financially driven as men's football:

Men's games are a lot quicker than the women's, but I think the women are just as talented. And they're not as big headed as some of the men...I suppose [be]cause the money's not there. And there's not as much diving in the women's [football] so I think that's always good. (Harriet, age 23)

Eva (aged 80) similarly discussed how she 'loved' to watch the women's game. She considered women's football as more appealing than men's matches because: 'You don't get the fouls and things like that with the women like you do with the men' and therefore the sport is not as 'dirty'.

However, issues were also raised around the lack of media coverage of women's football as this made it difficult to follow the sport and consequently this has a detrimental effect on developing a fan base.

## Lack of Media Coverage and Its Impact on Fans

Some football interviewees from all age groups expressed an interest in watching women's football on television. They particularly discussed how they had enjoyed watching previous Women's World Cups or other televised women's football events. However, a number of interviewees complained that there was simply not enough media coverage of women's football and that consequently the sport struggled to recruit fans and to be taken as seriously as men's football:

I think if there was a bit more coverage and there was a bit more hype in the press about it [women's football], and you read about it, it was on the TV and in the paper, then I think you would get a lot more people watching it and getting into it...You don't pick up a *Sun* [British tabloid newspaper] do you and read about women's football at the back? That's my view anyway, you should promote it more. (Katie age 26)

With how low coverage it's got...it's like they're patronizing the female football players...Oh by the way...we've got this on tomorrow to fill some time, so watch it if you've got nothing to do. If you're really bored and you want to watch girls' play football. (Rosie, age 20)

In the larger study, which included interviews with female rugby union fans, some of the rugby interviewees stated that they would watch women's rugby if this was available as they would at least 'like to give women's rugby a chance' (Lorraine, age 31), but they also emphasized that opportunities to watch women's rugby were and still are extremely limited. Only one respondent of the 34 rugby fans referred in the interview to watching a women's rugby match on television. However, there do seem to be some positive signs that televised media coverage of women's sport is beginning to increase, at least for major international women's tournaments. For example, at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, rugby sevens

became an Olympic sport for the first time (see Cleary 2016) and matches were televised live to an international audience. This media exposure opened up the sport to some new viewers or fans, demonstrating the potential of women's rugby to expand as a televised spectator sport.

For some respondents, watching women's football was not as appealing as watching the men's games simply because women's football lacks status: it had and still has little of the media impact, crowd appeal and commercial attractions of established men's football. 'Who could name an England women's footballer?' asked Louisa (age 27) rhetorically. The lack of media coverage of elite female footballers is illustrated by a survey on women's sport of over 2000 British adults, which revealed that only one in five knew that Rachel Yankey plays football, although she played for FA Women's Super League club Arsenal until 2016 and is the most ever capped England player in men's or women's football. By comparison, 97 per cent of British adults in the survey knew England player Wayne Rooney's profession (Dugan 2013). Hence, even today the majority of (men's) football fans may still not be able to name a female football player (Williams 2003).

Some interviewees consequently attributed their lack of interest in women's football to the lack of media coverage of the sport: for Sandy (age 26) this meant that: 'I don't know who any of them [players] are, I don't know any of their background. So it's not knowing them, I think, that you don't really have any interest.' Louisa (age 27) similarly noted: 'I know who all the male footballers are; so I watch a team and I'll be able to name them all, Premiership, Championship [men's English leagues], most of the teams, but if I watch women's football I haven't got a clue who anybody is, their names or anything.' Farrell et al. (2011, p. 198) discuss how the lack of media coverage of women's basketball meant that many female fans' could not name a player on the team. They speculate that the lack of stories regarding athlete personalities may have a greater (negative) impact on female sports fans than male supporters, who supposedly do not rely on developing their connection to sport via the personal 'stories' of players, although this claim is not supported by empirical data. Nevertheless, it seems likely that the lack of media coverage of women's football may prevent some females—and indeed males—from developing a connection and identification with elite female players in the way that they can with male football icons. Blackshaw and Crabbe

(2004) refer to the ubiquitous nature of elite level men's football and its celebrity players as a kind of 'soap opera'; today the media saturated coverage of men's clubs and players make it difficult *not* to follow men's football. Studies have shown that boys often have male professional football players as their heroes (Swain 2003). However, marginalizing women's football in the media also has wider implications for women's sport as this means that there are few female footballers' who can serve as visible and thus effective role models for girls and women.

Some interviewees also worried about the potential time and cost involved in supporting *both* the men's and women's games. Concerns about whether or not they could afford to watch women's football in the stadium illustrate the need for marketing campaigns to promote or 'sell' women's matches more effectively, especially given the relatively cheap ticket prices of elite women's football in comparison to the men's game. For example, an adult season ticket to watch Arsenal Ladies in the FA Women's Super League 1 was £23 for the 2016/17 season (Arsenal 2017), which is cheaper than buying just one standard Premier League ticket for the men's Arsenal team.

Some women may come to watch *if* the women's game is organized as more of an event (e.g., pre-match/half-time entertainment) and if there were existing crowds in the stadium. But in order to recruit these fans, there needs to already be an existing base of fan support. Would one of the interviewees, Lucy, consider watching a 'live' women's football match?

Lucy: I don't think [so]...Well, if Leicester had a women's team and they'd got, like, the Walkers Stadium [men's home stadium] for women, I probably would. [Be]cause it would have the same status in a way, do you know what I mean?

Researcher: Why? Do you need to have other people watching in the stadium then?

Lucy: Yes. It's about the experience of the match and everything that goes with it [i.e., the atmosphere]. And if the team is all women, well fine, no problem. (Lucy, age 45)

Farrell (2006) discusses how women's basketball does not receive the benefit of 'audience building' via the mass media—whilst men's basketball matches are profiled in newspapers and available on television,

coverage of women's matches is largely invisible. Media coverage of sporting events can help to generate hype and create 'a thing on everyone's mind' (2006, p. 147). This is certainly the case for the media hype that typically surrounds the men's football World Cup in England which consequently serves to generate wider public interest. But the 'audience building' for men's football does not increase interest in women's games. It is in also stark contrast to the coverage of the women's football World Cup, which is not promoted in the media to the same extent:

When the women's World Cup is on, there's probably only women that play football that even know about it or bother watching it. When England [men's team] are in the World Cup, you've got cars going around with flags and houses all decked out with flags. But I mean I can just never see that happening for the women's World Cup, I just don't think it's advertised. (Janice, age 53)

In the final section, I will consider some of the negative views that were expressed towards women's football which can perhaps be largely attributed to the poor media coverage of women's games.

## Negative Perceptions of Women's Football and Women's Sport and the Influence of the Media

Most of the established media continue to promote sport as a representation of *masculine* values. For example, Boyle and Haynes (2000, p. 191) suggest that televised sport continues to 'connote maleness', with male images of sport equating male sporting prowess with masculine superiority, hence deliberately or unconsciously excluding or alienating female athletes and women's sport. So it is unsurprising that some interviewees talked about women's football in a largely derogatory way; certainly as deeply *subordinate* to men's sport, as Sophie's dismissive account clearly indicated:

It's not right. It's just slow and they can't, they can't play football. I know I shouldn't say that as a woman [...] But there isn't that sort of real competitive aggressiveness I suppose: it just doesn't seem right. The brief few

games, or parts of games I've seen on television are a bit of a joke as far as I'm concerned [...]. I just don't enjoy it. I just don't like watching it. (Sophie, age 42)

It could be suggested that by marginalizing and trivializing women's sporting achievements, for example, by emphasizing females' physical weaknesses and reducing them to sexual objects (see, Christopherson et al. 2002; Duncan and Messner 1998; Kane et al. 2013), the media has contributed to construct and reinforce stereotypes about women's alleged natural 'inferior' bodily status in sport and also in everyday life. In this sense, the usual media presentation of women's sport reinforces the assumption that the female body is somehow lacking in both physical power and sporting capital. For many respondents in the football and rugby sample, it was because women's sport *lacked* men's aggression or physicality, that it had little appeal for sport fans, despite some interviewees seemingly being surprised by the abilities of female players. However, women playing football and rugby at a high level were derided here in the interviews using terms such as 'funny', 'odd', and 'silly', lacking the 'natural movement' and skill levels of men. The men's game, in contrast was perceived as 'quicker', 'sharper', 'harder', shows 'true grit' and having more of an 'edge'. Female versions of these sports were not classed as the 'real game' and were 'not very exciting'. A number of the football and rugby respondents across all generations broadly shared these sorts of views.

Meân (2012) proposes that the simplistic arguments which position men's basketball as 'better' than women's need to be problematized as the commodification of sport through media makes a sport more or less exciting and spectacular. Such differences can be 'subtle and embedded in other practices like prize money, audience building, and ticket pricing differences between men's and women's sports' (2012, p. 172). In my research, one of the key issues that contributed towards the different attitudes around men's and women's sports was how men were obviously playing *for* something—major financial rewards and well-established championships and trophies which have existed historically. For example, Helena (age 23) explained it was important for her that in men's football: 'Your teams and your leagues have all got stories behind them. That's a big thing for football...the coverage of the teams and who's fighting for

what title.' Women, on the other hand, still seemed to be competing needlessly—and therefore unattractively—for very little rewards:

Obviously because men's football has been going so much longer, it's faster and more skilful on the whole. I mean it's a massive generalization but I would say that it is faster and more at stake, a lot more at stake. But I would imagine that girl's football, women's football I should say will get better and stronger as years go on. (Amy, age 51)

It has to be noted that virtually all respondents made some kind of direct comparison to the men's sport when they discussed the quality and attractiveness of women's football. Lopez (1997) described how it is usually the case in Britain—unlike in other countries and in other sports—that the media compare high-profile female football players directly with male counterparts. She argues (1997, p. 211) that the 'incorrect, commonly-held assumptions about "women wishing to compete" with male players or to be compared with them, still persist'. By drawing direct parallels between the men's and women's sports, respondents conclude that male professional football must be 'better' than women's because men are 'naturally' physically stronger.

It might therefore be suggested that for women's football to have the same appeal as the men's game female players need to become more 'masculine'; they need to become physically stronger and the games need to acquire a more aggressive, more competitive edge. However, issues were raised in women's sport if athletes were perceived to be too 'masculine' or even simply physically competent. As Cahn (1994) points out, heterosexual female athletes are often faced with a central contradiction between their athletic prowess and the requirements of conventional femininity. Women's football teams such as the Dick, Kerr Ladies around the early 1920s were criticized for their lack of skill, but if they demonstrated their ball-playing abilities they were attacked because of their lack of 'femininity' (see Pfister et al. 2002). Almost a century later, my findings reveal this same complex double-bind situation for female athletes. It seems that if women's football is to attract more male and female supporters, female football players need to demonstrate the same level of skill or physical ability as men, and yet to do so raises doubts about their femininity from *both* men and women.

Moreover, we need to add a further dimension to this equation: 'feminine' athletes must also clearly be marked as *heterosexual* (Caudwell 2000). In sport, some scholars have suggested that 'femininity' is used as a code word for 'heterosexuality' (Harris 2004; Griffin 1992). Nina (among others) worried that successful sporting women might seek to ape men on the playing field, thus challenging conventional femininities and sexualities:

If you look at women's tennis against men's tennis, some of the women are now as powerful as some of the men. Do I like women's tennis more than men's? No, because I think you've got to keep an element of femininity in it. We're not men; we shouldn't aim to be men. So I look at it [women's football] and I think well: Yeah, don't go out and try to emulate it the same [as the men's game]; make your own niche and you can have an attractive game.

Don't forget you're a woman whilst you're doing it. So don't sort of shave your head and all the rest of it just to think you're gonna be better at it. You're not. Keep your ponytail or whatever suits you. Still look pretty, go out there and have fun and play to the best of your ability. And if you've got great skill, great. Then you can be as good as the blokes. (Nina, age 50)

However, although this respondent feels that women's football should be different to men's, she still compares men's and women's football—the success of a female player continues to be measured against whether she can be as 'good' as male players. Clearly, there is a perception here that it is important for women to balance their skills as athletes with their (hetero)sexual femininity. Christopherson et al. (2002) offer a content analysis of media discourses on the 1999 Women's World Cup US team which also showed that there were contradictory messages surrounding women and sports. Some players exhibited 'masculinity' through their athleticism but at the same time emphasized stereotypically 'feminine' qualities; for example, 'togetherness' and 'family values' (2002, p. 179). Paradoxically, players were presented as 'nice', and 'feminine' women who could simultaneously be 'tough', 'strong' and 'muscular' with heterosexual sex appeal as a result of their athleticism (2002, p. 182). Thus, it was the combination of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' or the 'athletic' and the 'sexual' that added to the appeal of these players (2002, p. 181).



Perhaps, it is even more difficult to find this balance between athleticism and 'femininity' in the highly physical, contact team sport of rugby. In the wider study, female fans of men's rugby suggested that it would be very difficult to balance the demands of conventional femininity with playing rugby. Terms such as, 'manly', 'big butch ladies', 'unfeminine', 'not very elegant' and 'lesbians' were used by many of the respondents to describe female rugby players, thus raising questions around women's (hetero)sexuality. Female athletes participating in sports which emphasize more traditional aspects of 'femininity' such as grace and balance (Christopherson et al. 2002) are unlikely to experience the same kinds of tensions.

Finally, in some cases, interviewees were not interested in watching women's football because this game was regarded as a sport which should be exclusively played by men. In feminist research the concept of 'separate spheres' has been used to describe the separation of men's and women's roles. This first emerged in western society in the nineteenth century, whereas the male (husband) was expected to be active in the 'public' sphere, the female (wife) was expected to occupy the 'private' sphere of the household (Pfau-Effinger 2004). This ideology has maintained a strong hold on the collective imagination in contemporary society and its legacy continues to shape the lives of many women (Jackson 2015). Some respondents discussed the notion of separate male and female spheres—playing sports such as football raised questions surrounding appropriate gender roles and acceptable femininities as this game was viewed as a 'man's sport'. As Bethany (age 73) clearly stated 'I think there's things that men do, and other things that women do' and Beth (age 68) similarly noted 'It's a man's thing and men play football and it's just not to me a woman's thing.'

A small number of older interviewees actually claimed that women's 'make-up' was not suited to playing football, and that this sport was 'dangerous' for women. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries biological determinism was used to channel women away from sport, with Social Darwinism supposedly proving 'scientifically' that women were biologically inferior to men. Whereas sport played an important role in developing a sense of 'manliness' and could improve discipline, leadership and physical robustness, claims about the frailty of women's vulnerable

bodies linked strenuous games and vigorous exercise with potential damage to reproductive organs (Vertinsky 1994; Heggie 2016). A substantial minority of football and rugby union respondents (10/85) objected to women playing these team sports (Pope 2017). This was justified because of the alleged dangers of injury; as women's bodies are different from men's they were concerned about a potential damage to 'internal organs', thus echoing these nineteenth-century arguments about risks of infertility. Whilst I was conducting the interviews and when discussing watching women's football, several of the 'middle group' and 'older group' fans placed their arms across their chest in a protective manner and shuddered at the thought of a football, rugby ball or tackle causing injuries to female players. These interviewees did not regard football as an appropriate sport for girls and women. Such views tended to be expressed in particular by 'middle group' and 'older group' fans and in some cases, these views were passed on to younger generations by mothers who socialized their daughters away from playing these sports and actively opposed their daughters involvement in 'men's sports' (Pope 2017).

## Conclusion

Given the limited research on the views and perceptions of women watching women's sport, the purpose of this chapter was to discuss the views that female fans of men's football express towards the women's game. The findings illustrate diverse viewpoints females' exhibit towards watching women's football, which ranged from enthusiastic support for women's football to deep hostility. Some women expressed a positive interest in watching women's football and were highly critical of the role that the media played in marginalizing women's sport. According to Williams (2013, p. 96), there is a consensus among researchers who work in women's football that the general profile of the game needs to be raised, with women's football being marketed more effectively and allowing the game to develop commercially. Many interviewees in my research similarly called for more media coverage of women's football.

However, these findings also illustrate the diverse and complex barriers to recruiting fans of women's sport. The low profile of women's football

in England makes it difficult to develop a wider public interest in the sport and many women referred to the lack of media coverage as one of the causes of their own lack of interest in women's football. The low profile of women's football makes it difficult for potential fans to build relationships with players and teams in the way that they can with elite level male footballers. This research lends weight to previous studies which have found that many women are ambivalent about watching women's sports and will instead prefer to watch mainstream men's sports (see Whiteside and Hardin 2011; Farrell et al. 2011). These findings show that being a committed female fan of (men's) football does not automatically transfer into having a wider interest in following women's football. Many women across the age groups directly compared women's with men's team sports, concluding that men's football must be 'better' because men are 'stronger'. Yet if female football players are required to emphasize the so-called masculine traits they needed to do so without sacrificing their obviously heterosexual feminine characteristics. Some women were also hostile to females playing sports such as football and rugby because this challenged traditional views about appropriate gender roles for women and some of the objections raised echoed nineteenth-century Social Darwinist concerns about risks to infertility.

There is evidence that women's experiences as fans of men's football are slowly moving onto the research agenda (see, e.g., Pope 2013, 2017; Pfister et al. 2013; Jones 2008; see also the chapters in this book on female fans of men's football). However, there is a lack of research on women's attitudes towards women's football (and other women's sports). This chapter builds upon existing feminist research on women's football and gender and media and sport, making an original contribution by focusing on female fans of men's football and their attitudes towards women's football. Clearly there is a need for future research to build on and extend this work to further examine female views of women's sport. With the exception of Dunn's (2016) study, which examines mainly England fans of the 2015 Women's World Cup, barely any research has examined female fans of women's football, so there is an urgent need for future studies to explore this topic at a time when women's football is rapidly expanding as a spectator sport. The research presented in this chapter has been based on a case study in England but responses could be

compared to women's football in other countries. Future research in this area could also provide crucial information about how more fans might be recruited to women's football.

**Acknowledgements** This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number PTA-030-2005-00310).

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# **Part II**

## **Female Football Fans and their Experiences**

# 8

## A Socio-Historical Account of Female Experiences of Football's Golden Age in England

Stacey Pope and John Williams

### Introduction

If there is a 'golden age' in the history of football spectating in England (better known in the United States as soccer), it can be argued such a period stretches from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, although recent trends in English football spectatorship suggest that, in a very different socio-cultural climate, the current era offers something of a renaissance for the return of very large crowds to football (Williams 1999). In the 1948–49 season, in the postwar glow of recovery and the search for

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Portions of Chap. 8 originally appeared as: Pope, S., & Williams, J. (2011) 'White Shoes to a Football Match!: Female Experiences of Football's Golden Age in England', *Transformative Works and Cultures* 6. Article DOI: 10.3983/twc.2011.0230. URL: <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/230/204> CC license: CC BY-NC 3.0 (Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported)

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collective leisure diversion in a society that boasted full employment but was still experiencing rationing and offered few leisure options, English football generated a record 41.3 million League match admissions (Walvin 2001; Phelps 2005; Taylor 2008, p. 194). The majority of these attendees would have been working-class men supporting their local football clubs—the story was less clear-cut in other European countries—but there was also a sprinkling of middle-class support at English football, as well as early signs of out-of-town support requiring private travel to watch embryonic ‘super-clubs’ (Mellor 1999).

As social attitudes and patterns of weekend leisure slowly changed in the post-austerity Britain of the 1950s and as the new affluent worker of post-war Britain became more individualistic and more consumerist, communal sport began to lose its grip on the public imagination. Car ownership in Britain rose from 2.3 million vehicles in 1950 to 5.6 million a decade later. Television barely registered in British households in 1950, but by 1961, three-quarters of all homes had a TV set (Taylor 2008, p. 195). By the late 1960s, Football League admissions in England had fallen to 30 million, though these figures were bolstered by crowds at new domestic and European competitions. But from the mid-1960s, the national picture for football in England began to change in other, largely unanticipated, ways.

As crowds continued to fall, English football began to suffer a series of crippling financial crises, and the behaviour of some young male English football fans gradually evolved into a form of highly ritualized intergang violent sporting rivalry, one centred on territorial conflicts and masculinity testing in and around the country’s football stadia. These same types of trends were also occurring in other parts of Europe, with crowd disorders being reported in a number of other countries, including West Germany, Greece, and Italy (Dunning et al. 1984). These modern versions of historical football rituals further damaged the national and international public image of the English game (Dunning et al. 1988). English football stadia introduced enforced segregation of fans by physical barriers and ‘pens’ (Bale 1993) in order to deal with this emerging fan hooliganism in the 1970s and 1980s, but failed to keep pace with prevailing public demand for generally improved (and pacified) leisure provision. English football was also struggling to hold on to its traditional audience in the face of increasing social mobility, class de-alignment and new leisure options, so that it ‘could no longer hold the centre of the communal

stage as it once did' (Allison 1981, pp. 134–135). By the 1985–86 season, following a catastrophic hooligan incident involving English club fans in Brussels that resulted in the deaths of 39 supporters,<sup>1</sup> the annual League attendance figure for football had almost halved, to just under 16.5 million: it would prove to be the postwar nadir for English football (Foot 2006, pp. 328–340).

A slow but persistent recovery in the sport's fortunes in England since 1986 was accentuated by the reflexive aftermath of another major stadium disaster, in the city of Sheffield in 1989, in which 96 Liverpool fans were killed (Taylor 1991), and by a new relationship established in 1992 between the top English football clubs and the European satellite television conglomerate BSkyB.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the late-modern version of English football has been radically repositioned in terms of its preferred audience, consumption patterns, market appeal, and global reach, as well as its cultural significance (Williams 2006). New television money has also meant that many major English football stadia have been modernized or rebuilt, with seats replacing standing areas at all major venues. Fan behaviour has also been modified and better regulated by the new, albeit rather suffocating, micro-management regimes established inside English football stadia (Williams 2001). By 2009, annual league football crowds in England had climbed close to the 30 million mark once more, with some evidence that gentrification and a recent surge in *female* attendance at football had contributed disproportionately to this revival in the sport's public fortunes.

Indeed, the first author of this chapter has argued elsewhere (Pope 2017) that there has been a 'feminization' of sports fandom in contemporary society, with increased opportunities for women to become involved in sport as fans and meaning that women now make up a substantial component of the typical sports crowd. She theorizes that this can be attributed to two key factors. Firstly, the recent changes which have occurred in the production of many professional sports, which have arguably created a more welcoming stadium environment for women. In English football, these changes followed the Hillsborough Stadium disaster of 1989 and the subsequent 1990 Taylor Report into the disaster which led to the shift to all-seater stadia, creating a safer and more 'civilized' environment at matches (Williams 2006, p. 98). The rise of the FA Premier League in 1992 and the excessive media coverage of the sport

and its ‘celebrity’ players may also have opened up elite level English football to some new female (and male) fans. Secondly, wider changes have occurred in women’s lives, which have led to greater equality between the sexes, allowing many women to have greater control over their work and leisure lives. These changes have roughly spanned the same period of time as those in professional sport, making it more likely that women will choose to become involved in sport as active fans (see Pope 2017).

However, there is evidence that women have attended football matches in England throughout the sport’s history, despite the persistent barriers to their involvement as sports fans (see Lewis 2009; Taylor 1992). Yet many British historians have claimed that English football in the post-World War II period was almost wholly the passion of working-class men (see, e.g., Fishwick 1989; Walvin 1994). Our oral history accounts have revealed a largely hidden history of active female sports fans, women who keenly followed football as fans. Despite evidence of women’s history of support as sports fans, very few historical studies of their experiences have been undertaken (see Allon 2012, p. 29). Our chapter directly addresses this lacuna and aims to make more visible the historical experiences of female football fans in Britain. We draw on oral history interviews with 16 older female fans of Leicester City Football Club, a medium-sized provincial club based in the East Midlands of England. Our findings explore women’s experiences in relation to the football stadium, styles of female support and relationships with and perceptions of football players. But before addressing them we will next offer an overview of existing sports fan research and discuss the wider context and methodology for our research.

## Sports Fan Research

Much of the recent growth in academic research on sports fandom has been characterized by a focus on changing patterns of sports consumption and, especially in the United States, quantitative studies driven mainly by the disciplines of social psychology and sports marketing: a largely statistical approach concerned with unveiling what are claimed to be the primary motivations for fandom (Wann et al. 2001; Chen 2010; Clark et al.

2009; Robinson and Trail 2005; Funk et al. 2004). In the United Kingdom, sports fan research has been rather more theoretically informed, more qualitative, and perhaps a little more sociological. But it has also had a rather narrow base. It has typically focused on how traditional male working-class sporting fans—usually football fans—and the local audience for live sport have been challenged by recent changes in the football nexus, thus producing their recent alleged marginalization or even their exclusion from active sport spectatorship (King 2002; Nash 2000, 2001; Williams and Perkins 1998). This is due; it is claimed, to the connected processes of gentrification, commodification, and the TV-promoted spectacularization (and consequent cultural ‘emptying out’) that have allegedly characterized new directions in the production and consumption of much late-modern English professional sport, especially professional football (Conn 1997; Giulianotti 1999; Sandvoss 2003).

These are important developments in the new agendas for sports fan research, but in our view there is also a tendency towards nostalgia in some of these accounts, especially concerning British sport's often exclusionary masculinist and cultish past. Moreover, relatively little attention has been focused here on the fan careers and normative experiences, over time, of *female* sports fans, perhaps because it is assumed that so few women challenged the male dominance of football in the 1950s. Indeed, a Mass-Observation survey of British women in 1957 found that 79 per cent of those polled agreed that ‘A woman's place is in the home’ (Kynaston 2009, p. 573). Or perhaps this lack of research can be attributed to assumptions that some women have been unfairly usurping some men in the late-modern sports stadium (Crolley and Long 2001). Existing studies typically style women sports fans as dysfunctional sexual predators (Crawford and Gosling 2004), subordinate subhooligans (Cere 2003), or spectators negotiating historic forms of male sports opposition to their presence at sports events (Jones 2008). Typically, female fans are stereotyped as lacking detailed knowledge about sport or their club and, consequently, are often considered as inauthentic in their support (Crawford and Gosling 2004; Crolley and Long 2001; Esmonde et al. 2015; Hoerber and Kerwin 2013; see also chapters on female fan experiences in this book). Women often emerge here as incomplete ciphers, as decidedly nouveau consumers of sport, with no identifiable or authentic sporting

histories. In short, they often appear as highly contingent and, at best, highly marginal and ersatz new members of the national sporting community. Our contention is that an excavation of the sporting histories of long-term female football fans in England adds more balance to this typified depiction and also to the research agenda and cultural positioning, more generally, of active female sports spectators.

## Context and Methodology

Hill (1996, 3) suggests that the overall aim of Richard Holt's *Sport and the Working Class in Modern Britain* (1990) is to 'investigate popular sport "from below" and thereby gain a perspective on working-class culture and social relationships that could not be acquired by studying dominant national forms of sport'. Thus, in the 1980s, some historians began to rethink their work on British sport, especially in relation to issues of social class. Indeed, Hill (1996) argued that important contributions from learned scholars such as Holt (1986), Jones (1986, 1988), and Taylor (1987) were actually written from a class perspective. However, gender issues remained largely marginalized because many of these same historians presented a 'male version of history' (Hill 1996, p. 12). Oral history accounts of sports fandom in England often excluded or 'invisibilized' women. Football historians have certainly tended to assume that accounts provided by male working-class supporters are the only preferable and available means of illuminating and understanding fan cultures in the postwar period (Holt 1992; Fishwick 1989).

Feminist academics have challenged this masculinist version of sports history. Langhamer (2000), for example, argues that the pre-occupation of historians with certain types of leisure has ignored or misrepresented the experiences of women, and she proposes a more holistic approach to the history of women's leisure. Parratt (2001, pp. 2–3), in her discussion of working-class women's leisure between 1750 and 1914, argues there is a need for an approach to history that 'draws women in from the wings and puts them at center stage, that acknowledges that they were historical agents and deserve to be the subjects of historical research'. In Wimbush and Talbot's *Relative Freedoms* (1988), women's leisure experiences were

also brought more to the fore (see also Deem 1986; Green et al. 1990). But while research of this kind makes women's leisure more visible, it still largely neglects the experiences of female *sports fans*. Hargreaves (1994), for example, recognizes how the importance of sports for women has been largely neglected in research, but her own excellent work still focuses primarily on women's experiences of *playing* sport.

A more recent contribution from Lewis (2009) on female spectators in early English professional football (1880–1914) offers a potentially important new direction and illustrates that women do have a history of sports fandom, even if they usually made up only a small minority of the typical sports crowd. Our own work centralizes the historical experiences of female sports fans in England. In doing so, it seeks to supplement the existing literature on sports history regarding gender and leisure. Historical accounts of active female football fans in postwar England are rare, although Watt's (1993) valedictory popular history of the north London club Arsenal's North Bank standing terrace does examine the memories of some female Arsenal supporters. Not only have the experiences of female sports fans been largely 'written out' of history here, but also the changing demands and the increasing domestic power of women, relatively speaking, have been widely *blamed* for the declining attendance of some men at English football from the postwar spectator high of 1949.

For instance, the historian James Walvin (1994) claims that from the 1950s onwards, British women began to exert more control over how men spent their leisure time and money, thus inexorably drawing respectable married men away from active spectator sport. Fishwick (1989) also argued that English football had always encouraged men, collectively, to spend time *away* from women, and the trend towards more family-based leisure pursuits in Britain in the 1950s coincided with a major decline in English football attendances—aggregate League crowds fell by 11.25 million (around 30 per cent) between 1949 and 1962 (Russell 1997; Walvin 2001). It is perhaps a telling aside that the role of women in English sport in this period is often measured by their alleged negative impact on male attendance rather than by any research-based accounts of the actual experiences of active female sports fans of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

These 'golden years' of English football—though years hardly matched by international success—are usually assumed to have ended in the early



1960s, when crowds start to decline quite rapidly. A popular marker here is when, after a bitter struggle between the sport's employers and the footballer players' union, the constraining maximum wage for football players in England was finally lifted in 1961 (Harding 2009). The term 'golden age' often appears in popular and media accounts of the history of the English game, and it is certainly clichéd. For example, both hooliganism and stadium safety were clearly underplayed in this period; English football fans were very poorly served by the responses of the authorities to routine instances of the dangers of overcrowding, and they suffered inadequate and badly resourced fan provision as a result (Ward and Williams 2009; Williams 2010). But this label also seems surprisingly appropriate here, not least because of the obvious warmth with which this period is often recalled by older female football fans.

Most football players in England at this time still earned plausibly ordinary wages compared to the employed mainstream in Britain, and they mixed regularly and relatively easily with local supporters, partially as a result of this fact. In this sense, professional football players of the time in England were clearly and definitively 'class located', in Critcher's (1979) terms. In the late 1940s and for much of the 1950s in Britain, mass car ownership, home-based leisure, the new consumerism, and organized fan hooliganism all lay ahead in English football's uncertain future. The English football professional of the 1950s was a sporting hero known largely to, and embraced by, his local communities for both his character and loyalty; the football player as a truly national or global celebrity, a sports and media star identified mainly by other, more transient, attributes, was generally yet to emerge (Giulianotti 1999).

Our subjects for this research come from a wider, comparative semi-structured interview study of female rugby union and football fans in a single location, the English East Midlands city of Leicester (Pope 2010). Using systematic sampling techniques, our respondents were originally drawn from existing local sampling frames for the two sports, which had been generated by fan surveys undertaken previously in Leicester (Williams 2003; Williams 2004). This produced a total sample size of 85 female sports fans. Respondents were selected to try to reflect the experiences of different generations of female sports spectators from three distinctive age groupings. The football fan sample consisted of ten 'younger

group' fans aged 20–27 (F1–F10), 25 'middle group' fans aged 28–59 (F11–F35), and 16 'older group' fans aged above 60 (F36–F51). But this chapter concentrates on the 16 Leicester City fans who make up the older fan group for football. The original case codes used in the research (F40, F46, etc.) have been utilized to protect participant anonymity; 'STH' below means the fan concerned is currently a Leicester City season ticket holder—someone who attends *all* the club's home matches. At the time of the research, Leicester City was competing in the second tier of English football, but the club routinely attracted more than 20,000 spectators to home games.<sup>3</sup> More recently, in 2016, Leicester City made against-all-odds global headlines by winning the Premier League title, the club's first such title success in 132 years. As a result Leicester was ranked the United Kingdom's 'greatest sporting city' in 2016 (ESPN 2016).

The recorded interviews typically lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours, although some lasted for up to 4 hours. They were usually conducted in the homes or the workplaces of our respondents. All were conducted by the female researcher and co-author of this chapter (also a Leicester City fan), who was occasionally challenged in her work on this project by male (usually husband) intrusions or other forms of male 'policing' of female research (Deem 1986). This is a further indicator, of course, of the highly marginal role still allocated by some men to some women in the latter's role as sports spectators (Pope 2008). Thus, our findings draw on oral history accounts that explore women's experiences of the so-called golden age of English football in the 1950s and early 1960s. In this chapter we explore three main themes: English football and a sense of safety; styles of female fan support; and women's relationships with football players.

## Findings

### English Football and a Sense of Well-Being: 'It Was Safe'

Fishwick (1989) describes how Football Association (FA) records show there were only 22 cases of football crowd trouble demanding FA consideration in

the years 1948 and 1949, when Football League attendance peaked in England. It is also remarkable that so many millions of people entered what were clearly unpleasant and even dangerous environments each week—crowded postwar football stadia—and yet the vast majority returned unscathed (Walvin 2001; Williams 2010). Moreover, older female football fans describe their relative *lack* of fear of attending during this period, with some attributing this, on reflection, either to youthful indifference to potential danger—‘When you’re young, you don’t care’—or the idea that any risks involved were acceptable—‘All part of the afternoon, the entertainment’ (F45, F47). If women (or other fans) ever needed assistance at football matches during this period, they also felt protected by the much-mythologized and eponymous postwar British bobby (police officer):

It was safe; there was none of this aggression. We didn’t have loads of police, just didn’t have that, no nastiness, none at all...[But] obviously if you did anything wrong, they’d [the crowd] get the bobby to come and see to you. And everybody was frightened of policemen. Now they’re not the least bit [frightened]. (F46, age 73, STH, long-term fan, retired, worked as a nurse)

This is an idealized picture, of course. But the police presence at football matches—or the relative lack of it—only served to reinforce the notion that, in the main, 1950s English football grounds were regarded as safe spaces for both men and women. For example, F43 remembers the ‘good times’ of attending matches in the years from 1949 with a certain nostalgia when the ‘policeman would take off his helmet, so you could see [the match]’. This is perhaps an especially powerful image, strongly signifying the pre-hooligan period of relative crowd harmony—though other accounts clearly suggest that male supporter violence was already a subterranean feature of postwar English football culture (Williams 2010).

A range of positive terms or phrases were used by female fans to describe their early football experiences, implicitly making comparisons with a more fractious, less tolerant, recent past: a ‘friendly atmosphere’; ‘You never saw any trouble’ or heard ‘bad language’; one never felt ‘scared’; ‘intimidated’ or ‘afraid’ (F40, F43, F45, F46, F47, F50, F51). Johnes and Mellor (2006), similarly, argue that a real sense of national cohesion

and togetherness developed around the shared experiences of spectator sport in Britain following the recently experienced privations of World War II. A key moment here perhaps was the live television coverage of the coronation of a new young British queen in 1953 and the first mass TV audience for the so-called Stanley Matthews FA Cup final of the same year. Matthews, the heroic, deferential old England international forward, achieved a life's ambition, to national acclaim, by helping his club Blackpool defeat Lancashire rivals Bolton 4–3 in a coruscating struggle. The early 1950s were also a period of relative national optimism in Britain, when its people assumed the nation would enjoy greater 'social solidarity and attain global significance and glory thanks to the Commonwealth' (Johnes and Mellor 2006, p. 269). In football crowds, this was reflected in rather more prosaic, if significant, terms:

People were more careful about the way they treated each other. You didn't rush along and knock people over, the atmosphere was sort of friendly... And people were more...well, I certainly didn't see any sign of people being rude or aggressive. (F40, age 64, STH, long-term fan, community social worker)

Hood and Joyce (1999) have tracked similar sentiments among men and women growing up in London working-class neighbourhoods in both the 1930s and 1950s. Their subjects stressed that still-binding structures of family, community, and class solidarity seemed more important and more stable in these periods than they are today. Respondents in our own research seem to share similar ideas about supposed greater communal trust in others, a point perhaps best illustrated when F47 described how large numbers of football supporters were happy to pay local residents threepence to look after their bikes while they watched the match.

This was also a period when relationships between generations in public are remembered—no doubt in part nostalgically—as being experienced rather differently than they are today. A number of respondents, for example, described how they witnessed children being passed down to the front of large football crowds in the early 1950s, over the heads of other crowd members—or how they experienced this themselves as children (F32, F40, F43, F46, F47, F51). There was little apparent fear that

these young people might be abused, crushed, or lost in these potentially chaotic public contexts. There seems to have been relatively little public concern or panic expressed about relations between children and ‘stranger’ adults in sports crowds. As F43 recalls:

I thought it was very exciting, I mean they were big crowds in those days. I’ve been down at one time at half past seven in the morning to get on the wall for a cup match [...]. We were there early, but if I wasn’t you were passed down. If you wanted to go [to the] toilet you were passed up, [be]cause they [the toilets] were at the back (*laughs*). You made friends and they’d save you a place on the wall, you know? They’d spread out. (F43, age 69, STH, long-term fan, retired, worked as a school meals cook)

English football culture at this time was also less prescriptive and certainly less profit-focused. Watching football was described as a form of cheap entertainment that would often be combined with dancing in the evening (F45) to complete a Saturday of simple, local leisure pleasures. Football grounds seem to be viewed, broadly speaking, as friendly and safe spaces in this period by female supporters—places characterized by the easy mixing of rival supporters in the stadium. Some respondents suggested that mixing with rival supporters—more difficult today inside micro-managed, segregated stadia—was also an important part of the essential sociability of the event (F48, F49, F51):

The atmosphere could be absolutely electric. And both sets of fans were together. I mean, that was part of it: conversing with *them*. You’d say things like “He’s a good player.” Or “What’s so and so like, I’ve not seen him play yet?” to *other* fans. [emphasis added] (F49, age 70, STH, long-term fan, retired, worked as a secretary)

As well as the term ‘electric’ used here, descriptions such as ‘buoyed up’, ‘elated’, ‘enjoyable’, and ‘excited’ were generally used to describe the tightly packed postwar crowds that, like great creatures, were often remembered as surging forward in collective swaying (F45, F47, F49, F51). This sociability and easy familiarity inside football crowds operated across the sexes. One of Watt’s (1993, p. 275) male interviewees described, for example, how male fans at Arsenal used to warm their hands under

the arms of unfamiliar females, with no objections. The sense that there was rather more sexual innocence and more mutual trust between the sexes at postwar football was also touched upon by our own respondents. Those older women who were terrace (standing) fans claim not to have been threatened at all by being stationed for hours on end, 'body to body' (F50); instead, such corporeal proximity with men helped women keep warm (F47, F50).

Social class relations also shaped the football stadium crowd. F50 recalled how, in this period, stadium seating was assumed to be for 'the hierarchy'; only a relatively small part of the stadium capacity was made up of seats, and this was where members of the higher social classes, club directors, and shareholders sat—the 'posh people' (F47), in other words. Thus, perhaps a more strongly shared stadium *class* identity added to this greater community spirit and a greater sense of common purpose and solidarity at the stadium, and indeed, to stronger feelings of collective solidarity in British society more generally.

This generally friendly match day climate at postwar English football would be challenged, of course, by developments among young male supporters in later decades. Walvin (2001, p. 156), for example, notes that by the end of the 1960s, fan behaviour at football in England was being discussed as a rising social problem, and more serious incidents soon pitched rival groups of male hooligans against each other. Women's experiences at football stadia in the 1970s and 1980s were certainly different from those in the earlier golden age. F40, for example, described how her dad first took her to watch Reading Football Club when she was 13 years old, and she continued to attend matches throughout the 1950s and 1960s, before moving to Leicester in the 1970s. Here, experience of male fan violence meant she would soon resort to watching sport on television:

Going home after the match there would be really running street battles almost with crowds like surging forward, and things being thrown [...]. I was frightened of a bottle on the back of the head really you know, stuff was being lobbed about the streets, it was really quite awful [...]. I never saw any of that when I was a child certainly...you just mixed in you know? It didn't matter who [...]. I thought well why am I putting myself through

this? Being frightened to go somewhere...And I just stopped going. (F40, age 64, STH, long-term fan, community social worker)

Other respondents who continued to attend during this period also recalled instances when they were fearful for their own safety at matches. This fan violence would indeed represent the end, for some of the game's supporters, of the modernist optimism and collective solidarities experienced at sport in the 'golden age'.

### Styles of Support: 'Everybody Was in Tune'

Exactly *how* did women support their sports clubs during this period? Some sense of the carnivalesque and rejection of the banality and anonymity of everyday life are clearly apparent. Turbin (2003, p. 45) argues that dress is highly gendered and that clothing gives both shape and meaning to the bodies of men and women. Dress is inherently both public and private, as 'an individual's outwardly presented signs of internal or private meanings are significant only when they are also social, that is comprehensible on some level to observers'. Some of our respondents discussed with relish their own match day football costumes, outfits they had made or purchased especially for this purpose. These seemed to be important for individual (private) identities and for exhibiting a public face for their fandom. For example, F47 described her public parading of Leicester City's blue and white colours for the 1949 FA Cup final while travelling with a female friend:

We were teenagers and we dressed alike...And we had this whitish coat with a belt round. We had royal blue trousers [...] and we had head scarves, I had them made on the market [...]. We thought it was very smart...and, you know, the thing of the moment. We were—we're *somebody*; we're on the bus and we're going to Wembley. (F47, age 78, STH, long-term fan, retired, worked in sewing)

FA Cup Finals—the culmination of the English football season and the end point of the most historically important domestic knockout football tournament in the world—were very special community occasions in

this era, a welcome opportunity for the demonstration of local female craft and for ostentatious public displays in a generally grey public arena. The sporting nation gathered around TV sets for the annual ritual of live TV football. The FA Cup seemed to demand more expressive forms of local support for the contenders, and we can perhaps speculate that this opportunity for public ostentation may have been even more important to *female* fans. This was an era before the mass production of football replica kits and goods, so outfits were often original—individualized and designed by fans. F49 described how she prepared her costume for weeks prior to the final, and that she would even wear her outfit to work to seek the approval and opinions of her colleagues. Dressing up for football may also have been a way of seeking male fan approval, a publicly legitimated way for females to express both their (hetero)sexuality *and* their support for club and civic loyalty. F47 remembers receiving compliments for her FA Cup final costume from the male fan group she stood alongside at matches. F38, and three other young women from Leicester, wore their outfits to *all* home and away matches, including the 1963 FA Cup final:

F38: We'd be the only girls on the train. Oh, it used to be fabulous (*laughs*). We used to have white skirts, royal blue tops, white shoes...I mean, white shoes to a football match! But that's how it was (*laughs*). [And] blue and white scarves...we all wore the same hair; hair all up here. We must have looked a sight!

*Researcher: Did you get much attention from men then?*

F38: Oh *yes, yes!* Wonderful! (*laughs*).

(F38, age 60, STH, long-term fan, retired, worked as a clerical worker)

Some older female fans also showed examples of their fan memorabilia from earlier decades during interviews. For example, one respondent had a football headscarf that she had made at the local hosiery market in Leicester, with players from Leicester City and Wolverhampton Wanderers hand painted on it, this for the 1949 FA Cup Final. Many female fans had football photographs on the walls of their homes, including shots taken with players from previous decades. Some had also decorated parts of their homes in Leicester City blue. One respondent had a cabinet in her home containing football products she had collected over the years,



including a number of model foxes (Leicester City's club logo and nickname). This highlights the importance of fan memorabilia for our older sample of female fans.

After Bolton Wanderers lost the 1953 'Matthews' FA Cup final, the mayor of Bolton praised the club's players for promoting and adding lustre to the town (Johnes and Mellor 2006, p. 267). A local football club reaching the FA Cup final at this time contributed to a palpable sense of civic pride and a strengthening of local communal identities for both men and women of the city. It generated a sense of community affiliation that affected female supporters as much as it did men—though relatively few fans, male or female, had the opportunity to *attend* the final because of restrictive FA ticketing policies. F38 described how 'tickets were few and far between' for FA Cup finals at this time, but also noted that such matches engaged not only active football fans, but the city as a whole:

You could go in the shops; they'd got flags up, even in the little villages, "Good luck City." It was the community, this is what I mean. It makes the whole city, because you'd walk round Leicester all trimmed up blue and white. Oh it was a wonderful sight to see [...]. It was great; it was good for the city, good for the city of Leicester, because everybody was in tune. (F49, age 70, STH, long-term fan, retired, worked as a secretary)

The image of the English football stadium of the 1940s and 1950s as a poorly appointed but safe—if highly masculinized—public space was expressed very strongly by those who confirmed that women were a distinct minority at matches in these early postwar years (F36, F37, F38, F40, F47, F51). But some female attendees also found the sheer numbers and obtrusive habits of men intimidating. For instance, F36 went to one football match as a child but then was deterred from attending by the large numbers of men present who were smoking; she did not return to the stadium until the late 1990s. This oppressive, smoky atmosphere was mentioned by other older female fans (F37, F47). Of the 11 older fans who regularly attended matches during these years, a number attended games at some stage (usually as teenagers) in all-female groups (F38, F43, F47, F49).

But gender also presented some special privileges in the stadium—including improved access to star players, and being chaperoned and generally protected by chauvinistic men. For example, F40 described how,

because hardly any of her female friends went to football, she enjoyed some local distinction. She could boast to female friends, 'Oh, I saw him. Oh and he's so handsome, this man. This *footballer*.' Others discussed how, as teenagers attending matches in 1940s and 1950s, they had player favourites (F40, F43, F45, F46, F47, F49, F50) and some stayed behind with other female fans after games to collect player autographs. Players, it seems—even these modernist and modest class-located, postwar sporting heroes—had something of a sexual aura surrounding them, although the typical socio-economic and cultural profile and the lifestyle of the English professional football player has changed dramatically since.

### **Women's Relationships with Football Players: 'They Were Just Like One of Us'**

First team top level football players in England were lauded in the 1940s and 1950s, but they were also strongly located in the local community (Cricher 1979). They could be met by fans at the local food market, in shops, or at one's place of work; some women fans had relatives who were friends with players (F45, F50, F51). There was a strong sense that players were 'Leicester people', participants in a communal production who would typically walk to the home ground along with everyone else on a match day (F49). Terms such as 'approachable', 'closer', 'one of us', and 'ordinary guys' who lived in 'ordinary houses' (F37, F40, F43, F46, F47) were frequently used when discussing players of this period.

A number of older respondents either lived near Leicester City players or knew people who did; players were a part of the local working-class or lower-middle-class communities of the city (F25, F39, F40, F43, F46). Some recalled seeing players socially after important matches. F39 remembered how her pub-owning parents provide lodgings to a Sunderland player who was on loan at City in the 1950s; lodging a football player was no great social marker at the time. F43 even described how, later, the Leicester City and 1966 England World Cup-winning goalkeeper Gordon Banks had living and child care arrangements in Leicester, which meant that he maintained strong daily connections with ordinary women's lives, including mixing regularly with local mothers:

I used to take her [daughter] to school, and I used to walk with Gordon Banks when he took his chap to school. [...] He was just in an ordinary semi-detached house up the road near the school, and mixed with all the mothers. [Be]cause there weren't that many men that took the children to school. He was a very nice chap. (F43, age 69, STH, long-term fan, retired, worked as school meals cook)

Thus, women fans in the city may have been in awe of footballers to a degree, but because players mixed locally and were not earning wages that were notably superior to many other local people in professional jobs, they were socially and culturally located; they did not 'think they were up on a pedestal like some [players] do now' (F37). Football players today were seen as being more 'cut off' because they live separately from fans, in 'big mansions' (F40, F43). Holt and Mason (2000, p. 122), commenting on football culture in the 1950s, similarly suggest that 'This was a world where local heroes were still ordinary men. Great players were often seen on the street or in the pub.' Some players in England had part-time jobs in addition to playing football professionally; and despite attendances increasing after World War II, the existence of a maximum wage in England meant that most players did not benefit from this rise in club income (Walvin 2001). Players may have seen themselves as 'football slaves' in this period (Russell 1997, p. 92), but their modest earnings offered a greater 'moral sense' to their established position as engaged and located figures in the local community (F19, F29, F30, F36, F37, F40, F45, F46, F49, F51).

Older female respondents fondly remember this era, partly because of the imagined greater sense of continuity and stability, but also because—perhaps less likely today—football was perceived to be an important and democratic site for the expression of local belonging as well as national virtues. These were often defined, in part, by a sense of certainty about local traditions and place and cultural continuity: a social homogeneity and a common ethnicity. In today's more global game, Leicester City, like most English football clubs, now recruits players from around the world. This new direction for football was rather more difficult for some respondents to identify with and accept:

I'm a big believer in local talent [...]. I mean in Leicester City now—don't get me wrong, I'm not racist—but you've got nine “internationals”, I'll call them, in that team and probably two or three white players. None of them are from Leicester, probably. Are they going to be loyal to Leicester City as a club? [...]. Their loyalty is probably with their salary. They think “I'll play for Leicester but I don't live here, I've got no interest in the city, I don't care.” (F36, age 68, occasional attendee, new fan, retired, worked as a secretary)

In this sense, local (meaning white British) players of the past were generally deemed to have been more dedicated to their local clubs, and hence fans got ‘better value for money’ from them, compared to the more transient and wage-focused international football professionals of today (F19, F36, F40, F45, F46, F49). Today's superstars are deemed to be detached and are ‘not really hungry enough for the game’ (F40). Because their loyalty is market-driven—strictly to the best payer—they do not show the same levels of attachment, commitment, and physical effort—a willingness to ‘die for the shirt’—as players of the golden age once did:

It was football [then], it isn't today...It was better then, because they were working hard and they weren't just thinking about the money [...]. They were all good players in those days, as I say. They'd got to play good otherwise they wouldn't get the money. But now they get the money anyway, it doesn't matter whether they earn it or not. (F45, age 80, STH, long-term fan, retired, worked as a personal assistant)

It seems like a long time ago now; the changes are fairly subtle all the way through. But it's gone, from ordinary working class lads who kicked a ball about, who lived in the community, to players that are no longer part of our community, but belong to their own. (F40, age 64, STH, long-term fan, community social worker)

## Conclusion

The recollections and views expressed above are, partly couched in nostalgic reflection, and sometimes dimmed by memory. Social and economic change—the impact of globalization—is difficult to accept, perhaps especially as one gets older and, arguably, more conservative. Were all football players in England of the 1950s really ‘class located’ and as committed to their clubs and local supporters as is suggested here? Do all foreign players today lack the commitment that is somehow deemed as being more inherent in locals? This seems doubtful. But these comments, we assert, reveal wider discomforts and anxieties about the neoliberal sports and economic order of today—about the perceived ‘chaos of reward’ of Jock Young’s (1999) disorienting late-modern world. Here, the widely held perception seems to be that society today is less obviously fair and meritocratic, and that showing loyalty and working hard—in any sport, business, or company—is no longer a guarantee of just rewards and opportunities as perhaps it once was. Players of this ‘golden era’ of English football are thus idealized for their supposed love of the game and for their more visceral connections with people, and an occupation, that was ‘their hobby, as well as their sport and their profession’ (F49).

The probably mistaken idea expressed by some respondents that ‘there were no super heroes years ago; they all played as a team’ (F43) also echoes Phelps’ (2001, p. 47) suggestion that the ethos of the ‘starless’ southern Portsmouth championship winning teams in England of seasons 1948–49 and 1949–50 embodied the same sense of player commitment and industriousness that was so widely admired then in the working-class cities of the English North and Midlands. Richard Holt (1992) has suggested that English football is rooted in working-class traditions of collective endeavour. Playing football provided British male factory workers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with a sense of release, belonging, and solidarity. The capacity to work hard, take punishment, and play your role in the team—all features of manual work—were the qualities that working-class male sports crowd most admired.

Thus, the male working classes in England identified strongly with football because it seemed to reflect a working-class experience back to

them. The division of labour within a team could be compared to the 'specialization of skills that went into the production of iron and steel or, perhaps more appropriately, the manufacturing of machinery' (Holt 1992, pp. 162–63). Our own interviewees—like those consulted by Phelps (2001)—also confirm that the key qualities admired in players of this period included a sense of fair play and a 'gentlemen's' reputation for being reserved; for showing courage, and exhibiting heroic forms of traditional working-class loyalty and toughness. Thus, it seems that female fans also identified strongly with traits more typically associated historically with a specific type of mythologized English identity and *masculinity*. While some of our female fans recalled identifying strongly with individual players, there was little room in supporters' affections—male or female—for 'fancy Dans' or faint hearts. In many ways, such sentiments endure in England today.

In more recent times, it can be contested that women have a more respected role as fans in the game. Pope (2017) argues that there has been a recent 'feminization' of sports fandom, with women now broadly accepted as forming an essential (and often substantial) component of the sports crowd. This process is argued to have first begun in the 1990s and, in men's professional football in England, this was in part the result of changes that were implemented after the Hillsborough Stadium disaster of 1989. For example, safer stadium spaces, improved facilities, and the move to all-seater stadia have arguably created a more attractive environment for women at matches. These changes have also coincided with greater media and social media coverage of the sport and its 'celebrity' players which may also have opened up the sport to some new female fans. Pope (2017) theorizes that these changes in professional sport have also occurred alongside major transformations in women's lives; arguably from the 1990s there has been a major structural shift which has reoriented the balance of power between the sexes which has enhanced women's autonomy and opportunities to engage in leisure activities, including becoming sports fans. This notion of relative 'feminization' is supported by statistics which show that whilst women are still in the minority as active fans at top level men's professional football, today they make up a relatively high proportion of fans; for example, 26 per cent of all Premier League stadium fans are reportedly female (Premier League 2016).

In recent years, there has been a growing body of literature on female fans worldwide, but when compared to the large body of literature on male sports fans it is clear that sports fandom continues to be researched as a largely male domain. Most studies on female fans have also focused upon women's experiences in contemporary society, so there is a lack of historical work on women's experiences as fans (Allon 2012). This chapter has focused upon women's experiences in football's 'golden age' in England, thus helping to redress this dearth of historical work on women's fandom, but clearly there is a need for further socio-historical work to examine women's experiences as sports fans.

Our findings here offer but a brief historical snapshot of women's experiences of English football's golden age. We have concentrated on their perceptions of football crowds, on styles of female support, on local identities framed through sport, and on their relations with, and perceptions of, British football players from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. We contend that women fans have been largely ignored by male sociologists and historians in their accounts of the cultural and social significance and meaning of football historically. The oral history research presented here can make some claim to be trying to 'retrieve' the experiences of women fans in this context and to explore, in greater depth, the various ways in which women once connected with the sport, in both its production and consumption. This was before wider social changes from the late 1960s onwards—including the rise of male fan hooliganism—began to offer new challenges to the role of women as active fans at English football matches.

**Acknowledgements** This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant PTA-030-2005-00310).

## Notes

1. In 1985, at the European Cup final between Liverpool and Juventus at the Heysel Stadium, Brussels, Liverpool supporters broke into a section of the stadium containing Italian fans; in the ensuing panic, 39 supporters died following a wall collapse. In addition to the action of English fans, the

- European football governing body UEFA and also the Belgian authorities were widely criticized for the poor state of the stadium and the inadequate control exercised at the venue. As a result of these incidents, English football clubs were banned from playing abroad, an exclusion that lasted five years, with an additional year for Liverpool FC (Williams 2010).
2. The Hillsborough Stadium disaster occurred on April 15, 1989, during an FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest at Sheffield's football ground, Hillsborough. Holt and Mason (2000, 159) discuss how the match was abandoned shortly after the start, when overcrowding on the terraces led to Liverpool supporters being crushed against perimeter fencing. A total of 96 people died and many more were injured. The tragedy was primarily the result of police mismanagement of the crowd; it led to the British government commissioning Lord Justice Taylor to investigate the causes of the accident. The Taylor Report of 1990 made 76 recommendations—most of which were implemented—including the removal of all perimeter fencing; the elimination of standing accommodation by August 1994 from the grounds of all clubs in the top two divisions in England and Wales and the top division in Scotland; and the establishment of a football licensing authority with statutory powers, which would inspect grounds and give out safety licences (Williams 2010, Chap. 17).
  3. Leicester City FC currently (2016/17) competes in the Premier League, the highest level of English football. The club was competing in the Championship, the second tier of English football, while the research was being undertaken. For many of the years following World War II and into the 1950s, the club competed at the second level of English football (Division Two), but between 1957 and 1969, Leicester City enjoyed its longest-ever unbroken period in top flight football (Division One). Thus, in the period our respondents are discussing, the club was fairly successful, and made four losing FA Cup Final appearances, in 1949, 1961, 1963, and 1969. During this 'golden age' Leicester City played matches at the former stadium Filbert Street, the club's home ground from 1891 until 2002. After relegation in 2004, the club aspired to return to top flight English football and this ambition was achieved in 2014. After narrowly escaping relegation in 2014/15, the club won the Premier League title in 2015/16 and made global headlines across the world.



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# 9

## Is There a Life Beyond Football? How Female Fans Integrate Football into Their Everyday Lives

Verena Leneis and Gertrud Pfister

### Introduction

Football is currently a spectacle which attracts large crowds worldwide—both in the stadium as well as in front of the TV screen. A representative survey conducted in eight European countries revealed that around 33% of the population ‘like’ and 18% even ‘love’ the game (FREE 2014). However, there are large differences between the countries: in Italy only 38% of the population likes or loves football, whereas in the UK more than 50% of people have positive feelings towards the game. For fans, as well as for many football researchers, it seems to be ‘normal’ that people watch football games, identify with players and teams and spend a considerable amount of time and money on football consumption.

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G. Pfister, S. Pope (eds.), *Female Football Players and Fans*, Football Research in an Enlarged Europe, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59025-1\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59025-1_9)

Historical research, however, reveals that football as a spectator sport first developed first in the twentieth century (e.g., Goldblatt 2008). In addition, pictures, newspaper reports and fan studies show that football and fandom were always and are still gendered (e.g., Meuser 2008; Selmer 2004; Kreisky and Spitaler 2006; Sülzle 2011). Football was in many historical periods and in many regions and countries a men's game; men form a large majority among the spectators and they dominate the fan stands in particular. The European fan study mentioned above showed that only 10% of women but 26% of men love the game (see also Pfister et al. 2013). The higher the degree of involvement (and also of violence), the higher, too, is the percentage of males among the fans. Hooligans, as well as some ultras groups, are sites for 'male bonding'; they do not accept women in their ranks (Pilz and Wölki-Schumacher 2010; see also Lenneis and Pfister 2015). In Denmark, too, women are marginalised in football and fandom: only around 20% of spectators attending the matches of the Danish Super League are women (Divisionsforeningen 2013, p. 6). The percentage of female supporters in the fan stands is even smaller since fan zones constitute an environment created and dominated by men (e.g., Kreisky and Spitaler 2006; Lenneis and Pfister 2015; Pfister et al. 2013).

Thus, it is not surprising that most fan studies focus on men: on their behaviour in the stadium or on the role of fandom in their 'identity work'. Jones (2008, p. 517) noted: 'The archetypal white, working-class male supporter is still seen as the default fan, and his behaviour patterns are still regarded as the most authentic fan practices by fans themselves, the media, and many football scholars (Armstrong 1998; Crabbe and Brown 2004; Giulianotti 1999; Robson 2000; Williams 2007).' Interest in football seems to be 'natural' for men and fandom seems to fit easily into their everyday lives. According to an OECD report (OECD 2014), 'in virtually every country, men are able to fit in valuable extra minutes of leisure each day while women spend more time doing unpaid house-work'. However, balancing life and football can be an issue for women, who are expected to prioritise families and partners over football commitments. The lack of interest in this relatively small and inconspicuous group of female fans may also be the reason why 'life-football integration' has never been a concern—either in scientific fan literature or in the media coverage of fans.

## Aims and Questions

The fascination of football and the close involvement of fans is a social phenomenon which can be explored with various aims and from numerous perspectives. We wish to emphasise at this point that we are not investigating the processes or the significant others who turn individuals, both men and women, into football supporters (see Pfister et al. 2017), rather, we ask here why a few dedicated female fans attend matches in the stadium, what their rewards are and how they manage to integrate football consumption into their everyday lives. This aim will be pursued by the following questions: What role does football play in the lives of dedicated female fans? How do they deal with and balance the competing demands of work, family, friends and other leisure activities? How do changing circumstances of life influence fandom, in particular their fan practices and the amount of time which they (can) spend on their passion for football? To obtain insights into the reasons for engaging in fandom as well as into the priorities and strategies of our informants, we will also explore what they 'gain' by devoting time and energy to football. A special focus will be placed on the intersections of football fandom and gender, in particular on the interviewees' ways of adopting and performing gender and fandom, since it can be assumed that gender norms and values have a decisive influence not only on becoming a fan but also on fan practices in and outside the stadium.

## Theoretical Considerations

Anderson's (1983) concept of 'imagined communities' and Nora's (1989) 'sites of memory' will serve as a general theoretical framework to provide insights into the meanings of football and the reasons why fans ascribe so much importance to football clubs. To understand the relationship between fandom, fan practices and the everyday lives of fans, we use a life-course perspective and concepts of work-life-leisure integration as a source of inspiration. Since life courses as well as playing football and watching the game are 'gendered', we will draw on social constructivist gender theories.



Nora's (1989) ideas about the techniques of remembering and the sharing of collective memories provide a new understanding about the social cohesion of groups which can also be used for understanding fans. According to Nora (1989) 'sites of memory' are recollections shared by the members of a group, for example, a fan group. They bind individuals into a community and provide a common identity. Communities of football supporters use collective memories, often staged in the form of symbols and rituals, as glue securing solidarity and coherence but also as a demonstration of their fandom to other fan groups and the world around them. Fans use clothes, actions and rituals, for example, forms of cheering, as a 'symbolic use of bodily movement and gesture in a social situation to express and articulate meaning' (Bocock 1974, p. 39). Anderson (1983) coined the term 'imagined communities' when referring to this form of interiorised affinity through collective memories. He referred in particular to nations as socially constructed communities whose members feel a 'deep horizontal comradeship' regardless of actual inequalities and despite the lack of direct interaction (Anderson 1983, p. 50). Sporting events, especially football matches, are excellent sites of memory, anchored in collective remembrances and used as a means of bonding through identification with the players. Football supporters believe that they pursue a common goal, and they exhibit a shared sense of identity and belonging by 'supporting' a club or a team—even though they will never actually interact with them. Fans construct (self-)identities, stage their collective identification with their team and create collective memories, thus contributing to the establishment of fan groups and imagined communities extending over space and time (see also Crawford 2004).

In line with the scholars presented above, Sandvoss (2003) too emphasises the close ties between football fans. He identifies fans as a community of consumers bound together by communication. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) notions of habitus and taste, he regards football fandom as a practice adopted and performed by way of media consumption and continuous—but mostly virtual—relations with other fans. However, Sandvoss assumes that 'in contrast to Bourdieu's unconscious habitus reflecting a particular class position, the habitus in football fandom consciously reflects particular values and beliefs' (Sandvoss 2003, p. 31). Hence, the taste for football or a specific team is not a matter of chance

but a conscious effort. Football fandom generates spaces where fans articulate values, opinions, fantasies and self-reflections. In other words, football fans communicate projections of themselves in 'virtual reality'.

Understanding fandom as a form of identity construction and communication raises the question about the reasons and processes behind the deliberate choice to join a real or virtual community of fans. As the composition of fan groups does not mirror the composition of society at large, football fandom seems to attract some and deter other groups of the population. As mentioned above, men are greatly overrepresented among fans, therefore gender appears to be an important factor in an individual's decision to support a football club and to become and stay a member of a fan community.

Individuals in modern societies have, on the one hand, numerous opportunities of interpreting, modifying or even changing the precepts of a given society and this also applies to fandom. On the other hand, the opportunities of living a self-determined life, enjoying leisure or even indulging in watching football, depend on age, social class, ethnicity and gender, as well as on the intersections of these categories. A very influential category is gender, a social construction which is embedded in culture and society, incorporated into individuals' identities and constantly created and re-created in social interactions. By means of gendered discourses individuals adopt and enact ideals, norms and expected ways of behaviour, which means that gender is not something we are or we have, but something we constantly do in interaction with each other (Lorber 1994). By complying with gendered norms and rules, that is by 'doing gender', we create differences between men and women which 'are not natural, essential or biological. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the "essentialness" of gender' (West and Zimmerman 1987, p. 137). The football stadium is, as mentioned above, an excellent stage for 'doing gender'.

The gendered practices of fandom depend on the fans' circumstances of life and are embedded in their life course. According to Kohli (1985, 1994, 2007) individual life courses are intertwined with 'normal biographies, for example 'traditional life trajectories associated with class and gender' (Fuller 2011, p. 24). These trajectories are shaped by historical developments, social structures, norms, values and beliefs which influence

people's individual biographies 'by providing the rules by which individuals unfold and conduct their lives' (Kohli 2007, p. 257). People move through their lives following socially defined pathways, resulting in a more or less 'normative life course' which is chronologically standardised according to different phases, important events and transitions such as employment, parenthood and retirement (Kohli 2007, p. 255). Even though post-modern societies show to some extent tendencies towards a de-standardisation and pluralisation of life courses, 'normal biographies' seem to be rather persistent and are still applicable to mainstream society (Kohli 2007). As 'normal biographies' are gendered, that is embedded in the everyday lives of women and men (Fuller 2011), they have a strong impact on leisure opportunities and constraints, also with regard to football and fandom.

For the past three decades an abundance of literature has focused on the gendered nature of leisure in western industrialised countries, particularly on the various leisure constraints in women's lives (see, e.g., Shaw 1994; Henderson and Hickerson 2007; Henderson and Gibson 2013). Women have been found to have a greater amount of family and household obligations than men and thus less time that can be used for leisure activities (Shaw 1994). They have to cope with a double burden of paid work and unpaid domestic chores and often experience what Hochschild (1989) has termed a 'second shift' at home, leaving little time for leisure. In addition, the leisure of women with families may be 'fragmented', for instance, interrupted by family duties (e.g., Wajcman 2008). Motivated by the 'ethic of care', many women have internalised their role as the primary caregiver within the family. Therefore, 'women often provide for the needs of others first, thus neglecting their own leisure needs' (Shaw 1994, p. 2). In a recent study Miller and Brown (2005) identified the ethic of care as an important factor influencing leisure habits among women, in particular among those with small children. As these and other studies indicate, it is difficult for many women to leave their homes and participate in time-consuming leisure activities such as attending football matches and enjoying fandom.

The theoretical concepts presented above can contribute to an understanding of the meaning of fandom, the importance of collective memories, and the community of fans in the lives of football supporters.

However, these approaches to fandom cannot explain the reasons for the large under-representation of women among football supporters. Why do only few women become members of the ‘imagined community’ of fans and why are women less likely than their male counterparts to use football fandom as a form of communication and self-presentation? Here we suggest that approaches to gender and ‘normal biographies’, as well as to the life-work balance, can provide potential explanations for the small number of female fans including the barriers which women may face when they engage in the support of a football team. It can be assumed that women anticipate or experience conflicts with other competing demands, in particular those of family responsibilities, which make it difficult to integrate football fandom into their lives. Still, we should not forget that there are numerous other reasons for not being interested in this game.

The numbers presented at the beginning of the chapter reveal, however, that in spite of women’s ‘normal biographies’ and their problems of life-work integration, there are women who enjoy watching football and support their teams from the fan stands (see Toffoletti and Mewett 2012). Their intensive, time-consuming and long-lasting involvement in football is not self-evident but a phenomenon which demands an explanation. This raises the following questions: How do dedicated female fans, who form a small minority in the fan stands, manage to combine fandom and everyday life? How can one explain the strong appeal that football has for these women? What role does fandom—in particular the community of fans—play? As the target group of this study comprises dedicated female fans, the theories on communities and collective memories allow insights into the role which football plays in their lives. The other theoretical concepts related to gender and work-life-leisure integration provide tools with which to discover their strategies for overcoming barriers which seem unsurmountable for other women.

## Sources and Methods

The sample of our study consisted of 12 female fans of 3 football teams playing in the Danish Super League. Five women were fans of FC Copenhagen, three of Brøndby IF and four of FC Nordsjælland; they

were between 23 and 54 years old and had been supporters of their club for between 3 and 23 years. We explored their fan practices and their everyday lives by means of interviews and observations. We used a purposeful sampling approach (e.g., Creswell 2013) with the goal of recruiting dedicated female fans of different football clubs for our study. Therefore, we contacted and interviewed women who served on the governing boards of the official fan clubs and members of the only women's fan group in the Danish Super League, the 'Pink Lions', supporting FC Copenhagen. In addition, we approached two interviewees in the stadium. These fans did not only represent different generations but also had different social backgrounds, levels of education and family situations: some were single, others lived with their partner and some had children. However, they had one thing in common, and that was their love of football: they attended all home games and watched the games from the fan stands (Table 9.1).

The 12 women shared with us their thoughts, experiences, motives and aims as passionate football fans. We used an interview guide derived from the theoretical approaches outlined above as well as from the results of previous research on (female) football fans and women's life circumstances. The questions were concerned with the women's 'fan biographies', their rules of conduct and their 'doing gender' as fans, as well as with their behaviour as fans inside and outside the stadium. A special focus was placed on the question of how these women integrated fandom into their everyday lives.

**Table 9.1** Details of the interviewees

Pseudonym	Age	Fan since	Fan of
Asta	32	1997	FC Copenhagen
Bodil	32	2004	FC Copenhagen
Cecilie	23	2005	FC Copenhagen, Pink Lions
Dorte	45	2004	FC Copenhagen, Pink Lions
Emma	37	2000	FC Copenhagen, Pink Lions
Freja	23	1992	Brøndby IF
Gritt	30	1997	Brøndby IF
Hanne	23	2004	Brøndby IF
Iben	54	1991	FC Nordsjælland
Jytte	39	2002	FC Nordsjælland
Karen	53	2010	FC Nordsjælland
Lærke	48	2002	FC Nordsjælland

In addition, we encouraged narratives and followed up on emerging topics (see Kvale 2007). After the interviews the women filled out a short questionnaire on their socio-demographic background (Flick 2006). The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were conducted by the first author. The questions and answers were transcribed and thematically coded according to the research questions (Bryman 2012); however, new topics and categories which emerged inductively were included in the analysis and interpretation (Mayring 2000; Miles and Huberman 1994).

In addition, we also gained insights into fan behaviour in the stadium as well as interaction within fan communities by means of exploratory observations and informal conversations. The combination of these methods provided rich material and facilitated an in-depth understanding of the actions, emotions, tastes and, in general, the lives of (female) football fans.

## Findings

The first part of the findings will focus on the interviewees' understanding of fandom and their reasons for being a football fan. In this context we briefly present the most important experiences and 'rewards' they named, which may help to understand the women's practices and patterns of football consumption. We assume that the rewards of football fandom play a decisive role in the everyday lives of the fans which will be described and discussed in the second part of the results section, where we consider fandom in connection with the women's other obligations, in particular with their work and family life.

## The Meaning of Fandom

### A 'Real' Fan Is a Fan Forever

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'You will always be a part of me  
Every day I think about you  
I will always be a fan of Brøndby  
You can't take this pride from me'  
[Fan chant of Brøndby IF  
([http://brondbysange.dk/vis\\_sang.php?id=231](http://brondbysange.dk/vis_sang.php?id=231))]

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'Success is temporary, loyalty  
is forever' (Slogan of FC  
Copenhagen and the Pink  
Lions)

According to the interviewees, there is intense debate in the fan community about what makes a football follower a 'real fan' and who is entitled to claim fan status. Asked how they would define a football fan, they came up with slightly different definitions. However, as in the fan chant and the slogan quoted above, the elements of unconditional love and loyalty were recurrent: 'A fan supports her club in good and in bad times' (Bodil and Dorte); 'If you can say that Brøndby is your boyfriend, I'd call you a fan. If Brøndby is only a very good friend, you are only a supporter' (Gritt) or 'That's part of my life! I don't distinguish between me being a football fan, a mother or being at home. That's a part of myself' (Emma). These quotes indicate that the interviewees regarded fandom and their relationship to their club as a consistent and permanent part of their lives. When defining 'real' fandom, the interviewees not only described their own involvement but also named criteria for judging who belonged and who did not belong to the fan community. Asta only considered people who were completely absorbed into football and who supported their club by doing voluntary work to be real fans. Gritt emphasised that fandom was a very personal relationship that could not simply be acquired by attending games. Although the interviewees' definitions of fandom were different, they had one thing in common: all interviewees referred to dedication as an important criterion, and all of them considered themselves to be 'real' fans with a lifelong monogamous relationship to a certain club: 'I would never change clubs. That would be like betraying your husband' (Freja) or 'It's like a loving relationship' (Gritt). In this respect, the women share a lack of interest in other football clubs or even in the national team. Asta stated: 'I don't care about the national team. I don't think that's so exciting. The only thing that counts is FC Copenhagen.' Hanne, a Brøndby fan, remembered that even though her father took her to games of the national team a few times, she could not develop a passion for it. She even cheered for Sweden instead of Denmark because the Swedish team had more players from Brøndby than the Danish team.

A sign of identification with their club is the use of the pronoun 'we', which the women used when they referred to 'their' club or the other fans. Iben, for example, talked about the club history: 'We were placed third in the first year [after promotion to the Super League]. But after that we had to fight hard for several years.' All interviewees were very

happy that they had become fans of 'their' club and gave various reasons to justify their satisfaction with their choice. For example, they referred to the club's quality or the loyalty of other fans and they were convinced that their community of fans was the best.

Furthermore, football 'accompanied' the interviewees in their homes: all the women had a numerous items of club merchandise at home and they arranged these paraphernalia in different ways in their rooms. Karen, for example, used her bedroom as a 'chapel' which she decorated with posters and merchandise of FC Nordsjælland: 'I can see FC Nordsjælland when I'm in bed.' Other interviewees had doormats, pins, dishes, caps or scarfs with the insignia of their clubs. Asta declared that 'there is no way around it', meaning that every dedicated supporter she knew possessed a broad range of merchandise. Bodil even signalled her attachment to her club with a tattoo of FC Copenhagen.

### **The Rewards of Being a Fan**

Without exception, all the interviewees mentioned their experiences at the stadium and the community of fans as the most important benefits of being a football supporter. There was complete agreement that the atmosphere during a game and their relations with the other fans were major incentives for them to go to the stadium every weekend to watch a football match.

All interviewees highlighted the magic atmosphere of the stadium, which was not only produced by the players but also—and in particular—by the fans. Freja loved to hear all the fans singing, and when they sang loudly enough, she got goose pimples. Bodil had trouble putting into words her feelings at the stadium but tried to describe a 'feeling inside the body' which was something that assured her that this was the right place to be. Emma used the term 'to feel the atmosphere' to express unique experiences and even physical sensations. All agreed that attending a football match was rewarded by intense emotions, thrill and excitement. Asta, Gritt and Iben talked about an 'entire range of' and a 'rollercoaster' of emotions that they went through each time their team played. Particularly exciting matches and victories of their favourite team were



remembered forever and could still create euphoria after many years: Gritt and Hanne described enthusiastically the unique atmosphere when Brøndby IF eventually won the cup final in 2005 and emphasised that only football fans could understand how they could still talk about a game that happened eight years ago. Memories like this become a part of the collective memory of the fan community. Not all the fans' stories referred to successes; team defeats also become collective memories, for example, when FC Copenhagen lost the last game of the season—and thus also the championship—to FC Nordsjælland, Bodil started to cry and had to leave the stands before the end of the match, which was something she had never done before. Even hours later, when she went out for a beer with her fellow fans, Bodil was still devastated and crying. Suffering for their team is also something which unites fans, who will never forget such disasters.

Not only the matches but also their relations with the other fans are assets of being a football supporter. Despite the domination of men in the fan zone, the interviewees experienced the stadium as a space where it was easy to meet new people and old friends and get into conversation. Freja used the metaphor of a family to describe the Brøndby fans. The other interviewees, too, talked about the close-knit community of supporters and pointed to the special group cohesion. They also talked enthusiastically about the numerous relationships and friendships that developed in the stadium: 'My best friends are those that I've met through FC Copenhagen' (Bodil) or 'You get a huge personal network. A lot of friends' (Emma). They looked forward to going to the stadium not only because of the games, but also because of the other fans they would meet and enjoy the game with.

A match day is not limited to 90 minutes of watching a game in the stadium but usually starts and ends a few hours before and after the kick-off. While the board members of the fan clubs were often busy preparing the choreography in the fan sector, the other interviewees met up with the group of fans they normally watched the game together with; these were often people they had met in the stadium—often years, but sometimes only weeks, ago. They went to a pub, had something to eat and also had some drinks before the match. Iben pointed out that voluntary work for the fan club required so much time that she saw the other fans much more often than she did all her other friends. Other interviewees explained

that since football fandom took up most of their free time, it was natural and practical to choose other supporters as friends: 'I also know other people, of course, but it's mainly other football fans where I've managed to keep up the relationship. That's because football takes up such a large part of your life. ... so it's easiest to do it this way' (Asta).

Friendships among fans do not revolve exclusively around football; the interviewees also celebrated important private events like birthdays or house-warming parties with their fellow fans. Three of the interviewees had even met their (ex-)boyfriends at the stadium.

## Everyday Life as a Fan

### Living According to a 'Football Calendar'

The excitement experienced in the stadium and the community of fans described above contribute to an understanding of why and how football influences or even determines their lives. During the football season Sunday is a very special day that the interviewees feverishly look forward to all week long. They all agreed that their teams' games were the priority on this day—or perhaps in their lives even: all other events and activities had to fit in with the date and time of the match. There was, they said, an unwritten law that invitations to parties or birthday celebrations had to be postponed if they collided with a home game. The interviewees only missed home games in exceptional cases and tried to attend as many away games as possible. Hanne, a 'hard core' fan, missed neither home nor away games and had a special agreement with her boyfriend, who was also a very passionate Brøndby IF fan: 'We have a rule called confirmations and weddings. We attend those. But family birthdays and stuff like that, we don't attend them.' Bodil emphasised that it did not take long for new acquaintances to find out about her passion. She explained: 'That's also because I often have to say no [to invitations], because I have to go to football. I have to say it at the beginning.' All interviewees had even travelled to foreign countries to support their teams, for example, when they played in the Champions League. However, only fans who had enough time and money accompanied their team abroad more or less regularly.

Both Freja and Hanne emphasised that a period without football was a challenge and that especially the winter break was a long and painful wait; life without football was virtually unthinkable for them: 'It's hard to explain, but it's like an obsession. I can't imagine a Sunday where I don't go to the stadium. But now winter break's coming up... I don't know what I should do then. Stay at home?! [...] What do other people do on Sundays?' (Hanne).

The women interviewed were well aware that fandom put a stress on their relationships and they described how their family and friends dealt with their decision to spend such a large amount of time and energy on football fandom. Bodil's habits and practices provide an insight into a life in which football was at the very centre and where matches structured time. She even used a 'football calendar where others use a normal calendar'. Bodil's parents not only respected their daughter's appointments but also included them in their plans and activities, for instance, on the occasion of their 25th wedding anniversary. The family scheduled the event in a way which took account of Bodil's football obligations: Bodil made a 'sacrifice' and did not go to the stadium; however, she followed the game on television while her sister did her hair. However, not all family members and friends showed as much consideration for the interviewees' hobby as Bodil's relatives. Asta reported, for example, that her family had problems dealing with her football addiction, but she added that this did not matter because she had many friends in the fan community who could understand her 'obsession' and shared her passion. A large number of interviewees had 'infected' family members, be it husbands, boyfriends or children with their 'football fever' and converted them to football fandom.

Football does not only take place on match days; it accompanies the fans in their everyday lives through the week. This was particularly true of the seven interviewees who served on the governing boards of fan clubs as this had serious consequences for their everyday lives. Not only did they spend their weekends attending football matches (an activity which has already been described as very time-consuming), but they also invested an average of four to five hours—and sometimes even up to 20 hours per week—doing voluntary work for the fan club. The board members undertook various administrative and organisational tasks such as looking after the registration of members and organising events or bus

tours to away games, besides being responsible for media relations and fan politics, for example, negotiations about fan-friendly policies with the management of the club or the police. Asta, who was unemployed at the time of the interview, volunteered in the fan club office from Monday to Friday from 9 am to 2 pm. This means that the group of fans participating in the study spent the majority or even all of their free time on their football club.

Fandom, however, does not only lead to work-leisure conflicts requiring negotiation, it can also have benefits in different areas of life. Football played a role at the interviewees' workplace; the female fans were acknowledged as football experts and included in football talk. In this way they were 'part of the team' and earned respect from their male colleagues. Jytte's (male) boss reacted positively to his employee's football passion: 'My boss thinks I'm really cool because I'm so committed to football. He thinks that's just great when I ask for a day off because of football' (Jytte).

### **Fandom and Work-Life Integration**

At the time of the interviews the female fans had been supporting their club for between 3 and 22 years. They acted out their fandom in different ways and with different intensities, which changed over time depending on their personal circumstances. For example, they spent different amounts of money and time on football, which was often due to their (changing) family or financial situation: Asta, Bodil and Freja had previously travelled to all away games and even to some games abroad, but they now primarily attended home games due to their current situation. Asta had become the single mother of a two-year-old daughter and did not have as much time as she used to have. However, she 'tried as much as possible' and considered herself fortunate to have a retired father who could take care of her child so that she could sometimes still travel to away games. Bodil and Freja had run into financial difficulties and now had little money to spend on football. Emma, founder of the Pink Lions, a women-only fan club, mentioned that she had already had the idea of founding a female fan group nine years ago but postponed this venture until the year after, when her children were a bit older and she had the energy to take up the project

again. Jytte had two small children and therefore did not attend any away games. However, she had found a way of combining being a mother and a fan by taking her two sons with her to all home games. Iben, too, went to the stadium with her teenage sons while Karen brought her boyfriend along. Cecilie and her mother Dorte were both members of the Pink Lions and spent a lot of time together, discussing football and watching the games in the fan stands.

Hanne, a dedicated Brøndby fan, had never spent more time on football than now and never missed out on a single home or away game. She explained that she had the chance of focusing so much on football because her partner shared her interest in the game. Her boyfriend, whom she met at the stadium, was also a very passionate Brøndby fan; accompanying their team all over Denmark was part of their relationship. Other interviewees, too, shared their 'football fanaticism' with their partners. Emma's and Freja's spouses were also big fans, but supported different teams to themselves. Although the support of rival teams led to teasing or even conflicts, the fact that both were fans seemed to create mutual understanding for the way the partners spent their leisure time. Football seems to take a lot of time and energy, which other women may spend on their families and friends. Therefore, relationships can only 'function' when the 'significant others' empathise with the interviewees' devotion to football or even share their fan experiences.

Freja was a cook and sometimes had to work at the weekend, which as a consequence prevented her from going to the stadium. Like Freja, Dorte, a nurse, had to work shifts, which sometimes coincided with football matches at the weekend. However, she mostly managed to swap her shift so that she could attend both home and away games. Other fans, too, reported days taken off work to attend home matches on weekdays or even international games in other countries on their days off.

Some of the interviewees assumed that with increasing age they might become 'lazier' and no longer want to follow the game from the fan stands or even go to the stadium in winter time. Nevertheless, they were all convinced that they would be fans for the rest of their lives, even though their ways of supporting their club might change. Asta put her feelings as a fan in a nutshell: 'FC Copenhagen will always be on my heart. Always. No matter if I'm in the stadium or not. It will always be something that is very important for me.'

## Discussion

The interviewees' statements leave no doubt that they are literally addicted to football, that their lives are centred on 'their' club and adjusted to the schedule of 'their' team. In particular, their relations with other fans and their identification with their club may contribute to an understanding of the patterns of their football consumption.

The fans' stories emphasise the strong group cohesion and close social bonds between fans. Flags, football jerseys and team colours, the memories of heroic battles and unexpected defeats of their team described above, along with routines and rituals before, during and after a game, constitute collective practices, create 'sites of memories' (Nora 1989) and contribute to forming an (imagined) community among fans and the strengthening of its cohesion (Anderson 1983). Activities such as meeting up with other fans before and after the game, eating and drinking vast amounts of alcohol, travelling to games together, going into raptures about legendary wins and taking part in the choreography in the fan stands, stimulate a sense of belonging which binds the individual fan to the fan community. In particular the fan support, for example, the songs and tifos (the choreography displayed by fans in the stadium), generate a special atmosphere which triggers an almost physical sensation that is described by all interviewees. The fans in our study show their loyalty to their club via paraphernalia such as T-shirts or caps with the club logo and, through their patterns of consumption, they can also be identified as members of a real or virtual community of insiders. Our findings are consistent with a large body of fan literature, including a survey conducted across 18 European countries which found that fans felt a tremendous solidarity and sense of belonging to the community of fans (SIRC 2008, p. 29).

The interviewees' narratives, in particular the descriptions of their clubs but also the use of the pronoun 'we' when talking about them, indicates that fandom has become part of their identity: 'the club is not considered as the object of fandom but as forming a unit with the fan' (Sandvoss 2003, p. 35). Moreover, the metaphor of the 'family', which is often chosen to describe the community of fans, reveals a strong sense of collective identity and of belonging to their football community, which

includes the players, teams and clubs as well as the other fans (see, e.g., SIRC 2008; Sülzle 2011, p. 241). However, supporter communities are based not only on a shared sense of belonging but also on the exclusion of, and opposition to, 'inauthentic' supporters and fans of other clubs (see Crawford 2004, pp. 55–57). Especially the practices of fandom draw the line between insiders and outsiders, between 'real' fans and other people in the stadium, for example, the 'apocryphal' women who are only interested in the players' bodies (e.g., Pope 2010; Sülzle 2011). Only those spectators conforming to the right code of behaviour can acquire fan capital and consider themselves 'real' fans (see also Otte 2010, p. 79).

As numerous studies show, the majority of dedicated fans are men and the fan stands are 'male spaces' where women are only tolerated at the fringes (e.g., Fritzsche 2010; Gerschel 2009; Hagel et al. 2005; Jones 2008; Lenneis and Pfister 2015; Selmer 2004; Sülzle 2004, 2005, 2007, 2011). The results of this study, however, reveal that there are ways for women to gain respect as football experts, to find football friends and to gain access at least to some fan groups. All interviewees found close friends among other supporters of their club. Although football is the basis of their friendships, their relationships have extended and affected other spheres of their lives (e.g., SIRC 2008). The social bonds acquired through football show clearly that the stadium is a social space where fans can quickly and easily build up a social network and generate 'social capital' if they conform to the code of behaviour prevailing in the fan stands (Bourdieu 1984). However, it must also be taken into consideration that the countless hours of performing fandom do not leave much time to keep up with other social contacts, which may result in the loss of non-football friends.

As dedicated fandom seems to be an almost 'full-time job', it has a decisive impact on the organisation of the interviewees' everyday lives, as well as on the prioritisation of their time. According to Stone (2007, p. 8), it is not only during the 'spectacle of match-days' but also in 'everyday life that football culture is primarily perpetuated, expressed and experienced, affecting individuals' notions of self-identity, belonging and interpersonal relations; all of which are initiated, reinforced and challenged through the enactment, internalization, embodiment and contestation of structural influences within the daily practices of life'. Since football fandom is both

expensive<sup>1</sup> and time-consuming, conflicts arise between football, paid work, household duties, child care and other demands on women's time, which often ends in favour of football. The fans we interviewed did not balance paid and unpaid work, various leisure activities and their involvement in football in equal measure but prioritised their 'love of the game'. They took days off work and turned down invitations to family events; missing a home game was a huge sacrifice that the fans were only willing to make in exceptional cases.

It must be emphasised that having and using time depend not only on the amount of 'abstract time' but also to a large degree on subjective experiences and priorities. Numerous examples of various forms of time-life integration show that time is a subjective experience and that obligations such as work, childcare or housework still leave enough room to negotiate time for prioritised activities (e.g., Pfister 2011). Consistent with the findings of Pope (2013), the interviewees of this study leave no doubt that football is the top priority in their lives, even though this requires careful structuring and planning of everyday obligations as well as constant negotiations with family and friends, who often have difficulty understanding why the fans spend such a great amount of time and energy on football consumption.

For men, fandom is a socially acceptable way of staging masculinity and a means of male bonding. Males are more or less expected to play football as boys and be football experts as adults, sharing collective memories about their teams and thus creating 'sites of memories'. By contrast, football fandom might not be a socially approved leisure activity for women, not least because the duties of a wife and a mother are considered more important than watching a football match (see Pope 2014). On the other hand, the families of the interviewees seemed to tolerate their passion for the game. There are, nevertheless, periods in the interviewees' lives, for instance, after the birth of a child, when the balance between domestic responsibilities and leisure has to be adjusted—meaning that football has to be relegated to second place.

The interviewees, however, pointed to different solutions for solving many of their conflicts regarding time and obligations: some managed to convert family members to becoming football enthusiasts with whom they could share their passion. In this way, they were able to combine spending time with their family, enjoying football and maintaining their



place in their fan group. The abovementioned European fan study (SIRC 2008) also found that many supporters grew up in families of football fans, with the result that attending matches at the stadium became a family activity, bonding multiple generations of a family together. One of the main results of this study is that football fandom has a large impact on the interviewees' everyday lives. However, everyday life also has an impact on fandom: the interviewees' fan biographies reveal varying intensities and different ways of performing fandom throughout their careers. They point to the interrelationship between fan practices and their everyday lives and illustrate that fandom cannot be regarded as a self-contained phenomenon but, rather, as something that is embedded in their life course which is structured by social norms, values and beliefs. As such, the 'normal' or standard biography of women in Denmark includes both employment<sup>2</sup> and at least two children<sup>3</sup>—which can be assumed to influence the practices of female football fans as well. This is supported by the interviewees' statements and also concurs with Pope (2010, 2014), who discovered that motherhood often led to compelled 'fan breaks' or to a change 'from a "hot" to a rather "cooler" fan affiliation—and then perhaps back up to "hot" (or planning to return) after offspring were older' (Pope 2014, p. 251, referring to Giulianotti's 1999 fan typology). Thus, unlike men's fan careers, women's 'normal fan biographies' can be characterised as being interrupted processes.

In addition, the interviewees' narratives show that other transitions or changes in personal circumstances, such as periods of unemployment or relationships, also have implications for women's involvement and intensities of fandom. In accordance with the findings of Crawford (2004) their stories confirm that the progression of fan careers is not linear but has peaks and troughs for numerous reasons. Our study shows that the interviewees' investment in 'their' club in terms of emotions, money and time is subject to fluctuations caused by significant life events.

## Conclusion

This chapter has provided in-depth insights into the everyday lives of female football fans in Denmark by adding life-football integration to the research agenda. The interviewees left no doubt that for this sample of

women football and 'their' football club are a priority in their lives and have a tremendous influence on their daily routines. In particular, their close relationships to other fans and their identification with the club may explain the importance the interviewees ascribe to fandom. However, the interviews also reveal that making football the top priority requires the careful planning and structuring of time in order to balance the competing demands of work, family and friends. It also requires negotiating time for fan activities. In addition, shifting (gendered) circumstances of life, for example, motherhood or periods of financial difficulties, influence the degree of intensity of fandom. Nevertheless, all interviewees are convinced that football is one of the most important assets in their lives, that the community of fans is an essential network and that they will support 'their' team for the rest of their lives.

## Notes

1. In 2012/13 a season ticket cost between 1000 and 2000 kr. Additional costs are incurred by expensive away games (travel plus ticket) and fan merchandise.
2. A total of 72% of Danish women in the ages of 16–64 are employed, which is one of the highest employment rates in Europe (Statistics Denmark 2011, p. 49). See also <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/2011/03/DK110302SI.htm> and [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/31\\_labour\\_market\\_participation\\_of\\_women.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/31_labour_market_participation_of_women.pdf)
3. A total of 87% of 49-year-old women have one child at least (Statistics Denmark 2011, p. 17). According to a survey 95% of all young people claim that they wish to have children in the future (Schmidt and Skakkebak 2009). This is also reflected in dominant discourses: motherhood is considered crucial to a woman's happy and fulfilled life.

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# 10

## 'One Is Not Born, But Rather Becomes a Fan': The Socialization of Female Football Fans—A Case Study in Denmark

Gertrud Pfister, Svenja-Maria Mintert,  
and Verena Lenneis

### Introduction and Background Information: Football and Fandom—A Male Domain?

In many time periods and cultures strenuous physical activity such as playing sport and participating in sporting competitions have been privileges, and also priorities, of men. This is also true of football, which was invented by men for men. It was also an opportunity to showcase the abilities and skills of the 'stronger sex.' After the game had been introduced to English public schools in the 1830s, it soon spread to other groups of the

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G. Pfister, S. Pope (eds.), *Female Football Players and Fans*, Football Research  
in an Enlarged Europe, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59025-1\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59025-1_10)



population, for example, members of the working classes, and to other countries, where it attracted increasing numbers of boys and men as players and as spectators (Walvin 2000; Pfister 2002; Sonntag 2008).

Who are these people who have an interest in this relatively new sport (which did not spread to Germany or Denmark until after the turn of the twentieth century) and who are willing to pay an entrance fee to see 'their' team play and—potentially—win? Information about football is made available by the mass media, in particular by the newspapers, but as a rule they focus on the games and provide little information about the fans, for example, about their 'support' (for instance, in the form of choreographies) or about incidences of fan violence. Media do not refer to the gender of the people involved in the game as it seems self-evident that football and football fandom—at least until the end of the twentieth century—were men's domains. Although we cannot exclude that there were some girls and women among the audiences, they were not 'conspicuous'; for example, they do not appear on the various photos of fans which have been published since the end of the nineteenth century in newspapers and are currently available on the internet. According to Pope and Williams (2017), the number of female fans in English stadiums increased between the 1940s and the 1960s, but the women 'disappeared' with the surge of fan violence, which can be interpreted as an expression and demonstration of masculinity, that is as a means of the fans to prove themselves as 'real men' in times of changing gender arrangements (see, e.g., Giulianotti et al. 1994; see also Sandvoss and Ball 2017).

Current sources and statistics, for instance, the results of the FREE project<sup>1</sup> as well as a number of sociological studies, leave no doubt that football is still dominated by men—on the field and in the stadiums (see, e.g., Lenneis and Pfister 2015; Pfister et al. 2013, 2014). The dedicated fans, often members of organized groups such as hooligans or 'ultras,' watch the games from the fan zones, where they perform specific rituals of cheering and demonstrate specific forms of hegemonic masculinity (e.g., Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Several publications, among them the studies of Lenneis and Pfister (2015), Selmer (2004) and Stülzle (2011) on German football followers, reveal that it can be very challenging for women to perform fandom in the fan stands as they are confronted with men's prejudice about their authenticity and may experience a considerable degree of sexism. However, female fans are tolerated at the

fringes of fan groups if they prove themselves as dedicated supporters (e.g., Lenneis and Pfister 2015). A number of fan studies show how women cope with the animosity of male 'hard core' fans and how they manage to be accepted as members of fan communities—in particular by demonstrating engagement and expertise (see also Radman and Hedenborg 2017 and Sandvoss and Ball 2017). Women also have the opportunity of following their teams in groups of female supporters. The establishment of women only fan groups, as in Germany or Denmark and the women's peñas in Spain, are good examples of this practice (see Lenneis and Pfister 2015; Llopis-Goig and Flores 2017).

According to the available literature, it may be assumed that male and female football fans are 'watching the boys play' (Selmer 2004). This raises questions about not only the motives of women to watch football, but also the reasons why female fans follow men's football and support men's teams. While the assumption that women regard the players as sex objects has been convincingly refuted (see, e.g., Sandvoss and Ball 2017), the question why and how female fans become attached to football and identify with male football heroes still has to be answered. Although the interest of scholars in women's involvement in football has recently increased (see, e.g., Pfister 2015), the majority of publications focus on men's games and male players. Insights into the emergence, development and enactment of football fandom among girls and women are still far and few between.

## Aims and Questions

Women's involvement in football fandom raises the question not only of why they are committed to following a men's football team, but also—and in particular—how they first become fans: Here, the following questions emerge: when, why and how do girls and women become interested in football? How does their 'fan career' develop, and what are their reasons for becoming dedicated football fans? As it can be assumed that—applying Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement about 'becoming a woman' to fandom—'one is not born, but rather becomes, a fan,' the focus of this chapter is on events, influences and processes which make individuals become football fans.

## Fans and Fandom: Theoretical Considerations

For many decades football has attracted the interest of scholars, in particular sport historians and sport sociologists who have focused not only on the development of the game but also on its consumers (see, e.g., Brown 2007; Giulianotti 1999; Horne and Manzenreiter 2006; Sandvoss and Ball 2017). Maguire et al. (2002), who have published extensively on the globalization of football, consider 'sport consumption' in its current form as a phenomenon of modern societies, which is in line with Guttman's approach to sport as a typical feature of modernity. Guttman (1978) identifies 'abstract' performances and records (which are independent of time and place) as typical features of 'modern' life and contemporary sport. Records are also excellent examples of Giddens's (1990) concept of 'time-space distanciation,' that is the compression of time and space and the 'disembedding' of events from the local context via communication and transport technologies.

Fandom, too, is mostly 'disembedded' as it is not based on a coincidence of sport production and consumption. Only a minority of fans watch football 'live' in the stadium, but all use the mass media to follow 'their' teams. In recent decades novel technologies have provided a multitude of new opportunities to access information about football and to identify with teams and players—independent of time and place. Yet opportunities of following a sport, whether via traditional or new media, explain neither the backgrounds nor the reasons for fandom. Although we have a lot of information about the ways in which fandom is displayed, in particular in the stadium (e.g., Pfister et al. 2013; Lennis and Pfister 2015), little is known about how people become fans and why they spend considerable resources—including time—on sport and on football consumption. As many football researchers are fans, they often take interest in the game for granted and do not consider it an issue worth exploring. However, there are some exceptions among the scholars involved in fan studies: Armstrong and Giulianotti (1998), for example, refer to Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' and Maffessoli's (2000) notion of fans as 'neo-tribes' emphasize that the common interest, the feeling of belonging and the joint emotions of football supporters are important attractions of being a fan. According to the influential

study of Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998, p. 39ff.), fandom has to be approached as a form of performance in our current 'diffused' society in which individuals have to stand out from others and present themselves, acting simultaneously as performers and as audiences. Sandvoss (2005) describes football consumption as a combination of the two processes of identification and identity presentation which currently take place predominantly in virtual reality, for example, via Facebook (see, e.g., Sandvoss and Ball 2017; see also Boyle and Haynes 2009; Boyle 2013).

Not only access to football games in the stadium and to the media coverage of the matches but in particular the opportunity for football consumption via the internet, its use for self-presentation and the development of virtual communities of fans are preconditions of modern forms of fandom which have been the focus of a number of recent studies (see, e.g., Crawford 2006; Dine 2012; Millward 2011). In contrast, the questions of how and why individuals, more men than women, become fans of a specific sport, team or athlete has attracted relatively little scholarly interest (as exceptions see, e.g., Wann et al. 2001 and Mewett and Toffoletti 2011). Some scholars, among them Carvalho (2013) and Tsitskari et al. (2014) refer to socialization as a reason for becoming a fan; however, neither do they elaborate on this approach nor do they focus on the significant individuals, the decisive moments and the various procedures involved in becoming and being a fan. In contrast to many other studies, Wann et al. (2001) provide a description and a psychological analysis of how the 'Desire to Follow Sport, Teams, and Athletes' emerges and develops. In their book 'Sport Fans' they identify the 'sport fan socialization process' as a process of 'learning to live in a specific environment and understand a culture or subculture by internalizing its values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms' and—it could be added—the related habits and tastes (Wann et al. 2001, p. 24). According to their findings and the results of numerous other studies, fandom is a culture- and gender-specific phenomenon which raises questions such as why and how individuals in different countries develop a 'taste' for different sports (e.g., for baseball or for football) and why different population groups such as males and females differ with regard to their sporting interests and consumption. Following Wann et al. (2001), we propose using concepts of

socialization to explain the involvement of individuals in sport, namely football consumption. As football fandom is gendered, we will intertwine socialization concepts and gender theories in the attempt to understand how males and females adopt an interest in this game. Based on a social constructivist approach, we perceive gender as a social institution that 'establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life' and is embedded in the 'major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family and politics' (Lorber 1994, p. 1). Gender is not something we are or we have, but rather something we do in interaction with each other (West and Zimmermann 1991). 'In social interactions throughout their lives, individuals learn what is expected, [...] act and react in expected ways, and thus simultaneously construct and maintain the gender order' (Lorber 1994, p. 32; see also Lorber 2012). Like other social practices, playing and consuming football are dependent on the 'doing gender' of male and female footballers and fans. While boys are expected and acknowledged for their involvement in playing and watching football, expertise as football players or fans does not seem to have the same 'benefits' for girls, which may influence their attitudes and practices related to this game.

The development of sport-related tastes, attitudes and practices can be understood as both a process and a product of socialization, for example, of the adoption and internalization of football as a practice and/or a form of consumption during one's life course (see, e.g., Hurrelmann 2006). According to the editors and authors of the 'Handbook of Socialization,' this term refers to the way in which individuals are guided in becoming members of one or more social groups, for example, a community of football fans (Grusec and Hastings 2016; see also Wann et al. 2001, p. 23). Wann et al. (2001) emphasizes the 'pervasiveness of sport in contemporary society' and the 'impact of the proliferation of sport' on the lives of all members of society, even those who are not interested in sport. Wann's statement may easily be applied to football and fan socialization, which must be understood as a process based on the interaction of the various experiences and influences of significant individuals and groups, as well as of the social and material environment and, in general, of culture and society.

The German sociologist Heinemann (2007) also identified the interactions and correlations between various facts, processes and influences as

determinants of socialization. He developed an intricate scheme which helps to understand the backgrounds and processes of becoming (and staying) a male or a female football fan. Heinemann points, on the one hand, to individuals with their abilities, skills and knowledge, their experiences, feelings and motives, their likes and dislikes, as well as their potentials, which are acquired in interactions with significant others and in encounters with the material and social environment. On the other hand, Heinemann emphasizes the significance of opportunities. Their availability and attractiveness decide if, when and how individuals are able and will engage in activities such as sport consumption. With similar insights and perspectives, Bourdieu (1984) described sport involvement as the result of the relation between the supply of sporting opportunities and the dispositions of individuals. Sporting dispositions are a dimension of the habitus which connects the individual with society: these unconscious schemes of perception, thought and action are acquired through exposure to social and cultural conditions (see, e.g., Wacquant 2006). Applying this concept to sport consumption can help to understand how individuals become interested in, get attached to and identify with football teams and players. However, as indicated above, individuals without an interest in sport are also affected by the omnipresence of sport-related discourses and images.

The approaches to gender and socialization presented above provide insights into how fandom develops as a gendered practice and how individuals appropriate football as a leisure habit, a rewarding form of sport consumption and a means of identity construction. We used these concepts as an inspiration for drawing up the research questions and the interview guidelines, as well as for developing the framework for the interpretation of the findings.

## Methods and Interviewees

The material used in this article consists of statements that were made in semi-structured interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) with 21 dedicated female football fans. These interviews were conducted in the context of a larger research project aiming to gain an in-depth understanding

of the opinions, attitudes and practices of female football supporters (Mintert and Pfister 2014, 2015). Aged between 23 and 54 years, the interviewees were fans of four football clubs and their teams in the area of Greater Copenhagen in Denmark. They attended all home games of 'their' team and followed the matches from the fan stands: seven women were fans of FC Copenhagen, four of Brøndby IF, four of FC Nordsjælland and six of Lyngby BK. The teams of these clubs play in the highest or in the second highest league in Denmark. A total of 12 of the 21 interviewees were current and 2 of them previous members of the official fan clubs attached to their clubs; some had even served on the governing boards of the fan clubs.

The interviewees were recruited via emails provided by their fan club's website or were approached in the stadium. Given the aim of this study, we addressed women who identified themselves as dedicated fans.<sup>2</sup> The interview guidelines were derived from the theoretical approaches to socialization, gender and football fandom described above and focused in particular on the significant others and the decisive moments of their socialization into fandom, as well as on their habits and activities as fans. To gain comprehensive information, we encouraged the interviewees to talk freely about their experiences with football as well as about their general opinions and reflections on the game and its fans. We also encouraged narratives about their attachment to a specific football team and their engagement as fans.

The women could choose the time and location of the interviews, which lasted between 40 and 90 minutes and were digitally recorded. After the interview, they filled out a questionnaire about their socio-demographic backgrounds (see Table 10.1). The interviews were transcribed and thematically coded using the software program ATLAS.ti, a tool for qualitative data analysis (Bryman 2012).

As advised by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 9), among others, the interview statements were put into categories, coded according to their explicit and implicit meanings and analysed by identifying 'patterns and processes, commonalities and differences' across the statements. In our descriptions and interpretations of the interview statements we used pseudonyms to guarantee the anonymity of the interviewees.

Table 10.1 Socio-demographic data of the interviewees

Interviewee	Age	Fan since		Fan of	Member of the		Board of fan club	Occupation	Civil status
		Age (at age)	(3 yrs)		fan club	fan club			
Aurora	52	1964	(3 yrs)	Lyngby BK	Previous (Blue Vikings)	Previous	Yes	Pedagogue at a nursery	Married, two children
Berit	37	1985	(9 yrs)	Lyngby BK	Blue Vikings	Yes	Yes	Paramedic	Married
Catrine	30	1998	(15 yrs)	Lyngby BK	Blue Vikings, Female Vikings (founder)	Yes	Yes	Office assistant	Single
Doris	31	1994	(12 yrs)	Lyngby BK	Blue Vikings	Yes	Yes	Administrator (Lyngby BK)	Engaged
Ester	34	1991	(12 yrs)	Lyngby BK	Blue Vikings	Yes	Yes	Pharmacist	Married, two children
Filippa	37	1987	(11 yrs)	Lyngby BK	previous (Blue Vikings)	Former	Former	Head (of Communications)	Married, two children
Gyda	32	1998	(17 yrs)	FC Copenhagen	FC FC	Yes	Yes	Unemployed	Single, one child
Herdis	32	2005	(24 yrs)	FC Copenhagen	FC FC	No	No	Student	Single
Isabella	23	2006	(16 yrs)	FC Copenhagen	FC FC, Pink Lions	No	No	Waitress	Married
Janne	45	2005	(37 yrs)	FC Copenhagen	FC FC, Pink Lions	No	No	Nurse	Divorced, two children
Klara	37	2001	(25 yrs)	FC Copenhagen	FC FC, Pink Lions	No	No	Shop assistant	Living together, two children
Lilian	23	1994	(4 yrs)	Brøndby IF	Brøndby Support	No	No	Culinary	Living together

(continued)



Table 10.1 (continued)

Interviewee	Age	Fan since (at age)	Fan of	Member of the fan club	Board of fan club	Occupation	Civil status
Mette	26	1992 (5 yrs)	Brøndby IF	Brøndby Support	Yes	Office assistant	Living together, one child
Nora	30	1998 (15 yrs)	Brøndby IF	Brøndby Support	Yes	Marketing assistant	Single
Oda	23	2005 (15 yrs)	Brøndby IF	Brøndby Support	Yes	Management assistant	Living together
Paula	54	1994 (35 yrs)	FC Nordsjælland	Wild Tigers	Yes	Elderly care nurse	Divorced, seven children
Quiana	39	2003 (29 yrs)	FC Nordsjælland	Wild Tigers	Yes	Office clerk	Married, two children
Ronja	53	2011 (51 yrs)	FC Nordsjælland	Wild Tigers	Yes	Shop assistant	Living together, three children
Sille	48	2003 (38 yrs)	FC Nordsjælland	Wild Tigers	Yes	Banker	Single
Torun	29	1994 (10 yrs)	FC Copenhagen	FCK FC	No	Media boss	Single
Uma	28	1994 (9 yrs)	FC Copenhagen	FCK FC	No	Job seeking	Married, one child

## Findings

Drawing on the theoretical considerations provided above, we will present and discuss the statements and narratives of the interviewees with a focus on the following topics: their first contact with football; the significant others who acted as 'gate keepers' and 'door openers'; the media as sources of information; and the significant moments and events which triggered their in-depth interest and enthusiasm in the game, particularly in specific players, teams and clubs.

### The Interviewees: Fans of Men's Football

All 21 interviewees were dedicated fans of men's football, invested a large amount of time and money in fan activities and considered themselves to be football experts. Only two interviewees showed at least a slight interest in women's football matches. The others justified their preference for men's football with the qualities of the male players on the one hand and the deficiencies of female footballers on the other. Ester describes her impression of women's football: 'I've seen some matches and found it very funny but so slow. Technically they are as good as men but they do not run as fast and do not shoot as hard as male players. It's not something I want to see much.' Herdis confessed that she "channel hops" when there's women's football on TV'; and Sille even emphasized: 'Life is too short for women's football.' Berit agreed with these statements and added: 'And there are not so many delicious legs.' Although this comment may have been meant ironically, it refers to a widespread prejudice about the reasons why women watch men's football, which, however, is not shared by the interviewees. Ester, for example, stated that 'there are prejudices (...) that women only watch football to observe attractive men (...). It always bugged me to hell, because it's not me. I'm not interested in it and I never have been.'

### Becoming a Fan: Processes and Influences

In accordance with the theoretical approaches described above, we consider childhood to be an important phase in the development of habits and tastes in general—and also with regard to leisure activities such as

football. Socialization theories, including Bourdieu's approach to habitus, but also popular wisdom, refer to the family and its decisive role in the development of tastes, interests and (leisure) practices. Thus, it can be assumed that families play an important role in the development of an interest in football. However, socialization is a lifelong process which is influenced by numerous significant others and important events, as well as by media images and messages. Therefore, we claim that peers, friends and acquaintances—but also the mass media—are important 'socialization agents' who instigated fandom and influenced our interviewees during their lives as football fans.

### **Family Members and Their Roles in Football Socialization**

I had just been born when my father looked at me and said: You have to live and fight for Brøndby. This should be a matter of pride for you.

This fan chant of Brøndby IF<sup>3</sup> provides important messages in a nutshell: fandom is a heritage and a mission which is passed on from father to son. The chant confirms the importance of socialization but also raises the question of whether and how this message can be transferred to female fans. Using our interview material, we will explore whether this chant also refers to daughters and whether the concept of 'social heritage' is also relevant for the female football fans we interviewed.

Like the son in the fan chant, some interviewees started their 'career' as football fans in childhood. A total of 7 of the 21 participants in the interview study became fans when they were between 2 and 12 years old. Their interest in football was sparked by their parents and other family members who took on the role as 'socialization agents.' The fan career of 23-year-old Lilian illustrates how fans may become interested in football at an early age. Lilian grew up in Brøndby, a suburb of Copenhagen and home of the famous football club, Brøndby IF, the arch-rival of FC Copenhagen. By the age of four, her father, a very dedicated Brøndby fan, took Lilian to the fan zone, where she followed her very first game in her father's arms. For many years Lilian spent her weekends at the Brøndby stadium together with her father and his friends, who later founded the

official fan club of Brøndby IF. Thus, for a period of several years Lilian was a witness of her father's support for his favourite club. He was not the only football fan in the family; her mother and her sister also supported Brøndby IF. They worked as caterers in the VIP lounge of the club, and it goes without saying that Lilian was a frequent visitor to the lounge. It has to be added, though, that she first started to 'attend away games more often and properly sang along' when becoming a teenager.

Several of the interviewees lived in Lyngby, a small town north of Copenhagen. One of them is Aurora, who was likewise infected by 'football fever' as a child. Both her father and her uncle played football for Lyngby BK, and she remembers that she watched games 'when I was quite small; there are pictures where I'm in the stadium sitting in a stroller. I was two years old, maybe even younger.' Aurora attended football games ever since, first with her parents, then with her male and female friends. Her first contact with football was a coincidence, but her relationship to the game became a 'love affair': 'It's mostly because we lived in Lyngby, and then suddenly but tacitly I fell in love with it. There is only one club for me.' Oda, too, came into contact with football via her father, who was an ardent fan of Lyngby BK. He took Oda to the stadium for the very first time when she was ten. Numerous years and Sundays later, Oda was still not a dedicated fan. However, she suddenly became hooked during a game between Lyngby BK and Brøndby IF, at which the Brøndby fans cheered their team with choreographies. Oda was fascinated and decided to watch a game in Brøndby in the near future. Shortly afterwards, her older sister obtained free tickets for a Brøndby match, and Oda's unforgettable experience during this game initiated a long career as a passionate Brøndby fan. 31-year-old Doris grew up with two brothers, and she started to join them watching football matches, first in her small home town and later in a larger city, Lyngby. There she found the games much more exciting than in her town and thus became increasingly attached to Lyngby football club. When the team was promoted to the next higher league and played against the famous teams of Brøndby IF and FC Copenhagen, Doris felt rewarded for her loyalty to this club.

Several other women we interviewed had also become fans as children, for example, Filipa, Mette, Catrine and Torun (for information

about them see Table 10.1). They, too, were socialized into fandom by significant others, in particular by their fathers, grandfathers and brothers. But there are also exceptions: Ester's first emotional experience of football occurred at the age of 12, watching a game together with a female fan, her mother. Ester's mother was a member of the municipal council of the city and thus entitled to two season tickets. Throughout her teenage years, Ester did not miss a single home game of her club. When her mother left the council, Esther bought the tickets herself and continued to support her club 'because it [Lyngby BK] is the best club in the world. Because that is where I grew up and that's where I have always been.'

Spouses may also act as 'significant others' who pass on their love of football to their partners. Ronja was already a fan of a football club but changed her loyalty when she married a football coach and moved to another city, where she became a loyal supporter of 'her' new club. The former fan club president of Lyngby, Berit, convinced 'Kim [her husband] to become a Lyngby fan. But they [members of his family] think it's fine. When I was the president of the fan club in Lyngby, they supported my work very much, in particular during the crisis when Lyngby went bankrupt.' However, attempts to convert partners to Lyngby fans did not always succeed: Klara's and Lilian's spouses supported the 'wrong' and rivalling clubs, Brøndby IF and FC Copenhagen. This led to teasing and conflict but also created mutual understanding for their time-consuming hobbies.

Several of the interviewees were—at least for a period of time—the only football fans in their families. Herdis and Klara, for example, had parents who were not interested at all in the game, but they did not pass on this indifference to their daughters. As a child, Herdis desperately wanted to watch football matches but had nobody to take her to the stadium. Only years later, when her younger brother became interested in football and took her to the stadium, could she make her dream come true and follow matches from the fan zone. Klara accompanied one of her girlfriends to football games and later converted her father and her sister, who became football supporters although they had previously shown no interest in the game.

According to the statements of several interviewees, friends played an important role in their interest in football. Berit, for example, was given an opportunity to attend a game when she was 12 years old. Her parents had obtained free tickets to a football match of Lyngby BK, which they passed on to their daughter. Berit joined her girlfriends and their fathers and watched the game from the fan stands. She was not only impressed by the match but also by the 'community of fans': 'It appeared to me that everyone in the Lyngby stadium knew each other—it's a small place—and then I got attached. That is how I became a fan of Lyngby.' Other interviewees, too, for example, Gyda, Berit and Nora, found 'significant others' who facilitated their 'fan careers.' They watched their first game as children together with (girl) friends who were interested in football. For Berit football became a lifelong passion that consumed a lot of time and (financial) resources as she was not only a season ticket holder but also a 'travelling fan' who accompanied her team regularly to away games.

The stories of female fans not only indicate that significant persons had an influence on their fandom, but also reveal the age of their initiation: many of them had already become interested in football in their childhood, for example, by watching exciting matches on TV, which will be discussed later in the article. Teenage years are also frequently mentioned as the age of their initiation. In this phase the influence of peer groups increased in parallel with a decrease in their dependence on parents.

## Significant Actions and Events

### Playing Football

From a socialization perspective we could assume that playing football encourages football consumption. Former and current football players have a vested interest in the game and may see themselves not only as members of a team but also as part of the larger football community. In addition, it can be presumed that their football expertise increases their insight into and appreciation of the game and the skills of the players. They may even use excellent footballers as role models and sources of inspiration for their game.

A total of 8 of the 21 interviewees had played football in their childhood or youth, some of them even in the club they still supported. Lilian, for example, joined the youth team of Brøndby IF when she was 6 and played football there until she was 15. Filipa was around 12 years old when she began to play football. In the next six years she played in different clubs, among others in Lyngby BK. By the age of 18 she stopped her football career, a decision which she explained as follows: 'At the end, I think I was not that good, and I got more mature. I didn't think that playing football and being a woman could fit together in a way. I also wanted to try out different stuff. [...] In the last couples of years I was a coach for girls, too, and I found that much more interesting than playing myself.' For her, it was also 'a little bit more fun to hang out with boys and go to parties, etc. And it was not that exciting to get up and play matches every week and train 3–4 times a week. Then it was more fun to go to matches and watch football.' Another interviewee who had played football as a small girl was Uma: she remembered playing the game 'just in shorts and no shirt because all the boys did so. I was maybe seven or something at that time.' When she was nine years old, her sister's new boyfriend always asked her, 'would you like to play football with me? This was an attempt to win over my sister.' Uma soon joined a girls' football team and gained lots of female—but also male—friends there; football was their main topic of conversation. Her statement shows that, besides 'following' and/or playing football, talking about matches and players can be an important means of fan socialization.

At the time of the interviews, Doris was the only interviewee who still played football occasionally, 'only for fun.' Until the age of 13 she played football in her local club but was forced to give up due to a knee injury. However, Doris's leisure and work still focused on football: she worked in administration for Lyngby BK, spent her weekends together with her football friends, travelled to away games and socialized with fans, players and club members. Playing football (in her leisure) and working for a football club allowed her to focus her everyday life on her passion: football. Although playing football seems to encourage interest in the game, the narratives of the interviewees show that being a fan is not necessarily dependent on previous or current experience as a football player.

## **Personal Experience: Watching Football on TV and at the Stadium**

As has been described above, our interviewees' socialization into fandom occurred mainly via 'significant others.' However, the mass media, and in particular television, are also important factors in socialization processes as fans, as most—if not all—football supporters consume football via the mass media, especially on television—either alone or with others, for instance, with their families. The television set in the living room provides the opportunity to watch broadcasts of common interest, such as football matches, with family members. Thus, girls may get involved in football by sharing not only the room but also the televised matches with the football fans in their families. In this way they may adopt football expertise and become 'infected' by their relatives' enthusiasm for the game. Several of our interviewees talked about their first encounters with football on television. Torun, for example, described watching football on TV as an issue of 'enjoying the community with my friends and with my father, who passed on his passion for football to me.' Berit also recalled her first football experience on television: 'It was when Denmark won against the Soviet Union in 1985. I was nine years old, and this is the first time I can remember seeing a football game. I watched it with my grandfather, who was a fan.' Berit was still an avid consumer of TV football, as she emphasized several times in the interview.

Although reading about football in newspapers and watching matches on TV still play an important role in the lives of numerous fans, including those of the interviewees, their consumption habits and in particular their favourite media have changed. Some of the Lyngby fans told us that they had been very interested in football magazines and newspapers, which satisfied their demand for information and at the same time increased their interest and commitment. However, they stopped reading these papers because they did not provide (enough) information about 'their' clubs and, in addition, because it was becoming increasingly easier to get information via the internet.

For many interviewees attending a football match at the stadium was a very significant event and often the most important step forward in their 'fan socialization,' a process in which family members played a vital



role. The majority of the 21 interviewees accompanied male relatives to football matches: Filippa went with her father, Aurora with her grandfather and Herdis and Doris with their younger brothers. Although male family members seem to have been important ‘socialization agents,’ in a few cases females acted as ‘gate keepers,’ for example, in the cases of Janne, who is a very dedicated fan of FC Copenhagen, and Ester, who had been a Lyngby supporter since the age of 12. Ester accompanied her mother to all home games during her teenage years. In contrast to many other interviewees, it was her mother ‘who was interested in football’ whereas her father ‘thinks it [football] is stupid.’ Mette visited the stadium for the very first time with both her father and her mother, who were—which is not always the case—both football fans.

The football crowds in the stadium experience a special atmosphere created by the fans’ attire, the songs, the tifos and, in general, by the enthusiasm of the masses. Everybody is addressed, becomes part of the crowd and is affected by the excitement of the game, the skills of the players as well as the suspense and the uncertainty of the outcome. Fans identify with ‘their’ players and teams and may ‘bask in reflected glory,’ that is experience the success of a player or team as their own accomplishment.

For many interviewees the first visit to the stadium was a crucial milestone and initiated a metamorphosis: they changed from being interested observers to fully integrated members of a fanatic audience. Filippa described her ‘addiction’ to football as follows: ‘I think it is wonderful supporting something, a hobby that you like and are happy about. But sometimes you also get sad because you lose the game. I think this emotional thing about a football game is what I get out of it, and also the aspect of a live show, of course.’ Following a football team provides fans with positive experiences, which again increases their interest in, and attachment to, the club. Berit, a Lyngby fan, recalled her first visit to a football stadium as follows: ‘The people were standing, shouting and singing; it was a happy atmosphere (...) in that way it was like one big party.’ She also remembered how the players joined in the celebrations with the fans after the game. She found this ‘awesome’: ‘The atmosphere in the stadium and everyone supported the same team, I think that’s great.’ In many cases, the first visit to a football match at the stadium seems to not only spark an interest in football but also create lifelong

memories, as the following quotes illustrate: 'When I first entered the stadium, a whole new world opened up to me. [...] I could only think "wow"; this is for sure not the last time I'm going to be here' (Gyda); 'I was captured by the atmosphere' (Herdis); 'I think such an experience is something that sits right in your body' (Herdis); 'When my mother took me with her, I was just doomed to be an FC Copenhagen fan' (Isabella). Gyda's and Herdis's experiences inside the stadium and the special atmosphere they felt there was why they became FC Copenhagen fans. However, they were sure that they would have become fans of another team, had their first game been played at another stadium: 'If they had dragged me along to a Brøndby game—and this is nothing that I should speak out loud [laughs]—I would perhaps now be a Brøndby fan' (Gyda).

## Female Fans in a Community of Male Supporters

The findings reveal that 'football socialization' is a lifelong process: one does not only *become*, but—normally—also *stays* a member of the fan community. The adoration of and identification with the players on the one hand and the relations among the supporters on the other are ties which hold the community of fans together. Asked about their relations with other supporters, the interviewees highlight the wonderful atmosphere among the fans and emphasize the importance of the fan group in their becoming and staying a fan. According to Oda, 'you really get to know people fast [in the stadium]. They are also the reason why you come again and again.'

However, women may also experience a certain measure of prejudice and sexism, in particular if they choose to join men's fan groups; for example, ultras or hooligans, in the fan zones (see also Radman and Hedenborg 2017). Some of our interviewees regarded sexism as an inherent part of the fan culture and claimed that women had to learn to live with a measure of sexism if they wanted to be accepted as fans. Klara, for example, explained: 'You shouldn't be upset if they scream pussy and cunt. ... If you can't stand that, you can't be in there.' Others also claimed that sexism was an attitude or strategy directed towards other women and

not towards them. Gyda stated in her interview that only a certain ‘type of woman,’ that is a woman who was tough and self-confident, could be real a fan. According to their statements, the interviewees regarded membership in the fan community as an important asset of being a football fan and as proof of their loyalty to their team.

## Passing Football Enthusiasm on to Others

The interviewees in this study were involved in socialization processes in two different ways: as targets and initiators. Their ‘football (her) stories’ revealed on the one hand that they were introduced to football by dedicated fans who passed their love of football on to others: they served as role models and socialization agents and inspired people in their environment to follow a football team and become supporters or even fans. On the other hand, a number of the interviewees seemed to feel a need to share their passion with their family, and most of them were successful in converting family members, among others, to football fandom: Gyda managed to persuade her father and sister, Herdis her mother and younger siblings, and Isabella and Janne their (grand) fathers to follow FC Copenhagen; Nora and Oda inspired their younger sisters to become fans of Brøndby IF. Paula, Quiana and Ronja usually attended all the home games of FC Nordsjælland with their own families, and Klara hoped that her little daughter would eventually become an FC Copenhagen fan. All interviewees spent a considerable amount of time watching football matches on TV with their relatives; football was for them a bonding experience over generations.

## Discussion

The narratives of female football fans can be condensed to a few central statements: Consistent with the theoretical concepts of socialization presented above, in particular with Heinemann’s (2007) notion of the importance of the social environment and Bourdieu’s (1984, 1988) concepts of habitus and taste, significant others (mostly family members but

also relatives and friends) passed on their interest in or even love of football to the interviewees. However, the decisive moment at which the spark 'jumped over' was often during a match at the stadium when the interviewees recalled the atmosphere as 'breathtaking,' 'unforgettable' and 'extremely rewarding.' Therefore, attending a game at the stadium often meant for them getting 'hooked' on football.

In line with the literature on the development of interest and engagement in sport or fandom (e.g., Côté 1999; Wann et al. 2001, p. 23–69; Fredricks and Eccles 2005; Wann et al. 2001; Stuij 2013), the interviewees' descriptions of their experiences suggest the re-construction of their fan careers as socialization processes. Many of them had already come into contact with football in the phase of their 'primary socialization,' inheriting their 'taste' for football in general, along with their adherence to a specific club, from their parents or their siblings (Wann et al. 2001, p. 29). However, even those interviewees who did not grow up in a family of fans remembered watching football on television as children. Talking about football and watching matches on TV engendered an interest in the sport and thus set the course—in the form of continuous socialization—for the development of their more intensive interest and, later, their passionate attachment to a football team, which influenced not only their leisure habits but also the ways in which they organized their lives. Many of the interviewees' statements reveal that loving this game and being a fan has become a dimension of their identity, an embodied disposition embedded in their 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1984; see also, e.g., Otte 2010; Stuij 2013).

Socialization theories emphasize the importance of peers and friends who are significant others and role models, in particular during childhood and youth (e.g., Wann et al. 2001, p. 27; Hurrelmann 2006). The interviewees' narratives confirm this assumption: they show how the interviewees passed on their interest in football to significant others and became football socialization agents of friends and, in particular, of members of their families. The large influence of the family on the initiation of children into fandom is supported by other studies (see, e.g., Ben-Porat 2009; Dunn 2014; Mewett and Toffoletti 2011; Selmer 2004). Dixon (2013, p. 48) suggests that 'fandom might be constructed by significant others and then unconsciously adopted as though it is an

inherent component of one's being.' A sociological inquiry across 18 countries in Europe (SIRC 2008, p. 35) likewise found that dedicated supporters most likely came from families in which football was a very important issue. According to this study, 'the father is the influence *sine qua non* in passing on traditions which span generations.' However, there are variations of 'football socialization' in different European countries: around half of the respondents in a study by Carrie Dunn (2014) in the UK named the father as the 'source' and primary 'socialization agent' of their interest and involvement in football. Research examining the socialization agents of Belgian and Portuguese football fans found that 31 per cent of fans in Belgium and even 54 per cent of fans in Portugal were initiated into fandom by their fathers (Carvalho 2013). In line with the findings presented above, an Australian study exploring the psychosocial influences on children's identification with sports teams emphasized the significance of fathers and other male role models (Spaaij and Anderson 2010).

Unfortunately, none of these studies differentiate between male and female fans. By contrast, Pope and Kirk (2014) found that three quarters of their interviewees, female fans of men's football teams, referred to males as the key figures in them becoming fans. Our interviewees, too, confirmed that football was often passed on from fathers (in some cases also mothers) to daughters, but they also reported the important role of siblings and peers in socialization processes, in particular during adolescence. Quite a few of the women we interviewed were introduced to football fandom by their brothers while others accompanied friends to the stadium. These results are confirmed by Canadian studies (presented and discussed in Wann et al. 2001, p. 24) which revealed 'that male and female participants reported different patterns of sport fan socialization. Males were most often influenced by peers [...]. As for female participants, family had the greatest influence followed closely by peer groups.' This information contradicts one of the most widespread clichés that female fans have to put up with, that is that they only go to the stadium in order to accompany their (male) partners (see, e.g., Sülzle 2011). It must be emphasized that only one participant in our study started to attend football matches because of her (ex-) husband (but she continued to be a fan after the divorce).

The most significant event in the fan socialization of our interviewees was their first visit to the stadium, an event which sparked off excitement and awakened the desire to repeat the experience. Although most women were children or adolescents at the time of their initiation into football, the magic of the stadium still worked at an older age. This interpretation is in line with other studies, such as that of Dunn (2014, p. 25), who notes: 'it was the experience of being at that first game that "hooked" her [the interviewed female fan].' Likewise, the German anthropologist Sülzle (2011) identified a variety of socialization agents, but also emphasized the experience of watching football 'live' as a decisive factor in young people's initiation into fandom. According to Sülzle (2011, p. 272), it is often the first experience of a game in the stadium which 'ignites a spark' and encourages a long-lasting fan career. However, it is not only the game which provides excitement and joy; it is also the community of fans, in particular the group of 'supporters' in the fan zones, who create the special atmosphere which transforms a stadium from a bare sports facility into a cauldron of emotions. Fans enjoy not only the games but also the displays of other fans on the way to and inside the stadium. They appreciate the communities of football supporters, which may provide social bonds and social capital (Bourdieu 1984). Our interviewees, too, stressed that the community of fans was a major incentive in attending a football match every weekend. Their statements about the role of fan groups are confirmed, for instance, by the results of a study carried out by SIRC (2008, p. 29) which found that 'keeping in touch with friends was one of their [the fans'] main reasons for returning to the stands.' The findings of a survey on 'Fan Motives' conducted by Wann et al. (2001, p. 32) also emphasize the importance of the 'group affiliation motive,' the authors concluding that 'sport fandom ... can help fulfil the human need for social interaction by providing a sense of belonging.'

The narratives of the participants in our study not only confirm these findings and interpretations but also indicate that socialization into fandom is an ongoing and lifelong process which does not end after the first and often decisive experience of football: one does not only become a fan but also—as a rule—continues to be a member of a 'fan community.'

However, to be accepted by this community, one has to show dedication to the team and the 'right' conduct, especially in the stadium.

Consistent with several studies conducted in other European countries and in North America (see, e.g., Wann et al. 2001; Cere 2003, 2012; Jones 2008; Kreisky and Spitaler 2006; Llopis-Goig 2007; Meuser 2008; Sülzle 2007, 2011), our interviewees describe their initiation into fandom as a process of socialization which included becoming familiar with the way to behave in the stadium, that is how to cheer and sing along, how to dress and what to consume—for example, (lots of) beer. Other studies, such as by Dunn (2014) or by Radman and Hedenborg (2017), report on sexism in some fan cultures, for example, making derogatory comments about women in chat-up lines or fan chants and the problems caused by female fans when taking the fan buses to away games. According to Dunn, women have to present themselves ‘as close to “male” as possible—dressing appropriately, not too much make-up, and certainly not complaining about sexism.’ Dunn also describes the unwillingness of all groups involved in football, including female fans, to address sexism.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas men may use the fan stands as an arena for their ‘serious games of competition’ (Bourdieu 1997), women have to accept or at least ignore male dominance in the fan zones. However, as described in the interviews, the atmosphere in the stadium and the excitement of watching a match live seem to create in-depth and long-lasting emotions, identification with their team and a feeling of belonging to a football club and a community of fans (see, e.g., Mintert and Pfister 2014).

An understanding of football fandom as the result of socialization processes not only adds to our knowledge of why and how certain individuals become fans but also helps to explain why certain groups, for example, young men, continue to be overrepresented among fans. Having experienced the dominance of male fans, the gender order among football supporters and the sexist atmosphere in the fan stands (see also Lenneis and Pfister 2015; Radman and Hedenborg 2017), it can be assumed that some women may be deterred by this sort of the fan culture at first, while others may learn to cope with it and even enjoy it later (e.g., Radman and Hedenborg 2017). Our interviewees learned to adapt to the rules of the fan communities. One of the potential reasons for their successful fan socialization was the existence of significant others who accompanied them on their way to the stadium—both literally and figuratively—and supported their integration into the community of fans, which became a stronghold of their engagement in football fandom (see, e.g., Dunn 2014

and Lenneis and Pfister 2015). Despite potential problems with the misogynist attitudes of some fan groups, the interviewees learned to adapt to the 'code of conduct' prevailing in the fan stands.

## Conclusion

This article provides insights into the processes and events which transform girls and women into dedicated football supporters, as well as the significant others who accompany them throughout this process. Drawing on the statements of our interviewees, we were able to reconstruct specific patterns in the 'fan socialization' of girls and women. In football, as in many other areas, family members play a decisive role in arousing interest and supporting consumption, for example, by watching games on television or taking children to matches. However, not all of our interviewees inherited a 'taste' for football from their parents and became supporters in their childhood: a number of the fans we interviewed were 'infected' with football fever as adolescents or adults and influenced by male or female socialization agents, among them siblings or peers. For many interviewees the crucial event was their first game at the stadium, which turned their football interest into enthusiasm. It was not only the suspense of the match and their identification with the players that triggered their passion, but above all the atmosphere in the fan stands created by the community of fans.

The interviewees' narratives emphasize that becoming a fan is a process of socialization and that the 'appropriate' fan behaviour has to be learned. Female fans also have to learn how to deal with the sexism of some fan cultures. It can be assumed that 'macho' fan culture has various implications for the socialization of girls and women into fans: They have to either tolerate sexism or watch the game from the family seating areas or at home on television. It may also be assumed that the misogynist atmosphere in some stadiums deters girls and women from becoming fans. However, the women in this study managed to integrate fandom into their lives and become members of a fan community—which is one of the most important incentives for watching football at the stadium. The bonding with other fans, integration into a fan group and the adoption of the rules and norms of the stadium are processes which confirm that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a fan.'



## Notes

1. FREE Project (2014): 'Survey on Football in European Public Opinion.' Information about the project: <http://www.free-project.eu/Pages/Welcome.aspx>
2. The interviews were conducted in either Danish or English and took place between December 2012 and August 2013. Quotations from the Danish interviews were translated by the authors.
3. See [http://brondbysange.dk/vis\\_sang.php?id=317](http://brondbysange.dk/vis_sang.php?id=317)
4. <http://www.kickitout.org/an-unwillingness-to-address-sexism-says-carrie-dunn/>

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# 11

## Women's Football Supporter Culture in Sweden

Aage Radmann and Susanna Hedenborg

### Introduction

The aim of this study is to analyse women's football fandom in Sweden in relation to women's experiences, practices and constructions of gender. Football supporter cultures have been studied and analysed since the 1960s from historical, economic, sociological, cultural and psychological perspectives. Important questions within the field have included who are football supporters, who and what influences them, how can they be categorized, are they violent or well behaved and whether, and if so how, football fans construct supporter identities (Armstrong 1998; Giulianotti 1999; Spaaij 2008; Hjelseth 2012; Radmann 2012). A majority of the studies on football fans have concentrated on British supporter cultures and most of them have focused on men. To be a football supporter has, and in some way still is, closely connected to men and

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masculinity (Radmann 2015). From this perspective a female football fan is contradictory in terms. Research on women's fandom is rare (Pfister et al. 2013; Pope 2014). A consequence is that the concepts and frameworks that have hitherto been used to understand supporter culture are presumably not useful to provide an insight into the role of football in the lives of women (cf. Spaaij 2006; Radmann 2014). In this chapter, theories of gender are used to understand how female football fans experience their fandom. The gender analysis takes into account that which is regarded as masculine or feminine is fluid and can vary from one context to the next (Connell 1995; Lorber 2005).

## The Swedish Football Context

Five teams, playing in the three biggest cities of the country, dominate the Swedish football landscape. These teams are Allmänna idrottsklubben, AIK, Hammarby Idrottsförening, HIF, and Idrottsföreningen Djurgården, DIF, in Stockholm, Idrottsföreningen Kamraterna Göteborg, IFK Göteborg, in Gothenburg and Malmö Fotbollsförening, Malmö FF, in Malmö. The average audience for a game in the Swedish men's top-league was 9967 in 2015. The average audience attendance for home-matches of the biggest teams was much higher—Hammarby, 25,507; AIK, 20,983; Malmö FF, 17,332; Djurgården's IF, 15,484 and IFK Gothenburg, 14,350. The majority of the attendants are men and information on the number of women attending football games is deficient and difficult to validate for Sweden as well as other countries. According to various research studies, women amount to between 10 and 27 per cent of the attendants in Europe (see Table 11.1).

**Table 11.1** Percentage of female attendants in European countries

Country	Female attendants (%)
Sweden	10–15
Norway	24–30
Denmark	10–12
Germany	27
UK	15–19

Source: Peitersen (2009), Pope (2010), Englund (2011)

There are some differences between countries regarding female attendants. In Denmark and Sweden, the share of female attendants is lower, 10–15 per cent, than in other countries. Norway and Germany seem to have a larger share of women attending football matches. Why this is the case is difficult to know and needs to be further investigated in other studies.

## Previous Research

It has already been pointed out that few studies investigate women's experiences of watching football, female supporters' relationship to the game and other fans and how women's interest in football is defined and socially constructed in a supporter context (Hynes 2012). Nonetheless, some studies on women's fandom have been published (Coddington 1997; Jones 2008; Hynes 2012; Pfister et al. 2013; Pope 2014). Journalist Anne Coddington is a pioneer in writing about women as fans. In her book *One of the Lads* (1997) she presents women's experiences with the football supporter culture. The majority of the women in the book are portrayed as wives, daughters and girlfriends of male fans. Some women, however, are described as 'real' football supporters. Coddington's work is descriptive and no particular conclusions are drawn regarding women's fandom providing insights on whether female fans have met specific (negative) experiences, challenges or barriers connected to the fact that they were women. In more recent studies, female football supporters' attempts to acquire fan status have been explored in more elaborate ways. These studies indicate that in particular the dedicated male fans develop and enact a specific form of 'football masculinity' which excludes women from football fandom (Pfister et al. 2013, p. 858). Pfister et al. describe how (some) male fans deny women a (cultural) ticket to fandom and depict them as football groupies. These fans are convinced that women are ignorant of, or do not even know, the rules of the game and that they are not interested in the match, but only in the players, for example, it is assumed that they come to the stadium to find boyfriends—maybe also among the male fans (Pfister et al. 2013, p. 858). In addition, there are studies demonstrating that emphasized or traditional femininity is incompatible with the social construction of an authentic fan. Stacey Pope points to the 'double bind situation' of female fans. She argues that women have



to demonstrate competence and femininity when they participate in male-defined activities (Pope 2014, p. 264). Sociologist Katherine Jones (2008) and media researcher Deidre Hynes (2012) argue in a similar way showing that female fans develop strategies to be seen as ‘real women’ and—at the same time—as ‘real fans’. In addition, women, in particular women who join men in the fan zones, are confronted with sexism and homophobia; Jones (2008) underlines that female supporters develop particular strategies to deal with sexism. According to the statements of female fans in Jones’ interviews, women turn against and argue with men who express sexist and homophobic views. Other women try to downplay sexism or ignore it. Furthermore, some female fans reinforce gender stereotypes, and act according to these. Hynes (2012) emphasizes that there are gender-specific codes that female supporters employ to strengthen their role as competent supporters of their teams. They demonstrate knowledge about the game, dress in clothes that are not sexually provocative and they make clear that they do not attempt to find a partner in the fan stands. Hynes stresses that there is even a contradiction between femininity and football fandom and that (traditional) femininity is rejected, as it is a threat to women’s credibility as football supporters (Hynes 2012).

## Methods

This chapter presents an analysis of life stories of female fans. For this study 20 female supporters between 18 and 65 years of age have been interviewed. The interviewees were selected and addressed using snowball sampling. All women that were asked to be part of the study cherished the opportunity to talk about their experiences. Just like in Hynes’ study, all the interviewees appreciated the fact that this study, for once, focused on female supporters, that is, a topic which they were specifically interested in (cf. Hynes 2012).

Before the interviews the women were informed about the research project and the issues we wanted to ask them about. In addition, the informants were told that they could add questions or raise topics. The latter was important in order to ensure that Radmann’s previous

experiences from interviewing male supporters would not influence the topics raised with the female supporters. Ten of the informants were interviewed face-to-face. Not all women we wanted to interview had time for a face-to-face interview and therefore we decided to conduct online interviews with ten informants using e-mail.

The face-to-face interviews were based on the following main themes: the interviewees background, their socialization to football culture, general experiences in and of football fandom, a typical day at the stadium, good and bad experiences at the arenas, traditional and new medias' role for the supporter culture, violence and, in particular, gender issues and women's roles. Questions related to the main themes were sent to the other informants by e-mail and they returned their responses in this manner. In an exchange of e-mails the researchers received clarifications and had the opportunity to ask more questions. There are some advantages that make online interviews a good alternative to face-to-face ones. First, online interviews make it possible to reach a greater number of respondents, as the number is not restricted by time and space. Second, the researcher has the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and have a continuous discussion over internet (cf. Berg 2015).

As well as collecting experiences and perceptions of women's fandom through interviews, two books in which male and female fans are portrayed are used as source material (Lindberg et al. 2012; Kuick and Qvarfordt 2013). The books are focused mainly on men's football culture, male players and fans and their perceptions and experiences of football. There are, however, eight portrayals of female supporters in the books.

## Women's Football Fandom in a Swedish Context

The analyses of the life stories provide insights into experiences and practices in the community of supporters as well as gender constructions. Three themes have emerged as important for the understanding of women's football fandom: restrictions, negotiating respect and freedom.

## Restrictions

According to the female supporters interviewed for this study, the number of female fans has increased over time. The interviewees also claim that female supporters take part in various forms of support for their team: via participating in media-discussions, by supporting their teams in the stadiums and in the stands, among other things through participating in the choreography in the stands and as board members for their football clubs or official supporter clubs. According to Maria:

There are many good match bloggers and analysts who are women. I feel that MFF support [the name of a supporter group in Malmö] in recent years have welcomed women on the board of their organization. Women are listened to... (Maria)

In this quote Maria refers to an important breakthrough for female fans—their opportunity to become members of a supporter board (a committee representing football fans). Both Malmö FF and Hammarby IF have female representatives on their supporter group boards (MFF Support 2014; Bajen Fans 2014). In Hammarby IF support, three of ten board members and in the MFF Support, two of eight board members are women. In January 2016, the Swedish Football Supporter Union even elected their first female president, Sofia Bohlin. Bohlin represents more than 35,000 football supporters in Sweden. Men are still in the majority, but women have begun to play an important role in the supporter groups and boards. A similar trend can be seen in Denmark (Pfister et al. 2013, p 856).

Even though women have entered the boards of supporter organizations, many women feel excluded and restricted in supporter practices. The interviews with and the life stories of the female fans show that male supporters try to create ‘women-free-zones’ within the supporter culture. Hooligan firms exclude women totally (Radmann 2014). Ways of restricting female supporters will be presented and discussed more thoroughly below, but to some, women’s participation in certain activities is restricted and women are sometimes not allowed to be members of specific fan groups such as Ultras. In addition, age and behaviour in relation to how a woman is dressed constrains their possibility to be a part of the supporter culture.

One informant said that she tried for a very long time to become a member of a supporter group, but that the male fans ignored her. In addition, women who are allowed to participate in the men's supporter groups are often not welcomed in the same way and to the same degree as men. Some of the interviewees expressed the feeling that they are less valued than male supporters. They emphasize that women have to 'perform better' in order to be taken seriously, and women are constantly tested and required to prove their love for football. These experiences are found in other studies too (Coddington 1997; Hynes 2012; Pfister et al. 2013; Lennis and Pfister 2015). According to the Swedish interviewees in this study, a female supporter needs to know more about football than a male fan (in order to be accepted), and even if women are more devoted to their team than men they are still regarded as inferior. They are seen as interchangeable, that is, they represent any woman, and are not seen as 'real' supporters. Linda states:

In discussions we are told that we are not equal. We must prove [ourselves] more because we are girls. We are more interchangeable as girls—I've been in a supporter bus a hundred times and it is not enough. Even if there is a new guy who has never been [to a game] he goes before me in the bus. (Linda)

The buses to away games are not only means of transport, but also means to demonstrate an insider status, an acknowledgment of being a 'real fan'. Some buses can be used by women, others transport only male fans. Ultra-groups normally deny women access to their buses.

All Ultras say no to girls and in these buses there is a rule that girls are not allowed to get a ride. We are told that girls destroy dynamics. (Karin)

And then you have all the Ultra-groups who do not allow girls to take part in their activities. (Linda)

The interviews show that male supporters want to exclude women not only from the buses, but also from the community of football fans. Karin revealed that she is not allowed to enter the buses with the hard-core fans, because these men do not accept her as a 'real supporter'.

According to Victoria, another female supporter, women are not welcome at away games because they should not distract the male fans from the support of their team.

I've asked my male friends a hundred times if I can come along to an away game... [Their answer was always] no, because then the focus of the men will be on their girlfriends, not on Hammarby (the football club). (Victoria)

Karin is critical and emphasizes that it should not be considered a problem of women, but a problem of the male supporters if they are distracted from the purpose of the away game. Reading between the lines of her statements, it is obvious that Karin is convinced that the female supporters, herself included, would be concentrating on football (and not on other fans).

The exclusion of female supporters from the buses to away games has been challenged by some of the interviewees. One woman described how she knocked down a male supporter to get into the bus when he tried to stop her. After she knocked him down, she was allowed to enter the bus.

In recent years the number of female supporters travelling to away matches has increased and there are now buses that transport male and female fans. In addition, there are buses for women only. The first women-only supporter bus trip to an away game in Swedish football history took place on 29 July 2012 when female fans from Hammarby went to a game in Halmstad (Bajenbrudar 2014). As well as being excluded from supporter buses, women face other constraints, too. Julia states that:

There are many groups that don't allow females to be members. In Malmö FF you find Fotbollens Vänner [The friends of football] who are a group of elderly people who invite football veterans but they don't allow women. (Julia)

Another female supporter, Elin, gave an example of a newly formed group that did not intend to accept women:

A few years ago my husband got a call from somebody asking him to be a part of a new group 'Bajen international' [supporting Hammarby IF]

a group that was planning to travel to watch football abroad once a year. We both ... were very happy about this idea and responded that we would love to be a part of this new group. After a few minutes the answer came: "It's supposed to be a-man-only-group." And these were ordinary men between 35 and 40 years. (Elin)

Elin, who is a long-time supporter, was very surprised that women were excluded from these trips and that they were excluded by men who were not hooligans or members of a specific sub-group in the supporter 'landscape' (just 'ordinary men'). Yet, when she challenged this exclusion, the male supporters changed their minds and welcomed her.

Female fans are not only restricted in relation to attendance and membership in different groups; symbolic violence as a way of keeping them out has been used too. As Hynes has shown, it is quite common that men use vocal abuse and sexist language towards other fans, both men and women. When Hynes analysed the web-discussions at football sites she discovered that aggression, abuse and insults were common features of men's interaction in digital media (Hynes 2012, p. 200). In our interviews women reported verbal abuse executed by male against female fans. Linda described how:

I have been called "a fan whore" many times and the youngest males are the worst ones when it comes to vocal abuse and bad language. (Linda)

In Linda's quote it is clear that male fans try to control women's participation through stigmatizing them and calling them derogatory names.

## Negotiating Respect

Jones and Hynes indicate that female supporters develop strategies to deal with the culture of emphasized masculinity in football arenas (Jones 2008; Hynes 2012). Hynes demonstrates that women have to dress in a certain way and are required to prove their knowledge of football in order to be accepted and respected as 'real fans'. Jones emphasizes that some women argue with men about their sexist and homophobic views and try to downplay sexism. However, women also reinforce gender stereotypes.

Pfister et al. (2013) found that 'real' female fans wore similar clothing to male fans and shouted, swore and joined in chants. They attempted to 'blend in' the fraternity of men. Women, as well as men, set up the rules for what is accepted as appropriate behaviour of women within the supporter culture. Pope (2014) found that some female fans were frustrated by women who lacked sporting knowledge and were aggravated by female spectators who seemed to derive pleasure from looking at male bodies during football games. Our empirical findings also indicate that Swedish female supporters have strategies and behave in gendered ways in order to be accepted. These strategies seem to include attempts of 'blending in', earning respect and distinguishing themselves as real supporters who are different from other women. Julia underlines that she does not think that women express fandom in a specific way. At the same time, she says that female supporters seem to wish to blend in:

I don't think that you hear or see the girls in the stands. It seems like they want to blend in. (Julia)

Respect can also be gained from demonstrating a long commitment to a team and several of the women emphasize that their interest for football started when they were very young and that they attended games together with their fathers (cf. Pfister et al. 2017). Elin:

I have followed my father to the stands since I was small. Through that I have achieved supporter status without having to fight for it. (Elin)

Elin also identifies herself as a tomboy, a position that has given her status in the stands. The interviews with Julia and Elin suggest that women's experiences of being a female supporter differ somewhat. Even so, most female fans wrestle with what is acceptable and unacceptable for women in the supporter 'landscape'. Questions like who is a 'real supporter', who is a 'hang around', that is, women who attend football matches for reasons other than watching football, for instance, looking for a partner, were also discussed by the women.

For some, age seems to be an important factor in their identity and standing in the supporter culture. One of the female supporters claimed:

Age-wise [female supporters] range between 16 and 50 years. Very few children and adolescents are girls. There are also very few older women, in their 60s or 70s, who watch football. Whereas men seem to go to football matches all through their lives, women seem to disappear along the way. (Julia)

The conditions of female fans in Sweden seem to differ from the situation in the UK in that the Swedish female fans participate during child-bearing ages. In her study, Pope concludes that many female fans in the UK take 'fan breaks' after having children (Pope 2014). This seems not to be the case for the Swedish fans; they continue their engagement when they become mothers. One of the women in this study said that:

I have two kids, 9 and 13 years old, and I have been visiting the stadium during their childhood, which has been an important part of my life. But I would never dream of taking my kids to the stands. The stands are not a good environment for kids. (Tove)

The interviews emphasize that perceptions on age and fandom are complex. The older female supporters suggest that the younger ones are not 'real fans', whereas the young women claim that the older female fans lack authenticity. There are also demarcations within the age groups. A young fan, Julia says that:

many (women), especially from the younger generation never talk about football, they seem more interested in the football arena culture and the men there than in the game. (Julia)

Julia also implies that she thinks some younger women are not really interested in football. She connects disinterest with a certain dress code and she uses the derogative concept 'girl' to distinguish herself from this group:

I don't like girls who come dressed in skirts and high heels to watch football as it demonstrates that they are there for the wrong reasons. They give us a bad reputation. As a girl you have to prove that you are there for the football to get accepted by your male supporter friends. Even that is not enough



sometimes. There are always guys who don't think that girls belong at a football match. (Julia, younger)

Another woman makes a similar comment, and clearly separates herself from a group of women (girls) who are not seen to be taking it seriously:

The thing is that I distance myself from girls, as girls are so damn complicated / .../ They stand there at the front and check their cell phones more than the game. I just want to shoot them! Wow you are not allowed to say that ...Or those who carry handbags and wear high heels. (Kuick and Qvarfordt 2013, p. 420)

These quotes are in line with findings in others studies of women's fandom. Hynes indicated, for example, the importance of women's attire at games (Hynes 2012). According to her, wearing hyper-feminine attire stigmatizes female supporters. Pope shows that some female fans were quite hostile to women who didn't perform fandom in a way that was seen as 'real fandom' (2014). The idea that there is a strict dress code on the stands is, however, contested. Most of our informants express contradicting and complex ideas of how a person could be dressed. According to Maria:

I have not experienced that women who are scantily dressed are stigmatised in the stands. On the other hand, women who come to the games dressed up are only there for the men. They cannot be seen as part of the supporter community. They don't sing and they do other things than supporting the team ... during the game. However, it is interesting to see that the guys who invite them or want them there don't seem to care what they look like nor do they try to influence them to look more correct. I don't think people care so much about dress codes. (Maria)

Strategies to gain respect involve, however, more than compliance with dress codes. An effectual way of gaining respect in the fan community is described as follows:

She (a female fan) was quickly known as an angry woman who could drink whoever under the table, who was tough enough to party 24/7, and who never compromised./.../ The fact that she was a self-employed accountant,

DJ, arranged clubs at Debaser in Malmö and a mother of small children, gave her an air of coolness and toughness that provided immediate respect. (Lindberg et al. 2012, p. 316)

In a way, this fan demonstrates many of the characteristics of a 'hard-core' male fan: strong, hard, cool, a heavy drinker and a person who never compromises. All these characteristics gave her legitimacy among the men. This is in line with previous findings that compliance with men's rules and norms was (and still is) a way to gain respect among fans. In addition, drinking alcohol increased the acceptance of female supporters (Pfister et al. 2013). One of the interviewed supporters, Karin, even talks about using violence in order to gain respect:

I hit a guy and broke his nose. I got tired of him harassing me because I am a girl, so one day I had enough and knocked him down. After that there was no more harassment from his side. (Karin)

Just like some of the female supporters in Jones' study, Karin represents female supporters who strike back (cf. Jones 2008).

## Freedom

Even though the female fans constantly seem to negotiate their role in the supporter landscape—in different sub groups, the buses, in the stadiums and stands—they also express that the football supporter culture is not only filled with restrictions against women and struggles for respect, but that fandom provides an arena in which norms can be transgressed and freedom can be reached. One of the female supporters discusses what the football arena means to her:

(The football arena)...is a place, perhaps the only place in the world ... where I do not need to think about the fact that I'm a woman. I do not have to fit into some sort of female stereotype, instead I can be myself. Hammarby (the football club) does not require me to follow some female norms or ideals. I can control space; I can roar, bellow and drink beer just like any man. (Kuick and Qvarfordt 2013, p. 418)

When women were accepted to accompany the male fans to away games, they learnt that the buses are important spaces in which they could talk about everything, sing about anything and trust that ‘what happened in the buses stayed in the buses’. They made clear that the belonging to a supporter culture gives a person—man or woman—an important group identity. One woman claims that the football stands are zones free from demands from school, parents and a sexualised party life (Kuick and Qvarfordt 2013, pp. 414–421). Another female supporter, who describes herself as having been a tomboy growing up, says that in the stands she:

could be just as tomboyish as I was. I could behave in a, for me, natural way. To shout, drink a lot of beer and say swearwords that gave me status in the group [whose members agreed upon that]. “She is for real, even though she is a girl.” For me, the stands was an arena in which I could be “one of the lads”, which was natural for me. (Elin)

Elin’s own reflection that ‘she is for real’ and that she gained respect from (male) supporters is connected to that she behaved like a regular male fan. When female supporters succeed in gaining acceptance, they express a sense of freedom as they have a possibility to challenge what is seen as accepted femininity and transgress gender norms. One of the fans says:

I was drawn to the supporter group for the same reason I decided to do gender studies [at university]. It has always seemed more fun to be a boy. Compare with sweaters. For girls life offers two different sweaters. Boys have many more sweaters to choose from. To be a girl is so boring and to be a football supporter is as far away from being a (traditional) woman as you can be. You have the possibility to be loud and vulgar; it is an environment that invites you to do that. (Lindberg et al. 2012, p. 424)

This fan emphasizes that a woman does not have the same possibilities to choose identity as men have. Her life choices—doing gender studies at university and being a football fan—have made it possible for her to broaden the repertoire of practices. According to some supporters, the

opportunity to experience this freedom seems somewhat restricted and related to age. Maria, a younger supporter, claims that female supporters behave differently according to age:

I behave like everybody else in the stand, which is unrestrained, singing, shouting and swearing. I believe that most women my age do the same and so do some of the younger ones—although this is not as common [among younger women]. (Maria)

Once again, age is mentioned as a factor that influences what women can and cannot do in the stands.

The transgression of gender norms described by the female supporters is complex and requires further study. Despite the restrictions and struggles female fans had to deal with, it seems that some women experience a feeling of freedom from gender restrictions. Simultaneously, this freedom can be questioned. It is not possible to behave in any way—for example, the women cannot be hyper-feminine and adopt norms of masculinity. Seen in this way, freedom is rather a form of 'blending in' (cf. Pfister et al. 2013).

## Summary and Conclusion

The female supporters in this study construct and negotiate their supporter identity in relation to space, age and gender constructions. First, women's participation in supporter culture is restricted; they are not welcomed in all groups and restraints are especially evident when it comes to bus trips to away games. In addition, there is symbolic violence such as sexist language in the stands, which can also be seen as restricting women. Still, the women included in this study challenge these limitations and negotiate participation in the football supporter landscape. They make sure they can go to away games, question why certain groups do not allow women and even fight sexism with physical violence.

Second, it is clear that the Swedish women develop strategies, like the ones found in other studies (Jones 2008; Hynes 2012; Pfister et al. 2013; Pope 2013) to gain respect in the supporter culture. They prove belonging

to the supporter group by demonstrating their football knowledge and adhering to a certain dress code. These strategies can be regarded as both challenging gender and legitimizing gender stereotypes. Gender is challenged as the female football supporters prove that, despite the fact that they are women and not expected to be knowledgeable about football, they do have knowledge and they are seriously interested in the game. Simultaneously, they reinforce gender stereotypes by claiming that women with feminine attire are not interested in the game.

Third, another conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that these female football supporters underline that they can engage in behaviours that challenge traditional notions of femininity. This is an important part of their attraction to football. They allow themselves to act in ways which are not expected of women; instead they behave in a way that is usually connected to men and masculinity. In doing so, they seem to experience a sense of freedom in the football stands and an ability to challenge gender norms and even transgress the gender order.

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# 12

## Challenging or Accommodating the Football System? A Case Study of Female Football Supporter Communities in Spain

Ramón Llopis-Goig and Helena Flores

### Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the study of a specific type of football community that emerged during the 1980s in Spain: women's *peñas*. Peña is an expression in Spanish that refers to groups and associations of football fans, that is, followers of the same team who meet to watch or attend their team's matches. They usually meet in bars that serve as their headquarters although some have their own meeting space in their club's stadium. The *peñas*' degree of formalization can vary: some are established as associations and have statutes or charter, while others are largely informal groups. However, one trait is common to almost all of them: their strong masculine culture. This is not surprising taking into account that football has traditionally been a site for the construction of masculinity that has kept women away, both as players and as spectators (Dunning 1994; Gosling 2007).

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For this reason, the study of women who join women-only peñas has a broad sociological potential as it allows an insight into, and an understanding of, the dynamics that have operated and continue to operate in Spanish football in relation to gender issues. However, as other studies have pointed out, 'what is conspicuous is that women are increasingly taking part in sports that for many years were absolutely taboo for them and which in the last two or three decades have been undergoing a sex change' (Pfister 2010, p. 237).

An initial examination of women's peñas was carried out in a previous study (Llopis-Goig 2007) focusing on the position of women in Spanish football. However, this approach to women's peñas was fairly tangential: it only examined the most visible characteristics of the phenomenon, and it used only the limited empirical material available at the time. Now, almost a decade later, a new study was carried out with an exclusive focus on women's peñas. The purpose of this study was to update the findings and focus specifically on the experiences of females in women-only peñas, thus gaining greater and more in-depth insights into this under-researched topic.

Various questions needed to be answered: How do women's peñas work? What are the reasons for their creation? What are their members' experiences of football as a space defined by specific gender relations? And to what degree do female fans try to challenge the configuration of the 'sex/gender system' that characterizes football in Spanish society? We understand the sex/gender system to be 'a series of agreements through which the society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity'. We agree with Gayle Rubin when she says that 'sex as we know it—gender identity, desire and sexual fantasy, concepts of childhood—is in itself a social product' (Rubin 1989, p. 183).

We will address these issues based on a social constructivist approach to gender (Butler 2007, p. 54; Lorber 1991, 2005) and understand gender as a sociocultural category related to the construction of differentiated and hierarchical relationships of power based on sexual binarism and the permanent reconstruction of the binary system. The sociocultural construction of gender differences through socialization processes and the regulation of gender behaviours, encompass many aspects that can lead to an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of women's peñas.

This chapter adopts a partial and 'situated' feminist perspective (Haraway 1995, p. 188), which means that women's peñas are viewed as a changing and transitioning phenomenon. In this sense, the purpose of this study is to analyse this phenomenon and reflect on it, making visible those structural aspects that might go unnoticed or that might not be contemplated from the dominant analytical perspectives in Spanish football.

This study is organized in the following way. First, background information for the research is provided. The next section is dedicated to the methodological characteristics of the study. Then the results are presented in three consecutive sections: main characteristics of women's peñas, reasons for establishing women's peñas and discriminations and naturalizations. The chapter ends with final conclusions.

## Background Information

Although there are still considerable differences between the sport participation of men and women in Spanish society (Puig 2001; Mosquera and Puig 2009; García-Ferrando and Llopis-Goig 2011, p. 52), various authors have referred to the increasing numbers of female athletes in the past few decades, and some have even described a 'women's sport revolution' (García-Bonafé 2001, p. 63). The increasing numbers of women engaging in physical activities and sports is surprising because, from their origins, sports were established in Spain and other European countries as a space for masculine initiation and the reproduction of masculinity (Sage 1990; Messner and Sabo 1990; Messner 1992; Badinter 1993). However, unlike in other sports, in the case of football the differences in engagement and participation between men and women have not declined, and a 'redefinition of masculinity' has not occurred (Mosquera and Puig 2009, p. 108). In Spain only 3 per cent of all Spanish players are girls and women, which is similar to percentages found in other European countries such as Greece (1 per cent), Italy (2 per cent), Slovenia (3 per cent), France (5 per cent) and England (5 per cent), whereas in the Netherlands (8 per cent), Germany (15 per cent), Denmark (21 per cent) and Norway (22 per cent), they are slightly higher (UEFA 2011).

The indicators of interest in football and audiences at football matches in Spain also show lower rates among women. For example, interest in football reaches 71.1 per cent among men, but only 38.3 per cent in the case of women. On the other hand, men's audience of televised football matches almost triples the percentage recorded for women: 58.7 per cent compared to 23.1 per cent (Llopis-Goig 2015, p. 13). Moreover, qualitative studies reveal that Spanish football is a social space where hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1997) continues to be created (Campo 2003; Llopis-Goig 2008; Campo and Jordi 2013).

According to these and other studies, football continues to be an essentially masculine social domain where men have created 'barricades to protect their territory' from the intrusion of women (Whelehan 1994, p. 127), and women continue to be marginalized in football fan communities (Gosling 2007, p. 258). Thus, although consumption of televised matches and attendance at stadiums may be increasing among women, men continue to exclude them as 'real fans' (Coddington 1997; Crolley 1999; Woodhouse and Williams 1999; Crawford 2004; Gosling 2007; Pope 2014).

The appearance of women's peñas during the 1980s in Spain has been considered a reaction to men's domination of football (Llopis-Goig 2007). Women who join a women's peña find a space of liberation from masculine domination that allows them to affirm their interest in this sport and create their own space around it. They do not find these possibilities in the other peñas, which are defined by a strong masculine culture. Female fans often find that men question their behaviours when supporting and following football clubs, accusing them of lacking authenticity as fans (Coddington 1997; Woodhouse and Williams 1999; Pope 2011). Men's resistance to accepting women in their groups and their refusal to recognize women's capacity to enjoy and understand a football match condemns women to a subordinate position in football. This type of resistance has been considered a structural limitation in their trajectory as fans (Crawford 2004, p. 47). In this regard, the creation of a women's group can be understood as an attempt to fight against the exclusion that women experience in the stadiums, as well as an effort to oppose the strong masculine culture that characterizes the world of football (Llopis-Goig 2007).

Spain is not the only country where this kind of fan group has emerged. In recent decades almost 40 women's fan groups have been established in Italy, and there is even a national association of female football supporters (Cere 2003). Similarly, in Germany women's groups have emerged to counteract the deprecation of male fans with provocative names, which has been interpreted as a strategy to ridicule the misogyny of male fans and neutralize sexism (Sülzle 2011). In Denmark one women's football group has been studied by Pfister et al. (2013). According to these authors, the aim of this women's group is to support their club and live their fandom in their own way. They conclude that this sort of group offers women 'enjoyment of football on their own terms and not as add-ons of male partners or their family' (Pfister et al. 2013, p. 858).

## Methods

During the months of October and November 2013 we conducted semi-structured interviews with women who were members of football peñas. For the purposes of this chapter we focus on seven interviews conducted with females who belonged to women-only peñas. The majority of the interviews were individual, one-on-one interviews. One interview, however, was conducted with two women who belonged to the same women's peña. The interviews were conducted by the second author of this chapter and averaged around 45 minutes in length.

The interviews were semi-structured to ensure that certain topics would be covered and it allowed interviewees to have greater freedom in their responses. Thus, issues raised during interviews were deepened (Bryman 2004). We used the same interview protocol for all interviews. This protocol included seven subsections (creation process, previous experiences, main aims, structure and organization, contributions and benefits, relations with other groups and opinions about football and gender), which served as a base for coding our data. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed by the second author. Subsequently, the data was coded, and we searched for emergent categories and themes based on grounded theory research methods (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

To identify these women's peñas, an exhaustive search was undertaken based on information in the Spanish press during the past ten years. After the first search we confirmed the existence of 12 formally established peñas that continued to be active. We attempted to make contact with members of these 12 peñas, and, finally, seven peñas agreed to be involved in the research. These seven peñas were located in the cities of Oviedo, Pamplona, Sevilla (two peñas), Huelva, Elche and Córdoba, and the football clubs they supported were, respectively, Real Oviedo, C. A. Osasuna, Real Betis Balompíe, Sevilla C. F., Recreativo de Huelva, Elche C. F. and Córdoba C. F. In this chapter we use number for respondents to protect participant anonymity.

## Main Characteristics of Women's Peñas

This first results section focuses on the analysis of the main characteristics and guidelines of the women's peñas in Spain. Based on the statements of their members and perceptions about themselves, the aim is to place them in the broader social space of Spanish football.

Women may adopt an interest in football through their partners or develop an appreciation for the sport progressively due to the encouragement of other people (Pfister et al. 2013). However, various studies reveal that the father has the most weight in introducing women to football (Pope 2010). In a study conducted in Ireland, Katie Liston noted that male role models, and especially fathers, played a key role in enabling females to participate in male-dominated sports such as football in Ireland (Liston 2006). Ben-Porat (2009) also highlighted the importance of males in recruiting Israeli females as football fans. Most of the women interviewed in the present study confirmed the results of these previous studies:

There has always been a lot of football in my house. As a young man, my father was obsessed with football (...). In this respect, my father influenced me a lot. (Interviewee 06)

It was my father. I remember how on Sunday afternoons with one hand he held a radio to listen to "Carrusel Deportivo" [a famous radio programme

in Spain] and with the other, he held my hand. The way he squeezed my hand gave me an idea of how the match was going. This was how he introduced me to the Betis team. [Spanish football club] (Interviewee 07)

There are a series of ‘unwritten requirements’ if one wants to belong to a *peña*, and they are closely related to the images the *peñas* want to present of themselves. First, one has to be a woman, and, second, one has to be a fan of the team the *peña* follows. In addition, there are other requisites, such as the rejection of violence and an interest in football that goes beyond the desire to meet attractive footballers or other fans. With regard to the latter point, the women are afraid of not being regarded by male fans as ‘real’ supporters because they are allegedly present—for example, at the stadiums—due to a sexual interest in the players (Crolley 1999; Crolley and Long 2001; Pope 2011). The following quotes show that some of the interviewees have seen this happen; some girls were rejected access to the *peña* because they were suspected of only having a sexual interest in the players:

We have to be very careful with certain women. The typical girls who come to catch a footballer, and we don’t want this type of women; we don’t want people to say: “look, what the girls in the *peña* want is to go out with footballers”. (Interviewee 05)

In recent years this has occurred less, but at the beginning it did happen, joking with us by saying we went to the football matches to see the men. And it isn’t true. (Interviewee 03)

When the women meet to make decisions about the management of the *peña*, the atmosphere is cordial and club-like. Decision-making takes place democratically and tasks of responsibility—such as the organization of trips or fundraising activities—turn out to be a mere formality. This ‘informal government’ functions because of the affective relationships established among the women and the small size of the groups, which are generally composed of 15–20 women.

Although the number of female football fans has grown in recent years in Spain (Llopis-Goig 2010, 2011), many of them prefer to attend matches at the stadiums with their partners, husbands or other family

members, thus reducing the number of candidates for this type of *peña*. Both the size of these groups and the atmosphere facilitate their organization and functioning, that is, the distribution of tasks and the resolution of conflicts. The typical tasks of a female *peña* are quite similar to those of other fan groups: the organization of trips to follow their team, fundraising activities such as lottery ticket sales, among other activities. The majority of these activities take place in a specific space—in a bar or in the club's stadium—that is crucial for the *peña* as this possession of their own space is a pre-condition for the activities of women's fan groups.

As housework and caregiving continue to be the obligation of many Spanish women, they often lack time for hobbies, social relations and other activities. This has been pointed out in various studies undertaken in the past few years showing that the division of tasks between men and women continues to have the consequence of women having less access to leisure activities (Durán 2002, p. 55; Fuente-Sánchez 2007, p. 99). Therefore, women who maintain these gender roles face various obstacles when attempting to play an active role as football fans. One of the interviewees mentioned these difficulties and emphasized that her husband does not participate in family and domestic duties:

The men can have a meeting until late at night; they can meet on Sunday; they can meet at any time (...) men and women don't have the same obligations at home, you know? Your husband might say, "I have to go out", and you stay home because the kids are sick, or you make dinner. (Interviewee 04)

Women's *peñas* usually have the support, approval and backing of other *peñas*, as well as of the clubs and their managers. This relationship with the main players in the men's football system supports the development of women's fan groups and legitimizes their existence. However, female members of the *peñas* often develop a defensive attitude. Some feel that their groups are questioned as an initiative and that they have to justify why they are made up only of women and why they try to place themselves in a social space that was not initially designed for them. Perhaps for this reason the majority of the interviewees made an effort to show the similarities between women's fan groups and the other *peñas*:

I don't see any differences as a member of a women's *peña*. It's usually people from outside who do, but for us it's a *peña*, and the only aim is to cheer on the team and try to have fun, and as we have some interests and goals in common, we have a good time and laugh. We feel good together and that's that. (Interviewee 02)

No one questions, "Why men?" because they get together in the afternoon to play cards (...) Well, we are a group of women who, instead of playing cards, what we do is go watch football once in a while. (Interviewee 01)

As in other previous studies, these results show that female fans want to be identified primarily as football fans rather than as women. Thus, they expressed 'a strong preference not to be singled out by sex', as they felt that this was 'irrelevant to their involvement as a fan' (Woodhouse 1991, p. 30). This kind of reaction has also been identified in studies by Coddington (1997), Crolley (1999), Crolley and Long (2001) and Woodhouse and Williams (1999), and they clearly show that women experience tension between fan identities and gender (Jones 2008, p. 531).

The members of female *peñas* find themselves trapped in an ambivalent situation. On the one hand, they do not want to give the impression that they depend on their male partners to enjoy football, and on the other hand, they want to dismiss the impression that they are only interested in football because they want to come into contact with the players. These two assumptions/prejudices are closely related to the stereotypes earlier associated with women who went to stadiums to watch football matches. Either they were considered companions of male partners (e.g., boyfriends or husbands) at the stadium, or they were given different labels signifying de-legitimization, stigmatization and control over women's sexuality loaded with machismo and lesbophobia:

Before, if you went to a football match, they said you were a "machorro" [Spanish chauvinist expression]. Now you don't hear these types of expressions. But the truth is that I have heard them at times. (Interviewee 06)

Some interviewees still seemed to fear the stigmatization derived from labels such as the one mentioned in the last quote. Perhaps for this reason some of them felt obliged to clarify their position of not challenging the



patriarchal system by reproducing and owning some of the common statements stemming from this system. Thus, the women clearly avoided any comments or references indicating that they did not conform to the traditional gender norms and ideals. They attempted to create an image of women's peñas that complies with a system that continues to be clearly patriarchal and heterosexist.

The majority of the interviewees had a positive attitude towards women's football and thought there was strong discrimination against female players, as well as against women in the governing bodies of professional football. They generally concur with what the majority of the literature has found: there is a clear lack of women in leadership positions in football (Pfister 2010; Hovden 2013; Adriaanse 2013; Pope 2014). In Spain Díez-Mintegui pointed out that as long as 'female participation in all the social aspects is not normalized or made visible, it will be difficult for young women to interiorize models of practice, both professional and leisure, in which sport is a source of emotion and enjoyment, as they will not experience it as something that forms part of their overall life project' (Díez-Mintegui 2003, p. 176).

However, data from our interviewees also showed the persistence of various gender stereotypes that continue to exist without being questioned or denaturalized. Stacey Pope has discussed in this book the hostile attitudes that some female fans of men's football expressed towards women's football in the UK (see Pope 2017). Some of the opinions given about football played by women continue to reinforce prejudices about women's physical possibilities and their technical qualities:

I don't think it's a sport for women. I don't think it's very aesthetic for a woman, but well (...) It doesn't bother me if they play, but I don't like it; I just don't like it. (Interviewee 01)

In summary, the spaces provided by the women's peñas provide personal and social benefits for the members of these groups, in spite of the work and effort involved in establishing and maintaining these 'women's spaces'. In these spaces these female fans feel comfortable and can develop their love of football without being defined as 'feminists', a term and a concept that may have negative connotations for some of the mainstream population. This was pointed out by one of the interviewees:

I do not defend the prevalence of one sex over the other, but rather equality. And I think that almost all the activities, jobs or sports can be done equally by a man or a woman. I am in favour of equality, not feminism. I do not make feminist demands. (Interviewee 02)

## Reasons for Establishing Women's Peñas

There were two reasons for the creation of a women's peña: the need for space and the need for company to watch and enjoy football.

Trying to find an appropriate space for an activity traditionally identified as masculine is often the most important reason for founding a women's peña. Thus, female football fans adopt an active role in their attempt to obtain a public space in order to watch football in an independent and autonomous way. By using public spaces, these fans distinguish themselves from women who follow their teams in a private setting.

They use a social space and adopt an active, public role that has traditionally been assigned to men. In addition, the possibility of acquiring and accumulating certain types of power is provided exclusively by the public fan space, which up to present has mostly been constructed by men and for men (Pfister et al. 2013). Football is a social space in which Spanish society combines large amounts of economic and political power, putting up numerous barriers and obstacles for women who want to have real and/or symbolic access to football consumption.

However, through their peñas, the women achieve access to a public space linked to men, something that single fans would not be able to achieve. Thus, they dissolve the public/private dichotomy, which grants them the possibility of becoming protagonists in a space where their presence was, and still is, not self-evident.

The anthropologist Teresa del Valle defined these positions as 'the relationships of prominence and centrality' (Valle 1991, cited in Díez-Mintegui 2003). The testimonies of some of the interviewees support this interpretation when they refer to the public recognition that the creation of and membership in the peña has provided them. They emphasize that being a member of a peña has made them unique and visible:

It makes us happy to see that there is a peña, that I'm one of the members, that we are becoming well known (...) So these things do make you happy because you say "what we did or thought, is getting recognition". (Interviewee 05)

Spanish football clubs were characterized by the associative model until this decade, when the majority of them became public limited sports companies (Llopis-Goig 2014). As football clubs were—until recently—associations of members, they had a strong relationship with the fans, and even now they maintain communication with the peñas, giving them special treatment regarding access to the stadium and the club's resources. As the peñas have the capacity to mobilize fans, the clubs initiate and maintain close communication with them and with the female fans. As members of female-only peñas, they not only use a space of consumption (as fans), but they also enter a space of participation (as members of peñas) that connects them with power, transforms them into active fans and gives them an important role in football clubs. There was also a suggestion that their status as *female-only* peñas gave them privileged access to members of the club and invitations to special events.

In addition, thanks to being women, the mayor called us because she knows our peña (...); the same day that the club was promoted to first division, the mayor called us and told us she was going to invite us to the Town Hall to welcome the team. We were the only peña that got to be there. (Interviewee 05)

I would never have imagined having access to the President of Sevilla FC (...); that is, we wouldn't have been able to talk to him if we had been an ordinary fan group. (Interviewee 03)

The second motive for creating a women's peña or becoming a member of one has to do with the search for companions with whom to watch football matches. Since there may be no other female football fans in their immediate surroundings (family and friends), some women may look for women with whom they can follow their teams. One interviewee expressed this as follows:

Because we didn't have anyone to go to the matches with, both of us had stopped attending games. Well, we didn't have friends, girls, or people to go with (...) there were women among the fans, but all of them or almost all were watching games in mixed peñas or with their partners. Girls alone like us, there were very few (...) so we launched the idea of a women's peña (...) we put it in the social networks, and right away a local station called us (...) so it had repercussions in the media and girls contacted us, well through Facebook, who wanted to join. (Interviewee 05)

Some interviewees expressed the need to build a group in which women were not given the secondary role as mere companions of their partners. They emphasized that they wanted to enjoy the match without their credibility as fans being questioned. In addition, they emphasized that their interest in football was shared by many other women and that they gained several benefits from participating in the peñas: among others, public recognition or inclusion in social networks, which helped them to gain security and have fun in the male-dominated public space of the football stadium:

We talk about our things, football, the players, we tell jokes, we sing, I don't know how to describe it; it's a meeting of girlfriends. (Interviewee 02)

That's important to me, the good times I have with this group of people and friends and I get that from being part of this group. I get friendship. (Interviewee 02)

In summary, the women's link to these peñas provides them with networks of support and sociability, bonds of friendship and integration in a community. Fandom provides, moreover, a door to the public space that helps them avoid the isolation of a nuclear family for some women. Thus, the female fans generate empowerment strategies that allow them to gradually combat the discrimination experienced in football and in society. The peñas are, therefore, an example of the importance of the sense of community, which is necessary to avoid or overcome isolation.

## Discrimination and Naturalizations

There are contexts which are characterized by ‘a merging of exclusion factors that are strengthened when experienced in certain bodies, spaces and representations’ (Berná 2012, p. 218). Football is one of these contexts, and various exclusion factors converge in the case of women in football. These exclusion factors place them far away from a central position in the hegemonic model of Spanish football.

Indeed, the most recent studies reveal that women continue to hold an irrelevant position in Spanish football, both as fans and as players (Llopis-Goig 2007). Furthermore, the presence of women in management and technical posts is practically non-existent (Pfister 2013). This situation does not go unnoticed by the members of women’s peñas, and in the interviews they mention situations and examples of inequality, especially regarding roles not directly related to fandom:

Football still belongs to men because you only have to look at the statistics. How many male presidents are there? And how many female presidents, female coaches or female masseuses are there? And who are the members of the boards of directors of the clubs? (...) I think where most progress has been made is in women’s attendance at the stadium. (Interviewee 04)

In the 124 years of the club, which we’re just coming up to at Recreativo [the Spanish football club R. C. Recreativo de Huelva], we’ve only had one woman president, who lasted only a few months. And when the club became a company (...) well, I got up at the first board of directors meeting and I said so to the managing director (...) It’s really terrible, isn’t it? (Interviewee 04)

However, the notion that discrimination exists is often rejected by these women.

It’s a masculine sport, but not chauvinist. Because at the stadium there are women, I’ve always seen women. (Interviewee 02)

I still miss more presence of women in football, above all as managers. And I think it will arrive sooner or later (...) But no, I don’t see any type of difference between the genders, or different treatment, no, not at all. (Interviewee 03)

These statements show that women sometimes downplay their *gender* identities to reinforce their *fan* identities. This is even clearer in the next quote, in which a woman downplays abuse by suggesting that these kinds of behaviour ‘were individual acts rather than evidence of oppressive social structures’ (Jones 2008, p. 532):

Occasionally, someone has insulted us, but no; I wouldn’t consider that there is machismo. (Interviewee 05)

Thus, there is an unfolding of one of the characteristics that Foucault attributed to the strategies of power, whose success is precisely ‘directly proportional to the degree of concealment of its workings’ (Foucault 1987, p. 105). Based on this perspective, it can be observed that some subtle mechanisms of power continue to operate in football, favouring men, but due to their subtlety it is not possible to observe the discrimination and imbalance they establish in the relationships between people. As mentioned above, even the members of the women’s *peñas* make comments using chauvinist stereotypes. Thus, there is a naturalization process of discrimination that is not referred to as such, allowing it to go unnoticed.

However, this is not the only naturalization process. There is also a tendency to present the establishment of a *peña* as an initiative with no political significance. The interviewees tend to ‘naturalize’ membership in a *peña* in order to avoid challenges to the sex/gender system that organizes the Spanish football space.

But the way of functioning or the way we talk or can have fun together is exactly the same as it would be in a mixed *peña*. We do attract attention because football is a masculine world (...) but we don’t talk about anything we wouldn’t talk about in a mixed *peña*. (Interviewee 02)

These types of comments show the women’s initiative in claiming their own space in a system dominated by men, but they also show their intention to present this initiative without threatening the system. Thus, women’s *peñas* cannot be regarded as initiatives that question the heterosexual and patriarchal structure of football; instead, they show the female fans’

desire to belong to this male-dominated system. Therefore, the women take on the patriarchal norms, guidelines and traditions in a process that could be characterized as 'inverse normalization', through which they attempt to have access to consumption and attendance at football matches without 'masculine tutelage'.

## Conclusions

Taking into account that the sport setting in our society 'is a strong generator and builder of gender relations and that the way this is set up will contribute to whether we live in a more or less just society' (Díez-Mintegui 2003, p. 175), the study of a social phenomenon like women's football peñas can contribute new insights into the social change and transformation processes of the sex/gender system.

The decision to create a women's peña or participate in one may lead to changes in both the women's lives and their immediate environment, although these changes are not always perceived by these women. In recent decades, membership in women's peñas has become an access route to the public space of football and a way to reach a position of recognition in this space. There is a tendency among female fans to 'normalize' the position they want to attain in the public space (and consumption) of football. They increasingly tend to look for other companions, apart from their husbands, partners, boyfriends or family members, with whom to enjoy watching the games. They become members of peñas that do not present a challenge to the set of rules that organize the sex/gender system in the football space, although they clearly violate one of its norms, that is, the re-appropriation of a public space socially reserved for men by women and their peñas.

Although the contributions of women's peñas are varied and depend on the context in which they develop, they always enrich fandom by introducing diversity, and they contribute to eroding the dominant androcentric nature of football and fandom. It would be advisable in future football and fandom research to explore the gender structures, norms and practices in an in-depth way to keep women from being excluded from the game.

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# 13

## Gender, Play and Identity: A Longitudinal Study of Structure and Agency in Female Football Fandom

Cornel Sandvoss and Emily Ball

In popular discourses as much as academic study, female football fans are commonly portrayed as exceptional or marginal. Research on fans in media and cultural studies has privileged fan cultures in television drama in particular in its study of the interplay of gender and fandom. This neglect of female football fandom as an important site of identity and gender construction appears to be rooted in conflating football's relative and absolute popularity among women. Female fans continue to be in the minority inside most football stadia—Pope (2012) estimates around 20 per cent—with a higher, yet not necessarily equal share among the game's television audiences. Yet, given football's status as the most popular of all forms of popular culture in Europe and much of the world, even an unequal share of females among football fans, leaves football with a large female following and a highly popular form of entertainment among females. At the same time, football fan cultures have a long, and in parts

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G. Pfister, S. Pope (eds.), *Female Football Players and Fans*, Football Research in an Enlarged Europe, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59025-1\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59025-1_13)

violent history of masculine hegemony. This chapter therefore aims to explore the conditions, practices and attachments of female football fans and assess the impact of their football fandom on female fans' identity and gender performances.

This chapter adapts a longitudinal approach by drawing on ethnographic, qualitative and quantitative research on football fans undertaken by the authors over the past two decades (Sandvoss 1996, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2012; Ball 2014). We revisit data across these studies with a particular focus on female fan experiences, practices and motivations. We seek to thereby offer a longitudinal perspective on the development of female football fandom in Western Europe from the mid-1990s to the present day. Most of our fieldwork has been based on club-centred football fandom in the United Kingdom and Germany with a focus on the South East of England and the Western Rhine region. While reflecting changing practices, environments and media, all semi-structured interviews over the 20-year period followed the same thematic structure. Participants were recruited through a mix of *in situ* recruitment at matches, advertising and convenience sampling based on previous or continuing participant observation. This chapter is based on a thematic re-analysis of interview transcripts with 48 female fans and field notes from participant observations between 1996 and 2015, using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software and introducing new codes reflecting the specific experiences of female football fans. Following a brief overview of the history spectatorship and gender in modern football and the particular role of different media in facilitating fandom, we examine the interplay between gender performances, fan practices and the affective attachment of fans to their fan object. The concluding discussion outlines the methodological and conceptual changes we propose on the basis of our findings.

## A History of Female Football Spectatorship

With the rise of Association football rules stipulating the separation of spectators and participants, which in turn reflected the wider societal and cultural changes arising out of the regimes of industrial work, football had moved from the inclusive all-participation activity of medieval folk

football (see Bale 1993; Sandvoss 2003; Cunningham 1980) to a highly gendered cultural space: male involvement was privileged in the emerging regulation of play tied into the rhythms of modern everyday life as the male worker regained a space and time for recreational activities lost during the height of *laissez faire* capitalism. Subsequent processes of suburbanization (see Silverstone 1994; Chambers 1997; Cross 1997) further manifested the gendered division of leisure with the focus on domestic work excluding women from centralized, non-domestic leisure spaces, such as sports stadia, giving rise to football fandom as a male-dominated cultural form, adding to the canon of the general cultural themes of ‘masculinity’ observed by Alan and John Clarke (1982, pp. 82–83): ‘toughness, physical strength and capability, achievement as the demonstration of virility, the importance of aggressive competitiveness.’

While female spectatorship has been documented throughout much of the twentieth century (Ward and Taylor 1995)—as in Pope and Williams’s (2017a) description of football’s ‘golden age’ from the late 1940s to the early 1960s—from the 1960s onwards football became increasingly marred by violence. In the recollection of long-standing fans a hyper-masculine environment drove other socio-demographic groups out of stadia. Recalling an away match in Southampton, Dan a Chelsea fan, remembers violence and large scale looting: ‘It was completely lawless. It was unbelievable. [...] There weren’t any women. There weren’t old men. There weren’t families. It was a very adolescent type, aggressive crowd.’ Curt, a Manchester United fan, who also grew up in the 60s and early 70s, recalls similar experiences: ‘you would shout abuse at passers-by, throwing cans out of the bus, probably stop at a service station and steal lunch. It was really “the-devil-may-care.”’ When asked about the presence of women, Curt responds: ‘I don’t know. There weren’t any when I went there, that’s for sure.’ Conversely, the experience of stadia as exclusionary during this period is a central theme in the recollections of female football fans. Doris, a Manchester United fan who grew up during the same period as Curt and Dan, reports her experiences of football in the 1960s:

I went to a Chelsea match actually, with my then boyfriend. And it was a bit frightening really. Just being in the crowd, there were no facilities really [...] and you’re going to get trampled over [...] I didn’t see that many woman there.

Long-standing female fans reacted to such violence by no longer attending matches. Louise explains how she was driven out of football by the increasing violence: ‘When I left school at 18 I became a season-ticket holder and went very regularly [...] until violence had come into football a little bit too much at the time. I had some bad experiences in football, and then I didn’t go for a couple of years.’ The small number of female fans who refused to be pushed out of attending live matches by a violent terrace culture, a theme we will shortly return to, replicated male performances in such spaces. As Bayer Leverkusen fan, Christine, recalls: ‘I didn’t used to see many women. And if I did, then they used to be real “tough butches.” They were drinking real hard and they were well tough and quick to get into a fight. They really had to prove themselves to be accepted.’

## Broadcasting and Female Spectorship

The deteriorating conditions of stadium spectatorship culminated in a series of catastrophic events at Heysel stadium in Brussels, Valley Parade in Bradford in 1985, and the Hillsborough disaster in 1989, killing a combined total of 191 fans. Following the Taylor Report prompted by the latest of these events, changes were initiated in regulatory regimes as well as clubs’ policies and planning. The most significant change in facilitating female spectatorship of football lay outside stadia in the emerging importance of fans in a diversifying media market. The impetus for such change has been twofold. The political economy of entertainment industries changed throughout Europe and North America in the 1980s at a time of declining attendance figures reflecting the increasing demographic siloisation of football and the emergence of an increasingly diverse leisure ecology resulting out of the accelerating globalization of entertainment industries and the deregulation of broadcasting markets in Western Europe. As football clubs increasingly embraced mediated (men’s) football as a central income stream, the need to broaden and diversify market appeal became a central concern of clubs and football associations. Efforts included the deliberate move beyond national markets, but also demographic diversification with respect to age and gender.

From the early 1990s onwards, clubs created dedicated family sections with improved facilities in their grounds to attract diverse crowds and allow for greatest profitability (Sandvoss 2003; see also King 1998).

This formal rationalization of football as a more calculable, predictable experience accessible to a wider demographic (Sandvoss 2003) was in turn facilitated by technological change: the key development for female football fandom was the emergence of multi-channel cable and satellite television with its exponential multiplication of broadcast hours and associated need for content. Live sports—and in Europe none more than football—played a significant role as a means of filling broadcasting schedules and as a linchpin of pay-tv's ambition to provide live premium content.<sup>1</sup> Television highlight shows of league football had been popular among female football fans even before the rise of pay-tv-based live broadcasting. Fans we interviewed in 1998 often identified such highlight shows as central to their football fandom. For instance, a Bayer Leverkusen fan, Gerlinde, stressed that she would happily watch football 'all day. I would watch it, whatever club is playing.' Similarly, Chelsea fan Karen always watches *Match of the Day*, 'and if I can't get to it, I record it.' As a fellow Chelsea fan, Catherine, describes, mediated football also provided the context in which stadium attendance was situated, thus forming practices and routines through which fandom forms a central thread in the fabric of everyday life: 'Once the game is over, and you are still on the way back and we're I'm talking about it in the car [...] we get the radio on, we get a round of football results. And when we get in, I'm talking to my brother about it. Then I'm also back in the evening watching *Match of the Day*. So it's over, but in a way it is not.'

Broadcast media have thus constituted a space for the consumption of football central to engagement of female fans, especially those born before the 1990s. Female fans from these generations frequently recall developing their interest in football through television. Ricky, a Fortuna Düsseldorf fan born in 1962, remembers 'watching a lot of sports, not only football but also other sports' highlighting the predominance of the magazine format in television sport until the 1990s (see Whannel 1991).<sup>2</sup> Doris also 'got in touch with football through the media. I was always sort of slightly interested, like back in the 60s when England won the World Cup. So I always had a sort of interest from there.' Television has



thus broadened the demographic profile of football fan cultures by offering a route into football fandom to both female and male fans whose interest was neither shared nor encouraged by their immediate social environment. Vicky remembers: 'I always liked football, which is strange, because my mum and dad don't like football at all. My brother doesn't like football; I'm the only person in the family. [...] I always watched *Match of the Day*. Or I taped it when I was out. I think this was how I got interested in football.' These accounts illustrate that the very structure and technological capacity of television is of no lesser significance than its textuality. Television football has driven the (trans) cultural diffusion of spectator football across lines of class, gender and age, within and across societies and geographical frontiers. For example, Alexandra, a female Chelsea fan from Australia, remembers her first contact with football: 'Back in Australia, I just remember, I think it was in the late mid-Seventies, early-Eighties. I was watching football just occasionally on ABC, which is like the BBC in Europe, with my dad who was Estonian. And I remember hearing names like Everton and Tottenham. I didn't know who was who, but I quite enjoyed watching it.'

With the evolution of pay-tv and within the increasingly ubiquitous media ecology of convergence media, many female football fans have become heavy media users, watching a number of live games on television per week. A Manchester United fan Hannah, for instance, reports to watch 'all football, any football, literally. Premier League, Non-league, women's, under 21, tournaments, world cup, whatever.' While the exclusionary and masculine hegemonic character was difficult to challenge inside football stadia, television and subsequent media have eroded the strength of the link between football and its immediate territorial, male-dominated context. This transcultural and transsocial technological ability of electronic media echoes Joshua Meyrowitz's (1985, p. 57) assessment that 'by severing the traditional link between physical location and social situation,' electronic media 'begin to blur previously distinct group identities by allowing people to "escape" informationally from place-defined groups and by permitting outsiders to "invade" many groups' territories.' Through television, female viewers initially gained the ability to bypass the male-dominated group territory of the stadium, and to build their

fandom not hampered by manifest cultures of discrimination inside football stadia. The larger the spaces of fan engagement, be it mediated or physical, the stronger the forces eroding the barriers to access, as illustrated by Gibbons's (2014) observations regarding the gender balance in different sized pubs for live football viewing. Television, through advancing the universalization of the game (Sandvoss 2003), thus changed the context in which gender and fan roles are performed.

If multi-channel television changed the accessibility of the game event for female fans, the emergence of digital media and social media in particular changed female fans' participation in fan cultures. To the generations of female football fans growing up since the 1990s, the fan object is constructed and read across different media platforms, further embedding fan practices in their everyday life. Hannah reports that she spends most of 'my Saturday watching football, reading about football, sometimes writing about football, Sundays are the same; and I read, most of the things I read are football related. And I'm on twitter a lot, an awful lot, and most of the people I follow on twitter are sports journalists or sports figures and personalities.' Similarly, Freya describes the significance of digital media in her feeling part of a fan community:

I have several apps on my phone which are related to football. [...] I log onto these at least once a day just to keep up to date with what is going on in the football world. I also subscribe to the Chelsea newsletter via email. [...] I also follow Chelsea FC and BBC sport on Twitter to get information. I have loads of friends which I've met through Chelsea on Twitter and Facebook so I can like chat with them about football online quite a bit.

As the *in situ* spaces of football spectatorship and the spaces of football-related fan discourse form part of a transmediated fan culture, the discourses, values and community memberships of wider fan culture in turn transform *in situ* environments themselves. Physical spaces, including stadia, are experienced by female fans today as more open and accessible than in previous generations. As Freya continues: 'I'm also in a few Chelsea groups where you can organize meet ups or buy tickets from other fans. [...] It is like, a cohesive environment online and offline. You can kind of feel the team spirit.'

The fan community, which Freya describes as a ‘cohesive environment’ which constitutes an imagined community constructed in reference to a shared fan object (the team or club that is supported) is also experienced as superseding gender divisions by Verity:

I’d say being a female fan I see no divide between males and females, only between the two groups of supporters. Like you even see couples with like his and hers on the back of their shirts. There’s [sic] more women at football, ‘cause like just everything’s changed, hasn’t it? [...] It’s not about men and women, it’s about togetherness.’

Verity thus seeks to firmly separate her fan and gender identities: ‘I’ve never really thought of it like that, like I’m a girl, or boy, I just love, love football. I love it!’ Similarly, a Chelsea fan Amy also born in the early 1990s, notes: ‘I don’t see myself as being any different. [...] Women are everywhere. There are a lot of women at football nowadays, than what there used to be [...] Women are more equal now.’

All such accounts of interviewees involve a claim—a claim of wanting to be and to be seen as a fan rather than a ‘female fan.’ As such, they do not suggest the disappearance of hegemonic masculinity in spectator football—indeed in Amy’s words women are ‘more equal’ rather than having achieved full equality. However, they highlight the importance of how different roles, performances and identity positions interact in their football fandom; it is this interplay we turn to now.

## Fandom, Family and Identity

Despite the barriers to football fan culture female fans have encountered, our research indicates no variation in intensity of fandom between genders. While males were—and still are—more likely to become football fans, female fans displayed the same degrees of passion and depth of affective investments as male fans. Verity, for instance, highlights such equality in commitment and passion: ‘it’s football, [vocally supporting your team] is what you do. I’m not different because I’m a girl supporting them, because that’s been my life.’ To understand the context of fans’ practices and performance, we first need to turn to a closer examination

of the intrapersonal dimensions and emotive structure of the relationship between fans and their object of fandom. For all the significance that fan studies have attributed to interpersonal and communal participation and spectatorship (e.g., Jenkins 2006)—mirrored in the emphasis of closely knitted football fan communities such as ‘ultras’ (see Spaaij and Viñas 2006; Doidge 2013)—fans’ own accounts powerfully illustrate the centrality of the bond between fan and fan object. To fans of team sports it finds a specific expression in the use of first person plural pronouns such as ‘we,’ ‘our’ and ‘us.’ The implied community is sometimes one which includes other fans, but at its heart, articulates an imagined space encompassing only the fan and their chosen team or club. In Sandvoss’s (2003) terms, football clubs as fan objects serve as an extension of the self as the affective quality of the fan object derives from an (unrecognized) image of self that is projected onto teams or players which fans support. Other respondents echoed Verity’s emphasis on the intensely personal nature of their fandom. Ally summarizes her emotional investment as follows: ‘It is self-identity, a lot of it. And it’s about laying yourself on the line. [...] It’s full absorption. Every ball that’s kicked, every gesture that is made. And a lot of the time you take it personally.’ Similarly, Hannah reflects on the importance of a club or a team to both her sense of self and how she is perceived by others: ‘I feel like football defines a lot of who I am, or at least a lot of what I do. It’s a passion, so you can’t avoid it having an impact on how others see you, especially when you are so massively passionate about it.’ The intensely personal nature of their fandom was reflected in the second major factor prompting childhood interest in football alongside initial encounters with the game through television: family encouragement.

While the role of parents, especially fathers, and siblings in encouraging football fandom and the support of a particular team has been documented before (Dixon 2015), our research indicates that this has become a more prevalent factor for respondents born during or after the above described transformations to football in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as illustrated in these recollections:

I played football in the garden and stuff, but then my dad would buy me the Chelsea kits when I was little and I would play out in them. But I don’t

really think I knew what Chelsea was, like I didn't have an understanding of them I just wore them because my dad gave me them and my brothers wore them. (Amy)

I have six brothers and four of them and my mum are Spurs fans. So I didn't have a choice but to like Spurs. (Kat)

My brother had a massive influence on me playing football and I guess I just stuck with it. I enjoyed it, so why wouldn't I? Also, my dad, being a football fan, was really up for me getting involved. I don't really know my reasons as a child, but in retrospect you could say I wanted to be good to, at first, impress my dad and brother, prove that I could do it and go to games with them and things like that. (Hannah)

In these accounts, fans construct a genealogy of support, identity and family that constructs the fan object as part of the fans' lifeworld, or even, as in Verity's case, an assumed essence of self:

I got forced [laughs]. Well it's the team I was born to support [...] it literally was, as my dad would've had it no other way. I remember being asked to play for my junior school and when I was training. I saw that some of the other kids had their team shirts on so I asked my dad if he would take me out and get me a Spurs shirt. He was well happy so we were in the shop and they didn't have my size so I pointed to a blue shirt, nice colour, I thought [laughs], because I was about 7. Anyway the look on my dad's face, I thought he was going to punch me, because it was a Chelsea shirt and that was my first experience of football rivalry. [...] And from there the passion grew for Spurs. They're my team, you know.

Beyond this interpersonal framing of the fan's attachment to their fan object, the self-reflective quality on which the affective attachment with the fan object rests is revealed in such talk about fans' favourite team and those which are constructed in opposition to their fan object. Kelly, a Fulham fan and health worker in her early twenties, who lives with her parents, for example, employs a series of distinctions to affirm her own

identity position in characterizing the club, highlighting her own close family ties, level-headedness ('not take it too seriously') as well as the authenticity of her fandom ('not a glory hunter'):

They stand for being a family club. I mean I know they don't have the best track record, but I don't support them because they're going to win the Premier League; because they're not. That's never going to happen. So it's not like I'm a glory hunter or anything [...] I feel emotionally invested into it, like I'm bothered if they make bad decisions definitely, but at the same time I think I take a general interest. I know some fans are, like, obsessed with it, but I try not to take it too seriously.

Through these distinctions, objects of fandom (and of anti-fandom) operate as spaces of—in the terms of object relations theory—'projection' and 'introjection' (see Elliott 1996, 1999). This externalization of desirable and negative aspects of the self, translated into binary perceptions of the world is equally evident in Lauren's reflections on her reasons for supporting Chelsea:

Because they're the best team. They're better than the rest. So I got into Chelsea cause of my dad and the pub and stuff; and the people I was around supported Chelsea, so I was young and influential [sic]. So I always knew Arsenal were scum [...] Chelsea was the only appealing team. They weren't horrible. They weren't dirty. They wanted to be the better team, play the good football. They were the honest team. (Lauren)

These binary oppositions frequently employed by fans of team sports (cf. Theodoropoulou 2007) create a system of signification constructed through distinctions that are commonly expressed through social and cultural categories such as class, religion or ethnicity. Gender, in contrast, does not constitute an *a priori* or even primary line of distinction in the interpretative construction of the fan object by female fans. As such, gender is secondary to the symbolic distinctions and oppositions that form the context for the semiotic appropriation of the fan object from which the affective quality of football fandom derives.

That gender is commonly de-emphasized in female fans' readings of their favourite team or club, is of particular significance because fan and gender performances are constitutive of identities not only in Goffman's (1959) sense of a self as constituted through social practices—practices which in the half century since the publication of Goffman's work have firmly shifted from spheres of work and employment to performances in spheres of leisure and consumption. Rather, in this social constructivist reading of the self as 'irretrievably "outside", constituted in social discourse,' gender, as Butler (1989, p. 528) reminds us, 'is an "act", broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority.' This 'essence fabrication' of gender thus operates through a publically regulated 'ascription of interiority' (Butler 1989, p. 528). If both identity positions in question here—being a fan and being female—are constituted through performances, it is therefore the symbolic formations in which such performances find their (affective) motivation that we need to turn to in the analysis of how performances of gender and fandom intersect in the formation and articulation of identity in female football fans.

## Fans and Fan Objects: Body, Gender and Identification

We thus move from the overt and formal barriers of hegemonic masculinity in football culture that are being gradually eroded by technological change and commercial imperatives, to a second, deeper level of patriarchy that persists beyond questions of access (see also Scraton et al. 1999). As the fledging symbiosis between broadcast media and spectator football in the age of media deregulation and subsequently the rise of digital media have fostered greater participation of female fans and seemingly normalized the position of the female fan, such participation operates within and through highly gendered symbolic forms embedded in the patriarchal normalization of both the fan and the fan object in football fandom as male (see also Caudwell 2011). Amy, having earlier stated that 'women are more equal now' reflects on the limitations on

her gender position in football, when, for instance, playing the popular video game Fédération Internationale de Football Association (*FIFA*):

Me and my friend were saying the other day, that there isn't a woman player option on *FIFA*. She plays all the time. I only play when I'm with her. But I don't give a shit that there's no woman player. I used to care. But you wouldn't sell a women's version; you wouldn't get enough girls to sell it to.

Despite being both a fan and an avid player of the game, Amy is resigned to texts and objects through which her engagement in football is performed, to be framed as male. Masculinity is established as denotative default position in many of the texts and narrative universes upon which her fandom is based. Verity, another avid gamer, describes her attempts to appropriate *FIFA* to allow the projection of self into the game text:

I love *FIFA*. I play all the time. I always pick Tottenham. I've put a player like me on there too, like saved it. You know David Luiz, out of Chelsea, the one with the big afro? Yeah, I made that me. [...]. Although you can't make a woman player on *FIFA*, which is annoying. It makes me fuming, it would be cool if they did the women's game, but I don't know if they'd sell it. You'd get a demo maybe. A little demo for the women [*laughs*].

The trajectory of changing experiences of football spectatorship over the post-war era driven by the new channels of football consumption and resulting imperatives of market expansion and diversification lowering access barriers for female fans as documented above also apply here: shortly afterwards *EA Sports* added female players and teams to the 2016 edition of its popular *FIFA* series albeit limiting these to national federation teams (in line with the only occasions women's football enjoys broadcast exposure in most European countries), and met with hostile reactions from male gamers online who voiced their displeasure at even this marginal shift away from the default position of football as a singularly male domain (Withnall 2015). In watching live football, as much as the many paratexts and wider textual fields forming around the game event itself—from gaming to fantasy sports—Kissane and Winslow's



(2016, p. 838) observation with regard to the latter realm resonates more widely with the experiences of female participants: they ‘are variously cast as outsiders and position themselves as legitimate participants, reproducing and transforming [...] the notion of sports as a male/masculine domain.’ In gaming, as Verity’s account highlights, female football fans—through semiotic appropriation partially and temporarily—escape the ‘factic materiality’ (Butler 1989, p. 521) on the virtual playing field. In traditional spectator football they do so symbolically through the body of the professional footballer. Louise, a Chelsea fan from Brighton in her forties when interviewed in 1998, describes this projective relationship between fan and fan object:

I suppose deep inside, I know women play football now, but they didn’t when I was young. I wish I could have done. I do like most sports and I like to participate as well. But I suppose really deep down I wish it was me out there [...]; but you have to live your experiences through somebody else.

The way in which, in Butler’s terms (1989, p. 521) ‘one does one’s body and, indeed, one does one’s body differently from one’s contemporaries’ is thus not only a question of embodied performance but also an intrapersonal performance through projective imagination. Here fandom operates through what Jackie Stacey (1994) has described as ‘identificatory fantasies,’ facilitating the affective bond between fan and fan object such as adoration or aspiration as expressed by Louise, pretending and resembling as in Verity’s above account, and imitating and copying. The material manifestations of such fantasies are common practices in both female and male fandom: in addition to gaming, the wearing of replica shirts, shoes and other kit and adopting players’ hairstyles or fashion lines. Notably, even those female fans interviewed who were active players of the game articulated such identificatory fantasies through male players only. These female football enthusiasts, who are players and fans of the game, had overcome the considerable pressures against their active participation at school age as documented by Pope and Kirk (2014), particularly the expectations directed at their bodies to conform to dominant constructions of femininity. In the words of one of their respondents: ‘it’s not very glamorous when you’re running round the pitch with no

make-up on covered in mud' (Pope and Kirk 2014, p. 233). And yet, in line with Harris's (2007) earlier findings of female player/fans of the same age group in the early 2000s, all interviewees who also actively played the game identified male players as fan objects to whom they had built an affective attachment based on identificatory fantasies. Consider the acts of resembling and imitating highlighted in Lauren's response when asked why England goalkeeper Joe Hart is her favourite player:

Because he's such a good keeper, and like I feel like he's a good representation of football, he never gets bad press or anything like that. And he's a keeper, like me. It's sad because he plays for such a rubbish team. But here's the thing, I'll watch [Manchester] City games just because he's playing. But obviously he represents England. It's just his style of keeping is just quite, like, good to watch. It's kind of, like, he's a showman not just a footballer, he really makes it look good.

Hannah offers a similar account of her 'favourite player ever,' Paul Scholes:

I just loved the way he played the game. He made everything look so easy. Ahh, like those pinpoint 40-yard passes were just a joy to watch and I actually take as much delight from those passes when I practice them in training as I do from scoring a goal. Like I try to replicate him more than anyone in the game. His attitude off the pitch was also something I respected. He very rarely took part in interviews and kept himself to himself, away from scandal and controversy.

The importance of the fans' values that are projected onto their favourite player in their self-reflective attachment are also highlighted in Amy's comparison between former Chelsea players Frank Lampard and John Terry:

I love Frank Lampard, just because he's a midfielder, like me; scores loads of goals, like me. Ha, I'm joking, but he's nice. I've met him. He's really nice, just a nice man. [...] I went a bit off of John Terry, because of what he did, he was a bit racist, apparently, a cheat, because he has money. It's not good.

Despite the profound changes in access to football culture and a new generation of female fans who have greater opportunity to play football alongside being fans, these affective, self-reflective attachments built on projective processes of resembling ('he's a midfielder, like me, scores loads of goals, like me') and imitating (see Hannah's quote above), remain as firmly articulated through male fan objects framed as masculine as they did two decades ago reflected in Chelsea fan Ally's words: 'Sometimes I have the dream of being taken away by aliens and becoming reconstructed as Ronaldo or Del Piero or whatever, but it is more like that it is a projection of yourself out there.'

## Performing, Gender and Hegemony

Female football fandom operates at lines of constant contestations in the interplay between gender, body and identity. As such, it bears the potential to transgress and challenge as much as it reinforces dominant gender constructions and relations. In their performances as football enthusiasts, fans and active participants, women are confronted with omnipresent expectations about their performances, habitus and motivations. As Butler notes (1989, p. 528) 'performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all.' These gender expectations are not only manifested in the interplay with male fans and non-fans, but also other women and female fans' own discourses. In line with the singular focus on male teams and players, female fans' perception of women's football hovering between the negative, to the at best casually interested, appeared largely unchanging over the two decades of our research (see also Pope 2017). Some interviewees were outright dismissive: 'I used to play myself a little bit when I was young. But I don't really like women's football [as a spectator], no absolutely not' (Gerlinde, interviewed in 1998). Freya, interviewed in 2014, echoes such sentiments:

It sounds really bad but I think women are shit at football—like in comparison to men. You watch a woman's game and they can't, like... I don't—I mean as a woman—I don't even know why I would say it, but it's just not

as good a game to watch. Like in my opinion, like, the English Premier League is just such good quality. [...] And also I don't have any affiliation with any women's teams.

Frey's account highlights the deep-rooted internalization of hegemonic gender performances highlighted by Butler (1989), even as many interviewees were acutely aware of the degree to which their own attitudes stand in conflict to commitments to greater gender equality they feel they ought, and often do, subscribe to. In the dominant perception of both female and male respondents, maleness is naturalized as the gendered position of players and fans. In the same way as football world governing body FIFA distinguishes between the World Cup (the men's tournament) and the Women's World Cup, it is males whose role is normalized and so it can be performed without a primary reference to gender position. Female football fans, in contrast, inescapably perform their fandom through their gender position and are perceived, contrary to their own self-understanding outlined above, as female football fans, rather than just football fans. This gendering of their position as fans limits female fans' freedom of forming and performing fan identities in two significant ways: Firstly, echoing Pope's (2012) findings, the denaturalization of their gender position translates to an *a priori* questioning of the authenticity of their fandom—the key operating principle of all cultural hierarchies, subcultural or otherwise (see Thornton 1995; Hills 2002; Sandvoss 2005a). Hannah recalls:

I always feel that females have to prove themselves more so than men. Like, we get questioned a lot more about why we like football. Like men never get asked, 'why do you like football?' And I get a lot of stick for being a Man United fan, for being in the Isle of Wight and now living in Surrey. And they just then kind of make a sweeping generalization, that you're a glory [hunting] fan, that you don't really like it, football. And it's like, well, talk to me for a bit longer and you'll really find out how much I know about football, other than just Man United. (Hannah)

As a female fan, Hannah's needs to re-assert the cultural legitimacy of her fandom by demonstrating knowledge that validates her position as a fan—a situation not encountered by any male respondents<sup>3</sup> and that

expands into those electronic and digital spaces that have facilitated wider access for female fans in the first instance (see also similar accounts by female fans in Dixon 2011). Hannah continues:

I think that the biggest issue I've probably faced as a football fan has been on Twitter when I get involved in debates with people. If you say something that an uneducated little oik doesn't agree with, then he will abuse you and tell you to get back to the kitchen, saying 'you don't understand what you're talking about' and stuff like that; purely because you're a female. What a joke!

In questioning the authenticity of female football fandom, masculine hegemony in football fan cultures also challenges—and assumes a position of judgement on—female fans' sexuality.

This challenge in turn is threefold. To earlier generations of female football fans, discourses questioning the authenticity of their fandom frequently centred on suggestions of 'improper' sexual desire which female fans feel is employed to undermine their status as a 'proper' fan, and this is responded to by adopting the position and practices of the male heterosexual fan, as past studies have highlighted (cf. Crawford and Gosling 2004; Pfister et al. 2013; Pope 2013). As Louise recalls: 'I know sometimes women can be asked questions like "Do you like their legs or something?" I certainly don't look at anything like that. I mean, I do like to watch the skills.' Responses such as Louise's echo Toffoletti and Mewett's (2012, p. 111) observation how 'in rejecting the notion that looking at players is an enjoyable part of watching football some women [assert] "authentic" fan identities.' And like the fans in Toffoletti and Mewett's (2012, p. 110) study, both Louise and Hannah seek to validate their fandom 'in the male sense of authenticity' (see also Sveinson and Hoerber 2016). Notably, we did not find evidence of a causal relationship between the internalization of a bond between fan and fan object modelled on the position of the male heterosexual fan, which a number of respondents such as Louise did to the extent that they sought to distance themselves from suggestions of heterosexual attraction to their fan object informing their fandom, and a wider acceptance of a need to conform to masculine traits in their fandom performance. This awareness of expectations of

defeminized fan performances to authenticate their fandom caused annoyance, but did not translate to a visible or acknowledged attempt to mimic fan performances constructed as masculine as Jones's study of female football fans in 2008 suggested. Nor, in contrast to Jones's (2008) findings did respondents articulate disapproval at other female fans choosing to accentuate their femininity in their fandom.

However, even without fellow female fans becoming complicit in perpetuating gendered behavioural norms, female fans are left in a double bind of conflicting patriarchal expectations: if they prove the authenticity of their fandom through a lack of sexual desire towards the fan object while demonstrating long-term fan commitment and detailed knowledge of the fan object, in other words once their performances are largely consistent with male heterosexual fans, their gender identity and sexuality are being questioned:

Being a female football fan seems to hold the taboo of being gay—which is not always the case. [...] I often wonder why women get stick for liking and playing football, but guys who do not even understand football don't. (Kat)

This scrutiny of female fans' sexual orientations is further reinforced in their objectification in interactions with male fans. Reflecting interviews we conducted with male fans who suggested the presence of females inside stadia was welcomed if they found the female fans in question attractive, our interviewees reported being the subject to such objectification portrayed as 'banter' (also see Dixon 2015):

If I stand up and try and start chanting a Chelsea song, I will get 'get your tits out for the lads' shouted at me [...] Or 'West London is beautiful, it's got the tits, fanny and Chelsea, West London is beautiful.' And that's been sung at me before. Like and you get positive, but negative at the same time. Like you'll be talking football to a guy and they'll be like 'oh that's amazing that you like football or something', or like a cringey old man will be like 'oh, I love a girl who likes football' and they'll be like 'why were there not girls like you when I was younger'. [...] I did get, when I went Chelsea a lot, loads of like dirty old men coming onto me because they were thinking that because you're a girl that likes football, that it's okay. (Freya)

The objectification that Freya and other fans experience further contributes to the process of essentializing female fans. Framing their practices through their gender positions thus limits female fans' agency in the utilization of the resources, roles and performances that football offers.

## Concluding Discussion

While widely acknowledged in sports studies, revisiting Butler's work on gender performativity serves as a reminder that academic studies of female football fans must themselves avoid the trap of 'essentializing' female fans. Necessary as the call to document and conceptualize the experiences of female football fans—which according to Pope and Williams (2017b) had 'been largely ignored by male sociologists and historians in their accounts of the cultural and social significance and meaning of football'—is, we argue, that work produced in response to such calls has suffered from a crucial limitation. Despite generally avoiding the trap of generalizing diverse female experiences and misconstruing a singular category (see Caudwell 2011; Dunn 2014), in its focus on gender, sports studies have tended to study women who also happen to be fans, rather than fans that are female. In other words, while the notions of gender performativity are at the heart of most feminist approaches to female sport fans, rarely has this performativity been understood as one of fandom *and* gender, and thus been conceptualized through the examination of the interpersonal and, importantly, *intrapersonal* dimensions of fandom through which the performativity of female (football) fans is structured. By documenting and theorizing the bond between female fans as forms of projection and self-reflection, we have not only sought to establish the emotive and affective dimension of being a football fan as the capacity to build a meaningful bond between the self and the object world, and maintain pleasures of (mis)recognition the self in the external textual object (cf. Sandvoss 2003, 2005b), but documented the motivational and affective processes through which gender performances become embedded in the interplay of structure and agency through the prism of fandom. The urgency of the analysis of gender and fan performances as highly interdependent is further underlined by the changing position of

fan performances in everyday life. As traditional markers of identity in high modernity such as marriage, employment and nationality have become increasingly ephemeral, mediated engagements, enthusiasm and fandom have become ever more prominent, near ubiquitous aspects of individuals' everyday lives; often, as respondents' stories of becoming and being a fan indicate, spanning across the life course (Sandvoss 2014a, b). It is in this context that fans' frequent insistence of the centrality of their fandom to their everyday lives, their identity and who they believe and want to be—in this study and elsewhere—(see, for instance, Pope 2012; Caudwell 2015; Dixon 2015; Sandvoss 2003) is to be read. The analysis based on our synthesis of feminist approaches to performativity with concepts in fan studies exploring the psychological, social, technological and textual premises and consequences of fandom, further confirms a number of previous findings, but also departs from past work in two important empirical and conceptual respects.

Beyond highlighting the importance of female fandom to female football fans' sense of self, our findings, in line with previous studies (Harris 2007; Caudwell 2011; Dixon 2015; Toffoletti and Mewett 2012) confirm that greater participation in football—both as spectator and participant sport—does not, *per se*, constitute a (substantive) challenge to masculine hegemony. Nor does it translate to an equality in symbolic resources that can be utilized in the formation of women's affective bond to their fan object as an articulation and re-assertion of a given identity position; an identity position that both as a fan and as a woman is constructed against substantially greater expectations and narrower norms reflecting structural inequalities. Our approach here, as well as Sandvoss's earlier work (2003, 2007, 2011, 2012), shares the fundamental concern over the interplay of structure and agency through processes of being a fan that informs Dixon's (2015, see also 2013) use of structuration theory for the same purposes. The nuancedly different conclusions we reach, however, are a reflection of methodological differences. Dixon (2015), as most other studies, concludes with attesting the reiteration of the *status quo* of gender inequality in football fandom as being largely unaffected by fans' awareness, as reflexivity of their own position holds no transformative capacity. This assessment mirrors the tenor of studies of female sports fans over the past two decades, though, crucially, like these—and despite Dixon's frame of analysis



being derived from structuration theory with its focus on 'social practices ordered across space and time' (Giddens 1984, p. 2)—as cross-sectional studies they remain limited in their capacity to trace gradual change or take a wider historical perspective (see, also Giddens 1990). In other words, whilst past studies of women's football in line with our own findings suggest that despite gradually increasing levels of female participation, significant qualitative, gendered inequalities persist, their conclusions remain limited to the specific moment of their studies and, consequently, they are less able to account for the gradual transformations of the quality of female fans' experiences and performances.

Our longitudinal approach, in contrast, suggests gradual qualitative change. While the lowering of barriers to encountering and engaging with football does not spell the end of hegemonic masculine fan culture, our analysis indicates qualitative changes to performances and perceptions of fans' gender over the past half century, and especially the two decades during which our interviews and participant observations were undertaken. Among female fans born during the 1990s the internalization of hegemonic masculine discourses accepting and perpetuating the framing of female performances in football spectatorship, including their own, as inferior was significantly less prevalent. These younger fans, often players of the game themselves, were fully aware of the masculine discourses seeking to undermine their fandom, but were much less likely to leave their premises of male sporting and supporting superiority unchallenged. In Butler's (1989) terms, these fans at least partially succeed in subverting the binary perceptions of 'essence fabrication' in their fan performance by claiming fan practices previously framed as masculine as their own.

Butler's emphasis on gender performance also points towards—at least in fan and audience studies—the largely overlooked significance of sports as a key field of cultural contestation. In their focus on television drama, film and literature, fans studies have celebrated the emancipatory potential of the interpretative and transformative practices of fan cultures and fan groups, largely and exclusively female, with some scholars forcefully seeking to claim and defend fandom as a practice solely for and by women. Important as transformative fan practices in these realms are in fostering potentially socially or culturally transformative imagination,

they remain largely inconsequential in the everyday life discourses through which gender is constructed and reinforced outside these interpretative communities, because they are performed in relative isolation. In contrast, female fans' subversion of masculine hegemonic expectations in football fandom take place in full view, and thus directly challenge the norms and essentializing discourses in a cultural field central to shaping masculinity.

Active participation in the game appeared to heighten fans' capacity to engage in such counter-hegemonic fan performances, as practices rooted in projective identificatory fantasies helped to naturalize their claim on the fan object as a part of self. Of course, this is not to argue that these fan objects are in turn no longer embedded in a heavily hegemonic framing. If the fan object provides the football fan with a mirror reflecting the self in the object world and hence the pleasurable articulation of one's identity while creating a sense of belonging, to female fans it remains a heavily distorting mirror as long as the fan object is heavily framed as masculine, and women's spectator football—though less so participant football—remains marginal. The nevertheless greater confidence in their fandom without accepting the suggestion of an inherent conflict between their gender position, or sexuality, and being a fan, in turn, highlights the interplay of structure and agency.

Our longitudinal perspective thus reveals the extent to which changing female fan performances reflect wider structural change. Interviewees' memories of their first contact with the game as well as of their current fan practices document how television, in particular deregulated multi-channel television leading the proliferation of regular, everyday live coverage of football in Western Europe since the late 1980s, offered new routes into football spectatorship and enthusiasm for young female fans, away from the aggressive and frequently violent manifestations of masculinity inside football stadia. The cultural universalization of the game that soon afterwards was propelled further by the rapid dissemination of digital media and global sports sponsorship (both driven by market expansion as an inherent force of global capitalism), thus created a necessary premise for greater agency in female fan performances. This in turn facilitated performances of gender that have gradually evaded masculine hegemonic frames of gender and sexuality. To be clear, the erosion of barriers

to the participation of female fans in football fan culture does not translate into greater equality *per se*, but it broadens the scope for female fans' agency to challenge hegemonic masculinity through their fan and gender performances alike. Moreover, it remains a gradual and slow process, despite the greater sense of normality of their fan practices among younger fans that allows them to loosen the historically close interconnection of fan and gender performances in football fan culture.

A longitudinal perspective to the study of football fandom is, however, also instructive for a second reason: the structural factors we have identified as creating the premises for broadening the scope of female football fans' practices and performances, would appear to favour a post-feminist frame of analysis highlighting the interplay of changing gender performances, female agency and neoliberalism (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009). Indeed such approaches offer a useful conceptual framework to examine, for instance, articulations of heterosexual desire by female sports fans towards athletes and of a more assertive female sexuality articulated in fan performances (Toffoletti 2016). However, we have drawn on Butler's (1989) foundational work instead to enable us to trace the macrostructural forces, such as neoliberalism, that transform female football fandom beyond its current manifestations. This wider historical analysis leads us to our final significant finding: our analysis of both male and female respondents' practices—further confirming the observations of previous major studies of female football fandom as well as much of the Bourdieuan second wave of fan studies (see Gray et al. 2017)—has highlighted the centrality of the notion of 'authenticity' in the construction of cultural and subcultural hierarchies, and thus as the key concept through which gendered performances in football fandom are valorised. It is therefore of particular significance that, as we have argued here, the vectors behind the changing structural context of female football fandom are not narrow expressions of consumerism or neoliberalism which contrast with an authentic, pre-consumerists' masculine football fan culture. Rather, it is the very logic that articulated forces of industrial, capitalist modernity that gave rise to modern football, its professionalization and symbiosis with broadcast and later digital media that resulted in the increasing accessibility of the game over our period of study and that has created the space in which female football fans' performances can challenge masculine hegemony.

As we suggested in the introduction, fandom matters as an important site of identity formation and articulation. In order to assess the extent to which fan practices allow for substantive social and cultural change, we therefore propose a methodological and conceptual refinement in the study of fans to account for the relationship between a fan and a fan object as a crucial site of the interplay between structure and agency that frame fans' performances of their fandom as much as their gender, while taking a sufficiently longitudinal perspective to account for the gradual nature of any such change.

## Notes

1. On the particular significance of football rights in the battle between BSB and Sky and the subsequent emergence of Sky as the dominant TV provider in the UK see Williams (1994).
2. On the role of media events such as the 1966 World Cup generating an interest in football for some women see Pope (2016) and Ward and Williams (2009). Pope (2016) discusses how for a small number of women the 1966 World Cup finals was the first time that they had encountered football and so this event was their first memory of the sport.
3. The delineation of fan practices and definitions of fandom are of course a persistent theme in (football) fandom with hierarchies often being constructed around forms of participation, such as regularly attending matches and other fan practices. However, in such debates it is commonly groups (television viewers, more casual fans, etc.) whose status is contested, rather than individuals.

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# Index<sup>1</sup>

## NUMBERS AND SYMBOLS

1966 World Cup tournament, 127

## A

Abercrombie, N., 215

African-American female athletes,  
racial identity of, 134

Agergaard, S., 93

Alan 1982, 281

Allianz, 96

Armstrong, G., 214

Athleticism, 145

and femininity, 146

ATLAS.ti, 218

## B

Ball, E., 11

Banks, G., 173

Basketball, 132

media coverage of, 134

women, 135, 140, 141

Bayern München, 38, 45

Ben-Porat, A., 264

Binary system of social organization, 43

Bolton Wanderers, 172

Bosman ruling, 38

Bourdieu, P., 44, 188, 217, 222, 230

Boys in football, 25–26

Brand marketing strategies, 88

Breuer, M., 62

---

<sup>1</sup>Note: Page numbers followed by “n” refer to notes.

Broadcasting, 82, 95, 96, 282–286,  
290, 291, 302  
BSkyB, 138, 159  
Bunel, A., 8  
Butler, J., 28, 292, 294, 295, 298,  
300, 302

## C

Carvalho, M., 215  
“Carrusel Deportivo,” 264  
Central contract system for national  
players, 94  
Champions League, 42, 45, 83, 197  
Charlton Ladies case, 107  
Chelsea FC, 38, 285  
Clarke, J., 281  
Club budgets, 82–85  
Club development, 9, 111, 114–118  
Club licensing systems, 92–93  
Club relationships  
  categorization of, 109–111  
  examination, 111  
  financial arrangements, 111–114  
Club-centred football fandom, 280  
Coddington, A., 243, 267  
Collective memories, 188, 190, 203  
  of fan community, 196  
  theories on, 191  
Communities  
  of fans, 201  
  theories on, 191  
Competition format, 86, 87, 91  
Compulsory heterosexuality, 28, 32  
Computer-assisted qualitative data  
  analysis software, 280  
Connell, R., 43  
Connote maleness, 142  
Constant comparative method, 136

Consumerism, 164, 302  
‘Contextuality of meaning,’ 23  
Crolley, L., 267  
Crolley, L. E., 267  
Cultural universalization, 301

## D

Danish Super League, 186, 191, 192  
Davies, Y., 41  
de Beauvoir, S., 213  
del Valle, T., 269  
Demographic siloisation  
  of football, 282  
DFB, 55–59, 64, 70, 71, 90, 95  
  officials and politicians as  
  pacemakers for women’s  
  football, 61  
DFB Advisory Council, 62  
Díez-Mintegui, C., 268  
Dixon, K., 231, 299  
Doncaster Rovers Belles, 107, 121  
Dunn, C., 79, 81, 91, 93, 95,  
232–234  
Dunning, E., 47

## E

Electronic media, trans social  
  technological ability of, 284  
Eley, G., 42  
England, 24  
  ‘golden age’ in football history, 157  
  integration of men’s and women’s  
  football in, 106–108  
  school systems in, 31  
  women’s football and  
  spectatorship history in, 126  
  women’s football in, 104

- English football, 158  
 commercialization of, 137–138  
 context and methodology,  
 162–165  
 culture of, 168  
 golden years of, 163  
 in post-World War II period, 160  
 and sense of well-being, 165–170  
 styles of support, 170–173
- English Football Association (FA),  
 57, 78, 94
- English football professional, 164
- English football stadia, 158, 159
- English professional football, 173  
 female spectators in, 163
- Entertainment industries, political  
 economy of, 282
- Essence fabrication' of gender,  
 290, 300
- Europe, women's football  
 leagues in, 77  
 attendance, 79  
 club budgets, 82  
 club licensing systems, 92  
 competition formats, 86  
 football associations'  
 strategies for, 85  
 league marketing, 95  
 league system, 87  
 player market regulations, 93  
 regulation, 91  
 revenue sharing/redistribution, 94  
 seasons, 90
- European Championship  
 in 2013, 41, 83
- European Club Association, 38, 82, 84
- European countries, 7  
 percentage of female attendants  
 in, 242
- European football, 106
- European football associations, 78
- European identity, 3, 8, 39, 41, 42, 49
- European integration, 42, 50  
 after World War II, 38
- European subjectivities, 42
- European Union, 38
- Europeanization, 41, 42  
 of men's football, 45  
 processes, 50
- F**
- Face-to-face interviews, 245
- Factic materiality, 292
- Family-based leisure, 163
- Fan communities, 3, 46, 189, 193,  
 194, 196, 198, 201, 213, 229,  
 230, 233–235, 252, 285, 286  
 football, 287  
 gendered, 44–45  
 international, 38
- Fandom, 193–199, 271, 286–290  
 fans and, 214–217  
 football and, 211–213  
 transnational, 45
- Fans, 290–294  
 and fandom, 214–217  
 men's football, 221
- Fan socialization, 216, 226, 227,  
 232–235
- FA Premier League, 138, 159
- Fasting, K., 8
- FA Women's Super League  
 (FAWSL), 107, 120, 121,  
 130, 132, 135, 140  
 BT Sport's coverage of, 137  
 establishment of, 116  
 media exposure for, 129

- FC Kaiserslautern (FCK), 59–61, 64–70
- Female athletes, 130, 133, 142, 144, 146, 261  
 race, class and sexuality of, 134  
 'sexiness' and 'femininity' of, 132  
 to sexual objects, 129
- Female bodies, 47, 143  
 normative ideals about, 21
- Female football fandom, 279, 294  
 key development for, 283  
 literature on, 126  
 in Western Europe, 280
- Female football fans, 213, 285, 295  
 in community of male supporters, 229–230  
 research on, 130–132
- Female football spectatorship, 280–282
- Female-only club, 119
- Female-only* peñas, 270
- Female peñas, 266, 267
- Female rugby union fans, 139
- Female spectatorship, 125, 282–286
- Female sports fans, 125, 140, 160, 161, 163, 164, 299, 302
- Femininity, 5, 39–41, 46, 104, 105, 145, 159, 177, 269  
 approaches, 106, 298, 299  
 athleticism and, 146  
 challenge conventional standards of, 31  
 images of, 31  
 movements, 104  
 radical approach to, 105  
 sport sociology, 20  
 theory, 104  
 traditional aspects of, 134  
 traditional notions of, 256
- Feminization of Sports Fandom*, 4
- FIFA survey, 2, 12n1
- FIFA Women's Football Survey 2014, 2
- FIFA Women's World Cup, 6, 80
- FIFA World Cup in 1974, 63
- Financial integration model, 113
- Flintoff, A., 26
- Flores, H., 11
- Football, 1, 225, 226  
 aims and questions, 187  
 female fans in men's world, 46–47  
 and gendered fan communities, 44–45  
 historical research, 185–186  
 sources and methods, 191–193  
 theoretical considerations, 187–191  
 on TV and at stadium, watching, 227–229  
 women in, 22, 29–31, 47–49  
 women team's and their fans, 49
- Football Association (FA), 78, 106, 107, 120, 127, 128, 165  
 strategies, 57, 85–91, 95
- Football clubs, 9, 33, 38, 47, 48, 56–59, 62, 65, 67, 97, 106–108, 113, 118, 158, 172, 187, 189, 192, 194, 199, 205, 218, 222, 224, 226, 234, 246, 262, 264, 270, 282, 287
- Football community, 201, 225, 259
- Football cultures, 50, 97, 174, 202, 245, 290, 294
- Football enthusiasm, 230
- Football fan communities, 262, 287
- Football fan culture, 279, 284, 286, 296, 302

- Football fandom, 188, 189,  
201–204, 212, 234  
living with 'football calendar,  
197–199  
real fans, 194–195  
rewards for fans, 195–197  
women involvement in, 213  
and work-life integration,  
199–200
- Football Federations, 38, 47
- Football slaves, 174
- Football socialization, 229, 231, 232  
family members and their roles in,  
222–225
- Formal rationalization of football, 283
- Foucault, M., 273
- FREE Project, 3, 8, 39–41, 50,  
212, 236n1
- Friendships, 196, 202, 271  
among fans, 197
- Fritzsche, B., 46
- Fundraising activities, 265, 266
- Fürtjes, O., 81
- G**
- Gender, 41–43  
boundaries, 21  
football fandom, 189  
issues of, 162  
nature of leisure, 190  
and normal biographies, 191  
relations, complexity of, 104  
and work-life-leisure  
integration, 191
- Gender differences, 43, 46  
expressions of, 105  
sociocultural construction of, 260
- Gendered fan communities, football  
and, 44
- Gendered practices, 120, 217  
of fandom, 189
- Gendered sporting identities, 26–29
- German Football Association,  
9, 55, 132
- German *Frauen-Bundesliga*, 79–81,  
88, 92, 95, 96
- German national women's football  
team, 128
- German *Sonderweg*, 56
- Germany women's groups, 263
- Gibbons, T., 285
- Giddens, A., 214
- Goffman, E., 290
- Grounded theory, 126, 136  
research methods, 263
- Group affiliation motive, 233
- Guilianotti, R., 214
- Guttman, A., 214
- H**
- Hall, A., 27
- Hansen, H. G., 60–62
- Hargreaves, I., 30, 33
- Harris, J., 293
- Hartmann, H. -E., 66
- Hedenborg, S., 10, 234
- Hegemonic masculine fan  
culture, 300
- Hegemonic masculinity, 21, 44, 212,  
262, 286, 300, 302  
in football culture, 290  
in western culture, conventional  
stereotypes of, 22
- Heinemann, K., 216, 217, 230
- Herzog, M., 8, 9
- Heterosexual attractiveness, 128  
middle-class stereotype of, 28
- Heterosexual female athletes, 144

- Heterosexual feminine  
 characteristics, 148
- Heterosexual femininity, 21, 32, 145
- Hillsborough Stadium disaster, 5,  
 159, 177, 179n2, 282
- Holt, R., 162, 176
- Homophobia, 8, 28, 29, 32, 46, 244
- Hooligans, 44, 186, 212, 229, 249  
 firms, 246  
 incident, 159
- Horne, A., 121
- Hubermann, A. M., 218
- Hynes, D., 244, 249
- Hyper-femininity, 29
- I
- Ideal' femininity, 21
- Identificatory fantasies, 292, 293, 301
- Identity, 3, 11, 27, 42, 188, 189,  
 201, 215, 231, 250, 254, 255,  
 279, 280, 286, 288, 290, 294,  
 299, 301, 303
- Imagined communities, 39, 41, 187,  
 188, 191, 201, 214, 286
- In situ* spaces of football  
 spectatorship, 285
- Informal government' functions, 265
- Instagram, 2
- Interpretative communities, 301
- Interviewees, 23, 24, 26, 111, 114,  
 117–120, 126, 136–143, 146,  
 147, 168, 177, 187, 192–205,  
 217–235, 244–247, 263,  
 265–267, 269, 271, 273,  
 286, 293–295, 297, 301  
 majority of, 268  
 men's football, fans of, 221
- Inverse normalization, 274
- J
- Jeanes, R., 48
- Jones, K., 244, 249, 297
- K
- Kay, T., 48
- Kirk, D., 232, 292
- Kissane 2016, 291
- Kjaer, J.B., 93
- Klein, M., 130, 132
- Klein, M. -L., 9, 79
- Kohl, H., 64, 71
- Kreisky, E., 44
- Kuhn, A., 21
- L
- Laissez faire* capitalism, 281
- Lampard, L., 293
- League marketing, 79, 95, 96
- Leicester City Football Club, 10,  
 137, 160
- Leisure  
 family-based, 163  
 gendered nature of, 190  
 social attitudes and patterns  
 of, 158
- Lenneis, V., 10, 212
- Liberal feminists, 31, 103–105
- Life-course perspective, 187
- Life-football integration, 186, 204
- Liston, K., 264
- Llopis-Goig, R., 11
- London 2012 Olympic Games, 133  
 women's football  
 tournament at, 129
- Long, K., 267
- Longhurst, B., 215

## M

Maffessoli, M., 214  
 Maguire, J., 214  
 Male supporters, 9, 128, 140, 166,  
 169, 186, 245–249, 251, 254  
   female fans in a community of,  
   229–230  
 Male working-class sporting fans, 161  
 Marschik, M., 44  
 Masculine culture, 259, 262  
 Masculine hegemony, 48, 279, 296,  
 299, 302  
 Masculine traits, 32, 148, 296  
 Masculine tutelage, 274  
 Masculinity, 21, 24, 27, 28, 32, 33,  
 40, 43, 44, 47, 145, 158, 177,  
 203, 212, 242, 249, 255, 256,  
 259, 261, 281, 291, 301  
 Mass media, 63–65, 133, 141, 212,  
 214, 222, 227  
 Mass-Observation survey of British  
 women, 161  
 Meier, H. E., 80  
 Men's football, 6, 10, 29, 39, 40, 42,  
 44, 45, 47, 49, 58, 61, 67, 68,  
 78, 80, 81, 83, 84, 86, 92,  
 108, 112, 115, 116, 119–122,  
 127, 135, 137–144, 147, 148,  
 213, 232, 245, 266, 268  
   fans of, 221  
   organizations, 104  
   structures, 106, 107  
 Men's sports, 42, 125, 131–134,  
 142, 144, 147, 148  
   female fans of, 135  
   organizations and structures, 103  
 Messner, M., 24  
 Mewett, P., 7

Middle-class stereotype of  
   heterosexual attractiveness, 28  
 Miles, M. B., 218  
 Mintert, S. -V., 10  
 Miracle of Bern, 56–58  
 Mixed-sex partnership club, 119  
 Müller, W., 64, 68

## N

National-Socialist rule, 59  
 Neoliberalism, 302  
 Network of non-centralized forces, 21  
 Neuberger, H., 62, 63  
 Non-domestic leisure spaces, 281  
 Normal biographies, 39, 189–191  
 Normative life course, 190  
 Norway, 29, 48  
   gender equality degree in, 133  
   young people in, 25  
 Norwegian national football  
 association, 77

## O

Obel, C., 21  
 Object relations theory, 289  
 Olympic Games, 22, 42, 129, 139  
*One of the Lads* (Coddington), 243  
 Open transfer market, 93  
 Outsider-status' of women, 39

## P

Paris Saint-Germain, 38  
 Partnership clubs, 110, 113,  
 118–120  
 Pay-tv-based live broadcastings, 283

- Peñas, 259, 261–263, 272, 273  
 contributions of, 274  
 initial examination of, 260  
 main characteristics of, 264–269  
 reasons for establishing, 269–271
- Petzold, B., 66, 67
- Pfeifer, W., 59, 71
- Pfister, G., 3, 4, 8, 10, 81, 212, 243, 249, 263
- Pink Lions, 192, 199, 200
- Player market regulations, 92–94
- Pope, S., 4, 5, 9, 10, 212, 232, 243, 250, 251, 268, 279, 281, 292, 295, 298, 303n2
- Post-modern societies, 190
- Poststructuralist analyses, 21
- Potential interviewees, 136
- Public/private dichotomy, 269
- Public space, 172, 269, 271  
 of football, 274
- R**
- Radical feminist, 103, 105–107
- Radmann, A., 10, 234, 244
- Rakow, L., 43
- Reading Football Club, 169
- Rio 2016 Olympic Games, 139
- Rooney, W., 140
- Rubin, G., 260
- Ruelius, H., 70
- S**
- Sandvoss, C., 11, 188, 215, 287, 299
- SC 07 Bad Neuenahr, 60, 61, 65, 68
- Scandinavian countries, 47, 77
- Scheidt, P., 61, 62
- Schicketanz, E., 60
- Schmidt, A., 65
- Scholes, P., 293
- Scraton, S., 8, 26
- Self-reflective quality, 288
- Selmer, N., 212
- Semi-professional FA Women's Super League, 129
- Semi-structured interviews, 19, 23, 126, 135, 136, 164, 217, 280  
 women, 263
- Separate female spheres, 146
- Separate male spheres, 146
- Separate spheres' concept, 146
- Separatism, 104, 112
- Sex-appropriate' activities, 26
- Sex/gender system, 260, 273  
 in football space, 274
- Sexual binarism, 260
- Siebenlist, M., 66
- Simmons, K., 89
- Sites of memories, 187, 188, 201, 203
- Social bonds, 201, 202, 233
- Social class relations, 169
- Social constructivist approach to gender, 260
- Social Darwinism, 146
- Socialization, 8, 10, 20, 26, 43, 211–236, 245  
 agents, 222, 228, 230–233, 235  
 processes, 33, 43, 215, 227, 230–232, 234, 260
- Social media, 2, 6, 39, 177, 285
- Social networks, 23, 202  
 public recognition/inclusion in, 271
- Social practice, 43, 68, 216, 290, 300
- Social space, 67, 202, 262, 264, 266, 269



- South-Western German Football Association, 61, 69
- South-Western Germany, women's football in  
 media, 63  
 Miracle of Bern, 56–58  
 motives, sexual orientation and social life, 65  
 pacemakers for, 61  
 spectator numbers, ticket sales and finances, 68
- Spain, 7, 8, 11, 20, 22–24, 30, 80, 213, 259–274  
 school systems in, 31  
 women's peñas in, 264
- Spanish football, 11, 24, 260–262, 264, 265, 270, 273  
 hegemonic model of, 272
- Spitaler, G., 44
- Sport and Its Female Fans* (Mewett & Toffoletti), 7
- Sport and the Working Class in Modern Britain* (Holt), 162
- Sportification processes, 38
- Sporting events, 126, 128, 188  
 media coverage of, 142
- Sporting women, 20–22, 145
- Sports fandom  
 'feminization' of, 159, 177  
 oral history accounts of, 162  
 research on, 125, 160–162
- Stacey, J., 292
- Stanley Matthews FA Cup, 167
- Steinbichler, K., 83
- Sülzle, A., 212, 233
- Suny, R., 42
- SV Spesbach, 61
- Swedish *Damallsvenskan*, 78, 83
- Swedish female supporters, 250
- Swedish football context, 242–243
- Swedish Football Supporter Union, 246
- Swedish interviewees, 247
- T**
- Taken-for-granted assumption, 128
- Terry, J., 293
- Theune, T., 67
- Three-class society' in German, 83
- Toffoletti, K., 7
- Tomboys, 27, 28, 32, 250, 254
- Traditional notions of femininity, 8, 11, 21, 256
- Transfer market in Europe, 93
- Transgress gender norms, 254, 255
- Transnational fandom, 45
- Trans/national identities, 39, 41, 43
- Tsitskari, E., 215
- Turbine Potsdam (German club), 38
- TuS Wörrstadt, 58, 60, 61, 65–68
- Twitter, 2, 285, 296
- U**
- UEFA, 2, 6, 38, 48, 77–79, 82, 84–86, 88–90, 93–96, 128, 178n1, 261  
 report, 12n1, 80, 92  
 rising power of, 45
- UEFA Women's Champions League, 38, 48, 82
- UEFA Women's Cup, 38, 48
- UEFA women's football brochure, 90
- UEFA women's football report 2014/15, 89
- United Kingdom (UK), 5, 7, 48, 108, 125, 133, 135, 161, 165, 185, 232, 242, 251, 268, 280, 303n1

## V

Violent terrace culture, 282  
Virtual reality, 189, 215

## W

Wann, D. L., 215, 216, 233  
Ward, A., 303n2  
Web 2.0 technology, 2  
Welford, J., 9, 79, 93, 95  
Western Europe, 282, 301  
    female football fandom in, 280  
Whannel, G., 1  
Williams, J., 10, 212, 267, 281, 298,  
    303n1, 303n2  
Winslow, S., 291  
Wohlleben, B., 56  
Wolverhampton Wanderers, 171  
Women  
    basketball, 132, 134, 135, 140, 141  
    bodybuilders, 21  
    fan biographies, 192  
    involvement in football  
        fandom, 213  
    and mediated sports, 131  
    peña, 213, 259–274  
    in physical activities and sports, 261  
    relationships with football players,  
        173–175  
    teams and their fans, 49  
Women's Club Football Analysis, 82  
Women's football, 22, 47  
    decline of, 127  
    in England, 104  
    history of, 126–130  
    lack of media coverage and impact  
        on fans, 139–142  
    medical arguments, 127

    methods in, 135–137  
    negative perceptions of, 142–147  
    pacemakers for, 61–63  
    positive attitudes towards, 126,  
        137–139  
    quality and attractiveness of, 144  
    in South-Western Germany  
        (see South-Western Germany,  
        women's football in)  
Women's Football Association  
    (WFA), 62, 70, 106, 128  
Women's football club, 7, 9, 82, 84,  
    86, 113, 119–121, 135  
Women's football fandom in Swedish  
    context, 245  
    freedom, 253–255  
    negotiating respect, 249–253  
    restrictions, 246–249  
Women's football leagues in Europe  
    attendance, 79–81  
    club budgets, 82–85  
    club licensing systems, 92  
    competition formats, 86–87  
    football associations'  
        strategies for, 85–86  
    league marketing, 95–96  
    league system, 87–90  
    player market regulations, 93–94  
    regulation, 91–92  
    revenue sharing/redistribution,  
        94–95  
    seasons, 90–91  
Women's Football Supporter Culture  
    in Sweden, 10, 241–256  
Women's National Basketball  
    Association (WNBA), 131, 134  
Women's Professional Soccer  
    League, 87

- Women's sports, 10, 28, 48, 108,  
125, 126, 128–132, 137, 139,  
140, 144–148  
implications for, 141  
integration and separation in,  
104–106  
marginalization and trivialization  
of, 135  
in media, marginalization, 133–135  
media presentation of, 143  
negative perceptions of, 142  
organizations, 103  
presentation of, 133  
revolution, 261
- Women's United Soccer  
Association, 87
- Women's World Championship in  
2011, 41
- Woodhouse, D., 267
- Working-class male fan, 125
- Work-life-leisure integration, 187, 191
- World War II, 160, 167, 174, 179n3  
European integration after, 38
- Y**
- Yankey, R., 140
- Young, J., 176
- Z**
- Ziller, P., 66, 67