Sports Fandom: ‘What do Women Want?’
A Multi-Sport Analysis of Female Fans

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INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

General Introduction

“A nation can truly call itself sporting when the majority of its people feel a personal need for sport,” – Pierre de Coubertin

Women account for 50% of the world’s population but yet constitute a minority group with the general body of sports fans. Can countries really call themselves ‘sporting’ when those who support and follow their sports are overwhelmingly male? As we will discuss, sport is very important to female fans worldwide and female fans are increasingly important to sports; however, the experiences of female fans across many sports show that women encounter significant obstacles to engaging in sports fandom. If the gender imbalance within sports fan communities is to be redressed, these obstacles must be overcome.

If they are serious about ensuring that female fans will be a valued and active presence within sport now and into the future, sports organisations and the wider sports community, sports must firstly recognise these obstacles and then take steps to address them. Existing research can only help to inform sports organisations to a certain extent. Much of the research on female fans to date is preoccupied with football fans; research conducted on female fans of other sports has tended to focus only on a particular sport and does not offer a comparison with the situation across different sports. In this study we take a novel international and multi-sport approach in an attempt to address this ‘gap’ in the research, by suggesting some answers to the following question: ‘In considering sports fandom internationally, what do women want?’

Research Aim

The aim of this research is to conduct a multi sport analysis of female sports fandom in order to identify common issues and experiences encountered by female sports fans. The ultimate aim of the study is to provide answers to the question posed above and to suggest how, by taking on board what female fans across various sports and cultures have to say in relation to their sports fandom, sports can more adequately address the needs and concerns of female fans. In order to achieve the research aim, the following objectives were set:

- To conduct a literature review on the concepts of fandom and, in particular female fandom;
- To review the known experience of female sports fans and the policies and initiatives of a number of different sports across a selection of countries with regard to female fans;
- To analyse the findings for common trends and experiences emerge in relation to female sports fans and their treatment; and
• To propose what steps should be taken to redress the current inequalities in terms of the numbers and treatment of female fans.

Scope
This study will focus on female fans of the following male team sports: (1) Football (soccer) in England, Germany and Spain, (2) The major U.S. team sports of NFL, NBA, NHL and MLB, (3) Rugby Union in England, (4) Rugby League in England and (5) Australian Rules Football. Additionally, the research will also explore the stated research objectives, with an emphasis on how they interact with the suggested proposals for change.

Limitations
(a) Female Sports
The study focuses only on female fans of male team sports. Female team sports constitute a sub-category of their own within sport and to try to ‘shoehorn’ a review of this issue into this research would not do the topic justice. Additionally, one of the ancillary objectives of the research was to examine how female fans operate and interact within the masculine setting of male team sports rather than within the female dominated environment of women’s sport.

(b) Individual Sports
While it would also have been interesting to study female fans of individual sports, we decided, for a number of reasons, to focus only on female fans of male team sports. Firstly, on a purely logistical level, issues of time and space were constraining factors on the scope of our research. Secondly, the types of fan allegiances in individual sports differ to the type of allegiances associated with fandom of team sports.\(^1\) Finally, we were of the opinion that whereas many individual sports events are run as annual events (e.g. Wimbledon, The Open Championship in golf), team sports at the club level rather follow weekly/fortnightly schedules and ‘real’ trends might be more discernable within these sports.

(c) National Sports Teams
The study does not deal with female fans of national sports team. Fandom of national sports teams tends to go through rather more extreme peaks and troughs depending on the fortunes of the team. The ‘bandwagon effect, whereby a new wave of fans excitedly support the national team when they reach the finals of a major tournament, only to turn away afterwards until a similar event comes along in the future, can have a distorting effect on any attempt to measure female fans of national sports teams and, for this reason, this category of fans are not discussed in this research.

\(^1\) Fans of an individual sport, such as golf or tennis, may support more than one player within that sport, whereas fans of team sports do not tend to support more than one club within any given league.
(d) Our data
Due to our physical location during the period of research, it was not possible to generate new primary data by conducting first hand interviews with female sports fans attending at various sports. We sought to circumvent this issue by taking a desk based, multi-disciplinary approach, engaging with sports clubs, sports professionals and prominent female sports fans and concentrating on reviewing, analysing and synthesising existing information on female sports fans worldwide.

Structure
The project is divided into six chapters. Chapter One sets the scene by discussing sports fandom in general and previous attempts to categorise sports fans. It considers female sports fandom both in a historical and modern context before looking at how women become sports fans and how they consume televised sport. Chapter Two contextualises female sports fandom within the general economic and social development of women’s lives and discusses the benefits of female fandom for various stakeholders. Chapter Three notes the various experiences of female sports fans and identifies common issues encountered by those fans. The multi-sport analysis angle of the research is highlighted in Chapter Four when the approach towards female fans of eight different sports across five different countries is examined. Chapter Five draws on the findings of the analysis contained in Chapters Three and Four to provide a summary of what the data suggest female sports fans want and do not want in terms of their sports fandom. The final Chapter contains proposals on actions that can be taken by sports, third parties and female fans themselves to give female fans more of what they want and avoid the repetition of previous mistakes.
CHAPTER 1: The Female Sports Fan

1.1 What is a Sports Fan?

If one were to ask a group of twenty randomly selected individuals “What is a sports fan?”, it is likely that the range of definitions and descriptions offered would be wide and varied, with every description coloured by each individual’s own affiliation to, experience of, and exposure to sport. Despite its importance, sports fandom, and indeed fandom in general, has “largely been ignored as a serious area for empirical research”².³ Perhaps the reason for the dearth of academic research on the topic is that it is presumed that there is no need to carry out such research since everybody knows what a “fan” is.⁴

Everyone may think they know what a fan is, but arriving at a definition of a fan is not straightforward. As Hills suggests, “fandom is not simply a ‘thing’ that can be picked over analytically” and nor is it just a label or a category.⁵ Crawford notes that “any attempt to define what constitutes a fan will inevitably involve highly complex and subjective codes of ‘authenticity’ – i.e. who and what is deemed as ‘legitimate’ patterns of support, and who and what is not”.⁶ The topic of authenticity is one which will be addressed in Chapter Three when we discuss barriers and prohibitions typically encountered by female sports fans.⁷ He suggests that it is preferable to view modern fan culture as an adaptable and dynamic social ‘career’ and as a constantly evolving community to which individuals commit in varying degrees over time.⁸

In existing research on sports fans a distinction has been drawn between the concepts of ‘fanship’ - a term which is stated to describe a fan’s personal link with a sports club - and ‘fandom’, the term used to describe a fan’s connection to other fans of the sports team.⁹ Although distinctive the constructs of ‘fanship’ and ‘fandom are related to a certain extent and both are relevant to the subject matter of this paper.

The approach taken in this paper is not to offer a definitive view of what does or does not constitute a sports fan – though clearly having an interest in sport and following the progress of a particular club or sporting figure is probably a useful baseline. The spectrum of fan behaviour is broad and extensive, ranging from the devoted follower to the more casual and passive fan. To draw a theoretical line above which only certain

³ While the volume of research on sports fandom has increased in recent years, compared to other sports related research sports fandom is a rather neglected field of study.
⁴ Matt Hills., Fan Cultures. (London: Routledge, 2002), ix
⁵ Ibid., xi
⁷ Crawford, in a previous paper, had in fact rejected the use of the term ‘fan’ as he opined that the term was exclusive rather than inclusive, in that those with only trivial or ‘uncommitted’ patterns of involvement were disregarded and that focusing only on “fans” inevitably excluded from consideration the wide array of individuals who may have less of an interest in sport, but are still nevertheless active participants in the consumption of it”. Gary Crawford, “The Career of the Sport Supporter: The Case of The Manchester Storm”, Sociology, 37(2) (2003), 219 - 237
⁹ Ibid.
followers of sport are classified as ‘fans’ would be to exclude those who may not typically exhibit the intensity of commitment or meet the criteria of the ‘traditional’ fan but who, nevertheless, have a significant interest in sport and who pursue this interest in more non-traditional ways. Female fans may, more often, fall into this second category.

Even at the level of the individual fan, one’s own level of fanship can fluctuate over time. Fandom is not a static concept. As a social phenomenon it is consistently evolving and adapting according to societal changes and technological advances. In attempting, narrowly, to define a fan, therefore, one runs the risk of providing a definition that may not be flexible enough to encompass the changes which fanship and fandom inevitably undergo as both society and sports change. Having chosen to sidestep this definitional issue, the next question to address is ‘can the sports fan be classified’?

1.2 Classifying the Sports Fan

The word ‘fan’ is a derivative of the word ‘fanatic’, a term that is suggestive of excessive or obsessive devotion to a cause or belief. The fanatical behaviour exhibited by some fans, not only of sport but other forms of entertainment, is the subject of a significant portion of the research on fans. More recent research on sports fans has sought to address and study the range of sports fan behaviour, in acknowledgement of the fact that being a sports fan is something that is personal to each fan and the role that their fanship plays in their day-to-day lives varies greatly among sports fans. In our own research it has been accepted that there are differences amongst fans in terms of how open and expressive they are about their fandom, the degree to which it defines their social identity and their level of expertise concerning the object of their fandom.

Some academics have sought to create typologies of fans in order to distinguish between their various types. This is understandable and often useful. It is very tempting to render sports fandom as taxonomy – who fits where, in relation to whom; and what it is that specific genre says about its adherents. There is an almost Linnean urge to organise sports fandom in a schematic way. While typologies are helpful in conceptualising the broad spectrum of fandom, they are also in our view, to an extent judgmental. According to these schemas, certain types of fan behaviour are regarded as more ‘authentic’ and therefore ‘good’ while other, often more ‘postmodern’ forms of fan behaviour, for example those practised through engaging

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10 This is a point picked up upon by Jenson in her research on fandom. Jenson observes that “literature is haunted by images of deviance” and is portrayed as “excessive, bordering on deranged behaviour”. Joli Jenson “Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization” in “The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media” (London: Routledge, 1992), 9


primarily with sport via the mass media, are deemed less genuine or significant. It is worth bearing this point in mind when considering how and where female fans fit into existing fan models. As Crawford has noted:

“Fans who buy a large volume of merchandise, those who follow sport via the mass media, those who attend ‘live’ games in family units, or even those who do not confirm to the ‘typical’ image of a ‘traditional’ fan (such as women or people with disabilities) are largely ignored in a large number of discussions of fan cultures.”

In considering sports fandom in the period of globalisation, one must also consider the interaction between fandom and consumption. A tension clearly exists between the concepts in a sporting context. Fans who regard themselves as ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ be hostile to newer fans and those who engage in more ‘postmodern’ forms of fan behaviour, associating them with and blaming them for what Giulianotti, writing in the context of UK football, has called the excessive ‘commodification’ of sport.

By contrast, Crawford does not view the relationship between fans and consumers as dichotomous, but rather as symbiotic, suggesting that exhibiting fan behaviour, almost by necessity, involves acts of consumption. We concur with Crawford’s view and submit that it is the high level of fan-related consumption practices that makes the global sports market so lucrative. Fans are, in many respects, ‘ideal consumers’ given their high degree of brand loyalty.

1.3 The Importance of Sports Fans

Sports fans play a crucial role in the success and popularity of sports teams and the enterprise of sports in general. The presence of spectators at a sporting event is the key in terms of creating an atmosphere and giving a televised sporting event the required air of authenticity and significance. Fans are also central to a team’s or a sport’s economic success, buying tickets to games, watching games on subscription television, and spending money on merchandise. It has even been proposed, rather idealistically, that in this sense sports fans are the ‘ultimate controllers’. We believe that this statement goes too far.

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15 This tension is perhaps more evident in the traditional European sports, particularly football, which evolved from amateur roots, than in the mainstream U.S. sports whose operations have always had a more profound commercial aspect.
16 Op. cit., Giulianotti, 25. The process of “commodification” is identified as having four key ingredients: football’s burgeoning popularity, its increasingly serpentine ties with corporations and other business institutions, the reduction of stadium capacities to create high-priced seating and the advent of pay-per-view television.
Fans do, however, wield a unique influence over the players, because: “If it were not for spectators watching them constantly from the stands or on television, the football player would not be compelled to subject himself to the rigors of constant physical and mental control." While the size of a player’s salary also no doubt incentivises players to push their bodies to their physical limits, it is not unreasonable to think that the adulation of their fans is also never too far from a player’s mind. Put simply, fans are a key stakeholder group and without them professional sport as we understand it would not exist.

1.4 Female Fans – ‘There all Along’ – From Olympus to Old Trafford

The relative lack of specific academic research on female sports fans and the relative omission, with a few exceptions, of serious discussion on female fans from existing research on sports fans, could lead one to presume that perhaps women have only recently turned to following sport. This, however, is not the case. Anthropologists have documented the presence of women at the sports events of preliterate peoples in Africa and the Americas. Women do appear, however, to have been precluded from attending at the ancient Olympic Games. Female sports fans of the time had to overcome significantly higher hurdles than they do today in order to secure attendance at this sports event. Pherenike, daughter of Diagores of Rhodes, violated the rule banning married women (it is unclear if maidens were also banned) at the ancient Olympic Games. She dressed herself as a trainer and attended the games at which her son Pisidorus was competing. When Pisidorus won his event, she rushed forward and was discovered. A law was subsequently passed requiring all trainers to appear as naked as the athletes. One can imagine that the enactment of this law did little to quell the clamour of the women of ancient Greece for admission!

The annals of sports history contain references to the presence of women spectators at major sporting events throughout history, from gladiatorial contests in ancient Rome, to horse races in the 1700s. Indeed we know that, “women were strongly represented at the great races that were highlights of the eighteenth-century social season.” They were also present in the ‘free’ crowds attending prestigious rowing events: “Women have always been attracted by the Oxford-Cambridge boat race, first contested in 1829.” A review of the ‘golden age’ of the history of football spectating in England has further revealed “a largely hidden history of active female sports fans, women who keenly followed football.” Even prior to the ‘golden age’ women appear to have followed football in significant numbers. Williams and Woodhouse note

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23 Ibid., 20
25 Ibid., 1096
26 Ibid., 1097
27 This period can be said to stretch from the late 1940s to the early 1960s.
28 Stacey Pope and John Williams, “‘White Shoes to a Football Match!’: Female Experiences of Football’s Golden Age in England”, Transformative Works and Culture, 6 (2011), 1
that in the 1880s female spectators constituted a noteworthy part of the overall attendees, which even resulted in Preston North End being “forced to abandon the, often standard, ‘Ladies Free’ concession in 1885, at a match at which some 2,000 female fans turned up.”

While numbers of female fans at English football went through peaks and troughs and fell away especially during the period in which hooliganism was a defining issue in English football grounds (1970s and 1980s), recent fan surveys conducted by the English Premier League show female fan levels to average around 15%. Levels of female fandom across the mainstream US sports are at impressively higher levels. A discussion on current levels of female fans attending across different sports is contained in Chapter 4.

If women have followed sport all along then why are females largely absent from histories of sports fandom? A review of historical accounts of sports fandom in England has noted how such accounts have often “excluded or invisibilised” women despite the fact that “women do have a history of sports fandom, even if they usually made up only a small minority of the typical sports crowd”. One reason proffered for this omission is that historians in discussing historical leisure pursuits have told a “male version of history”. Anne Coddington picks up on this point in her work on female fans of English football, reminding us that: “Women are right there at the centre of football’s history. Only in a history written by men, for men, the contribution of these women has gone more or less unnoticed”.

Coddington goes on to argue that it is convenient for current male fans to ignore the fact that women have traditionally attended football games because not to do so would mean taking female fandom seriously and recognising that women “have been there all along”.

1.5 Understanding the Female Sports Fan

There is a growing body of research dealing with women’s experience of playing sport. However, the academic research on the social phenomenon of fandom, with some notable exceptions, largely excludes or gives only short shrift to the experiences of female sports fans. Stacey Pope and John Williams have

30 Premier League Fan Survey, 2009/10
32 Ibid.
33 Op. cit., Hill, 12
35 Ibid., 7
36 Ibid. Pope has written of how “research on female sports fans remains limited and there is an urgent need for more research in this area”. Op. cit., Pope (2007), 50
37 This echoes calls from Mewett and Toffoletti who refer to this as a “glaring omission”. Peter Mewett and Kim Toffoletti, “The strength of strong ties: how women become supporters of Australian Rules Football” delivered at The annual conference of The Australian Sociological Association, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia (2008). Free and Hughson further allude to what they call a ‘startling absence’ of women’s voices. Marcus Free and John Hughson, “Settling accounts with hooligans: gender blindness in football supporter subculture research”, in “Men and Masculinities” 6(2), 152. Gosling highlights the need for research to examine what their fandom means to female sports fans and the role it plays in their daily lives Victoria...
recently written of how the focus of existing literature on sports fans is on the extraordinary rather than the ‘ordinary’ fan. This approach sensationalises the concept of sports fandom and thus renders the ‘ordinary’ female fan invisible.\textsuperscript{38}

Perhaps due to the lack of academic research on the topic and the marginalisation of female fans in sports histories, when female fans are discussed by the general public a homogenising trend emerges. Just as there is little benefit to offering a single definition of sports fandom, attempting to define ‘the female sports fan’ is equally difficult as the archetypal female sports fan does not exist. As Coddington argues in the context of football:

“There is no single unifying reason why women choose to go to football. Women have as many different connections and identifications with the game as there are female fans. These attachments may be even more wide ranging than men’s, given that women often come to their club via non-traditional routes”\textsuperscript{39}

The tendency to generalise narrowly about the female fan experience is not confined to the context of English football. Anderson has noted that female NFL fans are addressed as a uni-dimensional fan category that is more interested in the more frivolous and peripheral aspects of the game, such as the personal lives of the players and the players’ bodies, than in the game itself.

What is notable about Anderson’s observation is that women themselves have fallen into this trap because, “in addition, women often address themselves using the same discourse”.\textsuperscript{40} If one were to assume that all female fans could be put within one archetypal ‘female fan’ bracket, then answering the question of ‘What do female sports fans want?’ might be rendered a less than difficult task. As an alternative to attempting a simplistic definition of a female fan, it is suggested that it would be more beneficial to try to gain a greater understanding of the range of existing female fandoms and also what women currently want from their sport.

\textbf{1.6 How women become sports fans}

One step in the process of understanding the needs and motivations of female sports fans is to understand more about how women become sports fans. Until relatively recently little research existed on this particular topic. A 2008 study by Mewett and Toffoletti noted that previous research on sports fans of both genders has

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{38} Stacey Pope and John Williams, “Beyond irrationality and the ultras: some notes on female English rugby union fans and the ‘feminised’ sports crowd”, Leisure Studies, 30: 3, 293 — 308
\textsuperscript{39} Op. cit., Coddington, 14
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.}
glossed over” the topic of how fans become fans.\textsuperscript{41} They have addressed this omission. The results of their study identified four ways in which females become Australian Rules (AFL) fans and found that “at the heart of each of these paths to fandom are the close ties that the women formed in their social networks – either as children through their kin, or later in life through others that entered their networks”.\textsuperscript{42}

Mewett and Toffoletti’s used the data generated by their research to map out four categories of ‘becoming’ fans. These are: In-the-bloods, Learners, Converts and STFs (sexually transmitted fandom). The ‘in-the – blood’ group was by far the largest and was comprised of fans whose following of football derived from their family relationships. Their parents were avid AFL supporters, and therefore these women attended AFL games from an early age.\textsuperscript{43}

The ‘learners’ category accounted for approximately one quarter of the subjects of the study and is made up of those “whose appreciation of the sport developed progressively”.\textsuperscript{44} The learners gained exposure to the sport through two primary sources: television and introductions from other people. A review of the English Premier League fan surveys suggests that for female fans, friends and family tend to be most influential in their decision to first attend a game\textsuperscript{45}, a point that will be explored further in Chapter Four.

The members of the ‘convert’ group accounted for 13% of the AFL respondents. The term refers to those fans who were initially uninterested in and even opposed to AFL and who subsequently became interested having attended an AFL game. The smallest category identified in the study is the ‘STF’ category which consists of the fans who were introduced to AFL by their partners. A dominant theme in Mewett and Toffoletti’s research is the strong correlation between the central relationships in the fans’ lives at the time that their interest in AFL was initiated and their subsequent fandom. Although the research relates to how women became fans of Australian Rules football, these detailed findings are interesting and may be of more general application and relevance.

1.7 The Uninvited Viewer – Female Sports Fans as TV Viewers

In discussing female sports fans it is easy to consider only those who attend sporting events while neglecting those who cannot - or choose not - to attend. As Crawford has noted, existing research has, to a large extent, overlooked fans’ day to day experiences and consumption of sport “away from the ‘live’ venue.”\textsuperscript{46} To focus

\textsuperscript{41} Op. cit., Mewett and Toffoletti, 3
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Mewett and Toffoletti stress, however, that it does not follow automatically that just because one’s parent is a keen sports supporter that their children will go down the same path. It is important to recognise that, “whereas socialisation is significant for their entry into football fandom (…) children do exercise agency”. Op cit., Mewett and Toffoletti, 4
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} Premier League Fan Surveys 2005 – 2008
\textsuperscript{46} Op. cit., Crawford (2004), 105
only on fans who attend live events is to ignore those who choose to consume sport by alternative means.\(^{47}\) Sport today is much more than an event which takes place at a given venue at a given time; rather it increasingly has a global reach and, “lives on in people’s imagination and conversations, through their social networks, friendships, mass media and consumer good use, and in their very identity”\(^{48}\). The modern day phenomena of smart-phones, email and social networking contribute greatly to the ubiquity of sport and mean that these conversations are not only oral but virtual.

Although men do spend more time than women in virtual sports spaces and watching sport on television\(^{49}\), the role played by television coverage of sport in the lives of female fans is worth considering in some detail. Gantz et.al. have noted, for example, that where television viewing of sport is concerned “gender makes a difference”\(^{50}\). For females, “mediated sports gave them access to a male-dominated world, let them talk about sports with others if they wished, and look at men’s bodies without being questioned about it”\(^{51}\). Despite its potential importance as a channel of communication with existing and prospective female fans\(^{52}\), the role of televised sport in relation to female fandom has not been explored in depth, a point picked up by Anderson in her thesis on the subject. She goes on: “One of the least explored of all areas, even within the little-explored area of sports spectatorship, is female sports spectatorship and most notably, women watching men’s sport”\(^{53}\).

As will be discussed in Chapter Three, women’s experience in sports stadia can, at times, be quite negative. Watching televised sport thus provides many female sports fans with an opportunity to enjoy sport without encountering some of the conflicts they might experience while watching sport live in a stadium. However, female fans’ experience of watching sport on television is not without its own difficulties: here, the problem of the perceived ‘inauthenticity’ of female fans - a theme that will be further explored in Chapter Three - surfaces once again. In writing on female viewers of NFL games, for example, Anderson comments that, “as football spectators, women are often addressed as ignorant girlfriends, wives, friends, daughters, sisters and mothers of all-knowing male viewers”\(^{54}\). Anderson portrays the female sports TV viewer as ‘uninvited’ and equates female viewership of sport with “the feeling of looking in on a private world”\(^{55}\). Chapter Two, which follows next, will discuss some of the potential benefits to be gained from admitting more female sports fans to this hitherto ‘private world.’

\(^{47}\) This is something which in late-modern developed society of globalisation is greatly facilitated by developments in the mass media and technology generally.
\(^{48}\) Op. cit., Crawford, 106
\(^{49}\) Op. cit., Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, Jacquemotte
\(^{51}\) Ibid.
\(^{52}\) Mewett and Toffoletti referred to how television was one of the main avenues of exposures for those within the ‘Learners’ category.
\(^{54}\) Ibid., 84
\(^{55}\)Ibid., 45
CHAPTER 2: What Can Female Fans Bring To Sport?

2.1 The Power of Women

Chapter Two addresses the positive role that female fans can play within the world of sports. In order to understand how female fans can contribute to a sport in economic and social terms, it is necessary to analyse more broadly how the role of women has changed in society and to understand why, as a body of fans, they are a valuable asset upon which professional sports could leverage. In understanding the potential impact women as consumers and supporters can have on any industry and, in our case, on the industry of sport, women’s changing professional and economic status shall be briefly examined.

The economic empowerment of women across the developed world is one of the most remarkable social changes of the past 50 years. This change has precipitated an adjustment in the position of women within society: millions of women who were once dependent on men have now taken more control of their own lives and economic fates. Wilkinson uses the term ‘gender quake’ to describe “a fundamental shift in power and values between men and women”\(^{56}\) that leads to a society where male and female values are converging and the gap between the two is closing. This shift, it is argued, has given women much greater freedom and choice and has empowered them in many different spheres of social life, such as work and education.

*Forbes* magazine’s publication of its 100 Most Powerful Women confirms today that the number of women with important economic positions is extensive.\(^{57}\) The economic and social empowerment of women is to be found especially in the day-to-day reality of families, where the idea of a stay-at-home mother is increasingly challenged. Today, the two-income household is now much more prevalent, with women routinely contributing to the breadwinning duties.

Although this process of empowerment has not been uniform and the evolution of women’s position in society has followed different patterns, depending on cultural and national factors, the global trend has generally been positive. In terms of employment, today women make up the majority of professional workers in many countries (51% in the United States, for example).\(^{58}\) Similarly, in Spain, the proportion of young women in the labor force has now reached American levels.\(^{59}\)\(^{60}\) A UK report, forecasts that “the average pay for women in their twenties could bypass the earning power of men in the same group by 2015


\(^{59}\) Ibid.

\(^{60}\) Although women’s salaries in the United States are still lower than men’s and they still earn, on average, only 72% of what their male counterparts earn, they account for nearly 85% of the nation’s household income. Jennifer A. Sloan, “Marketing sports to women.” Master’s thesis, Seton Hall University, 14.
and significantly more women will be making the major financial decisions in UK homes by 2057”. The statistics demonstrate that women now have a higher disposable income than in previous eras, with which they make 80% of purchasing decisions within a household. Higher education levels have also boosted job prospects for women, improving their value on the job market and shifting their role from stay-at-home mothers to successful professional women.

2.2 The Benefits of Having Women in Sport

Liston has noted that such dramatic changes in the developed world have contributed to a rebalancing in relationships resulting in more equal power relations between the sexes and that this shift may have allowed more women to become involved in former male preserves, such as sport. The female respondents interviewed for Stacey Pope’s study of English sports fans, for example, were of the view that, “if women are in paid work they are therefore entitled to leisure time in largely the same way as men.”

In earlier periods women may have been grateful just to have the opportunity to engage in limited and segregated leisure activities. The growing sense on the part of women that leisure time is a right rather than a privilege may lead them to be more willing and able to defend this right and to challenge behaviour that impinges upon it. In this new era of greater gender equality the benefits that female fans can offer sport can be broadly classified into two main categories: economic, and social.

(a) Economic Benefits

The increased economic and purchasing power of women distinguishes them as a lucrative new demographic for sports and other stakeholders in the sports industry. Today, professional sports seek to ensure global popularity and financial and economic success by trying to maximise variables such as TV revenues, attendance, merchandising and sponsorship. However, in a male sport market that is increasingly saturated, diversification may be the key to future success.

In this important sense, the female market represents a consumer segment with a significant potential for growth and a market that, perhaps, has still not been considered seriously by marketers, promoters or advertisers, but most of all by sports organisations. It has been observed that sports which can position

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61 Op. Cit., Koranten, 35
63 In terms of education, women account for almost 60% of university degrees in America and Europe. Op. Cit, The Economist
64 These women have shown that they are increasingly willing and able to work outside the home, have a reduced amount of time to dedicate to ‘traditional’ female work, marry later and have children (if at all) later in their lives.
themselves in such a way as to meet more directly the needs of women will reap dividends down the line.\(^{68}\).

In commenting upon football in England, for example, Anne Coddington has noted that:

“In the modern ‘society of choice’ – particularly in the context of an expanding leisure sector, football cannot assume that its current pre-eminence as the biggest live spectator sport will remain unrivalled, nor can it be sure that a natural constituency exists as if by right (…) So to protect its long-term future, football has to constantly rebuild its fan base”\(^{69}\).

It is submitted that this statement is true of many professional sports today. From an economic perspective, women can impact on each of the core revenue streams of sports organisations, namely attendance, sponsorship, merchandising and, indirectly, to television revenue.\(^{70}\)

It must be noted that female fans have expressed resentment at previously narrow efforts to leverage upon the female fan base in order to boost revenue, by lambasting the “fast-buck marketing mentality”\(^{71}\) that looks upon female fans simply as “spend-per-head units”.\(^{72}\) While many of the other concerns highlighted by female fans, and discussed in detail in Chapter Three, were once valid, it is submitted that this criticism is increasingly less convincing. The reality is that in late-modern professional sports, all fans are regarded as consumers and as valuable contributors to a sport’s revenue streams. It is simply an economic reality of the sports world today and one that all fans, regardless of their gender, are more realistic about and must deal with.

\(\text{\textit{(i) Attendance}}\)

One field in which there is some margin for a potential improvement is in the attendance rates of female fans at live sport events. Although, as noted in Chapter One, women do have a history of attending sporting events,; history also shows us that, in general terms, the majority of male mass spectator sports have been predominantly attended by male sport fan communities. As will be highlighted in Chapter Three, female fans have typically been marginalised and de-legitimised in their role as spectators and supporters.\(^{73}\) Chapter Four will point out that, while some sports do boast relatively impressive attendance statistics for female fans, attendance by gender remains an area in which there is still much room for improvement.


\(^{69}\) Op. cit., Coddington, 216

\(^{70}\) In considering European professional football the impending introduction of the UEFA Financial Fair Play Rules will force professional football clubs in European club competitions to increase the revenue generated by each of these income streams in order to comply with the break-even requirements to be imposed on them from 2013 onwards. There is an imperative on clubs, therefore, to expand and diversify their fan bases as they strive to grow revenues. [http://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/uefaorg/Clubicensing/01/50/09/12/1500912_DOWNLOAD.pdf](http://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/uefaorg/Clubicensing/01/50/09/12/1500912_DOWNLOAD.pdf) (accessed 20 June 2011)

\(^{71}\) Op. cit., Coddington, 69

\(^{72}\) Ibid.

\(^{73}\) Op, cit, Crawford (2004), 56
In England, most Premier League clubs boast very impressive crowd figures relative to stadium capacity at their home games\textsuperscript{74}, and, therefore, increasing the rate of female attendance may not be among their top priorities. For large numbers of clubs, however, that sometimes struggle to fill their grounds, increasing the number of spectators by recruiting more female fans would bring obvious benefits and would assist them in their attempts to survive in the sports marketplace.

(ii) Sponsorship

Reference has been made already to the relatively saturated nature of today’s sports market for men. Such saturation levels present those seeking to market their products with a new challenge. With more and more companies vying for the attention of sports fans, competition is intense. In the United States, the impressive numbers of active female sports fans has caused advertisers to sit up and pay attention. More marketers are using sports to reach female fans as well as male\textsuperscript{75}. In an article discussing the rise of female fans of the Boston Red Sox and the New England Patriots, it was noted how sponsors have come to view the female market as one deserving of special attention: Whereas traditionally corporate sponsors used sports as way of targeting men, they have come to realise that sponsoring the Boston Red Sox could allow them to reach out to women\textsuperscript{76}. The Boston Red Sox were able to point to their growing female fan base in order to secure a sponsorship deal with CVS Corp., a Rhode Island pharmacy chain\textsuperscript{77}. The potential benefits, in terms of sponsorship, of having a significant female fan base has also been recognised by the Chief Executive of Premier League Rugby in England, Mark McCafferty. McCafferty recently stated that “given that 50% of the population is female, the more you attract the more you grow. If we attract more women, we might open ourselves to new sponsors who want to get involved and who want more balanced demographics”\textsuperscript{78}.

(iii) Merchandise

In writing on female NFL fans’ consumption of sports merchandise, Andersen has also noted that: “many women football fans engaging in the game through consumerism is a note-worthy recent demographic shift”\textsuperscript{79}. An examination by Koranten of expenditure within the United Kingdom on team-branded sports merchandise, however, shows a disparity between men and women. In this case, 19% of all men interviewed

\textsuperscript{74} Premier League Fan Survey, 2009/10
\textsuperscript{77} While CVS Corp. were initially reported to be ‘skeptical’, once they conducted research which showed that the Red Sox did indeed have a fervent and fast growing female fan base. CVS signed a major sponsorship deal that includes advertising on the Green Monster at Fenway Park, spring training tie-ins, and the designation of a special area at Fenway as the CVS Pharmacy Family Section.
\textsuperscript{79}Op. cit., Andersen, 39
spent money on such merchandise compared to only 10% of women\textsuperscript{80}. One could interpret this finding in a number of ways. It could indicate that women are less inclined to purchase team branded merchandise. However, it could also bolster the argument that the female market represents an untapped consumer segment with great development potential. The disparity could also be put down to a lack of a sufficient range of products that satisfy women’s needs. A more detailed analysis of what different sports are doing in terms of merchandising strategies to specifically address women is contained in Chapter Four. An interesting feature of the sports marketplace is the tendency for women to generate goodwill for a brand by word of mouth\textsuperscript{81}. Research has shown they are more likely than men to recommend products and services they have consumed to their friends and to communicate about such products and services with their network of co-workers and family\textsuperscript{82}.

(iv) Television Revenues

While, in general, women do watch less sport on television than men, the female viewing figures for televised sport are significant. Over 40% of the viewers of the 2007 Superbowl - some nine million viewers - were female\textsuperscript{83}. Over two and a half million female viewers, a figure which accounted for 37% of the total viewership, tuned in to watch the 2007 F.A. Cup Final in England between Chelsea and Manchester United.\textsuperscript{84} It has already been observed above that the potential for clubs to attract new sponsors can be enhanced by their having a more diversified fan base that includes significant numbers of female fans. It is further suggested here that sports which can point to noteworthy levels of female fans could be more attractive to television networks which may factor in the benefits of a large female viewership when considering the revenue these networks could generate through the sale of advertising slots during commercial breaks and through obtaining new programme sponsorships.

(b) Social Benefits

A number of social benefits relating to generating more female fandom have been identified by research. In terms of general social benefits, having more women in sport can foster a healthy gender synergy. Female fandom has the potential to foster a beneficial relationship between men and women\textsuperscript{85}. In sharing their interest in sport, men and women can learn from each other and get out the most out of their sports

\textsuperscript{80} Op. cit., Koranten, 122
\textsuperscript{81} Op. cit., Bush, 258
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Op. cit., Koranteng
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 107
experiences giving to the sport different approaches that can be used, “as sources of mutual enrichment”\textsuperscript{86}. Some of the more specific benefits relating to female fandom are outlined below.

(i) The ‘Civilising Effect’

Even those sports which already have healthy attendance figures may benefit from the presence of more women in the stadium. Referring once again to football, specifically English football, the discussion about recruiting female fans has often been linked to debates about violence and disorder by male spectators. Having more women attending the event is supposed to have a ‘civilising influence’ on the behavior of such men. This has long thought to be the case.\textsuperscript{87}

The ‘civilising effect’ argument was used, in fact, by the British Government in 1985 in the wake of serious disturbances involving English football fans to promote initiatives such as family areas and membership schemes in an attempt to curb violence within football grounds\textsuperscript{88}. This ‘use’ of women to attempt to ‘civilise’ crowds within sports stadia is a controversial one amongst female fans however. Anne Coddington considers it an “idea that makes your average female fan sick with disgust”\textsuperscript{89}. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, female fans have consistently struggled to gain acceptance within sporting venues. Female fans have expressed a desire to have the chance to go to a match just to enjoy it like any other fan, rather than acting as “informal manners police”\textsuperscript{90}.

Nevertheless, a school of thought exists which argues that the potential ‘civilising effect’ of women could even extend beyond the stands and onto the field of play. On field violence of athletes towards other athletes and athletes’ violence towards themselves, in terms of over-training, steroid use and playing on ‘through the pain barrier’ have been cited as examples of an attempt on the part of men to confirm and accentuate their masculinity through sport\textsuperscript{91}. Female fans, who are less concerned with issues of masculinity validation, are perceived as being less tolerant of such deviant behaviour. The extent to which their disapproval could bring about a change in this on-field deviant activity is difficult to estimate. It is notable, however, that the NHL has recently taken steps to curb some of the violence traditionally associated with the game. The public outcry for the imposition of measures to curb incidents of concussion and serious injury arising from violent

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{86} Op. cit., Koranteng, 107
\bibitem{87} For example, a report by the New York Chronicle on an 1897 initiative by the Knickerbocker Baseball Club to introduce a Ladies Day on the last Thursday of each month told of how, “the presence of an assemblage of ladies purifies the moral atmosphere” and represses “all the outburst of intemperate language which the excitement of the contest so frequently induces.” Op. cit., Christensen, Guttman and Pfister, 1097
\bibitem{89} Op. cit., Coddington, 87
\bibitem{90} Ibid.
\bibitem{91} Michael Flood, “International Encyclopaedia of Men and Masculinities”, (London: Routledge, 2007)
\end{thebibliography}
on-ice incidents was taken on board by the NHL authorities with a senior NHL figure remarking, “Sometimes when the public gets so focused on something like that it improves the climate for change”.  

(ii) Future Generations

It is generally accepted that, within the home, women are often the key decision makers in terms of how family leisure time is spent. Female fans who are also mothers can act as a strong link between current and future generations of fans. Premier League Fan Surveys have discussed how many fans are introduced to sport through their familial relationships. Often this introduction is made by a male figure within the household. Liston, for example, has noted how “male role models and especially fathers played a key role in enabling females to participate in male-dominated sports”. However, statistics show that single parent families are an increasing feature of modern society.

It was noted in Chapter One that sports fandom touches the lives of most members of society. It can be argued, therefore, that it is important for children to be encouraged, within the home, to play and be involved with sport, so that sporting practice, with its lessons about fair competition and cooperation, is an avenue that is opened to them. It is reasonable to assume that where a single mother is a fan of sport herself, she is more likely to encourage her children to play and follow sport. In talking about the ‘family’ audience, sport must offer a clear focus on women-headed households not least because:

“The fact that there are so many single mothers who have the responsibility of rearing their children alone makes it essential that they inform themselves about sports so that their children are not short changed in a society that places so much emphasis upon sport.”

Therefore, by reaching out to the specific family situations facing women, sports can influence how the families of today spend their leisure time and how the families of tomorrow will also do the same.

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95 David Canning Epperson, A woman’s touch. What Today’s Women Can Teach Us About Sport & Life (Indiana: Diamond Communications, 1999), 114
(iii) Benefits for Female Sports Fans

It would be an omission in a discussion of the benefits of female sports fandom not to discuss what equality benefits it may bring to women themselves. Women’s increased involvement in sport, both through direct participation and following sport as fans, can promote “positive development by providing alternative norms, values, attitudes, knowledge, capabilities and experiences.” Sports fandom has the potential to empower women to rebel against gender subordination. In addition, being a sports fan can “play an important role in constructing women’s identities” and has been shown to have a positive effect in terms of socialisation by giving women the opportunity to interact with other fans.

The results of Stacey Pope’s study on female fans of rugby union and football in the English city of Leicester, found that “for 61% of football fans and 59% of rugby respondents the social interactions they shared at sport events were an important aspect of their match day routine.” Older female respondents in Pope’s work also told of the importance of their fandom in their retirement years. For these more senior women “actively going to football was, for some, their sole remaining leisure focus and also a symbol of their independence.” For some of these older female sports fans, their fanship of Leicester City Football Club helped to stave off loneliness following the death of their spouse and even allowed them “to reassert structure and meaning” in their lives.

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96 United Nations, Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs “Women 2000 and Beyond”, December 2007, 3
99 Ibid.
101 Ibid., 292
102 Ibid.
CHAPTER 3: EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE SPORTS FANS

3.1 Introduction

In order to explore what women want in terms of their sports fandom, it is useful to take note of the various experiences of female sports fans across several sports and identify the common issues those fans encounter. One of the common misconceptions stressed by female fans - their perceived homogeneity - has already been addressed in Chapter One. This chapter will recount some of the experiences of female fans and highlight some of the concerns expressed by and regarding them.

3.2 Sport as a ‘male affair’

Sport has traditionally been seen as a male domain, a domain where women have struggled to gain both admission and acceptance. It has been described as “arguably civilised society’s most prominent masculinity rite, and is viewed as an arena characterised by conformity and consent, deference to male authority, pain and social isolation”\(^\text{103}\). For men sport assists the passage from childhood to the adult male world\(^\text{104}\) but this is not the case for women who find that their heterosexual femininity is challenged as a result of their interest in sport. It has even been suggested that the promotion of masculinity is at the heart of sport\(^\text{105}\). In a world where men feel that their masculinity is challenged by societal changes, it is not surprising that sport is seen as a refuge within an increasingly feminised society and is, therefore, held out as one of the ‘last bastions’ of masculine hegemony.\(^\text{106}\) It is also not surprising, therefore, that, consciously or unconsciously men will seek to protect this ‘bastion’ and to exclude women from it. The sense of exclusion from sport experienced by female fans is discussed further below.

3.3 Exclusion

A recurring theme in studies of female sports fandom is exclusion. In broad terms this exclusion can typically take two main forms: exclusion because of the existence of logistical hurdles that women must overcome in order to participate as fans (‘logistical exclusion’) and exclusion because of the ‘othering’ of female fans by existing, usually male, fans (‘social exclusion’).

(a) Logistical exclusion

As noted in Chapter Two, it can certainly be said that the ‘modern woman’ enjoys more social and economic freedom than her predecessors. For many women their role within the home, as wives, mothers and carers, has not changed to such an extent as to make this role completely irrelevant in terms of how it impacts upon how women spend their leisure time. Stacey Pope’s research showed that women encounter difficulties in


\(^{105}\) Ibid.

\(^{106}\) Michael A. Messner, “Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity”, (Boston: Beacon Press), 15
finding the time to pursue their own sporting and leisure interests while juggling their ‘responsibilities’ as wives and mothers.  

This kind of logistical exclusion is not typically a factor that prevents women from becoming fans. The logistical exclusion does impact significantly, however, on the ‘careers’ of female sports fans and it is certainly a factor that distinguishes female patterns of sports fandom from that of their male counterparts. In this sense:

“Women’s sport fandom ‘careers’ remain typically, at best, secondary to men’s – many women, for example, were compelled to take ‘fan breaks’ after having children whilst their male partners continued to attend ‘their’ sport apparently undisturbed by new arrivals.”

(b) Social Exclusion

When speaking of social exclusion with regard to female fans, we speak of a form of exclusion that restricts women’s participation as sports fans because of the effect of “cultural expectations and gender discrimination.” As sport is typically regarded as a ‘male preserve’, women are cast as the ‘other’ and can, therefore, feel excluded from sport and from displaying typical fan behaviour. As Crawford has noted, “Sport fan communities can operate as sites of social exclusion.”

Gosling, in writing on female sports fans, has referenced the work of social theorists who have argued that the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within a given community are mediated through cultural terms and therefore sports fans must gain the correct ‘cultural ticket’ to be accepted. Several factors, some of which are explored below, make it very difficult for many female sports fan to get their hands on this ‘cultural ticket’.

Sport plays a socialising role in the lives of men, particularly young men, even if they are not athletic themselves. Indeed one of the ways in which men who do not exhibit notable prowess on the sports field can gain masculine heterosexual acceptance is “to become a walking encyclopaedia of sports trivia”. It is not as straightforward for female fans to gain acceptance to sporting circles – or among other women - in this way. Female fans have recounted experiences of feeling excluded from the sports discourse simply by the language used by those ‘on the inside.’ In order to overcome exclusion and to achieve inclusion, women need to gain respect and there begins a somewhat vicious circle. To gain admission to ‘the inside’, women

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108 Ibid.
need to gain (male) respect. In order to gain this respect, women need to speak the language of sport and be listened to by those ‘on the inside.’ The accepted form of the language in sport can itself be exclusionary, however. Anne Coddington has picked up on this very point when she comments, astutely:

“However, in order to gain male respect, women often have to overcome an initial barrier. For language is a way of excluding as well as including people. And women have to earn their inclusion in a way men don’t (…) even the man who isn’t a serious fan is likely to be allowed to have his say, a courtesy not always extended to women.”

‘Sports talk’ is characterised by the prevalence of banter, a form of communication that is more typically an apparently contradictory feature of male interactions. If ‘sports talk’ is the language that allows men to connect with other men, it is probably natural that women would experience some difficulties in accessing and engaging in this culturally highly specialised channel of communication.

3.4 Female Fan Identity

A more complex issue we need to approach is how female fans perceive themselves and how they want to be regarded by others. Some female fans express a wish not to be identified specifically as female fans but just as fans. Interestingly, even though female fan numbers at English football grounds have increased significantly in the post-Hillsborough era, research shows that this fan/gender identity tension has remained a constant. In 1991, for example, Williams and Woodhouse observed that female fans “expressed a strong preference not to be singled out by sex”, regarding their gender as irrelevant to their fandom. Katherine Jones in her 2008 study on female fans of English football again noted this tension. Some of the respondents to Jones’ survey “did not want to be seen as women at football matches because of the negative connotations surrounding emphasised femininity within this setting.”

For those working inside sport to make them more attractive to female fan, the female fan identity issue is a complex one to address. Clearly, certain female fans resent being labelled and categorised as such. However, as noted above, female fans do encounter obstacles which their male counterparts simply do not encounter. If those responsible for running sports and sports organisations were to treat female fans as they do male fans, would this improve the situation and lead to an acknowledgement on the part of these sports and their

113 Op. cit., Coddington, 60
114 As Easthope explains: “The content of banter has a double function. Outwardly, banter is aggressive, a form in which the masculine ego asserts itself. Inwardly, however, banter depends on a close, intimate and personal understanding of the person who is the butt of the attack. It thus works as a way of affirming the bond of love between men while appearing to deny it”. Anthony Easthope, “What a Man’s Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture”, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 87-88
115 Op. cit., Williams and Woodhouse, 30
116 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
existing fans that female fans are ‘worthy’ fans and fit within existing fan cultures? On the other hand, would such an attitude operate to reinforce existing obstacles, thereby ensuring that the issues highlighted by female fans of today will remain the issues highlighted by female fans of future generations? It is suggested that the more likely outcome of the approach would be the latter of these alternatives. Given that sport is still so widely regarded as a ‘male affair’, it is likely to be the case that female fans will continue to be distinguished from their male counterparts. However, this distinction does not need inevitably to give rise to the negative side-effects highlighted in this chapter.

3.5 Issues of Authenticity/Credibility

In Chapter One, we argued that women do have a tradition of attending sports events and thus in engaging in fan behaviour. Chapter Four will provide examples of several sports where the proportion of female fans following and attending sport is high and is increasing. However, research has shown that, although women may be a growing presence at sports events and within fan communities, it does not follow automatically that they are fully accepted within such fan communities. A common theme in existing research is that female fans often have accusations of ‘inauthenticity’ levelled at them.

Anne Coddington has perpectively described how female fans have “a nagging feeling that they are on trial.”[119] Interestingly, the main challenge female fans experience in being accepted as authentic and credible fans is one that transcends sports and national and cultural differences. Coddington’s observation was made in the context of English football. In research on female fans of Spanish football it has also been recounted how those fans have waged a constant battle against a prevailing view that, because they have not played the game, football is something beyond their comprehension.[120] Andersen, writing on female NFL fans in the USA, tells of how women are frequently reminded that although they tune in to watch the game “they do not actually understand it”[121].

In Chapter One we mentioned how female fans are often regarded as ‘new arrivals’ despite their consistent presence at sports events. Perhaps if more attention was paid to the older female sports fan, as was the case with Stacey Pope’s study, there would be an increased recognition that female fans have actually been there all along. We submit that such recognition would counter some of the claims of ‘inauthenticity’ and bandwagon jumping.

It would be unfair, however, to lay the blame for the prevalence of this stereotype solely at the feet of male sports fans. There is evidence to show that some female fans have engaged in activities which perpetuate and

reinforce the stereotype, undoubtedly much to the frustration of those fans who constantly rail against it. Andersen refers in this context to a humorous book apparently aimed at female fans written by author and NFL consultant Betsy Berns.\(^{122}\) The book is “is peppered with ‘Fun Facts’ about players’ personal lives and has an entire chapter devoted to throwing a memorable football party (Helpful Hint: Place the crudité platter away from the TV – chomping on carrots and celery can be loud).”\(^{123}\) Many female sports fans have taken to the web to start conversations about their fandom. While some of these websites and blogs were initiated as a form of protest to the accusations of inauthenticity, others, which might argue for both humour and irony, simply provide ammunition to the accusers.\(^{124}\)

Certain sports have also fed into the negative and gendered stereotype under the marketing mask. In 2009, the English Rugby Football Union teamed up with publishers Mills and Boons in a licensing deal which would see the world’s biggest romance publisher produce “eight raunchy tales from the touchline”\(^{125}\), including *The Virgin Secretary's Impossible Boss* and *Blackmailed Into the Greek Tycoon's Bed*. It might be possible to dismiss this initiative as no more than a PR stunt or harmless fun if the RFU “did not try to legitimise it as some kind of outreach programme, and brand the England Rose symbol on every book”\(^{126}\).

Speaking of the deal, in the official press release, somewhat amazingly entitled ‘No Knickers at Twickers’, RFU Licensing & Marketing Manager Jane Barron, stated that "Rugby has always been a game enjoyed by women (...) A partnership with Mills & Boon is a fantastic way to encourage even more women and their families to get involved with the game”\(^{127}\).

Judging from the ‘uninhibited’ titles of some of these books, the RFU might be a little misguided in targeting families with this initiative. *The Ruthless Billionaire’s Virgin* can hardly be considered an appropriate title for a relaxing children’s bedtime story. As for the content of the books, an extract from *The Prince’s Waitress Wife* does not give the reader the impression that female rugby fans are a knowledgeable bunch. To quote just one example: “‘Oh no, the poor guy’s tripped. Right on the line! Why is everyone cheering? That's SO mean.’ 'He didn't trip, he scored a try,' Casper growled, simmering with masculine frustration at her inappropriate comment.”\(^{128}\)

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123 Ibid.
124 An example of such a website is the ‘Ladies…’ website. The raison d’être of the site as stated on its homepage seems promising at first: “Sport in America has been the province of men for generations. There’s no shortage of strong, capable women bucking that trend.” But the sentence ends in a way that leaves no one in any doubt that those behind the site are less concerned with undermining the arguments concerning female fans as inauthentic. It concludes, “so we’re out to conquer a side market: leering” http://ladiesdotdotdot.wordpress.com/about/ (accessed 19 June 2010)
127 Op. cit., Rugby Football Union News Homepage
Other initiatives launched by sports to target female fans, such as the NFL’s ‘Football 101’ workshops have been criticised for ‘speaking down’ to female fans. Women are invited to attend Football 101 to spend a day learning about football, meet players and coaches and tour facilities. However, the workshops appear to have been used primarily by NFL franchises as fundraisers for ‘women’s issues’ such as breast cancer research and raising awareness. Andersen has commented on this approach that there is little here about the pursuit of greater spectator equality. Instead, “The humorous and light nature of the fundamental portion of the workshops suggests that women learning about football is not something that the NFL takes seriously”.

3.6 Media Treatment

Discussions of sport in the print media and on television are largely spaces and debates that are without women – or a woman’s perspective. Easthope, writing over twenty years ago on the coverage of sport on television in the United Kingdom, commented that, “the role of television programmes based on football talk is, then, to establish a discourse space in which men can interact without women and begin to perform masculinity”.

While the presence of female TV and radio sports presenters has increased notably over the past 20 years, there is still a sense that sport on television is produced by men, for men. In the United Kingdom, for example, the female presenters on Sky Sports, the market leader in televised sport, are more reputed for their conventional heterosexual appeal to high spending young male sports fans – and thus the channel’s sponsors and advertisers - than their sports knowledge. The recent controversy in England in which Sky Sports’ top football presenters, Richard Keys and Andy Gray, were overheard making off-air crude remarks on sexuality and questioning the familiarity of a female referee’s assistant with the offside rule, reinforces this sense of a hidden casual misogyny in the sports media. The widespread condemnation of their behaviour and the subsequent resignation and dismissal of Keys and Gray, respectively, did send a public message that sexist comments are intolerable. Media reports of the incident, however, repeatedly told of how Gray and Keys’ real sin was that they ‘got caught.’ The use of this phrase implies firstly, that they and many others had gotten away with sexist behaviour in the past and secondly, that their real crime was not passing sexist remarks but actually getting publicly exposed doing so. The incident gives rise to the following question: if top figures in sports media cannot conduct their exchanges without demeaning women or respect a qualified female match official, what must they think – and say - about the average female fan?

It has been said of the NFL that “football genders its spectators by how it addresses them but also by how it allows them to participate”. Women in the NFL, according to this view, are seen as being capable of

132 Op. cit, Andersen, 86
playing only two roles: sideline reporters and cheerleaders. They therefore operate on the periphery of sport, and “are often known better for their good looks than their football know-how”. In Chapter Four we explore this contention by looking more closely at the experience of women sports fans.

133 Op. cit, Andersen, 86
CHAPTER 4: Female Sports Fans – An International Perspective

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we look at female fans of various sports across the world. In the course of our research, we have noted how much of the research to date on female sports fandom relates to fans of football. While research has been conducted on female fans of other sports, such research has tended to focus only on a particular sport and thus it does not offer a comparison with the situation in other sports. The confines of this paper do not allow for an in-depth analysis of each sport; however, we aim to provide a ‘snapshot’ of how football (in England, Germany and Spain), the major U.S. professional sports (NFL, MLB, NBA and NHL), rugby union (in England), rugby league (in England) and Australian Rules Football address their female fans.

4.2 Football

(a) England

Analysis of Premier League Fan Surveys: Female Fans

We carried out an analysis of the F.A. Premier League’s Fan Surveys from the 2003/004 season to the 2007/08 season to look for trends, particularly of course in regards to female fans. For purposes of consistency, we have focused only on the 14 clubs that were in the top flight of English football for each of the above five seasons.

The gender analysis of the fans for all the five seasons shows that although there are club variations, on average nearly 15% of Premier League fans are female (see Figure 4.1 in Appendix 1). The first national fan survey (1994-1995) found that the Premier League was watched by an audience that was 87% male and 13% female. The situation in 2011 has changed only slightly, returning figures of 85% male and 15% female fans. The statistics have remained consistent for the two Manchester clubs, whose percentage of female fans has averaged around 16% for all five seasons.

Bolton Wanderers and Middlesbrough are two clubs that consistently have a strong female supporter base. According to these data, Middlesbrough reached a highpoint of 34% female fans for the 2004-2005 season, a year which saw them finish 7th in the Premier League table. It is also interesting to note that the club managed to cover 91% of its capacity during this season which is relatively higher than their average

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134 This is not surprising given that football is, undoubtedly, the most popular and successful game in the world.

135 Goodform’s market research arm, SportsWise has completed the Premier League's Fan Survey since 2002, which provides league and clubs with time-series performance and customer satisfaction data. (SportsWise creates an extensive online survey covering key points of customer interaction and experience and attracts more than 30,000 participants every year. To ensure robust sampling and regular feedback on survey progress, the company liaises with the clubs providing them with client trends on experience and expenditure associated with match-day experience.) I don’t think we need this information.
occupancy figure by almost 10%. The club also won its only major trophy - The League Cup - in 2004, a year before the massive surge in recruitment of female followers.

The London clubs - Arsenal, Chelsea, Fulham and Tottenham - show a relatively low female fan ratio, averaging around 13% for the five seasons. Whilst the overall figure for female support shows some consolidation at 15%. This hides an apparent increase in female support for the two Merseyside clubs when compared with findings from the survey of 2001-2002. In this nine-year period Liverpool have moved to 14% from 9%, and Everton to 15% from 10%.

The surveys also indicate that there are higher levels of female attendance amongst more recent supporters; this is most marked amongst those fans who are new to Premier League football within the last 4 years (37% female). Thus, it can be said that gender profile sees little change overall, with the exception of the newly promoted clubs where far higher proportions of females supporters were revealed in the survey than is traditionally the case amongst established clubs. The survey does not advance any reason for this trend. It may be the case that these female fans are temporarily attracted by success and the glamour that the Premier League brings. One might expect that, given the recent ‘influx’ of younger female fans, the overall level of female fans would have increased quite substantially. This is not the case however. The data contained in the surveys does not suggest any reasons for this ‘paradox.’ It could be that older female fans are turning away from the game or, simply, that the number of new female fans are so small that they are not really influencing the overall gender figure.

**Fan gender by age**

Across supporter types – season ticket holder or non-season ticket holder – there was relatively little variation between males and females by age. However, one discrepancy is noticeable. Female fans in 2011 are more likely to be younger than older (18% of all 16–24-year-old Premier League fans are female compared to 10% of those over 65). This, in turn, suggests that a new breed of younger, female fan may be being attracted to Premier League football (See Figure 4.2 in Appendix 1).

There is also strong evidence to suggest that football is growing in appeal to younger, female fan. Nearly one in five of all 16–24-year old supporters are now female compared to just one-in-ten among the 65-plus age category. Likewise, among new attendees twice as many females have started attending Premier League games in the last four years compared to males. This is further evidence that the Premier League continues to gently broaden its supporter base (see Figure 4.3 in Appendix 1).
The statistics also suggest that the average male Premier League fan will have attended Saturday afternoon games on average for 24 years compared to 17 years for the average female fan. This could be due to a number of factors. We noted in Chapter Three that female fans encounter many interruptions in their fan career due to family responsibilities. Equally, however, the fact remains that twice as many existing female fans have started attending games on a regular basis over the last four years than existing male fans (20% versus 10%). This development may demonstrate that the Premier League is becoming less and less an all-male preserve. We have said that new fans are twice as likely to be female rather than male – but it is also more likely that more females than males will relinquish their direct tie with the game at a later date. Finally, men (30%) were twice as likely as women (16%) to have been previous season ticket holders at Premier League clubs.

**Marital Status**

According to the 2007-2008 survey, nearly one in four of those who responded (23%) were single; 71% were either married or living with a partner; 5% were divorced; 1% widowed – figures that have remained identical over the course of five seasons. It would be interesting to know how many of the female fans are single mothers, given their important role in introducing their children to sport, as discussed in Chapter Two. However, female supporters were more likely to be single than their male counterparts (28% versus 22%) – perhaps reflecting their younger average age.

**Role of family influence on female fans**

The analysis of survey data suggests that for female fans, family members tend to be a greater influence than for men in their decision to first attend a game. The graph below (Figure 4.4 in Appendix 1) illustrates this point. According to the 2007-2008 survey, gender also remains a strong distinguishing feature, with 45% of female supporters likely to attend games with their partner/spouse compared to just one in five males (18%). As ever, it is the men who tend to go to the match with their friends (59% male; 38% female).

**Other Factors**

**Match Day experience** - The Premier League National Fan Survey for all the seasons under review also reveals a higher level of importance placed by female fans on questions of cleanliness, toilet facilities and the match day programme, while, unsurprisingly, the fans who attend games with children put a greater emphasis on facilities for their children.

**Non Attendance** - In terms of their non attendance at home matches, male supporters are more likely than females to cite work (34%) and family commitments (41%) as the reasons for their non attendance - female counterparts (28% and 32%, respectively). It is interesting that family commitments are claimed to hold men back more than women in attending games. This strange finding could be attributed to a variety of reasons.
As noted above, many female fans attend games with their families and, therefore, family commitments are not as significant a reason for their non-attendance. Furthermore, the data suggests that men are more likely to perceive family restrictions as a burden, whereas women regard such commitments as a responsibility and perhaps are therefore less likely to ‘blame’ family commitments for their non-attendance. The average age of female fans is on average younger than their male counterparts, so it may be the case that they are not yet as ‘tied down’ as male fans for this reason. Finally of course we cannot say how many women are currently not attending – and so are not registering in the survey – precisely because of their family responsibilities.

For women, cost is again a restricting issue in attendance, be it travel costs (46%) or ticket costs (45%), two figures which are consistent within the surveys over the five seasons. Cost of a season ticket appears to be more of a barrier to entry to women than men (44% versus 32%). It is worth bearing this in mind when considering the ticket pricing policy of the German Bundesliga, which is discussed below.

**Safety** - Female fans generally place a higher emphasis than men on the four safety issues (fan safety, behaviour of people, stewarding, policing). Encouragingly, given the attention that female supporters place on these issues, female fans actually rate member clubs’ performances on these questions more highly than their male counterparts.

**Use of Internet for Merchandise & Football Information** - Gender-wise, checking for football news more than once a day appears more of a male preserve than female (43% versus 26%). Men tend to be the more frequent visitors to club websites (46% once a day or more versus 37% for women). The one particular area in which women exceed men in their internet football habits is *buying club products online* – 40% as opposed to 34%. But this may be more related to age, with the younger generation far more comfortable both talking with other fans via message-board communities and playing games online.

**Club Initiatives**

In the English Premier League, Dobson et al. stress that there is “a new phenomenon of mothers and daughters going to football matches together, just as fathers have traditionally taken their sons.”\(^{136}\) Better facilities and all-seater stadiums, less hooliganism and more star players (and international managers) were cited as key factors in attracting more female fans. In our online research we found that all English Premier League Clubs offer women’s club branded merchandise products in their online stores. Nevertheless, only approximately half of the clubs offer replica kits for women. The general focus of merchandise products lies

with apparel and accessories for adults (male), babies and juniors. Regular advertisers on the websites of the Premier League clubs include EA Games and Bet Poker Casino, both companies that target a specifically male demographic.

There is a trend amongst Premier League clubs to reach out to families rather than women specifically. Many clubs have designated family seating areas in their stadia and clubs such as Blackburn Rovers, Manchester City Wolverhampton Wanderers and Everton organise Family Fun Days. Everton FC has also taken the lead in implementing an inclusion and equality programme to tackle issues such as racism and discrimination. Interestingly, however, this programme does not lay any particular focus on issues encountered especially by women in the area of football. Sunderland’s website features a project called Delilah’s Diary, which contains match reports and football related news written by a woman – an unusual feature.\footnote{137}

(b) Germany

Statistics – The Current Situation

Women have been a near constant presence on the German football scene. Martin et. al describe how “at the first final of the German Championship in 1903 between VfB Leipzig and DFC Prag, women with big hats accompanied their husbands to the match”.\footnote{138} Since the ban established by the DFB prohibiting women to play football was removed in 1970, German women have been steadily establishing themselves as world class football players. Winning the 2003 and 2007 FIFA Women’s World Cup gained the German respect at home and abroad and the current Women’s World Cup finals in Germany are attracting huge crowds. Despite their tradition of attending football matches and their interest in the game, female fans have been rather dismissed as a “new phenomenon” in German football.\footnote{139}

Today, German football is known to have the highest overall attendance rates in not only European Professional football, but worldwide. According to the 2011 Bundesliga Report\footnote{140}, exactly 17,374,518 spectators (an average of 41,802 spectators per match) attended the 2009/2010 season across all divisions of professional football in Germany. When compared internationally, the Bundesliga, based on the 2009/10 data, is second only to the NFL (67,509) in terms of average attendance\footnote{141} and places ahead of the AFL (37,390), the English Premier League (34,151) and MLB (30,338).\footnote{142} For example, in the 2009/2010 season, if the ranking was done according to aggregate, rather than average, attendance figures, the order of the leagues would be different due to the relatively few NFL games and the huge number of MLB games played each season.

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\footnote{140}{Bundesliga Report 2011, Die wirtschaftliche Position im Lizenzfußball, 56}
\footnote{141}{If the ranking was done according to aggregate, rather than average, attendance figures, the order of the leagues would be different due to the relatively few NFL games and the huge number of MLB games played each season.}
\footnote{142}{Bundesliga Report 2011, Die wirtschaftliche Position im Lizenzfußball, 56}
\end{flushright}
Bundesliga matches were attended by approximately 7,000 spectators more on average than for clubs in the English Premier League.

In the 2007/2008 season, one quarter of all Bundesliga spectators were female, showing that football has considerable cross-gender appeal in Germany. Women not only add to the overall atmosphere in the stadiums, but they also contribute in financial terms. Based on the assumption that the spend per head on tickets and match day operations is equal between male and female spectators, female supporters can be said to have accounted for the following revenue amounts across the 2007/2008, 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 seasons respectively €84,513,000, €90,850,000 in 2009 and €94,821,000 in 2010.

A study by Judith Kerschgens shows the estimated levels of female attendees at home games across the Bundesliga’s top division in the 2004/05 season (See Figure 4.5 in Appendix 1). These data clearly have questions about their reliability, but an increasing number of female fans have been identified by some commentators as responsible for “rapidly transforming the atmosphere of Germany’s football stadium.” Some sources describe this increase in female spectatorship as a “quiet revolution” and stress that where once women were the butt of jokes within German stadia, they are now regarded as an “integral part of a happy stadium family.” It seems that the increasing number of female fans inside the stadium has also helped to push out right-wing extremists, which “had been a key deterrent to women interested in football”. Others have said that it wasn’t a case of women fans being deterred by racism; rather it was the racists who were deterred by the women. Is this another example perhaps of the ‘civilising effect’ of female fans?

**Specific Initiatives**

According to the DFL only a few clubs in the Bundesliga’s top division actually investigate rigorously the composition of their fan base and, so much of the German research is carried out on a rather ad hoc and unscientific basis. This statement is borne out by Judith Kerschegen’s research on female fan attendance levels. Very few German clubs publicise what is being done to improve the female fan experience. Measures to prevent discrimination are implemented in a general way and do not seem to solely focus on any minority group.

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143 Bundesliga Report 2011, Die wirtschaftliche Position im Lizenzfußball, 10
146 Op., cit., Laycock
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 Personal Correspondence, 17 May 2011
Fifteen out of the eighteen top Bundesliga clubs sell club merchandise that is designed for female fans. Nevertheless, only seven Bundesliga clubs incorporated female fit home jerseys into their merchandise offers. It is suggested here that it is not a coincidence that those seven clubs are among the most successful in the Bundesliga in terms of fan base size.

Thomas Schneider, Director of the Fan department of the DFL, explained that the DFL has not developed any specific strategies to communicate with female fans. This is surprising when one considers the following statement of Sport+Markt’s Alexander Krauser:

“Female fans are the sport's biggest growth factor. The male market is already saturated. All you can do is make sure that the levels stay constant. With women, however, it's different. Only 25 percent of stadium fans are women. What's to stop it becoming 50-50?”

**Stadia Improvement**

The only strategy in German football which can be said to have been undertaken with women specifically in mind is the upgrading of facilities within stadia. At the beginning of the 1990s, in the context of researching fan culture and social fan liaison work, the DFL focused particularly on the issue of sanitation facilities. Research was undertaken with a view to implementing improvements in this area so that every spectator would be catered for, according to his or her needs. This has lead to an improvement in childcare services and sanitary facilities within some grounds. Such improvements have served to make the football environment in Germany more pleasant and inclusive for women attending football matches.

**Ticket Pricing**

The ‘fan friendly’ ticket pricing strategy “never allowing its matches to turn into elite, overpriced events” is regarded as a policy which “has kept ticket prices affordable for fans and families”. Ticket prices within the top German League compare favourably with similar leagues internationally. As the DFL has noted “a look at other European leagues is illuminating: ticket prices in Italy are 25% higher than (in Germany), a match in the Spanish Division costs almost twice as much, and [English] Premier League fans pay over twice what they would for the Bundesliga.” The ticket pricing policy and a strong competitive balance within the league are put forward as reasons why the Bundesliga has the highest attendance rates in Europe.

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152 Personal correspondence, 16 May 2011
154 Such as in Armenia Bielefeld’s stadium.
155 Bundesliga Report (2010), Die wirtschaftliche Position im Lizenzfußball, 22
156 Ibid.
157 DFL Bundesliga Report 2010, page 22
In examining the presence and experience of female football fans in Spain, we have taken a slightly different approach to the more statistically based approach adopted with respect to England and Germany, in that we have decided to focus on a particular aspect of female football fandom in Spain – the female only peñas.

Although football fandom in Spain, like in many other European countries has been, and still is to a certain extent, considered to be a resolutely masculine sphere it has been reported recently that “Spanish women have become more interested in football”. This growing interest is attributed to the “deep transformation that Spanish society has undergone during the last thirty years as women have started to take the first stops on the path to equality, a path not trodden by previous generations”. In Spain, official fan clubs, the so-called “peñas”, are characteristic of Spanish football clubs. Despite the prevalence of peñas across Spanish football, female members are “practically non-existent”. The reason for the absence of female fans from the traditional peñas is due to the prevalence of many of the issues identified by female fans in other countries and as identified in Chapter Two. Spanish women felt uncomfortable in the traditional peñas due to the overwhelming masculine nature of such fan communities. Echoing the sentiments of their English counterparts, female Spanish fans “do not want to be seen as simple spectators of matches, but seek to be regarded as active, committed and knowledgeable football fans”. This quest for authenticity lead some female fans, over the past two decades, to establish female only peñas, thereby allowing them to “participate actively in fan communities where they can be feel accepted as 'authentic' fans, as opposed to auxiliary wives or daughters to 'authentic' male fans”.

Since the first female peña was founded in 1984 in Valencia, female fans of other Spanish clubs have followed suit. The accounts of some members of female only peñas underline how their membership allows them to enjoy football on their own terms: “Being women alone, we can talk about whatever and we can do what we want. If [men] are with us, everything we do seems to be wrong (...) If we give our opinion they...”

Since the 2003/2004 season, the ‘big two’ in Spain, Real Madrid and F.C. Barcelona, have enjoyed average home attendances of approximately 70,000. These attendance figures are well above the average attendance figure for a Primera División match, of some 28,196. Those Spanish clubs that lag behind FC Barcelona and Real Madrid on the attendance league table would surely welcome more female fans coming through their turnstiles.

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158 Since the 2003/2004 season, the ‘big two’ in Spain, Real Madrid and F.C. Barcelona, have enjoyed average home attendances of approximately 70,000. These attendance figures are well above the average attendance figure for a Primera División match, of some 28,196. Those Spanish clubs that lag behind FC Barcelona and Real Madrid on the attendance league table would surely welcome more female fans coming through their turnstiles.
160 Ibid., 179
161 Ibid.
162 Ramón Spaaij, “Understanding football hooliganism: a comparison of six Western European football clubs”, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 106
163 Real Madrid has 1,605 peñas, FC Barcelona 1,508 and Valencia CF 716.
164 Op. cit Goig, 180
165 Ibid., 179
tell us to shut up as we know nothing about football\textsuperscript{167}. Their peñas have allowed these women to enjoy the game in their own environment\textsuperscript{168} and to “create their own cultural spaces around football, spaces that cannot be found in the traditional peñas that are defined by the kind of strong masculine ethos that has become a barrier to women”\textsuperscript{169}. The philosophy of the peñas is clear: to create a sense of community which acts as a counterbalance to the exclusion and derision previously experienced by these women.

A notable feature of these female Spanish peñas is how keen they are to be regarded as a forum for active, committed and, above all, ‘authentic’ supporters. Having had accusations of inauthenticity levelled at them in their previous experiences of fandom, the members take steps to guard against a repeat of this situation. For this reason, teenage girls are discouraged from joining the women-only peñas. In the same way that male fans dismiss female fans on grounds of credibility, members of the female peñas take a similar approach towards female teenage football fans, regarding them as “having merely changed their interest from male stars in music to those in football”\textsuperscript{170}. Therefore, “to allow such girls to join would bring criticism that peñas permit ‘hangers on’ to join for superficial reasons”\textsuperscript{171}. On one hand this approach can be seen as a valid way of protecting the credibility of the female only peñas but on the other it could be seen as shifting accusations of inauthenticity onto younger and potentially new generations of committed female fans.

Anecdotal accounts have pointed to the effect that female-only peñas have had in bringing gradual change to Spanish football. Ricardo Penella Arias\textsuperscript{172} spoke recently of the shift in gender balance among fans of Valencia, and indeed throughout Spain over time. He objected to the notion that Spanish football was a male domain and hinted that the increase in the number of female fans could be due to a more family friendly environment, commenting: “Today the number of women in the stands now is huge. I think that, in part, this is because in the past games were only really attended by adults, but now they're open to all ages, and [this] has opened up new possibilities”\textsuperscript{173}. In Chapter Two, evidence of the narrowing of the social gap between men and women in Spanish society was provided. While it is not suggested that a level of gender parity has been reached, it appears that as Arias has noted “bit by bit, the number of male and female football fans is balancing out”\textsuperscript{174}.

4.2 American Sports

Statistics – The Current Situation

\textsuperscript{167} Op. cit., Goig, 182
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 183
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Ricardo Penella Arias is one of Valencia FC’s most adored and longest-standing players,
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
American sports, such as American football (National Football Association: NFL), basketball (National Basketball Association: NBA), ice hockey (National Hockey Association: NHL) and baseball (Major League Baseball: MLB), consistently draw millions of spectators to their games. Apart from the lucrative franchise based-structures, American professional sport clubs and leagues implement creative initiatives to increase and diversify their fan bases and increase profitability. The major US sports, like their European counterparts, are under constant pressure to attract new fans. Nevertheless, according to Freifeld, in the United States the number of female sports fans is on the rise.175 The matured “Title IX generation of women [who now] have jobs and disposable income”176 have become increasingly more important in the sport and in the corresponding merchandise industry. A 2009 Harris poll shows that the major U.S. professional sports boast impressive levels of female fans within their fan base: NHL (40%), MLB (37%), NBA (35%) and the NFL (34%). These statistics indicate that these sports must be doing something right in terms of attracting and retaining female fans.

Writing in 2007, Jen Brown of MSNBC wrote that, according to the NFL, “Approximately 375,000 women attend professional football games each weekend, with more than another 45 million watching on television”177. According to Nielson Media Research, “more women watched the 2007 Super Bowl (42.2 million) than men and women combined watched the Academy Awards (40.2 million).178 Nonetheless, as Erin Durant, Co-Founder of Women in Sport International has commented there are also, “still a lot of North American sports that continue to ignore women as an audience.”179 Ivette Ricco, the President/CEO of Femmefan Inc, further states that "the issue has been that they [women] have not been taken seriously by the sports industry.” She additionally explains that one of the reasons for launching www.femmefan.com was “the lack of appreciation for the passion of female fans” in the United States. Ricco noted that women follow male sports in significant numbers and are very often the decision makers within the home and yet, in spite of a well-publicised report by Scarborough180, “it has taken the sports industry decades to make an effort to embrace these fans.”181

However, Ricco acknowledges that the sport industry in the USA is changing, albeit slowly, and is taking some steps to cater for female fans by manufacturing and endorsing female sports apparel of male professional teams. Ricco does go on to note, however, that:

176 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
179 Personal Correspondence, 15 May 2011
181 Personal Correspondence, 16 May 2011
“unfortunately, although I was pleased that the industry recognized, finally, that women attending a football game in fall or winter, were not able to buy a jacket that fit them, but rather choices available were in men's sizes, they started by making everything glittery and pink.”\(^1\)

This point about ‘gender-appropriate’ merchandise will be picked upon again in Chapter Five. Among the initiatives that have been devised in an attempt to reach out female fans in a marketing sense, a distinction can be made between two different types of approaches adopted: ‘direct marketing’ programs and ‘indirect marketing/clean up’ initiatives.

(i) Direct Marketing

(a) MLB

Major League Baseball (MLB) has engaged in selling licensed sport apparel to women since 1989. The MLB licensing business evolved over the years due to changing commercial partners, shifting demand for trendier and more feminine sport clothing, and product line extensions, such as accessories, shoes, and fragrances.\(^2\) A study\(^3\) launched by the MLB in 1999 showed that out of the four major US sports, women identified baseball as the sport which is “the most family-friendly” A significant majority were of the opinion that baseball games provide “a wholesome environment (72%) and give family and friends a positive way to spend time together (90%).”\(^4\)

The MLB launched a series of initiatives targeted at female fans on the back of this study. Examples included an official MLB Mother’s Day Celebration; special ballpark nights with discounts, giveaways, and in-park promotions (which, it was stated, were “designed to entertain – not patronize – female fans”\(^1\)); a short lived, presumably due to its rather patronising nature, ‘Women’s Corner’ on the MLB website; a pledge to find new and stronger ways to support women and girls in diamond sports, and a Breast Cancer project named MLB Goes to Bat Against Breast Cancer.\(^5\)

(b) NFL

Following the MLB’s lead in this area, other professional American sports organizations, such as the NFL, the NBA in 2003, the NHL, as well as the MLS (Major League Soccer) introduced women’s sports licensing apparel. Although only introduced in 2000, by 2006 women’s merchandise accounted for 15% of the NFL’s

\(^{1}\) Personal Correspondence, 16 May 2011

\(^{2}\) Op. cit., Freifeld

\(^{3}\) The Commissioner’s Initiative on Women and Baseball


total merchandise sales\(^{188}\), up from just 3% in 2004.\(^{189}\) The road to commercial success in this area was not a smooth one however. The NFL experienced four major challenges when selling women’s league apparel:

1) The success of women-specific lines was only short-term
2) In times of business crisis, women’s sport lines were cut first
3) Mass marketing resulted in more unisex products not favoured by female consumers
4) Distribution outlets were difficult to find.\(^{190}\)

Some clever marketing and distribution strategies, such as introducing an NFL Line at *Victoria’s Secret*\(^{191}\) and offering replica jerseys in women’s sizes, the NFL reached out to many female fans. Reference was made in Chapter Two to the Football 101 workshops launched by the NFL, and while the workshops cannot be said to have been greeted with universal enthusiasm among female NFL fans, according to the NFL the project led to a 5% increase in female viewership at the next year’s Super Bowl.\(^{192}\) The NFL also temporarily hosted a dedicated female fan page called ‘NFL for Her’ on their website, which contained information on player’s wives, community events sponsored by the NFL and an explanation of some NFL rules. Although it is unclear why this is the case, this page has been discontinued.

(c) *NHL*

The NHL and some of its individual clubs have also implemented recent initiatives to diversify their fan bases. In 2009, the Washington Capitals reached out to female fans by creating the NHL’s first all-female fan club, Club Scarlets. A specific website, ‘Scarlet Capitals’ was launched in order, “to cope with the fastest growing sector of supporters, female hockey fans”.\(^{193}\) The dedicated fan page features events and news specifically targeted to female fans, such as ‘Hockey ‘n Heels’ and ‘Hockey 101’ with female hockey writers’ and hockey mom tips.

The ‘Hockey ‘n Heels’ initiative, which is similar in terms of tone and content to the NFL’s Football 101 initiative, proved popular with members of Club Scarlets. It sold out in five minutes and more than two hundred and fifty women participated. Erin Durant has cited the NHL as an example of how some of the male leagues have undertaken programmes to help women's sports teams as a way to gain more female fans.\(^{194}\)

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\(^{188}\) The NFL’s total merchandise revenue for 2006 were estimated at US$3.5 billion.

\(^{189}\) Op. cit., Brown

\(^{190}\) Op. cit., Freifeld

\(^{191}\) *Victoria’s Secret* is a huge U.S. retailer of lingerie, women’s wears and beauty products

\(^{192}\) Op. cit., Gosling, 254


\(^{194}\) The raison d’être behind the WNBA, for example, which was created and is owned by the NBA, is to, “both grow the women’s game of basketball as well as to increase its reputation amongst female basketball players and fans.” Ibid.
(b) Indirect Marketing – Player Behaviour

In Chapter Two, we mentioned the potential ‘civilising influence’ that female fans could have in relation to on-field violence. In the U.S. it could be argued that this influence extends to athletes’ off-field behaviour also. The major U.S. professional sports, for many years, encountered issues regarding the poor off-field behaviour of some of their athletes. This poor behaviour was regarded as having a negative impact on fan perception of their games and on consumer behaviour, with fans, especially women and children, being turned off the sport. Therefore, the leagues decided to ‘clean up’ their sports. The high rate of arrests among NFL players prompted the NFL to introduce a new Player Code of Conduct in 2007. One of the stated reasons for doing so was to “clean up the league and make it more attractive for a female audience.”

4.3 Rugby Union

Statistics

As a starting point, it is worth noting that, until recently, research on English rugby union fans was a neglected area of study. Williams’ survey of premiership rugby fans in 2003, in fact, was the first attempt to analyse crowds at top rugby union matches in England. Although some of the 2003 survey’s findings may be skewed by the fact that the majority of those surveyed were season ticket holders, and, therefore, to an extent, are likely to be older rugby union followers, the findings are still helpful in providing a general understanding of the composition of crowds at top level club rugby union games in England and in illustrating the prevalence of female fans within that crowd.

In comparison to the Premier League, it appears that, based on these statistics, Premiership Rugby has approximately the same percentage of female fans within its fan base. Female fans account for approximately 16% of attendees at game. It must also be noted that the rate of female fans varies

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196 Ibid.

197 Adam “Pacman” Jones of the Tennessee Titans was the first NFL player to be suspended without pay for the 2007 NFL season for several violations of the NFL’s new personal conduct policy. “Goodell Suspends Pacman, Henry for Multiple Arrests”, ESPN (May 17, 2007), http://sports.espn.go.com/nfl/news/story?id=2832015, (accessed 21 June 2011)

198 John Williams, “A national survey of premiership rugby fans” (Leicester: Leicester University. 2003)

199 That the Premiership, the English rugby union equivalent of the Premier League, was much later in attempting to add to its knowledge about its own supporter base may well be due to fact that rugby union only went professional in 1995, one hundred and ten years later than English football. Ibid.,1


201 Of course, as attendance levels are rather lower at Premiership Rugby games than at Premier League games, in real terms the number of female fans of club rugby union in England is significantly lower than at Premier League clubs.
significantly between rugby clubs. Significantly, 64% of female Premiership rugby fans attend matches with their partner and 22% bring their children along to the matches.

An interesting piece of data generated by the 2003 survey relates to the amount spent by fans on club merchandise. While the figures are lower than the corresponding Premier League figures, what it noteworthy in the case of Premiership Rugby is that female fans are the top spenders when it comes to purchasing merchandise, spending, on average, 25% more than their male counterparts.

**Strategies**

Premiership Rugby clubs have taken steps to recruit more female fans by using a mix of infrastructural and merchandise initiatives. Harlequins, for example, pioneered the ‘Big Game’ concept. This initiative was launched in 2008 when the Harlequins club played their big 'Christmas game' at Twickenham, a stadium with a capacity of 82,000 and the home of the English national rugby union team. One of the key themes of such an initiative was to create an event aimed at families and to generate ‘extra value’ for general rugby followers with additional entertainment. Sale Sharks adopted and also adapted Harlequin’s ‘Big Game’ concept and have played some of their own high profile games in the larger and modernised Reebok Stadium, home to the Premier League football club Bolton Wanderers.

In some cases, rugby union clubs have tried to attract more female fans through a process of stadia modernisation in meeting the demands of these particular customers. Leicester Tigers, for instance, built new stands and incorporated bespoke executive facilities at Welford Road as part of its more inclusive approach towards a new ‘family’ rugby audience. In this respect, it is important that facilities on offer within a ground cater for needs for all its attendants. As Tony Rowe, chief executive of the Exeter club, plainly stated: “You’ve got to make the place family-friendly”, otherwise - he goes on- “if you go to a pub or a restaurant, and your missus goes to the toilet and it’s awful, she’ll come back and say: ‘We’re not coming here again.’” In contrast to the statement of Mark McCafferty, Mr. Rowe’s comment could be regarded as more indicative of the less positive way in which female fans of English rugby union clubs are viewed by those in positions of power.

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202 Female fans, for instance, are strongest at Leicester Tigers (28%) and Northampton Saints (25%), two of the more ‘traditional’ English clubs.
204 Ibid., 41
207 However, the extent to which this can be regarded as a dedicated effort to increase female fans is questionable. It might be a case of a ‘rising tide lifts all boats’ approach, in that the assumption is that if the game is held in a bigger stadium, more fans will come and, by virtue of more fans in general attending, the number of female fans in attendance will increase.
208 As will be noted in Chapter Five, not all female fans supported the redevelopment of Welford Road.
In terms of merchandise, all of the Premier Rugby clubs have taken steps to keep up with modern technology and they all offer their fans the possibility to buy club merchandise via their online shops. Based on our own review of the range of club merchandise available to women, it is clear that there is still room for improvement in this regard. Although all the clubs sell ‘ladies wear’ within their range of products, just five out of twelve clubs sell replica kits with a home jersey specifically designed for women. It must be said, however, that although often the offerings available to the ‘average’ female fan were rather meagre the extensive range of children and baby wear might indirectly compensate for the needs of a specific segment of the female fan community, the younger mothers.

4.4 English Rugby League

Statistics

Having considered English rugby union, another English sport which is deserving of attention for what it is doing to recruit and involve more female fans in the game is rugby league. Although professional rugby league is limited mainly to a small corridor in the north west of England, research conducted by MORI’s Sports Research Unit shows that rugby league ‘interests’ around 15% of British adults and that it was the fourth most popular team sport in the February 2005 list of sports\textsuperscript{211} In particular, rugby league’s flagship competition, the Super League, is the 4\textsuperscript{th} most popular televised sport in Britain, with a recorded two million fans attending Super League games in 2009.\textsuperscript{212} The breakdown of Super League’s fans shows that approximately 40% of Super League attendees are made up by women\textsuperscript{213}.

Strategies

Community Outreach

A key point of emphasis for English rugby league clubs is the importance placed by them on developing and maintaining strong links with the community. As Chris Thair, the person with responsibility for club support at the Rugby Football League (RFL), pointed out: “The clubs are at the heart of their communities and families are main the consumers of these initiatives.”\textsuperscript{214} Most of the clubs have initiated charitable programs engaging schools and the local communities in projects aimed at providing education, health and sporting opportunities for all.\textsuperscript{215} Every club has a dedicated section on their respective websites detailing all of the community-based projects that are being undertaken at the local level.


\textsuperscript{212} Personal Correspondence, 2 June 2011

\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{214} Personal Correspondence, 2 June 2011

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid.
A Family Game

A key pillar of rugby league’s marketing strategy is the ‘family’ aspect of the game. The family has been the powerful marketing focus of English rugby league for many years now, especially when set against the only recently challenged reputation of English football for crowd hooliganism. The RFL have consciously identified and promoted the family as lying at the heart of the rugby league brand. The message has obviously been quite successfully conveyed to fans, who have recognised the emphasis on the family as one of the fundamental values connected to the sport.

In terms of branding, rugby league in England has tried to position itself as an inclusive sport, in terms of both ticket prices and providing a safe and welcoming environment, and as a sport that is conducted with integrity, dignity and respect for others. Finally, it is a sport in which fans can share a great enthusiasm with everyone who shares the same passion for the game. The envisioned result is a sport whose values fit well with the needs of an average northern family, which is the main target in terms of brand management, business plans and pricing strategies. By comparison with elite football, rugby league crowds are modest, but Chris Thair outlines how, “Family initiatives are mainly pushed by clubs and this practice is then shared as best practice by the RFL.” Tangible evidence of this is the free family tickets offered by some clubs.

Female Focused Strategies

In 2004 the RFL proposed various strategies to the clubs to assist them in specifically addressing their growing female fan base. The RFL recognised that women are key decision makers in family activities and pursuits and that it is often women who have the major say on what the family or a couple do at weekends. It was, therefore, decided that it was crucial for clubs to acknowledge and determine their specifically female target markets.

The Super League clubs offer an extensive range of choice within the category of ladies’ leisure wear. However, just four clubs out of thirteen sell replica kits designed specifically for women. Other clubs, as is the case with Rugby Football Union, decided to adopt an ‘indirect’ female marketing strategy, instead, by focusing on selling child and baby wear.

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216 Personal Correspondence, 2 June 2011
217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
220 Ibid.
221 For example, for the RL Championship game between the Widnes Vikings and Halifax RLFC, 200 free family tickets were offered on a ‘first come, first served’ basis.
222 Personal Correspondence, 2 June 2011
223 The proposed strategies include: supermarket promotions, leveraging upon the fact that women are the major purchasers for foodstuffs; female business lunches to meet the needs of the ‘woman of today’, career-led and with a distinct career path; fashion shows in which to involve rugby league players in an attempt to appeal to women; improvement of stadium facilities in terms of toilets and catering; female specific magazines to exploit women’s higher propensity than men to purchase reading materials; and the selling of club merchandise specially designed for women.
Finally, the strategy of many rugby league clubs to transform the match day experience from ‘more than just a game’ into an ‘event’ has also been credited as one of the major factors that have contributed to the recruitment of more female fans. Many clubs have taken steps to provide their fans with different types of match day entertainment in order to improve the experience before and after the game. Providing such match day entertainment has been seen as a way of emphasising the ‘value of money’ element of rugby league.

4.5 Australian Rules Football (AFL)

History and Development

One of the most important factors that make AFL the most popular sport in Australia is its substantial female following – rather countering the excessively masculine stereotype of Australian culture and sport. AFL’s supporters include significant numbers of women who follow the sport and regularly attend games. It has been noted that since Australian football first became an organised sport in the mid-1800s, women have actively supported the game as spectators. As noted in Chapter One, one of the main reasons that women become AFL fans is due to the strong social ties that they have with people who are existing fans.

Men act as gatekeepers when it comes to female fandom in most of the sports that tend to exclude women, but AFL is an anomaly in this regard. The, “historically high attendance of women at AFL games, the interactions they have with male fans and the knowledge they acquire of the sport” are advanced as reasons why female AFL fans “are accepted by men as legitimate, informed observers of the game.” AFL, therefore, offers a social construction of female fandom that seemingly differs from that found in other sports and in other societies. Many Australian women enjoy involvement with AFL; they understand the game and its strategies; and they value being a core part of the football community in diverse and evolving capacities.

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223 Personal Correspondence, 2 June 2011
224 Typical ideas implemented as forms of match day entertainment usually involve pre-match music performances by well-known artists, half-time fan interaction competitions where fans compete against each other to win prizes, initiatives for children involving the club mascot and post-game parties with special guests.
226 Australian Rules Football is probably best described as a hybrid of the games of rugby union and Irish Gaelic football. It is played on a large oval shaped field by two teams of 18 players each
227 Deborah Hindley, “In the outer – not on outer” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Murdoch University, 2006), 86
228 Op., cit., Mewett and Toffoletti, 2
229 Ibid., 3
Leoine Sandercock and Ian Turner have noted in their research that early in the history of the AFL, women were consistent spectators of the game. According to The Australasian which Sandercock and Turner quote, AFL’s popularity in the 1920s not only had “broad class appeal” and the that women sometimes also got “excited”, so much so that some of them assaulted umpires! These authors thus acknowledge the fact that those early female fans attended AFL games with their spouses or partners, but the reason for doing so was mutual enjoyment.

Deborah Hindley states that most of the female fans of AFL become fans at a very young age. Her findings are backed by Mewett and Toffoletti’s later research. Mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters all play an important part in their initiation, emphasizing that football was mostly a family affair, particularly for those who are raised in the country where social life in Australia revolves around cricket in summers and football in winters. She further describes female fans of AFL as independent “self standing fans” rather than as “pillions to masculine glory”.

Current Situation in the AFL
In recent years, between 1993 and 2003, the membership of AFL clubs more than doubled from 207,640 to 463,171. The total female membership in 2003 was 34%, or 158,799 members. Adelaide had the largest membership, of 47,097 with 18,812 female members or 39.9%, followed by Collingwood with 40,455, with female membership of 11,766, or 29.1%. The Western Bulldogs, a Melbourne based club, had the largest percentage of female members with 43.1% or 9,171, out of a total membership of 21,260, the second lowest membership overall. However, with the exception of Western Bulldogs, clubs outside of Victoria drew the highest percentage of female memberships. The four clubs in South Australia and Western Australia boast the largest number of female fans, with almost equal - if not in some cases more than equal - number of women members.

In addition to these impressive fan figures, the number of women working in AFL had increased from 2000-2003, although their numbers remained low in positions of authority within the league. However, there was a change in 2004 after a series of complaints of sexual assaults and scandals. In response to the call for increased women’s authority within the game, in 2005 the AFL finally appointed a women commissioner.

231 Ibid., 97
232 Ibid., 85
233 Ibid., 172
234 Ibid., 166
235 Ibid., 21
236 Op. cit., Hindley, 47
237 Ibid., 50
They have also engaged with researchers working on female fandom and in late 2005, also released a social
responsibility policy to address the issue of sexual abuse committed by AFL footballers\textsuperscript{238}.

**Specific Initiatives**

The female fans of AFL are also generally well appreciated by the clubs of the league. In 2008, Sydney
Swans paid $200,000 reportedly to win over the women of Sydney.\textsuperscript{239} The Swans and their long-time
sponsor QBE financially backed the New South Wales Swifts for year one of the semi-professional Trans
Tasman netball championships with a three year option. In return for the sponsorship\textsuperscript{240}, the Swans tapped
into the database of 110,000 female netball participants in this state. The partnership followed a declaration
by the AFL that it would boast a second club in Sydney by 2012. Winning over the hearts and minds of
women was a key aspect of the Swan's strategic plan as they did not want to lose their fans to a potential
new Sydney outfit in 2012.

Also, the past 10 years have seen a steady increase in the number of women occupying the traditional male
roles in AFL clubs as presidents, secretaries, treasurers and team managers.\textsuperscript{241} Currently, there are over
164,000 female volunteers actively involved in Australian Football. Their responsibilities cover anything
from acting as local AFL Auskick Coordinators, to coaching and assisting with training drills.\textsuperscript{242}

Recently, AFL launched the sport’s ‘women’s week’ on 6\textsuperscript{th} June, 2011 to recognise and celebrate the role
females play at all levels of Australian Football, from participation to administration, volunteering and
supporting. Activities that took place to commemorate the involvement of women included AFL and club
functions, an all-female super clinic prior to the match between Melbourne and Collingwood, female
participation in all half-time NAB AFL Auskick, and a performance by Stonefield\textsuperscript{243} before the Geelong and
Hawthorn match. During the official launch, AFL General Manager - National and International
Development, David Matthews, said that the contribution women and girls make to Australian football is
critical to the development of the game.\textsuperscript{244}

Gold Coast Suns’ General Manager of Marketing and Community Kelly Ryan perhaps best sums up the
general attitude of the AFL towards women when he says:


\textsuperscript{240} The sponsorship was estimated to be worth up to $1 million to the Swifts over four years.

\textsuperscript{241} This is particularly the case in junior football clubs.


\textsuperscript{243} Stonefield is a well known, all-female Australian rock band.

“Women play such an important role in our game, from taking their children to Auskick, participating or volunteering in a number of areas, filling executive roles at the elite level, to supporting their team each week. Women love our game, and Women's Week allows us to shine a spotlight on this relationship and hear what makes footy so special to our female fans.”

A suspicion lingers that leading figures in some sport sports pay ‘lip service’ to female fans, pandering to them in their public statements while the actions of their organisations do not tally with their words. The same criticism cannot be leveled at the AFL because it has backed up its statements praising the involvement of women in their sport at all times with actions that demonstrate their appreciation of the active role played by females in the AFL.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

Having discussed female fandom in general, highlighted the benefits associated with female fans, identified barriers encountered by female fans and looked at a range of sports in different countries across the world, we are now in a position to suggest some answers to the question we posed at the start: when it comes to sports fandom, ‘What do women want?’ This is a general question but the reality is that there is not one simple answer. Sports do not exist in a vacuum and are functions of the cultures within which they operate. Therefore, while the rules or laws of a global sport may be uniform, the same cannot be said of its fans. The manner in which a sport is ‘consumed’ and supported varies greatly from country to country and from woman to woman. We recognise the importance that personal and cultural factors can have on a sport and its fans. Nevertheless, we believe that by adopting a multi-sport, multi-region approach, we can extrapolate some commonalities in terms of female sports fandom that will assist us in providing some answers to the question initially posed.

5.2 What Women Do Not Want

We submit that although it as important to know what women want in terms of their sports fandom, it is equally important to recognise what they do not want.

(a) Masculine Nature of Sport

Women have consistently struggled to gain acceptance and recognition in the domain of sport - due to the traditional dominance of men and the excessively masculine behaviour which seems inherent to it. We would argue that female fans have grown increasingly frustrated with the ‘macho’ culture that pervades sport. It can be said, therefore that women do not want this culture to continue. It could be argued that what women do want in this regard is for a process of ‘feminisation’ to occur within the sports world. John Williams and Stacey Pope have recently written of how the meaning of the term ‘feminisation’ may vary across and even within cultures. We use the term here in what has been called its “basic sense” where it can be said to “refer simply to the opening up of more opportunities for women to become active sports spectators”. One means of achieving this ‘opening up’ is arguably to take steps to tone down the excessive masculinity which is sometimes associated with sport.

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246 Stacey Pope and John Williams, “Beyond irrationality and the ultras: some notes on female English rugby union fans and the ‘feminised’ sports crowd”, Leisure Studies, 296
247 Ibid.
248 Ibid.
(b) Exclusion

Female fans do not want to be excluded from engaging in sports fandom. Due to the existence of certain logistical factors, women often experience significant interruptions in their fan careers. As a social level, women have been excluded from ‘traditional’ fan communities by men seeking to protect one of the last bastions of masculine hegemony. It can be said of female fans, therefore, that they want to be included in regular fan culture without necessarily having to adopt aspects of the alien language and behaviour that prevails within it.

(c) Female Fan Identity

Some female fans have spoken out against being ‘labelled’ as ‘female fans’ and most of them do not want to be singled out by sex. Such fans have stressed how they like to go to games to enjoy the sport just like any other fan. This is indicative of a feeling amongst some female fans that to link female fandom with the feminist or ‘women’s rights’ movement would be counterproductive in that it would only serve to bring undue attention upon women in circumstances where they already stand out. Female fans want automatic acceptance in the same way that such acceptance is afforded to male sports fans. This desire is perhaps idealistic on the part of female fans however. One could not say that the level of social and economic empowerment that many ‘modern’ women enjoy today has come about automatically. Rather, all women have benefited from the way feminists and the ‘women’s rights’ movement fought for this empowerment on their behalf. If women want acceptance within the sports fan community, then they will need to fight for it too, a point that we will return to in Chapter Six.

(d) Credibility/Authenticity

Although female fans have been a constant (if hidden) and an increasing presence in the sports world, this presence has not always equated to increased acceptance within broader fan communities. Female fans across the world and across various sports are consistently labelled as ‘inauthentic’ and lacking in sports knowledge. Women do not want to have to consistently demonstrate their fan credentials in a way that male fans do not have to. Women do not want to have their credibility undermined by other women. What women do want is to be accepted within fan communities on their own terms as legitimate and authentic fans without having to actively prove this each time that they engage in fan behaviour.

(e) Media Treatment

Women have been invisibilised in sports history to a large extent. The nature of the media’s treatment of sport is such that, by and large, women are still invisibilised today by the manner in which the modern day media presents male sports as spaces without women – or a woman’s perspective. Female fans do not want to be forgotten about by the media. They want to see and hear authentic women’s voices with a deep sports
passion and knowledge, women like themselves, who can address men and women from behind the sports
desk instead of this role falling to weather girls turned sports presenters. They do not want to be the butt of
‘in-house’ media jokes, but want to be acknowledged as a credible presence by the sports media.

5.2 What Women Want!

Our analysis of the experiences of female fans across different sports in various countries has enabled us to
identify some common trends and initiatives that have found favour with female fans. We have classified
these initiatives as follows: (1) facility improvement, (2) family friendly atmosphere, (3) specific targeted
marketing and merchandise activities and (4) ownership of fandom.

(a) Facility Improvement

Our research has shown that women want safe, clean and comfortable sports stadia. In general terms
however, safety concerns trump those feelings of nostalgia and the modernisation of stadia has proven to be
a key factor in attracting more women to matches. This was particularly evident in Germany and England,
where the stadia regeneration that has been undertaken over the past twenty years has impacted significantly
on female fan numbers. The DFL (Deutsche Fußball Liga) and Sport+Markt, have identified a clear
link between the growing numbers of female fans in German football stadia and the modernisation of those
stadia and their facilities in the run-up to the 2006 FIFA World Cup. The same trend can be seen in
England where, after the introduction of all seater-stadia as recommended by the Taylor Report, more
women started attending matches, some for the first time.

Once inside the stadia, female fans have stressed the importance of clean and accessible toilet facilities for
them and, if they come as part of a family day out, for their children. Women want stadia designers to
consider their needs and those of their children so that a trip to a sports event is both an exciting and a
pleasant experience for all fans.

Female fans want to enjoy the sports event they attend in a safe and non-threatening atmosphere. The results
of the Premier League’s Fan Survey bear this point out, as female fans were shown to put much emphasis on
safety issues (fan safety, behaviour of people, stewarding, policing). The improvement in the standard of
stewarding within the modern stadia has raised safety standards, a development that has been welcomed by
female fans.

249 It should be noted that Stacey Pope’s research on female rugby fans in the U.K, town of Leicester noted that some female fans
actually opposed the renovation of their rugby team’s home ground, Welford Road, and felt that with the demolition of the old
stands and their replacement with new modern ones, a part of ground’s heritage and tradition would be lost forever. Op. cit., Pope
(2010)

250 Thomas Schneider, personal correspondence, 16 May 2011

251 Cologne-based market research company

252 Op. cit., Laycock
(b) Family Friendly Environment

Our research has shown that female fans who have families often want to enjoy sports events with their families. In addition to fan and family friendly stadia that are safe and comfortable, a fan and family friendly ticketing strategy appeals to female fans. While ticket pricing may be less of an issue for long-term hardcore female supporters, a sport’s ticket pricing strategy is significant when it comes to attracting more female fans and in the decision of those fans to bring along their family. Reference was made in Chapter Four to how female fans of English Premier League clubs place more emphasis on ticket prices and transportation costs than their male counterparts. As has been noted, as it is often women who take control of family finances, and female fans who are mothers and who bring their children with them to games are more likely than men to be price sensitive. It is notable that in the German Bundesliga, every match ticket includes the right to use the public transportation system before and after the match without additional costs. We noted in Chapter Four how rugby league in England has been proactive in this regard, by offering discounted family tickets and by taking steps to provide their (female) fans with a value for money experience. Sports that pay attention to ensuring that the match day experience is a family friendly one are likely to reap the rewards of such an approach.

Our research has also shown that the concerns of those female fans to whom a family friendly environment is important, relate not only to infrastructural issues but also to the values associated with a sport and how its players conduct themselves both on and off the field. Female fans who attend sports event as part of a family day out want the sport to reflect family values. We have noted how the NHL and the NFL took notice of this fact and took steps to deal with unsavoury behaviour by their players on and off the field of play.

(c) Tailored Marketing and Merchandise

Our research has shown that on balance women’s needs and demands in terms of sports fandom differ to some extent from those of male fans. Women want to know that their specific concerned have been considered by sports marketers and have grown impatient with initiatives which play on stereotypes and generalisations. Today’s women enjoy more purchasing and financial decision making power than ever before. Furthermore, we noted that female rugby union and football fans in England outspend male fans when it comes to branded merchandise. American sport leagues have noticed this development from the very beginning and leveraged upon it by offering a wide range of club branded merchandise to women.

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253 The survey did not state whether those female fans who emphasised this issue were mothers who brought their children to the stadium.

254 We would stress here that a family friendly atmosphere is not something that is important to all female fans. Stacey Pope has noted that some football fans have lamented the ‘family’ environment within English football grounds on the grounds that it has come at the expense of the general match day atmosphere. Op. cit., Pope (2010), 218

255 On balance’ because the construction of sporting masculinities and femininitie overlap across the male/female binary. There are plenty of active ‘masculine’ female fans who want little in ‘their’ sport to change.

256 For example, due to the franchise-nature of the NFL teams, the licensing and merchandise activities are regulated centrally by the league. Therefore, every team offers a similar, if not the same, range of products to the fans.
Products for female fans include the regular team wear, as well as different coloured jerseys. While it may be tempting to class the issue of branded merchandise as a peripheral one, it must be noted that historically women have shown a desire to wear their clubs colours and have regarded this as a means of forming a cultural bond with their fellow supporters. It has been suggested that female fans have used clothing as a way of gaining approval from male fans and as a “publicly legitimated way for females to express both their (hetero) sexuality and their support and club and civic loyalty”. Women want, therefore, to use their sports clothing as a way of openly demonstrating their fandom and commitment to the cause.

It must be acknowledged that marketing professional sports to women is a nuanced endeavour. A seemingly innovative strategy can alienate more fans than it may help grow. The perception that women do not know the rules of the game may only be strengthened with certain Football or Hockey 101s and game watching tips. The tone of address of advertising campaigns is crucial. It is suggested that this level of insight and care was missing from the RFU’s romance novel initiative. Additionally, by offering merchandise in glittery and pink, people’s stereotypical opinions of female fans are reinforced. Most female fans want sports marketers and clubs to go beyond the ‘shrink it and pink it’ approach that pervades currently and to demonstrate that they take women seriously as fans.

(d) Ownership of Fandom

The accounts of females fans referenced throughout the paper show that women want to gain a level of ‘ownership’ of their individual fandom. In general, they enjoy the same fan activities as men: chanting, occasionally screaming at the referee and they firmly object to being singled out as ‘female fans’. They want to be afforded the opportunity to engage in fandom on the same terms as male fans. Nonetheless, the example of the Spanish peñas shows that where women are not able to gain a sense of ownership of their fandom within the ‘traditional’ fan communities, they can take it upon themselves to find ways to be engaged with football as active, committed, knowledgeable and, above all, authentic supporters. This collective assertion of power, independently and separately from men has strong feminist overtones, which we would defend. By taking control in this regard, these women have found a means of counteracting the exclusion and ridicule they had previously experienced. A sense that they control their own fandom and are not only items to be manipulated as sports see fit is, therefore, crucially important to female fans.

CHAPTER 6: WHAT NEXT?

6.1 Introduction
Having identified what women want and what women do not want in terms of sports fandom, we now address what can and should be done in order to react to these ‘demands’ and to avoid the repetition of past mistakes. While sports organisations should take the lead in implementing measures to connect with their existing female fans and reach out to new female fans, it is submitted that some of the measures required are outside their direct control. Furthermore it should not be overlooked that female fans themselves have a role to play in bringing about positive change.

6.2 Measures Within the Control of Sports Organisations

(a) Infrastructure
Infrastructure is an important aspect in a sport club’s drive towards fully realising the commercial potential of a sports event as well as capturing the attention and imagination of the fans. As outlined in Chapter Four, female fans place particular emphasis on infrastructure, specifically stadium safety and security and the availability of hygienic toilet facilities at the stadium.

(i) Stadium safety and security:
One of the major concerns of female fans while attending sport events is that their safety and security within the stadium is guaranteed. In England, the Hillsborough disaster of 1989 and the subsequent Taylor report ushered in a new era in which stadium safety and security became the norm. Women who, during the era of hooliganism had turned away from the game, returned and with them came new generations of female fans. It has been noted that with these measures has also come a “gentrification”259 of the sport in England, a development that women have sometimes been ‘blamed’ for. The message to sports organisations on this point is clear: providing a safe stadium environment is a prerequisite to attracting female fans, but this need not come at the cost of ticket price inflation. Germany has a lesson to teach England on this score.

(ii) Toilet Facilities:
It may appear clichéd and as though we are stating the obvious, but most spectators, male or female, want to be reassured that a decent toilet is within easy reach within a stadium. This is particularly true of female fans. Sports clubs should be aware that if the provision of toilet facilities for female spectators is inappropriate, it will almost certainly have a limiting effect on female fans attending the games. Research also shows that women make more visits to and spend more time in washrooms than men for what have been described by those who study this subject as “physiological and cultural”260 reasons. Female fans have long been overlooked when stadia are designed. The suspicion exists that many sports stadia were designed

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by men with men in mind. The toilets issue, while it main seem somewhat trivial, is an opportunity for clubs to show that female fans are on their radar and that their comfort and convenience is a matter that the club cares about. If clubs are serious about facilitating the entry of female fans into the male dominated sports domains, then they should take this issue seriously.

(iii) Stadium Environment

Although it can be broadly said that women who view sport in modern sports stadia no longer feel at risk of physical harm, female fans have had their credibility and legitimacy as fans questioned by male fans within the stadia setting. Great efforts have been taken to eradicate stadium hooliganism, while similar efforts are ongoing in relation to racist behaviour. If sports are serious about having female fans form a significant and permanent proportion of their fan base, measures must be taken in a different direction: to ensure that sexist behaviour towards female fans and intimidating behaviour generally is not tolerated.

(b) Marketing

Although the makeup of the fan base of major team sports is still predominantly male, as has been noted in Chapter Two, women have a significant contribution to make to the sports world. Too often attempts to attract female fans have been characterised by generalisations and stereotypical depictions of the female sports fan. It is too easy and simplistic for sports clubs today to attach their female fan recruitment policy to a high profile ‘women’s issue’ such as the fight against breast cancer. While fundraising for breast cancer is a laudable initiative, female fans prefer to be spoken to as fans and not as potential cancer sufferers. Initiatives such as Football 101 speak down to the female fan and do not treat her as the equal of a male fan. We do not submit that there is no place in sport for such initiatives. Marketers, when considering marketing sports to women, however, need to avoid homogenising the female fan and should ensure that their marketing campaign is multidimensional and not clichéd. There needs to be an acceptance on the part of sports organisations that not all female fans are the same; that they have “different needs, emotional attachments, and degrees of loyalty”.

In considering marketing, sports clubs need to ensure that they have adequate data on the numbers of their female fans. It has been said that ‘You cannot manage what you do not measure’ and ‘What is measured gets done’. These phrases are particularly relevant to marketing to female sports fans. In Chapter Two, we noted how competitive the current sports market is and highlighted how the female fan market could be a very lucrative growth market. It is, therefore, unacceptable in an era where clubs have access to advanced

261 It is notable that in 2008, the NFL and all of its 32 teams created a Fan Code of Conduct to “promote a positive fan environment at NFL stadiums”. There have been calls for a similar code to be adopted in the English Premier League. Patrick Barclay, “Football needs to establish a code of conduct”, The Daily Telegraph, 13 December 2008, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/competitions/premier-league/3723804/Football-needs-to-establish-a-code-of-conduct.html, (accessed 29 June 2011)
262 Op. cit., Coddington, 216
Customer Relations Management systems that top sports clubs cannot identify how many female fans they have. It may take more effort on the part of clubs to accurately segment the female fan base, but clubs that do so will find it easier to be innovative and really engage with their female fans and will ultimately reap the rewards.

(c) Club Merchandise

Our study shows that female fans are ahead of male fans when it comes to buying sports merchandise online, despite the fact that the range of merchandise on offer to female fans pales in comparison to that on offer to male fans. It is suggested that European professional sports need to take a leaf out of the books of their U.S. counterparts and significantly increase the range of products offered to their female fans. Alienating a large portion of a fan base or a potential fan base is a business opportunity lost. Too often the merchandise that is produced for women is either designed with men in mind, such as club branded lingerie, or is either pink or sparkly or, quite frequently, both. It is suggested that if every line produced by Versace or Dior featured only clothes in pink or pastel, it would not be long before these major fashion houses went out of business.

It should not come as a surprise to sports clubs and marketers, therefore, that women wear other colours – and are proud to wear the colours of their own club. There is a lack of effort and thought displayed by many sports, both in the U.S. and in Europe in developing club merchandise with women in mind. It is commonly accepted that women are more discerning customers when it comes to purchasing clothing, so why should this situation change when they purchase sports related merchandise?

(d) Inclusion

If sports organisations are serious about recruiting more women as part of their fan base now and into the future, they need to firstly acknowledge their presence, secondly identify understand the obstacles that women encounter in engaging fan behaviour before finally seeking a way to address such obstacles. Alienating and ignoring female fans and thus facilitating their exclusion by default is short sighted and commercially ill-advised on the part of sports organisations. The reason for the absence within many sports of a specific strategy based around female fans is that such a strategy is not easy to define or deliver. We have already spoken of the ‘catch 22 situation’ whereby some female fans do not want to be singled out as ‘female fans’ but unless sports organisations recognise that the experiences of female fans differ greatly to those of male fans it is difficult to envision a situation in which female fans can ever feel fully integrated within ‘traditional’ fan communities.

‘Inclusion’, admittedly, is a somewhat vague concept to urge sports organisations to act upon. An ostensibly inclusive policy, such as English rugby league’s targeting of families, may be welcomed by some sections of
the fan community but interpreted as a ‘sell out’ by other sections – including some women. Our advice, therefore, to clubs who are committed to making female fans more welcome within the community of their club is to listen to their own female fans and try to gain an understanding of what matters to them. The mere act of putting together a female fan focus group would be a signal of greater inclusivity and would go some way in ensuring that female fans are not invisibilised.263

One of the current ‘buzz words’ in professional sport worldwide is corporate social responsibility (CSR). We suggest that CSR programmes could be used to great effect as a means of tackling some of the issues identified by women and for fostering a culture of inclusion within a sports organisation. We have already noted the prevalence of single parent households headed by women in developed societies and suggest that there is greater scope for clubs to reach out to single parents and assist them in introducing their children to sport. In many ways, such an approach would be a win-win. The children of single parent families would not lose out on gaining early exposure to sport despite the absence of the traditional introductory figure, the father. Also, clubs would have a head start in reaching new generations of fans while picking up some potential new female fans en route. The AFL, which, as shown in Chapter Four, has an impressive record in how it deals with its female fans and women in general, has used CSR to engage in a meaningful way with its female fan base. The AFL’s Respect and Responsibility Policy264 was introduced to address violence against women with the express aim of, “advocating cultural change across the entire organisation, and to develop and promote safe and inclusive environments for women, at all levels of Australian Football.”265

Other sports might take note.

(e) Women in Leadership Positions

In Chapter Two reference was made to the feelings of social exclusion experienced by some female fans across various sports. This form of exclusion operates at two levels: female fans feel excluded at the fan level by men and at an institutional level by sports clubs and organizations which, in many cases, have not recognised female fans as a distinctive group and who have done little to address their issues. It is suggested that one of the reasons behind this form of ‘institutional exclusion’ is the low level of representation of women within sports clubs and organisations and the almost complete absence of women in the upper ranks of such bodies.

The perceived disproportionate numbers of women and men at the organizational level of sports bodies is borne out by research on the topic which has shown that “females are vastly under-represented in the upper

263 The latest draft of the UEFA Club Licensing Manual requires that each applicant football club must have a dedicated fan liaison officer. Even prior to the introduction of this requirement, all of the Bundesliga clubs created such a position within their club structure. This officer could be used to liaise specifically with female fans and gain a sense of the issues that they encounter in their day to day fandom.


265 Ibid
echelons of sports organizations.” It has been noted in the context of football that there is little empirical evidence of blatant sexism within professional male football clubs. It is a submitted that this is a case where the doctrine of *res ipsa loquitur* is applicable in that the very absence of women from positions of power can be taken as *prima facie* evidence that such a culture of sexism exists.

It would appear that UEFA has recognised the mismatch. On 17 June 2011, UEFA announced the appointment of a woman, Norwegian Karen Espelund, to its Executive Committee “as a member by invitation.” The appointment came in the wake of Michel Platini’s statement at the 2011 UEFA Congress that a way must be found “to break the glass ceiling preventing women from reaching positions of responsibility within our organisations.” In the United States, the 2009 Race Gender Report Card showed “the leadership at the top levels of the pro leagues is concerned with diversity issues and their attention has caused notable improvements.” The AFL took the step in 2005 of appointing a woman to its top job, a move that is, perhaps, not unsurprising given the AFL’s generally progressive approach towards women.

We do not argue that increasing female representation on the boards of sports clubs and organisations would immediately improve the lot of female fans. However, it is submitted that a female appointee to such a position is more likely to bring a different perspective to the activities of that club or organization; a perspective within which the needs of female fans are more likely to be considered. Karen Espelund has previously commented that “women are one of the biggest social movements and must be given the possibility to take active part in all functions in football - not only as players.”

High profile appointments throughout world sport of qualified and capable women, such as Espelund, provides women with a platform to demonstrate to the wider public that they know what they are talking

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267 Dr Steven Bradbury, Dr Mahfoud Amara, Dr Borja Garcia and Professor Alan Bairner, “Representation and structural discrimination in football in Europe: The case of minorities and women”, Institute of Youth Sport, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University


269 Ibid.


271 Ibid, 100

272 Notably, all of the major professional leagues within the United States have specific diversity initiatives and they were prepared to share those initiatives with The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, the body behind the study.

273 Espelund was General Secretary of the Norwegian FA for 10 years and is currently Chairwoman of the UEFA Women’s Football Committee.

about. If their knowledge and expertise is then acknowledged on a wider level it may pave the way towards the average female fan being more accepted by men as both credible and knowledgeable.

**Conclusion**

We suggest the following general advice to sports organisations who want to diversify their fan base and increase their numbers of female fans:

- **Recognise** – the existence of female fans within your fan base and measure what proportion of your fan base consists of female fans.

- **Listen** – to what female fans have to say. Don’t assume to know what female fans think. Ask them! A sport can only meet the demands of its fans, male or female, if it better understands them. The sport that treats female fans as fans, first and foremost and goes on to consider all of the needs of its female fans, be they logistical, social or other, is the one most likely to resonate with female fans.

- **Look** and **Learn** – at what has worked for other sports. Consider cultural factors but don’t rule an initiative out just because it was adopted by another sport or in another country. For example, could the equivalent of female-only peñas work in England? What could clubs do to assist in this regard?

- **Act** – now! In an aggressive market place, sports no longer have the luxury of waiting for fans to come to them. Sports organisations need to be proactive in engaging with fans. Anne Coddington has succinctly addressed this point when describing female fans as “a massive, untapped but increasingly sympathetic audience” who are just waiting to be asked to be part of the game. \(^{275}\) Sports need, therefore, to invite and encourage women to be part of their sport both as fans and within their administration.

**6.3 Measures Outside the Control of Sports Organisations**

**(a) The Media**

In Chapter Three, we noted how the sports media is space largely created by, populated with and designed by men. Women, tend not to feature in this space and often are often only peripheral figures. Media, in all of its forms, plays a key role in forming and reflecting public opinion. Media sport, in particular, has been recognised as significant in terms of representation of gender identities. \(^{276}\) Therefore, if women are to achieve firstly, recognition and secondly, acceptance as credible sports fans, the sports media world will

\(^{275}\) Op. cit., Coddington, 219

\(^{276}\) Raymond Boyle, Richard Haynes, “Power play: sport, the media and popular culture”, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 136
need to be ‘feminised’ in the same way that, to an extent, sports crowds have been. We suggest that the adoption of the following macro and micro measures would go some way towards giving female sports fans what they want:

(i) Female Journalistic Presence

According to a 2008 survey conducted by the Sports Journalists Association, less than 10% of sports journalists in the United Kingdom are women. There has never been a female sports editor of a national newspaper in Britain. A U.S. study of over three hundred and fifty Associated Press websites and newspapers has shown that, in 2008, 94% of the sports editors, 90% of the assistant sports editors, 94% of columnists, 91% of reporters and 84% of copy editors/designers are male. The author of the U.S. study has suggested that creating an ‘academy of excellence’ for some of the talented young writers from the categories that are currently underrepresented in the print and online media in order to provide them with a point of access into the sports media world. We endorse this suggestion and are of the opinion that it could help to increase the female presence within the sports media world.

(ii) Female Broadcasters

The apparent trend of broadcasters to opt for style over substance when selecting female broadcasters, as discussed in Chapter Three, does a double disservice to women involved in male sport. Firstly, it prevents more talented, but perhaps less visually appealing, female broadcasters from getting their opportunity and secondly, it perpetuates the myth that women’s only role in male sport is to act as ‘eye-candy’ for the viewers, who are assumed to be almost exclusively male. In 2007, the BBC, for the first time, appointed a female to commentate on a game that was featured in the BBC’s flagship football programme ‘Match of the Day’. The reaction to the decision highlights that there is still a long way to go if women are to be accepted as having a meaningful role to play in male sport, be it behind the microphone or in the stands. When questioned about the BBC’s decision, Dave Bassett, a former Premier League coach stated: “I am totally against it, and everybody I know in football is totally against. The problem is that everybody is too scared to admit it.”

It may be too late for the opinions of men like Bassett, Richard Keys and Andy Gray to be changed. However, if broadcasters do not show some initiative and begin a process of putting the best qualified and most knowledgeable female broadcasters in front of the camera, it is hard to see how the struggle for women to be taken seriously as sports fans can make significant headway. If women are not

278 Ibid.
280 U.S. research on female sports broadcasters has shown that often these broadcasters feel they have little choice but to consent to the dominant (i.e. masculine) values of the sports/media complex. Marie Hardin and Stacie Shain, Stacie (2006) “Feeling Much Smaller than You Know You Are”: The Fragmented Professional Identity of Female Sports Journalists’, Critical Studies in Media Communication, 23: 4, 335
281 Op. cit., Boyle and Haynes,135
appropriately addressed by the media, they may not only tune out from the coverage but tune out from the sport too.

(iii) Addressing the Female Sports Fan

We noted in Chapter Four that, in many sports, women account for a significant portion of attendees at sports events. The media tends to provide viewers and readers with shots of the beautiful young women usually in eye-catching outfits within the crowd to the exclusion of the ‘regular’ female fan.\(^\text{282}\) If female fans are to be acknowledged by the general public as ‘real’ fans, then the media must firstly acknowledge their presence and secondly, acknowledge that many of these female fans have the same level of interest in and knowledge of the sport as male fans. Actions such as including female fans in the pre and post game crowd interview segments\(^\text{283}\), including shots of ‘ordinary’ female fans in coverage of the game and making ‘sports talk’ more gender neutral are all small steps that could assist in tackling some of the issues identified in Chapter Three.

(b) Legislation

In Chapter Two the economic empowerment of women and the adjustment of women’s position in society were discussed. These societal changes came about, in large part, due to the inroads made by feminist lobby groups, collectively termed as the ‘women’s movement’, who championed the cause of women, railed against gender discrimination and sought to bring about real change. The fruits of the labour of women’s rights campaigners can be seen in the raft of gender equality legislation enacted throughout the developed world as a response to their campaigns. A brief examination of the effect that such legislation has had, and could have, on women’s relationship with sport is set out below.

United States – Title IX

One of the most famous pieces of legislation in this area is Title XV of the Education Amendments of 1972, a United States law that amended Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, commonly referred to as Title IX.\(^\text{284}\) The purpose of Title IX is to ensure that males and females are given equal opportunities in all federally funded school programmes. Although Title IX itself does not even mention the term ‘athletics’, it has been said to have caused a “virtual revolution”\(^\text{285}\) for girls and women in sport. The statistics are

\(^{282}\) This approach is perhaps indicative of the trend identified by John Williams and Stacey Pope to focus on the sensational rather than the ordinary female fan.

\(^{283}\) It is important that the interviewers would ask these female fans relevant sport related questions and not merely questions related to more trivial aspects of that game.

\(^{284}\) This law states, subject to some specified exceptions that:“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance”. Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972, (Title 20 U.S.C. Sections 1681-1688), United States Department of Labor, http://www.dol.gov/oasam/regs/statutes/titleix.htm , (accessed 22 June 2011)

startling. According to data from 2008, in the United States before Title IX was enacted, one in every twenty seven girls played sport; since Title IX one in every three girls plays sport.286

While much research has been generated on the impact that Title IX has had on female participation rates in sport in the United States and how it has contributed there to a surge in professional women’s sports, there is very little research on the link between Title IX and female fandom of male sports. The reason for this gap in the research could be due to the fact that the link, if one can be said to exist, is not a direct or even an obvious one and is, therefore, difficult to measure. The little research that exists on this specific point suggests that since the introduction of Title IX, education has played an important role in influencing sport and school is now the key factor in terms of that influences the socialisation of women as sports fans.287 It is our contention that the enactment of Title IX precipitated a culture change. It “ushered in a more inclusive era.”288 In this new era, shifts occurred in how women viewed sports, how sports viewed women and how society perceived the relationship between women and sports, so that “a new generation of women became committed to participating in and consuming sport with the same devotion as their brothers and father.”289

While female sports fans within the United States are still faced with many of the barriers identified in Chapter Two, the levels of active female fandom across the four major US sports, as recounted in Chapter Four, are impressive.

**Norway – Gender Equality Act**

It is generally accepted that Scandinavian countries are among the top global performers when it comes to women’s rights and gender equality legislation. In terms of sport, Norway has been particularly proactive in using gender equality legislation as a means to promote the status of women within sport. It is submitted that the appointment of Karen Espelund to the UEFA Executive Committee, as referred to above, can be regarded as a tangible result of the Norwegian policy.

Gender equality legislation made its first appearance on the Norwegian statute books in 1978 with the enactment of the Gender Equality Act.292 The legislation was tweaked in 1988 to require at least a 40 %

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289 Ibid.

290 We mean here Denmark, Sweden, Norway.


representation of males and females on all boards, councils and committees. Significantly, in 1990 the Norwegian Sport Association amended its by-laws to include the following statute:

“All national congresses, executive committees, councils and boards shall have representation proportional to the percentage of men and women in the organisation. However, every board must have at least two members of each sex. If a committee has three or fewer members it is not bound to this rule.”

By 2004 almost 30% of the membership of executive boards of Norwegian sports federations was female. While it has been noted that men still account for the majority of leadership positions in Norwegian sport, Norwegian gender equality legislation has been credited by some commentators with playing a key role in the development of not only women’s football in Norway but also in contributing to a growth in female fans of men’s football. As of 2005 it was estimated that, “women make up 30% of the spectators at men’s matches in Norway”. The legislation has also facilitated the development – and recognition – of women’s competencies in the upper tiers of football administration and has enabled the conventional notion of the ‘male expert’ to be challenged, developments that strengthen women’s credibility within the game.

We do not submit that gender equality legislation is a panacea for all of the difficulties associated with female sports fandom, nor is it submitted that female sports fans in the United States and Norway are immune from the issues identified in Chapter Two. The examples provided above do demonstrate, however, that such progressive legislation can bring about cultural and institutional change and can inculcate a greater acceptance of women’s place in the sporting world within the wider public. Perhaps if the opportunity provided by gender equality legislation to effect change in the area of women and sports had been spotted or acted upon in other jurisdictions, some of the negative experiences of female fans may not be as pronounced as they are today.

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294 Ibid.


296 Ibid.


298 Op., cit., Skogvang, 52

299 Ibid.

300 Op. cit., Bradbury, Amara, García and Bairner, 16

301 It is notable that the United Kingdom’s Sex Discrimination Act 1975 specifically exempted sport from its equality provisions. Op., cit., Pope (2010), 149
(c) New Sports v Established Sports

We acknowledge that some sports, by virtue of their long traditions and history, are, to an extent, hamstrung in terms of how innovative they can be in implementing initiatives to reach out to their female fans. On the other hand, the promotion of ‘new’ sports in countries where those sports are not already associated with a masculine culture may open up more opportunities for women to attend in more equal numbers. Soccer in the U.S. has been cited as an example of a sport that has been able to capitalise on the fact that because it lacked the tradition, commercial partners and male domination of the main U.S. professional sports it has been able to attract impressive levels of female players and fans.\(^{302}\) In particular it has been noted that some of these ‘newer sports’ that are “free from the ‘baggage’ of the masculine history” of more traditional sports have been able to position themselves more easily as forms of family entertainment\(^ {303}\) and also towards female fans, regardless of their family status, who perhaps have grown tired of or stayed away from traditional sports because of the prevailing masculine culture.\(^ {304}\) This positioning can be achieved without incurring the wrath of the ‘traditional’ supporter who associates such strategies with the alleged takeover of their sports by the middle classes. Whether, in a particular country, a sport is regarded as ‘traditional’ or ‘new’ is not something that is within the control of a sport. The fact that more ‘traditional’ sports may encounter more resistance to opening up their games to female fans should be regarded as an excuse, however, for not trying to do so. As fan cultures and society changes, so too must sports, regardless of how ‘traditional’ they are perceived to be.

6.4 What Female Fans Can Do

We noted above that women have demonstrated a desire to ‘own’ their fandom and not be dictated to as to how, and even if, they should engage in sports fandom. It has also been noted that, at times, it is other women who have been prominent in subjugating female fans. Female fans who strive for acceptance within sport cannot just sit back and complain about such activities or rely on sports organisations and outside entities such as the media and the legislature to bring about change.

We submit that if female fans want to be regarded as active, authentic and committed sports fans, then they themselves should be active in practices that may lead to positive change. The female only peñas in Spain are an example of female fans taking matters into their own hands by creating their own cultural space within which they can engage in fandom on their own terms.\(^ {305}\) Female fans must speak out against sexist behaviour if they want such behaviour to change.

\(^{302}\) Op. cit., Gosling 258

\(^{303}\) Ibid.

\(^{304}\) Victoria Gosling and Gary Crawford have made a similar observation in relation to Ice Hockey in the U.K., noting that it “does not have the same masculine working-class culture that surrounds many other male mass spectator sports in the UK.” Victoria K. Gosling and Gary Crawford, “The Myth of the 'Puck Bunny' : Female Fans and Men's Ice Hockey”, “Sociology” 2004 38: 490

\(^{305}\) Similarly, the creation of websites such as Femmefan and Women In Sport International provide a virtual space where committed female fans can interact and consume sport without being patronised, mocked or excluded by men.
The general absence of women from leadership positions in sport has knock on consequences in that it reduces the aspirations of women to pursue those positions. Women, therefore, need to maintain their efforts to break into the upper ranks of sports organisations. Sports organisations and the media have a role to play in highlighting such initiatives. An ‘initiative’ is so called because it is *initiated* by someone. If these initiatives are to have a real and lasting effect, women must be proactive in getting them off the ground and ensuring that they gather momentum. If such actions are classed as ‘feminist’, so be it. If successful, projects such as these could allow women more opportunities to gain this ‘ownership’ of their fandom and to at least ameliorate some of the negative experiences female fans still encounter.

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306 Op. cit., Bradbury, Amara, García and Bairner, 9
CONCLUSION

We acknowledge that, in attempting to answer the question posed at the beginning of this study, we set ourselves a difficult task. Sigmund Freud has even admitted defeat in trying to answer this question when he stated “The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is “What does a woman want?” The inherent complexity in this question is that attempting to answer it inevitably involves making sweeping generalisations about women, an approach that is almost doomed to failure from the outset. Freud should have known better! All women are different and the same goes for female sports fans. But all women also face some common structural and cultural problems. While our research has shown that these certain core commonalities amongst female sports fans can be identified, a ‘one size fits all’ approach on the part of sports clubs will not work.

The issue facing sports clubs, therefore, is which female sports fans should they try to attract? Here, sports may find themselves in a dilemma. Clubs that decide to orient themselves according to the more ‘traditional’, and arguably stereotypical, view of the female sports fan would take steps to emphasise the ‘family friendly’ aspects of their sport, highlight improvements in terms of infrastructure and fan safety and seek to leverage on the potential ‘civilising influence’ of female fans. Such an approach, however, would inevitably, in the case of more established sports, involve a certain shift away from the sport’s ‘traditional’ base, a move that is likely to be met by opposition from some of the more long standing fans, be they male or female. On the other hand, clubs may fear that to adopt strategies that address the concerns of the more serious ‘modern’ female fan, the fan whose primary interest is in the sport itself and not the ‘packaging’ that surrounds it, may prevent them from being sufficiently innovative to reach out to more family oriented female fans, an admittedly lucrative ‘market’. To further complicate the issue, the ‘modern’ fan may also be a mother and even a single mother and so demands that her chosen sport addresses her needs in a holistic fashion.

Can sports organisations strike a balance here? We believe that by approaching the matter seriously, not merely paying ‘lip service’ to female fans and by segmenting their female fan base appropriately, such a balance can be struck. We propose that the path that a sports takes in relation to its female fans does not need to be, and cannot be, a matter of ‘either/or’ – the ‘family market’ or the ‘modern’ fan; the boundaries between these categories are blurred and a clear distinction cannot be made. There should be a place for all types of female fans within a sport, just as all types of male fans are accommodated. The AFL has demonstrated that, by acknowledging that female fandom is not a homogenous concept and that women are capable of playing a ‘real’ role within their organisation, it is possible to successfully engage on different
levels with different female fans with varying degrees of interest in the sport and with different reasons for involving themselves.

We suggest that regardless of the approach sports may wish to take, sports can attract and retain more female fans if they follow our advice and recognise the existence of female fans, listen to what they have to say, look to and learn from other sports and act promptly by inviting and encouraging women to be part of their sports. While sports organisations should take the lead in engaging with female fans, the media, the legislature and female fans themselves can all play their part. The bottom line is simple: female fans love their sport and want their sports to love them back.
APPENDIX 1

Figure 4.1: English Premier League Female Fans, 2003-2008 (%)

Figure 4.2: Premier League Fans by Gender and Age, 2011 (%)

Figure 4.3: Fans Who Started Attending Premier League Matches in the Past Four Years: by Gender (%)

For how long have you been attending your club's football matches?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005 (n=25472)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006 (n=24539)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007 (n=24386)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008 (n=31005)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.4: Family Was Influential in me Attending my First Game (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club</td>
<td>Female Fans %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC Freiburg†</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansa Rostock†</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borussia Dortmund†</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schalke 04†</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainz 05</td>
<td>40*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannover 96</td>
<td>30*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VfB Stuttgart</td>
<td>30*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VfL Wolfsbur</td>
<td>30*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hertha Berlin</td>
<td>25*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arminia Bielefeld</td>
<td>23*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamburger SV</td>
<td>20*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borussia Mönchengladbach</td>
<td>15*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Werder Bremen</td>
<td>No data provided</td>
<td></td>
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†approximate percentage provided by clubs based on their own collection of data

*% estimated by clubs
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