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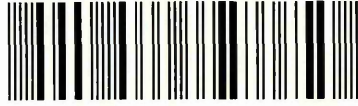
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The experience of female football fans in England:

a qualitative study

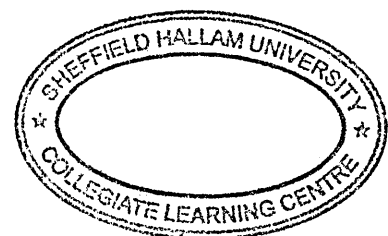
Caroline Stephanie Dunn

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Abstract

There is little, arguably insufficient literature in the mainstream (or 'malestream') domain of sports research focusing exclusively on female football supporters and looking at their reasons for their fandom as well as their particular experiences. This thesis, based on 100 questionnaire responses and 27 in-depth face-to-face interviews, explores respondents' narratives, analysis and perception of their own experience as a football supporter.

It positions itself within a tradition of feminist standpoint research, defining the researcher interrogating the object of her own fandom as an 'aca/fan', and stressing the importance of self-reflexivity. Jennifer Hargreaves (1994: 1) refers to her own research as a 'political intervention' as she works to make women's sport a standard topic for sports sociology scholarship; my intent is to do the same for women's sports fandoms.

The qualitative interviews have given rise to three key themes – the female fan's 'supporting career', her practices of fandom and the ways in which she negotiates her identity, and her experience of the importance of the supporters' trust movement. It also discusses the responses of clubs and football authorities to their female fans and their intentions (or failures) to market the sport to girls and women.

Although every object of fandom and performance of fandom is different in both perception and practice, whether the individual is male or female, this thesis shows that there are some significant overlaps in experience and performance among people who share a particular fandom. However, female fans – even though they identify themselves simply as 'fans' – also share an experience of negotiating a complex fan identity as women within a sport that is institutionally sexist.

Chapter 1. Introduction

'I remember the overwhelming maleness of it all...' (Hornby, 1992: 19)

1.1 Area of investigation: the experience of the female football fan

In most forms of popular culture, the 'fan' is invariably assumed to be female (cf. Burchill, 1987; Moseley, 2002; Taylor, 1989). Yet in football the opposite is true. The football ground is assumed to be a male domain, and the football fan is assumed to be male, with team allegiance frequently passed from father to son. Connell et al. conclude that such a ritual allows the 'sharing of men's emotional responses and judgements and the initiation of the boy into a male language and male traditions... [H]eroism and community are rendered concrete in ways that encourage male bonding and encourage the exclusion of woman from the brotherhood of those who can understand' (1990:25).

However, female football fans do exist; and I know this because I have been a football fan since childhood. My father was a keen football fan, following Luton Town, attending matches regularly and bringing home memorabilia for me, before taking me along with him at the age of seven. From the age of nine, I had my own season ticket; from the age of 16 I began travelling to away games, alone, with friends, or with my father.

My awareness of the gendered concept of football fandom was non-existent until I was a teenager. My female friends at secondary school were entirely uninterested in the

sport that took up every single Saturday, and were not at all understanding about my lack of availability for weekend social excursions. Very occasionally I would be on the receiving end of sexist heckles as I walked to my seat. When I began to consume more football-focused media, I realised that their intended audience was male; even when I read and delighted in Nick Hornby's seminal *Fever Pitch* (1992), some of his analyses of his love for the game jarred with me.

When I was researching my Masters' dissertation in English literature, I chose sports auto/biography as the focus. As I read more accounts of players' and supporters' relationship to football, I felt that my own experience was not being reflected back at me. This is not just the case in popular auto/biography and the mass media.

Historically, academic studies of football supporters have invariably taken the white, straight, working-class man as the normal fan; anything else is presumed abnormal, and since the establishment of the Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research (later the Centre for the Sociology of Sport) at the University of Leicester in 1987, that fan has been the focus of even closer research, usually within the context of hooliganism and the reasons for violent disorder (eg Dunning, 1999; Williams, Dunning and Murphy, 1984; Williams and Perkins, 1997).

As this thesis will show, researchers into football have been largely male (with a few exceptions), and they assume that the football supporter is also male – someone similar to them. Even self-confessed 'post-modern' researchers such as Redhead (1997) focus on football's 'lad culture' and the way in which young men are 'fathered' by their sport of choice, and then mention women's long-term involvement in the game in passing,

calling them 'marginalised'. Writers explain football fandom as a desire to consolidate one's masculinity - for example, Hornby (1992) explains his fandom as a quick-fix of masculinity; Robson (2000) explains 'Millwallism' partly as a harking-back to older values of masculinity - or a wish to become part of an entirely male hooligan 'firm'; for example, Ward's series of eyewitness accounts of hooliganism (1989, 1997, 1998, 2000), or the Brimson brothers' autobiographical accounts (1996, 1997).

The obvious questions that have not yet been addressed are – why, then, do women become football fans, and what do they get out of it?¹ As Chris Weedon says, '[I]f women's experience is different from the experience of men, it is important to understand why. Either we can see women as essentially different from men or as socially constituted as different and subject to social relations and processes in different ways to men' (1987: 8).² This is the driving intent behind my own research: to gauge the experience of female football fans, to offer some potential explanations as to why they perceive these experiences in particular ways, and produce a qualitative study of the life story narratives they produce.

Before I move on to set out the specific objectives of my study, I will now sketch out my definitions of what it is to be a 'fan', and address the myth of the absentee female

-
- 1 Haynes (1993: 55ff) discusses the 'novelty value' of women in football, but then goes on to state, 'The most important question to pose, then, is why men have claimed football as their own, and why does it arouse such passion and energy?' The corollary to this – why women have traditionally been seen as outsiders to this male domain and why and how some women do manage to enter it – is not addressed.
 - 2 This is similar to McRobbie (1978) addressing issues of youth subcultures: 'Very little seems to have been written about the role of girls...They are absent from the classic subcultural ethnographic studies, the pop histories, the personal accounts and the journalistic surveys of the field' (1991: 1). McRobbie's own work has addressed this omission somewhat, and more recent studies (see Lewis, 1992) have looked at female fandom within popular culture.

throughout the history of football fandom.

1.2 Who and what is ‘the fan’?

1.2.1 Defining the fan and the supporter

One of the two terms used most frequently and interchangeably to describe the follower of a football team is ‘fan’. This word has its roots in the noun ‘fanatic’, meaning a person with an unusually (possibly inexplicably or ridiculously) strong commitment to a belief system or way of life – in this instance, to their football club. Hills (2002) discusses the popular perception of the obsessive nature of the fan:

Everybody knows what a fan is. It’s somebody who is obsessed with a particular star, celebrity, film, TV programme, band; somebody who can produce reams of information on their object of fandom, and can quote their favoured lines or lyrics, chapter and verse. (2002: ix)

In a tongue-in-cheek way, he suggests that the factors that constitute a fan are common knowledge; it means having an obsession, it means retaining a lot of useless trivia, it means spouting off about the object of the obsession. Yet people’s fandoms manifest themselves in many different ways. They are partly influenced, of course, by what it is that they are a fan of. (So, for example, Morrissey fans still invariably brandish gladioli at his gigs, in recognition of his previous television appearances performing clutching the flower.) Of course, just as with anything else that is perceived, taken on and

performed by an individual, other factors such as their social background will affect the way the fandom is created (and the performance of the 'fan' identity will be looked at later). There are as many ways to be a fan as there are people in the world, for as Lewis (1992) points out, everybody is a fan of something to some degree.³

The obvious impulse for the football fan is to be present at a football match. The experience of being there at the game is an entirely different one to the experience of watching on television on several levels - the view of the match, the appreciation of and contribution to the atmosphere, the sense of community, and the supporter's memory of the game. Canter et al. argue that the fan's presence enables them to feel the atmosphere, increases awareness of the conditions at the ground, and engage with the crowd's response to the action; and they add that 'being there' is in itself a reason for going (Canter et al., 1989:127)

The term 'supporter' is applied to any individual who likes football; but their attachment to the game could be a limited one (extending only so far as watching some games on television, attending when finances allow, and buying a replica shirt) or a strong, all-encompassing one (stretching to attending every single match a particular team plays). Some who lean more towards the strong end of the spectrum object to the less dedicated also being deemed 'supporters', arguing that to 'support' a team, you have to attend the ground in person and add your presence and your voice to back them.

3 Lewis argues that this is why studying the fan's behaviour is so important, saying: 'Perhaps only a fan can appreciate the depth of feeling, the gratifications, the importance for coping with everyday life that fandom represents. Yet we are all fans of something. We respect, admire, desire. We distinguish and form commitments. By endeavouring to understand the fan impulse, we ultimately move towards a greater understanding of ourselves.' (1992:1)

Indeed, Hornby (1992) feels this very strongly, even to the detriment of his own teenage support of Arsenal, when he explains that he did not feel entitled to join in the celebrations when his team won the Double in 1970-71 because he had not attended enough games and thus 'done the work', as he puts it, to enable him to share the rewards (1992: 45).

1.3 A brief history of female football fandom

The masculinity of sport has been enshrined in social apparatus, including the church and school system. The concept of 'muscular Christianity', rooted in the New Testament, is thought to have first appeared in an 1857 review of Charles Kingsley's novel *Two Years Ago*, and later used to describe *Tom Brown's School Days*, an 1856 novel about life at Rugby by Thomas Hughes. Both writers were labelled 'muscular Christians', and the definition was extended to their work: adventure novels with high principles and manly Christian heroes. The idea created an association between physical strength, religious certainty and one's ability to shape and control the world (Hall, 1994: 7).

Hughes and Kingsley's inspiration was the English public school system, in particular Dr Arnold's tenure at Rugby from the mid-1830s, during which he developed a concern that a lack of supervision would lead the boys into vice and a non-Christian way of life. Arnold's near-contemporary biographers explained that he was ideally suited to the headship of a major school because of his own 'physical vigour and activity', and his encouragement to the pupils to participate in sport, which he saw as 'essential to a boy's

true development' (Selfe, 1889: 37).

Hughes and Kingsley saw themselves as social critics, and believed that asceticism and effeminacy had gravely weakened the Church of England. To make the church a suitable supporter for and partner of the expanding British Empire, Hughes and Kingsley wanted it to demonstrate more 'rugged' and 'manly' qualities. Prominent figures such as G Stanley Hall warned of the 'woman peril' to the church, creating a 'feminising' influence on hymns, music, imagery and ministry (Putney, 2001: 3). This campaign was not limited to England or the empire; they also exported their call for more health and manliness in religion to America, where their ideas failed to catch on immediately due to factors such as Protestant opposition to sports and the popularity of feminine iconography within the mainline Protestant churches. However, in the 1890s President Theodore Roosevelt began to stress the importance of boys participating in sport as preparation for future national service, developing in them the 'Christian' qualities of 'strength, prowess, virility and endurance' (Hagem, 1996:73).

In reality, women have always watched and played sport, and for as long as there has been organised football in England, there have been female fans. Men may have thought the football match an unsuitable place for a lady – one male supporter wrote to the *Leicester Mercury* in 1889 that he would 'have liked to take [his] wife and son to matches but that bad language makes it impossible' (Murphy et al., 1990:56) - but women did attend games. Reporter Charles Edwardes noted in 1892 that it was not just working-class men who had 'football fever', but many old people and women as well. He was surprised that 'the fair sex' were prepared to stand on the terraces, taking 'their

chance in the crush which often precedes entrance into the field: and, to do them justice, they do not seem to mind these crushes' (Taylor, 1992: 7).

In 1884, a referee complained about the way he was treated by a group of disgruntled fans after a game, and his words make it plain that he was outraged not by their complaints, but their sex and their contravening of their status in society as women and mothers: 'After the affair was over I was tackled by a flock of infuriated beings in petticoats supposed to be women, who without doubt were in some cases mothers, if I may judge from the innocent babies suckling at their breasts. They brandished their umbrellas and shook their fists in my face' (Taylor, 1992: 7).

The year after that, before the Football League began in 1888, Preston North End were forced to withdraw their offer of free entry to ladies when 2,000 women were turning up at the ground (Taylor, 1992: 7). Rob Lewis (2009) points out that 'by 1948, 37% of women...were spectators of one sport or another, mainly of football, cricket and tennis', adding that 'some women were accompanied by husbands or boyfriends, but others were spectators in their own right' (2009: 2167). When the Ladies Free concession was scrapped, women were frequently offered a reduced entry rate; by 1890, the minimum entry price charged in the Football League was 6d, with boys and women usually 3d (2009: 2169).

After World War One, when women entered the workplace in large numbers for the first time, women also began attending football matches in large numbers. The *Leicester Mercury's* coverage of the local side's game against Clapton in 1922 noted 'a good

sprinkling of women. Quite a number of women, in fact, faced the cup-tie crush without a male escort. If Leicester is any criterion, then the lure of the English Cup is rapidly infecting the female mind.' The *Mercury's* report on the 1927 Cup final commented: 'A remarkable feature was the number of women who had accompanied their husbands and sweethearts. Many mothers carried babies in their arms and confessed they had brought them to see the cup-tie' (Murphy et al., 1990: 77-78). The City Corporation of Manchester provided special transport for the region's women wishing to travel to games, while contemporary reports suggest that the crowd for the 1929 Cup final between Bolton Wanderers and Portsmouth was split equally between men and women, and local newspapers began to nickname Brentford 'the ladies' team' due to the high number of women travelling around the country to watch them (ibid.: 77-78).

The idea of the 'civilised' English football fan grew during the 1920s, when more women took advantage of their war-induced freedom and went to sporting events. The concept that women are in a football ground makes men behave better became increasingly insidious, extending even into comedy writer Kevin Baldwin's late 20th-century humorous guide on how to be a real football fan: '[M]ore and more women are coming along to matches these days. This is to be welcomed, as they generally have a civilising influence; their presence helps to curb the worst excesses of laddish behaviour' (1994:133). Though football has been characterised by an element of violence from its very beginnings (amongst fans and players), there is a generally accepted view that football hooliganism and crowd violence increased from the 1960s until the 1980s. Murphy et al. point out that football violence dipped between the two world wars, a time which allowed the establishment of the myth of the civilised English

football supporter – and a time when more and more women went to games (1990:73). The football ground at this time was a place suitable for ‘respectable’ people to go, both men and women. Dunning et al. argue that prior to the 1966 World Cup in England, newspapers began to sensationalise their coverage of football, including focusing on crowd disturbances, in order to increase sales. This presented the football ground as a place where violence was commonplace, expected and even acceptable, thus attracting an element who sought a place to fight, making the concept of the ‘dangerous’ ground a self-fulfilling prophecy. They conclude that hooliganism at football reached an early peak in 1968, when the skinhead movement was at its peak (1988:17). The violent members of the football crowd began to organise themselves into ‘firms’ during the 1970s – gangs of hooligans fighting for a particular team. Coddington describes the popular perception of the football ground during the 1970s and 1980s as ‘a haven for racist, sexist thugs’ (1997: 2), explaining that many women were put off going to football for fear of violence during this period. Yet this was not the case for everyone, and this is where my research intervenes.

1.4 The uniqueness of women’s experience

By researching female football supporters of different generations, I am looking to discover and understand their experiences. The particular character of women’s experience is a key tenet of recent feminist research, as theorists such as Stanley (1992; 1993) and Skeggs (1997) have made clear. The history of auto/biography has seen lives written on class-privileged men (a term used by Stanley, referring to men of the middle-

and upper-classes, though she sees all men as privileged by virtue of their sex).⁴ This has continued to dominate sociology and other studies into football – class-privileged men have written their own lives and the lives of others as sports sociology has taken off and football studies has become a branch of academia in itself.

As the following chapters show, there is little literature in the domain of sport research focusing exclusively on female football supporters and looking at their reasons for their fandom as well as their particular experiences; and thus my research will elicit anecdotes, analysis and perception of respondents' own experience as football supporters. Redhead (1997) argues that football is becoming more and more feminised – both in terms of the space and the game itself – and that those who watch the game now have an entirely new method of supporting, which he refers to as 'post-fandom' rather than traditional supporters. I intend to unpick and analyse these assumptions, and discover whether today's fans consider that their supporting experience has altered significantly during their lives and if so, why they think this is.

1.5 My research questions

The previous sections have established how assumptions have historically been made about the absence of female football fans, despite the presence of significant evidence proving that there have always been women in attendance. The remainder of this thesis now addresses the following specific research objectives:

4 The concept of auto/biography and the production of life narratives are examined in chapter 4.

- Why do women become football supporters?
- What do women get out of being football supporters?
- How does being a football supporter affect a woman's (performance of) identity?
- How do women become football supporters?
- How does their fandom manifest itself?
- How does their fandom affect or frame their everyday lives?
- What is the peculiarity of female football fans' experience?

1.6 The structure of this thesis

The next chapter is a review of the mainstream ('malestream') literature which has looked at football fandom but ignored the experience of women, from social histories of working-class leisure time through to the development of academic football studies during the 1980s, when the sport and the fandom were frequently argued to be a domain in which certain forms of masculinity were performed and reinforced. When the structure of football in England changed with the introduction of the Premier League and all-seater stadia, the interest of scholars moved to examining issues of commercialisation and globalisation, but gender remained a largely uninterrogated facet of football fandom.

The following chapter looks in more detail at those few studies which have looked at female football fandom, highlighting Coddington (1997) as the broadest study to date of wider experience in England, but also looking at other studies which examine a

particular aspect of female football fans' experience, at studies that have looked at female fans' experience in other countries, and in other sports.

The following chapter addresses issues of method and methodology, assessing issues of epistemology and theory, the relevance of feminism to this research, the framework of self-reflexivity, the methods to elicit data, and the problems encountered during research. The bulk of the data is qualitative interviews, conducted and structured in order to gain respondents' life stories as a football fan, allowing them to frame their own experiences in their own vocabulary. Fundamentally, the intention behind these interviews is to record the participant's life story in terms of her football supporting and provide a record of her experience. Hargreaves (1994: 1) refers to her own research as a 'political intervention' as she works to make women's sport a standard topic for sports sociology scholarship; my intent is to do the same for women's sports fandoms.

The qualitative interviews have given rise to three key themes, analysed in the subsequent chapters – the female fan's 'supporting career', her practices of fandom and the ways in which she negotiates her identity within a domain that has institutionalised sexism, and her experience of the importance of the supporters' trust movement. I then go on to examine the ways in which football clubs and football authorities have perceived female football fans, how they have traditionally marketed to them, and how, if at all, they intend to improve the experience of female fans.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has set the context of my own reasons for wanting to investigate this particular area in my research; I have provided some broad background information about my own identity as a fan and how my interest in this field has been triggered and developed in recent years; and throughout this research, my own identity and fandom remain important strands of my conducting of the investigation and the interpretation of my data.

I have also highlighted some of the key interventions this research will make to the study of football fandom, and the following chapter begins to set some of the academic context for this research, examining the 'malestream' body of work that has marginalised women's experience as football fans.

Chapter 2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter and the following chapter constitute an overview of studies focusing on the nature and activities of football fans in the English professional game. As the previous chapter showed, there has been a long history of female participation in football fandom, chronicled in some contemporary reports and personal accounts. However, as I shall discuss in this chapter, women's experience as football fans (and indeed sports fans in general) has largely been excluded or marginalised from the mainstream academic literature. The bulk of the literature confirms Crawford's view (2004) that, in much research, any fans who do not conform to the 'traditional' fan identity (which he suggested is marked by maleness, supporter chanting, group solidarity, and aggression) have been dismissed as 'inauthentic', or simply gone unrecognised. Seismic changes in the nature of football as a spectator sport have induced a corresponding shift in the focus of studies on football fandom. An early emphasis on masculinity and violence has thus been superseded by a greater preoccupation with fan practices and consumption. However, throughout all this, the potentially crucial issues of gender and sex have remained largely uninterrogated.

The primary objective of this present chapter is to highlight and elucidate this tendency. The subsequent chapter will then assess the very small body of work that has focused on female fandom, including most significantly Coddington (1997), and extend into the

research that exists on female fandom in other sports. This assessment of the literature concludes with a discussion of the key works that provide a context for this current study, highlighting particular areas of interest or omission where this research will contribute to a deeper and broader understanding of these facets of football fandom.

The present chapter comprises three major sections: a discussion of the beginning of ‘malestream’ research into fandom, moving on to look at the specific interest in football hooliganism and disorder; an overview of the dramatic changes within football over the past 20 years, leading to an increased emphasis on football fandom as a whole and its practices, rather than the hooligan subculture per se; and an examination of the construction and performance of football fan identity.

2.2 The invisible woman

Female fans are omitted from or marginalised in much of the discussion and debate centring on football fandom. Writing on and research into football specifically and working-class leisure time more generally has portrayed fans as male (cf. Clarke and Critcher, 1985). The focus on how football reinforces ‘ideals’ of masculinity, particularly through the opportunities to engage in violence, recurs throughout this strand of literature, implying that the study of football fandom is only significant because of what is learnt about masculinity.

2.2.1 Social histories and accounts of football

Arthur Hopcraft's *The Football Man* (1968) was a series of essays and interviews with people within the game, and is intended to construct a social history.¹ Yet the first paragraph of its introduction indicated falsely that football's importance to everyone in the UK would be assessed: 'It is inherent in the people. It is built into the urban psyche, as much a common experience to our children as are uncles and schools' (1968: 9). The second paragraph showed more clearly who is classed as 'people': 'No player, manager, director or fan who understands football, either through his intellect or his nerve-ends, ever repeats that piece of nonsense trotted out mindlessly by the fearful every now and again which pleads, "After all, it's only a game"' (1968: 9). The first line read: 'Sport can be cruel to men', and throughout 'men' and 'people' were used interchangeably.

Some women in the game are discussed, but they have a 'feminine' role: *domestic*, like landlady Mrs Mary Fullaway who is asked about her young lodger, George Best (1968: 13); *maternal*, like the famous Mrs Elizabeth Charlton, mother of England stars Bobby and Jack (1968: 87); or *sexual*, with the disturbing synecdoche of 'a mixture of mini-skirts and school satchels' (1968: 16) demonstrating the female fandom revolving around Best. Yet they are all defined in terms of their relationship to the man, and not always a positive influence (1968: 103). Women are supportive and nurturing, like the landlady or the mother; or they are unhelpful distractions, and possibly over-sexual at that. Hopcraft's social history of football is one of 'masculine', i.e. not-feminine,

1 Previous football literature aimed at a relatively wide audience focused mostly on on-pitch activities, such as Glanville and Weinstein's *World Cup* (1958). Russell (2010) assesses at greater length the books that preceded Hopcraft and shared his 'literary and intellectual ambition'.

leisure, setting out perceptions of what women are 'like' in relation only to men.

Another important historical narrative which underplays the role of women in the game is that of sport historian Tony Mason, who set the context for his history of leisure in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Mason, 1980) by explaining that football was organised around its fans, with fixtures arranged for Saturday afternoons when most 'working men' had a half-day. However, what Mason did *not* assess was what it was about the game that attracted people to it, also focusing on the working-class nature of the sport, and entrepreneurs wanting to make money from staging it as a professional product (1980: 3). Mason dealt with the generic 'working man' without looking at the experience of the individual *per se* – understandably, as he was working with archive material between 1863 and 1915, and few individuals would have been available for interview or to provide additional information. Thus, the bulk of his work focused on the structure and processes of the sport (1980: 4), and on 'the crowd', a term which not only implies an amorphous, collective mass, but also highlights an emergence of the 'law and order' concerns that came to characterise contemporary football fandom studies in the 1970s and 1980s.

Mason set out the questions he sought to answer:

[W]ho went to football matches in the years 1870 to 1915? Can the socio-occupational structure of the crowd in this particular period be discovered? Moreover, how did those people who did go behave when they got there? What measures were taken by clubs in an attempt to

keep that behaviour within fairly obvious limits? (1980: 138)

This emphasis on 'limiting behaviour' shows that an interest in the 'bad conduct' of football fans is in evidence here. However, Mason was also interested in how people made their decision to spend their leisure time at football, examining the number of people entering football grounds, how they travelled there and whether they stood on terraces or sat in stands, and how they learnt about games through advertising. Several of the posters he mentioned include the line 'Ladies free', showing that women were encouraged to the ground by the offer of free admission, right from the beginning of organised football. This led him to speculate that middle-class women may have gone to matches while working-class women did not, because of their domestic responsibilities (1980: 153) – an idea that lingers still.

2.2.2 Football hooliganism

Mason was not alone in focusing on 'limiting bad conduct' to the exclusion of all other facets of football fandom. The correlation between working-class men/masculinity and the violence to be found at football grounds was interrogated by several studies from the early 1970s onwards, creating a vast and dominant body of football-focused literature in which female fandom, involvement and experience continued to be pushed aside. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies's Clarke (1978) and Critcher (1979, 1991) both argued that the core values of working-class culture had traditionally been equated with masculinity, aggression, physical emphasis, and regional identity, all of which can

be found within football.² Critcher argued that the increased importance placed on spectacle led to 'traditional' (i.e. male and working-class) supporters' disaffection from the game, which in turn led to ritualised and realised aggression.

Marsh et al. (1978; also Marsh, 1978) argued that football grounds are the sites of rituals that demonstrate the fans' masculinity (1978:133); they said that 'hooliganism' was misunderstood and misinterpreted, actual violence was rare, and it was 'running' (gangs of fans running towards opposition fans with the intent of making them retreat) that was most often seen at grounds. For them, this was not a genuine attempt to fight; rather, in the supposed absence of females to impress, it was a stage to demonstrate physical presence and overpowering masculinity (the 'ritualised violence' referred to by Critcher).³ Similarly, popular anthropologist Desmond Morris (1981) set out to assess 'the soccer tribe', which he described as 'strange and often savage' (1981: 8), making it clear that his research, intended to be 'anthropological' and looking at the football fan as a species of animal, was set within the 'law and order' context. He described the game itself as a 'ritual hunt' (1981: 15), and as a 'battle' (1981: 17), discussing the 'aggressive feelings' that emerge and are expressed at football (1981: 19), and describing the football supporter solely as male:

2 McRobbie (1982) mentioned in passing a possible understanding of football hooliganism – the desire for fame through notoriety, and gaining mementoes of engagement with a society from which they are largely excluded.

3 Several studies (eg Waddington, Jones and Critcher, 1989; Waddington, 1992; Marsh and Kibby, 1992) took a similar stance to look at instances of civil disorder in the UK in the 1980s, theorising crowd behaviour in situations other than football (although Waddington, 1992, does address incidents of hooliganism as well). The trend demonstrated a wider interest in other modern 'folk devils' (such as Marsh and Kibby's examination of excessive alcohol consumers) and understanding reasons for collective disorder at a time of political and civil unrest – for example, the Northern Ireland 'Troubles', the poll tax riots, the miners' strikes.

[H]is heart is always with one particular team and his tribal allegiance to his home club transcends all other considerations...He may moan and grumble, but he does not desert them. He has learnt that no team, however brilliant, can win all its games, and he waits for the good times that must surely come. (1981: 234)

In both these studies, evidence in support of the authors' argument is based purely on observation and assumption, without data to back up the conclusions; the heavily-gendered arguments show the authors' belief in a possible 'biological' explanation for all 'disorderly' behaviour – men cannot curb their 'naturally' aggressive instincts. Women are omitted from any examination; their fandom is invisible, for if their presence were acknowledged, these 'natural' hypotheses would be proved utterly unfounded.

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the 'Leicester School' of football research criticised earlier concepts of football disorder, particularly the idea put forward by the CCCS and Ian Taylor that it was a feeling of social exclusion from football that made male working-class fans behave in a violent fashion.⁴ Their concern was to investigate the subculture of football hooliganism, taking the figurational standpoint that the process of civilisation is ongoing, and currently a de-civilising spurt was affecting the lower working-classes, resulting in uncivilised, i.e. violent, behaviour (cf. Dunning, 1982; Elias and Dunning, 1986; Williams, 1984, 1986; Williams et al. 1984), and

4 Atkinson and Young (2008: 33) argued that the Leicester School produced a very specific form of subcultural research, even though it was and is not often recognised as such.

carried out this research through participant observation and then undercover observation. This period of work continued to largely omit discussion of gender issues involving female fans. The assumption here was that the most significant aspect of football support and thus the focus for study was the opportunity for hooliganism – a phenomenon in which women do not take part, and could therefore be excluded from consideration. They did, however, discuss women’s role in socialisation, arguing that because men have historically been the physical protectors of their family group, they have learnt to be more aggressive (Williams, Dunning and Murphy, 1984: 193); and from childhood, working-class boys and girls are segregated, with girls encouraged to take up domestic responsibilities, leaving the boys in tight-knit gangs which draw attention from the police and from ‘rival gangs’ in the area (1984: 202).

Ian Taylor (1969, 1971) had been arguing for some years that working-class masculinity is embodied by physical toughness, stamina and autonomy, deriving from the experience of industrial work, and therefore it was necessary to understand the particular conception of ‘masculinity’ that pervaded the football terraces. Taylor was writing a time when huge changes were occurring in the sport, such as the removal of the salary cap for footballers, and the rapid increase of the English transfer fee record,⁵ taking it away from its ‘traditional’ roots and making ‘non-traditional’ (i.e. female or middle-class) fans more welcome. Yet these changes (including the changing demographic of the fanbase), he argued, were increasing the levels of disorder at grounds; when clubs were participatory democracies - i.e. when fans had an input into

5 This rose from Denis Law’s 1962 transfer from Torino to Manchester United worth £115,000, and almost doubled within a decade as Alan Ball moved from Everton to Arsenal in 1971 for £220,000 (cf. Redhead, 1987).

the way clubs were run - the spectators 'respected' the pitch and the stands; but when clubs began to be owned by businessmen, spectators felt less of a connection and a responsibility.⁶ The next section now goes on to examine how the game changed in the 1980s as football disorder became more frequent and high-profile, and as stadia became more and more neglected.

2.3 The changing face of football: its implications for research

2.3.1 The 1980s: a turning point

From the mid-1980s onwards, it would be no exaggeration to say that the face of British football changed even more drastically. Giulianotti (1994a: 18) termed 1985 the 'crisis year' as, in March, Millwall fans rioted before, during and after their team's game at Luton's Kenilworth Road, triggering a decision by Luton's chairman, David Evans MP, to ban away supporters from the ground. Two months later, on 11th May 1985, 56 people died at Bradford City's Valley Parade, as a discarded cigarette butt set a pile of litter alight underneath a wooden stand. On the same day one person died with over 160 injured as a wall collapsed at Birmingham's St Andrews. Just over two weeks later, on the 29th May, 39 Juventus fans died at Heysel, in Belgium, after a wall collapsed in the already-condemned stadium as they tried to move away from opposition supporters during the European Cup final against Liverpool.

⁶ However, violence at football is not quite so neatly packaged as this, with incidents of disorder recorded since the game began. The previous chapter highlighted some 19th-century incidents of disorder involving females, while the work of the Leicester School in tracing the media coverage of football violence is addressed later in this chapter.

As a direct response to the 'hooligan problem', UEFA, the game's governing body in Europe, banned English clubs from competing in European competition for five years, with the exception of Liverpool who were banned for six (Giulianotti et al., 1994: 20). The government commissioned High Court judge Sir Oliver Popplewell – a self-confessed fan of cricket and rugby union - to chair an inquiry, ostensibly to investigate why the Bradford fire had happened (Popplewell, 1986). However, rather than examining the reasons why a ground had been so neglected as to cause a fire hazard, the inquiry opened out its scope to look at the separate issue of hooliganism, which had nothing to do with the Bradford tragedy.⁷ The inquiry constituted an official endorsement of the then prime minister, Margaret Thatcher's plans to curb the behaviour of football fans by introducing identity cards (Armstrong and Young, 1997).⁸

Yet the popular media and academic perception of fans started to alter as they began to take a visible role in the debates over the changes in the game and collective action came increasingly to the fore; although the football fan was still characterised as male, the traditional view that he was also invariably working-class and violent started to subside. The Football Supporters' Association was formed in 1985 to counteract establishment views developed, in the wake of the high-profile riots and disasters

7 Taylor (1982) criticised the series of official reports into football-related problems, primarily hooliganism, from the 1960s onwards, arguing that although they purported to take an overview and made recommendations to eliminate violence altogether, they were triggered by specific individual incidents and as such did not have the holistic view they intended.

8 It also encouraged some researchers to begin to examine the role the football stadium played for fans in developing their affective attachment. Canter et al. (1989) approached the subject from a psychological and environmental perspective, rather than one rooted in existing football sociology. They drew upon earlier work theorising crowds (cf. Canetti, 1962), which treated the crowd as a homogenous whole and looked at its collective effects rather than individual actions. However, they did acknowledge that the football stadium is an important centre of attachment for the fan, which has since developed into a sport-specific idea of topophilia, as formulated by John Bale (1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1995), who began to develop a 'geography of football'.

referred to above, which characterised football fans as violent, criminal and untrustworthy. The majority of its founders were Liverpool fans keen to campaign on the organisational issues that led to the Heysel disaster, but it soon became a national movement working to improve the experience of all football supporters (cf. Brown, 1997).⁹ This need to improve conditions became particularly vital after 96 fans died at Sheffield Wednesday's Hillsborough stadium during an FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest, due to overcrowding in the central pen on the Leppings Lane terrace.

Just as Hopcraft criticised the media portrayal of football 20 years beforehand, Phil Scraton in his work examining the English football disasters (1999, 2004) was critical of the media's tendency to depict fans as 'uncivilised' or 'violent', arguing that the 'lens of hooliganism' contributed to the conditions that precipitated Hillsborough and its aftermath.¹⁰ The academic researchers investigating football disorder were also a factor – albeit minor – in maintaining this stereotype. When violent fans are a minority but are the only ones given any kind of documentary attention, even within an established academic tradition of interrogating male youth disorder and subculture, the cliché that all fans are potential hooligans is reinforced. This has the effect of reinforcing in turn the feeling of 'community' among that subculture. Equally, the focus on 'masculinity'

9 The reasons for the fans' solidarity and opposition to the government's proposals that ensued are debatable, and varied according to the individual. Some may have been eager to protect 'traditional' football supporting patterns in the face of the conservative middle-class onslaught, whereas some may have taken the view that a cohesive fans' movement was necessary to improve the standards of the stands from which they viewed football, arguing that putting up with such conditions made it easier for politicians and the authorities to treat football fans as animals.

10 The police officer in charge of the match at Hillsborough initially informed the FA general secretary Graham Kelly that the incident had been caused by hooliganism, and that the external gates which had allowed so many fans to flood in had been broken down by violent fans, when in fact they had been opened on his orders.

has constantly served to overlook female presence and activity in studies of fandom. After Hillsborough and the ‘humanisation’ of football fans, sports sociology in the mid-1980s and beyond shifted its attention away from studying football disorder and on to the experiences of fans themselves; rather than studying structures and large groups, there was a shift towards the experience of the individual: postmodernist approaches – with their focus on the uniqueness, importance and significance of the individual subject and experience – began to take a firmer hold.

Various cultural theorists and sociologists in fields other than football were arguing at this time that women were shaping subcultures and identities, as the concept of ‘post-subculture’ developed alongside criticism of the CCCS’s previous work (cf. Carrington and Wilson, 2004; Muggleton, 2000; Thornton, 1995; Weinzierl and Muggleton, 2003). Atkinson and Young (2008) argued that this new wave of post-subcultural work theorised women’s role in subcultures beyond traditional boundaries, and offered new ways of looking at gender, sexuality and ethnicity, over and above the class focus that had been pursued by the CCCS in the late 1970s.¹¹ Steve Redhead (1990) had previously criticised the theorisation of subculture, arguing that even if subcultures were once ‘authentic’, they were no longer so, and the concept that subcultures were self-generating led to misreadings of their activity. He employed the term ‘post-fan’ to refer to the late 20th-century culture generated by the ‘literaturisation and musicalisation of soccer’ (Redhead, 1997: 1);¹² the dominant male terrace culture as conceived by the

11 They also argued that the sociology of sport had neglected subcultural theory as a whole in the 1990s onwards.

12 Redhead’s earlier work was situated within the Manchester Institute of Popular Culture, Manchester Metropolitan University’s school of law and popular culture, within a field that tied together subculture, youth culture and popular culture, which he described as ‘popular cultural studies’ as

CCCS and earlier theorists is not necessarily dead, but negotiating a more reflexive, mediated fan identity is now possible, which he terms 'post-fandom' (Redhead, 1997: 29).¹³ However, some of his later work (Redhead, 2007) has reflected on the fact that few football researchers adopted the concept of post-subculture, opting instead to work within the well-defined sphere of hooliganism and subcultural practices. He has criticised academia's failure to engage with this new critical thinking as well as its failure in recent years to conduct new and rigorous studies of hooligan subculture.

2.3.2 Commercialisation and globalisation

The examination of football from a changing economic perspective was another popular standpoint at the turn of the millennium. The emphasis on money and finance was not new, but the foregrounding of fan reaction was: Korr (1986) had previously focused on producing an 'economic history' of West Ham United, but deliberately opted not to speak to fans, making it clear in his preface that if he were to do so, it would distort his data from the 'genuine' information elicited from those directly involved in the day-to-day operations of the club (1986: ix). Korr demonstrated that he accepted the club's narratives as the basis of his history as this allowed him to contextualise; yet he had no real reason for not using information from other 'interested parties'; indeed, it is easy to argue that drawing upon a wider range of sources allows for a more accurate and realistic context. This omission is indicative of the dismissive way in which fans had

distinct from traditional cultural studies (1990, 1997).

13 More recent work by Redhead (2007, 2009, 2010) has suggested that there is something of a resurgence of the traditional hooligan subculture, tied in part to the increased interest in hooligan memoirs.

(and have) been historically treated by their clubs and the Establishment.¹⁴

Many critics examined the ways in and extent to which money and commercial factors affect the practice of fandom, but did not consider gender as a relevant facet for interrogation. Richard Giulianotti began developing his body of work in the early 1990s, and since then his interest in globalisation and the effects of capitalism on football has become more pronounced (1999, 2004, 2007). Giulianotti (2002) tracked the changes, or 'intensive hypercommodification', that have taken place in English football since the 1990 World Cup. He assessed the impact that the changing commercialised nature of the game has had on spectator identities, and drew up four categories of English football fans, all incorporating elements of consumption and financial investment. The 'supporter' follows one football club with an intense personal and emotional investment, possibly supplemented with a financial investment, such as buying shares or merchandise. S/he places emphases on ritual and their strong affective, emotional ties, or 'topophilic' relationship, with their club's home ground. The 'follower' watches a club, but also tracks developments in the careers of other people or clubs in which she or he has an interest, and the stadium does not have the same symbolic importance.¹⁵ However, a follower must still obey certain rules of

14 More optimistically, accepting the 'Establishment' narratives as accurate without cross-referencing it with the assessments of the other 'interested parties' would probably not be an acceptable methodology today for a serious historical analysis, particularly in the light of the research into the Hillsborough disaster and the official Taylor Report (1990) which pinpointed the 'Establishment' narratives as inaccurate and mendacious and the fans' eyewitness accounts as true.

15 Giulianotti gave the example of followers being drawn to St Pauli in Hamburg if they have left-wing politics, or one of the Italian clubs with a strong fascistic fan subculture if they have extreme right-wing views. He extended the idea of football following in Italy by explaining that the subcultures there are so interwoven that a supporter of Sampdoria might also follow Parma (2002: 35). He also linked the rise in football following in the UK to the rise of televised matches, saying that to sustain an interest in all the games available to watch, the viewer must develop an interest in at least one club apart from their own.

fandom: for example, a follower could not have an interest in Liverpool and Everton, or Manchester United and Manchester City, or even Liverpool and Manchester United, because of the intense rivalries that exist between these clubs (2002: 36). The 'fan' is a 'modern' football-watcher, experiencing the club and its traditions through purchasing products, thus authenticating their support through acknowledgement of, participation in and consumption in a commercial market.

Giulianotti also adopted and adapted Charles Baudelaire's term of 'flaneur'. This was initially intended to refer to an individual who experiences a city by walking around it; but in this context, it designates a person who observes football through market-dominated virtual relationships – particularly through television and online – and pursues a number of football experiences through a detached relationship with a club, or several clubs at a time. Giulianotti likened their behaviour to 'window-shopping': choosing aspects of the fandom according to personal preference, and avoiding formation of ties with others within the fandom. The flaneur's ties with the fandom are accordingly weak, and can be broken, not only by converting loyalty to another club, but by switching to another form of entertainment and fandom altogether. My research will show that although football fans may not draw up categories as explicit as Giulianotti's, they certainly create their own definitions of what constitutes being a football fan, and what constitutes being a fan of a particular club – what constitutes 'authenticity', what constitutes appropriate behaviour, what constitutes acceptable dress within the football stadium, and so on.

Other researchers shared Giulianotti's interest in the role that money and consumerism

has played and continues to play for football fans, and highlighted the way it helps to constitute particular male identities. Redhead (1987, 1993, 1997) positioned football as a strand of popular youth consumer culture, and tended to maintain that the consumer of football is a young male, and that football is a leisure choice, selected for its particular style- and identity-signifying properties. Although gender remains an overlooked element of identity in this discussion, with 'male' remaining the 'norm', throughout Redhead's work there is a shift towards acknowledging the changing wider demographic of the football fan. Thus, Redhead has acknowledged how fans have become increasingly involved in supporters' movements, and argued that this democratisation of fandom allows for the integration of 'non-traditional' fans, such as women (Redhead, 1993).

Matt Hills examined the figures of the 'fan' and the 'consumer' in opposition (2002: 27), highlighting the issue around who is a 'real' fan and how they demonstrate it. He criticised the idea that the 'fan' is somehow better than the 'consumer' because he or she does not spend any money in pursuing his or her fandom; high levels of consumption can be portrayed as another way of being a dedicated fan, because one's purchases increase the club's income. This maps on to football fandom, where the 'realness' of one's fandom can be interrogated by others, to discover whether or not one is a genuine fan (i.e. someone who attends lots of games and understands the laws) or a 'glory-hunter' (an individual who stops attending if the team's performance and results are bad), or whether one has other, insubstantial reasons for going to games (i.e. the cloud of doubt that hangs over seeing a female at a game, which leads to assumptions that she is there because she wants to look at men). Again, these concepts will be

examined in this research, where I will explore the ‘authentic’ and ‘genuine’ identities which female fans create and navigate for themselves.

2.3.3 The sense of community within fandom

As the experience of the individual became more of a focus, more literature began to include the experience of females within the football supporters’ community, even if specifically gendered dimensions of fandom were not explored. The sense of community between all football supporters, regardless of age, ethnic origin, biological sex or even which club they supported, has been addressed by Rogan Taylor of the University of Liverpool’s Football Industry Group. A Liverpool fan, he was also a leading member of the Football Supporters’ Association; as such, he takes a non-club-specific stance, first looking at the development of a cohesive national ‘supporters’ movement’ and the cultures growing from it, and more recently looking at the increased globalisation of the game (cf. Taylor, 2007). The two key works he has contributed are his 1992 history of the National Federation of Supporters’ Clubs, valuable in the way it chronicles attachments to clubs over the course of a century, looking specifically at organised fans’ groups who work alongside their club, primarily to raise money for them,¹⁶ and Rogan and Ward (1995), in which they interviewed players, managers, administrators and fans of football about their memories of the game over the past century to produce an oral history. They applied no criticism or analysis of the data they elicited. Instead, they organised the material chronologically, allowing their

16 The more political supporters’ trusts are a late 20th-century development, and their formation and operation will be assessed in chapter 7.

interviewees' narratives of their experiences and memories to stand alone without having a framework imposed on their words.¹⁷ They interviewed male players, such as Sir Stanley Matthews, and female players, such as Alice Barlow, a former player for Dick, Kerr's Ladies,¹⁸ and included female fans' narratives as well as male fans' narratives which mention the presence of females.

2.3.4 Club subculture

Rather than focusing on football fandom in general and how it contributes to specifically masculine identity formations and performances, some researchers have looked at particular clubs and the ways in which their fans create a clearly delineated, shared identity. Some of these have focused on clubs' particular hooligan groups' identity (Giulianotti, 1994a, 1994b), but others have looked at the wider supporting culture rather than simply the groups that contribute to disorder.

The premise of sports sociologist Garry Robson's work (2000) is that a club's fan culture is distinct and identifiable, but not generic; however, his theories of football fandom are intrinsically bound up with (the performance of) masculinity; for example, he explained the fan's emotional investment in the game through 'a need to sustain male contexts in which the core elements of pre-modern male subjectivities and cultures could survive and flourish' (2000: 2). He argued that Millwall fans are bound together

17 This leaves it up to the reader to interpret and assess the narratives; the issues with presenting respondents' narratives 'as intended' are discussed further in chapter 4.

18 Dick, Kerr's Ladies were a team of women who played to raise money for various charities when men's football was suspended in wartime. Jean Williams (2000) narrates part of their history; Gail Newsham (1994) produces a longer chronicle of their existence.

through their specific and shared understandings of class, masculinity and local history, and it is unimportant whether or not a supporter lives in the immediate vicinity. Robson conveyed a strong sense of football being under attack from a process of ‘gentrification’ and the establishment (2000: 6); he did not explicitly mention women as a factor in the attempted destruction of the game, although he briefly stated that football distances working-class men from all women as well as middle-class men (2000: 75ff). Women are once again equated with the middle class, because of their shared difference from working-class men (cf. Gosling, 2007). With this in mind, it is unsurprising that he did not mention in his analysis any female Millwall fans; indeed, such a creature is not even mentioned in the text. Again, this leaves a space to question why, if Robson is correct to link football directly with masculinity and producing a socially acceptable and admired male identity, any woman participates in such a ritual.

2.4 Identity, display and participation

2.4.1 Experience and identity

Also towards the end of the 20th century, some researchers began to pay attention to the individual’s experience, looking at what attracts fans to football, what makes them into a fan, and how their fandom sustains. The focus still remained primarily ‘malestream’: any unique dimensions of female experience stayed unexplored, with the ‘ungendered’ experience being equated to ‘male’ and put forward as ‘standard’ or ‘the norm’. Murphy et al. (1990) made no gender distinctions in their explanation of a fan’s attachment to their club and how these attachments first form and develop, and they began to engage

more explicitly with the idea of subcultures at this point, though they went on to examine in detail only the subculture of hooligans. They introduced the idea of 'attachment', suggesting that people watch football because of a bond with the team, and they are introduced to the game via exposure to the 'subculture of football' from a 'significant other' such as a parent and will have been sustained through, for example, membership of a football-orientated peer group (1990:8). Various factors, such as geographical proximity, may lead an individual to feel a sense of kinship with a football club, but in order to sustain a fandom, this kinship must be nurtured through a social network; this sense of a supporting network is important to strengthen each individual's ties to the club.

Work on national identity, with a particular focus on its role in constituting masculinity, increased after the ban on English clubs competing in Europe was lifted (Giulianotti, 1999; Williams and Wagg, 1991); and many researchers (including Boyle et al., 1994; Williams, 1994; Williams and Giulianotti, 1994) linked this to the examination of football's role in constructing late 20th-century male identity. Williams (1994) addressed the topic of identity but still adhered closely to his previous work and the ethos of the Leicester School (and also Robson, 2000) in examining why football is so important to so many people. The principle around which Williams continued to work was very similar to that espoused earlier by the CCCS: the game, whether watching or playing it, provides a set of values for masculinity, particularly working-class masculinity (1994:153).¹⁹ Similarly, Armstrong (1998) focused on how and why hooligans have

¹⁹ Having said that, Williams does make clear that he is setting up this hypothesis on the topic of 'supporting a professional football club, for men', implying by omission that not all football fans are men, there are some supporters of professional football clubs who are women, although the reasons

chosen to participate in violence at football, arguing that ‘hooliganism’ at football is merely a performance of a ritual in a safe environment, signifying traditional working-class masculine strength, and placing football hooliganism in the tradition of ‘masculine revelry’; the authorities condemn such activities because they fear the power of the mob.

Yet since then, there has been adverse commentary on the continuing focus on ‘male’ and ‘masculine’ identities; for example, Free and Hughson (2003) criticised these ‘new ethnographies’, such as Armstrong’s, for their concentration on male identity and failure to consider issues of gender and sexuality, and suggested that the performance or exaggeration of working-class masculinity is only possible when others (such as women, or middle-class fans) are increasingly feminised or cast as ‘other’, or, as in these cases, excluded entirely.

2.4.2 Performativity and performance in sport and sports fandom

As Free and Hughson suggest, one of the more recent ways in which fan identity has been assessed is through the prism of performativity, which has taken into account performance not only of one’s fandom but of one’s gender. These concepts of ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’ are drawn from a background of postmodern and poststructuralist theory. Business researchers Alvesson and Skoldberg argued that postmodernism and poststructuralism have a shared understanding that the ‘grand narratives’ – the general principles governing the absolutism of knowledge and ‘truth’ –

for their fandom are not dealt with in his essay.

are mythical. Individuals construct themselves differently according to their social setting, and understand what is expected of them in particular situations (cf. Alvesson and Willmott, 2004: 439; Barker, 1999: 124; Weedon, 1987: 86); social researcher Jane Elliott concurred: '[I]ndividuals cannot be understood as having a fixed identity that is ontologically prior to their position in the social world. Identity is not to be found inside a person (like a kernel within a nut shell) but rather it is relational and inheres in the interactions a person has with others' (2005: 124).

West and Zimmerman (1987) focused on how gender itself is performed, arguing that they were offering a 'new understanding...of everyday interaction' and described it as 'doing gender'; for them, gender is not fixed or essential, but performed differently according to the individual and the situation. Sports sociologist Gertrud Pfister argued that research into sport is an excellent area in which to perform and assess gender, because sport has always had (or has been perceived to have) such starkly drawn dividing lines between 'women' and 'men' and what constitutes appropriate conduct and appearance in the sporting arena for both (2010: 240).

A more recent assessment of fandom's role in constituting identity came from Ben-Porat (2010), who stood back from any discussion of performativity by arguing that because fandom itself is 'stable and effective' its role as a 'significant component of identity' is also fixed. This may not be the case; though one's support for a club may never alter, one's commitment to active support may do for various reasons; for example, some respondents take a break from attending matches for domestic reasons, and some stop buying outward manifestations of support (for example, supporters' trust

memberships, or club-branded merchandise) for financial reasons. Ben-Porat argued that the concept and commitment of fandom itself may remain stable, similar to Brown's ideas that fan communities (2009) are simultaneously 'fluid, changing, contested' as well as being 'unified, rooted, structuring'; and that football fandom is a 'way of life', offering a consistent way of understanding oneself in a world that elsewhere provides only 'unstable identities'. However, I suggest in this thesis that Ben-Porat is wrong to say that fandom per se is unchanging; how one performs and expresses that fandom and thus how one understands oneself as a fan can alter depending on circumstance.

The development of audience studies (Hall, 1980; Willis, 1990) has led to some theorists suggesting that football can be understood as a text perceived and consumed (after being at least partly produced) by its fans. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998: 40ff) argued that sports events are a performance (reiterated with a more American slant in Brummett, 2009); the physical division between participants and audience is marked; the participants accentuate their behaviour while being watched; and the audience perceive a sense of 'specialness' and being transported out of the mundane. With all-seater stadia, the audience at a football ground has less opportunity for interaction among themselves, meaning increased attention is paid to the performance. Crawford (2004) extended this idea, arguing that the sport audience is not as 'simple' as Abercrombie and Longhurst suggested, because even live sport is mediated (for example, with action replays screened around the ground, and the use of music during a match). He stated that sports audiences can be part of the text/performance that is produced, through participation in singing at the ground, or away from the match itself

through writing on websites²⁰ or phoning radio talk shows.²¹

The gendered dynamics of the sports (media) audience have been assessed by Fiske (1989), who argued that the female fan has an ambiguous position, calling her ‘traditionally the uninvited observer (which presumably gives her the powerful position of the voyeur), but the televising of sport has...eroticised the male body so that it can become an object of feminine desire and pleasure’ (1989: 88). The tentative language used here demonstrates that he is well aware that the female viewer is not endowed with the power of the voyeur, even though theoretically she should be; and though the male body ‘can’ become an ‘object of feminine desire and pleasure’, this is by no means inevitable. He added to this analysis in his later work (Fiske, 1993), suggesting that female sports fans need to perform their fandom differently to distance themselves from their male counterparts, and arguing that females demonstrate their knowledge ‘sceptically’.²²

2.4.3 The ‘maleness’ of football discourse

Tangible expressions of allegiance and experience, particularly printed chronicles,

20 The impact of the internet on (post-)subcultural activities is addressed by Paul Hodkinson (2003) and in sport specifically by Brian Wilson (2008).

21 There has also been some work on the audience for football on television, such as Garry Crawford’s history of televised sport (1992), in which he noted that television audiences tend to be more aware of how the coverage they are watching is mediated because of their parallel experiences in a live sport situation; and Ian Taylor’s observations about the launch of the Premier League and its increased reliance on television coverage (1995), as well as others (cf. Duncan and Brummett, 1989).

22 This analysis, however, is drawing on studies of American football (gridiron), and as such its very gendered assessment of fans’ behaviour and this scepticism emerging from the females may well not be paralleled in the English game (soccer); it is possible that televised sport, which was the focus of that study, creates a different dynamic than supporting a team at the actual stadium where the match is taking place.

remain a key part of football fandom. Haynes (1995) focused on the fanzine phenomenon, which mimicked other, older, 'subversive' subcultures such as punk (cf. Redhead, 1991). Running throughout the work there is a thread that emphasises the masculinity of football discourse. This is shown in observations such as the links between football discourse and the male space of the pub in the earlier parts of the 20th century (Redhead, 1995: 21), the attribution of football fanzines to 'working-class lads' (ibid.: 45), the aim of mainstream sports media to appeal to men (1995: 99), and the discussion of 'disparity between men and women in their level of obsessiveness for football' (1995: 113ff).²³ From the mid-1970s rise of hooliganism and the work of Taylor through the stadium disasters of the 1980s, Haynes traced the idea of a unique football discourse, 'male talk: a form of working-class "common sense".' He introduced the idea of a working-class leisure-time gender division between public and private spaces, where men enter the public arena at the weekend to watch sporting events, and women perform domestic duties in the private setting (1995:12). For Haynes, even though football has been examined and overhauled as a response to the deaths at Heysel and Hillsborough, it is still a uniquely male interest, and talking about it is a uniquely male preserve, explaining that: 'Talking about football has been an almost exclusive male domain, often practised in the "patriarchy of the street corner", the pub' (1995:21). Again, the focus on 'traditional' working-class values is clear: the public, masculine space of the pub is not intended to be open to females, and nor are they supposed to engage in the discourses used there – specifically, the discourse of football. This exclusion of women, found in the print media and in television (as I shall examine later

23 Haynes does not define or explain what he understands to be 'male' or 'masculine', which he tends to use interchangeably, but uses both terms throughout the book. He later also addresses the concept of what he refers to as 'women's genres' (1995: 115ff), which are invariably low/popular culture, such as soap operas and glossy magazines.

in this thesis with an analysis of female fans' reaction to Sky Sports' *Soccer AM*), continues today; as the previous chapter showed, academic research into football has typically focused on men, but even academic research into football media has written out women's presence (cf. Chovanec, 2006, and his analysis of the Guardian's online 'minute-by-minute' match reports as a display of 'male gossip', ignoring female contributors)²⁴, perpetuating women's invisibility in football-related discourse.

The 'maleness' of football discourse continued with the late 20th-century boom in football 'literaturisation' (Redhead, 1997), led by Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch* (1992), his autobiographical account of his life supporting Arsenal, and was followed by scores of other imitative books. In his examination of football in the media, Redhead pinpointed the 'hooligan memoir' as a style of writing that developed in the 1990s and beyond, triggered by the popularity of *Fever Pitch*, terming it the 'hit and tell' genre (2004, 2009); and drawing parallels between this 'unpleasant' strand of social realism to the earlier 1950s and 1960s social realism of Sillitoe and Osborne (2007). Redhead highlighted these portrayals of 'violent male football fandom' (2004: 395), acknowledging that these experiences are not necessarily typical, but although the 'maleness' of this type of fandom is highlighted, there is no discussion of the particulars of different experiences on gender lines.

24 Indeed, his analysis is of four reports, three from the 2004 European Championships and one from the 2006 World Cup, and he stated at the outset: 'Since both commentators quoted in this article are male, as are other commentators appearing on the Guardian Unlimited website and commentating on football matches, the gender-specific pronoun he is used throughout this study to refer generically to this profession' (Chovanec, 2006: 24). Georgina Turner was a minute-by-minute commentator for Euro 2004; I was part of the Guardian sports team for the 2006 World Cup, writing several minute-by-minute reports when there were two other women on the team, Turner and Gemma Clarke, also writing minute-by-minute reports – yet our presence (and indeed the female readers of the minute-by-minutes) is completely ignored in Chovanec's analysis.

The football media have continued to target male audiences; Andy Lyons, the founding editor of *When Saturday Comes*, a monthly football magazine which grew up from the 1980s fanzine culture and was first published in 1986, and which has been involved in anti-racism campaigns and debates since its inception, spoke of his readership and intended audience:

[T]he average reader is someone in their 20s, maybe ex-student, or quite likely to be a student, and the Guardian/Independent reader...Someone that grew up watching football late 60s, early 70s. Predominantly male. We have got some women readers, but not that many really. But in a way there's not a great deal you can do about that. (Haynes, 1995:75)

Only an elite group of men with a certain level of education, a particular time-frame for their support and a defined set of politics are likely to read the magazine, and are targeted and welcomed by its editor.²⁵ Yet he does not expect his readers to be 'working class' in the traditional sense of the term – they are likely to be in or have gone through tertiary education, and readers of broadsheets. These readers are not the traditional football fans of the 'golden age' as discussed previously; this is a new demographic of well-educated, possibly aspiring middle-class male fans, and they are accepted as knowledgeable football fans.²⁶

25 In this sense, Lyons's comment is reminiscent of McRobbie's analysis of the rock press: 'Writers and editors seem unable to imagine that girls could make up a sizeable section of the readership' (1980; 1991: 28).

26 Haynes admits this later: 'While not openly sexist, male subjectivity is inscribed within the WSC text, and football fanzines in general, offering a subtle brand of male bonding. One glimpse at the names on

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, historically, the mainstream of academic literature about football fandom has focused heavily on male experience. Male football fandom is the norm; men are entitled to go to football, and their fandom is an expression of their values – most typically working-class, community- or ‘tribe’-focused, with ritualistic displays, whether that is the chanting identified by Crawford (2004) or the aggression highlighted by Marsh et al. (1978).

However, female participation in football fandom has largely been marginalised or omitted entirely from studies. This is despite the acknowledgement in newer work that (male) football fandom has changed drastically since the mid-1980s, moving from an experience characterised as a working-class expression of masculinity to one characterised as more ‘commercial’ and ‘globalised’, as discussed by critics such as Giulianotti, and as more ‘civilised’ and ‘gentrified’, i.e. middle class, as discussed by critics such as Robson. Even when women’s presence or influence is acknowledged, as it is in the later work of Williams, Dunning and Murphy, it is assessed according to how they affect the behaviour and experience of men, with ‘women’ being positioned as different by default.

The collected historical body of knowledge about football fandom according to gender can be summarised thus:

the letters page gives the male game away!’ (1995: 121).

Male football fans	Female football fans
The norm, ungendered	Unusual if not invisible
Entitled	Uninvited (cf. Fiske, 1989)
Traditional	Non-traditional (cf. Taylor, 1969, 1971; Redhead, 1993)
Authentic	Inauthentic
Working-class (cf. Mason, 1980)	Equated with middle-class (cf. Mason, 1980; Robson, 2000)
Aggressive (cf. Critcher, 1979, 1991)	Civilising (cf. Williams, Dunning and Murphy, 1984)

The next chapter looks at the existing research on female fandom. It begins by looking at the gendered experience of popular culture fandom, the limited amount of studies which have examined female football fandom and offered some discussion and analysis of (some facets of) female experience, and the work that exists on female fans of other sports, suggesting some ways in which their findings may possibly map on to the understanding of the experience of female football fans. It then concludes by outlining some of the omissions and ideas stemming from the works discussed over the course of these two chapters which have triggered this current research.

Chapter 3. The focus on female fandom

3.1 Introduction

Although, as the previous chapter has highlighted in detail, the majority of academic research on football fans has indeed been ‘malestream’, marginalising the experience of women, there have been some notable exceptions. This chapter begins by looking at how female fans participate in other subcultures aside from sport, discussing how some of this research might apply to football fandom. It then moves on to the few studies which examine the experience of female football fans in England, the work that has been done on female football fans in other parts of the world, and the research into female fans of other sports that has the capacity to inform this current thesis.

3.2 Female fandom outside of sport

Several researchers have looked at how fans demonstrate their fandom, including their engagement with other fans and their objects of fandom, as well as analysing them as an audience for the product or text they are fans of, and women’s roles within particular fan communities. One of Henry Jenkins’ interests (1992, 2006a, 2006b) is in the role of new technologies and how they allow fans to carry out their fandom, and he argued that fans have been early adopters of digital technologies (2006b: 138), and this has certainly been the case for football fans, who have used the internet to collaborate and

discuss for many years.¹ Jenkins argued that female fans within various communities have been met with hostile reactions from the internet's predominantly male population; and it might be expected that if hostile reactions are commonplace, then female football fans might set up their own enclaves, as female fans from (for instance) science fiction communities have done (cf. Jenkins, 2006b: 139), but this has not occurred.²

In Jenkins' collaboration with Justine Cassell (Cassell and Jenkins, 2000), they examined female fandom of and participation in another form of technology - video gaming. They questioned the 'sexist ideologies' and 'misogynist images' found within the subculture, 'potentially socialising boys into misogyny and excluding girls from all but the most objectified of positions' (ibid.: 3), with characters in games constructed according to traditional gender stereotypes. In their edited collection of essays, several chapters (cf. Brunner, Bennett and Honey, 2000) examined how females participate in the gaming culture, but also suggested how they negotiate their identities and their fandom within what can be described as an inherently sexist domain; this is a technique that female football fans must also employ, which will be addressed during this thesis. Cassell and Jenkins' work has since been built on by other researchers including Sweedyck and de Laet (2005), who suggested that the games women enjoy playing are deemed to be 'not real', i.e. the authenticity of their gaming fandom and their practices of fandom are questioned – just as I have shown has historically happened in literature

1 Again, this supports Wilson's argument (2008) of the important role that internet communities now play for sports fans. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that Jenkins is correct: for example, WHOSH, a Luton Town email list, has been operating since 1992 (WHOSH website, 2005); Rivals.net, a network of unofficial fan sites and forums, was founded in 1999 (Two Hundred Per Cent website, 2005).

2 Female fan forums exist but they are dedicated either to males objectifying and discussing female fans and their aesthetic and sexual attractiveness (examples include the SoccerWives website), or to females objectifying and discussing male football players and their aesthetic and sexual attractiveness (such as Kickette), rather than providing a place for female fans to discuss their thoughts on football.

examining female football fandom.

Similar to the work of Sarah Thornton, Matt Hills assessed Bourdieu's ideas of capital (2002:57), and related them to popular culture fandom. The ways in which he suggested a hierarchy might develop within a particular fandom could easily apply to football. He suggested that capital for fans can be 'cultural' (relating to the knowledge that they have about their fandom) or 'social' (relating to the number of other fans within the fandom they know). Fans' involvement in organised supporters' groups, home and away attendance, and proximity to players may all play a part in creating capital; but crucially for football fandom, the hierarchy and the weighting of capital will differ according to the club and then most likely according to the factions within that club's fanbase.³

Bailey (2005) drew a distinction between the casual 'fan' and the dedicated 'fanatic', and warned of the danger of linking the 'fan' irrevocably with 'fanaticism', arguing: '[A]n emphasis on this sort of irrationality, whether presented as an amusing or dangerous obsession, tends to reduce fandom to a kind of pathology' (2005: 49). As Kozinets also argued (1999: 252ff), fans do not simply invest emotion and affection, but they interpret the object of their fandom and engage with it equally actively but differently; he was discussing online communities centred on what he termed 'consumer interests', but which ranged from television fandom to fandom of a particular food stuff,

3 Hills also examined the idea of (cult) fandom being designated as a form of religion, and concludes that rather than being a religion per se, fandom can be perceived in terms of neoreligiosity (2002:118; Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998); fans appropriate discourses of religion in describing their fandom and are aware of the parallels of experience that may exist. He felt that defining 'religion' is complex, and there is no 'essence' of religion a fandom can contain. Thus a fandom can be described instead as 'neoreligious', and this neoreligiosity is produced because of the religious discourses that are appropriated, rather than because of anything essential within the fandom. Hills also looked at the idea of fans feeling a spatial tie as part of their fandom; again, he focused on cult fandom, but once more this idea can be adapted to apply to football, looking at the topophilia fans feel for their home grounds, and the football-going rituals that fans may undertake, either through habit or a quasi-superstitious belief that it will bring their team luck.

concluding: 'Whether it is a collectible, a food, a celebrity, or a television show, the members of these virtual communities of consumption have implicated their own identities deeply and lastingly with the consumption object and its symbolism' (1999: 261).

Yet these ideas of engagement and interpretation can apply to sports fandom: there is not necessarily a 'right' way to view the game (hence people supporting different teams, liking different players, enjoying different styles of play), various factors affect the fan's interpretation, and fans use their fandom to inform their (performance of) identities in different ways (such as their levels of consumption, what they choose to consume, how they display their fandom, and even which supporters' groups they decide to join or align themselves with, if any). In his analysis of Kiss fandom, Bailey noted that for many of his respondents, their attachment to the band begins in childhood and continues into adulthood (2005: 109). He also assessed the ways in which fans relate to the male rock star; while male fans are permitted 'jubilant identification', female fans can objectify him as a figure of sexual desire, or simply ignore these gendered heteronormative dynamics completely. Cline (1992), writing about her own experience as a rock music fan, concurred with Bailey's idea that when a woman is a fan within a male-dominated realm, there is frequently a heterosexist assumption that her fandom depends upon being sexually attracted to one of the men involved. Thus, her fandom is somehow less 'genuine' than a man's, because there is a concurrent assumption that his fandom can never be triggered or forged by sexual attraction.⁴

4 Allen Guttmann argues that there has always been an erotic element to sports spectatorship, regardless who is playing and who is watching. He says that in Ancient Greece 'everyone seems to have understood that physically trained bodies, observed in motion or at rest, can be sexually

There has also been a significant body of fan research focusing on science fiction, another male-dominated popular cultural form, with some discussion of female-specific or -dominated fan behaviours. This has frequently manifested itself as an examination of the production of 'fan fiction', a female-dominated behaviour of creating stories involving their favourite characters (cf. Lee, 2003; Scodari, 2003). *Star Trek* has been a particularly popular landscape for research of female-specific fan behaviour; Kozinets highlighted that 'the prevalence of females in executive roles [in organised fan groups] is common in *Star Trek* and speculative media fandom', suggesting that '72 per cent of the executive board seats [in organised fan groups] were held by females' (2001: 70). Camille Bacon-Smith investigated female fans of *Star Trek* by travelling to conventions and meetings and eliciting data in order to build up a picture of the ways in which some of the members of the community express their fandom (for example, through their dress, producing fanzines, through collecting memorabilia – all aspects of fandom that can also apply to football). She outlined the misperception and continuing folk belief that 'before *Star Trek*, the only women who attended [science-fiction] meetings and conventions were the girlfriends of fans, or women looking for men' (1992: 17). The situation in football may well be worse, as the idea that women at football are accompanying a partner or objectifying men continues now. However, as the following section demonstrates, there have been some studies into female football fandom that acknowledge the women's attachment to the object of their fandom, and describe and discuss their practices and experiences.

attractive', but this understanding has become feared and deprecated in modern times (1996: 1).

3.3 Case studies of female football fandom

This current research is inspired largely by the work of Anne Coddington, the only researcher that has examined the broader female experience of English football fandom in any depth. She set out her aims clearly in the subtitle to her book *One Of The Lads: Women Who Follow Football* (Coddington, 1997) which targets both an academic and non-academic audience in recounting the experience of many women of different generations, supporting a wide range of teams from all over England.⁵ After highlighting the invisibility of female fans in popular culture (she gave the example of JB Priestley's 'The Good Companions', where she argued that football was portrayed as 'an all-male world, an escape from ailing children and nagging wives'), Coddington – a journalist by trade – interviewed fans, footballers' wives, female football administrators and female football writers and broadcasters, arguing that all female contributions to men's football have been written out of the sport or at best marginalised.⁶ She summarised the purpose of her book thus: '*One of the Lads* is a book about the women who follow football, who work in it and write about it, providing the informal infrastructures that enable men to manage, play and support' (1997: 11).

Her concluding chapter makes some suggestions as to how women can be encouraged to watch men's football. She couches these ideas not simply as ways to promote gender

5 In terms of gaining an overview of female experience, it is disappointing that she seems focused entirely on fans of Premiership teams (for example, she frequently quotes the statistic that 'one in eight fans at Premier League games is a woman' (1997: 1), but as much sociological research is produced on the Premiership fan demographic rather than their Football League or non-league counterparts, it is unsurprising.

6 Redhead (1987) also makes a brief mention of female football journalists when he refers to Julie Welch, the first female football reporter for the national press; however, he describes her as a 'rare token woman', implying that her role is merely for show (ie tokenism), when simply 'rare woman' may have been a better phrase to use.

equity, but also in furtherance of the Leicester School's abiding dictum that female presence will encourage better behaviour in men (1997: 211). Coddington also put the responsibility for targeting female fans squarely on the football authorities, criticising their stances as 'not good enough' (1997: 213) and arguing that the traditional concept of football fans being 'born, not made' (1997: 215) may now be outdated. In my research, I explore the football authorities' attitude to female fans (and potential female fans) and consider whether or not they do now promote the game to women or whether their activity continues to be 'not good enough'.

One key recommendation that Coddington highlighted throughout was the need for women to be given the opportunity to play the game from an early age so that girls can develop a knowledge of football through participation as well as observation. This will allow them to develop a kind of 'credibility', or 'authentic' knowledge. However, female footballers themselves were not interviewed for Coddington's research. Instead, she posed the questions:

Who looked after the kids while those great managers and players were busy making football history? Of those boys who played football, didn't their sisters play too? And who patched up their knees when they fell on those hard stone cobbles? Why have so few people heard of the pioneering women's football team the Dick, Kerr Ladies, who attracted crowds in excess of 50,000? And when those avid male fans went to see their team in a thrilling FA Cup final, who packed their sandwiches? (1997: 18)

Coddington does mention the historic Dick, Kerr Ladies team here, but throughout her study she is focusing on women who are involved in football in a strictly off-the-pitch capacity. However, though women's ancillary roles in men's football - such as wife, mother, administrator and journalist - are indeed highly significant, as they allow men to participate in the football arena without any domestic or administrative concerns, the fan's experience is by necessity very different from the wife, the player or the female professional in the sector. Thus even though the wife, the player or the female professional may play a highly significant role in football, or may count themselves as fans, their experience is clearly not the same as the supporter who does not have this additional role, which is why my research focuses solely on the fan.⁷

Coddington's interviews and the information she elicited centred mainly around females' experience of football in comparison with men. For example, she quotes a female Bolton fan who explained, 'I'm told that when I feel sorry for the players when they lose it's the mothering instinct coming out... You feel for the players, whereas men don't' (1997: 73). Her interviewees were also asked to describe how men typically responded to them. A Tottenham fan speaks of a man accusing her of being 'the typical woman who always has to have the last word' (1997: 63); a West Ham supporter talks about her male colleagues thinking that she 'was trying to spoil their conversation'

7 In fact, Coddington accepts in her introduction that her research cannot provide a comprehensive analysis of all women involved in football, and chooses to omit female football players from her work. She explains this decision by saying, 'That's not to decry the contribution of women footballers, their story more than deserves a book in itself, it's just that this isn't it.' Though she may well be correct that the history and experience of female footballers needs to be researched as a standalone topic - and indeed has been by Lopez (1997) and Williams (2002) - she is implying, then, that the contribution of female supporters, administrators and journalists can easily be covered in her book, thus perhaps unintentionally decrying those about whom she does choose to write.

when she wanted to join in their chat about football, and that she would ‘make a valid point but they would brush it aside’ (1997: 61). Though male reactions to female fans are of course pertinent to the female fan’s experience, that is not all that is significant, and my research aims to elicit female fans’ experience without necessarily making explicit comparison with men.

Coddington commented at one point that most women start going to football as adults (1997: 10), and therefore largely chose to interview middle-aged women who began going to football just after the World Cup in 1990, declaring that the tournament ‘heralded a new dawn for women’ as it was an ‘aesthetically pleasing spectacle’ as opposed to the ‘grubby, dirty, battle-soaked game’ of popular genteel imagination (1997: 1). This assertion is thus supporting the folk belief (cf. Freeman, 2000) that women began watching football as the game became more ‘acceptable’, ‘respectable’ and ‘gentrified’, thanks to the increased media exposure and financial input since the repackaging of top-flight football as the Premier League. It also aligns the increase in female fans with the increase in middle-class fans, implicitly conflating the two, as other critics such as Robson have done.

Coddington did also interview elderly women who have been following football since childhood, but talked to few young women (say, in their early or mid-twenties at the time of interview) who have been going to football since childhood. This, I suggest, is a significant omission: their experiences and perceptions, especially when it comes to comparing themselves with men, may well be different as this would be a generation of women perhaps more financially independent, more used to equality of opportunity, and

having grown up after the Taylor Report and the changes made to football stadia and the treatment of fans within them.

Coddington observed that men grow up ‘playing football, swapping Panini stickers in the playground and developing some knowledge of the game’ while women simply do not have the same ‘multi-faceted, lifelong relationship of the game’ (1997: 10); however, as she contrarily and conversely observed, historically women have been going to football for just as long as men have; contemporary newspaper reports have demonstrated this, as have cultural phenomena such as Brentford proudly boasting the nickname of ‘The Ladies’ Team’ in the 1920s due to the huge number of women watching them. The numbers of women attending football has increased since then, and indeed, Coddington commented on the changes in society that have made it easier for the post-war generation of women to go to football but does not extend this to make the seemingly natural progression of analysing the fandom of later generations. She does, however, reaffirm the view that the end of the 20th century saw multiple changes taking place in football, regarding its landscape and the media and popular perception of fans; she highlights in particular the impact of the 1990 World Cup, hosted by Italy and bringing its ‘high culture’ in the form of opera to a new audience (1997: 2). As such, my research extends to gaining data from younger women as well as older women who have been attending since childhood.

Coddington also acknowledged that ‘football is essentially a social activity passed down through families’ (1997: 20); so my research also extends her work even further by analysing the fandom of the baby-boomers’ daughters and granddaughters, and

examines the influence of family members as female fans develop their fandom and practices. Another important point that Coddington raised from her respondents' narratives is the impact that marriage and having children has on a woman's fandom, and the time that domestic commitments take up, necessitating a break from football but not necessarily a diminution in the strength of their emotional attachment to their team; one of her interviewees reported that after she married in 1959, 'I did go to a couple of games when we first married, but my husband didn't like it, he would get upset if I was out too long. Women just didn't have the independence that they do today' (1997: 30ff). Another respondent reported that she stopped going to football after she became a mother. When she decided to go back, she found that had lost touch with her previous fan network and, therefore, had 'no one to go with'. Although she wanted to resume attending matches, she nonetheless felt that it would be 'inappropriate' for a woman to go back by herself (1997: 33). My research builds on Coddington's suggestion that women may find themselves having to take a break from football due to domestic commitments. It looks in particular at how female fans negotiate their fandom within their families, both as children and as adults. It aims to discover how they might balance any domestic obligations with their desire to go to football - for example in terms of any childcare preparations they might need to make, or any compromises they might have to strike with other (notably male) football fans in the household.

Her work has been followed by some smaller-scale and more specific studies of particular elements of female fandom. John Harris, in his study of the media coverage of the 1996 European Championships, did touch on the increasing popularity of football in the UK, and the concurrent rising number of women attending games (Harris, 1999:

97). However, he also looked at a news story about a woman who sold her television set because she was fed up with the amount of football her boyfriend was watching. He used this to illustrate the 'traditional' roles that men and women are expected to fulfil within British culture – men like football, women do not. He quoted some anecdotal evidence that young girls are socialised into hating football by friends, family and everyday media images. If it is the case that mainstream British culture is structured to socialise girls into disliking football, then it is valuable to look at girls and women who break against this tradition and ask how and why they began supporting, and assess whether or not they were or are aware of the popular expectation that they should not like football.

Katharine Jones (2008) has more recently examined women's gender identification and performance within football fandom. Jones looks primarily at their strategies for negotiating sexist and homophobic abuse at games (whether directed at fans or players), and strategies for negotiating sexist and homophobic attitudes among male fans. She spoke to some respondents who indicated that in order to distance themselves from 'abusive hypermasculinity' they attempt to assert their femininity by refusing to join in with what they see as 'inappropriate' fan behaviour. Some of her respondents expressed a dislike for obscene language, which Jones described as a performance of 'genteel femininity'; but they simultaneously said that they would not want to challenge male fans who used it because they would not want male fans to alter their fan practices simply because of their presence. However, some respondents did nonetheless maintain that they would challenge 'inappropriate' or offensive behaviour when it appears. Jones concluded that this demonstrates both that women are capable of questioning the 'status

quo' and that to employ 'obnoxious masculine fan practices' is not the obligatory behaviour of a football fan. Jones's respondents show clearly here that there is no one single 'female experience' of football fandom, but the specifics and peculiarities of individuals' experiences are significant in their own right, which I shall be examining in this research.

Jones also suggested that sometimes women downplay any sexism or homophobia they may encounter, or embrace it as part of the game, in such a way as to comply with men's sexist assumptions and, therefore, establish themselves as 'similar' to, or just as 'authentic' as, their male counterparts. This issue of 'authenticity', Jones argued, is important to some female fans because of their reported awareness that some male fans do not see them as genuine fans simply because of their gender. Jones's study does not, however, look at the background of respondents' fandom, their enjoyment of football or their wider experience, which is a gap this current research addresses.

There have also been studies that have examined female football fandom in England in a more general way; Williams and Woodhouse (1999), in their official FA-endorsed book, discussed the history of female fandom briefly alongside a more detailed study of women playing football.⁸ This analysis focused once again on the perception of the increased number of women attracted to football after the 1990 World Cup and the revamp of English professional football post-Hillsborough, although with an acknowledgement of the evidence that women have always made up a significant

⁸ As I have alluded to, there are several histories of women playing football, such as those by former England international Sue Lopez (1997) and Jean Williams (2000, 2007).

proportion of the English football crowd.

There is also some examination of female football fandom outside the UK. For example, Cere (2002) has looked at the coverage and the history of women's involvement in the Italian clubs' *ultra* fanbases, highlighting the way that female football fans have been ignored by the mainstream media, and arguing that this invisibility is because 'girls are not standard bearers of those codes and masculine values central to football support' (2002: 182); and Hyun Mee Kim (2004) has reported on the high degree of female spectatorship in Korea during the 2002 World Cup, arguing that the tournament was 'feminised' because half the number of people watching were women, creating a 'civilising process' by driving away the 'hooligans who romanticized collective violence', and suggesting that women's presence also made the football stadium into a new, heterosexualised public space rather than the guarded homosocial centre it had been previously (2004: 42). Her study focuses largely on the (hetero)sexualised dynamic brought into football by women's presence, allowing women to present themselves in opposition to the typical societal role they had been historically expected to fulfil – 'asexual, gender-role-fulfilling beings'.

Pope (2010) has more recently been comparing and contrasting the experience of female fans in rugby union and football in the same city of Leicester. She has also highlighted the dearth of work on women's fandom of male sports, arguing (as I have done in the previous chapter) that studies of football fandom have tended to centre on how the sport offers a space for the performance and reproduction of certain kinds of masculinity, typically working-class masculinity. She too has pointed out that there is a tendency to

conflate increased middle-class attendance at football with increased female attendance at football, without any real data to support this assertion of 'gentrification' equalling 'feminisation'.

Pope suggested that there is something distinctive and valuable about female experience of sports fandom. Some of her respondents drew a very clear distinction between 'male' football fandom and 'female' football fandom, suggesting that football is simply 'more important' to men than women, who have other interests and responsibilities as well, such as the home and their children. She also highlighted the 'shape' of some female fans' supporting careers, with breaks in attendance due to pregnancy and caring for small children, while their male partners continued to go to matches.

She also argued that respondents' experience of participation in sport while at school has often shaped their response to sport since then and impacted on their ongoing fandom; she suggested that some of her younger respondents had had chance to play football as children, and were 'at least tolerated in this all-male domain' (2010: 141). This correlates to my earlier suggestion that had Coddington spoken to younger fans she would have found that their experience of being able to play football at school has enabled them to develop their football knowledge and become more accepted more easily as an 'authentic' fan.

Pope discussed the ways in which females devise and negotiate their identities in a sporting setting; she looked primarily at women who had or still did participate in sport, and how they presented themselves as 'tomboys' and 'different' from 'normal girls', in

order to secure access to this privileged domain (one of the connotations of being a tomboy, she reported, is '[taking] sport seriously, or [being] perceived to do so' (2010: 155)). However, this highlighting of how women understand themselves within the 'masculine' realm of sport also applies to female fans, as my research shows.

3.4 Female fandom in other sports

Although, as I have suggested throughout this chapter and the previous one, there has been a limited amount of research into female football fans, there is some additional work looking at female fans of other sports played by men, which looks at why they become fans, how they sustain their fandom, and their subsequent experience. Dietz-Uhler et al. (2000) looked at sports in general and how men and women begin their fandom, hypothesising that men and women typically have different reasons for becoming sports fans and go on to perform their fandom in different ways. They suggested that it may be because female sports fans are (or fear being) ignored, marginalised or 'trivialised' within the domain of their fandom, that they opt to avoid engaging in typical 'male' (or 'traditional') fan behaviours, such as consuming sports media and discussing the object of their fandom. These authors concluded by suggesting that females may be more likely to become sports fans for 'social' reasons, i.e. being with their friends and family, whereas men become sports fans because they like to play sports and 'like sports in general', and that females attach 'less strongly' to the object of their fandom than males. This is despite the fact that they clearly acknowledge that females appear simply to have different ways of performing their fandom than their male equivalents; their fandom is no less 'real' or 'authentic' to them, they simply

behave in ‘non-traditional’ ways when compared to ‘traditional’ fan behaviour.

Crawford and Gosling (2004) looked at female fans of men’s ice hockey, producing a specific case study of one team, The Manchester Storm. Crawford and Gosling used their work to draw local and general, national and international, conclusions. They asked why men’s ice hockey has been so successful in managing to attract a high proportion of female supporters, and concluded that the perceived safety and accessibility of the sport has been a crucial factor. Yet they concluded that female fans continue to remain marginalised within this supporter community, and are not treated as ‘real fans’ by male supporters but perceived as ‘puck bunnies’, interested only in the physical attractiveness of the players. Crawford and Gosling suggested that these accusations originate in male supporters’ fears of losing their male-dominated domain and in insecurities rooted in homophobia concerning their own adulation of male sports stars. Their qualitative data indicated no significant differences in the levels of knowledge and commitment between male and female supporters, or that the physical attractiveness of players performs any significant role in attracting women to ice hockey.⁹

Hess (2000) examined the tradition of female support within Australian Rules football, and highlighted that academic research into and media coverage of this sport has historically written out female experience, just as has happened in English football. This is despite the fact that newer research indicates that women have made up a great

⁹ The researchers went on in 2005 to look at the marginalisation of women in another male-dominated sphere – digital gaming participation.

proportion of the crowd at Australian Rules games than at any other code of football. Similar to Giulianotti's typologies of football fandom, he suggested that female fans of Australian Rules football could be historically categorised as 'passive onlookers', 'voyeurs', 'socialites', 'barrackers', 'civilisers' and 'auxiliaries; however, these typologies were based on observers' perception of female fans' behaviour and do not take account of how the female fans themselves understand their fandom or behaviour.

Mewett and Toffoletti (2008, 2011) have also looked at Australian Rules football. Their first study examined women's perceptions of players, and their second, which they describe as 'the first study solely devoted to analysing how women become fans of male-dominated sports', looked at how women are 'socialised' into their fandom. They argued that the number of female fans of AFL has been consistently 'robust', but their position within the sport is 'habituated'; they have never challenged the male/masculine hegemony, but have sustained it by their participation. They too created four typologies with which to categorise the way their respondents began their fandom (rather than how they conduct it, as Giulianotti's typologies operate): 'in-the-blood' (acknowledging the influence of family); 'learner' and 'convert' (both acknowledging the influence of friends and social networks); and 'sexually transmitted fandom' (acknowledging the influence of a boyfriend or husband). Similarly, Melnick and Wann (2010) have reported on Australian sport in general, and found that being 'socialised' by an influential male, particularly the father, is a key factor in creating all sports fandom. However, for men, it is the influence of a friend that is most significant in their socialisation into the fan community itself; for women, it can be friends or family.

This is a finding replicated in many studies of other sports: Farrell et al. (2011) examined the reported increase in female spectatorship of male sports in the US (including baseball, basketball and American football). Though they acknowledged that there is no consensus on the motives for sports spectatorship, their study suggested that women are encouraged to watch men's sport by the men close to them – primarily blood relatives or husbands or boyfriends – and the experience of some of their respondents further suggested that women's sports fandom is maintained because they want to spend leisure time with those men, forcing them to relegate their own interests down their list of priorities. They also noted that none of their respondents indicated that a female friend or relation had been an influence on their interest in sport, with men closely guarding access to sport, and speculated that the women in their study were simply supporting and facilitating the leisure choices of the men close to them.

This idea of a leisure choice being heavily influenced by wanting to please men has also been suggested elsewhere. Sisjord (2009) highlighted the phenomenon of the 'babe' in her investigation of females' experience of snowboarding: female participants in snowboarding referred to a type of female snowboarder who does not dress appropriately, who does not participate appropriately, and encourages males to take females in snowboarding less seriously because of her behaviour.

However, in studying the rising popularity of mixed martial arts, Kim et al. (2008) reported that about a quarter of MMA fans are female, and suggested that the sport's authorities should consider altering their product to focus on 'drama and aesthetics' as these were the aspects that most appealed to women. Additionally, they discovered

that one-third of all MMA fans are encouraged to watch the sport by someone close to them – i.e. a family member or friend influencing their sports fandom is not something that happens just to women.

3.5 Conclusion

The influences on this research are varied. As this chapter has shown, very few other studies have been directed specifically at the experience of female football fandom. It has therefore been necessary to draw upon a wide range of prior research in order to contextualise the present study in such a way as to identify a set of useful objectives, methods of approach and means of analysing the resultant data.

Having heeded all these influences, this study looks at the experience of female football fans of various ages, offering a comparison about whether female fans began their fandom differently, depending on when that fandom began. It also examines their strength of attachment to the wider fan community and organised fans' groups, providing a gendered perspective on some of the ideas initially raised by the narratives collated by Taylor (1992), and allowing for the debate to be brought up to date after the rise of the supporters' trust movement in the 21st century. I also look at female fans' preferred practices and displays of fandom, including consumption of media and merchandise (cf. Giulianotti, 2002), again offering a gendered perspective on some of the work that has previously been done on 'fan practices' but that has addressed only male behaviour.

Similarly, some misrepresentations, oversights or oversimplifications in the canon of football fandom research highlighted in this chapter will be addressed in this study, in order to attempt to address some of the misconceptions that exist about female football fandom; primarily, the ongoing assumption that females should be encouraged to go to football because they change or 'improve' men's behaviour (as referenced by the Leicester School); the folk-belief that women attend football only to accompany men, not through any interest of their own; and that women do not participate in fan practices such as collecting memorabilia (as discussed by Hornby and Bacon-Smith).

My research, then, builds on existing work and develops and addresses other issues raised primarily by focusing on the following aspects of female football fan experience:

- The female fan's supporting career: how it begins, how it develops, how it is maintained, how she relates to her fan community, including her family, friends and partner, and how her fandom alters in practice;
- The female fan's practices of fandom, particularly her rituals and considerations centring on match attendance, her understanding of what constitutes appropriate appearance and behaviour for women at football, the position of her fandom in her everyday life, her football-related consumption, and how she negotiates and understands her fandom within a sport that is institutionally sexist;
- The female fan's understanding of the supporters' trust movement and her attachment to the fan community.

The next chapter discusses the research methods used: the adoption of self-reflexivity, the influence of postmodern and feminist ideas. It moves on to assess potential methods of investigation for this kind of research, and looks at the ways in which 'narrative' has been understood and elicited, examining in particular how the interview situation and the relationship between researcher and respondent can be theorised. It then looks at the methods employed, and acknowledges some of the problems arising from the particular ways and situations in which they were used, and considers whether and how the 'perfect' piece of research can be constructed.

Chapter 4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter opens by locating this research within epistemological and theoretical positions, highlighting the importance of constructivism (and constructionism) and feminism (both theoretical and my personal feminism) to my work. It outlines the methods used in this research – a self-completion questionnaire, a semi-structured ‘responsive interview’, and a focus group – and the reasoning behind their selection. I then explore the concepts of ‘narrative’ and ‘memory’ as they relate to the respondent’s part of the interview, and critically reflect on my role as the researcher, particularly the part I play in producing narrative within the interview. I discuss my similarity to my respondents, sharing an identity as ‘female football fan’, and how that has enabled the research, but also highlight my difference from them as a researcher rather than the researched; and I position myself as an ‘aca/fan’, paralleling the theory of fan research put forward by Jenkins (1992, 2006a, 2006b).

4.2 Positioning the research within traditions of epistemology and theory

As sociologist Alan Bryman points out, older notions of research have argued that social investigation should imitate research conducted in the field of natural sciences, i.e. assume a ‘positivist’ stance (2004: 11). Though the term is used differently in different

contexts, Bryman identifies the shared principles of phenomenism (knowledge confirmed by the senses alone can be described as 'knowledge'), deductivism (generating hypotheses that can be tested), inductivism (gathering facts to provide basis for rules), objectivity (researching in a way that is value-free), and that researchers should deal solely in scientific statements of fact (2004: 11). Bryman says that in the second half of the 20th century even scientific researchers have 'drifted away' from the positivist stance (2004: 12), and highlights 'realism' as another, more recent method of understanding research. This viewpoint also concurs that the natural and social sciences 'can and should apply the same kinds of approach to the collection of data and to explanation, and a commitment to the view that there is an external reality' (2004: 12). Elliott describes this approach as 'naturalist': '[the] view...that the social world is in some sense "out there", an external reality available to be observed and described by the researcher' (2005: 18).

However, in this research, I choose to reject these historical understandings of an objective, observable reality or truth. These older ideas about the ways in which research should be conducted and theorised are incompatible with my intentions behind eliciting and interpreting respondents' experience. I do not concur, for example, with the humanist view that a person has an easily accessible 'authentic core and an essential identity' (Elliott, 2005: 124); rather, this research looks to discover how they understand and present their experience and performance of being a football fan.

Instead, taking the epistemological position of constructivism as defined by Crotty

(2005), the individual constructs their own understanding of experiences and attributes their own meanings to it. Social constructionism, meanwhile, states that, although some things are 'real' and 'true', the meaning of them can vary according to the context in which they are perceived. During this chapter and this thesis I take and apply both these understandings of knowledge. I will be looking at the ways in which my respondents present their understandings of their experiences, the ways in which I elicit these experiences through interview and (participating in constructing) narrative, and the ways in which these individual narratives fit into broader narratives, by examining shared themes among narratives but also how these themes coalesce with ideas found in the 'malestream' tradition of football fandom research.

As the previous chapters have highlighted, the bulk of the research into football fandom has been 'malestream'; it has been focused on men and male experience, and generalisations about the nature and experience of fandom have been made according to those findings. I show in this chapter that my research is a feminist piece of work, which seeks not only to express the experience of female football fans but to look at why and how they experience and express their fandom in these particular ways, and in its very existence demonstrate that female experience and female sports fandom are valid topics for academic research and interrogation during the third wave of feminism.

However, describing this research as 'feminist' is not as straightforward as it may appear. Brooks argued that feminist research must take account of historical specificity, the role of the researcher, the relationship between the researcher and the researched, the

role of language and reject essentialist binaries (1997: 104); but as she observes, ‘Contradictions within feminism will inevitably persist, because women’s experiences and the way in which women understand and articulate diversity is contradictory’ (1997: 68). Feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar draws out four categories of influential feminist ideology - conservatism, liberal feminism, radical feminism and Marxist feminism – but even then there remain variants within these different strands of thinking (1977: 5ff). Indeed, Jaggar herself comments (1977: 15ff) on the new directions (lesbian separatism and socialist feminism) which she saw feminism taking at the time she was writing, frequently inserting caveats such as ‘not all...accept this position’ and ‘the issue is extremely controversial; (1977: 17) demonstrating that feminism is ever-changing and difficult to define with any certainties. As Joanne Hollows rightly points out, ‘Any definition of feminism is notoriously difficult as it was never a uniform set of ideas: the aims and character of feminist struggles were hotly contested from the outset’ (2000: 3). Feminist theory is not a unified or homogenous discourse, but there are some similar goals and purposes shared by feminist practitioners, beginning with an analysis of gender relations (i.e. how genders operate in relation to each other), how they are constituted and experienced, and how we perceive them (cf. Flax, 1987: 622).

I define myself as a feminist and this research as feminist too, not because it focuses on women (which is not sufficient as a definition of ‘feminist’), but because it explores the experience of women, looking at commonalities and differences, seeking to explain them and suggesting ways to improve women’s experience combine to make this a feminist study according to my own feminism (cf. Flax, 1987: 623). It is underpinned by (the acknowledgement of) my personal understanding and theorisation of feminism,

and focuses on addressing the gaps left by the 'malestream' body of football fandom research. I share many of Jennifer Hargreaves's ideas about conducting a feminist piece of research; she argues that putting feminisms into easily-labelled categories is merely 'convenient' rather than necessarily accurate (1994: 26). Her assessment of feminisms as a combined movement and as varied theoretical standpoints, i.e. that there is no single established, agreed, identifiable 'feminist' or 'female' experience or position, combine with my own thinking about the experiences of my respondents: simultaneously they are individuals, they are fans of their clubs, and they are 'female football fans', meaning there is not necessarily a single 'female' experience to be discovered, but many. Hargreaves maintains that:

Although it is convenient to separate feminist theories and important to recognise differences, a good deal of overlap exists between them as well, and there should be resistance to the idea that somewhere...a definitive theory of female sports exists. Theoretical absolutism is not possible: theories are interpretations and they change as do the circumstances being analysed. (1994:26)

Flax argues that a feminist theorist/researcher must 'articulate feminist viewpoints of/within the social worlds in which we live...; think about how we are affected by these worlds...; consider the ways in which how we think about them may be implicated in existing power/knowledge relationships; and...imagine ways in which these worlds ought to/can be transformed' (1987: 641). Similarly, this research aims to elicit participants' viewpoints and consider the factors, i.e. their contextual experiences,

that have combined to create their (perceptions of) experience. The following section moves on to look at the potential methods I considered using in order to do this, looking at the socio-historic context of interview-based research, and the different approaches to eliciting and analysing narrative.

4.3 Selecting and employing appropriate methods

This section looks how I conceptualised and employed selected methods in practice during the research. I describe how I designed and then used the self-completion questionnaire to gain some basic autobiographical data, and then assess the methods I considered before choosing the qualitative ‘responsive interview’ (cf. Rubin and Rubin, 2005) to elicit more in-depth narrative data or what sociologist Ken Plummer terms the ‘short life story’, using in-depth interviews, open-ended questions and gentle questioning from the researcher. A series of short life stories can be ‘weaved together to create a larger map’ (Plummer, 2001: 25), and that is the intent behind this work, making them ‘topical life stories’, confronting a specific issue with respondents (cf. Plummer, 2001: 26ff). These are researched, solicited stories, brought out of the respondents in an interview setting, and producing what could perhaps be termed a focused ‘oral history’.

4.3.1 Questionnaire design and employment; recruitment of respondents

The study began with a questionnaire as a development stage (Hesse-Biber, 2010: 5) to gain some quantitative data and to help decide which respondents to interview. Bryman

discusses the self-completion questionnaire, noting that the design should provide few open questions, be easy to follow, and be relatively short. He argues as it has a set list of questions, it is similar to a structured interview, but is cheaper and quicker to administer, taking out the necessity of the researcher's travel and participation in eliciting the data, and the impact she may have on the data through her participation in the interview, which will be discussed shortly (2001: 133).

My fandom was singularly helpful in finding respondents to complete the questionnaire, providing access to information sources I might otherwise not have been able to reach. Friends and associates from football and football-related organisations (including the FSF and Supporters Direct) were approached individually and asked if they would be prepared to take part.¹ Word-of-mouth gained more respondents, as those who had already agreed to take part in the study passed on the information to their own personal contacts, and people who belonged to email news groups or who ran websites posted messages with the details. Finally, a public advertisement was released. With the assistance of the British Sociological Association, a short piece was written to catch the eye of the reader, and giving contact addresses (both electronic and postal) based at the university, and a mobile phone number that I did not use regularly, to ensure my own safety.² The advertisements were sent to every Premiership and Football League club and supporters' trust, various supporters' mailing lists and websites, and several

1 The issue of pre-existing personal relationships affecting the data elicited through interview will be addressed later as it is encountered in practice.

2 This was also for practical reasons – respondents were able to leave a voicemail message with their details, and had their call returned within a week to notify them their information had been received and they would receive further details shortly.

regional magazines across the country picked up the ad from the clubs and trusts.

Publication could not be guaranteed, and it was almost impossible to keep track of all the prints and reprints, but nearly all the supporters' organisations carried the advertisement on their websites and in their newsletter, and around half of the football clubs did the same.³

The questionnaire⁴ was issued to the database of initial contacts,⁵ and designed to get fundamental personal information, followed by details about why the respondent first went to football, current attendance patterns, and other forms of football following other than match attendance. At the end there were questions intended to elicit more personal details, such as residence status, number of children, personal income, household income, and parents' occupation at the time the respondent was born. This section was placed at the end of the questionnaire so as not to discourage the respondent by placing it right at the front before they answered any questions about their supporting. The questionnaire, when printed, was six pages long, which I felt was a reasonable length to expect respondents to fill in (especially as several questions simply required a tick-box response rather than a lengthy prose answer); and it is more likely that respondents will be more tolerant of extensive questionnaires that are asking about a topic in which they are interested (cf. Bryman, 2001: 137), and as this questionnaire is interrogating the respondent's own fandom, it is even more likely that they will answer it to completion.

3 I was careful to request print publication alongside online versions where possible, as I wanted to elicit a broad demographic range of respondents, and did not want to alienate older supporters who may not be internet-literate.

4 The full questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

5 In accordance with the Data Protection Act, the respondents' personal details were stored and used only with regard to my research.

Questionnaires were designed in Microsoft Word format, and distributed by email where possible, and hard copies in the post where not.

Following the completion of the questionnaire, respondents were selected for interview who could and were prepared to talk at length about their experiences and involvement with their club, and who would have anecdotes to illustrate their points. Thus a respondent was highlighted as a potential interviewee if she stated that she was willing to participate in face-to-face interviews and indicated that she:

- attends games regularly; and/or
- holds shares in her club; and/or
- is an active participant in an organised fans' group; and/or
- has been a supporter since childhood or for more than 30 years.

Any participant who mentioned an exceptional role or anecdote on her questionnaire was also highlighted (for example, editing the club's fanzine, or travelling abroad to see her team in a European match). Each respondent was then plotted on a map of the UK, dividing the country into large regions (North-East, North-West, Midlands, South, East, M25 and West), in order to ensure a wide geographical spread of respondents; and the club they supported was also noted, in order to stop one single club from dominating the responses.

Table 4.1 gives some basic information about the individuals who took part in the interview stage of the research, showing their age, their club allegiance, the length of

their fandom and the number of games they had attended in the previous season. It shows the respondents' breadth of experience, demonstrating the varying ages, occupations, club allegiances, length of support and regularity of attendance found in the 28 interviewees.

Table 4.1 - Profile of interviewees

	Name	Age	Team	Years supported	Attendance last season	Occupation
1	Kimberley	32	Watford	4-6	All home games	Project manager
2	Lucy	24	Doncaster	16-18	All games, home and away	Community magazine editor
3	Sarah	32	Watford	7-9	All games, home and away	Heritage Officer, Watford Museum
4	Liz	25	Charlton	10-12	All home games	Postgraduate student
5	Tracy	39	QPR	28-30	All games, home and away	Sales advisor (part-time)
6	Anna	32	Leyton Orient	16-18	35-39	Social worker (part-time)
7	Theresa	45	Leyton Orient	7-9	All home games	Sexual health advisor
8	Jayne	42	Gillingham	30+	35-39	Senior HR manager
9	Pat	47	Charlton	30+	All home games	Secretary
10	Steph	23	Liverpool	13-15	10-14	Subtitled
11	Carole	54	Notts County	30+	All games, home and away	Elected member of Nottingham City Council
12	Karen	39	Tottenham	30+	15-19	Business owner

13	Niki	34	Liverpool	19-21	15-19	Sales manager
14	Polly	41	Coventry	30+	All games, home and away	Homemaker
15	Christine	51	Crystal Palace	30+	35-39	Construction project manager
16	Elaine	26	Tottenham	16-18	All home games	Full-time employed
17	Lynn	41	Watford	25-27	All home games	Self-employed
18	Kitty	88	Southend United	30+	All home games	Retired
19	Liz	40	Rotherham United	28-30	30-34	Journalist
20	Christine	48	Gillingham	30+	20-24	Data manager
21	Christine	60	Charlton	30+	All home games	Homemaker
22	Kerry	12	Walsall	7-9	25-29	School student
23	Lesley	40	Walsall	16-18	All home games	Part-time nurse
24	Tabatha	33	Brentford	7-9	20-24	Part-time HR projects advisor
25	Sarah	40	Ipswich	25-27	20-24	Finance manager
26	Alison	24	Doncaster	7-9	All games, home and away	Sales assistant
27	Viki	27	Charlton	16-18	All home games	Production assistant
28	Alison	36	Notts County	25-27	All home games	Sign language interpreter

These 28 respondents participated in 27 separate interviews, with four of them also joining a focus group. The interviews and focus groups took place between June 2005 and August 2007,⁶ and I travelled to meet some respondents at their homes; others met

⁶ Interviews with representatives of football clubs, the FA and the Football League were conducted

me prior to their team's game in London; some met me in public places such as coffee shops, at the university or at my home; others invited me to their office. However, I was not able to meet with all the respondents I wanted to speak to, some of whom proved difficult to contact, and/or indicated they were no longer willing to be interviewed.

There was also a very sad case where I wanted to interview a mother and young daughter supporting the same team, but discovered a few months after receiving their questionnaires back that the mother had died shortly afterwards from a long-standing illness.

4.3.2 Conceptualising the interview

Bryman (1988, cited in Seale, 1999) hypothesises that quantitative research is geared towards the concerns of the researcher (that is, the researcher devises questions and makes observations according to their own interests) while qualitative research is orientated towards the researched (that is, the participants decide what answers they want to give; in an interview situation they will do the bulk of the talking). Though this is a simple and simplistic dichotomy to draw, it helps indicate why qualitative study is so important to this research – rather than imposing the researcher's concerns and leading the respondent's answers (or forcing them into a closed-question format), her own experience as a football supporter in her own words is elicited (which is thus consistent with my standpoint of constructivism; it is the individual making meaning from her experiences and observations through her narrative). This is why I opted not

between August 2007 and June 2009.

to employ participant observation,⁷ despite the advantages it offers for a self-reflexive researcher working within a field with which they are very familiar and with respondents to whom they are similar. Since my aims are to understand how female fans understand, conceive and remember their experiences and practices of fandom, simply observing their behaviour would not be enough for this study. I was more comfortable with the prospect of conducting ‘responsive interviews’ where the respondent has the flexibility and freedom to construct her own narrative, but in which the roles of researcher and researched are separate, defined but mutually dependent and influential (cf. Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 33).

4.3.3 Defining narrative

Hammersley and Atkinson argue that narratives demonstrate to us the kind of person the speaker is, and how they behave and react in certain circumstances (1995: 249).

Plummer points to Barthes’s initial highlighting of the ‘pervasiveness of narrative’ as the initiation of the ‘narrative turn’ and an interest in narratives and stories (2001: 11).

He argues that in a ‘late modern’ (or postmodern) world, with its focus on the micro rather than grand overarching structures, there is an increased interest in the local and the individual and a multiplicity of stories rather than generalities. The next section examines the concepts behind the term of ‘narrative’, the options for gaining this kind of material through the semi-structured interview, and how the narratives from my respondents were elicited and analysed.

7 This ethnographic method has been employed by many social science researchers and in many studies of football fandom (cf. Dunning, 1982; Dunning and Elias, 1986; Williams, 1984, 1986; Robson, 2000).

Plummer notes that there is little agreement on what actually constitutes a ‘narrative’ (2001: 185), from lengthy stories describing one’s entire life to smaller chunks focusing on one particular event or experience. Elliott says that ‘a narrative can be understood to organise a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole. In this way a narrative conveys the meaning of events’ (2005: 3). She specifies that narratives should convey meaning, and that they are produced for a specific audience (in this case, for me as the researcher, the respondent as participant, and the work that has resulted from the narrative). Though she argues that narratives are ‘chronological’, this does not mean that the narratives in my study are told by the respondent beginning with the start of their support and moving through to the current day; rather, they consist of several ‘representations of sequences of events’ (2005: 4), and thus it may be more appropriate to think of respondents as providing multiple narratives – one narrative in response to each question or with each conversational turn she takes.

Yet my respondents did not simply answer questions; they spoke of their memories and experiences, and therefore produced a personalised account in which their identities were performed within the context of the interview (and performed to me as researcher) rather than necessarily a more detached eye-witness account. Plummer comments on ‘personal documents, the documentary tradition, oral history...qualitative talk’ and says that all these terms relate to one ‘particular methodological style’ (2001: 3). The term ‘oral history’ refers to a type of discourse which narrates the past and acts as a medium to express current views and opinions (cf. Roberts, 2002:94). Plummer identifies this as a method ‘as old as history itself’ but also observes that recording these ‘oral histories’

for posterity has only been a relatively recent development, post- World War Two (2001: 28). These are not naturally-occurring speech events, but are elicited in an interview situation; however, the term tends to apply to stories that are gathered to narrate experience of a particular event – Plummer lists: ‘the lives of old criminals in east London underworlds..., the voices of the truly marginalised disabled people at the start of the twentieth century..., the lives of both staff and patients living and working in large mental hospitals through the twentieth century’ (2001: 29).

My research does not focus on one particular setting or historical event; rather, it constitutes a series of experiences across a relatively long space of time, in a number of different settings, and therefore does not quite fit the term ‘oral history’. Stanley creates the term ‘auto/biography’, arguing that it is difficult to tell fiction, biography and autobiography apart, and thus ‘auto/biography’ recognises the overlaps between stories, cultural scripts and collaborators (1992: 125ff), and can be applied to all the ways of writing a life rather than necessitating a distinction between them (1992: 3). In the context of this research, a full autobiography has not been produced by the respondent; rather, through collaboration, we produced an auto/biography of her supporting life, using her words in response to my questions.

Plummer uses Atkinson’s definition of a life story: ‘[T]he story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible. What is remembered of it, and what the teller wants to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another’ (2001: 19). However, the necessity of collaboration in producing a life story means that this definition is perhaps a little too simple. Thus, Plummer

distinguishes between 'long' and 'short' life stories, the 'long' instance being a 'full-length book account of one person's life', while the 'short' ones take less time, 'tend to be more focused, and are usually published as one in a series' (2001: 19ff). The 'short life story' is part of this study, as respondents speak to a researcher in an interview setting to talk about their football supporting careers, ultimately giving me multiple stories from different respondents to use as data.

4.3.4 Eliciting narrative via interview

Following the narrative approach, as outlined by biographical researcher Brian Roberts (2002: 94), "'fact" is secondary to an exploration of the ongoing construction of an individual's unique standpoint', and this is the maxim by which this research was conducted. As Stanley (1992) correctly surmises, one of the misgivings sociologists occasionally have about auto/biographical research is that it depends entirely on the individual creating their own meanings of their world. However, in terms of this research, this is exactly the constructivist position I assumed and what I wanted to explore; I wanted to elicit respondents' perceptions and descriptions of their supporting lives rather than an 'objective' account; their own word choices and the issues they opted to focus upon are significant to this research. The very idea of producing a 'true' account of all female football fandom is impossible; there are as many unique experiences as there are fans. As per the poststructuralist/postmodern theories that have influenced this research's methodology, the 'authentic experience' of 'woman' cannot be found; this quest for a 'truth' can be seen as just another attempt to impose a 'grand narrative' that silences diverse voices (cf. Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 213). Added

to this, it must be remembered that respondents construct a particular and unique narrative and perform a particular identity within the particular context of this interview; or as Rubin and Rubin put it, an interview is ‘invented’ each new time it occurs (2005: 12). Respondents are framing their narrative in their own words, necessitating self-editing, foregrounding incidents they perceive as important and downplaying others, producing their own accounts of their experiences, though others who were with them or witnessed the same incident may describe it differently.

The widespread acceptance of the use of narrative as a conceptualisation of interview data is a relatively new development and, as has already been mentioned, became increasingly popular in the second wave of feminism. Some feminist critics (such as Stanley, 1992) promoted the use of life histories as a research tool as a rejoinder to more traditional methods which have an in-built male bias (i.e. the ‘malestream’ methods that have produced ‘malestream’ research), and argued that it was thus an ideal methodology for discovering unique female experience.⁸ However, as many critics have observed (Kelly et al., 1995; Chase, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2010), this equating of qualitative research with feminism is simply an orthodoxy; it is appropriate in any study that wishes to gain first-hand biographical information, and indeed feminist research must be more than simply a method of gaining data in order to be feminist; it requires a critical stance on gender power and relations. As feminist theorist Sandra Harding

8 Similarly, I also accept that there are as many ‘feminisms’ as there are feminists. Just as my respondents understand and interpret experiences differently according to their history of fandom, my own feminism (from choosing how I gather data, to the questions that I ask, to assessing the data elicited) will invariably affect what I do, and may of course vary from another feminist’s standpoint. The multiplexity of existent feminisms make this inevitable; all that they most certainly share in common is a belief in equality between the sexes, but there may be no agreement on how this should be achieved, nor what the ‘movement’s’ priorities should be in seeking to achieve it.

(1987) points out, methodologies may be feminist, but methods themselves are not.⁹

This does not mean that narratives provide ‘factual’ information about events or lives; rather, they demonstrate an individual’s perception and experiences of and reflections on events and influences (Chase, 2005: 655). Aca/fan and folklorist Camille Bacon-Smith (1992: 293) deems narrative to be ‘powerful, dangerous and accordingly... closely guarded by masculine culture.’ Certainly, vocalising one’s experience and being given the space to do so is privileged, and though interviews are not ‘feminist’ per se, offering women the chance to vocalise their experience in a field previously dominated by male voices, as football fandom research has been, is a feminist action.¹⁰

Hodgkin and Radstone claim that oral history has sought to ‘[solicit] the voices of those who have been silent and ignored’, and as has been shown in chapter 2 women have certainly been absent in the bulk of football fandom studies (2003: 4). However, it is dangerous and mistaken to assume that simply by eliciting women’s narratives, all methodological problems are solved. Sports sociologist M. Ann Hall (in Scraton and Flintoff, 2002: 13) hypothesises that ‘woman-centred research’ can be sexist in itself as it is excluding the views and experience of men. Similarly, Stanley and Wise warn of

9 Indeed, Stanley and Wise (1983) make a similar observation, that methods are not and cannot ‘be’ innately anything; they are simply used in different ways.

10 Of course, Stanley and Wise’s binary divisions can be identified as a rather essentialist standpoint; as Weedon points out, some may express concerns over a researcher creating work that draws upon perceptions of ‘experience’ as it removes control over understanding from individual women, and other critics, such as Mary Daly (1978), see this kind of research as another form of masculine discourse, coopting and suppressing women’s engagement and voices; after all, many of the studies into football fandom that have focused on men, such as Williams et al. (1984) and Robson (2000), have also been qualitative studies. However, I argue that providing a space in which women’s voices can be heard, as I do in this study through use of qualitative methods, is a contribution towards the research’s feminist aims; as Bryman points out, ‘qualitative research is not ipso facto feminist in orientation...the question of appropriate approaches to feminist research would seem to reside in the application of methods rather than something which is inherent in them’ (2004: 289).

the dangers of a 'ghetto effect' in women-focused research, arguing: 'Feminist research must be concerned with all aspects of social reality and all participants in it. It seems obvious to us that any analysis of women's oppression must involve research on the part played by men in this' (1993: 31). However, I argue that this idea that woman-centred research is exclusionary is rather missing the point. Although data from males has not been sought, this research does not '[see women] only in relation to a social universe constructed around females' (Hall, in Scraton and Flintoff, 2002:13). Rather, it sees women in relation to a universe that contains both males and females, and seeks to assess their experience within it, and the respondents do also give accounts of how they perceive the behaviour and experience of the men they know and male fans. The existing 'malestream' research on football fandom is, obviously, male-centric; there are multiple studies that discuss the experience of male fans, and thus this research fills a gap and addresses the need to explore female experience.

4.3.5 Re-membering

The concept and theorisation of 'memory' is relevant to this research, as it has sought to discover how respondents recall their supporting lives and what events and experiences they have prioritised.¹¹ Hodgkin and Radstone note:

In all the debates over the relationship between history and memory,
one constantly recurring theme is that although history is about the

11 Despite the academic discussion on the reliability of memory, both short-term and long-term, this debate on accuracy can be dismissed for my purposes as I seek not some objective 'truth' but respondents' perceptions.

present, so too is memory, and much more directly. Memory is still live and active, still charged with the weight of these contests, and it is to memory that one should turn in order to reveal 'what really happened'. (2003: 1-2)

If one understands 'what really happened' to mean 'how the individual recollects it from her perspective', this is what this research aims to do. Hodgkin and Radstone go on to explain the attraction of working with people's memories rather than trying to assert a 'factual account': 'Working with the concept of memory – provisional, subjective, concerned with representation and the present rather than fact and the past – suggests a way out of the impasse into which historiography might have been driven by the poststructuralist assault on truth' (2003: 2).

This issue of the individual's unique perspective is crucial to how this research deals with 'memory' and factors influencing recollection. However, there is not necessarily just one way in which a person might narrate a particular incident or experience; indeed, as I have argued, an interview is a unique event, particular to the context in which it is conducted, and the narrative elicited is also unique. Edwards et al. (1992) agree, arguing that narrating one's memory of event is 'a heavily contextualised affair'; this kind of talk, they suggest, is a performance in itself of a situated social action, depending on the purpose of the narrative, the setting, their interlocutor and so on.

It is also affected by the social group they belong to – in the case of this research, most often their football fan group. Edwards et al. suggest that a reporter usually has a 'stake'

in what she is reporting as her experience, whether she was there or not; and this links to historian Anna Green, who assesses the ways in which individuals' recollections have been subsumed according to the degree to which they fit the 'collective memory';¹² this study includes interviews with individuals and a small focus group, allowing each to put forward their own thoughts and feelings, but there is, of course, the possibility – indeed, probability – that because of the highly affective links between individual fans and their clubs (and the rest of the fanbase), individuals do adapt and select their memories according to the cultural script and the discourse with which they are provided as a fan of that club. It is also possible that their memories are shaped and reinforced by media coverage and a dominant narrative that has been put forward (Green, 2004: 36ff).¹³ Middleton et al. (1993) argue that putting forward a particular perspective on an experience is literally an act of 're-remembering'; it situates the person giving the narrative within their particular social setting or group, and in this instance it re-members the respondent as part of her fandom, reinforcing her club allegiance.

As my interest is in my respondents' experiences of their fandom, their memories remain valuable, regardless of whether or not they have been influenced by a dominant collective memory, because their narratives, both individual and collective, shape the individual's future experience and how they look back on the past. Indeed, Flax argues that the attempt to produce a single account that speaks for 'all women' or even a

12 Gary Armstrong (1998: 21) notes the phenomenon of the football fan's access to collective memory: 'Fandom is...sentimental. Fans' collective memories generate affection and romance and help make sense of the world. We talk of our teams and our experiences of being a fan. There are varying self-delusions, ways of remembering, nostalgias and narratives.'

13 Respondents' perceptions of their clubs and fellow fans are examined in a later chapter, which will allow the opportunity to assess whether or not individual narratives are in conflict with the collective discourses.

section of women is flawed because the unified category of 'woman' does not exist (1987: 642).

4.3.6 Developing areas of interest for the interviews

Thanks to the questionnaire responses, the areas of potential questioning in the interview stage became more apparent. The interviews were directed in that the respondent was already aware of the research topic, but the questions were not scripted; though I had ideas of the topics I would like to cover, such as the respondent's memories of her first game and why she decided to go to football, I was able to follow her lead and talk about subjects she introduced herself. The technique of asking open-ended questions was employed almost invariably, in order to gain longer and more detailed answers. When I began interviewing respondents, I assessed the transcripts and considered the questions I asked after having conducted the first three interviews, and then the next three, enabling analysis of which questions provoked the most informed answers, and which wordings of questions proved most effective. In fact, this stage of my research fits with Bryman's suggested stages of qualitative research, moving from collecting data to interpreting data to framing data conceptually but then moving back to tightening up the specification of the research questions to be addressed before collecting further data and then re-entering the cycle (2004: 269). Rather than 'testing theories', *per se*, though, the initial interviews in this first stage enabled me to gauge the kind of common themes that may emerge in future interviews. As each interview was recorded, each respondent's reaction to each question could be gauged and compared after the event, allowing me to see whether there were shared trigger words or topics,

tying in with what Rubin and Rubin (2005: 30ff) call 'responsive interviewing', permitting flexibility in the topics covered, the questions' phrasing and the physical context of the interview.

The first six interviews occurred during the close season, as more people were available for interview without football commitments.¹⁴ The respondents were all extremely keen to talk about their football experiences (which was to be expected, as they had stated they would be happy to be interviewed). The first three interviews were conducted in an office at the university campus, which was a fairly formal setting, but refreshments and the day's newspapers helped to create a better and more relaxed ambience. After assessing the first three interviews, I chose to interview the next three respondents at their own places of work and home, allowing her to talk on her own 'territory', making her feel more comfortable.

A list of trigger questions to structure the interview was created and added to throughout the process. By the sixth interview the seven trigger questions ran thus:

- 1) How was last season? – This question appeals to the respondent's immediate memories, and gets her neatly onto the topic of talking about her experiences and her team;
- 2) How does last season compare to your best ever season? – This question leads the respondent to look back further into her supporting past and make

14 Although it was reasonably simple to schedule the individual interviews, it proved more problematic to organise the two planned focus groups, which will be discussed shortly.

comparisons between her different experiences;

- 3) Tell me about how you first started supporting – This is phrased openly so as not to draw the respondent into giving an “answer”, but enable her to structure her response as an anecdote;
- 4) Do you remember your first game?;
- 5) Who was your favourite player when you were growing up? – Asking the respondent to think about fond memories of her supporting experience is intended to make her volunteer more information;
- 6) Who are your favourite players now?;
- 7) What are your hopes for the future? – This is a very open question, and (with prompting if necessary) incorporates on-the-pitch and off-the-pitch activities at the club.

If the respondent did not mention it while talking about other subjects, she was also asked who she attended games with, and whether or not she had been involved with any campaigning related to the club, such as a supporters’ trust, or a lobby for a new stadium. I also asked supplementary questions according to the subject the respondent wanted to talk about most, and as I knew from the initial questionnaire which team the respondent supported, I was also able to formulate supplementary questions from my own knowledge. For example, Charlton fans were asked about any involvement they had in the long-running Back To The Valley campaign and the Valley political party, and Brentford fans about the fans’ group Bees United which runs the club.

The first few individual interviews helped me to get more of a sense of how to ask

questions and look out for comments and themes that frequently arose. First, respondents who had supported their team as a teenager often identified one particular favourite player from that time, and referred to it as a crush, even though they were clear there was no romantic or sexual intent behind it. Similarly, adult fans frequently had one particular favourite player, who was not the best player in the team but the fan took it upon herself to defend him from criticism from others. A sense of history and local ties were also common interests of several respondents, who discussed the importance of community and the football club's place in it, and the importance of passing one's team down to one's children. Lastly, several respondents talked about the noticeable changing demographic of the football crowd, including the increased number of women in the ground. Themes that arose in passing and were noted as possible issues to look at in greater detail in the study proper were whether or not a respondent was an only child or the oldest child in the family if she began going to football with a parent; the respondent's awareness of football before consciously becoming a supporter; and the respondent's feelings about her team's 'home' ground, which seemed significant as analysis of the initial questionnaires showed that many respondents held season tickets and attended every home game, but did not travel to away games.

To keep the balance between eliciting women's experience of football fandom (a male-dominated domain) and assessing the influence of men's actions on female fans and the ways in which my respondents related to other fans at games, at home and in the workplace (without proscribing my respondents' reactions), a section of the interview was devoted to discussing other fans and relational dynamics of their fandom. This allowed respondents to discuss other fans of the same club (male and/or female) and

fans from other clubs, enabling them to explain what they perceive as difference between groups of fans, and how much importance they attach to this difference. To ask direct questions about the behaviour of male fans would have been an overt attempt to direct the narrative produced; and to interview male fans would be entirely contradictory to the aim of my research.¹⁵

4.3.7 Conducting the focus group

The initial intent behind conducting a focus group as part of the initial stage of the study was to allow respondents to discuss and compare (shared) experience and issues with other female football fans, leaving me to act as facilitator rather than part of a two-person conversation. This allows respondents – all ostensibly on the same level of power in the conversation – to probe each other’s answers and reasoning in a way that might not be appropriate for an interviewer eliciting a life narrative, and allows the respondents to talk about subjects they are interested in discussing rather than the researcher continually leading the conversation (cf. Bryman, 2004: 348ff).

Due to the problems of getting the participants together, just one of the two planned focus groups was conducted. Though I had previously met all the women who were taking part in the focus group, facilitating this discussion was much harder than the one-to-one interview, as I was keen to ensure that everyone had the chance to participate on

15 There is already a great deal of material on the experience of male fans, but this is not presented as a ‘ghetto effect’, as per Stanley and Wise’s earlier point; rather, it is represented as the norm, extrapolating the experience of the ‘fan’ from the ‘male fan’. As Reinharz (1994: 52) points out, assessing the experience of women only in relation to how it compares with men is ‘endemic in Western civilisation and in the social sciences.’

each topic, making the discussion less natural than it would otherwise have been.

Bringing together respondents who had not met each other before and expecting them to be able to discuss topics in a relaxed and honest way was naively optimistic; I had not considered issues of power dynamics and how this would affect turn-taking and the narratives elicited. For example, one respondent, Tabatha, in her early 30s, seemed noticeably in awe of Tracy, in her 40s, particularly when the issue of belonging to a supporters' trust was discussed. As I shall explore later, Tracy was a highly active and engaged member of QPR's supporters' trust; Tabatha had let her membership of Brentford's supporters' trust lapse and did not buy a season ticket. During the focus group, Tabatha seemed intent on justifying her reduced financial investment in her team, particularly when she was turn-taking with Tracy, when she appeared to be seeking her approval.

These issues of power relations and how respondents' perceptions of each other affected their narratives contributed to my decision not to use the focus group as a methodology throughout the study, opting to reduce these problems by solely using one-to-one interviews instead. However, although the focus group ended up being an anomaly in terms of the methodology, the data it produced proved useful in terms of helping me to refine the themes I was interested in for later interviews. To assess the respondents' interest in football beyond their one club, I introduced topics about the game's politics and economics as well as its representation and coverage in the media. I also wanted the respondents to discuss and compare their own forms and experiences of supporting, so asked more specific questions about experiences, as well as topical questions about

current events.¹⁶ Several significant points arose from the focus group, including the discovery that fans of lower-league clubs tended not to have too much interest in Premiership transfers and other stories; and though all respondents were interested in the World Cup and the 2012 Olympics, they did not see it as directly relevant to their fandom, and they seemed surprised to have the events mentioned. Also, all respondents had lots of thoughts on the state of the game's stadia and facilities, digressing into personal anecdote to illustrate their points. Thus for the rest of the individual interviews, additional questions were framed according to these themes, by asking about national issues in the context of the respondents' own clubs. Big-money Premiership transfers could be discussed by first asking about the respondents' clubs' own highest-ever transfer fee paid. International tournaments could be discussed by initially asking about their clubs' players' involvement. I planned to do this for each topic, broaching it by appealing to the respondents' personal experience and then expanding on the broader themes once the respondents are thinking about the subject.

4.3.8 Transcription and analysis of the main interview data

Each interview was transcribed. As someone with a professional background in journalism, I see the transcription as a vital part of the interview process; as Elliott notes, '[T]he transcription process is more than a trivial, mechanical task' (2005: 51); it

16 At the time this focus group was conducted, it was the close season of 2005, so I asked topical questions about the signings the respondents' clubs had made recently, the Stockport supporters' trust taking over their club, Steven Gerrard's contract negotiations with Liverpool resulting in an agreement of over £100,000 wages per week, the new Wembley building project, London winning the 2012 Olympics, former FA secretary Faria Alam taking her former employers to court claiming sexual discrimination and harassment, the Glazer family's takeover of Manchester United, and their hopes and wishes for football next season.

allows the researcher to familiarise herself with the data and her respondents, and note aspects of the narrative that she may not have picked up on when in the interview setting. It also has practical applications; transcribing soon after the interview has been conducted allows the researcher to fill in unclear words or phrases by drawing on her memory, which an automated program or even another person transcribing the interview would not be able to do. This also allows for recall of how narratives were said, rather than simply focusing on the words that were uttered; this means that specific data arising from the context of the interview, and which the researcher only knows through being part of the interview, such as tone and gesture, can be noted during the transcription process. As Hammersley and Atkinson note (1995: 205), analysis of data is not a distinct stage of research that is moved on to once all the interviews are completed; it begins long before that, and familiarity with the data, noting linguistic and supralinguistic features, is vital; not just to understand each interview in isolation, but to link together key themes and to highlight relevant topics that could be discussed with other respondents in later interviews. The transcripts were neither completely 'clean' (i.e. with all false starts, intonation and pauses removed) nor fully 'detailed' as per conversation analysis, with, for example, all pauses counted and pitch shifts marked. Instead, all utterances were transcribed, including false starts, laughs and noticeable pauses (which were timed if they were particularly lengthy). False starts and noticeable pauses were recorded as the respondent's attempt to re-frame or rephrase her narrative may prove significant; and the occurrence of laughter was noted as it may signal a joke, an amusing anecdote, a story that the respondent may view as light-hearted, or that the respondent is not taking a particular topic seriously.

4.3.9 Thematic analysis

During the analytical stage, the intent was not to necessarily ‘code’ the data, as would be typical in a standard content analysis. Rather, themes or topics that a respondent talked about in relative detail were highlighted, and this process was repeated for each transcript, similar to the practice of ‘open coding’, isolating key overarching concepts. Then the themes or topics that had been discussed by several respondents were picked out, and these ‘open coding’ concepts were broken down further into smaller categories. This analysis of the narratives falls into two of Riessman’s categories: thematic analysis, looking at the words and how they combine to convey the respondent’s experience; and performative analysis, looking at how the respondent is narrating her story to her audience and taking into account possible reasons for how she chooses to present herself (cf. Bryman, 2004: 412). As Boyatzis points out in his argument in favour of the process of thematic analysis (1998: vii), the ‘theme’ here is a pattern in the data that describes or organises possible observations; he also distinguishes between ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’ levels of information, and in the case of my interviews themes were both manifest and latent. Some respondents were open and talked explicitly about particular aspects of their fandom (for example, their involvement in organised fans’ groups), while some referred to them in implicit terms, or talked about other issues in discourses that on analysis were linked to themes identified in other respondents’ narratives.

The process of identifying themes was slightly less quantitative than the content analytical methodology Boyatzis proposes; he puts forward the idea that ‘themes’

should be broken down into a 'code' to be applied to the data, allowing for countability and thus quantitative data to be elicited from qualitative. Having stayed grounded in the interview data from the start, my familiarity with the material meant that the themes I wanted to investigate became evident as the interview and transcription process went on, without interrogating the data by applying a code. As particular words and phrases recurred and indicated 'themes', they were noted on the interview transcripts, identifying them for further analysis later. The exact number of mentions of a particular word, or emergences of a theme were not counted, nor was the intensity with which the respondent spoke about the topic marked; all that was highlighted were some overarching key themes of my respondents' narrative and experience worth assessing and analysing.

This process is similar to the 'emerging grounded theory' advocated by Alvesson and Skoldberg, when they argue that the 'emerging theory controls the process throughout' (2000: 28ff), and that selecting a 'category' for further investigation should depend on how central it is to each narrative, how often it appears, how it links with other categories already identified, and so on. They observe that if one develops categories in this way as one progresses through the research, the theory is integrated as part of the process, and highlight the 'inspiration' this can provide for the researcher (2000: 34). The idea is that one remains 'grounded' in one's data throughout, allowing it to direct the research, rather than imposing categories on data. I have reservations about this, as the researcher is inevitably going to approach this categorisation procedure with some level of subjectivity, interpreting words and phrases in her own way and homing in on particular themes that have resonance or interest for her. Indeed, this is a criticism

Alvesson and Skoldberg make, suggesting that researchers, 'without paying too much attention to the whole', could openly choose their material to use according to their tastes and interests, leading to a more interpretative understanding of grounded theory's original intent (2000: 34). Regardless, this data-led approach is more satisfactory in my research setting than attempting to employ grand theory frameworks from the outset, and selecting data according to a pre-existing fixed hypothesis.

Additionally, I am mistrustful of the idea of applying a somewhat stringent coding process to interview data for several reasons: first, respondents will not use the same language to articulate their experiences, and will select their discourse according to various factors (such as their location, education, the interview setting, their perception of me as the researcher, and so on). Second, in terms of this research and the aim of eliciting narrative about fans' experiences, what is not included in a narrative may be just as significant as what is. Third, and pragmatically, as I progressed through the interviews I was increasingly aware of the themes that had emerged in earlier narratives, and so the prompting questions that I asked began to lean towards triggering narrative on these topics, meaning that coding for frequency of mention would be inaccurate in these cases.

Selection of themes to focus on is of course motivated by several factors – the data and obviously the researcher's own interests provide some sway. As Boyatzis helpfully observes: 'Thematic analysis is a way of seeing. Often, what one sees through thematic analysis does not appear to others, even if they are observing the same information, events, or situations' (1998: 1); as he indicates later (1998: 8ff), having knowledge of

the topic being investigated enables the researcher to identify, isolate and interrogate themes; however, he does not then go on to note that the researcher's specific situation within the domain under investigation will affect the themes they identify and assess as the most important, interesting or significant.¹⁷ However, the key themes identified, the analysis of them, and a series of case study illustrations, form the bulk of this thesis.

I have already said that I share Hargreaves's aim to stage a feminist political intervention into a male-centric field of research; I also share her realisation and total acceptance that to produce a comprehensive 'history' of my area of interest is impossible (cf. Hargreaves, 1994: 2, 1994: 10). This research outlines several fandom experiences and then assesses some themes that several respondents have in common; and again, this does not mean that all female fans have them in common, nor indeed that these are the most 'important' themes. Rather, these are themes that the researcher analysing the interview perceives as significant, and once more the subjectivity of the study's participants – both researcher and researched – is highlighted.

The concepts that emerged from the coding, or 'key themes', run as follows:

1. The female fan's supporting career
2. The female fan's practices of fandom
3. The importance of the supporters' trust movement to the female fan.

¹⁷ He speaks later of the dangers of 'projection', i.e. pushing your own interpretations or thoughts or motivations onto someone else's (1998: 13ff). I concur that this is a danger, but do not agree that Boyatzis's idea of remaining detached or 'objective' from one's field of study is a possible solution to this; this does not remove the risk of projecting one's own views, simply the level of the researcher's engagement with the material. Even a researcher who is not immersed in her field of investigation may still project her views on to the words of her respondents. Interestingly, Boyatzis does note the problem of subjectivity in relation to the researcher's mood when working (1998: 15ff) though he does not address other subjective influences on the researcher.

Each of these concepts has several other sub-categories that will be examined during this study and the chapters that address each of the key themes; the language respondents use to discuss these concepts and their experiential relationship to them is examined. An additional important point, though not strictly a key theme, is how female fandom may be affected or encouraged in the future, and thus this thesis also includes an examination of some predictions and the work being done by various clubs to draw more women into the football ground.

4.4 The research relationship

In the sections that follow, I highlight the concept of self-reflexivity, arguing that it is impossible for me as researcher/interviewer/interlocutor/writer to remove myself from the data entirely, as I am part of the interview and thus part of the data I have collected (cf. Davies and Davies, 2007; Rubin and Rubin, 2005), and I consider how my presence and interaction has affected the interview process and later the transcription and data analysis. I consider the ways in which the researcher/respondent relationship has been conceptualised previously, looking at the previous analyses of this relationship within the feminist tradition of research, and discuss the ways in which potential perceived power imbalances between me and the respondents were minimised, and respondents forming preconceptions about the research were avoided.

Plummer discusses the ways in which the relationship between the researcher and the respondent have been theorised previously (cf. Adler, 1987, 1994; Gold, 1958), and suggests that the researcher must make a decision as to the role she assumes: there is a

continuum along which she may position herself, from 'stranger' to 'acquaintance' to 'friend' (2000: 209). Briggs (1986) notes the danger that in an overly formal and structured interview, the researcher ends up assuming power over the respondent, regardless of their roles in real life: 'the interview moves the roles that each normally occupies in life to the background and structures the encounter with respect to the roles of interviewer and interviewee' (1986: 2). He warns that in such a situation, the researcher runs the risk of overlooking the status of the interview narrative as something produced by both interlocutors, and stresses the need for any researcher employing interview as a methodology to 'examine [their] own role in the research process' (1986: 4), indicating that the researcher should also assess their contribution to the interview in terms of data as well as the context in which the interview was conducted. Mishler (1991: 122ff) suggests, then, that one avoids the use of the terms 'interviewer' and 'interviewee', which would reinforce the power imbalance; and he examines the alternative pairs of terms used in different forms of research (eg 'reporter' and 'informant' in some ethnographic work; or 'actor' and 'advocate' if a researcher is promoting the interests of the group she is researching) has similar effects on perception of power.

Bloom (1998: 27ff) discusses the concepts of the 'good researcher' and the 'good respondent', arguing that the researcher and respondent must navigate an appropriate way of working for themselves during the interview. She refers to an example of an interview where she had to play down her preferred procedures (she notes that she was attracted to the idea of eliciting 'feminist' data through conversation with another woman, and the idea of a 'respondent-led' interview), because her respondent was more

comfortable with a more conversational dialogue, with evenly-spaced turn-taking. She also notes that the researcher is not necessarily more powerful than her respondent, arguing: 'Power is situated and contextualised within particular intersubjective relationships' (1998: 35). She refers to the conflation of 'power' and 'responsibility', and the need for the researcher to share the respondent's narrative with her, but it is worth noting that she also discusses the problems of a student-researcher interviewing a more senior academic as a respondent, and the implications of power division in that situation. Though this does not directly apply to this study, it should be noted that a number of similar factors can affect the balance of power, such as the age of the respondent, their job, or the location of the interview, all of which could contribute towards what Bloom calls 'an authoritative discourse of structural superiority' (1998: 37). She (correctly) concludes that there will never be an 'ideal' interview situation with completely equal power dynamics perceived identically on both sides, so the researcher must instead note and acknowledge potential problems with power imbalances: '[T]he goal for feminists is to understand power's complexities and its influences on how we interact with each other' (1998: 40).

Elliott points out that in social research, interviews do not simply 'produce data'; they are also worthy of analysis and investigation in their own right as a 'site for the production of data' (2005: 17). She observes that an individual's narrative is also inevitably part of a wider discourse: '[the respondent's] narrative will take as its template existing narratives which each individual has learned and internalised' (2005: 127), as the following section suggests. The ways in which the respondent narrates her story is influenced by many factors, and in this study by the team she supports and the

particular discourses found in that fanbase; for example, a Liverpool fan might choose to employ the club's unofficial motto 'You'll Never Walk Alone', or a member of a supporters' trust may use the recently popularised phrase 'franchise football' when referring to teams such as MK Dons who have moved to play in a town where the club was not founded. In this way, an individual's narrative is never really solely theirs; other people who use or contribute to a particular discourse or cultural script are also to be found in their story.

A narrative developed from an interview situation is the product of two (or more) interlocutors, but as Elliott notes, telling one's story is not a 'routine' incident, as conversation is; rather, it requires a 'special' organised setting, where the usual norms of turn-taking are suspended so that the one telling the story has 'privileged access' to the floor (2005: 10). She argues that the listeners become participants in the narrative's telling, and the person telling the story will make decisions on what to tell and the words to use according to the people listening. In this research, I was the only immediate listener to the narrative, and my position as a known participant in the fandom about which the respondent was speaking should have elicited some relatively 'natural' narrative. How I positioned myself when dealing with respondents was key to eliciting material: in approaching people to participate, in how I phrased the questions in the written questionnaire, in how I communicated with respondents prior to meeting them, and most obviously in how I talked to them in interviews. However, that is not to say that my role as researcher, my behaviour and my contributions to the interviews did not affect the narrative elicited from the respondents, which I shall address in the next section.

4.4.1 Power relations in the interview situation and the ‘aca/fan’

I begin with discussing the obvious possible power relational problem between me as an academic researcher and the respondents as those I am seeking to gain data from. As a fan, I have gained privileged access to other fans and share a discourse with them; as an academic researching an academic piece of work this could have distanced me from them or set up an overt power imbalance. The following section looks primarily at the theorising of the ‘academic fan’ by Jenkins (1992, 2006a, 2006b) and Hills (2002), who have previously interrogated the objects of their own fandom(s) and used self-reflexivity to conceptualise their own role in their research, which has helped me to formulate my own methodologies of working with my respondents.¹⁸

Jenkins refers to himself as an ‘aca/fan’ – someone who is both an academic scholar and a fan, defining it as ‘a hybrid identity that straddled two very different ways of relating to media cultures’ (2006b: 4). Researching a fandom that one shares is both common and understandable, and positions the researcher favourably as they access privileged resources and draw upon their existing knowledge; indeed, media researcher Steve Bailey (2005: 13) enthuses about the different fandoms he has investigated, all of which have been ‘autobiographically resonant’ for him.¹⁹ Jenkins acknowledges that he will

18 Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) also put forward the idea that some researchers are performers and audience at the same time, acknowledging their football fandom but also writing and performing for their audience of other academics and other fans, negotiating this tension of multiple identities.

19 Of course, this could also be a criticism of the aca/fan’s position: though they might be able to access privileged resources, they might also be situating themselves in a position of increased power with the added status of ‘academic’, distancing them from the rest of the ‘fans’. However, as I discuss later in the chapter, it has been my experience that a shared fandom is far more important to respondents than one’s position as ‘academic’.

never be able to separate his academic work on fandom from the fandom itself, sharing his position on the inevitability of subjectivity with Stanley and Wise (1983; also see Stanley, 1992). As he puts it: ‘I did not have the option of distancing myself from the fan community. What I knew about fandom I knew from the inside out’ (2006b: 61). He illustrates a problem with articulating a suitable vocabulary to talk about a fandom that one shares:

[W]hat I lack, and still do – I haven’t seen anyone later introduce one – is an adequate language to describe emotion or affect in theoretical terms that would be acceptable within academic discourse... (2006b: 26)

In conversation, Hills and Jenkins discuss the issue of interpreting ethnographic interviews and the problematic nature of multiple ‘realities’, and conclude that a ‘real’ account or discourse is simply unattainable; no two researchers would write up or analyse an interview identically, but this does not mean that the data produced are worthless. Instead, the interview offers the opportunity for dialogue and for interpretation of cause and effect (in Jenkins, 2006b: 30-31).²⁰ These methodological concerns are key to this study; establishing what is ‘real’ or ‘true’ may be impossible, as

20 In this extract (Jenkins, 2006b: 30-31) Hills says: ‘What counts as the real for Sherry Turkle is different to what counts as the real for Dave Morley. Hypothetically they could go and talk to the same respondents, and have the same conversations, but then they’d go away and write these interviews up using different discourse.’ Jenkins responds: ‘[D]ifferent interpretive grids map onto bits of the real – and that’s not a word that I use very much – in different ways and produce very different interpretations... To my mind the value of ethnography is not ultimately that it allows you to talk to the real but that it introduces notions of dialogue and accountability. And different ethnographic methods arrive at dialogue and accountability in different ways.’

it depends on how the respondent perceived or experienced situations and how she then narrates them, but that information – about the individual’s thoughts and memories – is what is valuable for this study.

Jenkins points out that fans often have different perceptions of themselves than the people who “control” the material of their fandom: ‘[T]he fans often cast themselves not as poachers [i.e. people who are taking material without permission, a term popularised by Jenkins²¹] but as loyalists, rescuing essential elements of the primary text “misused” by those who maintain copyright control over the program materials] (2006b: 41). He is referring to *Star Trek*, but such an idea can also apply to football fans, who can have different ideas about the ways in which the club is run or the team plays. Similarly, on the subject of fan fiction, Jenkins says: ‘To fully enjoy the text, women are often forced to perform a kind of intellectual transvestism – identifying with male characters in opposition to their own cultural experiences, or constructing unwritten countertexts through their daydreams or through their oral interaction with other women’ (2006b:44), and this too can be applied to female fans of male football teams and players: this is something I shall look at in greater detail throughout the thesis, most specifically when assessing how female fans consume overtly male-centric media, such as Sky Sports’ *Soccer AM*.

Hills, who defines himself as a ‘scholar-fan’ despite his concerns that in academia

21 Though Jenkins did popularise this term in fandom studies and uses the term ‘Textual Poachers’ as the title of his 1992 book, it was initially coined by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice Of Everyday Life* (1984).

fandom can be devalued and perceived as a sign of inappropriate engagement (2002: xii), takes great care to make it clear that he understands fandom not as a ‘thing’, but as performative (2002: xi). He argues that those working in academia have ‘imagined subjectivity’; they present themselves as having a certain type of subjectivity, with a high value placed on rationality, reason, logic and persuasion. He concludes that this is fallacious because academic theoretical perspectives cannot be reconciled through rationality, reason, logic or persuasion, and thus the high value placed on these characteristics is imagined, and academics have no choice but simply to believe and have faith in their favoured standpoints (2002: 3). He likens this to being a fan; except rather than being a fan of a television programme or a sports team, academics are fans of earlier theorists and writers (2002: 4).

Reconciling one’s fandom with one’s work presents a challenge to some, and Hills refers to queer fandom researcher Alexander Doty (2000) who fears a loss of respect if one’s fandom becomes too obvious, self-indulgent or celebratory (2002: 12), and asks why foregrounding the scholar-fan’s fandom becomes embarrassing. He concludes that it is because academics’ ‘imagined subjectivity’ forces them to work within a system of value, and those topics that can engender passionate fandom (e.g. television programmes, films, sports) are outside those boundaries. He also discusses the ideas of Richard Burt (1998), who argues that it is not possible to be truly both an academic and a fan; those who attempt to navigate this division are indulging in a fantasy of ‘having it all’ and simultaneously maintaining that split because they want to maintain their authority to determine what is and what is not significant in that fandom (in Hills, 2002:

13). Hills disagrees with this idea for the same reason I do; academics who are also fans are well aware of their limitations and the context they are working within, and the fact that they are highly familiar of the fandom's terrain simply contributes towards this awareness. Burt's positioning of academia and fandom in opposition to each other is one which Hills – and I – cannot reconcile. In this research, the intention is to allow the respondents to highlight episodes of their supporting life and determine for themselves what is and is not 'significant' by producing their own narrative.

I take Stanley and Wise's position that the researcher cannot fail to be part of her research. The choice for the researcher is not between being involved in the process of gathering and the production of data and being detached from it; it is between acknowledging it and ignoring it. The researcher is not omnipotent; she is on the same plane in terms of fandom as those she researches; and acknowledging the researcher's role in eliciting and representing her data also acknowledges the inevitability of interpretation, as each individual brings their own knowledge and worldview to the data. However, any perceived imbalance in power or problematised relationship will corrupt the data elicited, as the respondent may adjust her word choice or stories told to either distance herself from or make herself more similar to her interlocutor (cf. Hudson, 1999: 122ff). I made a point of not entering into football-related correspondence with any of the respondents, so that none of them knew what team I support (which might lead to preconceptions about me on their part) or my level of dedication to my supporting (which might lead to the respondent thinking they have to alter their answers to something along the lines of what I would say), and this is a

potential problem that I examine more closely shortly.

My position as an academic leads to a possible problematised imbalance of power between me and my respondents, but needing to pretend a fandom I do not share is not an issue. Unlike Robson in his study of 'Millwallism' (2000) and Williams' undercover adventure with England-supporting hooligans (in Williams et al., 1984), I have not needed to be able to pass as *similar* to my respondents, as I am a female football supporter, and do have the background knowledge and the vocabulary of the fan; club allegiance or participation in a particular kind of fan subculture was not crucial. Plummer points out that if a researcher is not adequately engaged with or immersed in her life story data produced through interviews, then she runs 'the risk of simply getting it wrong: of speculating, abstracting and theorising at too great a remove...and worst of all, of substituting the researcher's own view for that of the participant' (2001: 37). I acknowledge this danger, but argue that my role as 'scholar-fan' has given me an understanding into the realm I am exploring, and the respondents to whom I am speaking. More practically, in terms of narrative data elicited through interview, the researcher, as listener and participant, must give minimal responses (such as 'mm' or 'yes') to the story-teller to demonstrate that she is listening to what is being said; she may also support this through nods or headshakes or smiles; and of course she is part of the research because it is she who is asking the additional questions when necessary (cf. Elliott, 2005: 11).

Though Hills (2002: 72) raises the possibility of employing autoethnography in the

context of researchers exploring their own cult media fandom, it is equally relevant for me. My football fandom was created in its own cultural context; I began following football in the mid-1980s, prior to the Heysel disaster; I started attending games regularly in the late 1980s, prior to the Hillsborough disaster and the formation of the Premier League. I attended games with my father, who was a long-standing fan of the football team and encouraged my fandom, but there is no more extensive family tradition of supporting our team. I am the eldest daughter of two, and have no brothers. My team enjoyed some success in the 1980s but since 1991 has suffered a decline, so my experience is mostly of lower division football. Since the age of 16, I have travelled around the country and abroad to watch my team (sometimes with my father, sometimes with friends, sometimes with my younger sister, who developed her own fandom at the age of 15, sometimes alone). In 2003, a crisis at the club led to the formation of a supporters' trust, in which I played a role for the following three years – my first experience of an organised fans' movement, discounting the junior fans' club I attended as a child.

Acknowledging my (perceptions of my) own fandom is valuable, because as with any text, the meaning of the narratives I elicit is partially determined by me, as the audience; no text receiver can avoid some type of interpretation. My understanding of my respondents' narratives is invariably shaped in some part by my understanding of my own fandom, and in addition, my research and understandings are shaped by my 'intellectual biography' (cf. Elliott, 2005: 154). Yet my understanding of my fandom is no more or less valid than someone else's. If I had become a fan of a different team or

at a different time, my experiences of my fandom would have been different – and this is equally true for everyone, including my respondents. As Jenkins says with regard to media fandom, ‘Given the highly social orientation of fan reading practices, fan interpretations need to be understood in institutional rather than personal terms’ (1992: 210). This is true for sports fandom too – as well as a fan’s personal expression of their fandom, one needs also to take into account expressions of fandom that are peculiar to particular clubs. However, as Elliott notes (2005: 155ff), if the researcher is inevitably part of her research and she interprets the data she elicits according to her own perceptions, the best that she can do is employ ‘[a]n approach to conducting and writing up research which makes clear the perspective of the author and describes the practicalities of how the research has been conducted’, as I do in this thesis. Nonetheless, the fact remains that I seek not to explain fandom per se or isolate the characteristics of a female fan – the ‘single system of value’ to which Hills refers. Instead, I have sought to gain a wider knowledge of how fandom is experienced by many female football fans, and in doing so highlighted issues or themes that recur, to contrast experiences, and to bring female fans together to discuss and compare their experiences – or their ‘multiple systems of value’.

My role as part of my study signals its position as a postmodern-influenced piece of work; I do not see the researcher as an ‘authoritative’ or definitive voice per se; rather, the researcher has the privilege of voicing their interpretations – or as Davies and Davies put it, the researcher has ‘interpretative power’ (2007: 1142) – and this privilege and the factors that affect interpretation need to be acknowledged as fully and as

honestly as possible. The time and place of the interview will also influence the data elicited; as Grbich describes it, postmodern-influenced studies require ‘dialogue with other contextual and temporal influences’ (2004: 18). The exact data elicited in an interview may not ever be exactly replicated as it is a product of its place, time and participants, and it is important to acknowledge that this research – the language used, the interview techniques employed, the participants’ engagement – is socially and culturally constructed (cf. Grbich, 2004:18). In a study that states from the outset that meaning is ambiguous, that ‘truth’ in the sense of ‘what actually happened’ is impossible to determine simply from interviews about experience, and that fragments of data must be assessed and pieced together, the influence of postmodernist theory on this research is clear (cf. Grbich, 2004: 26; Oleson, 2003: 347ff).

If one uses Plummer’s understanding of the researcher’s potential relationship with her respondents, as I have communicated with all of them at least once, I have assumed the role of ‘acquaintance’ (2001: 209). The relationship between me and my respondents is focused solely on eliciting narrative from them for the purposes of this research, but as Plummer points out, ‘[i]t is actually hard to be a “stranger” when doing a life story...[but] a casual working relationship is very easy – the researcher possibly having a drink or a meal with their subjects’ (2001: 210) . However, retaining a professional distance between a researcher and a respondent with many shared ideas and affections (not least the shared fandom that triggered this research in the first place) is not as straightforward as this may appear; and I discuss some of the problems I encountered when carrying out my research in the following section.

4.5 Reflection on my methods

This section looks briefly at some of the data elicited during the interview process, and how my respondents reacted to me and particular lines of questioning. The problems facing me as the researcher in the interview have been noted, and this section highlights some of the data that illustrates the need to be aware of the researcher-respondent relationship. Hammersley and Atkinson rightly note that the researcher faces the problem of deciding how much information to disclose about herself, arguing: 'It is hard to expect "honesty" and "frankness" on the part of participants and informants while never being frank and honest about oneself' (1995: 91). They point out that managing people's impressions of you by suppressing or playing down one's own beliefs, opinions or allegiances is a normal part of everyday interaction, so this is bound to apply to the interview situation as well.

I have already discussed my own supporting career, and because I found some of my respondents through personal contacts or through the nationwide network of supporters' trusts and clubs with which I was involved, one of my respondents knew me personally on a friendship level, and several of the others were aware of my own club allegiances if not the detail of my supporting history. However, although I presented myself as a football fan, I endeavoured to keep the details of my support hidden from people who had not previously known me. I wanted to keep my club allegiances hidden where possible because of the very partisan, tribal nature of football support: I was concerned that, should a respondent know the details of my fandom, it might affect how she perceived me; it was possible that she may have had a bad experience at the ground, or

disliked one of the players for some reason, or, in several cases with my respondents, there may have been a local rivalry between her team and mine. Luton's local rivals are Watford; three of my interviewees were Watford fans, none of whom knew I was a Luton fan. I felt reasonably confident that if they had known my allegiance, they would either have not been so happy to give up their time to help me, or their responses to some questions may have differed. For example, Lynn was very honest in her narrative discussing an incident of hooliganism at a match between Watford and Luton, and explaining that she wanted to go to the forthcoming match between the sides because she wanted to see her team against another good team but was worried about the possibility of violence. Had she known that I was at that first game as a Luton fan, I suggest her narrative would have been very different.

Even if they did not know my own supporting background, they were aware that I was a football fan and as such, they often attempted to steer the interview on to a conversational path so that turn-taking would be more evenly spaced and to give me an opportunity to talk about my own club in the same way that they were talking about theirs. Creating a rapport and enabling two-way communication rather than exploiting respondents and eliciting one-way communication is of course vital for qualitative research carried out according to feminist research principles (cf. Bryman, 2004: 336), but on the other hand it was necessary for me to be careful that the interview stayed focused on my respondent and their viewpoints, rather than allowing my own perspectives to take precedence, as per Denzin's fallacy of objectivity; that is, when the researcher unwittingly imposes her perspective over that of the person she is studying (cf. 2009: 8).

Anna, a Leyton Orient fan, was answering a question about her hopes for next season when she appeared to remember the conversational maxims that would normally direct such a discussion, and began to mention my own club and its players who had previously played for her own team. She knew nothing about me apart from the details of my research project and my own support, and so she decided to talk to me about our overlapping fandom. Her friend Theresa, another Leyton Orient fan, asked me questions about a player who had played for both our teams; Sarah, an Ipswich fan, tried to engage me in a more general discussion about my team's current form. Those who did not know my allegiances were interested in what they might be, and asked questions to gain more information about me.

Occasionally, because of my investment in the fandom and the subjects we were discussing, it became problematic to remain as objective as I would have liked to have been in order to allow the respondents to speak their own narratives with minimal leading from me, particularly in the focus group when the interview was operating more like a normal conversation and I allowed my own thoughts and experiences to emerge. However, during the focus group I also exaggerated my opinion to act as devil's advocate and trigger further debate – for example, if there was total consensus among the others, or if I was concerned that the respondents constituting this group were agreeing for the sake of politeness, and thus by adding a more sceptical assessment of the events, I was hoping to signal that disagreement with the majority opinion was acceptable.

As this chapter has suggested, it is impossible to produce an entirely 'unbiased' account

of 'factual' events in this kind of research, even though one may avoid the fallacy of objectivism by concealing one's own identities and opinions (and in this case my own football allegiances, as I have demonstrated). Indeed, this research focuses on narratives from respondents, but they have been edited and presented in a narrative of my own creation. As Stacey argues: '[T]he research product is ultimately that of the researcher, however modified or influenced by informants. With very rare exceptions it is the researcher who narrates' (1988: 23). My acknowledgement of my own situation and presentation of my own identities goes some way towards rectifying this; as Elliott notes, 'an explicitly reflexive approach to research provides a way through this crisis of representation' (2005: 154). The choice is not between the researcher being part of her research and the researcher detaching herself from her research, but between acknowledging it and ignoring it. Elliott argues that taken to the extreme, the 'crisis of representation' – i.e. the impossibility of removing oneself from one's research and its written forms – could lead to all attempts to engage with real-world research being entirely abandoned (2005: 154). Though no piece of research in this format can be entirely ideal, what I have done instead is to acknowledge my work's unavoidable partiality and aimed to make my research and this thesis 'as informative as possible...[with] insights [provided] into the means and circumstances of their production' (Elliott, 2005: 155).

As with any exercise where one is assessing a text created by someone else, there is the possibility that my interpretation of my respondents' narratives has pushed meanings on their words they did not intend. Similar to Fiske's ideas (1988: 49ff) within audience theory, a text is not closed; the interlocutor is not simply a passive listener - they create

meanings according to the text with which they are presented, and the meanings they create are not necessarily the meanings the producer originally intended (see also Buckingham and Willett, 2006). However, this interpretative process was of course crucial to construct my perception of the respondent's standpoint and how they performed their fandom. All interaction involves some level of interpretation, and acknowledging this outright and endeavouring to minimise miscommunications is the best way to proceed with dealing with this data.²² As Stake points out, in any form of research, though the respondent chooses what and how they narrate, it is the researcher who has the final say in what 'story' or narrative is presented, through the selection of data to report and the writing process; 'more will be pursued than was volunteered, and less will be reported than was learned...the whole story exceeds anyone's knowing and anyone's telling' (2005: 456).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has assessed the schools of thought and potential methods that have informed the choice of methodology in this research, and highlighted some of the issues I encountered while employing those methods. I have positioned my work as 'feminist', relating it both to my own feminism and to its aim of eliciting women's narratives of

22 The idea that feminist research practice should include a 'non-hierarchical relationship' between researcher and researched (cf. Bryman, 2004: 336) seems a little optimistic to me, as power (im)balances exist (or are perceived by the interlocutors to exist) in all modes of communication. Bryman (ibid.) argues that imposing interpretations on a narrative that are not necessarily shared by the respondents means that there cannot be a 'non-hierarchical relationship' between the researcher and the researched. However, as I have highlighted, in this study, as I share the key fandom with my respondents, this goes some way to creating a more level power dynamic. I argue, though, that in any research of this nature, where the researcher has to put her own interpretation on the narratives of her respondents, she is by necessity in a position of power, even if it is after the interview process itself; and no researcher (or indeed interlocutor) can ever fully avoid interpreting a dialogue or conversation.

their experience. I have also suggested that gaining those narratives, or ‘short life stories’, is not a straightforward process; an individual’s narrative may be influenced by many factors, including their club allegiance and the ‘collective memory’ of that fanbase, and the act of telling their ‘short life story’ within this context also helps them to ‘re-member’ – to re-situate themselves within their fanbase and reaffirm their ties.

However, narratives are also influenced by the context of the interview, and I have emphasised the importance of acknowledging the relationship between researcher and respondent when eliciting narrative, and indeed the researcher’s role in producing and interpreting that narrative. I have shown the difficulties of negotiating my own identities as ‘fan’ and ‘researcher’, introducing the idea of the ‘aca/fan’ to understand my role in this research.

In the chapters that follow, the accounts of experience elicited during the interview process are interrogated, and look in particular at the broad key themes that emerged as significant to some respondents. The study then goes on to examine how (people think) female football fandom may develop in the future, looking at how the game is (or is not) promoted to females, and assessing the obstacles female fans may face.

The next chapter begins by looking at the importance of community to female football fans, starting with an examination of the ways in which English football clubs are situated in their local communities, both physically and in terms of their outreach work. It moves on to look at the concept of ‘topophilia’, developed by Tuan Yi-Fu and later in

sport by John Bale, and how this applies to the area occupied by the football club in general and their ground in particular, and then discuss the rise of the supporters' trust and how some respondents have become involved in this community-focused cooperative movement.

Chapter 5. The female fan's relationships within her family and fan community from childhood to adulthood

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have shown how the academic concept of fandom has developed, and how the study of football fandom has increased in the past 30 years. They have also demonstrated there is a long history of female football fandom that has not necessarily had due attention in academic investigation, as well as set the context for this study's methodology.

This chapter examines how the female fan begins and develops her 'career' in football fandom and how fandom operates on the locus of a social network. It looks at how, when and why a child begins to support her football team, and how her support develops over the course of her childhood. It then moves on to look at the importance of key people in the development of her support, observing that female children interested in football tend to be encouraged in their support by their fathers, and looks at how gender difference and patriarchal power relations operate. However, the influence and encouragement of the father is not the only route to developing a committed football fandom; this chapter also assesses the narratives of women whose fandom began under the influences of other friends and relatives. The chapter also examines if and the extent to which the female fan's fandom and engagement alters across her life, and whether or not it is affected by motherhood, and the transition into that life status.

5.2 How, when and why fans begin to support their teams

The following section looks at how fans begin their support, opening with an examination of the significant role that location and a feeling of 'community' plays. It moves on to look at when and why fans select their particular team to follow, and the people who influence that choice.

5.2.1 Location and the 'community'

The choice to support a particular team and become part of the community of fans is influenced by various factors. Geographical proximity to a particular football club can be an important factor influencing the choice of one's football team; after all, clubs across the world tend to be named after the community they grew up in, showing the importance that football tends to attach to location, as Warner discusses (2010: 61); and the club's stadium, referred to as its 'home', is the focus of support, as Hornby explains with his desire to move to the area around his team Arsenal's home ground (1992: 210). The home ground is where fans congregate; obviously for matches, but also at other times, such as times of bereavement (for example, to lay wreaths after the death of an ex-player or manager, as was seen at Leeds United's Elland Road, Sheffield United's Bramall Lane, and Newcastle United's Sports Direct Stadium after the death of Gary Speed in 2011). As such, it is the tangible central point of a community joined together not necessarily through blood ties or geographical proximity to the area, though these can be important factors, but through sharing a fandom; the football supporting community is a community that relies heavily on the importance of location in terms of its

symbolism and the opportunity it offers for congregation, but it also develops through choice and extends beyond geography and family.

Mark Smith (2001) suggests that numerous definitions have always existed for the term ‘community’, referring to ‘community as a geographical area;...a group of people living in a particular place; and...as an area of common life’. It means all these things and more in the football lexicon; not only does it refer to the people who attend matches and/or live and/or work in the area around the stadium, but also to the outreach work the club does in the area.¹ For the purposes of this specific chapter, though, although both senses are retained and used throughout this thesis, ‘community’ will primarily mean the supporting community: those people who share a fandom of a club and are brought together by their practices of fandom, most often regular attendance at the club’s ‘home’ ground. They may be initially linked by family ties, but their shared fandom strengthens this social network. The following section demonstrates how some of my respondents began their supporting careers and the influence of their immediate family and closest friends in initiating them into their fandom and encouraging and reinforcing their support.

1 ‘Football in the community’ departments (FitC) exist at almost every professional club in England; the Professional Footballers’ Association launched a pilot scheme at six clubs in the north-west in 1986, and eventually rolled it out across the country over the next decade (The PFA, 2011; McGuire, 2008). FitC provides coaching in schools and as extra-curricular activities, opening up the possibility of participation to groups that may not have the chance to play otherwise (for example, girls in schools that do not offer football; or disabled children); it also provides more ‘traditional’ education schemes, such as literacy programmes and homework clubs, encouraging attendance and participation through links to football and the presence of footballers. FitC schemes now encourage corporate social responsibility, particularly in areas where clubs have moved to out-of-town stadia, and thus reduced employment and passing trade in the original community; however, clubs are also very aware that FitC work can encourage children and their parents to pay to attend games and potentially ensure future generations of fandom.

5.2.2 Initiation, socialisation and the familial tradition of support

The decision to support a team can be made at any age, as my respondents reported.

Due to the issues previously highlighted with the reliability of memory², in the questionnaire phase respondents were not asked exactly how old they were when they began supporting their team, but were asked how long they had been supporting their team, providing 11 three-year bands as options, allowing them to indicate the approximate duration of their fandom so far.³ In interview, many respondents did, however, have more specific answers about when they began supporting, and perhaps unexpectedly this was particularly the case when they had been supporting since early childhood (and thus one might expect their memories to be slightly clouded), and when their supporting is part of a long family tradition.

It appears from my respondents' narratives that when they are following a family tradition of football support, their gender or role as 'daughter' (specifically gendered as opposed to 'child') has been largely immaterial or ignored by the members of the family who have initiated them into the fandom. It has traditionally been assumed that football supporting is passed down through the male side of the family (cf. Coddington, 1997: 20), downplaying the possibility of fathers passing the supporting tradition on to daughters, or mothers to sons, or even mothers to daughters. It seems clear from my respondents that their choice of football team says something about their identity as

2 This is discussed in chapter 4.

3 I was concerned that asking for a more exact answer might have been difficult, as I expected that many female fans would have begun supporting in early childhood and not be able to remember particular detail, and thus discourage respondents from completing the rest of the questionnaire and participating in the rest of the research.

well, taking into account their family and supporting traditions, their location and their place of birth (cf. Murphy et al., 1990:8). They are introduced to the ‘subculture of football’ via the agency of a ‘significant other’, and fandom is sustained through the development of social networks (1990: 8), and it is not necessarily being born or living in a town that is important, but rather sharing a particular understanding of a shared history (cf. Robson, 2000: 7). It is clear that dedicated and committed football support is a significant component of the individual’s identity, and in the following sections I examine some of the reasons my respondents give for selecting a team in childhood and how they have sustained that fandom into adult life as well as what those choices represent about themselves.

5.2.3 Overview of the primary personal influences which attract child fans to football

It is certainly the case that my respondents indicated that strong personal influences played a large role in initiating them into football support, with a particular individual (a family member, a friend or colleague) being identified as a significant initiator in 91 per cent of questionnaire respondents; only 9 per cent of respondents claimed they first went to football alone and of their own volition.

Table 5.1 – Person prompting respondents into attending matches

Person responsible	Percentage
Respondent, herself	9%
Father	50%
Mother	8%
Sister	5%
Brother	11%
Other relation	4%
Partner	15%
Male friend	10%
Female friend	11%
Mixed group of friends	4%
Colleague	2%
Total (NB respondents could select more than one person acting as an influence)	129

It is also certainly the case that the football stadium is perceived as being constructed as a male-gendered arena, and that males do seem to influence females in their decision to follow football and support a particular team.⁴ However, instead of the auxiliary or detached supporting role formerly attributed to female fans (cf. Haynes, 1995: 125;

⁴ Woodhouse (2002) also observes that the father is usually the inspiration for elite female football players, but in recent years this is changing and now ten per cent of elite female football players cite their mothers as an influence instead.

Freeman, 2000: 2), my respondents show that they experience lifelong attachments to their clubs which are rather more complex than previous studies have indicated. The stereotypes that all women go to football just as adjuncts to male partners or to display 'femaleness' by gazing at male sportsmen are not necessarily empirically true (although none of my respondents practised their fandom in such a way, it is possible that such fans may exist); this chapter shows that my respondents demonstrate a high level of autonomy and 'authenticity' in their fandom.

However, football is a social activity, and most people who go to football are introduced to it by and then continue attending with friends or family (cf. Melnick and Wann, 2010; Mewett and Toffoletti, 2011; Murphy et al., 1990). As Table 5.1 above shows, half of the questionnaire respondents named their father as a primary influence in developing their fandom.⁵ I suggest that one way in which the more involved fathers of the late 20th and early 21st-century might spend 'pleasurable' time with their children (cf. Segal, 2007: 30) could be through a shared regular football support (see Williams, 2001). If fathers have increasingly played a part in their daughters' leisure time, then it might be expected that fathers who are football fans would have instilled a love of the game in their daughters, resulting in today's female football fans having begun their supporting under their fathers' influence.

I argue in the rest of this chapter that female children, just like male children, are generally encouraged in their interest in sport by their fathers; half of the respondents

5 The father was by far the most significant figure in developing my respondents' fandom; after the father, the next most influential figure was 'a partner', named by 15 per cent of respondents. Brothers and female friends were also highlighted as significant influences by 11 per cent each.

named their father as a key influence on their football supporting, and though some of them admitted that other women thought football supporting was an unsuitable activity for a woman, none of them mentioned that they felt out of place at a football ground. I also assess the narratives of women whose fandom began under the influences of other friends and relatives, showing that there is more than one route to developing a lifelong career as a football fan. The following section examines the narratives of respondents who were encouraged in their fandom as children by their father, and highlights how respondents moved from childhood and the strong paternal influence to develop their own loyal, authentic, autonomous football fandom.

5.2.4 The father's influence on the female child and her development of autonomous fandom

Her father's influence on her fandom was evident throughout the narrative of Tottenham fan Elaine, 26 at the time of interview. She claimed that she had no choice in starting her fandom; her father made the decision for her, as this extract shows:

CD: Why and how did you start supporting?

Elaine: My dad. He took me to my first game when I was four, so I didn't really have much say in the matter.

She describes this as something she had no say in – she was passive, she 'was taken' –

but she has maintained that fandom over the subsequent 22 years.⁶ She explains a little further about the circumstances of her father deciding to take her to a game:

I've got pictures of it. It was only a reserve game against Luton or Millwall or someone randomly local. It was a reserve game. We'd done really well in the reserve league. Dad decided to take me because it was free for kids. It's been my life ever since.

The initial attendance was enough to lure Elaine into an intense and committed fandom, despite the low status of the actual game itself (the 'reserves' is the 'second XI'; the second string of players). After this initial game, she then moved on from simply attending reserve games to attending first-team matches, and from there she got a season ticket. The season ticket is described by many respondents as a badge of intense dedication, involving paying a relatively large sum of money prior to the season in order to guarantee entry to all home matches; 73 per cent of questionnaire respondents were current season ticket holders at the time of completing the questionnaire, and of those who were not, nearly half of them had been in a previous season (see Appendix A for the full questionnaire results). Elaine explains in the next extract that she got her first season ticket at the age of seven or eight, when obviously her parents paid for it, but she is keen to establish that her attendance was very high at this time, showing her commitment. She also elaborates on how her fandom developed even further to a stage where she did not miss a single game, showing the progression of her support, her

⁶ Elaine's attribution of responsibility for her fandom to her father emerged several times throughout the interview.

dedication and her authenticity:

Then they had a policy where you could get cheaper children's tickets. I got my first season ticket when I was about seven or eight. What season would that have been? The first season that I didn't miss a game was 1987. So, and then that was the year we lost to Coventry in the final. Oh no, it wasn't that I didn't miss a game, because I was too young to go to the night games, but I didn't see us lose a game until the final at Wembley, when Gary Mabbutt scored an own goal. So that was my first year of having a season ticket, and I've had a season ticket ever since.

Elaine shows in these two extracts that her early memories of her fandom are a little muddled – unsurprisingly as she was very young at the time – and, similarly, her parents controlled the extent to which she could attend games, which she demonstrates with her mention of her father's decision to take her to her first match and of being 'too young' to go to matches in the evening. However, it is evident that her fandom has continued into her adulthood as she has had autonomy over her leisure time. She continues to buy a season ticket now with her own money, as she has done 'ever since' that first season, demonstrating her long-term commitment to the club and the importance of its role in her life. In fact, she goes so far as to describe her support as her 'life', indicating its central role and importance to her.

Elaine is the oldest of three children, the youngest of whom was a boy. She admits that

if her brother had liked football, her father may not have been so keen to take her to games, as this extract shows:

CD: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Elaine: I've got a brother and a sister and neither of them are very interested.

CD: Did your dad try and make them be interested?

Elaine: Yes, that's why they had a third child and had a boy, but it really didn't work. So I don't know. When we used to go to England games, my brother would come to them. But he's not very interested.

Elaine shows here that she discounts the fandom of her brother, who will watch international matches, because he does not watch Tottenham; this for her is not 'authentic' fandom, which is the fandom of a particular football club, and she therefore describes him as 'not very interested'. She suggests that her father wanted a son to take to football, but the plan 'didn't work', meaning he had to take his one child who was interested in the sport. This idea of taking a daughter to football to make up for the disappointment of not having a son (or a son interested in the game) is one that Robins (1984: 95) notes in his analysis of hooligan supporting culture, written at the same time as Elaine was beginning to go to matches with her father, but he does not acknowledge the possibility that the daughter would revel in it, instead positing the scenario that she could be put off it for life (1984: 95). Elaine's father had gone to matches with his own father and was keen to continue this with his own children. It seems entirely reasonable that he should want to pass on a pastime that had given him such great pleasure over the

years. Even so, Elaine seems almost amused by her father's dedication to his fandom, saying:

My dad hadn't missed a Wembley England game since the 1966 World Cup Final. He's a bit obsessed, as you can see...Him and his dad used to go...They used to go when he was about four or five.

This gentle amusement at the expense of her father's 'obsession' continues throughout Elaine's narrative, as she refers frequently to his experience and anecdotes rather than her own, with comments such as 'My dad moans about it all the time'. Significantly, she also plays down her own part in developing and sustaining her fandom, with phrases such as 'I really didn't have much say in the matter'. She constantly reiterates that her father has always been the more dedicated, or to use her word 'obsessive', supporter out of the pair of them, despite her own support demonstrating an extremely high level of commitment. She explains:

Dad's got every programme since God knows what year, 61 or something ridiculous, it's quite obsessive. Where I've now moved out of home, my old bedroom now has all the programmes on all my shelving, it's really sad. The yearly, annual handbook and things like that, [I do buy them], but not obsessively. I'm not, I like my shirts and things, but I don't necessarily buy every single one. They're expensive and I can't be bothered. [CD: What about DVDs and videos?] If it's a Sky game and we go to it, we'll still come back and

watch it. We have got some games, if we've won a Cup one obviously it's on BBC, and even before Sky and everything, we've got, they're probably at Dad's, but we've got all the games we've won significantly.

I suggest that Elaine's concern with stressing her father's greater 'obsession' with football in general and Tottenham in particular, prioritising it over narrating her own experience in places, could be linked to a belief that a female cannot really be an 'authentic' fan in the way that a male can be, due to her awareness that her father wanted to take a son to football, and pass his football fandom down the male line of the family. Though she is a fan with a high level of commitment, she simultaneously indicates that her father has a greater fandom because he is male, and thus she refers to his opinions and experiences throughout her narrative, sidelining her own thoughts. Elaine is happy to assume a secondary, sensible, 'non-obsessive', perhaps more appropriately supportive and feminine fandom in the shadow of her father's. However, another possible interpretation could be that her father has more years of support than Elaine, and thus she defers to his knowledge because he has decades more of experience; and of course, because he is her father and thus, even to the adult Elaine, a respected and loved authority figure in her life.

Viki, a 27-year-old Charlton fan, had a very different introduction to football to Elaine, but her father still played a key role. He introduced her brother to football at his request, but Viki herself had no interest in attendance. However, when her mother decided that she wanted to go to games too, Viki was too young to be left at home alone, and had to

go along. That means that she had no choice whatsoever over selecting her team nor attendance in the first place; it was forced on her; and nor was it one of the close father-daughter relationships that led to an interest in the sport and a subsequent 'initiation' into fandom. She says:

We're between Charlton and Millwall. My brother wanted to go to football in the late 70s. Millwall was not a great option to take your family to, so my dad opted to take him to Charlton. I never was interested, and then my mum wanted to go to a game. I had to go because I was only about nine or ten. So it was like, 'You've got to go because we're all going.' Then I got hooked.

The geographical location of the family home played a part in her father choosing Charlton over Millwall. It seems from Viki's narrative that she was not interested in going to football at all and showed no interest in attending even when her brother began to go. She was a passive observer as her immediate family began their collective fandom, and it was not until later that she became active and 'got hooked'. The actual act of attendance, though it was reluctant on her part, was key in securing Viki's fandom; it was not her father's initiation that encouraged her fandom, nor even the influence of her mother or brother; it was the experience of being at that first game that 'hooked' her.

Anna, a 32-year-old Leyton Orient fan, on the other hand, was proud to describe her initial fandom as an active choice – 'I've always gone' – despite the fact that she dates

her fandom from the time when her pregnant mother accompanied her father to matches, as this extract demonstrates:

Anna: Even when my mum was pregnant with me she used to take me over there. Then I went as a kid. I was born in 72, so in the Eighties Liverpool were the team, so I used to like Liverpool but go and watch Orient. I never supported Liverpool, I never even saw them play. It was an infatuation. Then when I got to about 14, I thought no, I started to get a bit snobby about football, I think, I'm not really supporting Liverpool, I just like them, I do support Orient. I started going over Orient of my own free will, then, travelling over here, when I got to 14, 15, 16. Then, I think as soon as I got a job, I bought a season ticket. I think it was my biggest outlay ever. I've always really gone, but of my own free will since I was 14.

CD: So your mum went?

Anna: She went because of my dad. It was my granddad that supported them, then my dad, then me and my sister.

The way Anna narrates Leyton Orient fandom being passed down the generations is significant. Her grandfather was a fan, her father was a fan, and then she and her sister were fans; even though her mother did go to matches, she went 'because of my dad', and thus had not had the fandom passed along the bloodline nor developed an appropriate attachment to the club, according to Anna's assessment; simply attending because of a man – an echo of the ideas expressed by Haynes that adult women go to

football to keep male partners company – is not enough to qualify you as a supporter.

Anna also mentions here that Liverpool were the popular team to ‘support’ in the 1980s among her peers, but although she ‘liked’ them, she always went to watch Leyton Orient with her family. I suggest that the patrilineal family tradition of supporting Leyton Orient combined with the affective ties created by attending matches outweighed any peer pressure Anna felt to support Liverpool, thus creating what she terms her football ‘snobbery’. This ‘snobbery’ actually appears to be a form of verifying one’s ‘authentic’ fandom and knowledge, separating oneself from those who are inauthentic and lack knowledge; Anna was a genuine fan with good football knowledge because she attended matches, whereas people who claimed an interest in Liverpool were neither authentic fans nor knowledgeable about the game. Though with some of the more high profile or ‘glamorous’ clubs people may begin supporting without an obvious bond, as Robson points out for smaller or less fashionable clubs supporting is a ‘blood tradition’, with few people ‘converting’ to support that team without a family link (2000: 116).

Anna dates her autonomy as a fan to her early teenage years; although she has always attended matches with her family, she began going of her ‘own free will’ as a teenager, paying for her own season ticket as soon as she had some independent income. From her narrative, it seems that the move to paying for her own ticket and travel is a rite of passage into ‘authentic’ fandom because she is now choosing for herself whether or not to attend, rather than attending because her family tell her to.

Christine, a 60-year-old Charlton fan, also narrated her fandom as part of a family pastime. She began going to minor Charlton matches with her father when she was a child, and then as she grew up, the entire family went to big games. She explains:

I first started going to games probably when I was quite young, seven or something like that. My father used to go to the first team and the reserves. He used to take me to the reserves. My mum always used to give me the option did I want to go shopping with her, or did I want to go to the football with my dad. I said the football with my dad. I used to go to the reserves from about seven to ten. After that, I went to one or two first-team games when Charlton were in the old first division, and the crowds were 50,000 plus, and mum and dad and my sister and everybody went. I went to one or two but not the whole season, because, I was still quite small, and it was 50,000 crowds, if I had to stand up I couldn't see very much. So that would be in about the mid-50s I started going to the first team, but before that the reserves. My mum and dad, auntie and uncle, cousin, sister, used to stand as a big group there in the old days.

Like Elaine, Christine developed her fandom by initially attending reserve matches and then first-team games after she had been 'initiated' into football by her father; and like Anna, Christine takes active ownership of her fandom by stating, 'I first started going to games.' She qualifies this by then describing her father's influence on her attendance – 'He used to take me' – but then returning to the active voice to narrate her attendance

patterns from then on. This active fandom seems to be influenced by the fact that Christine was given the choice whether to go to football or not (indeed, whether or not she wanted to engage in typically ‘feminine’ behaviour such as shopping instead of going to the football). However, she did not have an option about the team she could watch – it was Charlton or nobody, because that was who her father was going to watch.

This perception of a lack of choice about a team to support was the case with most respondents who began their support as part of a family tradition. However, those who claimed to have picked their own team demonstrated through their narrative that they too were influenced by other family members close to them and/or people whom they admired. Liverpool fan Niki grew up (and still lives) in the south-east of England, but she began supporting her team because of two older male cousins who she admired; this choice also had practical benefits – her cousins agreed to take her to matches if she supported the same team as them, as this extract shows:

CD: How did you first start supporting?

Niki: When I was about nine or ten, I just generally quite liked watching any sport on telly. None of my family really liked sport at all. They probably do a bit more now. At the time they didn't. I just thought, I was quite contrary when I was a child, I just thought, right, what can I like that none of them like, right, I like football. Of course, none of my close family really supported football. I've got some relatives in Devon, some cousins in Devon, who I was really close to, I used to see them a lot. Two of my cousins there were both male, they

were probably about eight, ten years older than me. They used to come and stay with us quite a lot. I didn't know who to support. They said if you support Liverpool, we'll take you to see football. By this point they'd moved up to London. Of course, then in Devon you supported Liverpool or Man United in the 70s. When I got to probably about 12 or 13, my mum would put me on the train here. They'd pick me up on the platform in London and take me to all the away games, stand on the away terrace, when I was about 12 or 13. So that was about, early 80s. So I've been hooked since then.

Although Niki was not initiated into a long tradition of fandom by an immediate family member, as has been the case with the other respondents in this chapter, her older male cousins passed their fandom on to her, meaning that the impact of family influence still played a small role in her support. Significantly, she describes herself as being 'hooked' since she began going to games; she had a passing interest in the sport beforehand, but when she was initiated into Liverpool fandom and began going to games, that was what 'hooked' her and made her into an 'authentic' fan.

5.2.5 Family opposition to female football fandom

This next section examines the narratives of respondents who experienced strong opposition within their families to their fandom, and who continued their fandom regardless. Even though Niki's immediate family were not fans themselves, they clearly did not oppose her Liverpool fandom; as Niki explains, her mother would make sure she

got on her train in Devon to London. However, some respondents described active opposition to their fandom from their family. Lucy, a Doncaster fan, went to football with her father despite her mother's opposition. Lucy describes how she first became a football fan in this extract:

The first game was at home to Port Vale. We won 2-1. I was the mascot. My dad had always been a Rovers fan, my granddad before him. My dad used to go along with his friends from work. The company was sponsoring a game once upon a time. On the Friday before the game, they realised they'd not got a mascot for the club, so the club phoned up to find out if anyone could do it. My dad was like, 'Oh, my daughter will do it, she's never been before, but she'll run out.' It was November, so my dad took me to the club shop beforehand and got me changed into my replica kit. That was it. I didn't have a coat, I didn't have a jumper. I was six. I was six years old. I had these little patent shoes on because I didn't have any trainers, and a replica kit. At half-time, I'm absolutely frozen in the stands, as you can imagine. I missed the second half. I went into the stand and they'd laid a buffet out for the sponsors. I was just left in the room with the buffet. I munched my way through the buffet. That's my claim, eating the lunch for the sponsors. They came in after the game. My dad wasn't very happy. He took me back, and took me back with a coat the second time, to make sure I stayed outside. That was my first game. When you're young, you don't tend to go all the time.

It was more like when my dad would take me, or my mum would let him take me. She didn't really think that girls should be doing football. She tried to cling on but I wasn't really listening. I started going a lot more regularly when I was 12 or 13. That's when I started going all the time. I became a season-ticket holder, probably when I was about 13. I stopped being a season-ticket holder for the first few years of the Richardson era. There was a lot of protests going on. We still went to the games, just paid on the day. I went back to being a season-ticket holder just before we got relegated, and I've been one ever since. I started going to away games, 1995, I think it was. Played Wigan away, anyway. I think we lost. That was my first away game. I've been going on and off to away games until five, six years ago. I don't miss a game now. I've not missed a game for years.

It seems from this extract that Lucy's mother holds the stereotypical opinion that football is suitable as a game for boys, but not girls. Thus she prevented the child Lucy from attending regularly by stopping her father from taking her to games, and it seems that she also tried to convince her that it was an inappropriate pastime for a little girl, but Lucy 'wasn't really listening'. Lucy's assertion that her mother tried to 'cling on' is significant as this is reminiscent of Chodorow's claim that a mother loves her daughter narcissistically, as someone just like herself (1974: 44ff). Thus one could explain Lucy's mother's objections to football according to this theory: the mother sees her daughter as being 'like her', so her induction into this male world is deemed inappropriate, which means she tries to prevent it from happening, albeit in this case unsuccessfully. As

Weedon notes: '[T]he overriding concern of most parents in bringing up their children is with 'normality', the normality necessary for future success in the two privileged sites of adult life, the family and work... We know how girls, boys, women and men should be if they are normal...' (1987: 76). There seems little chance of the child Lucy's enjoyment of football directly affecting her work prospects, so it is easy to argue then that Lucy's mother's concern is for her daughter's future chances of entering into a 'normal' family life (i.e. a heterosexual marriage with children) if she enters now into this male domain.

Lucy's narrative also shows the importance she attaches to the season ticket, just as we have seen with other respondents in the chapter; the purchase and possession of a season ticket is a key indicator of the fan's level of attendance and thus commitment. She mentions that she stopped buying a season ticket 'for the first few years of the Richardson era', meaning that she refused to give the club a lump sum of money in advance when it was run by people of whom she disapproved; but she is quick to point out that she did not actually stop attending but instead chose to pay on the day. Her failure to buy a season ticket in those years was not a demonstration of a drop in dedication to her team, but a demonstration of disgust in the club's owners.

Lucy mentions that she used to play football before she went to a football match, but from her narrative she does not seem to have ever considered playing the game at a higher level or even in a more organised team, nor that her mother objected to her kicking a ball around:

I know I used to play, from being able to walk. Our next-door neighbour, his kids used to go to Rovers. They used to kick the ball, we used to have a low fence. One of my earliest memories is playing football over the fence, just kicking it. Then my dad was teaching me to play. So I remember playing before I actually went to watch Rovers.

It is possible that at the time Lucy was growing up (in the early 1980s), at a time when the FA had not yet taken over the official administration of the women's game and the best female players were having to leave the country to have the chance of playing even semi-professionally (Lopez, 1997), it was inconceivable she might be able to continue playing football in environments other than the back garden, and thus there was no need for her mother to express any concern about this 'masculine' behaviour. Going to football matches, on the other hand, was possible, even if it was deemed unusual or inappropriate. Although Lucy says that it was up to her mother to 'let' her father take her to football, she does not mention any instances where her mother tried to actually prevent her father from taking her to the football; in the patriarchal power structure, the father's word is incontrovertible. Lucy's mother can only attempt to prevent her daughter from entering this masculinised sphere by enticing her into more feminised pursuits.

Lucy describes how the shared interest of football shaped her relationship with her father, but created some conflict at home. She says:

When I used to live at home, she used to hate it. In an evening, my dad would come home from work and we'd be eating tea, and all the time it'd be just football football, football. She was just, like, 'Shut up!'

Again, Lucy's narrative shows that her mother could not stop Lucy's fandom or change her close relationship with her father, forged primarily on football. Eventually she decided to stop fighting against it and instead accept that her daughter would be a football fan and closer to her father. In fact, she indicates that her mother now shows a casual interest in football in order to have a common interest with her daughter, and explains that she watched televised matches during a big cup run:

She's just accepted it now...She knows the players' names now. She kind of takes an interest. She watched the cup games when we were on Sky, she watched them. I think she actually secretly wants to support Rovers.

Regardless, Lucy is now positioned within a family tradition of support, which has previously been all-male, but in lieu of a son, Lucy assumes the mantle. She explains: 'My dad had always been a Rovers fan, my grandad before him.' She, like the other respondents examined so far in this chapter, has taken on her football fandom because it is part of a family tradition that has been passed down to her.

5.3 Continuing the father-daughter relationship after his death

Half of my respondents indicated that their fathers had been the individual who most influenced the start of their football support, and as their narratives in this chapter so far have shown, most have continued their supporting careers alongside their fathers.

However, some respondents discussed how their support and perception of the club has been affected by the death of their father, and the next section examines this experience.

Alison, a Notts County supporter, was very articulate about the intertwining of her relationship with her late father and with her football club. She was first taken to football as an eight-year-old, and she and her father even attended club training sessions in the school holidays. Initially, everyone in Alison's family went to football, but it gradually became a pastime that she shared with her father. She explains:

Originally it was my mum, dad, sister and I. My sister stopped in her teens. She went for maybe seven or eight years. My mum had something wrong with her back, and had five major operations. She stopped going about eight, nine years ago. But my dad and I, we went all the way through. Twenty years, we were going.

Alison is clear that though her mother and sister attended for a time, football was an activity for her and her father, as they 'went all the way through'. Indeed, her sister returned to football supporting when she met the man who became her husband, but she started watching Nottingham Forest, who were her future husband's team but Notts

County's local rivals. In the next extract, Alison jokes about the horror she feels at her sister's behaviour, but it is evident that she deems this unacceptable behaviour, and does not see her sister as a genuine supporter of either team because of this:

I've got one sister who used to go. She went turncoat. She then went to Forest when she started going out with someone. She turned her back on us. It was outrageous.

This is a transgression on multiple levels: Alison's sister stopped going to Notts County (abandoning her fandom, the supporting community and her blood family); she then switched to her new boyfriend's team when she first started going out with him (allowing herself to be influenced by her male partner and attending as an adjunct to him); and she was supporting Nottingham Forest, her original team's local rivals (showing herself to be a 'turncoat' with no loyalty). From this, it is possible to conclude that it is not the fact that her sister stopped supporting Notts County that is the problem for Alison, but her later decision to support Nottingham Forest; Alison says, 'She turned her back on us,' which could be read to mean 'Notts County the club and the fans', but I suggest refers simply to Alison and her father. Alison's sister has rejected the fandom and the community her father wanted to pass on to her, and it is that which Alison considers 'outrageous'. Alison is positioning herself as separate from her sister, and aligned strongly with her father; she stresses her own loyalty to Notts County and her father's tradition by pointing to her sister's lack of loyalty as she 'went turncoat'. Yet she is also positioning herself as an 'authentic' fan, who has supported her team all her life and attended matches throughout; and again she emphasises this by setting her sister

up in opposition – her sister stopped going to Notts County in her teens, and then began going to Nottingham Forest when she met the man who became her husband, demonstrating her ‘inauthentic’, changing fandom.

Her mother stood back from the parent-child pastime due to ill health, but from Alison’s narrative, it seems that she does not perceive her mother as genuinely understanding a love of football. This becomes obvious when she speaks about a childhood incident:

I’ll always remember watching the World Cup game when Gazza had got the card, and he was going to miss the final. He was going to be out for the next game. My mum looked at me. He burst into tears, and my mum said, ‘It’s only a game.’ I was, like, ‘Please!’

Again, here, Alison is positioning herself within her family through her narrative; her alignment with her father is implicit here as she distances herself from her mother with the exasperated expression, ‘I was, like, please!’. She does not feel that her disbelief with her mother requires any further explanation; her mother’s failure to understand the importance of Paul Gascoigne’s booking specifically and football generally speaks for itself. After her female relatives demonstrated their lack of understanding about football and the importance of fandom, Alison saw football as a pursuit that belonged to her and her father, and they continued to attend matches until his death. Alison’s ambitions for the future centre only on keeping the club alive, which would also maintain what she still experiences as a genuine, living link with her father. She explains:

It [the uncertainty of the club's future] has been very upsetting. It was very, very stressful when we thought we were going out [of business]. I don't think people realise the impact it actually has on you. Every other Saturday for 25 years I've been going there, so it's a major part. I've always gone there with my dad, who's no longer with us, so that's a really strong tie. Suddenly for it not to be there...

The club has become a symbol for her father, and as such Alison's love for and tie to it cannot and must not be broken.

Carole, 55 at the time of interview, is also a Notts County fan with a great family tradition of supporting the club. She explains:

Notts fans are a special breed, they really are. I came down, my dad brought me down to my first match, the season starting the year I turned five. I've just turned 55. I go with my uncle. My dad died when I was 21. I go with my uncle who's coming on for 78, who's been going since he was 7. He never misses a match home or away. When we had a reserve team, he goes to every one. Other than he can't necessarily go on a yomp or anything, but he walks well and he's very, very fit. But he won't miss a match. He won't miss a match. He's on the committee of the supporters' club. It's just brilliant.

This extract shows that the young Carole was introduced to football by several male

family members, which was an important part of her initiation into the game, and through her narrative it becomes clear that supporting Notts County is a family tradition rather than a peculiarly male one, and is the primary way in which family ties are maintained. She says:

I don't think anyone in my family has ever supported anybody other than Notts, although my son-in-law has been known to go over the river. We call it a mixed marriage...One of my brothers, the only time I see him is at football matches. It's not that we've fallen out or anything, it's the kind of family we are. All my relatives support Notts.

Like Alison, she makes the connection between her continuing fandom and her relationship with her late father. When her fandom makes her depressed, she reminds herself of attending games with her father. As she says here:

There are times when you think, 'Can I do this any more? Why am I doing it? What are we getting out of it?' The fact is, for me, personally, when I get times like that, I remember the times I used to meet my dad from work on a Saturday dinnertime, and he took me in a caff, which was very exciting, then we'd come down to the ground for a match. What would my dad say if I suddenly stopped going?

Carole too sees Notts County the club as representing her father now. It is possible that

Alison and Carole have had such similar experiences despite being a generation apart because of the nature of the club they support. Notts County are the oldest league club in the country, and so history and tradition has always been very important to the fan base, which is something Carole acknowledges. Alison and Carole stress throughout their narratives the importance of their fandom and the way that it is intrinsically bound up with their understanding of family and their own family dynamic; football and Notts County offer both of them a way to position themselves within their families and engage with and understand their family members through initiation and sustenance of their fandom.

5.3.1 The significance of the club's location and the feeling of topophilia

The next section explores how a particular location, specifically the club's 'home ground', can hold strong significance and affective ties for fans. At the time of interview, Carole was about to become a grandmother, and was looking forward to taking her new grandchild on a tour of the football ground and the area, saying:

When the baby's born, when it's old enough, I'm going to take it down to Meadow Lane for a walk round the ground, to see its heritage. A friend of mine, her father was born on Meadow Lane. She still goes to watch Notts. I think that's something that particularly we have that not all other clubs do seem to do.

Carole's feelings about Meadow Lane and its environs link to the idea of topophilia,

‘the affective bond between people and place or setting’ (Tuan, 1974: 4), but with an additional layer of family-focused tradition.⁷ Tuan examines the reasons why human beings feel drawn and emotionally tied to different places or settings, stressing the importance of a place’s symbolic meaning; even if a place does not look objectively aesthetically pleasing, it may still hold a strong topophilic pull for a particular person or group because of what it represents, as Carole showed in the previous section with that characterisation of what her grandson’s ‘heritage’ would be (1974:15), which has more recently been applied to the sports stadium, primarily by Bale (1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1995), explaining the fan’s emotional tie to their team’s home ground. Tuan mentions the importance of ‘awareness of the past’ and how it engenders a ‘patriotic rhetoric’ (1974:99), and though it may sound melodramatic to an outsider to apply this idea to football grounds, the connection is easy to make. ‘Monuments in the landscape’ could be a club museum (such as the National Football Museum formerly sited at Preston North End), or a statue of a past player (such as Billy Wright at Wolves, and Bobby Moore at West Ham), or even a stand named after a significant figure from the club’s history (such as Fulham’s Johnny Haynes Stand, and the stands at Bristol City’s Ashton Gate named after John Atyeo and Billy Wedlock).⁸ ‘Past battles’ can be interpreted as

7 Some previous research has also highlighted the importance of family history in football support and the development of topophilic sentiments, for example the work of the Norman Chester Centre: ‘The ground ‘carries’ the memories of earlier generations of supporters. Sons (and some daughters) follow in their father’s footsteps by standing in the same place as did their parents’ (2002: 12). This somewhat clumsy syntax acknowledges that both boys and girls do go to football, but unfortunately continues to resist the idea that older generations of women are fans, referring only to children following ‘in their father’s footsteps’.

8 Dave Russell (2006) concurs that ‘[t]he game has certainly always been deeply concerned with its past, but it is perhaps worth noting that he sees these memorials as a relatively recent development, triggered by the stadium disasters of the mid-1980s. He observes that exceptional tragedies such as the 1958 Munich plane crash broke the pattern, but in general football tended to pay quiet, unostentatious respect to its dead. After Hillsborough, though, there was a public outpouring of grief and distress, with floral tributes, shrines and written messages left at grounds, establishing what Russell calls ‘an absolutely clear grammar of football grieving’.

important matches; for ‘blood of heroes’ read ‘past players’; and ‘recounting’, or passing down tales of particular events in the club’s past, has been a long tradition between generations of fans, as Carole is indicating with her wish to share her fan history with her grandchild as she introduces him or her to the supporting community to which generations of her family have belonged.

5.4 The influence of platonic friends on the female fan

However, support does not necessarily depend on family ties; as Table 5.1 showed, a quarter of my questionnaire respondents named platonic friends as prompts in their initial football attendance and the centre of their social network, and this following section examines their experience. Lynn’s interest in football as a game started with her father, who was an Arsenal fan, but she chose to actually begin her ‘authentic’ fandom, i.e. attendance and physical support, with her local team Watford, going to matches with friends rather than family. She explains:

My dad was an Arsenal fan, and I remember as a kid doing scrapbooks and watching Arsenal on telly, much to my husband’s disgust. Then I went to Watford, I was taken when I was about 13 with some friends, and just loved it. In those days, there were terraces. It was great, standing on a terrace. I just fell in love with the game, which was a strange thing to do, being a girl, because not a lot of people did. I loved the atmosphere, I loved the whole thing about it.

Her experience is interesting because she shows here that it was the act of attendance that secured her fandom rather than the influence of her father (or indeed anyone else); similar to Niki's narrative about her cousins taking her to Liverpool games which led her to become 'hooked'. She went through some of the performance rituals of fandom with Arsenal, such as collecting memorabilia to put in a scrapbook, and consuming media relating to the team;⁹ but her fandom was not consolidated because she did not attend Arsenal matches. When she went to Watford as a teenager, being there in the ground and practising fandom through active attendance and support secured her allegiance to that team over the one with whom she had gone through the motions of fandom. She reiterates how much she 'loved' the experience of attendance; being at a game encouraged her love for the sport but also this particular team, which television viewing and making scrapbooks simply could not do.

Karen chose to support Tottenham because of her uncle and cousins, but she did not go to games with them. She attended with friends as a teenager, but gradually her commitment was such that she wanted to go to games even if nobody would go with her. She remembers having to deceive her parents about going to a cup final at Wembley; they would have been happy for her to go in a group, but not by herself. She recalls:

[The Cup Final] was pretty special for me because I snuck off to buy the tickets. We were living in Willesden at the time...I walked from Willesden to Wembley to queue up at about six o'clock in the

9 Some of the typical practices of fandom will be examined in the next chapter.

morning. I can remember nearly getting squashed and being really scared, I was completely by myself. I lied to my parents that I was going with friends, and went by myself, so that was memorable for that, and just the buzz when you're standing in the crowd.

She mentions her fear and potential physical danger here, but this was not at a match; she is referring only to queuing to buy her ticket for the game. She is showing that 'orderly' behaviour, such as queuing for a purchase, can become dangerous, while her 'lie' and 'transgressive' behaviour of attending a game alone (having deceived her parents) resulted in no danger at all.¹⁰ Karen mentions no disquiet or fear when she was at the match alone; indeed, she enjoys the memory of being there 'in the crowd' by herself and the 'buzz' she felt. In this extract, she is positioning herself and demonstrating her identity as part of the fan community, showing that she was a part of the crowd and that it was exciting for her; even though she was by herself, in that she was not with her parents or her friends, she was not alone or isolated because she was with the crowd and they are her fellow supporters. Of course, it is possible that she has chosen not to remember any sense of apprehension because she wanted to prove her parents wrong; however, this excited feeling of enjoyment is the way she has remembered and presents her experience.

Similarly, as a teenager, QPR fan Tracy regularly travelled to away games without

¹⁰ The idea that women are at risk and there is safety in numbers is a common folk belief perpetuated by status-quo social structures including the media and the police, and Karen's parents have clearly adhered to this. However, young men are actually the group at highest risk of violence, and women of all ages are more likely to be attacked or even killed at home rather than on the street (Home Office, 2005).

parental supervision, but does not recall that as a time when she supported 'alone', because she was always with a group of other fans and thus was never by herself; she looks upon that time as a highlight of her supporting career. She says:

Without a shadow of a doubt, the best season I ever had was the 82-83 season. Obviously I'm going back a few years now. I was a young teenager at the time myself. QPR had been down in the old Second Division at that time for three, four, five years, something like that. I was at the stage where I'd started following them regularly, going to places, stupid places like Carlisle and Huddersfield, that kind of thing, taking myself off to those kind of places...Although I'd be on my own, I wouldn't be, because I'd be with all the other fans.

Tracy does not mention her parents wanting to attend with her or worrying at all about her lone attendance at QPR away games. She mentions safety once in her narrative, when she refers to being allowed to attend games at a local non-league club when she was ten or eleven (the 'safeness' of this environment was presumably assessed by her parents, who gave her permission to go), but after that, parental permission or interference or even simply influence or presence are absent from Tracy's narrative, and she describes the start of her support as a relatively solitary activity. When asked why and how she started going to matches in the first place, she responded:

CD: What made you first want to go to football?

Tracy: Do you know what, I can't even remember, to be honest with

you. I know that my dad took me. I'm going back to about 74, 75. I think he started taking me because I used to watch it on the TV quite a bit, when I was very young, and he started taking me, and it's just gone on from there, went on from there.

CD: Your dad wasn't a particular QPR fan?

Tracy: No. He followed them, but he wasn't a big fan as such. But he could see that I wanted to go so he took me a couple of times. Then as I got older, because we lived in Hayes in Middlesex, when I got to the stage of ten, eleven years old, I would go to Hayes, the non-league team, which was safe, and my parents didn't mind me going there.

When I got to about 12 or 13, I was allowed to make the bigger step then of going to QPR more on my own.

She answers immediately with the holding statement, 'Do you know what, I can't even remember, to be honest with you', and then as she buys herself some thinking time, goes on to elaborate slightly. Although Tracy does not classify her father as a major part of her supporting life, she does show here that he was the first one to take her to games, even if it was simply to indulge his daughter's interest; and that her fandom was secured and developed through her attendance, just as other respondents have described.

Throughout this chapter, respondents have shown that their 'authentic' fandom for their club (as opposed to the 'casual' interest of Elaine's brother, only interested in international games, or Lucy's mother, who will only watch big cup matches on television) has been secured by attendance at matches; and respondents have tended to

be influenced in their choice of team and initiated into their support by family members and close friends. The following section looks at those respondents who have been influenced in this way by a husband or boyfriend.

5.5 The influence of husbands and boyfriends

The folklore that all women first go to football to keep their partners company appears to be a fallacy according to my questionnaire data (see Table 5.1), with only 15 per cent of respondents naming their partners as an influence. One respondent whose support was triggered by her husband was Kitty, an 88-year-old Southend fan, who, as a newly-wed in the mid-1940s, may have experienced a pressure to share her husband's hobby and selection of team that the other, younger respondents simply did not later in the century. Sporty as a child, she went to watch her father play football – bringing football into her 'blood', as she describes it – and took an interest in football in her teenage years. However, her 'authentic' fandom began when she got engaged to a Southend fan, and her support of his club began on their wedding day. She says:

In 1945, March 1945, we decided to get married on August 25th. You won't believe this, Southend's first home match was the 25th. Can you imagine trying to organise a wedding at the end of the war? My son always says my husband never really forgave me for not letting him go to the first game. Really I've supported them since 1945.

Just as with Elaine and her father, Kitty implies the prioritisation of her husband's

support over her own. It has evidently been passed down in family folklore that the wedding arrangements were Kitty's responsibility (because they relate to the private, domestic sphere) and being a woman and not understanding the importance of football, she did not arrange the wedding around football fixtures, which is something her family teases her about even 60 years later, as she explains: 'My son always says my husband never really forgave me for not letting him go to the first game!'¹¹

Lesley, 40 at the time of interview, was another fan who had been a football fan as a child, attending matches with her friends and holding a season ticket for some years, but stopped going to football as a teenager due to the pressures of school studies. However, even when she finished her exams and began work, meaning she once again had her weekends free, she did not go back to football. Instead, she resumed attendance when she met the man who was to become her husband, and adopted his team. She explains:

I probably started going again when I met my husband in 1988, when I would have been 24. When I met him, he was a Walsall supporter. He hadn't always been, he'd been a West Midlands supporter. But Walsall had a run in one of the cups and played Arsenal, it was a big game, he went to that, because they were the underdogs, he sort of got quite passionately involved in that, and from then on started to follow them. When I met him, and he said he went to football, I was like,

11 This is ironic because Kitty's dedication to both Southend and her family emerged over the course of the interview; she worked with her husband to introduce commentary for the blind at Roots Hall, she took her children and grandchildren to games, and after her husband's death and despite her increasing physical incapacity she continued to attend matches regularly. Kitty died in 2011, during the course of writing up this research, and her passionate love for Southend United was recognised by the club and several media outlets in obituaries paying tribute to her.

hmm. I'd wanted to go back to football for a couple of years because I had more time. I hadn't had anybody to go with. So I went with him and it escalated from there.

Lesley came back to football supporting as an adult but felt that she had to wait for someone to take her; however, although she returned to football with a man to reintroduce her to the community, I suggest that a woman would have been an equally appropriate companion. It is going to football by herself that is the concern for Lesley. As an adult, she felt a sense of societal propriety about adult women at football that she simply was not aware of as a teenager going to games with her friends. She explains:

I didn't think about going by myself. I suppose probably because I was a woman and in those days, now, a lot of women do go to football. In those days, you would probably see younger girls going, probably like when I was about 12 or 13, there was quite a few of us. But girls in their twenties didn't really go to football on their own.

Lesley's desire to go back to football regularly was overridden by her awareness that young adult women 'did not really go to football on their own', although teenage girls did; she did not want to break this unwritten rule. Without any evidence, it would be premature to hypothesise on why 'girls in their twenties didn't really go to football on their own'; however, I do suggest that Lesley is saying here that as a lone 'girl in her twenties', without a family tradition of support or friends to attend with, she would have felt out of place and isolated in a way that a lone male in his twenties may not have

done; a lone woman in a male-dominated crowd would stand out more than a lone man in a male-dominated crowd. Thus, Lesley felt she had to wait for a chaperon; it would not have mattered if she had been accompanied by a man or a woman, she simply needed a companion in order to feel part of a fan group rather than a lone woman.

Lesley now goes to games with her husband and her teenage daughter, who has attended games since childhood, and the following section looks at my respondents' reported experience of balancing their fandom with parenthood, another life stage that can affect the fan's attachment to the club and attendance levels, and examines whether or not respondents act as the 'socialisers' into fandom for their children.

5.6 The female fan as mother

So far this chapter has shown how my respondents have begun and sustained their football fandom, shaping their 'career' as football fan. I suggest in the following section that becoming a parent has a significant impact on the female fan's career, more so than it does for a male fan. Stereotypically, once a woman becomes a mother, her domestic commitments prevent her from continuing with her normal leisure arrangements in a way that simply does not apply to men when they become fathers.¹² Davies (1992) and Gosling (2007) have both argued that not only do women have their opportunities for going to football limited when they become mothers, but if they decide to go as a family to football, the childcare will remain their responsibility rather than their male partner's.

12 Indeed, at the time of writing this also applies to work – women are entitled to several months of statutory maternity leave and pay in the UK, while men are entitled to claim only two weeks of paternity leave, as the expectation is that women will take on responsibility for the bulk of the childcare.

Several respondents spoke about combining their fandom with pregnancy and motherhood, and the following section examines their narratives.

5.6.1 The pregnant female fan's access to the football ground

As this chapter has already shown, Notts County fan Carole was awaiting the birth of her first grandchild at the time of interview, and her daughter had stopped going to football because of her pregnancy. Carole thought this was a natural and sensible decision, yet it emerged during our conversation that she had gone to football when she was pregnant with her daughter, though she had problems getting through the gates with her full-term bump:

Carole: It's not really safe for her to go now, I don't think. Not from a fear of any trouble point of view, but big crowds and pregnant women, they don't really go together, do they? She's only four months, as I say. But the baby's going, boy or girl.

CD: Did you go to football when you were expecting?

Carole: I did, actually. I went right from being four or five years old up into my mid-20s and having my daughter. There does come a point when you can't get through the turnstiles.

Carole is naturally concerned for the safety of her daughter and her grandchild in the 'big crowds' one sees at football matches; yet she freely admits that she had no similar safety concerns when she was pregnant herself. She did not see herself or her unborn

child as being in any danger in the 'big crowds' then; however, her attendance was restricted when she could physically no longer fit through the stadium turnstiles. This practical consideration was prioritised over the potential of harm, which she ignored to facilitate her continued attendance.

Watford fan Kimberley was five months pregnant at the time of interview, and this had impacted on her football attendance as she had been forced to cut down on travelling to away games due to exhaustion. (Kimberley's attendance at home games had not altered, once again demonstrating the significance respondents attach to attending home games.) She explained:

Now that I'm pregnant, I'm just too knackered to spend all day in the car trying to go to a football game. Obviously we're trying to get stuff ready for the baby as well and Saturday is the main day for that, but we're still going to all the home games.

She had not noticed any difference in her comfort or access to Vicarage Road, her club's home stadium, as yet; in fact, she did not mention that her pregnancy had altered her experience of attendance, so I asked her whether or not she was noticing any differences since becoming pregnant. She took some time to consider the question before describing her usual seat in the ground as 'spacious', and then elaborated:

As long as I don't expand too much width-ways, I think there'll be enough depth between me and the seat in front, I think we'll be OK,

and because I've got Doug on one side of me anyway, I can just kind of go, shove up a bit. There's quite a skinny guy sits on the other side of me. I'll just elbow him out the way because I'll be bigger than him.

I then prompted her further, and asked about whether she thought she would have enough space for turnstile access to the ground later on in her pregnancy. Again, this was something she had not considered, explaining:

I hadn't thought about that. It could be interesting...I'll have to play that one by ear, I think, as I go along. I might have to get the steward to let me in the gate.

I suggest that Kimberley is similar to Carole, despite being a generation apart and supporting different teams, in that she did not intend or expect or even consider the possibility that pregnancy would impact on her attendance; specifically, her attendance at home games, the key signifier of dedication and authenticity for a football fan.

Despite the physical changes she was experiencing and would still be experiencing for four further months, Kimberley's narrative shows that stopping her attendance at home games is not an option; rather, she would expect the stadium (and the stadium staff, such as the gate steward) would still accommodate her regardless of her pregnancy, because simply being pregnant does not affect her commitment to her club or her desire to demonstrate authentic fandom through attendance.

5.6.2 The female fan's reduced attendance in motherhood

However, several respondents reported in their narratives that actually having children did (or would) affect their attendance patterns. The following section looks at how becoming a mother affected some of my respondents, beginning with those who had found or expected to find their attendance significantly reduced, either because they had responsibility for childcare or because they found their income proportionately reduced while on maternity leave and could no longer fund their fandom.

Brentford fan Tabatha cut down on her attendance since getting married and having a baby, for financial and domestic reasons. Her husband is also a Brentford fan and as he cannot attend regularly because of work commitments, she feels it would be unfair for her to do so. She explains:

Now we've got a 16-month-old, and my husband works shifts, he can't get to every home match. I don't think it's fair, when I'm at work all week, to dump Rowan on a babysitter. We only go probably every other home match, if that, so it's not worth getting a season ticket, to be honest.

Tabatha's management and perception of her fandom is largely dependent on her husband, as she is keen to maintain that she is not a bigger football fan than he is. She will not go to a game without him because she does not think that is fair, and she does not want to leave her son with a babysitter on one of her two days off every week

because she does not think that is fair either. What she seems to be suggesting is that it is not acceptable behaviour for her to go to a football match without her husband, nor is it acceptable behaviour to abdicate childcare responsibilities on a Saturday after being at work all week in order to engage in her fandom, which is time-intensive, requiring travel as well as attendance. It is not clear whether this is a peculiarly gendered balance of power, but it certainly suggests that: as a wife and a mother, Tabatha has duties to her husband and her son, and if they mean that she cannot go to football, then she will not go. It is reminiscent of Hornby's anecdotal analysis of his own relationship with his then-partner, also an Arsenal fan, who scares him when she suggests that when they have children, they could get one season ticket and take it in turns to go to football, with the other staying at home to look after the child (1992: 172).

Watford fan Kimberley also mentions the possibility that financial restrictions might stop her from attending football after her baby is born, as her husband is also a season-ticket holder at the same ground. Unlike Tabatha, who talks about having to leave her child with a babysitter, Kimberley is willing to consider taking her baby to games with her, and is reassured that this would be a safe thing to do because she already knows people who take their infant children into grounds. One thing that does concern her is how she might be able to feed her baby at football. She says:

Some friends of ours who had a baby in April-May time have started taking their baby daughter. She's got these really cute little headphones, they're really gorgeous, to protect her ears from the noise. Apparently she's been pretty good, she kind of sleeps through

most of it. What Michelle does about feeding her, I don't know, I don't sit near enough to find out. Maybe she, I don't know, perhaps she expresses the milk and takes a bottle into the ground with her...I don't know how it's going to work, I think we'll just have to see. It may be, we could have a fantastically happy, contented, easy-going baby who'd be quite happy to go to the football and wear headphones and sleep. Or we could have a complete, bawly, unhappy, miserable baby that does nothing but scream, in which case maybe we'll stay home.

Having thought her way through the issues via her narrative, Kimberley concludes that she and her husband will wait until the baby arrives before deciding definitively how their football fandom will continue as parents. She acknowledges that taking a baby to football might not be judged favourably by some fellow fans, saying:

[W]e did have on the internet mailing list, there was a big debate about breastfeeding children at football a few years ago. Somebody – single, and without children of her own – just randomly started this thread about would you breastfeed your baby at the football, and of course all the blokes were like, why would you take a baby to the football, it's not safe, why would you do that, it's football. Some of them are barely capable of acknowledging that a woman can a) go, b) enjoy and c) actually understand the rules. The idea of having a baby there was just anathema.

A female fan who is embedded in her club's supporting culture may not be perceived as 'female' but simply as 'fan'; it is possible that the other fans' issue here is not so much with having a baby at the ground (who after all is unlikely to impinge too much on their support or view of the game) but with the obvious reminder that the female fan is both female and sexual, bringing an unwelcome disruptive dynamic into the community.

Chris, a Gillingham fan, stopped going to football when she married and became a mother. She had begun going to football as a teenager, accompanying her father and then with a group of peers, but found that as a grown-up she had other responsibilities. When she decided she wanted to return to supporting, she did not consider going alone, but again went with her father. She says:

I went with my father, then I started going on my own with my friends. Then I stopped for years because I got married and had a baby. I stopped for years and years. I came back to it about three seasons ago. My father was thinking of getting a season ticket, and I said, 'Why don't I join you?', so we got tickets together.

Chris says here not that she was busy and had other priorities and thus had to stop regular attendance, but that she stopped *because* she got married and had a baby (my emphasis). Continuing her support, even at a lower level of commitment, was not an option for her as wife and mother. Her return to support was again triggered by her father's suggestion; it is possible that she would not have got a season ticket again after her break of 'years and years' had her father not prompted her decision and attended

with her.

5.6.3 The female fan's renewal and/or maintenance of support in motherhood

However, some respondents did not find themselves forced to take any kind of significant break from their fandom when they became mothers. Leyton Orient fan Anna cut down on her highly dedicated and committed attendance slightly when she first had her son, explaining, 'I was always, until I had Ben, I was sort of more or less a home and away girl.' Now he is slightly older, she takes him to games with her. She explains:

He's been going since he was born, really. It started, he was born on the seventh of August, he's two on Sunday, so the first few games of the season we didn't go. Then I went without Ben. Then towards mid-October, it was still quite mild and I couldn't get a babysitter. So it was either miss the match or try Ben with me. We decided to try him, and it was all right, but I was breastfeeding at the time so it was a little bit awkward. So we left it again until February, and he's been coming ever since. So since he was about six months old, he's been more or less an ever-present.

Again, breastfeeding is an issue, though Anna does not make it explicit whether it was 'awkward' because she had to feed him in the ground, or whether she personally felt physically uncomfortable as she could not feed on demand or express any milk while

she was in her seat. However, even though her attendance has not decreased, her general knowledge of what is happening in the game has been affected by motherhood, admitting:

I have to say there is some England friendlies when there's a player or two I don't know. That's because I have so many other things to do, especially since Ben's come along.

Anna is bashful about confessing this lack of knowledge, prefacing it with the embarrassed signal 'I have to say', and suffixing it with her reasons for her ignorance. However, this is not evidence of a waning in her fandom of Orient, just a glitch in her wider knowledge.

So it is clear that motherhood does not necessarily mean that a fan has to stop going to football, or even cut down on her attendance. Polly, 41 at the time of interview, had got married and had her first child in the previous two years. She is a highly committed fan of football and had recently entered the 92 Club (a club for people who have visited all the league football grounds in the country).¹³ However, she admitted that she had considered cutting down on her attendance, not ascribing this to her new parental responsibilities, explaining it instead by the quality of the football she had been watching, saying:

13 The 92 Club is a genuine club with entry criteria, not a self-labelling process. As Polly explained to me: 'For the 92 Club, which is England and Wales, you just have to produce a set of stats to say which games you've been to. The attendance, the score, the date, everything else like that. If you're sad enough to do all that for 92 grounds, you're not going to make it up for the hell of it, are you?'

For the first time in my life, I keep thinking, 'There are other things I could be doing on a Saturday afternoon rather than coming here.' I've never felt like that before in my whole life. That's not like me. It's just...I don't know if it's because Maud's come along and my priorities have changed, but I really, honestly think it's because the football's been so bad!

Polly does not want these thoughts to be attributed to her new parental responsibilities. Football has always been her top priority and how she understands her identity, having spent her entire life as a fan before becoming a mother relatively late. Motherhood is a new part of her life and identity and she has not yet quite scoped out how she understands it, so she ascribes these thoughts, which she vehemently reassures the listener are 'not like [her]', to solely football-related reasons; football is no less of a priority now than it has ever been for Polly, but she would like to see Coventry play better.

Those respondents who had continued to attend football, however regularly, after becoming mothers also discussed the issues they faced about whether or not to take their children along with them, regardless of whether or not the child wanted to or was indeed old enough to express any kind of opinion; and the following section looks at how respondents reported they had dealt with (or expected to deal with) the opportunity to initiate their child(ren) into football fandom.

5.6.4 Children of female fans and their socialisation into support

As this chapter has shown, although 50 per cent of questionnaire respondents named their father as a primary influence on their fandom, 8 per cent named their mother.

Football fandom can clearly be a matrilineal tradition, not one simply passed down from the father; and some respondents discussed how they expected or did not expect their children to take on their fandom.

Lynn, a Watford fan, refused to encourage her daughters into football fandom because their father supported a different team, and they had made an agreement not to influence the girls' choice of fandom. Both Lynn and her husband treated their fandoms equally seriously, and thus neither took precedence, meaning that neither got to pass on their fandom tradition to their children. Lynn had not stopped going to home games since the birth of her daughters, but had cut down on her away game attendance. Her husband, a Tottenham fan, had also experienced this, and they divided childcare between them to allow the other to attend their team's home games. When Watford and Tottenham had home games at the same time, they would organise external childcare, demonstrating that they attribute equal importance to their respective fandoms and neither expects the other to cut down on attendance to care for the children. She explains:

I go to the away games that are important, if they're big ones.

Obviously with kids and having a husband who supports a different team it's a bit of a nightmare because we clash nearly every game this season, so we juggle around having people coming to look after the

girls. Yes, I used to do all the away games up until about six, seven years ago.

Unlike Tabatha, she does not express any sense of guilt about getting babysitters for her children so that she can go to football (although admittedly Lynn's daughters were slightly older than Tabatha's toddler son). As this chapter has shown, several mothers take their children to football with them simply for convenience, rather than in an effort to get them to support the team, but Lynn and her husband do not do this, as they fear it would force their daughters to choose between their two teams.¹⁴

Polly has taken her toddler daughter to games, but does not expect her to become a Coventry fan too, as she says she thinks it would be unfair to force her into supporting a relatively unsuccessful side. Polly's support for Coventry is extremely dedicated, but forcing the same fandom on her child would, she says, be unreasonable and excessive. She thinks her child needs to make her own decision of fandom, and is sanguine at the possibility that her daughter may choose to follow a team other than Coventry, saying:

You always want what is best for your children. You always want better than you had yourself. If she chooses to support somebody like Arsenal, who could blame her?

However, she does feel that 'choos[ing] to support somebody like Arsenal' would not be

14 They take this agreement seriously, with Lynn explaining: 'We're not allowed to buy shirts or any memorabilia, which is why there are two Watford things up there that were given to me. But no. If you ask Ellie [the eldest daughter, six at the time of interview] who she supports, she supports Watford, Tottenham and England. She won't say either. No, there's no power struggle.'

'genuine' or 'authentic' fandom, admitting, 'She should support this lot because it is her local team, which is the reason I supported them.' Polly invokes a moral imperative to support one's closest team by geography; any other decision would not be 'right', even though it might be logical, which she points out through the use of the rhetorical question 'Who could blame her?' Clearly, though 'blame' might be too strong a word, Polly would feel that her daughter's decision to support Arsenal would be disappointing. She demonstrates the conflict between her long-term identity as 'Coventry fan' and her somewhat newer identity as 'mother'; although she says she wants the 'best' for her daughter, what would be 'right' for her daughter would be a lifetime of Coventry support, and initiation into the family tradition.

QPR fan Tracy has always taken her daughters to games with her (and as such as acted as the person who has 'socialised' them into fandom), initially through necessity, but more recently her eldest child has become a dedicated supporter in her own right. She explains:

They've just kind of always gone. The eldest one, she really has always been into it more. Like I say, the younger one, there's not a specific desire there, she's not interested in wearing the kit or anything.

The younger daughter has no interest in displaying her fandom in any way other than attendance; indeed, she has not made the decision to take on this fandom, but has been forced into it because her mother had no childcare options. She has not chosen to

become a fan, and her behaviour bears this out. I suggest also that this lack of interest in the object of the mother's fandom may be partially what Polly is worried about when she reiterates that she would not force her daughter to become a Coventry fan.

5.6.5 Issues of childcare and children's attendance

Even if fans' children do not become fans themselves, this still raises a potential problem centring on childcare while parents attend matches; and some respondents raised the question of whether or not it was the club's responsibility to provide facilities for fans' children, from childcare to parent-and-baby rooms, allowing parents to attend the game in moderate comfort. When Tracy's daughters were younger, QPR did provide a crèche facility, which she took advantage of. This experience of a crèche run by the football club is a highly unusual one (indeed, she mentions that the crèche facility is no longer on offer), although Nash (1999) demonstrates that some fans' groups continue to lobby for such provision.¹⁵ Generally, if parents take small children to football, there are few baby-changing facilities, as many mothers noted. Polly has visited every league ground in England and most of the grounds in Scotland, so she is well aware of the different facilities available at different stadia, and she thinks there is only one ground where baby-changing facilities are on offer – Cowdenbeath, who were in the third division of the Scottish League at the time of interview.

Anna, who earlier mentioned feeling 'awkward' when she took her still-nursing infant

¹⁵ Armstrong (1998: 125) notes that professional clubs have promoted themselves to women by offering female football teams to join, or offering matchday childcare facilities, but while the opportunities to play the game have certainly increased in recent years, respondents are very clear that there are now few facilities for childcare or even baby changing at grounds.

to football, thinks clubs should consider providing facilities for mothers and babies, as a generation of women who have always felt entitled to go to football begin to start their families but continue to go to grounds. She says:

There's nothing like baby changing or anything like that [at Leyton Orient]. I emailed the club about starting a crèche up in the new stand that's just gone up, and I didn't get a reply. Obviously they're busy. There's quite a lot of us of my age, a bit older, that have just started to have kids... Then other people that are slightly younger than us, you start to see people's bumps around. Because there are more women at football, there's definitely a need for a crèche eventually.

Several mothers mentioned 'safety issues' cited by football clubs with regard to infants at football; Anna talked about the problem she had trying to take a buggy to various stadia, including Grimsby's Blundell Park. It is significant that Anna feels part of a larger group of young women just starting their families, who have always gone to football and do not intend that their new babies should prevent their attendance. The 'traditional', passive, 'feminine' behaviour in the incident Anna relates would have been to have accepted Grimsby Town's initial ruling that she could not take her buggy into the ground with her; instead, she chose to complain and pursue the grievance, eventually coercing them to change their minds. She thinks her argument was perfectly sensible and logical, while the initial decision was 'a joke'. It is possible that knowing other women with children who would face the same ruling and benefit from a change – that is, hers was not an isolated case and that clubs should start to make provision for

women and families - gave Anna an additional reason to take on this particular campaign.

5.7 The female fan's opposition to the family's involvement in football

However, not all respondents were supportive of the idea that provision should be made at grounds for children, nor that allowances should be made for children. Sarah had no children with her partner, and criticised an Ipswich player who missed a crucial game in order to attend the birth of his child as well as England's then cricket captain for a similar incident that occurred at the same time. She says:

[Kelvin] Davis, the only thing was, I was quite disappointed, we were playing Leeds, it was the match, we had a real chance of automatic promotion, he didn't go up to Elland Road, his wife had a baby, and I just thought, the team's more important. If you're doing that job, you've got to go with the team. We lost that game. We could have won it...Michael Vaughan made that dash off the field for his baby. That's all right. You've got years and decades with this person. They won't know that you weren't there.

It is, of course, possible that her view may have been different if she had children of her own, or if there had been a medical problem with these births, but as it is her narrative shows that not all women – and certainly not all female football fans – are in favour of sportsmen taking on the 'new man' duty of attending the birth of their child, nor of

children being part of the football crowd.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, in many cases, football fandom frequently begins in childhood, when children are influenced strongly by family, and the child's father is frequently the key influence in influencing a child's football fandom and choice of team. Half of my respondents named their father as their key influence, although as Kelly (2009) points out, the father's influence tends to be key in initiating male children to football fandom as well.

I have suggested that football fandom's appeal frequently lies in the community, camaraderie and friendship engendered between fans of the same club, creating a feeling of family not necessarily linked through blood ties. Some respondents have been happy to travel to games alone without parental supervision since they were teenagers, knowing that they would be with other fans of their club and thus would need no additional company or protection; and some respondents talked of the friendships created and deepened through their shared fandom.

I have also shown that females' fan careers (and some of their practices of fandom) alter over their lives, with motherhood and marriage both impinging primarily on regularity of attendance for some respondents. Sometimes those who have taken a break from supporting have needed to be reintroduced and reinitiated into the game by existing football fans, male or female. Though some women go to games with their husbands or

partners, their choice of team is rarely influenced by this relationship. The next generation of support is being encouraged, as female fans bring their children to games, sometimes relatively soon after birth, although not all women are supportive of this development.

The next chapter moves on to examine some of the practices of fandom described by my respondents, exploring how they understand their identity as football fan and how they perceive 'appropriate', 'authentic' fan behaviour. This includes preparations for match attendance, the purchase and display of club-themed merchandise, and media consumption, with a specific focus on Sky Sports' popular *Soccer AM* show. I suggest that female fans face a dilemma in negotiating their identities as women and as fans, because they (are aware they can) face sexism throughout their football fandom – in the ground, in the media, and within the organisation of football as an institution.

Chapter 6. Some patterns of female fans' supporting performances and behaviour

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter showed how my respondents' supporting careers were instigated and have developed, focusing on how their families, friends and broader social networks have been influences on this process. This chapter moves on to consider some everyday practices of fandom narrated by my respondents. It shows the preparation involved in attending games and travelling to away grounds, from basic requirements such as ticket purchases and arranging childcare to extensive commitments such as arranging for physical displays of fandom such as the releasing of balloons and the throwing of confetti.

As Stone (2007:170ff) argues, football fandom impacts on everyday life, not just the times when one is actively supporting one's team, and thus this chapter also examines the everyday manifestations of fandom, such as their purchase, consumption and display of different types of merchandise, and looks in detail at their consumption of football media, with particular reference to the Sky Sports magazine show *Soccer AM*. The chapter concludes by assessing the ways in which female fans create and navigate identities for themselves as 'authentic' fans within a sport and a fandom that is institutionally sexist. It looks more specifically at their reactions to former Luton Town manager Mike Newell's argument that women should not be involved in professional

football, and also explores the ways in which clubs and the football authorities continue their institutional sexism.

6.2 Preparation for the match

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to describe any preparations they made prior to attending a match, with some options as well as space for them to add any other organisational considerations. This section looks at some of those preparations, examining the primary needs: travel arrangements, ticketing, and childcare.

6.2.1 Travel

Unsurprisingly, many more respondents needed to arrange group travel, either on a coach or a train, for away games than home games (38 per cent as opposed to 7 per cent); and car-sharing was almost twice as popular for away games as for home games (27 per cent as opposed to 16 per cent).

Table 6.1 – How respondents prepare for going to matches

Type of preparation made	Location of match	
	Home matches	Away matches
Make car-share arrangements	16%	27%
Book tickets on train or coach	7%	38%
I have to make childcare arrangements	13%	12%
I have to make other domestic arrangements (excluding childcare)	5%	7%
I regularly need to take time off work	5%	7%
Other (specified)	19%	17%

One significant aspect of respondents' experience of group travel explored in the interviews was whether they identified themselves as part of a community, or whether they regarded the group travel simply as useful and a pragmatic way to get to a ground. Theresa was one respondent who relied on group travel for away games, using either a coach or public transport, and enjoyed the community element of group travel, as this

extract shows:

CD: Do you drive or get the train?

Theresa: Mixture of train and, or one of the guys, Joe, puts on what he calls the Sunshine Coaches. So he goes out, arranges a coach, and we pay £20 each. That's a coach there and a coach back, which is great.

It's started a big camaraderie, these proper coaches.

This narrative shows that Theresa not only welcomes the relatively cheap price for travel to and from a match, but she also enjoys the friendship, or 'camaraderie', engendered by the supporting community on the coach, which she describes as 'proper'. Similarly, Alison, a Doncaster fan, had always attended matches in a group, and continued to travel to away games on a coach.

We still go with some of the lads, some have disappeared, some more have come. There's me and two other girls who go, and about five or six lads who I go with regularly. We go on the mainline coach, the supporters' coach, all over the country following them.

Although she also travels to games on a coach, she is not necessarily interested in the larger camaraderie that Theresa enjoys with all the passengers. Alison identifies here that her supporting network is herself, two other females, and five or six men; the coach travel is simply a means to an end, i.e. getting them to the ground, and she does not engage in the larger sense of community with fellow passengers that Theresa enjoys.

6.2.2 Tickets

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked about their ticket-purchasing habits.

Table 6.2 – Respondents buying a season ticket for previous season

Whether bought	Percentage
Yes	73%
No	27%
Total	100%

Most questionnaire respondents did not have to buy individual tickets to attend home games, as 73 per cent were season ticket holders, meaning that they paid in advance for entry to all home games during a season.

The purchase of tickets and the significance of the season ticket was a theme explored further in the interviews. Tabatha, married to another Brentford fan, was one respondent without a season ticket, and she took responsibility in her household for organising tickets and keeping up to date with any news from the club. She says:

I suppose I'm the one who actually sorts out, he will ask me who we're playing. I'm not more fanatical than him, but I'm the one who looks on the website and say, did you know we got rid of – My

husband doesn't. He just goes along. He'll pick it up when he's there - it's the same with other things. When we've been to England matches, it's always been me that gets the tickets. I'll phone him, and say shall we get tickets for the England match, do you want to go? Oh yeah! But he would never think of doing that himself.

However, she was loath to conclude that this is simply because she is female; she suggested it might instead be peculiar to her relationship with her husband and the dynamics within that. Significantly, though, Tabatha also mentioned that she only goes to games with her husband; if he is unable to go, she will not go either. She explains that since they have had a child, this is a working agreement they have come to:

I work part-time, four days a week, so then on a Saturday to dump him with someone, it's a bit unfair. My husband works shifts, so what we decided was the games he can go to, when he's not working, we'll go. So we probably get to about half of the home games now. Once he's bigger, I'll take him on my own.

Tabatha is here demonstrating a fascinating delineation of the identity she has negotiated for herself as a football fan. Since becoming a mother, she has cut down on her working hours (from full-time to part-time), meaning her baby is with a childminder during the week; thus she does not feel it is 'fair' to find a babysitter to take care of her child at the weekend so that she can go to football. She balances this with her role as a wife to a fellow Brentford fan, agreeing that they will go to games together as a couple

when he is not working. Yet she also signals that she will be happy to take her son to games alone when he is older. I suggest that Tabatha, true to her assertion that she is ‘not more fanatical’ than her husband, has negotiated for herself a fan identity that she sees as appropriate – it is not obsessive or excessive; nor is it solitary; but it is reasonable, within appropriate limits, and dependent on community, in this case her family.

6.2.3 Childcare

The previous chapter outlined the experience of those interview respondents who took their children to games, but Tabatha was one of several questionnaire respondents who indicated that they required childcare to enable them to attend matches, with around equal numbers needing it for home and away games (see Table 6.1).

Lynn, a Watford fan, explained in interview the difficulties she faced in finding childcare for her two daughters. Unlike Tabatha, her problem did not lie in feeling it was unfair or inappropriate to leave her children at the weekend, simply in managing her fandom and her husband’s Tottenham fandom and the availability of babysitters:

Obviously with kids and having a husband who supports a different team it’s a bit of a nightmare because we clash nearly every game this season, so we juggle around having people coming to look after the girls.

Lynn and her husband had previously divided childcare between them to allow the other to attend their team's home games, but the fixture list during the season in which I interviewed her meant that Watford and Tottenham often had home games at the same time. Thus they had decided to organise external childcare, demonstrating that they attribute equal importance to their respective fandoms: neither expected the other to cut down on attendance to care for the children. Lynn's identity as fan was just as important as her husband's; and her identity as mother did not require her to give up her fandom or compromise it in any way.

6.2.4 Additional preparation

The additional preparation for matches mentioned by questionnaire respondents - other than travel, tickets and childcare - were not options I provided on the questionnaire; they were practices that the questionnaire respondents highlighted themselves.

Table 6.3 – Other necessary preparations for match attendance

Home matches	Away matches
Pack blanket and cushion (1%)	Pack blanket and cushion (1%)
Eat on the way to evening matches (1%)	Packed lunch for long journey (1%)
Wrap up warm (2%)	Wrap up warm (2%)
	Book accommodation (3%)
	Arrange meeting places (3%)
	Making confetti out of Yellow Pages (1%)

It became apparent that these additional actions fell into two broad categories – the self-focused and the group-focused, and I explored some of these practices with respondents during the interviews. The self-focused reasons are about ensuring personal comfort at the ground (by taking food, drink, blankets and cushions; by dressing in warm clothing; by getting an appropriate parking space).

The oldest respondent, Kitty, aged 88, mentioned several self-focused reasons, saying on her questionnaire that she needed blankets and cushions for her seat at Southend’s home ground, Roots Hall. During our interview, although she lived by herself and was largely independent (she could still drive, for example), she explained that she had also liaised with the club to ensure her access to and comfort at the ground:

I have to have help to get up and down the steps. I’m allowed now to

walk round, coming out to save me going up the stairs, they allow me to walk round the ground to get out. That's good, isn't it? They're a lovely club.

Kitty's love for her club was enhanced and reinforced by their accommodation of her needs, but she was also conscious that she did not want to take advantage of what she saw as their kindness. She explained this further later, when she discussed the problems of queuing for tickets at the ground:

After I'd been to the doctor's to get my husband, I used to go in there, and they were ever so good. They used to say, "Go on, you go home, we'll drop it in." ...One year when I couldn't get down to get the tickets, I did ring her up, and she [the club secretary] was very good. Normally, I just go, I can't queue now. I usually pick a time. Normally if there's anything good on you've got great long queues. They're very good like that. I don't take advantage of it. If I can get there, I will. It's the only time I've ever done it. Now, often I'll ring up and when I go in I'll sit and wait in the queue.

I suggest that Kitty is aware of the democratic ideal of football fandom, where everyone in the community is equal, with equal rights to access tickets, and she does not want her age or relative infirmity to entitle her to too much special treatment. Thus she avoids 'taking advantage' of the option of ringing the club and asking them to reserve her tickets or deliver them to her; instead, she 'does the work', as Hornby would put it, and

queues with everybody else.

The group-focused reasons are about encouraging the social aspect of supporting (by arranging meeting places; by picking up fellow fans; even by providing confetti for fans to throw in order to welcome players to the pitch). In her interview, Watford fan Sarah talked extensively about the preparation she did prior to important matches, organising displays of fandom such as the release of balloons in the club colours prior to a game to signal intensity of support. She says:

I do special bits and pieces, like when we did our balloon campaign when we went to Liverpool in the Carling Cup last season. We'd done it when we got to the quarter-final of the FA Cup. We had this big thing. We played Burnley. We just had loads and loads of balloons, we got as much money as we could from people, bought balloons. We did it fairly formally through *Blind, Stupid and Desperate* [the fanzine]. So we said we'd do it again, see how we got on....We took 6,000 because that was our allocation, or however many thousand it was, so we took the exact allocation of balloons. Fazana actually made a yellow over-the-shoulder bag. We all stood outside, we got quite a few people to help us, we gave out yellow balloons to people to take inside with them. We cut up Yellow Pages to take in. In fact, it was very, very funny. You get there, Anfield is so intimidating, I'd never been there before, you're there and you're like oh my God, it's so big. You're looking at all of these fans, and they're all singing You'll Never Walk

Alone. OK, this is big, scary, a bit full-on. Then the players came out, and we let loose the balloons. They just all stopped. I don't think they'd ever seen such carnage in yellow on the pitch.

Sarah's narrative makes it clear that this kind of preparation involves a great deal of time and expense. The balloons in this story need to be purchased, so she had to coordinate donations; she then had to buy them and take them to the game (and of course she also had to pay for her travel and her match ticket); she tore up multiple copies of the Yellow Pages to create yellow confetti; she inflated and distributed the balloons; and finally the balloons were released and confetti was thrown prior to the match as the teams entered the pitch. All the work that she put in before the match was simply for the effect created at this moment, and it is evident that she considers that it was worth it; it stopped the players in their tracks, and created a spectacle that had not been seen before, which she describes vividly as 'carnage in yellow'.

6.2.5 At the match

The fan can make a deliberate choice to sit or stand with certain other fans at all matches, creating a social network and a sense of community and 'family' linked through love for the club, as shown in the previous chapter. Sarah feels a strong sense of community within the loose, less formal ties of the fans who she counts as friends (Gosling [2007] refers to football's power to develop new friendship networks), remaining close to those who sit near her at the home stadium, enjoying the

camaraderie, and taking pride in the diversity of the supporters.¹ She enthuses:

It's a really weird mix. We like to, we joke about it sometimes. We say that we haven't had anyone come out as gay or lesbian, which we're really disappointed in, because otherwise where I sit we have a mixture of ages, some people bring their kids with them, we have a guy who's disabled and uses a wheelchair... We have lots of girls as well and quite a small ethnic origin or ethnic background or whatever... We go to the football and we have a chat, have a laugh, eat lots of cake and chocolate, half-time match chocolate is an integral part of the football experience.

This prioritisation of what happens 'off the pitch' is common, according to Brown (2007: 629) in his assessment of the development of FC United of Manchester, where he argues that each strand of the club, from fans to players to officials, contributes to the unique match experience; here Sarah is making it clear that it is being a fan and the sense of community she feels when with her supporting family of choice that she enjoys. She refers to the collective 'we' throughout this section, and highlights some of the practices she enjoys within this social network, all of which are distanced from watching the football itself – chatting, laughing, and eating confectionery.

Throughout her narrative, Doncaster fan Alison also highlights the importance of a close

1 Penny and Redhead (2009: 758) note the importance and strength of ties that can be developed between people who sit near each other at a football ground over a length of time, even if they are not related and even if they do not socialise with each other outside the football stadium.

relationship among the fanbase and her enjoyment of the off-the-pitch elements of the day. Her club had had serious off-field problems over the previous years, which were eventually reflected on the pitch. Alison continued to attend games regularly, musing:

We probably wouldn't be as well-run, such a close-knit group of fans, if it wasn't for everything that happened. We bounced back stronger from it, definitely. We really had to go down to the lowest of lows, nearly getting relegated from the Conference. The first game of the season in the Conference, we were just so glad to have a team. I remember us trailing down to Dover away. We spent the whole season we got relegated, I mean, it just became about, you just turned up to the games, went for a few beers, had a natter with your mates. It didn't become about football, it became about a day out. The football was the down bit in a good day out, really. It had to be, because otherwise you'd go insane, you couldn't keep watching them lose like that.

Here Alison shows that the actual football itself is not necessarily the primary reason for going to the match; rather, when her team was losing every week, her regular attendance was simply for 'the day out' and the social aspect. Like Sarah, she uses the collective 'we' to refer to the club and fanbase combined; but she also uses it to refer to her section of the fanbase who travel to away games together. She also employs the second person 'you' to talk about her actual experience of her match attendance at that time; I suggest this is to retain the sense that she is talking about a collective, but also to

include me as her interlocuter in her generalisations. She is indicating that any football fan would have behaved in exactly the same ways as she and her group did; this was not a Doncaster-specific form of support, but simply the form of support any football fan would have adopted.

6.2.6 Travel to away matches

Like Alison, many respondents spoke with great affection of their away trips. Anna, a Leyton Orient fan, could not remember the first match she attended, but she could vividly recall her first away trip. She explained:

I know what my first long away trip was. It was Hartlepool on a Tuesday night, and I went on the supporters' coach, and I didn't know anyone. It was just fortunate that these guys, Steve and Rob, who were the same age as me started talking to me, and another guy, Jason. We talked all the way up there. It was quite amusing, actually. I would have been about 17, I think. We got to Hartlepool. The woman that used to run the coaches was called Phyl, Phyllis, known as Phyl. She had an invite from Hartlepool working men's club to go and have a drink in there. Then we got there and they realised that it was a Phyllis. They sat the women in a little side room, which was really bizarre. There were no female toilets because no women were allowed in there. It was just nuts. It was just me and this Phyl and all the lads were allowed in the bar. They were bringing us drinks out. It was very

funny, it was very good. That would have been about 88, I suppose,
no, 89.

Here Anna narrates a story that took place early in her supporting career, when she was a teenager (and nearly 20 years previously at the time of interview). She is explaining the sex segregation that she and another female fan encountered in Hartlepool; it is an example of institutionalised sexism in football. 'Phyl', the person who organised supporters' coaches and was an important part of the fanbase, was welcome to join the Hartlepool fans for a drink in the working men's club; 'Phyllis', a woman, was not, and had to sit separately from the men, with no access to drink or any other facilities. As I showed in the previous chapter, Anna is very aware of gendered issues in football because of her motherhood and the problems she has encountered in taking her child to matches. However, I suggest here that the time distance allows her to move from describing this incident as 'bizarre' and 'nuts' to 'funny' and 'good'. She has detached from the episode and can look back on it with a sense of ironic amusement; however, I suggest also that had it happened more recently she would have been significantly angrier and more offended by it.

Two respondents, Niki and Steph, were Liverpool fans, and both narrated their behaviour and feelings during their 2005 trip to Istanbul to see their side in the Champions League final, where Liverpool were losing 3-0 at half-time, scored three goals in the second half, and proceeded to win 3-2 on penalties. Significantly, both could recall very few details about the match itself; the trip, the win and the emotion of the event was foremost in both their narratives. Since Niki began travelling to games

regularly, she goes most frequently to home matches, although as she lives in the south-east of England, this journey to Liverpool is almost like an away trip anyway. She attends few away games as a matter of course, but when Liverpool progressed to the final of the European Champions' League, to be played in Istanbul, there was no question that she would attend. She narrates her preparation for this game at great length, talks about her arrival in Istanbul in detail, and describes her journey from her hotel to the stadium, yet her narrative about the match itself is sparse, and even then contains a great deal of her own feeling and experience. She says simply:

Then within a minute, we're a goal down. I just remember we got to half-time and we were 3-0 down. Normally, I am a real optimist. I thought this is a fantastic game we're playing in here. All I could think was we're going to get absolutely annihilated. We're going to have the biggest defeat in history. That's all I could think about. I have to say, for the second time ever at football, I just cried at half-time, because I'd spent so much money and it was just going to be a complete embarrassment. That's all I could think of. I never thought we'd get back into it. Of course the second half is just history.

Steph,² another Liverpool fan, talked about her experience of the Champions League final in similar terms, saying:

I don't remember a huge amount about the first half other than it being quite quick and there having been three goals and there could have been about 12...It sounds so sad because you've spent so much money on it and you were there, but I can't remember it as well as people who watched it on TV.

Steph admits that her lack of memory about the events on the pitch might seem like a waste of money when she could have watched it on TV and remembered more of it. However, what is actually important to her is that she was there, and she can say that she was there. This badge of commitment – travelling so far and paying so much money – and this presence at this important victory are what matters. If they were unimportant, she would have indeed been justified in opting to watch on TV instead. However, match attendance and the financial investment is a part of Steph's fan identity; she does not seem to care that she cannot remember the match, as for her that is not an important part of proving her authenticity – her travel is enough. It became evident that Steph saw this specific game and matchday experience as encapsulating the entire experience of being a Liverpool fan because of its emotional trajectory. As she puts it:

2 It should be noted here that Steph was the only respondent during the interview stage with whom I had a prior existing friendship.

Let's make a stupid day of it, let's make it hard for ourselves. We can have a huge great big comeback. An element of the martyr about Liverpool fans. They can't just win it. It has to be something stupid, like concede three in one half.

This is a significant piece of narrative in terms of Steph's construction of her own fan identity; although she is talking about events on the pitch and the players being three goals down and making it 'hard for ourselves', she embeds a reference to 'Liverpool fans' and their near-enjoyment of the 'huge great big comeback'. In this extract, Steph is describing the match is almost as if the fans are actually playing and were the ones who conceded the goals and then fought back to win; or possibly again building on Hornby's idea of a football team being the chosen representatives of the fans in the stands; or in a kind of synecdoche, even, the eleven men on the pitch stand for the whole club and fanbase. She uses the collective terms 'ourselves' and 'we', but immediately after mentioning the massed entity of 'Liverpool fans' she uses 'they' instead. This could be an unintentional lapse and a recognition that as a female and a non-local she will never truly be part of the community; but I suggest that it is more likely that in this situation, where Steph is being consciously ironic and mocking of the 'martyr-like' mindset of the Liverpool fan, she uses 'they' deliberately to distance herself from the rest of the fans. She is showing to me that she is not a martyr; she does not have this ridiculous attitude to winning or losing (she would much prefer an outright win for her team rather than such ups and downs); she would much prefer a simple fandom uncomplicated with all the pomp and circumstance that surrounds making 'a stupid day of it'. Though she is indeed unquestioningly and unquestionably part of this

fan community, she realises that some of its unique characteristics could easily be seen as peculiarities and unreasonable. Thus her choice of vocabulary reflects a deliberate decision to perform her fandom (to me, in this interview, for these purposes) in a way that shows her to be perhaps ‘more reasonable’ or ‘more practical’ or even ‘more of a fan’ (because she would prefer boring 1-0 wins rather than dramatic comebacks like other Liverpool fans).

Niki was prompted further to see if she could recall more specific details about the game itself.

CD: Do you remember much of the actual game?

Niki: It’s funny, if you’d said to me the day after, do I remember anything, I’d have probably said no. But, and this is very unlike me, I bought all of the DVDs on it...I feel like I’ve honestly watched, the key moments I’ve seen probably a hundred times over. On the way back from football the other day we had the DVD on, showing the whole match, the whole match through. It now feels like I know it from back to front. I’m not sure I would have done if I hadn’t watched all the DVDs.

Niki admits that she very rarely buys or watches DVDs of matches, but she has made an exception for this game. Remembering – or creating memories about – this match is significant to her because of the scale of the victory (winning Europe’s most important club trophy), and so she has bought and watched many different recordings of the match

to enable her to do this. Thus she can combine her attendance with a good (albeit constructed) recall of the game; perhaps to feel like her financial outlay was justified (like Steph) or to prove her dedication and commitment should anyone ever question it. Niki is reinforcing her own identity as authentic fan through this consumption of DVDs: she not only made the long journey to Istanbul, but she now also knows the match ‘from back to front’; nobody can doubt her knowledge.

6.3 Behaviour and appearance within the ground: performativity of gender and the gender continuum

I have suggested throughout the thesis that fandom is a performance, highlighting some of the ways in which respondents have constructed their identities as fans, and the following section looks more specifically at the way(s) in which female fans manage their identities as ‘female’ and present themselves in the football stadium. Fans are constantly making choices about how to (re)present themselves in terms of their fan identity; fan identity is not fixed; it is fluid, and the fan has agency over which form it takes (cf. Hills, 2002). For football fans, this negotiation of identity can include choices of which games to attend, which merchandise to buy at the ground (an element which I shall examine shortly), which supporters’ organisations they join (which I address in the next chapter), where they sit or stand at the ground (which I have looked at earlier in this chapter), and even what they wear; and according to this research, for female fans in particular, this choice of clothing is key.

Those respondents who mentioned the clothing choices of female fans (both themselves and others) were explicitly opposed to such 'feminine' clothing in the football ground. For example, Brentford fan Tabatha talks about the 'different' styles of clothing visible on female fans. She says:

The women that go to the Premiership, they always seem different as well. When you go to Brentford, most of the women that go are dressed in, dressed like I am now. When I've been to Premiership matches, they're all dressed up, they've got their little – I wouldn't take a handbag with me to football. You just wouldn't. Where would you put it? You'd hold it on your lap like this. You always know when you go to football, when you see a woman who hasn't been before because they'll be in their stilettos, they have their handbag on their lap, and their husband or boyfriend is explaining the offside rule.

She draws a very clear distinction between the women who go to the Premiership matches and the women who go to watch League teams like Brentford, and I suggest this also reflects the changing commercialisation of the game in recent decades. Tabatha is inferring here that attending a Premiership match can simply be a demonstration of a fashionable or financially well-off identity, because of top level football's status as an expensive, glamorous, more middle-class leisure pursuit. Women who go to the Premiership matches are 'dressed up'; they take impractical accessories with them; they wear stiletto heels on their shoes, they are not appropriately dressed and their traditional femininity stands out; they are distinct from those women at the ground who are simply

'fans', and do not accentuate their femininity. As if their lack of knowledge about football was not obvious enough through their failure to adhere to appropriate dress codes, Tabatha reiterates that such women need their husbands or boyfriends to explain the laws of the game to them, and in doing so she asserts her own identity as a knowledgeable football fan, different and separate from these Premiership women. Women who go to football and display their femininity and femaleness in such an overt way are making their lack of knowledge visible and explicit; they do not understand the unwritten codes of conduct within the ground, which set out what appropriate clothing and behaviour are. This is reminiscent of Sisjord (2009) and her categorisation of snowboarding 'babes', who detract from 'authentic' female participation through their inappropriate behaviours; for Tabatha, women who go to watch League teams are the opposite to these Premiership 'babes'. They are not dressed up; they do not take handbags; they do not wear stiletto heels; and crucially they do not need men to look after them or explain to them what is going on. Their status as a fan, understanding of the game and the appropriate behaviours is made visible and explicit by their appearance – they are not overtly and obviously 'feminine'.

Tabatha is engaging with traditional ideas about the hegemonic masculine form of football fandom, assessing what constitutes 'authentic' and 'appropriate' fan behaviour (Jones, 2008). Tabatha presents herself, of course, as one of these women who understand the game and appropriate behaviour in the ground; she even uses herself as a benchmark for other female fans – 'most of the women that go are dressed in, dressed like I am now.' Her division between females at Premiership matches and females at League matches is significant. Tabatha implies that a different sort of audience is

attracted to Premiership games, which are perceived as a glamorous, social occasion for people (women) who are not interested in football, whereas League games are simply intended for people (including women) who support their teams and are interested in the game. Tabatha is attempting to assess fans' 'authenticity' based on the team they follow; 'real' fans are those who support League clubs, and Premiership fans are their opposites.

Alison's ideas about appropriate female clothing at football matches are linked with her ideas about appropriate conduct at football matches. She says:

I have been to games where there have been girls with short tops and you get all that awful cat-calling. I find it really, really offensive and it really puts me off. I hate it. It puts me off at Meadow Lane. We had these stupid cheerleaders, I absolutely, I hated it, and there was cat-calling. It's just not appropriate, it's just not appropriate, it's on the rise. If women are going to football, it's for what's going on, not to sit up there as eye candy for the blokes. 'He's got nice legs, look at the muscles.' That just defeats the whole object.

Alison describes here different styles of inappropriate conduct at football, all of which contain an element of gender performance in the context of the stadium: women wearing skimpy clothing; men cat-calling at women; women performing as cheerleaders in a form of pre-match and half-time entertainment; and women admiring the male form and commenting on it. These factors combine to create a threat to what Alison sees as

the authenticity of her fandom. In fact, Alison's narrative here becomes rather confused; she begins by criticising women who display their overt femininity and femaleness at the football ground (female fans in skimpy clothing, and cheerleaders), and explains that this presentation of the sexualised female body in the football ground makes her feel uncomfortable; her own physical difference from men, who comprise the majority of the fanbase, is emphasised, and she is made to feel Other. She stresses that most women go to football to watch 'what's going on', and women at football should not be presented as 'eye candy for the blokes'. Yet then she follows this statement with a quote imitating a woman who goes to football to look at footballers – 'He's got nice legs, look at the muscles.' She does not add any context to this; for example, she does not consider that some women may go to football to enjoy male 'eye candy' in the form of footballers. Such a statement requires no further explanation – such behaviour is not 'authentic' fandom – and she simply adds the conclusion, 'That just defeats the whole object.' Presumably 'the whole object' refers to football simply as a sport, and women who have 'done the work' to prove themselves genuine football fans. For Alison, the minority of women who go to football purely to look at the men devalue the fandom of the majority.

6.4 Fandom's position in everyday life

As well as match attendance and conduct within the football ground, outward, tangible manifestations of one's allegiance is also a key element to one's support (cf. Crabbe,

2008).³ As was demonstrated by Nick Hornby's scathing assessment about female fandom, when he concludes that '[t]hey always seem to have lost their records, or to have relied on somebody else in the house – a boyfriend, a brother, a flatmate, usually a male – to have provided the physical details of their interests' (1992: 103), there is a stereotype that women are less likely to be obsessive fans with incredible statistical recall and a house full of years' worth of memorabilia, reiterated by critics including Richard Haynes (1995: 117)⁴ and Frank Mort (1996: 83).

6.4.1 The purchase of merchandise

However, this research's respondents are self-evidently not positioned on the periphery of their club's supporting culture. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked which items of memorabilia they had purchased in the preceding season. Respondents reported that they had bought a very wide variety of items from their club's shop, both for them and for others.

3 Crabbe (2008) argues for a 'postmodern community' – fans display their fandom with a 'sense of temporality', demonstrating their 'consumerist desire for community'; he is discussing one particular tournament but this also applies to a matchday: 'supporters wish to be identified with one another through their attire and demeanour, as fans' (2008: 435).

4 This is a rather more thoughtful analysis than his earlier statement: 'Women are virtually excluded from such a football world as the many comics, magazines, games and stickers are targeted at a male consumer' (1993: 66). Certainly bringing in the idea of connotation rather than the rather more unambiguous targeting makes more sense with regard to football merchandise; such items are typically only understood as 'for males' because they are football-themed, not for any other reason.

Table 6.4 – Types of merchandise purchased from club last season

Type of purchase	Percentage of respondents purchasing
Matchday programmes	82%
Replica kits for me	35%
Replica kits for someone else	36%
Other items of clothing for me	43%
Other items of clothing for someone else	41%
Team poster for me	11%
Team poster for someone else	9%
Signed photo of player for me	8%
Signed photo of player for someone else	8%
A book for me	26%
A book for someone else	18%

Buying branded merchandise assists in reiterating identity. If one buys a piece of branded clothing for oneself (as nearly half of respondents did – 38 per cent of them buying a replica kit, and 43 per cent of them buying another item of clothing), that signals one’s allegiance to others, and that allegiance is apparent even when one is outside the football ground, demonstrating the strength of one’s group membership. If one buys a piece of branded clothing for someone else (as, again, nearly half of respondents did – 36 per cent of them buying a replica kit, and 41 per cent of them

buying another item of clothing), that is a signal of one's interpretation of someone else's fandom; you are demonstrating to them either how you perceive their identity as a fan (their allegiance, the strength of that allegiance, someone who likes to demonstrate their allegiance to others) or how you would like them to perform their identity; for example, you would like them to be a fan of this club – this is often the case when buying items for children, who may not yet have decided which team they are going to support, but if they are wearing items that boast of their allegiance, that is a step towards creating a fan of that club. Alison spoke of her small niece's football fandom, which began as an interest in watching England international matches, and how she had influenced and encouraged it by her purchases on her behalf, saying:

She said, 'I want to go and watch football.' I said, 'Oh, come to Notts County,' thinking it would be a one-off. She went three or four times – wanted a hat, wanted a scarf, she wanted everything. I said, 'Well, next season you'll have to pay, so if you want I'll get a season ticket for your birthday in July.' She said yes... She's been watching England games, and then decided, 'I want to go and watch football myself, I want to go and watch England play.'

Alison has encouraged and facilitated her niece's fandom through buying her a Notts County season ticket and other memorabilia; although she is at pains to point out that her niece decided on her fandom, it certainly seems as if it would not have developed without her aunt's influence, and I suggest that she unsurprisingly does not like the idea of being perceived as forcing her niece to support a particular team and shaping her

(performance of) identity so obviously, so makes her niece's autonomy clear.

Other items which remain in the home may not be so easily accessible and interpretable by other people (such as mirrors, clocks, bed linen) but should they be seen, they demonstrate that club allegiance is not just felt on a Saturday at the football ground, but it shapes one's everyday life and one's identity on a day-to-day basis. Some items such as car pennants and air fresheners indicate allegiance while the individual is travelling, regardless of where the journey is to. Certain items, such as mugs and posters, are often taken into the workplace as well, meaning that the individual's club allegiance is explicitly indicated there too, allowing colleagues to interpret that identity but also meaning that the individual can create and perform their identity taking into account their fandom all day every day. This is examined in the next section with a discussion of how various respondents view particular items of merchandise, and how they consume them, if at all.

6.4.2 The matchday programme

For many people, part of the ritual of going to a football match includes buying a matchday programme (cf. Henderson, 2010). These small glossy brochures tend to include a message from the team manager and the team captain, details about the opposition squad and information about forthcoming fixtures, and typically cost around £3 to £5 depending on the division the teams play in.

Leyton Orient fan Anna talks about her lack of interest in the matchday programme, saying:

I used to buy a programme, and now you can absolutely guarantee what they'll say in it. Because you've got access to the website, you don't need that for the news, so unless you know the mascot or you're particularly interested in the away team, I just don't buy them now. I've got boxes – we're about to move house – we've got boxes of programmes up there, but I haven't bought a programme pretty much since Theresa's been going.

She gives two reasons here for her failure to purchase the programme. First, she finds the content boring: the internet gives her access to all the news during the week so she does not have to wait until Saturdays to find out what has happened at the club. Second, and here she almost qualifies her original statement, her friend Theresa buys a programme every week, so she can read that instead; even though she does not find it interesting enough to buy her own, she will always read her friend's copy. This could be because she perceives the matchday programme as a significant part of the football-going ritual; Anna is at pains to point out that in the past she has bought the programme every week and equally significantly kept them, leading to boxes of programmes stored in her house as a bulky physical demonstration of the length and depth of her commitment to Leyton Orient.

Tottenham fan Elaine also talks about her consumption choices, comparing her purchases to those of her father, just as she compares her practice of fandom with his.

She says:

Dad's got every programme since God knows what year, '61 or something ridiculous, it's quite obsessive. Where I've now moved out of home, my old bedroom now has all the programmes on my shelving, it's really sad. The yearly, annual handbook and things like that, but not obsessively. I'm not, I like my shirts and things, but I don't necessarily buy every single one. They're expensive and I can't be bothered. If we've won something I've got some sort of rosette. It's tradition, especially when it was at Wembley.

Elaine is a prime example of the female fan as described by Hornby – she relies on her father to provide the concrete evidence of her fandom. She is careful to be affectionately dismissive of this 'obsessive' demonstration of fandom – where she says 'ridiculous', she means it; where she deems it 'sad' that her old room has now been turned into a museum of Tottenham memorabilia, she means it. She talks about the physical manifestations of her own fandom but again is very meticulous about stating that this is not obsessive, yet she too almost contradicts herself by partly attributing her lack of obsession to it being expensive, before adding that 'I can't be bothered'. It is significant that the two pieces of merchandise she mentions as a regular purchase are items that can be worn as a physical symbol of her support, marking her out to others as a Tottenham fan. The pieces of merchandise that must be stored elsewhere as an archive of her

support are not of interest. As such, there is an element of performativity to her purchasing choices; she buys the items that help her construct her identity as a football fan, indicating to others how she wishes to be perceived (Crabbe, 2008; Hills, 2002). She invests in the replica shirt (though she points out that she does not buy every single kit that is on the market): an item of clothing that can be worn in places other than the football ground, demonstrating to others in non-football environments her interest in football and her club allegiance.

The one piece of memorabilia that she does always keep is a rosette after a trophy win, but according to Elaine this is 'tradition'. She emphasises this by bringing the old Wembley stadium into the narrative, adding, '[E]specially when it was at Wembley.' This word choice is nonsense because there are no degrees of keeping rosettes – either you keep them or you do not, regardless of where the final was. Nevertheless, Elaine feels that invoking the historic name of Wembley adds weight and logic to this manifestation of her fandom; simply wanting to keep the rosettes for the sake of keeping them would not be enough justification and would veer dangerously close to the 'obsession' of her father.

6.4.3 Media consumption

Many respondents mentioned in their questionnaire that they watched football programmes on television; since the launch of the five Sky Sports channels as well as additional digital channels and on-demand viewing, it is relatively easy to access broadcasts of or about football. 90 per cent of my questionnaire respondents said they

watched television highlights of matches they had attended; 86 per cent watched television highlights of matches they had not attended; and 83 per cent regularly watched live matches on television. When it came to consumption of football news, 81 per cent of respondents used their club's official website, 53 per cent used the BBC Sport website, 50 per cent used their club's unofficial website, and 50 per cent regularly read a daily tabloid newspaper's sports section. This shows the importance of football media to the female football fans in my research, and their heavy consumption of it.

One programme that was mentioned frequently was Sky Sports's *Soccer AM*, which has one male and one female presenter, and a group of fans are invited on as guests every week. However, an additional female appears on a weekly basis – the Soccerette. This woman enters the set wearing a short skirt, high heels and the replica shirt of her favourite team. After a brief interview with the male presenter, the Soccerette strips off her replica shirt to reveal a tight-fitting white top with *Soccer AM*'s logo emblazoned across the chest; then, flanked by the male presenter and one of the guest fans, she walks up an impromptu catwalk. *Soccer AM* is the televisual equivalent of the 'New Lad' magazines such as *Loaded*, which Imelda Whelehan describes as 'sport, pop, alcohol, soft drugs, heterosex and soft porn. Furthermore, this is the domain of the male and the male alone, where women function only as objects' (2000: 58).

Many respondents were regular viewers of *Soccer AM*, despite its obvious targeting of a male audience. As Whelehan asks, 'Just what is it that makes these knowingly offensive stereotypes so appealing to so many men, and, for that matter, a significant number of women?' (2000: 58). Watford fan Lynn was a typical example, who rated the show very

highly. She says:

Lynn: They do the football fans, and a girl coming out in a football shirt. You get some right wallopers on there. I'd love to get on, sit there and do it when they do the fans' thing.

CD: Something like the girl modelling the shirt, do you not find it irritating?

Lynn: Oh, yeah, I do. I'm like for goodness sake. Yeah, it is, but they're just taking the piss. A lot of things they're just taking the mickey.

Lynn here makes the distinction between 'football fans' and the female model wearing a football shirt. The model may be wearing a replica shirt – a traditional display of fandom and club allegiance – but this in itself does not make her a fan. It is significant that Lynn acknowledges her annoyance with the entire Soccerette concept, but she still loves the programme, and does not feel that it is cause for complaint because it is 'taking the piss' – it is based on humour. Lynn does not want to be perceived as humourless, not being able to take a joke, or to make herself appear obviously different from other football fans, who by their conspicuous participation in the show do not object to its structure.

Tottenham fan Elaine does not see the Soccerette as a 'joke', more as a sop to male desire, but she does not find this objectionable or exploitative. She says:

The Soccerettes, they wouldn't do it if they didn't want to, would they? It's like all the teams that have got their own cheerleading squad or whatever. It's never going to be the same as America. If girls want to do it, and they're quite happy – I do look at it and go, God, they're crap. They're there for the man's point of view, they're doing what they're there to do. It's all a bit stupid, really.

This is a common reaction to other arenas of female objectification by the male gaze, such as Page 3, lap-dancing and even pornography; Elaine takes the stance that the decision to make oneself an object is a free one, and thus it cannot be criticised.⁵ She is suggesting that she is taking a moral high ground; men gaze on the Soccerettes, which is 'a bit stupid', while she (and presumably other females) pass judgement on the Soccerette's modelling performance, which is invariably 'crap'. She reassures herself with the fact that English football is 'never going to be the same as America', where the gender division at sporting events is evident through the squads of cheerleaders present for each team. For Elaine and female fans like her, the presentation of the objectified Soccerette is not the 'abusive hypermasculinity' described by Jones (2008), such as overt sexist or homophobic comments, which would require the female fan to assert her femininity in direct opposition in order to distance herself from it; it is simply a masculine practice of fandom that the female fan can either adopt or ignore. For the female fan watching this programme, it is almost as if she is 'neutral'; it is a position she constructs in order to avoid the 'ideological dilemma' (cf. McLean, 2012) of

5 For a discussion of sexual objectification, see Walter (2010) and Levy (2005).

explicitly acknowledging the sexism on show and to consume the programme. The show does not intend to exclude her from watching, nor does it intend to offend her, but no special allowances are made for the female viewer. She can view – or gaze – along with her male counterpart and assume the active male role if she wishes; her femaleness is not considered or taken into account.

Rotherham fan Liz was more reflective about *Soccer AM*, expressing some reservations about the way it is structured. She talked about the show's female presenter Helen Chamberlain, and voiced disappointment that she had posed for nude photo shoots in the past. She says:

She went through a phase where she kept taking her clothes off in a lot of places, and I thought Helen, you don't need to do that, you're a woman, you like your football, you know what you're talking about, you don't have to be totty as well. I do enjoy *Soccer AM* but I do sometimes wish they'd have a few more women guests who are on there not because they're going out with a footballer.

Liz's feelings about Chamberlain are clearly conflicted; she likes the programme, and likes there being a female presenter who is knowledgeable about football, but she does not like Chamberlain having posed for nude pictures. She implies with the words 'You don't have to be totty as well' that Chamberlain perceived an imperative in action – the need for a female football presenter to be perceived as a sexual being – when in fact no such imperative existed or exists. This decision that Chamberlain has made – and Liz

makes it clear that she sees it as Chamberlain's decision, rather than any outside factor influencing her choice – is the wrong one. The only reason that Liz can see for Chamberlain doing this is so that she can be seen as sexual and sexually attractive to male viewers, and not just as a football presenter; other reasons that may have come into play, for instance financial ones, are not considered by Liz. Similar to the issues other respondents raised with cheerleaders, Liz objects to Chamberlain being presented as a sexual object (or, alternatively, making the decision to objectify herself). She does not make explicit that her objection is partially grounded in the fact that a high-profile female fan being objectified in this way makes it more difficult for other female fans to be taken seriously and not objectified. If it is true that the 'true' female fan is 'ungendered' by male football fans, it seems that someone like Chamberlain seeking to be objectified demonstrates her desire to reclaim her femaleness and femininity and to be perceived as a sexual being. Liz dislikes Chamberlain's objectification because it seems that it overrides and takes precedence to her fandom; she seems to be arguing that female fans must make a choice – either they can be a knowledgeable football fan or she can be sexually objectified decoration ('totty'). To be 'totty' is to be demeaned in the eyes of other female fans, and to devalue one's fandom; but to be 'totty' is also to increase your status and appeal to males, particularly male fans, and this is illustrated by Liz's comment that female guests are invited on to *Soccer AM* if they are the partner of a footballer. For females, footballing knowledge does not raise your cultural capital or improve your chances of a high-profile interview on this television programme; only attractiveness and a relationship with a male connected to football can do this. It appears that in this particular context a female cannot hold the cultural capital of football

knowledge; but she can share in the cultural capital that belongs to a male. She can also hold capital in her own right, but this is based purely on her aesthetic attractiveness.

Liz attributes some of this attitude to the media's perception and discussion of female football fans. She discusses one example of 'unhelpful' newspaper coverage:

Liz: I don't think it helps when you get, it was the *Sun* the other week, they had like a Girls' Guide of how to get into football. This is what the offside rule is. Say you like Thierry Henry. It does a lot of the time treat women as though they only go because they fancy the players. That's as much of a generalisation as well.

CD: Yeah. "Girls like going because they like looking at the players."

Liz: I get this as well, you know, when they have the cheerleaders at half-time at some grounds and all the men are chanting get your whatevers out. If you ever said, they'd say, 'Well, you've been looking at their legs all match.'

This extract indicates that Liz believes that the media's predilection for treating women as a homogenous group with no knowledge about football and emphasising the opportunities to gaze at attractive young sportsmen has the knock-on effect of making it acceptable for male fans to behave in sexist ways, for example by directing chants at women, or by gazing at young female cheerleaders. The media's creation of the stereotypical female who goes to football to look at men gives men at football the excuse to objectify women at football; men can argue that there is equality and equality

of opportunity in objectification at football (heterosexual women can gaze at the players; heterosexual men can gaze at cheerleaders as well as the women in the crowd) and thus women cannot complain that the atmosphere at football is 'sexist'. Liz believes that should a woman mention to a man at football that his objectification of a female in the ground is offensive, because of the stereotype that has been created and perpetuated, he would immediately say, 'You've been looking at their [the players'] legs all match,' which would be impossible to disprove.

This construction of a female stereotype and the resulting sexism and clear heterosexist gender binaries that persist in the football media is, unsurprisingly, also reflected in football itself, which has historically been and continues to be institutionally sexist, undermining the authenticity of female knowledge. Liz adds an anecdote later about women being 'allowed' to go to football; she mentions first the entirely true story that for a long time, no females were permitted to enter the boardroom at some grounds, regardless of whether or not they were directors. She then discusses her consumption of other media, in this extract Teletext letters pages, where writers put forward the idea that women should be 'banned' from football. She says:

Liz: I remember Delia Smith once saying something about that when she first started going with Norwich, there were still places where women weren't allowed in the boardroom.

CD: Karren Brady has said that a few times. How much of that prejudice do you think is still inherent in football?

Liz: Ooh. I saw a, I always read the letters pages on Teletext and

those, just for a good laugh. There was someone this time last week saying women should be banned from football because they always squawk, and they always get upset at the wrong things. You think - This is something that's always worried me about the move to go back to the standing areas. You listen to the people who are wanting to be in a standing area. A lot of them, it's this attitude, oh, football was so much better when a lot of women didn't go and families didn't go, and I think there still is some of that there.

Liz recognises that though Delia Smith's experience was real, media discussion now of women being completely banned from football is simply designed to provoke. Yet she also says she 'laughs' at the letters that stereotype women as 'squawking' and 'upset', because she knows that she does not 'squawk' or get 'upset'; in this situation, she is similar to Elaine who expressed her disdain for models and cheerleaders on football programmes and at football matches by calling it 'a bit daft'. Liz and Elaine view these different circumstances through a similar prism; the thoughts of these male fans are irrelevant to them, because the women upon whom these men are gazing or about whom they are talking are totally different to them. The objectification and the criticism alike are rejected; and neither has an impact on them, their fandom or the way they view others. Should a female fan object to the presentation of women on sports programmes in the media, as Liz does, she is running the risk not only of distancing herself from the rest of the fanbase, but she is also veering towards identifying herself as someone who is promoting 'political correctness'.

There is an argument (cf. Whelehan, 2000) that would say that the woman who happily accepts the gender stereotypes portrayed in the media and participates in them (in this case simply by viewing), as Lynn and Elaine do, also accepts that ‘women are primarily prized and displayed for their looks’, and while women are depicted only in relation to men (which occurs on the heavily gendered *Soccer AM*) then this undermines individual women’s argument that they dress and act simply for themselves rather than male approval. Elaine is an example of a woman who maintains that females who display themselves in a sexualised manner within a sporting context are simply operating under the freedom of choice; but one argument would be that these women are colluding with a kyriarchical structure and reinforcing gender stereotypes, which is the point that Liz was making with regard to Helen Chamberlain.

6.5 Institutionalised sexism and the dilemma of negotiating identity

So this experience of watching *Soccer AM* demonstrates the dilemma that female football fans have: they have to negotiate their identities, as fans and as women, in an institutionally sexist sport and an institutionally sexist fandom. This has also been shown with other narratives: such as Tabatha’s clear ideas of ‘appropriate fandom’ taking into account her husband’s shared fandom of Brentford and Anna’s experience of actual segregation from other fans because of her femaleness.

Occasionally the institutionalised sexism of football is made explicit, which was the case with a widely-reported incident in 2006, when then-Luton Town manager Mike Newell complained about assistant referee Amy Rayner, saying:

She shouldn't be here. I know that sounds sexist but I am sexist. This is not park football, so what are women doing here?...It is tokenism - for the politically-correct idiots. We have a problem in this country with political correctness and bringing women into the game is not the way to improve refereeing and officialdom. It is absolutely beyond belief. When do we reach a stage when all officials are women because then we are in trouble? It is bad enough with the incapable referees and linesmen we have but if you start bringing in women, you have big problems. (BBC News, 2006)

When the institutionalised sexism of football is made explicit in this way, similar to the pattern illustrated with the viewing of *Soccer AM*, female fans have to position themselves as separate or distanced from the situation in some way, in order to remain connected with their fandom and the identity they have already scoped out for themselves. In the following section, I look at some respondents' narratives regarding Mike Newell's comments, and examine how they dealt with these expressions of overt sexism.

6.5.1 The Mike Newell controversy: respondents' reactions

A typical response was that given by Charlton fan Liz, who was unmoved by Newell's comments, though she deplored them. She explains:

It didn't make me outraged. I think it's a kind of a resignation, maybe, is the best word, you just think, he's an idiot, it's just typical of how people, I can't imagine how you'd feel as a female official in the game. As a female fan, you're disregarded, you know, by fellow fans, not at the club, but if I'm in the pub with my boyfriend and his friends, or people in the office and maybe they don't know you, and you express an opinion about football, it's just disregarded immediately. I guess for female officials it must be a thousand times worse. I think it's good that it got that publicity and that he got into trouble over it, I think that's really positive. I just think it's life, maybe.

For Liz, such attitudes as Newell's elicit only a sense of 'resignation'. She feels that other fans have similar attitudes to her as Newell does to Rayner, but there is no way round this particular problem that she can see. The schism between males and females in football cannot be crossed; this division and all its knock-on effects are just 'life'. Yet it is significant that on further reflection, Liz's placid attitude to this incident altered slightly when she put herself in the position of a Luton fan. When she imagined her feelings should she have been a Luton fan hearing her team's manager make these comments, she imagined a great deal of anger, saying:

If it was my manager, if it was something that happened at my club, I probably would have been a lot more, had a lot more passionate feeling about it. It is disgraceful... The fact is that he thinks it's

acceptable to be a bigot.

Liz acknowledges that though she is calm about the matter as it stands, she would feel passionately about this issue if she had been a Luton fan. It is almost as if one should expect men in general to hold prejudiced sexist attitudes (because that is simply 'life' and one needs to be 'resigned' to it), but one expects better from someone else with an allegiance to one's club. As this thesis has shown, one automatically holds a higher opinion of those attached to one's own club, and has lower expectations of rivals and/or opponents. The manager of one's club making these comments is tantamount to a personal betrayal, because football allegiances are so strongly held and almost tribal in the bonds they create (or are believed to create) between individual fans, players and staff.

Only 14-year-old Kerry, a Walsall fan, was entirely amazed by what Newell had said. She was unaware of Newell's comments, and was shocked and visibly distressed to hear them, explaining:

I find that unfair. At the moment there's been a big increase in females playing football. There's a professional England's women's team. There are loads of other local teams. I think he'll hurt people. Some people are trying to aim at that level and do that sort of thing. So really I don't find that fair.

The arguments she chooses to express her feelings are significant; she thinks that a

high-profile person like this making high-profile comments like this will affect the progress of women's football, but does not mention anything about female fandom of men's football. This is undoubtedly in part because Kerry's major interest in watching men's football is to pick up skills and abilities she can use when she is playing in her own team, but it may also be because she does not see it as an issue affecting fans – only the women who are breaking new ground, such as officiating at men's games and becoming professional players themselves. Indeed, Newell's comments did not mention female fans at men's games, so it is possible that Kerry has not made any connection between his voiced objections and how it affects her fandom. Then again, nor did he mention female footballers; the only explicit criticism was of female officials in male professional football. I suggest that Kerry does not think it is at all possible for any comments to shake her fandom nor that of any other woman; but she knows from personal experience that some men still object to women playing football and that neither professional female footballers nor female officials are secure in their roles yet. She thinks it is possible that a critical word or two from someone like Newell will be given huge publicity and can affect public opinion and block the chosen career paths of women in football – or 'hurt people', as she puts it, which she finds 'unfair'.

Her mother, Lesley, who was part of the conversation, was another who disagreed with Newell's words, but like Liz she was resigned to such attitudes. She was less negative and downbeat than Liz, though, using positive examples of women's capabilities to illustrate the mendacity of Newell's comments, saying:

No, I don't agree with it. We've had a couple of female lineswomen.

The one we had at our last game, she did a better job than a lot of the chaps I've seen. I can quote you the offside rule as well as any man. Why shouldn't we? It's not a male-dominated sport, as much as they might want it to be.

Lesley has seen women officials do their job well; and she herself is well aware of the laws of the game. Her final sentence is intriguing; football is certainly still a male-dominated sport in the UK. What she means is that football is not exclusively for men, and women have just as much right to play the game, to work in the game, and to watch the game. Yet the tag 'as much as they might want it to be' is an acknowledgement that 'they' – presumably a proportion of men within the game, such as Newell – will continue to complain about women in football, criticise their contributions, and generally uphold the existing levels of institutionalised sexism in the game. Despite this, female fans, officials, players and administrators love the game and their roles within it just as much as any man – and 'why shouldn't we?'

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the ways in which respondents practise their fandom. I have shown that attending matches requires some preparation, including organising travel, tickets, childcare and overt displays and performances of fandom as well as smaller, more personal preparations such as packing a cushion and blanket. My respondents outlined the impact of their fandom on their everyday life, through purchase of merchandise, displays of merchandise, and consumption of media.

It is clear from my respondents' narratives that often they find themselves in a conflicted position, participating in a fandom which is institutionally sexist and thus (hetero) sexually objectifies women (who are not generally deemed as part of the fandom); this chapter has shown the way they negotiate their identities as women and as fans through their reactions to the football media and the way they present themselves at the football ground.

The next chapter examines my respondents' involvement in a fan community wider than the one(s) centring solely on their club. The supporters' trust movement is ostensibly club-focused but also has a strong emphasis on the national and international collaboration of fans, and in the following chapter I look at how and why respondents have engaged with the movement, and how they have understood and conceptualised their experiences of involvement in supporters' trusts as gendered.

Chapter 7. Female fans' experience of the significance of the supporters' trust movement

7.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have examined the supporting careers of my respondents, and the influences on their creation and sustenance of fandom, and their everyday practices of fandom. They have looked at the institutionalised sexism within football, manifesting itself in poor facilities for women at grounds, objectification of women in the football media, and comments from high profile figures suggesting that women should not be involved in professional football. These factors combine to imply that football as a whole is not a particularly welcoming place for females; and that female fans continue to face problems and obstacles in their practices of fandom.

Thus this chapter looks in detail at the development of the co-operative supporters' trust movement, which offers a new, democratic and equitable way for supporters to become involved in the life of their club, and become part of a new, wider fan community, broader than simple club allegiance. It offers the opportunity for supporters to help the game progress in a way that is advantageous to all fans, not just females. This movement has grown in the UK over the past decade, and here I examine and discuss the concept's history and its government backing. The involvement of respondents in the supporters' movements is examined in this chapter, profiling the ways in which

respondents have immersed or distanced themselves from the supporters' trust concept and community, and comparing their experiences as they have described them in interview.

7.2 Finance, politics and football: the development of the supporters' trust movement

In the UK, football clubs are generally owned by one rich individual or a consortium (Ward, 2010), putting their own money in initially before running it as a business intended to make profit.¹ The idea of supporter involvement at board level is becoming more widespread, though sports clubs governed by their membership are a popular concept in Europe (cf. Hamil et al., 2009).²

As new stadia are constructed, clubs move away from their 'traditional' home, and the financial situations of clubs alter due to accumulation of debt after the building process, fans have become increasingly interested and involved in encouraging clubs to stay rooted in and listen to their community. The following section looks at the ways in which fans' groups and community groups have organised themselves and the events which have triggered collective action.

As I have already discussed, the Taylor Report following the Hillsborough disaster recommended a shift towards all-seater stadia, which has since been implemented for

1 For example, at the time of writing, Chelsea are owned by Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich.

2 In Spain, Barcelona are owned by their membership; in Germany, several clubs such as FC Pauli are supporter-owned (cf. Williams, 1999: 27ff).

the higher divisions.³ Compulsory ground improvements cost money, and though the Football Trust (now the Football Foundation) has contributed towards construction projects across the country,⁴ the balance is settled by the clubs. If a club does not have a wealthy benefactor, such as Blackburn Rovers' Jack Walker who bankrolled the improvements to Ewood Park from the start of the 1990s, then money is generally raised by increasing ticket prices, which may have a detrimental impact on attendances. Alternatively, clubs may borrow money and accumulate debt, hence the need to auction off stadium naming rights; for example, Arsenal's new stadium, opened in 2006, was funded by a complex system of loans and bonds totalling over £357 million, and necessitated the sale of naming rights to the airline Emirates to ensure income for the club. Even so, according to the 2007 accounts, the club's net debt stood at £262.1 million (Arsenal Holdings, 2007).

7.2.1 Insolvency and financial problems in football

Since 1992, there have been over 40 cases of insolvency proceedings involving league clubs, and John Reid attributes the continued survival of all the English Football League clubs to 'the growing intervention of fans in the shape of supporters' trusts and other action groups' (2005:2). As the financial gap between the Premiership and the top of the Championship and the lower leagues extends further due to increased TV and prize

3 There are still some terraces at a lower level: for instance, at the time of writing, part of the Brook Road End at Brentford's Griffin Park is a terrace, and the entire Ealing Road End is terracing; Exeter City also has home and away terracing.

4 Though all-seater stadia only became compulsory post-Hillsborough, the Football Trust began to fund ground improvements from 1975 onwards, after the introduction of the Safety at Sports Grounds Act following the 1971 Ibrox stadium disaster, in which 66 people were crushed to death.

monies⁵ as well as gate receipts, it has frequently been the supporters who have rescued their club from administration, receivership or liquidation; for example, when Luton Town's new owner threatened to liquidate the club, it was a group of supporters who took on a debenture from a previous creditor, enabling them to call in the debt and seize control.⁶ However, where once supporters were content to raise money for their clubs without asking for anything in return (cf. Taylor, 1992), they are now using their collective influence as a bargaining chip, seeking a voice in the community and in the running of their club, primarily through the supporters' trust cooperative movement, with over 110 trusts in England now owning shares in their football clubs (Supporters Direct, 2011).⁷ This is in direct opposition to Williams' idea that football post-Hillsborough has reflected the country's shift towards the national government policy of prioritising ownership, choice and success rather than promoting a sense of community (1995: 223), and Raymond Boyle's argument that supporters have become 'increasingly disaggregated and disenfranchised' (2010: 1306).⁸

5 The Championship play-off final is the 'richest game in the world', due to the millions it is worth to the winning club in terms of TV and prize money and the increased revenue it will receive over the course of the next season in the Premiership – a conservative estimate would value this at around £35 million (Reid, 2005:12). Even when a club is relegated from the Premiership, it receives parachute payments over a number of years to cushion the blow of playing at a lower level without the financial benefits of being in the top division, regardless of its future performance.

6 It should be noted that it is not just financial issues that trigger fans' collective action. Rex Nash (1999) reports that Southampton fans looked in to setting up an independent supporters' association in 1991, but as the team were performing relatively well at that time, there was not a great deal of support for the venture. An ISA was eventually formed there in September 1993, primarily as a reaction against a poor style of play and widespread dislike of the team manager.

7 For an earlier and slightly more critical view of the supporters' trust movement, see Martin (2007).

8 Though certainly some supporters of larger clubs may feel increasingly distanced, I argue here that far from being disenfranchised, supporters of most clubs (ie most of those in the Football League and lower) now have multiple opportunities to become involved in the organisation and running of their clubs. As I shall show, the supporters' trust movement has enabled supporters to vote on many issues, meaning that fans have actually become literally enfranchised.

7.2.2 The mobilisation of supporters' groups and the development of the supporters' trust movement

Clubs across the country have set up political parties to influence local elections on a single football-related issue,⁹ and the growing supporters' trust movement also has a distinctly political element to it, run democratically, and with clear aims and objectives shared by all trusts, as this chapter shows.¹⁰ A trust is not just another form of supporters' club, but is a properly-registered company, mostly set up as an industrial and provident society, where one share is owned by each member, and governed by an elected board (Supporters Direct, 2009). Money made by IPSs is invested back into the organisation to further its aims and objectives; in practice, with supporters' trusts, this means buying shares in the club, or funding community projects.

Organised fans' groups are, of course, by no means specific to football. Many fandoms hold regular conventions, or create fanzines, or meet virtually via an internet forum (cf. Jenkins, 2006b). However, football is unique in the UK because of the impact a fans' group can have and the control they can have over the object of their fandom. Fans of television shows may bombard a network to demand the re-commissioning of their favourite programme, or may take 'control' over the object of their fandom by writing fan fiction. Football fans, however, by participating in this form of collective cooperative organisation, can work together to gain shares and even run their clubs,

9 The most famous and successful examples are probably Brentford's A Bee C party and Charlton's Back To The Valley party, both of which are assessed in more detail later in this thesis.

10 Boyle rightly observes: 'The call of "keep politics out of sport" has always been a mistaken aspiration, given that sports cultures have always been steeped in the politics of gender, class and power' (2010: 1307).

with the aim of benefiting the community and the supporters.

The first supporters' trust in the UK was at Northampton Town, where in January 1992 supporters called a public meeting, concerned at the level of the club's debt. The Northampton Town FC Trust was set up, and aimed to save the club from extinction by raising money (though with the proviso that it would not be given to the existing board), being accountable for its expenditure, and to secure supporter representation on the board of the football club. When a new set of directors was chosen four months later, two trust representatives were elected to the board, along with a local council member, representing the authority who later built the club a brand-new stadium (Northampton Town FC Trust, 2006). The formation of a trust was not simply a fortuitous accident; founder member Brian Lomax had been working on the concept for some months thanks to his work in a housing trust (Frampton et al., 2001: 10). The fans of Northampton were fortunate in the support they had from their local council, and that the club as a whole had a progressive outlook (indeed, in 1996 Northampton became the first professional club to formally introduce an equal opportunities policy), but their achievements have become a template for supporters across the country. The demand for supporter representation at director level has been repeated at every trust, meaning that the movement has an inescapably political dimension, setting out this shared aim and working collectively to achieve it. Fundamentally, the sector's consumers are asking for involvement in a company's board; rather than choosing to take their custom elsewhere as would happen in other industries, they seek to change from within. Frampton et al. (2001: 7) argue that this situation is entirely unique to football; previously club owners could act as they wished because fans would not go elsewhere

to watch football regardless of what happened on or off the pitch. Now, however, fans have the option of taking effective collective action if they disapprove of or disagree with the direction a club's ownership is taking. Though clubs may still have a monopoly over their fans' consumption of football, they are now aware that fans also have the power to take direct action should they so wish.

Supporters Direct was established by the Labour government at the end of 1999 to assist fans to play a responsible part in the life of the club they support, through forming trusts, collective ownership of shares and boardroom representation (personal correspondence via email with Dave Boyle of Supporters Direct, 2006). Since then, as the movement has expanded, the aims of SD have been refined and its philosophy now comprises: 'promote and support the concept of democratic supporter ownership and representation through mutual, not-for-profit structures; promote football clubs as civic and community institutions; work to preserve the competitive values of league football in the United Kingdom and promoting the health of the game as a whole' (Supporters Direct, 2011). These clearly-defined political aims tie in to Grbich's analysis of postmodern activity focusing on the local, the situational and the particular, allowing a push towards effective political action within a community (2004: 19). The trust concept also links in neatly to Smith's ideas (2001) about the benefits of fostering a sense of community and its inherent 'sense of belonging and the concrete experience of social networks', concluding that interaction such as that found within the trust movement 'enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and to knit the social fabric'. The supporters' trust movement is not open solely to active football fans; it also encourages people who are part of the club's community to

join and influence the trust's and thus the club's future direction.¹¹

7.2.3 My involvement in the supporters' trust movement

As an individual football fan, I became involved in the supporters' trust movement in the summer of 2003, helping to set up Trust in Luton, and serving as communications officer on the trust's board for the next three years. This involvement and my experiences led to my being interested in the experience of other women at other clubs' trusts, and also more practically helped me to get in touch with trusts to advertise for potential respondents. The following section shows how some respondents have become involved in their clubs' supporters' groups, including supporters' trusts and single-issue pressure groups. I argue that their femaleness has shaped the way in which they have responded to the fans' groups, the way in which fans' groups have responded to them, and the ways in which they have become involved in collective activity (for example, in terms of the tasks they have been allocated, and the time commitment expected of them).

7.2.4 The appeal of the supporters' trust movement to female football fans

Received wisdom is that female fans are more likely to become involved in the trust

11 This is not to say that all supporters have a positive view of trusts, nor that they operate in exactly the same way within all fanbases. For example, Richard Giulianotti (2007) examines Rangers fans' responses to the Rangers' Supporters Trust, and notes: 'Rangers fans hold diverging views over the RST. Many fans, notably in England or overseas, are either unaware of the Trust's existence and *raison d'être*, or uncomfortable with its public criticisms of their club...Others argue that the Trust encapsulates supporters' passion for Rangers. Some fans are dubious as to whether the club's directors share this emotional commitment or appreciate the essential importance of the supporters to Rangers' survival.'

movement than their male counterparts. The then-chief executive of Supporters Direct Dave Boyle reported: ‘In our experience, women have a higher representation within Trust membership, and within Trust activists, than the strict demographic proportion of women in a normal football crowd’ (personal correspondence, 2006). Admittedly this is anecdotal evidence; however, of my initial questionnaire respondents, 56 per cent supported a club with an active trust of which they were aware,¹² and 62 per cent of those respondents were members of the trust. In comparison, 89 per cent supported a club that had a traditional supporters’ club, but of those respondents only 38 per cent of them were members.

Table 7.1 - Respondents who support clubs with a supporters’ trust

Whether club has a supporters’ trust	Percentage response
Yes	56%
No	10%
Unsure	33%
Total (N.B. Totals less than 100% as respondent without club allegiance did not answer)	99%

12 34 per cent of questionnaire respondents said they did not know if their club had a supporters’ trust or not. On examination of the questionnaire results, most of these respondents did in fact support a club which had a supporters’ trust: respondents stating ‘don’t know’ supported Charlton Athletic, Watford, Gillingham, Leeds United, Tottenham, Brentford, Walsall, and Leyton Orient. 10 per cent of respondents said their club did not have a supporters’ trust: at the time of writing, this was true for the respondents who supported Huddersfield Town, Colchester United, Brighton and Hove Albion, and Liverpool, but not for those who supported Charlton Athletic.

Table 7.2 - Respondents whose club has a supporters' trust of which they are a member

Respondent is a member	Percentage response
Yes	64%
No	36%
Total	100%

Table 7.3 - Respondents who support clubs with a supporters' club

Whether club has a supporters' club	Percentage response
Yes	89%
No	3%
Unsure	7%
Total (N.B. Totals less than 100% as respondent without club allegiance did not answer)	99%

Table 7.4 - Respondents whose club has a supporters' club of which they are a member

Respondent is a member	Percentage response
Yes	38%
No	62%
Total	100%

The inclusive community ethos driving the trust movement offers a new way of supporting for those concerned with their club's position in the locality and the outreach work that can be done through football with marginalised groups. This concern to extend football to all interested parties – not just the traditional male, working/lower-middle-class demographic - may explain the attraction of the trust movement for female fans, and support Dave Boyle's observation that more women than are proportional to the supporting demographic are involved in the movement. The trust movement develops the football community's 'communal' aspects, encouraging engagement, tolerance, reciprocity and trust (Smith, 2001), but joining each individual/local community with a larger, nation-, continent- and world-wide football community.

The supporters' trust movement, though, needs to adhere to very strict rules to maintain its status as an Industrial and Provident Society: accounts need to be produced and audited; meetings must be minuted; elections must be held. If what Boyle says is true about women being attracted to the trust movement, it is possible that this is at least in part because of its democratic set-up, meaning that every member has a vote, rather than

policy being decided by whoever is most vocal in their opinions. However, it is also possible that women then get drawn into working behind the scenes of the trust in an administrative or supportive role, rather than a more obvious or ‘prestigious’ spokesperson role.¹³ As the following narratives from my respondents show, working to set up a trust is a thankless task, and much of what must be done is dull but necessary. More practically, in general more women than men work part-time; according to the Office of National Statistics (2011), 21 per cent of the UK workforce consists of part-time working women,¹⁴ so – even though they may have additional domestic duties, including childcare – they could be considered to have more spare time than full-time working men.

7.3 Respondents’ involvement in the supporters’ trust movement

The following sections look at case studies of respondents’ experience within the supporters’ trust movement on a club-by-club basis, examining their work in the trusts at QPR, Watford, Notts County, Charlton, Leyton Orient and Brentford, and comparing and contrasting some of their narratives. All the respondents were or had previously been members of their club’s supporters’ trusts, but as their narratives show, their levels of involvement and their current commitment to the supporters’ trust concept varied greatly for a number of factors, which will be explored in the rest of this chapter.

13 In fact, this is partly what Coddington argues in the preface to her book: though men in football are visible and assume all the credit and glory for their achievements, it is female administrators and relatives who provide the framework for their triumphs: ‘[W]here do the women fit into these pictures [of iconic football moments]? Who were these great players’ wives, daughters and mothers?’ (2007: 7).

14 Full-time working women comprise 28 per cent of the UK workforce; full-time working men 45 per cent; and part-time working men 6 per cent.

7.3.1 Tracy - QPR First

QPR First was formed in April 2001, following a public meeting at Hammersmith Town Hall. The trust sets out its stance as ‘independent’, and admits it is not in a position to own the club outright, but continues to strive to work with QPR’s owners or major shareholders to preserve the club’s best interests (QPR First, 2006). Tracy is one of the key figures in QPR First and she explains her initial involvement as partly because of her role as a mother, which means that she works part-time and gives her more free time to devote to other interests. She says:

What happened was, I’d been reading the various things on different lists. The media at that time as well, there had been quite a bit about the setting up of Supporters Direct, which as you know comes out from the foundation. We were like, there was myself and a couple of others who were really keen on the idea. So what I did, because I’m local, well, local-ish in the London area, and because I work evenings, I was able to go to a couple of workshops and meetings that Supporters Direct were holding at that particular time to give advice and to help people and say look, this is what it’s all about. I was able to do that, and went along to a couple. We were taking notes and saying this is what we need to do. Myself and a couple of others, what we did, we got a list of people who we knew would be particularly interested in helping to set up a steering group. Then it all took off from there because of the announcement of us going into

administration. We set up a pub meeting, then went on to the public meeting. That's what happened with that.

One possible interpretation of this narrative is that she is the person who actively wishes to 'give advice and to help people', and thus she is acknowledging her interest in the issues, which she flags up at the beginning of this extract by saying that she had been reading the coverage of Supporters Direct's foundation. However, I suggest a more likely interpretation would be that she perceives her reasons for becoming involved in the first place in terms of her proximity to key events (being 'local-ish' to London) and the free time that she has, rather than her own abilities and interest. However, as her commitment has grown and deepened, she now describes her reasons for staying involved in highly emotive, almost evangelically polemic, terms, and remains committed and highly vocal about what the trust stands for, as she explains:

Originally what happened with us at QPR was that there were a significant number of the fanbase who were unaware of the real situation of what was going on. When it all came out that there had been £25-26 million in losses over three years, there was a genuine amount of shock and bewilderment. People were like, "How could this have happened?" And you know, this is what we've been saying. This is what the supporters' trust movement now is all about. Some people may hate us. They may loathe the idea of supporters' trusts. But at the end of the day, we've gone through this. It's been proved that we do need to know what's going on at our clubs. We nearly went out of

existence because we didn't know what was going on. You still get people, oh supporters' trusts, what do we need them for, the idea of QPR First running the club, it's ludicrous. Well, why? Why is it? What can these other people offer, then? You know?

Tracy uses the personal collective to refer to fanbases, and specifies that football clubs are not simply businesses, but are 'our clubs'. She introduces an undefined 'Other' as well here – 'people' question the purposes of supporters' trusts, and those 'people' could be either fans unconvinced of the merits of joining the organisation, or club executives unconvinced of the value of working with them or indeed wary of working with them. Similarly, when she questions what 'these other people' can offer, she could be asking whether other fans have any better ideas for collective action than via a supporters' trust, whether the current club hierarchy has any better suggestions for listening to supporters' voices, or what other potential club owners could offer that would be better than involving fans in decision making. Regardless, the Other is defined in opposition to the 'us' of QPR First and the collective fanbase.

Tracy is reflective about her own femaleness as an aspect of her football supporting, and is most explicit about how she feels being female has affected other fans' attitudes towards her. She believes that taking a public role, as she has done with the trust, has directed sexism towards her, which she had never experienced previously as an 'ordinary' fan. However, when she relates her experience, her anecdotes do not indicate that other fans specifically objected to her as a woman, but that they did not agree with the idea of a supporters' trust, as shown in this extract:

Tracy: I think also, dare I say it, I think one of the initial problems with QPR 1st as well was that in the initial stages when we were setting it up, there was myself and two other female supporters. We did meet with some resistance, shall we say, about, well, you know, there was a feeling that because we were more vocal and outspoken and because we're females and we were coming up against a little bit of resistance with that as well, we were finding - Not so much now. I think that attitudes have moved on now. But before, there were problems in that respect. We did actually come across people who were, 'No, what does that silly bitch think she's talking about? Blah blah blah. We don't need QPR First, what do we need you for, people like you telling us what's good for the club?' Well, you know -

CD: Had you had anything like that before your involvement with the Trust, like just at matches?

Tracy: No, to be fair, no. Not really...

Nash (1999) suggests that in the independent supporters' associations he researched, female members and committee officers were reluctant to speak in meetings or in public, so it is possible that Tracy was indeed judged for transgressing norms of female behaviour. However, based on this anecdote, I suggest that other QPR fans may have objected to 'people like Tracy', but that does not necessarily mean that they objected to her femaleness. Tracy illustrates only that they did not like being told what was 'right' for the club (possibly because this would certainly affect their practices and

performances of fandom). It is Tracy herself who has surmised that her being female was an element in their objection. Of course, it is possible that it was and that she has based this assumption on other separate incidents, but according to this one anecdote, there seems to be no evidence for it; at the most, her femaleness has been used as an additional reason to criticise and insult her, which is not quite the same.

7.3.2 Kimberley and Sarah – Watford

Contrastingly, Watford supporters (and close friends) Kimberley and Sarah have a much looser tie to their supporters' trust, despite the fact that they were both involved at and with its inception; their narratives also indicate that they do not view it as a hugely democratic or egalitarian movement. Kimberley took on an ancillary administrative role when the trust began, while working full-time in a senior executive fundraising position. She recalls:

There was a big meeting being organised at the Leveret Leisure Centre in Watford, and I can't remember how but I ended up agreeing to take the minutes, and I can't quite remember how that happened.

Because Kimberley is so vague about the chain of events that led to her taking the minutes, it is difficult to infer the reasons behind it with any degree of accuracy. This allocation of roles shows that Kimberley (not an administrator by profession) takes on a traditionally female task; and it is also worth noting that the minute-taker's chances for turn-taking and contributing to the discussion are limited, because her focus is on

recording the contributions of others. Though this may not have been a conscious reasoning behind Kimberley being asked to take on this role, the end result is the same – muting, if not completely silencing, the voice of a female fan and putting her into a role she did not volunteer for. After the trust had been officially launched, the male-led committee took note of Kimberley’s professional skills. She says:

Eventually the board of the trust asked if I was willing to be coopted on to the board as fundraising or whatever, and I agreed. It was just a matter of knowing the right people, them knowing me, and I’d been doing bits and bobs.

Kimberley’s narrative describing how she became involved with the trust is rather brief and straightforward, encompassing the initial meeting, her role there, and then how her role changed to take into account her abilities once the trust hierarchy knew her, without making any explicit connections between her femaleness and her role in the trust.

Yet her close friend Sarah, with whom she sits at home games, has a rather different view. Her work has led her to become very involved with Watford’s local community, and her field of expertise is in the town’s history, marketing and promotional activities, and fundraising event organisation. Sarah remembers their initial contact with the supporters’ trust very differently, saying:

Myself, actually, and my friend Kim...we said, well, look, two of us between us have got loads of marketing experience...She knows about

fundraising, she knows about local community groups, she's a known face. Then you had me who is known for doing football things, straight off the back of two big football exhibitions, who sort of knows lots of people. I work for the local council. I know a lot of the community groups. So we said, well, look, between us, we have a load of local knowledge, can we help, we really want to be part of this... We basically got palmed off on this sub-marketing committee, on this guy, who's really nice, but he worked for eBay. It was like, great, utilise him, but he didn't have any marketing.

Sarah goes as far to make the connection between the problems she faced (and that she assumes Kimberley faced too) with the supporters' trust board and a sexist mindset. She says:

We were thinking, we're here, we really want to be taken seriously. I actually wrote to the trust, or emailed these guys and said that I really feel some of this is because we are female and we were not being taken seriously. You got the impression that they thought we should just go off and do a cake stall. That I was angry about.

She sarcastically suggests here that the men on the board thought the women should 'do a cake stall'; that is, fit in to a traditionally 'female', 'domestic' role, and provide a fundraising, 'supportive' element to the trust's activities. She does not elaborate on whether or not she got a response from the men after her email accusing them of

sexism, but evidently her opinions on the reasons behind their actions have not altered. Unsurprisingly, her anger and disappointment has led to generally negative views about the trust itself. She does not refer to it in inclusive terms, as an organisation to which she belongs and is a part, but uses the pronoun 'they' to refer to the trust as a whole but more specifically the board members, distancing herself from it and from them. It is evident that she does not agree with the way the trust is being run or its priorities. As she puts it:

From my perspective, I don't, I've not really enjoyed the supporters' trust as much as I hoped I would do. I felt at the beginning, really positive, that it was something I could do. It's kind of got down the road to other things that have been done before. They're having trouble now getting people to stay as members, because people have lost that emergency - they've missed a lot of bandwagon, they've missed their chance. Also, there's that idea that they have a lot of meetings with the club that they're not allowed to talk about, this inner sanctum. The club refers to an inner sanctum. I think that's really, really shaky. I think that's more shaky for the supporters' trust to have that inner sanctum feel. OK, I could have been on that committee. Maybe I could have been in that inner sanctum. That wasn't the point for me.

She explains here that she was hoping to 'enjoy' being part of the supporters' trust and the new opportunities it offers for fan involvement rather than imitating previous supporters' groups' activities. She did not want to be involved in order to discover confidential information about the club or to be closer to its personnel; for her, such motivations are 'shaky' and not 'the point'. I suggest that 'the point' for her was her wish to be part of a significant cooperative collective, which could take effective action due to its collaborative ethos, and this has failed to happen; instead, an undemocratic 'closed shop' or 'inner sanctum' has been created. Indeed, although Kimberley does not make this explicit, her own experience chimes with this; she was co-opted onto the trust board rather than standing for election, which is one of the key elements of the democratic supporters' trust.

Sarah's experience contrasts neatly with Tracy's at QPR; both were keen to be involved with a cooperative supporters' movement that would be of benefit to the wider fanbase, and both identify what they perceive as 'sexism' directed at them. Yet where Tracy has chosen to continue her involvement with her club's supporters' trust, Sarah has decided to step back from it altogether. I suggest that this is not simply due to sexism, but also due to the way the respective trusts are run. Tracy remains enthusiastic about the potential QPR First offers, speculating that the trust could take a major stake-holding in the club one day; Sarah is let down by Watford's supporters' trust, saying that although there was a great deal of excitement at the start, it now offers nothing new when compared to supporters' groups that have existed before.

7.3.3 Carole and Alison - Notts County

Sarah talked of the sense of ‘emergency’ which created the conditions for Watford’s supporters’ trust to germinate. Similarly, Notts County Supporters’ Trust was founded in January 2003 when the club was in administration and facing extinction; by the end of that year it held 30 per cent of shares in the football club, for which it raised over £250,000 in a matter of weeks. By May 2007, the trust had gained another 30 per cent of shares, making it the club’s majority shareholder and as such the provider of strong strategic influence over its day-to-day running and long-term future (cf. Notts County Supporters’ Trust, 2011; Notts County Mad, 2007).¹⁵ Such an achievement requires the backing and active involvement of a large proportion of the club’s fan-base.

Carole was a trust board member and was eager to talk about the problems at her club and her reasons for devoting so much time to the trust. At the time of her interview in November 2005, the trust were leading a fundraising drive to keep the club afloat. As a long-term fan, she could not conceive supporting any other club. She says:

I’ve just gone into my 50th season of supporting the club, believe it or not. For me there isn’t an alternative. If Notts County go bust, I’ll go back to watching amateur football, which I’ve always done as well.

My brothers were involved in playing amateur football. I was watching them on a Sunday and watching Notts on a Saturday. I

¹⁵ Since the research was initially carried out, the supporters’ trust were bought out and the club promptly experienced serious financial problems again.

sincerely hope it doesn't happen because if for the lack of 150 grand the oldest football league club in the world, maybe not the oldest club but the oldest league club in the world, goes bust, then it says something very sorry about the state of football, I believe, I really do. Hopefully it's not going to come to that.

Here she makes it clear that history is important – not just the history of the club, which is as she explains 'the oldest league club in the world', but her own history, and her fifty years as a fan. The length of time a club has been in existence means that the rest of the football world should feel more of an attachment or an obligation to it, just as the length of Carole's attachment to the club means that she cannot contemplate ever supporting anyone else. As a local councillor, she is passionate about the importance of solidarity within a community, and the local football club's role in promoting that. She says:

I have to say, people here at the council house were brilliant. The leader of the council in particular was incredibly supportive. He's a Watford fan, but you can't hold that against him. By example, full council, five different parties, he stood up and said, 'Right, if we all chip so much in, we could raise this, and here's my fifty quid.'

She believes it is part of the council's role to support its local football club, but also that it is the councillors' individual responsibilities to set an example in this. It is not just the job of the supporters to back the club, because wider communities benefit from the presence of having a football club within it, just as the supporters' trust ethos states. As

Notts County had already been in administration once before, the fanbase had already worked extremely hard to save their club, but Carole did not see the repetition as tedious, or the initial project as a waste of time. She says:

I do get disheartened, never to the point that I say, 'Right, I'm not going again.' That defeats the object. I really get angry when people say, 'They're not playing very well, they've not got any new players.' I think, 'How are they going to get money for players if you're not going through the gate?' I do get disheartened. Never to the point where I think I'm not going to go. I don't know what it would take to happen, me not going to go. I can't conceive of anything at this time that would stop me from going. Hope springs eternal. Something will turn up.

Inevitably, with Notts County in repeated precarious positions, Carole feels discouraged and depressed about the situations, but would never consider abandoning her fandom. Although she makes her loyalty plain here (she cannot conceive of anything that would stop her attendance), she gives hypothetical reasons that other people sometimes put forward as to why they have stopped going: not in terms of the depth or intensity of their attachment, though, but in terms of practical thoughts; if people do not go to matches, the club does not receive money, and cannot operate, let alone purchase new players. She is making the case for continued loyal fandom in purely pragmatic terms; if people are angry with the team's performance or financial situation, they cannot stop going because withdrawing their attendance will create a vicious circle of lack of

money. As Frampton et al. (2001) pointed out, clubs have a monopoly on their fans' loyalty; Carole argues that continued attendance is not just because of sentiment and affection, but supporters' awareness of the economics of running a football club mean that there is an imperative to keep money moving into the club.

Alison is also a long-term Notts County fan and member of the supporters' trust.¹⁶ She is active in the supporters' movement but in a less high-profile way than Carole; when she talks about the supporters' trust, she does so in inclusive terms, not referring to the trust as 'them' (as the disillusioned Watford fan Sarah does), but views herself as part of the trust. As she says:

Some people say they [supporters' trusts] haven't got a big voice.

Some supporters' trusts have, I think ours actually have. We have got quite a big membership. I actually think that we do have a say. I don't think it is a token, I actually don't think it is. I actually do think that we at Notts County have a say. We get information back. I think that is where supporters' trusts are good. If you've got efficient people on the board who are going to feed back to supporters, then that is good.

Obviously not, it depends on who's at the top of the tree. But ours is good.

Here Alison switches between talking about 'they' (the supporters' trust as a collective

¹⁶ Again, the interview took place in November 2005, so the fundraising to buy more shares remained the backdrop.

whole movement) and ‘we’ (the supporters’ trust in action at Notts County). However, she also shows a slight distance between herself and the active members of the trust (presumably those who are involved at board level), demonstrated by her somewhat uncertain assertion that ‘I actually think that we do have a say’. Significantly, she speaks of her enthusiasm for the supporters’ trust movement, extrapolating her feelings for the movement as a whole from her experience in her own club’s trust. It is as an afterthought that she mentions the possibility that sometimes trusts may fail due to personnel issues, but that negativity is quickly dismissed because the key issue for her, her fandom and her club’s supporters’ trust is that ‘ours is good’.

7.3.4 Anna - Leyton Orient

Similar to the Watford fans Kimberley and Sarah, Anna’s experience with her club’s supporters’ trust has been mixed; however, this is not because of the trust itself, which she believes is well-run, but because of the supporters who have not joined it. Since its inception the club’s owners have not been supportive of the movement, and as such the trust activists have difficulty convincing the rest of the fanbase of its value. Anna believes that the problem lies not with the trust, but with the mindset of the non-members, saying:

It [the trust] has had quite a lot of bad press because people don’t like new things, they don’t like change. Then we fell out with the club, and things are back on. But I don’t think the fans’ trust has a lot of power, really, which is a shame, because it’s really well run.

Again, Anna's use of pronouns here is significant: she refers to the trust as 'it' twice and 'the fans' trust' once, depersonalising it and detaching herself from it, but also refers to 'we', i.e. an inclusive collective in opposition to the football club itself. Her use of 'people' is also significant: these people who do not welcome change could be the fan base who are not joining the trust; or it could refer to the club, who do not welcome additional fan input; or, indeed, it could refer to both elements, which are combining to stultify the trust's development. Similar to Tracy's experience at QPR, Anna believes that the problems with the trust lie with the sceptics who cannot be persuaded of its value, who are stuck in their ways and will not entertain ideas about different ways of running football clubs. The crucial purpose of the trust that Anna singles out is the necessity of gaining 'power' (i.e. within the club in terms of decision-making and organisation) as the main objective to be achieved rather than outreach or community work.

7.3.5 Viki - Charlton Athletic

Some respondents acknowledged that they supported the concept of trusts on principle, but in practice they did not want to be involved in the movement on a day-to-day basis. Viki was one such example. Her club Charlton Athletic were evicted from their ground, the Valley, in the mid-1980s, and the supporters led a lengthy campaign to return there in order for the club to have a home in its founding community, one of the principles which created the supporters' trust movement. At that stage, the trust idea had not taken off in the UK, and instead the supporters collaborated on traditional political platforms, forming a party to stand in local elections and gain council influence. Viki talked about

her own limited involvement and interest in the project as a young teenager below the voting age, and thus not in a position to become involved in these political campaigns, though her older brother did take an active part. Though Viki fully supported the campaign then and what the politicised wing of the fanbase stands for now, she has never been involved, not due to apathy, but because as she works full-time she is anxious to keep her football supporting separate from her home life. She does concede that in dire circumstances she would become an activist in order to save the club. As she explains:

There's a limit to how much football I want in my life. I think it would take over completely... It would have to be something dire, something like getting kicked out of the Valley again. It would have to be awful. It would have to be bad, very bad.

Viki's comments here demonstrate that she thinks that there is an unwritten code of conduct for football supporters; the club being evicted from their home ground would be her breaking point and force her into acting on this imperative. Other than that, she is happy to retain some degree of detachment from fan activism so that she can remain solely focused on enjoying the on-pitch action; once more we see the truth of Brown's (2008) argument that different fans enjoy different aspects of the fan experience and choose to become involved with different types of fan activity.

Viki is not concerned solely with her own club's well-being, expressing a concern for Manchester United (a club she dislikes) after their 2005 takeover by the American

Glazer family, showing a good knowledge of trust activities around the country as well as informed contacts, and her (albeit limited) sympathy for fans who are suffering due to poor running of their club,¹⁷ as this extract shows:

CD: What do you think about the Shareholders United protests against the Glazers?

Viki: Very mixed feelings. I do feel sorry for the genuine Man U fans because it's not a position I would like to be in. But then I think, well, they listed themselves, and you run the risk that someone comes along and buys you. So I don't think Glazer will do them any good.

CD: But do you think he'll do them any harm?

Viki: Yeah. The amount of debt would worry me if I was a Man U fan. I can see where they're coming from. I think if I were a Man U fan I would feel that you'd have to do something. I don't know, it's difficult. It's hard to feel sorry for Man U fans.

When pressed, Viki says that a hostile takeover of her club similar to this would convince her to become involved in football politics, and if she were a Manchester United fan, she would be active in their supporters' trust rather than following an individual plan of action such as stopping regular attendance. She says:

I think you'd have to keep going. There are a lot of people at Charlton who boycotted, and said we will never watch Charlton again outside

17 For more on the Glazer takeover and the fans' campaigns which ultimately failed, see Brown (2007).
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the Valley. I don't know. If you support them, you support them. I would get involved in the Shareholders United, I'd go down that route, I'd get involved in the politics of it... That would be bad enough.

Just like Carole, Viki is clear that stopping one's attendance and taking action in this negative way is not an option; rather, a campaign should be led through positive action, that is, actually 'doing' something rather than 'not doing'. However, unlike Carole, she does not make the logical financial connection between attendance and improving the ground or the squad; she simply states that there is no choice between attending and not attending for the supporter – 'If you support them, you support them.' This, for Viki, is genuine fandom.

7.3.6 Tabatha - Brentford

Like Viki, Tabatha was detached from the supporters' trust movement; however, this was due to financial and time constraints, not necessarily a deliberate choice to withdraw from the collective fanbase. Throughout her interview, it became clear that she was not particularly aware of or involved in the politics of football, despite supporting Brentford, a club that has previously been supporter-run, with a high level of involvement and engagement among the fanbase, demonstrated by the success of supporters' trust Bees United and previously the fans' own political party ABeeC. Her supporting levels had diminished since getting married and becoming a mother; she was formerly a member of the club's trust, Bees United, but has not renewed her

subscription, though she acknowledges that she would still like to be a member and continues to support their aims and objectives, saying:

You do a monthly direct debit, but then I went on maternity leave and I wasn't getting any money. So I couldn't give them any money. I haven't redone it, which I must do, really.

Tabatha invokes the word 'must', indicating that like Viki she perceives that there is a moral imperative for football supporters that she should act on with regard to this form of community and communal fans' involvement. Members of Bees United agree to abide by the rules of the society and to promote particular courses of action: strengthening the bonds between club and community; promoting football as a recreational facility, sporting activity and focus for community involvement; providing and maintaining football facilities; promoting coaching schemes to develop the football skills of young people and to widen interest in football regardless of the sex or ethnic origin of those involved; promoting the game nationally and internationally; encouraging the principle of supporter representation on the club's board; and communicating information to the trust's members. These are the ideas, then, to which Tabatha believes she must adhere as a football fan, and most especially as a Brentford fan. Belonging to the trust is a necessary part of fandom for Tabatha, just as regular attendance is for Carole and Viki. She demonstrates this during the focus group, when she again raises the subject of her failure to renew her trust membership, and reiterates her intention to do so, when asked by another participant, 'Are you a member of Bees United?' She says:

I used to be, but I'm not any more, then I went on maternity leave. I couldn't afford to give them the money...I need to get it sorted out again now I'm back at work. At the time I had no money coming in. That was one of the easy things to go, you've got to pay your mortgage and all of that. Me and my husband both were, probably if we were we'd know more about it [the trust's activities].

Here Tabatha makes a pre-emptive defence of her failure to belong to her club's trust, explaining that her domestic responsibilities took priority over the moral imperative involved in supporting Brentford. Though cutting down on expenditure may make sense when a woman goes on maternity leave and has reduced income, this division between home life and public life (which includes work and football fandom) is discussed several times by Tabatha. Throughout her interview, she demonstrated a very clearly delineated understanding of how football fandom can and 'should' be gendered, and here we have an indication that her traditionally 'feminine' responsibilities at home are more important to her than the traditionally 'masculine' football fandom.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that although English football clubs have been traditionally owned by rich individuals and consortiums, there has been a recent change whereby supporters have been able to become more involved and develop closer ties with their clubs and the local community (Nash, 1999; Taylor, 1992). The democratic nature of the

supporters' trust movement, and its stated aim of looking to the future and preserving football clubs in their home communities for generations to come, theoretically offers new opportunities for all fans to become involved in the life of their club should they wish. I have suggested in this chapter that this democratic framework opens up this particular supporters' organisation to female fans; involvement is open to everyone, and holding office in the supporters' trust movement is (or should be) dependent on a one-member-one-vote election rather than on one's existing social network of fandom and having the 'right' contacts. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests women are more likely to become involved in supporters' trusts, possibly because combining motherhood with part-time work or being a stay-at-home mother with no paid work outside the home enables women to have more time to devote to this voluntary work.

Those respondents who talked about the supporters' trust movement (and also football-related political parties) had strong feelings about the perceived philosophical and moral imperatives motivating people to commit more of their leisure time to their football clubs. This chapter has examined the experiences of several respondents, all of whom were or had been members of their club's supporters' trust, but through their own experience had come to have very different perspectives on the trust concept. Parallels have been drawn with the 'support' roles women seem to be expected to take in supporters' movements (as opposed to roles that put them in the public eye), and the 'support' roles women are expected to take in other situations, such as within the domestic sphere and in conversation. Some respondents also commented on the particularly 'gendered' roles assumed by people within the movement, and how they felt they were perceived by male fellow fans, with some feeling that putting oneself in a

more visible role within the fanbase opens them up to sexism. This links in to the observations in the previous chapter about the endemic institutionalised sexism that permeates football, football fandom and football media. The following chapter builds on this perception of institutionalised sexism to explore how football clubs and football authorities understand the experience and practices of female football fans.

Chapter 8. The perception of female football fans' practices by clubs and authorities

8.1 Introduction

The continuation and pervasiveness of institutionalised sexism and the lack of understanding of female fans' experiences and practices of football fandom is demonstrated by some additional interviews I conducted: two with representatives of the football authorities (the FA and the Football League), and two with directors of Football League clubs supported by respondents to my initial questionnaire.¹ My intent in conducting these interviews was to examine what information clubs and authorities have about the experience of female fandom, how they market (or plan in the future to market) football fandom to females, and the strategies they have in place to combat sexist attitudes in the game in order to present it as a sport that is open to men and women. The following section of analysis shows that sexism is deeply embedded in the sport and its structures, meaning that sexist attitudes and actions continue even if individuals and groups are not consciously aware of them.

8.2 How clubs perceive and market to female fans

I interviewed two directors of Football League clubs; several questionnaire respondents had indicated support for both clubs, so I was aware prior to interview that the clubs

¹ These four interviewees are referred to by pseudonyms throughout.

certainly did have female fans and had attracted them over a number of years. Paul was the chief executive of a league club which had experienced great financial difficulties over the past 30 years, and had continued issues with finding an appropriate stadium in the area with enough capacity to meet its needs. He told me in interview that the club promotes aggressively to families, and women are encouraged to attend as a parallel strand of that. This marketing strategy was decided upon as the club's directors were concerned about creating a feeling of 'local' support in the area despite the question marks over their ground and its location. They realised that with the issues that had experienced, they could not rely on the traditional 'local' support that football clubs usually count on for the core of their fan base, and so they worked to devise a long-term marketing strategy that would appeal to the widest possible demographic. Paul explains:

We had to sit down and think, well, if you're ambitious to try and make this a successful football club, how do you do that when you've only got 4,000 fans, and how do you sort of re-engage back against with the local community?...The way to do it was if you can engage with the community, people could see that you're actually giving something back to them and their families, you then by the right pricing and the right promotions will bring them back into watching football.

He continued to state this interest in relating to the community and the importance of 'family' fandom, presenting this marketing choice to reach out to families simply as the

easiest and quickest ways to ensure a fan base for the future.² However, rather than lumping in ‘women’ as a category with ‘families’ and thus ‘mums’ coming with their children just because they had to, the importance of the role that women play within their families is acknowledged by this club. Thus women with children are prioritised as a target market not because they can come along with ‘Dad’ and ‘the kids’, but because of the power they hold in terms of decision-making about their child’s leisure time, as women continue to rule within the domestic sphere. Paul explained: ‘[I]t tends to be Mum, I know it sounds like terrible stereotyping, but it tends to be Mum who drops the kid off at school or drops the kid off at the courses.’

This kind of targeted marketing contrasts heavily with that done by another league club, where I interviewed their director Dean. His club had had similar financial problems and issues with locating appropriate land to build a new ground, and Dean himself had responsibility for all community activities, encompassing the club and the supporters, acting as a link between the club as an entity and the community, whether that is the fan base or potential new sponsors. He criticised the marketing work previously done by the club, saying:

We’ve never marketed ourselves to anyone... We’ve never marketed ourselves. I think the marketing has been non-existent. It’s always been. I’ve made several presentations to the club in the past over

2 As Williams (2006: 109) notes: ‘[T]he more prized, well-behaved, “family” fans, and real consumers, might be better searched for in the well-heeled, Internet-rich neighbourhoods of ‘connected’ nearby affluent suburbs and market towns – or even in similar locations abroad – than in the depressed neighbourhoods and run down estates of the urban inner core of Britain’s post-industrial cities.’

about ten years about how easy it would be to get marketing operating. But I think unless you're faced with a crisis like Charlton were, or Wimbledon, then there are still people around the club who think, 'Last season we had a good season, we'll attract more people. If we have a bad season we'll attract fewer people. Hey ho, such is life.' And it's like Carling saying, 'We've had a good summer? We'll sell more lager. A bad summer? Who cares? Our sales will be down. Hey ho, that's life.' Can you imagine?

Dean was clear that many women already go to watch the team, but struggled to articulate details of this, or even reasons why women would attend:

I think it's beginning to, almost by accident, we're doing some work with, and of course if you've been, then you'll know, and the results of your survey, we have a high proportion of women and kids in the crowd already.

It is glaring here that the club labels 'women and children' as one sub-set of non-traditional football fans, leaving the corollary that the traditional football fans who maintain privileged access to the ground are men. Indeed, the lack of provision for women in terms of ground facilities is the next point he raises:

My wife would say you wouldn't know it [that there are a high proportion of women at the ground] to judge from the ladies' toilets.

‘Have you seen the ladies’ toilets?’ ‘I haven’t seen the ladies’ toilets. I know the ladies’ toilets are dreadful.’ We took some friends last year. [My wife] rang them up just before, and said go before you go, for God’s sake. You won’t want to go when you’re there.

It makes a comic anecdote for Dean, but the flip side to this is that although the ladies’ toilets are dreadful and the board members know this to be the case, it is not deemed important enough to deal with and thus female fans are not deemed important enough to get acceptable facilities. Dean mentions one instance of female-specific marketing, but as he explains it as far as he can (it becomes clear that he is unsure of the details of the offer) he realises that it could be perceived as sexist, and acts quickly to point this out:

We do a Ladies’ Day once a year. It’s just, we’ve got a very good ladies’ team. We’ve got a good ladies’ team, they turn up, women get in for free, I think – how sexist is this? There’s the main game, and then [the ladies’ team] will use the pitch immediately afterwards, and you can sit and watch that. I don’t suppose many people sit to, I stayed the first two years. There isn’t that much interest from the normal football supporter about the ladies’ game.

He quickly points out that women getting free entry could be deemed as ‘sexist’ because women are being treated differently from male supporters. Yet his anecdote is also intertwined with what seems to be an institutionally sexist attitude towards women playing football. Their low attendances are explained by Dean as simply because people

are not interested in women playing football, even though he is astute about the club's poor marketing when it comes to the men's team, pinpointing flaws and making suggestions, and does not attribute poor attendances to people (or as he may put it 'normal supporters') not being interested in men playing football; instead, he acknowledges that the club's outreach work has been poor and much needs to be done to interest the local communities. It is possible here that Dean is extrapolating from his own experience – as a 'normal football supporter', he is entirely uninterested in the women's game, even when they are playing for the club where he is a director. The 'normal supporter', based on Dean's entire interview, is evidently a man who follows men's football; the corollary is that it is abnormal for a woman to follow men's football, to follow the women's game or even have a passing interest in it.

8.3 The football authorities and their attitude to 'sexism'

I also interviewed two key figures at the FA and the Football League, asking them about their organisation's perception of female fans, sexism, and whether they have strategies in place to overcome some of the barriers that female fans face.³ Both had responsibility in their roles for promoting the game to a wider audience, including dealing with issues of sexism; but as this following section shows, neither the FA nor the Football League had any clear understanding of what constitutes sexism, and there was little to no understanding of the experience of female fans.

3 Williams (2006) notes the increasing numbers of women and girls playing football in the UK, attributing this to the authorities' efforts to promote the game, but fails to mention either the FA's historic resistance to women playing football, or that there has been a continued resistance to allowing girls to play football in mixed teams after the age of 12; only in 2011 has the FA relented and permitted.

At the time of interview, Laura had been in her role at the FA for over six years. The FA have committed to eliminating all kinds of discrimination from the game, but in recent years this has primarily meant racism via the highly-publicised Kick It Out campaign.⁴ This has progressed from simply an anti-racism campaign to one that encourages community integration,⁵ taking in and combating other forms of prejudice and discrimination, as she explains:

...We've focused heavily on race, we've now got an emphasis on homophobia, anti-semitism, islamophobia...

She did not mention sexism in this list, but it is part of the newly-expanded Kick It Out project as one of the unacceptable behaviours the FA is now trying to eliminate in football through direct action and awareness raising. It is not necessarily a priority; indeed, Laura explained that the very word 'sexism' is misunderstood by most people. As she puts it:

I don't think we have any clear idea about sexism, about what sexism actually is. So I think if you were to say to people, what's racism in football, they would generally understand it's probably black, white,

4 For more information about the Kick It Out campaign, its history and its aims, visit <http://www.kickitout.org>.

5 Although a little dated, it is worth considering the investigation of Back et al. (2001: 166ff) into the effectiveness of anti-racism movements in football; they report that one club chairman initially refused to sign a 'Let's Kick Racism Out Of Football' statement because, he said, he was a racist, but was told by the community officer that he should sign it anyway in order to keep up appearances. Bradbury and Williams (2006) are also highly critical of the last Labour government's attempts to redress inequality within football; they argue that the Football Task Force that was appointed to look into these issues simply assumed that racism in football no longer existed rather than considering potential issues of structural, institutional prejudice.

Asian abuse. But if you say 'What's sexism?' I don't think anyone could answer that.

She is keen to emphasise that taking action against sexism does not mean removing 'humour' from the game, and significantly she believes that sexist comments can certainly be categorised as 'humour'. She explains:

I think there would be a lot of people who still think it's a bit fluffy, a bit about just being, women should be in the kitchen, or is it about some of the really, really nasty chants, the things you hear, you know, I can't say this on tape, the Beckham one, when they used to shout about her taking it up the arse. For me, there's a massive difference between, that was continual, that is absolutely offensive, insulting and abusive, to actually that's still a bit funny, like go home and do the ironing, clearly it's so far removed from what it's about. I think we haven't even touched on that. I think if you ask anyone if they have a sense of what it was, I think that's a challenge in terms of women's involvement in the game to try and raise awareness. That's the level we're really worried about. This is quite funny, we want to keep some humour in the game and on the terraces, but that's what we want to aim at eliminating.

She believes that sexism is actually generally understood in terms of humour, and thus is not taken seriously, adding: 'Sexism is dumb blonde jokes, it's fluffy.' Her emphasis

on not trying to change men's behaviour or force an entire reassessment of existing sexist attitudes is similar to the situation of the female football fans who are keen to distinguish between themselves as 'real fans' like the men (all men), and the 'newer' women at football, who act in feminine ways. She is equally keen to make it clear that as a woman in the FA campaigning against inequalities, she is not trying to stop men from making jokes about women. She stresses on more than one occasion that she is not the 'killjoy feminist'⁶ of myth, who wants to stop men from having fun, nor is working for equality about political correctness; for example, as she explains here:

One of the first things we say in any of the equalities training, that we tell the tutor to say, is that it's not about political correctness... This is about treating people fairly, with respect.

It is significant that she shuns 'political correctness' as a term, and she explains that the phrase and the concept are both viewed negatively by people undergoing the FA's equalities training. The need to take into account the feelings of people undergoing training can be explained by the fact that it is not compulsory, and is directed at grassroots volunteers and key workers. These people need to be accommodated, otherwise the game will not be able to operate properly. The fear of being associated with the negative 'political correctness' means that training courses must begin by dissociating themselves from it. She says:

6 The idea that feminism is 'humourless' is one perpetuated in popular culture and journalism; philosopher Roger Scruton wrote in the *American Spectator*: "The literature of feminism is devoid of humor -- and advisedly so, for if it ever were to employ this resource it would die laughing at itself' (2007).

We get them and we say it's not about the loony left that you used to see in London, it's not about whether you can say blackboard or white coffee. It's nothing like that. This is about treating people fairly, with respect. You can almost see them physically relax in the room when you say that, they go, 'Oh, OK.'. The other thing we get them to say is we're not here to tell them what to say or what to think. That's up to them. All we can do is help people understand.

For all the FA's policies and courses, they do nothing to encourage female fans into the game, because they do not see that as their remit. Nor can they change the attitudes that exist on the terraces – one of the major obstacles or issues for existing female fans. As she explains here, the FA deals with registered participants and the running of the game:

We do staff equality training, special leagues do training, but the group we can't get to is fans, for obvious reasons. They're not registered participants. We've got no control over them, if you like. Where you've got referees, we can say you have to do it, they'll do it. Where you've got a whole mass of people who are not registered, it's difficult to know how to educate them.

Even though as Hughson and Poulton (2009: 510) point out, 'The FA is also responsible for promoting and regulating the game off the field, meaning it has direct responsibility for football fan culture particularly in regard to the maintenance of public order,' if aggression or prejudice among fans does not escalate into actual violence, the FA will

not act.^{7,8} The FA can offer (non-compulsory) courses to member clubs and officials at all levels, or insist that members go on courses in certain circumstances, but they can do nothing about fans. The fans have chosen to be at football, but more significantly they bring money into the game. Without the money coming through the turnstiles, the game cannot operate; and it is financially not worth alienating the ‘sexist’ male fans to placate those fans (female or male) who are offended by their actions and attitudes – the number of fans who are offended and also prepared to speak out about the offence is evidently much smaller than those who either participate in or tolerate such behaviour.⁹ More precisely, she says that it is ‘difficult to know’ what line of action to take, indicating that education is certainly needed on the terraces, but her options are limited. Thus the FA’s default decision is to piggyback on the work done by the Kick It Out campaign, because the infrastructure is already in place, and because it has been successful in reducing racial prejudice in football. For all their promises to support equality in the game, the only actions Laura herself can take on behalf of the FA are ‘fire-fighting’ ones – she can step in to deal with problems that have already arisen, such as offensive chanting on the terraces. What she and the FA cannot do is address problems they anticipate may arise; and, as is evident from her interest in this research,

7 However, the FA run and administrate ‘englandfans’, the official supporters’ group for the England men’s team. Fans who wish to become part of this group must register, and also sign up to a list of anti-discriminatory requirements (Hughson and Poulton, 2009: 511ff).

8 It is interesting to note that Dougie Brimson, a ‘reformed hooligan’ who now writes on football violence, has called on the FA to lead the campaign against hooliganism, arguing that it is their role to administer the game, and they have avoided dealing with hooliganism for what he deems to be much too long (cf. Brimson, 2000). His point is that the FA rarely become proactively involved in any campaign to change people’s behaviour or alter the status quo at all.

9 This is similar to what Nash (1999) points out with regard to independent supporters’ associations; they struggle to criticise the behaviour of fellow fans because they do not want to create a split in the fanbase or drive away potential fans/consumers from the club.

nor do they actively find out what can be done to make football a more welcoming domain for previously and traditionally excluded groups.

At the Football League, I spoke to David, whose role encompassed wider customer service and customer experience issues. He talked about plans to encourage female attendance through the Fans of the Future initiative, aimed at bringing families into football. For the League, as for their member clubs represented by Paul and Dean, female attendance is not a target in itself; it is a byproduct of encouraging young people into the game, who will need to be accompanied by a parent, perhaps their mothers. Though this is certainly a long-term view, unlike at Peter's club it does not take into account the benefits of promoting football to women specifically. As David puts it:

Your specific topic is very much in terms of what we're trying to do in the League, which is be more family-orientated and more, well, our clubs, after the Premier League we're desperate for people.

He is careful to use the word 'people' here; though he hopes that these 'people' will eventually become fans, what is important (and this became increasingly apparent throughout the interview and will be shown through the rest of the chapter) is that 'people' go through the turnstiles and spend money on tickets, food and merchandise. Only through this kind of commercial spend will the Football League's clubs remain viable commercially. He talks about the need to bring young people in to the game, saying: 'These are the people who are going to make Luton viable and Bury viable – girls as well as boys.'

Encouraging women and families to football is not a question of promoting equality of access; it is a commercial necessity. David and the League as a whole are not particularly interested in the experience of women or women's perceptions or gendered perceptions; they are interested in attracting non-football fans to football, and believes that this should be done through bringing in families, maximising the revenue and guaranteeing future support:

Most kids under the age of eight go home and they don't know what the score is, they're running around, they can't concentrate for 90 minutes. So what are we offering above cheap tickets in the family stands? Can they be mascots? Are injured players going to sign autographs? Is there a juggler, is there a magician, blah blah blah?

This policy is based on the Football League's single piece of research into supporter experience, which focused on one family visiting various football clubs. In their edited report, which the Football League forwarded to me along with the raw data, the family stated:

Our over-riding impression of the vicinity is one of missed opportunities. We asked many stewards for directions, but there was no evidence of children or family focus. Only at two Clubs did there appear to be specially focused assistants, whose job was to look after 'first timers' and families. There is little to engage families or children, while other leisure attractions have face painting, free

entertainment – making use of all available space – but we felt like outsiders at many of the games we attended. (Football League Supporter Experience Assessment, 2007)

The focus on the ‘family’ mindset is clear. A football ground with jugglers, magicians and special guest appearances is certainly not the ‘traditional’ ground that has been so jealously guarded as a male domain, unsuitable for the faint-hearted or the female. Yet this break with tradition – or even alienating the traditional core male support – is not a problem for David, as long as enough people spend enough money at the club to keep it going.

David confessed during the interview that many peripheral issues surrounding female support had never occurred to him before, simply because he had not thought about them or attempted to consider any gendered problems at football. He recognised that as adults, women do get discouraged from going to football, but he framed it in a way that puts the responsibility for this decision first on the women themselves and second on facilities, neither of which would be anything he or the Football League as a whole could influence. He suggested:

It could be when you’re younger you put up with all these things that you wouldn’t put up with when you’re older. It’s probably, there’s probably an age group of support probably that stopped going when they had kids around the mid-90s, and actually, they’ve had kids, and then thought, well, I’m a mother now, I’m not going back to those shit

facilities. A lot of stadiums have improved since then.

When the themes emerging from this research were raised with David, he attempted to explain them and in some cases justify or mitigate them. For example, when sexist attitudes to women at grounds were discussed and the issue of adult cheerleaders making women uncomfortable was raised, he responded that some men also feel uncomfortable, and that some clubs use dance classes and the goal of becoming a cheerleader to encourage children along to their junior supporters' clubs:

...[T]he whole cheerleading thing, I think first for male supporters, there's a growing feeling for male supporters that they don't like it because it's too Americanised. They don't like it because they feel uncomfortable about it as well. You've got your other lot that are like phwoar, kind of stuff. Preston have got a cheerleading group, but it's on the back of the community project. It's not like they're getting people in Preston to put on short skirts and crop tops. They're young kids, who do the community programme, learn dance, and then go on the pitch. I think, I'm a traditionalist, I don't want that in football, it's all right in rugby league, it's a rugby league thing. I'd think about it differently if it was a group of eight to twelve-year-olds. Do you see what I mean?

David's objections, and those of the hypothetical male supporters, are not based on gender issues or empathy with female supporters, but with the grand 'tradition' of

football – perhaps the mythical ‘golden age’ of football that has so often been mentioned by other critics and theorists, examined in earlier chapters – that is being flouted by the introduction of new ideas. The objection to cheerleaders is not that it is sexist and objectifying, but that it is too American. As a representative of the Football League, he is obviously obliged to take the side of the member clubs, and in this case he gives an example of where cheerleading, however objectionable it is as a general concept, is acceptable because of its wider goal of community inclusion and attracting fans to the game. Similarly, when discussing the issue of attitudes at football, the mindset that ‘football is white, male and working-class and that’s all there is to it’ was mentioned. He was again defensive about this, but only on the class-based aspect – ‘Well, actually more and more it’s becoming white, male, lower-upper-middle class’. The fact that there is still sex bias and race bias in football was not addressed, or perhaps implicitly taken as read that such biases are always going to exist in an institutionally racist and sexist sport.

It is clear that within both the FA and the Football League, there is little agreed policy on how to promote football to women and how to deal with sexism; and this is largely because there is simply no agreement on what ‘sexism’ is, and when it is encountered, it is rarely acknowledged as a problem. Rather, it is treated as ‘humour’ or ‘banter’ or ‘not sexist, just fact’.

8.4 Conclusion

The persistence of institutionalised sexism in football, as highlighted by my respondents in the previous chapter, is unsurprising bearing in mind the lack of understanding of female fans' experiences and practices shown by clubs and authorities. Club directors and governing body officials demonstrate in their interviews their fear of the 'new' and of isolating or disenfranchising the 'traditional' (i.e. male and working-class) fan, particularly with regard to taking action against sexism in the ground and in the game more broadly. This is despite the fact that both clubs and authorities are anxious to encourage families to attend, including mothers and daughters. However, it is clear that this anxiety is not due to a keenness to promote equality of opportunity, simply a desire to maximise ticket revenues and merchandise spend.

The next chapter moves on to discuss the findings of this research and how it has achieved the aims initially set out in the introduction. It also explores the possible future of female football fandom, as perceived by clubs and authorities, and highlights the need for further interventions in this area of research.

Chapter 9. Discussion

9.1 Introduction

Female fandom has been one of the most neglected aspects of football scholarship. This thesis has attempted to begin to redress this imbalance, though of course there is still much more to be done. The existing body of football research and fan scholarship has certainly provided a starting point for my work, both in terms of setting a historical context and by highlighting methodological differences and alternatives (such as those of Coddington, 1997, and Robson, 2000) as well as gaps in the canon. Few other studies focus on the experiential as narrated by the participants themselves, but it seems evident from my research's findings that although every object of fandom and performance of fandom is different in both perception and practice, whether the individual is male or female, there are some significant overlaps in experience and performance among people who share a particular fandom.

9.2 Key findings and reflection on initial aims

The initial aims on commencing this research were:

- Why do women become football supporters?
- What do women get out of being football supporters?
- How does being a football supporter affect a woman's identity?

- How do women become football supporters?
- How does their fandom manifest itself?
- How does their fandom affect or frame their everyday lives?
- What is the peculiarity of female football fans' experience?

In addition, as I progressed through my research, I have also developed an awareness of the requirement of reflexivity during the data collection process as well as writing the thesis. As I have shown throughout, I (as researcher, as football fan, and in all the other elements that constitute the way I perform my 'self') am inextricably linked with the data, the interpretations, and the results and answers to the research questions set out initially. Throughout the data collection, I became more and more aware of my position as 'interviewer' and how it conflicted with my position as 'female football fan', as interviewees tried to create equal turn-taking conversations with me rather than allowing me to create an 'interview'. Then throughout the assessment and analysis of the narrative data collected, I recognised that the themes I highlighted as issues of interest were not necessarily the same themes that another researcher would have chosen; and nor were my interpretations the same as another researcher may have created. My frameworks for research and analysis are, like my own football fandom, created in their own cultural context; acknowledging how my 'self', my background and my fandom have affected my research and its outputs has been key throughout.

9.2.1 Why do women become football supporters?

Females begin their fandom for many reasons, but from this research's data it tends to

be the influence of the father that encourages them, with half of my questionnaire respondents attributing the start of their support to their fathers. This close relationship between father and daughter, cemented and maintained by their shared fandom, continues throughout their lives. However, this is not the only way in which female fans begin their fandom; respondents have also reported being influenced by mothers, other family members, friends and colleagues, and some even choose to attend matches alone. It is evident that the traditional conception of football support passing from father to son is somewhat outdated; female fans can also introduce friends, family members, and their children to football, and initiate them into the fandom.

9.2.2 What do women get out of being football supporters?

Whereas previous studies have discussed the ways in which football reaffirms ‘masculinity’ through bonding with men who support the same team (cf. Robson, 2000, Williams et al., 1984), female fans reported that they too enjoy the feeling of ‘belonging’ that comes from identifying with a team, a fanbase and a particular football ground, but they do not report that they feel it in a specifically gendered way.

9.2.3 How does being a football supporter affect a woman’s (performance of) identity?

Respondents’ perceptions of overt, deliberate sexism were limited. This is partly because female fans choose to perform their fandom in a way that is not marked as feminine; rather, they perform fandom in an unmarked, i.e. ‘normal’, i.e. ‘authentic’, i.e.

'typically male' way. Females performing fandom in this way do not highlight themselves as female or feminine, and are perceived (and perceive themselves) first and foremost as 'fans', not 'female fans'. I conclude that sexism is an unspoken, covert dynamic operating within football; it is institutionally ingrained in the sport; and it is never explicitly criticised as the authorities refuse to take the lead in combating this form of prejudice, and as such sexist attitudes persist. The easiest way to deal with this for respondents is to ignore it, just as most did with Mike Newell's comments about assistant referee Amy Rayner. As such, sexism remains implicit as football is not portrayed or perceived as a deliberately welcoming sphere for women: football clubs may say they want more women to attend games and that women are welcome to become football fans, but displays of women as cheerleaders at grounds or as 'Soccerettes' on mainstream football television indicate otherwise.

9.2.4 How do women become football supporters?

After being attracted to football through the influence of a significant person in their lives, respondents' fandom is consolidated through regular match attendance. Most enjoyed the social aspect of their fandom; many saw their fandom as part of a family tradition, while others enjoyed seeing their friends and chosen fan community, with very few viewing their support as a solitary activity.

9.2.5 How does their fandom manifest itself?

Respondents' fandom manifests itself primarily through the obvious display of

attending matches. However, the purchase of club-branded merchandise is also a significant demonstration of fandom, allowing fans to show their club allegiance in various ways, such as through their clothes (by wearing replica kit, or clothes with the club crest), or by displaying these items around the home or in the office (such as team posters). This allows them to signal their club allegiance and also their allegiance to the other members of the fandom, stressing the depth and intensity of their fandom and group membership.

9.2.6 How does their fandom affect or frame their everyday lives?

These manifestations of fandom affect the fans' everyday lives, as their demonstrations of allegiance impinge on their appearance or conduct. In addition, some respondents spent time in fan activities outside the football ground. Several participated in the supporters' trust movement, highlighting the appeal of community-focused action, and narrated their enthusiasm and enjoyment of their involvement. Some also wrote for unofficial fanzines and websites, playing an integral role in participating in these fan communities.

Some respondents also reported that their fandom requires them to make significant preparations for matchdays, such as arranging travel or accommodation if there is a long journey involved, or childcare if they would be away from home all day and/or overnight, but also advance preparations for displays of support within the ground, such as the creation of yellow confetti mentioned by Watford fans.

9.2.7 What is the peculiarity of female football fans' experience?

Though 'female fans' are no more a uniformly homogenous group than 'male fans' or indeed 'football fans' as a whole, it is clear that this research's sample of respondents perceive (at least some) aspects of football as gendered, and they are aware of football's gendered dynamics in their interaction with others, whether it is going to games despite disapproval from a female relative, proving to men their knowledge of the game, or disapproving of females who are too overtly feminine in their dress at a football ground. Similarly, though they may not act on these impulses consciously, they perform their identity as football fan and assume different interpretations of their 'gender' according to their audience, just as West and Zimmerman (1987) and Butler (1990) have argued.

9.3 Reflection on this thesis

From the quantitative and qualitative data, three key themes have been highlighted, and discussed in successive chapters: first, the female fan's supporting career; second, the female fan's practices of fandom; and third, the importance of the supporters' trust movement to the female fan. I have further explored the ways in which my respondents perceive and construct their identity (identities) and the ways in which they navigate these constructions within the 'institutionally sexist' domain of football have been explored. Finally, I have also examined the perceptions of female football fans held by football clubs and football authorities, focusing especially on the ways in which they promote the sport (or not) to girls and women.

As I demonstrated at the introduction of this thesis, there has historically been an accepted popular myth that women have never attended men's football matches with any degree of regularity, despite there being evidence that women have always been fans of the sport. This myth, and football's traditional positioning as a sport for (working-class) men, has allowed researchers to ignore the experience of female fans and concentrate solely on issues such as football's role in constituting fans' understanding of masculinity, and its creation of a site for father-son bonding. I have showed that, in sidelining female experience, this 'malestream' body of work has left glaring gaps in the literature of football research. My work has addressed some of these omissions.

In addition, where women's role in football has been mentioned in research, it has tended to be framing their attendance in terms of how it relates to the 'normal', male fan; usually that the presence of females should be encouraged in order to change or 'improve' men's behaviour, rather than to foster their own fandom in its own right; or that women attend football only to accompany men, not through any interest of their own. Again, my research has shown these sweeping assumptions are rather outdated; my respondents demonstrate that girls and women can make an autonomous choice to go to football without a civilising imperative being imposed – that is, given appropriate influences, including but not limited to an encouraging family member or friend, the money to pay for entry, and manageable school, work and/or domestic responsibilities.

9.4 The future of (research into) female fandom

It is certainly a possibility that the numbers of female fans in male professional football will increase over the next ten years as girls who have always played the game mature into financially independent womanhood. When I interviewed representatives from football clubs and the football authorities (the FA and the Football League), they seemed to think this might be the case, with David of the Football League arguing this particularly strongly. He suggested that the Football League need to begin marketing to them, to encourage them to pick a League team to support (rather than a Premier League team, which they will be more likely to see on television). He hypothesised at length about this, but it became apparent that the Football League did not have a plan to put into practice to achieve this aim, saying, ‘The reason why we get young boys is they usually play football and are interested in it, or their dads are. It should be no different for girls.’

The speculation here is key – the football authorities in England have very little data on female consumers of football, regardless of age, and regardless of how they consume football, whether it is as a player or as a fan, because there has been no research done in this field. There is no hard evidence to suggest that girls now who play football will be women who support men’s football in the future, but it is the hypothesis the League is working from. David was honest about the lack of work done in the area, but said that this was due to lack of staff and the broadness of his role rather than lack of inclination. He sought information from me throughout our interview to guide his answers and analysis, and again speculation was crucial. At several points, it became obvious that far

from me eliciting information from him, I was the expert in the interview, and my knowledge and research was desperately wanted by him as he asked me questions about girls' experience of playing sport and their initiation into football fandom. There is clearly a well-known and well-comprehended research base for these assumptions about why boys go to football; the best that he can do for explaining why girls go to football is extending the male framework to them – which encapsulates neatly why I wanted to research this topic in the first place.

What does seem clear from my research is that if women are encouraged to go to football, whether that is through advertising, marketing or encouragement from individuals close to them, they will certainly attend. There is nothing inherent within football as a sport that means it is male-only; but the attitudes from fans, clubs and the football authorities, culminating in an atmosphere and structures of institutional sexism mean that significant numbers of women are and could continue to be dissuaded from attendance or even interest. This is an area that requires much more investigation on a wider scale; the key themes identified and interrogated here are obviously indicative only of a relatively small sample, and, as I have signalled from the outset, have been selected by me as issues of interest within my own context as fan and researcher (or 'aca/fan').

9.5 Conclusion

This thesis has shown that female football fandom has been a sorely neglected aspect of scholarship, and draws upon the narratives of a small sample of respondents to produce

an initial assessment of some aspects of the female fan's experience. As such I am loath to conclude that there is a single peculiarly 'female' experience of fandom, any more than I would argue that there is a generic 'male' experience of fandom. However, the respondents' interest in and narration of their experience within the context of the three key themes isolated here indicates that it is likely that being female does influence or affect one's fandom at least in some ways: even if it is 'only' having to explain the offside law to disbelieving men every so often, as Notts County fan Alison discussed, or needing to ask for gates to be unlocked when turnstiles are too narrow when one is pregnant, as Watford fan Kimberley speculated, or feeling that one is inevitably going to be faced with sexist attitudes, as QPR fan Tracy and Watford fan Sarah both argued. However, although dealing with sexism may be inevitable for the female football fan, it is not always an explicit confrontation. Instead, as this thesis has shown, it is a subtle negotiation of identity as 'fan' and identity as 'female' within an institutionally sexist sport.

This research has been grounded in ideas centring on performativity and identity, and I argue throughout that all football fans choose to perform their fandom differently, and experience their fandom differently. As this research shows, fans' choices within their fandom and thus their experiences of their fandom are influenced by factors ranging from family background to the club they support, and so I conclude that one's biological sex also affects fandom. Indeed, as I have highlighted, it has traditionally been argued and accepted within 'malestream' football research that football is a domain in which 'historical' 'working-class' values of maleness and masculinity can be exercised, explored and displayed. Thus, even if there is not a uniquely and uniformly 'female'

experience of football fandom, *being* female is a factor that affects football fandom - not always explicitly, but obliquely, in a male-dominated, institutionally sexist sphere where 'male' and 'masculine' values and behaviour are still accepted as the norm.

Appendix A: Questionnaire and responses

<u>Collated data from questionnaire responses</u>	
<u>Question</u>	<u>Responses / 100</u>
1. What team do you support?	
Charlton Athletic	18
Brighton	13
Leyton Orient	7
Brentford	6
Tottenham Hotspur	6
Watford	6
Walsall	5
Leeds	4
Northampton	4
Notts County	4
Gillingham	3
Huddersfield	3
Liverpool	3
Crystal Palace	2
Doncaster Rovers	2
Wolverhampton Wanderers	2
Bury	1
Colchester United	1
Coventry	1
Ipswich	1
Luton Town	1
QPR	1
Rotherham	1
Sheffield Wednesday	1
Southend United	1
Wimbledon	1
Wrexham	1
None specified	1
Total	100

2. For how many years have you supported this team?	
0-3	3
4-6	10
7-9	12
10-12	8
13-15	11
16-18	9
19-21	7
22-24	2
25-27	7
28-30	7
30 or more	24
Total	100
3. Did any of these people prompt you to go to football?	
No, I went by myself of my own accord	9
Father	50
Mother	8
Sister	5
Brother	11
Other relation	4
Partner	15
Male friend	10
Female friend	11
Mixed group of friends	4
Colleague	2
Other	0
<i>N.B. Totals more than 100% because multiple answers allowed.</i>	129

4. Why did you first go to football?	
It was the influence of a friend/relative	61
The football ground was near my home	7
I had seen games on the TV and wanted to see a game live	20
I can't remember, I've always gone	4
Other	0
<i>N.B. Totals less than 100% because some respondents opted not to answer.</i>	92
5. Why do you still go to football?	
A pure and simple love of the sport	68
I enjoy the camaraderie with other fans	17
I like to travel around the country	2
It's a habit I can't break even if I wanted to	14
Other	0
<i>N.B. Totals more than 100% because some respondents signalled multiple reasons.</i>	101
6. In the 2003-04 season, how many of your team's games did you go to?	
All of them, home and away	6
All home games	44
45-50	4
40-44	3
35-39	6
30-34	7
25-29	10
20-24	12
15-19	4
10-14	5
5-9	8
0-4	5
<i>N.B. Totals more than 100% because some respondents signalled multiple answers (for example, an exact figure as well as all home games).</i>	228

7. Do you go to more than ten away games per season?			
YES	24		
NO	75		
<i>N.B. Respondent with no team allegiance did not answer.</i>			
	99		
8a. For the 2004-05 season, did you buy a season ticket?			
YES	73		
NO	27		
Total	100		
		8b. If no, have you ever held a season ticket?	
		YES	48
		NO	52
		Total	100
9. Will you be buying a season ticket for 2005-06?			
YES	78		
NO	24		
Total	100		
10. At your home ground, how do you prefer to watch?			
Sitting	83		
Standing	17		
Total	100		
11. How many Premiership/Football League grounds have you visited?			
0-10	37		
11-20	19		
21-30	14		
31-40	7		
41-50	7		
51-60	6		
61-70	3		
71-80	2		
Over 80	4		
<i>N.B. Totals less than 100% because one respondent opted not to answer.</i>			
	99		

12. How many non-league grounds have you visited?	
0-10	88
11-20	7
21-30	0
31-40	5
41-50	1
<i>N.B. Totals less than 100% because one respondent opted not to answer.</i>	99
13. How do you prepare for going to home matches during a season?	
I have to make childcare arrangements	13
I have to make other domestic arrangements (excluding childcare)	5
I regularly need to take time off work	5
I have to make car-share arrangements	18
I have to book seats on a train or coach	7
Other necessary preparation (specified)	23
None specified	45
<i>N.B. Totals more than 100% because multiple answers allowed.</i>	114
14. How do you prepare for going to away matches during a season?	
I have to make childcare arrangements	12
I have to make other domestic arrangements (excluding childcare)	7
I regularly need to take time off work	7
I have to make car-share arrangements	27
I have to book seats on a train or coach	38
Other necessary preparation (specified)	17
None specified	30
<i>N.B. Totals more than 100% because multiple answers allowed.</i>	138

15. Which of these words describes your team's home ground?	
Spacious	15
Cramped	16
Too big	0
Too small	23
Soulless	7
Traditional	29
Modern	22
Friendly	65
Ugly	8
Home	58
Shrine	17
<i>N.B. Totals more than 100% because multiple answers allowed.</i>	260
16. Are you a shareholder in your club?	
Yes	24
No	76
Total	100
17. Does your club have a shop (physical shop building)?	
Yes	100
No	0
Don't know	0
Total	100

18. What merchandise have you bought in the last season from the club?			
Matchday programmes	82		
Replica kits for me	35		
Replica kits as a gift for someone else	36		
Other items of clothing for me	43		
Other items of clothing as a gift for someone else	41		
Team poster for me	11		
Team poster as a gift for someone else	9		
Signed photo of player for me	8		
Signed photo of player as a gift for someone else	8		
A book for me	26		
A book as a gift for someone else	18		
Other items for me	0		
Other items as a gift for someone else	0		
N.B. Totals more than 100% because multiple answers allowed.	317		
19a. Does your club have a supporters' trust?			
Yes	56	19b. If yes, are you a member?	
No	10	YES	64
Don't know	33	NO	36
N.B. Totals less than 100% as respondent without club allegiance did not answer.	99	Total	100
20a. Does your club have a supporters' club?			
Yes	89	20b. If yes, are you a member?	
No	3	YES	38
Don't know	7	NO	62
N.B. Totals less than 100% as respondent without club allegiance did not answer.	99	Total	100

21a. Does your club have a fanzine?			
Yes	72	21b. If yes, do you buy the fanzine?	
No	11	YES	54
Don't know	14	NO	48
<i>N.B. Totals less than 100% as some respondents chose not to answer.</i>	97	Total	100
		21c. Or write for it?	
		YES	15
		NO	85
		Total	100
22. Do you or have you ever collected matchday programmes?			
Yes, I do	44		
Yes, I have done	34		
No, never	21		
<i>N.B. Totals less than 100% as one respondent chose not to answer.</i>	99		
23. Do you or have you ever collected other sorts of football memorabilia (eg a scrapbook of press cuttings, autographs of players)?			
Yes, I do	20		
Yes, I have done	53		
No, never	28		
<i>N.B. Totals more than 100% as one respondent indicated both past and present collecting.</i>	101		
24. Do you regularly watch on TV the highlights of games you have attended?			
Yes	89		
No	10		
<i>N.B. Totals less than 100% as one respondent chose not to answer.</i>	99		
25. Do you regularly watch on TV the highlights of games you have NOT attended?			
Yes	88		
No	14		
Total	100		

26. Do you regularly watch live football games on TV?	
Yes	83
No	17
Total	100
27. Do you regularly utilise any of these media products?	
Your club's official website (including messageboard)	81
An unofficial website (including messageboard)	50
Sky Sports website	28
BBC Sport website	53
Football365	12
Soccerbase	7
Other football website	0
Daily tabloid newspaper sports section	50
Daily broadsheet newspaper sports section	31
FourFourTwo magazine	14
When Saturday Comes magazine	9
Match magazine	3
Shoot magazine	1
Other monthly magazine	0
Other weekly magazine	0
N.B. Totals more than 100% as multiple responses allowed.	339
Further details about respondents	
Where do you live?	
Alone	15
With parents	18
In halls of residence	0
In flat or houseshare	6
With partner/spouse	37
With partner/spouse and dependents	22
With children ONLY	3
N.B. Totals less than 100% as one respondent chose not to answer.	99

Do you have children?	
Yes	37
No	62
<i>N.B. Totals less than 100% as one respondent chose not to answer.</i>	99
What is your occupation?	
School student	4
Student (undergraduate)	5
Student (postgraduate)	1
Unemployed	0
Homemaker	10
Part-time employed	19
Full-time employed	62
Retired	2
<i>N.B. Totals more than 100% as some students also worked part-time.</i>	103
What is your personal income?	
0-10k	23
10,001-15k	19
15,001-20k	11
20,001-25k	14
25,001-30k	11
30,001-35k	8
35,001-40k	2
Over 40k	9
<i>N.B. Totals less than 100% as some respondents chose not to answer.</i>	97

What is your household income?	
0-10k	4
10,001-15k	3
15,001-20k	10
20,001-25k	8
25,001-30k	10
30,001-35k	8
35,001-40k	4
Over 40k	47
<i>N.B. Totals less than 100% as some respondents chose not to answer.</i>	92

Appendix B: Ethics form

Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were asked to read an information form and then sign their consent to their responses being used in this thesis.

The information given was as follows:

Please read this before completing the questionnaire.

My research is into the experience of female football fans, and I am grateful to you for replying to my advertisement for respondents.

You will find at the end of this questionnaire a statement from the University Research Ethics Committee, along with a consent form which I would like you to sign and return to me.

This questionnaire is the first stage of my research. The data obtained will be used to elicit respondents for the second stage of my research, in which I will conduct interviews to be recorded on an MP3. It will also be used in the written account of my research, which will be submitted for assessment. Both a presentation of the data and the thesis can be viewed on request.

Your contact details, which you provided me with when agreeing to take part in the first stage of my research, will be used solely by me in the course of this research.

Your full real name and other identifying personal details will not be used in any account of my research.

Research data given in confidence do not enjoy legal privilege, that is they may be liable to subpoena in court.

I am a member of the British Sociological Association, and their statement of ethical practice can be provided to you on request.

Consent To Participate In A Research Study

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

Project Title

The Experience Of Female Football Fans In The English Game: A Qualitative Study

(working title)

Project Description

This research is an investigation into the experience of female football supporters in the English game. The aim is to elicit accounts from respondents about their experiences of following football, and then to discuss some issues about the sport.

As a respondent, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire, which will include questions on your background, your team, your match attendance and your relationship with your club. After this stage of the research, you may be asked to participate in an interview, either alone or in a group, which will be recorded on a minidisk.

Confidentiality Of The Data

All data will be used solely by me in the course of this research.

Location

I am based in London; the interview locations are yet to be arranged.

Disclaimer

You are not obliged to take part in this study, and are free to withdraw at any time during the tests. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

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