

# **Female Fandom in an English ‘Sports City’**

**A sociological study of female spectating and  
consumption around sport**

**Stacey Elizabeth Pope BSc, MSc (Leicester)**

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Department of Sociology

University of Leicester

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an exploratory study which examines, comparatively, the largely neglected area of female sports fandom. Using the UK East Midlands city of Leicester as a case study site for the research, 85 semi-structured interviews were conducted with three generations of female fans of football (Leicester City) and rugby union (Leicester Tigers).

The thesis emerges, broadly speaking, out of the recent feminist tradition of research on sport and leisure, but uses Glaser and Strauss's (2008) 'grounded theory' approach to data collection and analysis to seek to 'add' a sociological account of women's experiences as sports fans to the existing research on women and leisure. The main aim was to consider the extent to which, and how, sports fandom figures in the leisure lives of women in different sporting contexts today and in the recent past.

Continuity, as well as change, in women's sporting lives was a central theme. Whilst some women overcame barriers to their involvement in sport as players and spectators, many obstacles continue to restrict women's leisure involvement as active fans. The thesis examines the distinctiveness of women's experience of spectator sport as a changing commercial and cultural product in England from the post-war period, stressing both similarities, but also important differences between men's and women's historical experiences of these sports.

The differential extent to which sports fandom fosters a positive 'sense of place' for females was explored, as was the mutual hostility often expressed between female football and rugby fans which is largely attributed to the combined impact of relations of place, gender and social class. Little existing research has explored this complex terrain. Finally, important differences *between* women in terms of the wider meanings they attribute to their involvement in sport were revealed which other approaches to the study of fandom largely fail to acknowledge.

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*This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Ernest Cooper & David Pope*

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis is an empirical research project centred upon female sports fans in the UK city of Leicester. This East Midlands city was selected as a site for the research because of its strong sporting traditions, and its peculiarities in being one of the few cities in Britain in which a strong public interest in professional football is relatively balanced by interest in other professional sports, including a ‘classed’ male team sport rival, in the form of rugby union. This allowed my research to focus on female fans in two reasonably comparable sports (in terms of popularity and importance) in the same urban location, thus making for a highly original study. This thesis, then, is a comparative study of female fans of football (Leicester City, the Foxes), and rugby union (Leicester Tigers) in Leicester. This opening chapter outlines the need for this research, the grounded theory position I adopted, and the key aims and objectives of my thesis.

### **1.2 Existing Studies & Rationale for the Research**

A number of theorists have expressed the urgent need for more empirical research on fandom. Recently Jones and Lawrence (2000: 21) criticized how, twenty years ago, fans were ignored as a research area, yet the same authors argue that a similar accusation could be levelled at the academic community today. Because the nature and meaning of ‘fandom’ has remained largely un-theorized, it is claimed that: ‘we know virtually nothing about what produces fandom, what specific practices are associated with it, what role fans may play in social and cultural processes, or who is likely to become and remain a fan’ (Harris 1998: 3). Consequently, there have been demands for more

scholarship that seriously examines fan subcultures (Harrington and Bielby 1995: 5), and especially sports fans, who have been largely marginalized (see Schimmel *et al.*, 2007).

One might conclude from this that fandom has largely been ignored as a serious area for empirical research. Since fans are often viewed as ‘dangerously out of touch with reality’ (Jenkins 1992: 15), this has led to both the media and academics pathologizing fans, ‘without leading us much closer to understanding this important phenomenon’ (Harris 1998: 4-5). Fans have simply not been taken seriously as research subjects by either critics or scholars (Lewis, 1992), although this lack of research is perhaps unsurprising given the connotations of triviality and ‘non-seriousness’ often popularly associated with the study of fans (Jones and Lawrence 2000: 22). Hills (2002) posits that the lack of empirical research on fandom may be related to an associated ‘fear of a loss of respect’ for academics, as they are expected to be detached and rational. The ‘fan-scholar’ is suggested as a possible solution here, whereby fan and academic identities can be brought together. However, this may result in a double bind for the academic, one in which they are alienated by both fellow fans and by academics: ‘scholar-fans’ are typically looked down on as not being ‘proper’ academics, while ‘fan-scholars’ are typically viewed within fan groups as ‘pretentious’ or not ‘real’ fans. The typical stereotypes of fans has meant that there is very little literature that explores fandom as a normal, everyday cultural or social phenomenon (Jenson 1992: 13), so there is a pressing need for researchers to investigate more ‘normal’ patterns of fan behaviour and their everyday experiences, rather than simply ignoring them or only analysing ‘extreme’ examples or manifestations of fandom (see Crawford, 2004; Schimmel *et al.*, 2007).



Further impetus for the project was the specific dearth of detailed empirical research on *female* sports fans, in England and elsewhere. Whilst there is a large body of research which examines women's experiences of *playing* sport (see Chapter Two), barely any research has considered women's experiences as sports fans. The lack of research on females seems especially surprising in football, given the amount of material and research available on *male* supporters, which typically centres on the importance of sport for constructing hegemonic masculinities. In rugby union it is very difficult to locate reliable academic studies which examine supporters of either sex. Free and Hughson (2003: 152) in their critical examination of recent ethnographies of male football supporters have commented on the 'startling' absence of women in these ethnographies, and they express the hope that 'women's voices will be heard in future studies' (see also Gosling, 2007; Horne, 2006). On commencing the project in 2005 there was barely any qualitative material available on female fans of football or rugby - the most useful study I could locate then was Crawford and Gosling's (2004) research on female ice hockey fans. Since 2005, Jones (2008) has published on problems facing female soccer fans in England. This UK based research, along with a small number of international studies, has been useful as a comparator for my own research findings.

Thus, there seems to be a relative absence of empirical work on women, leisure and sport, and the urgent need for work to explore in some depth the role of sports fandom in women's lives largely shaped the focus of this research. My study, I would contend, makes one small contribution towards changing the relative invisibility of female sports fans. The originality of the project is further highlighted by its focus on examining generational change in women's sporting lives and comparing fans of two different

sports. This is indeed, I would suggest, a highly novel approach to the study of sports fandom in general.

The need for further research is also offered by the major transformations which have occurred in women's lives over the past 20 years which, arguably, have given women greater freedom and control in the work and leisure spheres, thus offering more women opportunities to enter and use public spaces from which they had restricted access or were previously excluded. It seems likely that this has included increased possibilities for watching - or perhaps even playing - football and rugby union today. It might also be expected, therefore, that sports fandom will play a greater role in the leisure lives of women today. This contention appears to be supported by fan surveys which seem to signal that increasing numbers of women are now attending sports events (see Williams, 2001, 2003). Furthermore, this relative increase in equality between the sexes has also coincided with major changes in the professional sports of football and rugby union in Britain which may have helped to 'open up' these sports to some women.

In football, the Hillsborough Stadium disaster in which 96 Liverpool supporters died on 15 April 1989 enforced major changes in the sport, and led to the so-called 'post-hooligan' football era in England, producing a safer and more 'civilised' environment at matches, promoted by highly managed, all-seater stadia (Williams, 2006). The formation of the FA Premier League in 1992 and the selling of TV rights for this new league to the satellite BSkyB channel, saw money flood into the game, and something of the scale of its recent hyper-commercialisation can be seen in Blackshaw and Crabbe's (2004) description of the ubiquitous nature of football today; the Premiership and its 'celebrity' players can be seen as a kind of dominant and deviant late-modern

‘soap opera’. Rugby union, too, underwent major transformations in this period when the sport became professional in 1995. Media coverage of rugby has increased dramatically (though not to the same extent as football) - matches were screened on satellite TV, and the European Heineken Cup was introduced for elite clubs. Perhaps most importantly - and as in football, though not quite to the same extent - live attendances grew as the sport became more ‘fashionable’ (Collins, 2009).

However, perhaps surprisingly, these major changes in the structures and financing of British sport - and in their growing female audience - do not seem to have prompted more empirical research on female fandom. In terms of football, assertions about the recent changes in the sport - including the alleged ‘feminization’ or ‘gentrification’ in its cultures which have supposedly enhanced the sport’s appeal to female fans - are widespread in the academic literature, but they are not supported by empirical research on women fans. My exploratory study in this new era for British sport will offer some opening statements about the ‘condition’ of women sports fans in two key sports. The theoretical perspective adopted for the study will now be briefly discussed.

### **1.3 Adopting a *Grounded Theory* approach & Aims and Objectives**

My thesis has a background in feminist studies in the area of sport and leisure and very obviously follows in the tradition of the work of people such as Deem (1986), Talbot (1988) and more recently Jones (2008). My literature review has been largely informed by such research, and there are clear methodological parallels between my own research and that of feminist studies of sport and leisure, where very similar issues of negotiating access to women interviewees were confronted and overcome (see Chapter Four). However, most of the seminal texts on women and leisure which have been published

over the past twenty years make little or no mention of *sports spectatorship* as a leisure choice for women. My research is thus, in part, offered as a reflection back to such absences in the earlier collections on women's leisure, such as Wimbush and Talbot's (1988) very important contribution in *Relative Freedoms*. My thesis thus seeks to 'add' or incorporate women's experiences as sports fans into the existing research on women and leisure, and so it makes a small contribution towards bringing women's leisure experiences as sports spectators in largely 'male' sports to the fore. Thus, I am sympathetic to feminist approaches and my work does have many similarities to existing feminist research in the field of sport and leisure. However, in terms of managing and interpreting my material I also found 'grounded theory' a highly useful theoretical tool to adopt for purposes of data collection and analysis. This approach is briefly outlined below and is the theoretical position from which I have sought to interpret and present my empirical findings.

In 1967, Glaser and Strauss published their ground-breaking work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. This text inspired new generations of social scientists and research professionals to adopt *qualitative* research methods (see Charmaz, 2006) and challenged 'grandiose armchair theorizing by developing a more effective means of generating theory' (Dey 2007: 172). Glaser and Strauss (2008: 1, 5) define grounded theory as 'the discovery of theory from data'; grounded theory is thus 'derived from data and then illustrated by characteristic examples of data'. In short, this approach rests upon a process of induction rather than deduction (Pole and Lampard, 2002).

This definition of grounded theory is now contested - indeed the two founders, Glaser and Strauss, went in different directions after their original collaboration, and whereas Glaser continued to define grounded theory as a method of discovery, Strauss moved the method towards issues of verification, cementing this position further in his co-authored works with Corbin (Charmaz, 2006). Bryant and Charmaz's (2007) *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory* demonstrates the extent to which scholars have invoked different positions in grounded theory approaches, with many of the contributors offering their ideas about what are taken to be the essential properties of grounded theory (e.g. Wiener, 2007; Urquhart, 2007; Hood, 2007). O'Neil Green *et al.*, (2007: 472-73) discuss three distinct versions of grounded theory:

- Constructivist - whereby it is proposed that the researcher is integral to data collection and theory development due to their past and present experiences (see Charmaz, 2006).
- Systematic - emphasis is placed on the researcher using a systematic matrix for coding (see Strauss and Corbin, 1998, Corbin and Strauss, 2008).
- Emergent - this position directs the researcher not to subscribe to using a matrix, and instead the emergent nature of analysis should dictate the study's direction (see Glaser, 1992).

Whilst acknowledging the complexity of defining grounded theory, I adopted a grounded theory perspective in my own research. I would suggest that Hood's (2007: 163) definition of grounded theory is especially useful here, who suggests that the three dominant 'brands' of grounded theory today (Glaserian, Straussian, and Charmazian) rest upon three principles, even if they vary in how each is implemented. These

principles are: (1) theoretical sampling, (2) constant comparison of data to theoretical categories, and (3) focus on the development of theory via theoretical saturation of categories rather than substantive verifiable findings.

Hood's (2007) three defining features of grounded theory were adopted in my research. Firstly, 'theoretical sampling' was employed. Corbin and Strauss (2008) define this as a method of data collection based on concepts/themes derived from data, with the expressed purpose to collect data from places, people, and events that will maximise opportunities to develop concepts. This was felt to be imperative in my research, given the dearth of existing studies on female sports fans as: 'theoretical sampling is especially important when studying new or uncharted areas because it allows for discovery' (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 145).

Secondly, the 'constant comparative method' was utilised. By constantly comparing many groups, Glaser and Strauss (2008) suggest that this draws the sociologist to their many similarities and differences and considering these will lead to the development of abstract categories. Lower level categories are said to emerge rather quickly at an early stage of data collection, whereas the higher level categories or concepts are the overriding and integrating conceptualizations and so come later in the analysis. Higher-level concepts are sometimes referred to as 'themes' and they can 'tell us what a group of lower-level concepts are pointing to or are indicating' (Corbin and Strauss 2008: 159). One of the major strengths of analysis of this kind is that the categories or themes have *emerged* from the data, so the researcher can be confident in their data and in developing theory (Glaser and Strauss 2008: 76).

Finally, Hood (2007) suggests that the development of theory should be via ‘theoretical saturation’ of categories, and I aimed to reach this point in my data collection. ‘Saturation’ is when ‘no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category. As he (*sic*) sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated’ (Glaser and Strauss 2008: 61).

Glaser and Strauss’s (2008: 32) classic text stresses the importance of studying an area: ‘without any preconceived theory that dictates, prior to the research, “relevancies” in concepts and hypotheses’ (see also Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Whilst I would agree with Bryant and Charmaz (2007) who propose that it is necessary to have some familiarity with existing literature before data collection and with their claim that anyone commencing research will already have some preconceived ideas relevant to the research area, I concur with Corbin and Strauss’s (2008) suggestion that the researcher should try to put aside preconceived notions about what they expect to find and let the data be a major guide for the analysis.

Glaser and Strauss (2008: 32) propose that grounded theory can be used to generate two basic kinds of theory: substantive and formal. Substantive theory is: ‘that developed for a substantive, or empirical, area of sociological inquiry’ and examples include areas such as race relations, delinquency or research organizations. Formal theory is: ‘that developed for a formal, or conceptual, area of sociological inquiry’ and examples provided include socialization, authority and power, and stigma. Charmaz (2006: 8) claims that: ‘most grounded theories are substantive theories because they address delimited problems in specific substantive areas’. My research on female sports fans

largely produces substantive theory, although I do draw upon other sources, incorporating more formal theory into the analysis where appropriate.

My research thus adopts what I would broadly describe as a grounded theory approach to explore the experiences of three generations of female sports fans (of football and rugby union), in one locale, Leicester. My key research question is to consider the extent to which, and how, sports fandom figures in the leisure lives of women in different sporting contexts today and in the recent past. In order to address this focus I have also been concerned with a number of sub-issues, which *emerged* during the data analysis:

- Continuity and change in women's sporting lives (see Chapter Five).
- Female sport spectatorship and social change (see Chapter Six).
- The extent to which sport fosters a positive 'sense of place' for female fans (see Chapter Seven).
- The wider meanings of sport for female fans (see Chapter Eight).

In the next chapter (*Chapter Two*) I move on to offer a more generalized account of how fandom is typically defined. I then describe some of the existing research in this area. I begin by outlining psychological and sociological studies which have attempted to measure the motives of sports fans, before addressing the complex relationship between fandom and consumption. I consider how sports fandom has typically focused on men and on constructing hegemonic masculinities. I also examine the extent to which the media trivialises the role of women in sport, before finally summarising the



existing empirical research conducted on female sports fans, both in the UK and elsewhere.

*Chapter Three* offers some wider context for the research by discussing how opportunities for females to become sports fans appear to have grown in late-modernity. I examine how women's leisure experiences were initially ignored by (male) academics, as well as how women were often excluded from the leisure sphere - especially in sport (as both players or spectators). I then consider in more detail the major structural shifts in late-modernity which have arguably re-orientated, relatively speaking, the balance of power between the sexes. Combined with crucial changes in football and rugby union, especially in the 1990s, I will argue that these shifts have presented new opportunities for women to become more involved as sports followers. Finally, I offer some background to the 'sport city' of Leicester, and why this location was an ideal case study site for the research.

*Chapter Four* offers a justification for the mix of qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches selected for the research. The data analysis is then divided into four 'results' chapters.

Firstly, *Chapter Five* centres upon change and continuity in women's leisure lives. This compares my three generations' early experiences of sport, and how different socializing agents served to exclude females from football and rugby as players and fans. I consider women's perceptions of change in terms of sporting opportunities for women today. I also address the limits to this change: some women are critical of women's push for equality; many continue to be compelled to take 'fan breaks' after

having children; and women's sport, in a more general sense, continues to be marginalized.

*Chapter Six* provides a brief historical overview of the experiences of those women who were active fans in earlier decades. It begins by addressing the connected themes of 'belonging', 'ownership' and 'togetherness' which were important for football and rugby fans in earlier decades, before briefly examining the iconic sporting events of the 'golden era' of football in the 1950s and 1960s which, in some cases, were important in first recruiting women fans to the sport. Women's experiences of the general movement of players from the crude categories of 'local, working class heroes' to 'sexualised national celebrities' is analysed, as is the impact of professionalism in rugby union. Finally, I address perceptions on changing patterns of females support for male professional sport in England.

*Chapter Seven* addresses some key differences between the fans of the two sports. I analyse the importance of place for female fans, and here I also consider the importance of following a local club for civic pride in the 'sports' city of Leicester, and the 'topophilic' attachments for women to sports stadia. I also offer an account of the class-inflected rivalry which exists between fans of football and rugby union in Leicester.

*Chapter Eight* offers a simple schema designed to try to help explore the importance and range of supporting styles available for female fans. I examine two main fan 'types' which were found to connect with distinctive kinds of gender performance in sport. I also consider here important issues concerning sport and sociability for female fans, as well as the perceptions women hold about the importance of sport for *male* fans.

Finally, *Chapter Nine* is my concluding chapter. Here I revisit the aims and objectives of the study, reflect on the research process, and make recommendations for future research. But let us now turn, firstly, to the important matter of offering some wider context for my research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Sports Fandom and Gender**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins by offering a generalized account of definitions of fandom, as this has gendered implications for the ways in which female fans are often presented in the Academy. I move on to consider some of the motivations for sports fandom, before addressing the complex relationship between fandom and consumption. This then leads into a discussion about how sports fandom has typically focused upon men and masculinities. I consider how the media usually trivializes the role of women in sport, which consequently helps to reinforce normative notions of women's inferior status as fans, before finally providing a summary of the existing research on female sports fans.

#### **2.2 Definitions of Fans and Fandom**

##### ***i) Popular stereotypes of fans***

Although there have been recent attempts to conduct comparative studies of sport fans and pop culture fans (see, for example, Gantz and Wenner, 1995; Jones and Lawrence, 2000), Schimmel *et al.*, (2007: 593) argue that there is a need to bridge the division between sports and other types of fandom. Indeed, it is only recently that sport scholars have even begun to cite the literature on fans and fandoms of other 'genres'. By examining existing research on other types of fandom (besides sport), I aim to avoid positioning my research on one side of this division, and would agree with Sandvoss (2005: 4) that:

‘To meaningfully theorize fandom as a practice across various genres...we need to reduce individual fan cultures in scale and move from ‘rich descriptions’...to the common themes, motivations and implications of the interaction between fans and their objects of fandom’.

There is a strong, underlying assumption that is discussed within much of the academic literature on fandom that the concept actually does not need to be defined, since ‘everybody knows what a “fan” is’ (Hills, 2002: ix). Lewis (1992: 1), for example, claims that fans are: ‘the most visible and identifiable of audiences’, and that it seems to be ‘common-sense’ that fans are simply the people who are ‘obsessed’ by particular stars, celebrities, films, TV programmes (often soaps), and/or sports teams (see also Hills, 2002; Lewis, 1992; MacDonald, 1998). Fans are also distinguished from other spectators by their ability to ‘produce realms of information on their object of fandom’ (Hills 2002: ix), hence, they attend to their TV programmes, stars or sports teams, in greater than usual detail (MacDonald 1998: 135). However, this approach has meant that much of the research in this area has been based upon taken-for-granted assumptions and stereotypes about fans. It might be useful to examine some of these briefly:

(a) Fans as cultural dopes

Grossberg (1992: 52) has described how, for many years, fandom has been studied as a forum for ‘cultural dopes’: as an arena for people who are passively consuming popular culture and not recognizing how this passivity exploits them, or fans who cannot discriminate between ‘authentic’ popular culture and ‘commercial’ or ‘tainted’ versions of this. These ideas developed from the Frankfurt School (see Strinati, 1995), which was first established in 1923. According to this theoretical perspective, people have ‘false needs’ which are fulfilled by the desires of consumerism, but this means that their

‘real needs’ remain unsatisfied. Adorno (1991) claims that it is the ‘culture industry’ that transforms people into ‘cultural dopes’ - illustrated by their preference for popular music over the avant-garde - but this can be extended to cover *all* fans of popular culture. However, Grossberg (1992: 53) stresses the need to overcome these embedded stereotypes of fans within the Academy; instead, fans need to be studied as actively creating their own meanings from texts, and should not be ‘conceived of as a singular homogeneous entity’. Adorno has also been criticised for being ‘elitist’, since he assumes other kinds of music can be judged by the standards of western classical music (Strinati 1995: 76).

#### (b) The ‘pathological’ fan

By failing to offer an impartial definition of the nature of fandom, many researchers have been influenced by popular stereotypes of fans which are either pathological or hysterical. Jenson (1992: 9), for example, states that: ‘the literature on fandom is haunted by images of deviance’, as fandom ‘is seen as excessive, bordering on deranged behaviour’. For Jenson (1992) there are two fan types which appear in popular and scholarly accounts of fandom. These are the result of recent fears about modernity, as it is claimed that the absence of stable identities in modern society has left people open to irrational appeals, leading them to turn to fandom to try and ‘compensate for their own inadequate lives’ (Jenson 1992: 18). Hence, the definition of modernity as a fragmented, disjointed mass society is mobilized in the two images of the pathological fan. The ‘obsessed loner’ is possibly the image of the ‘isolated, alienated, mass man’, who has been cut off from family and community, thus becoming vulnerable to the seductions of the mass media. These individuals often enter into an intense fantasy relationship with a celebrity figure and may stalk or threaten to kill them. They appear in current news

stories, such as in David Chapman's killing of ex-Beatle John Lennon. The 'frenzied fan', is vulnerable to irrational loyalties triggered by sports teams or celebrity figures. Even though not all - or many - fans will behave in this way, much of the existing literature seems to associate fandom with this kind of violent and irrational behaviour.

(c) Fans as 'losers'

Harrington and Bielby (1995: 102) have discussed the two further common images of the fan - as 'loser' and 'lunatic'. These stereotypes are reflected by the media depictions of fans. For instance, the image of the 'fan in the attack' or the 'lunatic' is often used in suspense films, detective novels and TV cop shows, such as the films *Misery* (1990) and *The Fan* (1981) (Jenkins 1992: 14). Barbas (2001: 2-3) also describes how back in 1938, the book *The Day of the Locust* ended with rioting fans waiting for film stars to emerge. In that same year the film *The Broadway Melody* is perhaps an illustration of the fan as 'loser' - the 'silly schoolgirl' (played by Judy Garland) foolishly falls in love with a movie star. Almost fifty years later, Robert De Niro played Rupert Pupkin in *The King of Comedy* (1983), yet another illustration of the 'loser' fan, who eventually resorts to stalking his idol.

This negative portrayal of fans is largely based on ignorance, since 'few of us understand what fans actually do and why they do it' (Harrington and Bielby 1995: 5). Yet scholars continue to rely on common-sense assumptions to define fandom. For instance, Jenkins (1992: 9-12) uses the example of the guest appearance of *Star Trek* star William Shatner on *Saturday Night Live* to illustrate how this negative presentation of 'fans' has won widespread public acceptance, and is quoted to Jenkins by his students and colleagues who question his own academic interest in fan culture.

“Trekkies” were portrayed on TV by Shatner as: ‘brainless consumers’, who could not easily separate fantasy from reality. Although some fans of TV shows and cinema do blur these boundaries (Jenkins 1992: 18), for example by flooding TV networks with congratulatory cards and letters when favourite characters get married (Harrington and Bielby 1995: 103), it would be unfair to generalise this to *all* fans. More recently, Gray *et al.*, (2007: 2) describe how Harry Potter fans were mocked by the media: when the fourth Potter installment premiered in North America, the *New York Post* published a two page spread with the headline: “*Potterheads: Wizards of Odd*”. But rather than challenging this negative presentation of fandom, academia often seems to perpetuate it. Popular culture scholars were primarily concerned in earlier decades with the issue of whether fans could distinguish between ‘reality’ and the fictional worlds constructed through the objects of their fandom (Schimmel *et al.*, 2007). Clearly there are major problems if academics in their study of fandom have, in this sense, been influenced by constructs mapped out by popular journalism (Jenkins and Tulloch 1995: 5).

## *ii) Gendered divisions within fandom and fan knowledge*

The term ‘fan’ derives from the word ‘fanatic’, which has ‘traditional links to madness and demonic possession’ (Jenkins 1992: 13). Associations in this context are often made between femininity and this dark portrayal of fans - although not all fans are female, the literature strongly suggests that many are (Harris 1998: 7). Jenkins (1992: 15) discusses the assumed differences between the sexes within fandom thus:

‘If the comic fan and the psychotic fan are usually portrayed as masculine, although frequently as de-gendered, asexual, or impotent, the eroticized fan is almost always female’.



Hence, whereas the feminine image of fandom is represented as, ‘sobbing and screaming and fainting, and assumes that an uncontrollable erotic energy is sparked by the chance to see or touch a male idol’, the masculine image of fandom, ‘is of drunken destructiveness, a rampage of uncontrollable masculine passion that is unleashed in response to a sports victory or defeat’ (Jenson 1992: 15). I do not have space to go into the numerous studies but, in short, academic research on fandom has tended to reflect this division, meaning that gender-driven research and gender-informed commentary is based largely upon the male in sport and football fandom and, by contrast, upon the female in media and TV fandom (Jones and Lawrence, 2000). Media coverage of female fans often exaggerates their activities or only focuses on extreme examples of their fandom. For example, the British press reported that the ‘mob’ - centrally female fans - was supposedly responsible for crushing 11 teenagers to death before a concert by the rock band *The Who* in 1979, but in reality the tragedy occurred because of structural inadequacies at the venue (Jenson, 1992). Consequently, it seems that academic research on female fans usually positions them as irrational. Female fans are typically researched as fans of soap operas (see Ang, 1991; Harrington and Bielby, 1995, Spence, 2005), new reality TV (see Kilborn, 2003), music (see Cline, 1992; Ehrenreich *et al.*, 1992, Hinerman, 1992), and movies/movie stars (Taylor, 1989; Barbas, 2001).

Fans also vary in how important or central their fan identity is to their lives. As Grossberg points out (1992: 58-9), for some, being a fan can constitute a dominant part of the fan’s identity. For others, it may not define their dominant social identities at all. Hence, not only are there differences comparing fans and non-fans, but there is also variations *between* fans in terms of how much of their fandom they are prepared to

reveal, the extent to which their fandom dominates their social identity, and how much knowledge they have of their object of fandom.

Fiske (1992: 42-43) argues that the accumulation of knowledge is fundamental to the accumulation of cultural capital in fandom, and that this has been recognized by the cultural industries that now produce a huge range of material to give fans access to valued information. This fan knowledge helps to distinguish a particular fan community (those who possess knowledge) from others (those who do not), as well as serving to differentiate within the fan community, as ‘the experts’ - those who have accumulated the most knowledge - gain prestige within the group. MacDonald (1998: 137) also suggests that fans are divided by well understood hierarchies: for example, in *Star Trek*, the hierarchy of knowledge is ‘determined by the amount of knowledge that person has about the fictional universe’.

## **2.3 Sports Fans’ Motivations**

### ***i) Quantitative attempts to ‘measure’ sport fans motivations***

Using statistical techniques Wann *et al.*, (2001: 31) in their research on sports fans in the USA identified eight most common sport fan motives. These were: ‘group affiliation’, ‘family’, ‘self-esteem’, ‘aesthetic’, ‘eustress’ (pleasure from excitement and arousal experienced during sports events), ‘entertainment’, ‘economic’ (motivated by the potential gains of sports gambling) and ‘escape’. Mehus (2005: 8) in research on spectators of soccer and ski-jumping, lends weight to Wann *et al.*’s (1995, 2001) findings that female fans score higher than male fans on social motives, although he also argues that there is more ‘uniting the experience of male and female spectators than what separates them’.

However, although various quantitative attempts have been used to examine the motivations of sports fans, important questions are obviously raised here concerning the degree to which fandom can be ‘measured’, and whether quantitative methods are the best approach for this. Trail and James (2001: 2) criticized Wann *et al.*’s research instrument, expressing concerns about its content validity, and arguing that ‘with several of the items it is unclear what, exactly, was being measured’. They developed their own Motivation Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) to improve upon and ‘solve’ problems with the Wann *et al.*, (1995) Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS), and this scale was used by James and Ridinger in their 2002 study ‘*Female and male sport fans: A comparison of sport consumption motives*’.

Hence, there is no one agreed scale used by researchers to try to measure accurately sport fan motivations and differences in levels of motivation. Studies by Dietz-Uhler *et al.*, (2000) and Jones and Lawrence (2000) have used Wann and Branscombe’s (1993) Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSI), because of its supposed ‘reliability’. However, the adapting and refining of such scales makes comparisons between different studies extremely difficult. Therefore, perhaps more *qualitative* methods and more ‘subjective’ observations can provide a more satisfactory approach to assessing levels and types of fandom. For example, the sociologist Giulianotti (2002: 30) has recently created a ‘taxonomy of spectator identities in football’, arguing that football spectators can be classified into four ideal-types: Supporters, Fans, Followers and Flâneurs. These four spectator categories are also underpinned by two binary oppositions: hot-cool and traditional-consumer, thus there are four quadrants forming the taxonomy: Traditional/Hot Spectators (Supporters), Traditional/Cool Spectators (Followers), Hot/Consumer Spectators (Fans) and Cool/Consumer Spectators (Flâneurs). The

traditional/consumer horizontal axis measures the basis of the individual's investment in a club - whereas traditional spectators have a longer and more local identification with the club, consumer fans have a more market-centred relationship. The hot-cool vertical axis represents the different degrees to which the club is central to the individual's project of self-formation, with 'hot' forms of loyalty emphasizing intense forms of identification with the club and 'cool' denoting the reverse. In my view, using this is potentially a more useful approach for analysing the particular kind of identification that fans feel towards their sports clubs, even if it relies more upon the researcher's own creative and discursive judgements than it does on a linear questionnaire scale. Before collecting my own data I found this a helpful model to begin to think about the potential differences that might arise between women or possibly between fans of the two different sports. I later draw on this approach to develop my own model of female fandom (see Chapter Eight).

## ***ii) Other sport fan motivations***

A range of other motivations have been put forward to explain the attractions and incentives of being a sports fan. For example, it has been routinely contended that sports fans in Britain do not attend matches simply to spectate; they go to *participate*, believing, with some degree of justification, that they may be able to influence the result of the game by supporting their team, or creating an intimidating atmosphere for the opposition (Boyle and Haynes 2000: 204). Sports fans, in effect, are asked to purchase what they themselves actively and imaginatively create: the spectacle of 'support' and the 'atmosphere' at matches (King 2002: 141). Thus, sports fandom is different to other forms of fandom, in the sense that other sorts of fans are not usually involved in influencing outcomes for the object of their fandom, and therefore are less likely to be

able to enhance their self-esteem through the process of basking in reflected glory or 'BIRGing' (see Cialdini *et al.*, 1976). They achieve this, for instance, by wearing team colours after victories and using the pronoun 'we' to describe a win (Wann *et al.*, 2001: 170).

We have seen how there is often a negative academic portrayal of fandom - fandom is often perceived as a substitution for something *lacking* in individuals' own lives and fans are often presented as 'losers'. But Sandvoss (2003: 100-104) offers an account of football fans motivations which challenges this view. He proposes that there is a narcissistic self-reflection between the fan and the object of their fandom - fans will emphasise parallels between themselves and their object of fandom, and may even 'superimpose attributes of the self, their beliefs and values systems, and ultimately, their sense of self on the object of fandom'. Sandvoss draws on examples of football fans to illustrate this, for example, those who identify with the 'success' of Chelsea Football Club and use this as an extension of their own identity. From this perspective sports fandom is about literal self-reflection and individualisation. Others have contested that sports fandom is undertaken for feelings of collective belonging. Crawford (2004: 53) for example, posits that in bringing people together sport can 'play an important role in defining their sense of identity and belonging...it is not necessarily the case that supporters need to know each other or even associate with fellow fans. It is more important that supporters *believe* that they possess a shared sense of identity'. He too, however, highlights the new role of spectators as performers. Using the mass media to inform their performance, supporters 'can carry with them the information and consumer goods they have acquired at the 'live' venue and utilize these in performances in their everyday lives' (Crawford 2004: 87).

## 2.4 Fandom and Consumption

### *i) The importance of consumption?*

According to Crawford (2004) changes within the wider society and moves towards a post-industrial, post-Fordist consumer culture have increased opportunities for fans to connect with sport via the mass media and the ever-growing market of consumer goods. He even goes as far as to suggest that being a fan is primarily a consumer act; consequently fans can be seen first and foremost as *consumers* (2004: 11, 4). Thus, for Crawford, consumption is a key component of fandom, and being a (sports) fan is most often associated with consuming, be that attending a 'live' sport event, watching it on television, or buying club products.

Furthermore, Harris (1998: 6) argues that consumption must be considered when developing object adequate theories of fandom, especially because the collection of fan products, 'serves both as an admission to fandom and as a form of ritualized maintenance'. Collecting fan objects can serve as a form of cultural capital in fandom, and although there are a few exceptions (for instance, autographed copies usually have high cultural capital), generally, as Fiske (1992) points out, the distinctiveness here often lies in the scale of the collection rather than in the uniqueness or the authenticity as cultural objects.

Media industries have quickly recognized the potential of fans as a ready-market for products (Harris 1998: 4). The labelling of fans as 'cultural dopes' also allows social theorists to look down on fans, on mere consumers who apparently cannot see that they are being exploited for commercial purposes. However, this perspective ignores those fans who understand well that 'industry-sanctioned gossip is altered or manufactured for

public consumption' (Harrington and Bielby 1995: 27). Furthermore, consumption via fandom can enhance the power of fans and even allow them to influence the object of their fandom. Barbas (2001), for example, argues that film fandom is the story of the way that fans significantly influenced Hollywood by actively creating their idols. She contends that the fear of potential box office losses and negative publicity has allowed movie fans to exert some significant control over the film industry. Although the film business also controls fans (by encouraging them to see consumption as a form of participation), this relationship is actually much more equal than has previously been speculated.

The relationship between fandom and consumption is a very complex one, of course, and this is largely because of the dualism that exists between processes of production (good) and consumption (bad). Fans can produce and circulate texts amongst themselves which have production values as high as any in the official culture but unlike official culture, fan texts are not produced for profit or mass-produced (Fiske 1992: 39), and few fans earn enough to see fandom as a primary source of personal income (Jenkins 1992: 49). However, Hills (2002: 30) has criticized researchers such as Fiske (1992) and Jenkins (1992) for defending fans on the basis that they are 'consumers who also produce'. Hills (2002: 30, 44) claims that the basic valuation of 'production' and the basic devaluation of 'consumption' continue to be accepted here, and suggests that 'any academic approach to fandom which favours one side of this contradiction inevitably falsifies the fan experience'. Football fandom is even more complicated in this respect as there is also a perceived tension between the sport's supposed 'new' ersatz consumers and older, more 'authentic' types of football fandom.

*ii) The 'problem' of football and consumption*

Following the Hillsborough Stadium disaster in 1989 (see Chapter Three), the popular image of English football today is of modernised, all-seater stadia filled to capacity with largely well-behaved supporters who are passively watching an unprecedented influx of expensive foreign stars (see Lee 1998: 32). However, this popular image has been challenged from a number of positions. In the new 'business' era of English football, football clubs or companies know they can rely on the unquestioning support of fans (Conn 1997: 66), so unlike other spheres of business, football is peculiarly vulnerable to exploitation of its customer base because of the loyalty and commitment of its supporters (Hamil *et al.*, 2001: 2). These worries about consumption in football are perhaps comparable to critiques and fears about mass culture and Americanisation in Britain, post-World War II in the 'slowly emerging consumer society' (Strinati 1995: 30).

The stock market flotation and marketisation of English football clubs has also financially exploited many supporters as, unlike financial investors (who will sell their shares if demands for a financial return are not met), supporter shareholders are 'unlikely to part with what they see as a stake in their club' (Hamil *et al.*, 2001: 3). Sponsorship deals have also been criticized for their commodification of the sport which means now 'we recognise the sponsor's name and thereby recognise the football team' (Horton 1997: 54). Many football grounds (now *stadiums*) have lost their traditional names (see, even, Leicester City's new Walkers Stadium) and supporters' lack of power and control over what was traditionally *their* ground can even be compared to the more extreme American examples, where sports clubs in the modern era routinely threaten to move cities, knowing that this requires million dollar solutions,



without caring for the emotional attachments of supporters and the civic identity sports teams bring to cities (see Euchner, 1993).

It has also been argued that whereas for much of the post-war period the Football League structure protected the interests of lower division clubs, the new commercialisation of football has served to legitimise inequalities between the rich Premier League and the other, poorer, divisions (Lee 1998: 33). Hamil *et al.*, (2001: 3) have noted what they claim to be the negative effects on the overall quality of the English game as a result of this new divide. Indeed, 'there is a very strong case for arguing that it is only among the 'super-rich' elite...that realistic title winners can be found' (Lee 1998: 37) and thus the Premiership title race in England has become very predictable. Conn (1997: 287) contests, without real evidence, that 'if nothing changes, the future of English football is entirely predictable...Every decision will be made solely on the basis of whether it will make more money for the already rich'. There is, however, little suggestion so far that making major investments in football in England can actually produce serious profits for those involved: the Glazers at Manchester United, the American owners of Liverpool and Roman Abramovich at Chelsea seem a long way from realising profits at these clubs. But because of financial pressures, there is a danger that football will 'develop in ways that serve the interests of those outside the game and weaken the links between football clubs, supporters and their local communities' (Hamil *et al.*, 2001: 1).

Hamil *et al.*'s (2001) solution to this dilemma is to formalize the positive role supporters play in football, through creating *Supporters' Trusts*, and, perhaps ironically, Lee (1998: 48) argues that it is the purchasing of merchandise which gives 'English

supporters a most potent weapon'. Supporters have the power to withdraw this custom in order 'to defy the corporate merchandisers and artificial uniformity of all-seater stadia'. Maybe supporters are most fearful that football in England will develop like the USA's 'Super Bowl', where oversized Coke cans and the 'Little Green Sprout' look natural during Super Bowl week, and visually represent the 'grandiose celebration of commerce and commodification' in American sport (Schwartz 1998: 64). There can be no doubting in this case that although supporters want to believe 'the spectacle taking place is a game', instead it 'has become a profitable commercialized holiday, fashioned to perpetuate the social and economic regime of corporate capitalism' (Schwartz 1998: 136).

Purchasing products actually seems to advertise and validate fandom in relation to pop music. For example, fans must buy CDs as well as go to pop concerts to exercise their role as fans. However, in sport, a willingness to 'sacrifice' seems much more important than consumption per se as proof of 'real' fandom. Despite the numerous parallels which have been drawn between sports fans and other 'consumers', I would suggest that it is also necessary to distinguish fans from mere 'shoppers'. Grossberg (1997: 222) states that: 'fandom is different from consumption or simply enjoyment (although it may incorporate it) because it involves a certain kind of identification or investment', and King (2002: 141) has also noted that fan consumption of sport 'is radically different from that of the consumer of domestic goods, who will merely go to the cheapest or most convenient shop'. Hence, buying sports club merchandise is a very different form of consumption, as fans often identify strongly with the club badge, colours or name on these products and these are likely to have an emotional attachment for fans.

Nevertheless, it is clear that consumption is perhaps more problematic in sports than in other forms of popular culture. In football, it is the so-called ‘traditional’ supporters who have found themselves increasingly excluded from the game as a result of increased ticket prices and the commodification of the sport (Williams and Perkins, 1998). ‘Traditional’ football fans claim that they can ‘see through’ some of the new (inauthentic) forms of fandom in England, those based more strongly around consumption and customer ideologies. Chants such as the Old Trafford query: ‘Do you come from Manchester?’ is an implied critique from traditionalists of these new ‘consumer’ fans from outside the city. This approach claims that the commercialization of clubs such as Manchester United has somehow rendered the club itself as ‘inauthentic’ since it is no longer actively supported by the local working class community but by middle-class fans from outside the Manchester area who attend the club’s matches primarily as customers and only when the club is successful (King 2000: 427). Hence, the typically ‘modernist’ style of football fandom in England (based on local, male, classed links between the pub, work and football club) has, allegedly, been challenged in recent years by more ‘inauthentic’, middle-class styles of support which are less dependent on organic, local or family ties to the club. Interestingly, these ‘new’ fans are often assumed to be *female*, and consequently this seems to have impacted upon much of the existing research on sports fandom, which either seems to invisibilise the experiences of female fans or else includes them only as inauthentic, consumer fans. Let me now move on to explore existing research on sports fandom and gender in more detail.

## 2.5 Sports Fandom and Gender

### *i) The 'other' in sports fandom & the focus on men and masculinities*

Fans of individual sports such as tennis or golf may claim to watch for their general enjoyment of the sport, but most are likely to favour certain players and so 'unfavour' others. Although music fans, for example, may dislike those who follow other 'groups' or 'types' of music, they do not oppose 'others' to the same extremities that football fans, for example, oppose other teams. King (2002: 168, 141) has discussed at some length the energising rivalries between football supporters. The 'lads' (young male fans) usually sing songs referring to their superiority and their opposition's inferiority, and he notes that even when compared with fans of pop bands, football fans show a remarkable 'monomania'. Whereas most fans of pop bands will also own records of other bands or go to see other bands playing, the dedicated fan of a football club will pretty much exclusively attend the matches of that club and purchase only that club's merchandise.

Jones and Lawrence (2000: 10) have also discussed characteristics fans display as part of their group membership, including: 'ethnocentrism' (seeing the group the fan belongs to as 'special'), and 'conflict with, or derogation of other groups'. They conclude that 'football fans showed dislike of their rivals, and a desire to be successful to a greater extent than did their Star Trek counterparts' (2000: 19). For Armstrong and Young (2000: 175) it is the act of following a team which 'permits various antagonisms to well up in ways that are similar to a 'ritualized warfare''. This 'otherness' is reflected in the fact that, unlike other forms of fandom, much of the academic research on sports fans - especially football fans in England - has focused upon on male hooligan cultures and/or fan rivalry (see, for example, Armstrong, 1998; Armstrong and Giulianotti, 1997; Dunning *et al.*, 1984, 1986, 1990; Kuper, 1996). Other football fan research has

examined ‘lads’ sporting identities (e.g. King, 2002), and male-dominated organized supporter movements (for example, Taylor, 1992; Nash, 2001) in a search for evidence of ‘authentic’ forms of male fandom. Given the dominance of the research on hooliganism in the arena of the sports crowd in England: ‘the dearth of research on female fans or even on issues, is perhaps unsurprising’ (Jones and Lawrence 2000: 11), since hooliganism is, in the UK at least, usually an all-male ‘problem’.

The tendency for academics to focus upon female fans almost exclusively as ‘media’ fans, but also to label these fans as ‘irrational’ has meant that in the few cases where females have been analysed as *sports* fans, these existing stereotypes may have impacted upon the research. The associations made between the increasing middle class entry to football post-1989 and the marketing of ‘new’ football as a ‘family’ product, allegedly leading to rising numbers of women fans attending matches in England (see Chapter Three) could also have perhaps played a role in helping to sustain the gendered hierarchy that seems apparent in sports fan research between male and female fans.

For example King (2002) in his research on Manchester United supporters, appears to present a duality between male (the ‘lads’) and female (‘new consumer’ fans). ‘The lads’ in his research on Manchester United fans resist the new consumption of football by insistently standing up in the stadium, by pointedly not buying club merchandise, and by ‘reasserting’ the class traditions of the sport by persistently arguing that the game was traditionally a working class men’s sport of which they are the inheritors (King 2002: 163, 154). But although ‘the lads’ criticize the ‘new consumer’ fans who ostentatiously purchase club merchandise, they can also appreciate that consumption is important for their club in an era of global super clubs and market competition. They

are, thus, secretly pleased that (other) fans buy the club shirt and that merchandise sales are high. Ironically, this compliance has been informed 'by the same notions of masculinity that have provided a resource and reason for resistance' (King 2002: 166). It is this masculinised need for both commercial and playing success which has led 'the lads' to accept football clubs as profit-making businesses. The logic is that once 'the lads' have accepted the new commonsense that football is a business, it is axiomatic that they should want the club to be successful as a capitalist institution. Thus, they can appreciate the importance of consumption for their club, whilst simultaneously deriding the 'new consumer' fans who have invaded their cultural territories.

King (2002: 195) does attempt to incorporate female fans into his analysis, but they are uniformly labelled by him as 'new consumer' fans. He claims that these females can only fall into one of three categories he has constructed for them:

- Fans who have attended matches for a long time and approve of changes in the game. At Manchester United, it is proposed that a large number of middle-aged and elderly single women make up part of this group, resulting from popular reactions to the Munich disaster of 1958 whereby seven members of the team were killed in an air crash.
- Those who have been encouraged to attend matches after the creation of a new family stand at Old Trafford.
- The teenage girls who now attend football matches because of the new sexual attractiveness of star players.

Although undoubtedly some female fans do attend football matches for reasons such as these, the fact that King (2002) has claimed that males ('the lads') and females ('the

new consumer fans') have entirely different forms of fandom available to them means that his research does not look beyond these gender stereotypes, and therefore does not consider the possibility of female fans who may support clubs - and the sport - for similar or the same reasons as the 'lads'. As a result he also appears to present a hierarchy between male (traditional, authentic) and female (consumer, inauthentic) fandom.

Nash (2000) in his research on Independent Supporters Associations (ISAs) expands on this duality further. Nash suggests that the transformation of English football in the 1990s centres around an ideological struggle between an old fan tradition (working class terrace culture from the 1960s or Nash's 'traditionality') and 'modernization' or 'new fandom'. Nash (2000: 468) examines the ideological construction of these two groups: shared rituals or modes of interaction are used to demonstrate *genuine* loyalty and club devotion for the 'traditional' fans, whereas negative perceptions of English football prior to the commercial revolution has provided the 'new fandom' group of the 1990s with some misleading ideas of the history of football which consequently impact upon their conceptions of the present and so they construct another 'imagined' fan culture. Nash (2000) draws upon various sources including King (1997, see also 2002) amongst others (for example, Brimson and Brimson, 1996; Brown, 1998; Edge, 1997; Sampson, 1998) to construct some broad-brush principals of the two schools of fandom.

The 'traditionality' category, in short, consists of supporters who attend in groups and are loud and aggressive, with a close personal and local identification to the club and the 'new fandom' group in contrast are those with a much weaker attachment to their club as for them football is merely another form of late-modern entertainment. King's

(2002) 'lads' and 'new consumer' fans can be positioned on the opposing sides of these fan groups, and so research of this kind appears to present a hierarchy between males as 'traditional' or 'authentic' supporters and females as more typically 'new consumer' fans, seemingly implying that they will have a 'naturally' weaker and contingent identification with their club.

Many theorists have also bemoaned the lack of information on the 'non hooligan' supporter in football - though usually meaning *male* fans - as a result of the emphasis in England on researching fan violence (see Duke: 1991; Haynes: 1995; Peitersen, 2009). Researchers such as Dunning (1999: 219) seem to be acutely conscious and almost wary that they are attempting to 'add' women into their analysis after decades of ignorance, and of focusing exclusively on 'sport as a male preserve': 'I shall extend my focus and explore, in a preliminary way', he tip-toes, 'not simply sport and masculinity but aspects of sport and femininity as well'. It is debatable how much this kind of 'research' - Dunning refers to no empirical evidence of his own on female spectators or players - can actually add to our understanding of female fandom, when women are merely 'added' to existing research agendas probably as much as a response to feminist critiques as it is to the recent rising numbers of women attending or playing sport (see Chapter Three).

Surprisingly, perhaps, most researchers have made little or no attempt specifically to incorporate women into analyses of sports fandom, despite evidence of their growing involvement (Brown 1998: 7). For instance, Pringle (2004:12) has recently assessed whether football can help in the development of a positive state of mental health for its fans, with perceived benefits including 'stress relief, catharsis and the development of



good parent-child relationships'. But the research explicitly excludes female supporters (Elliot, BBC News, accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2006). In trying to overturn or challenge the negative associations between masculinities and football, it seems especially odd that this recent project is aimed so exclusively at men. Much of the recent popular literature on football fandom has also focused exclusively on male supporter styles. These range from Hornby's elegant and troubled musings about the 'male condition' and sport in *Fever Pitch* (1992), to Brimson's more direct and less enlightening *The Geezers' Guide to Football*, (1998) and King's fictionalised and celebratory account of hooliganism, history and culture in *The Football Factory* (1997). In a collection of articles written by football fans about their spectator experiences in the early 1990s (mostly by academics or journalists), only three contributions were made by women out of a possible 24 (See Bull, 1992).

Crabbe *et al.*, (2006: 78) in their model of different styles of football fandom only discuss gender in relation to how football can generate tension in relationships with non-supporting partners. It is claimed 'there is a "gendered" aspect to the game which in some circumstances allows men to claim football as "theirs" and to use it to distance themselves from the women in their lives'. Football allows male fans to spend time with 'mates' and it is proposed this is especially true for the 'new dads' who seek to 'escape' new domestic realities. Crabbe *et al.*'s. (2006) 'football widows' focus group described how they did not feel they could object to their partner watching football and the associated drinking this often led to, since other women had sanctioned their partners' attendance. When asking 'Can the girls go out to play?' Crabbe *et al.*, (2006) only consider those women who do not follow football and so may be able to escape domestic burdens when their partner involves their children in the sport. But what about

women who use going to football as an 'escape' from domesticity and who do 'go out to play' in this way? Do female fans 'fit' Crabbe *et al.*'s. styles of fandom? Once again, female fans experiences are effectively excluded.

***ii) The relative 'invisibility' of females in the media coverage of sport***

It is also crucial to consider the prevailing TV and media sports agenda when examining female fandom as this shapes the presentation of both sport and fandom and so helps to define fandom itself. The mass media plays a crucial role in shaping people's social reality (Creedon 1998: 88; Duncan *et al.*, 1994: 249). Consequently, by trivialising the role of women in sport, the mass media may help to construct and reinforce people's ideas about women's 'natural' inferior status in sport. Haynes (1995: 114) has discussed how football's popularity amongst men has been bound by its reportage - literary, verbal and visual - within the mass media, so that the male domination of sport in newspaper columns, on TV and radio, helps to create and maintain the masculine control of sport.

We have already seen how there are presumptions about the gendered divisions in fandom - whereas soap fans are assumed to be female, sport has been described as a soap opera for males (Poynton and Hartley, 1990; Boyle and Haynes, 2000). Although research on television viewing patterns has shown that women watch more than men in every time and programme category except sporting events, simply stating such differences exist and suggesting, for example, that TV game shows or reality TV can assume for women the role that TV sports holds for men (Cooper-Chen 1994: 264, 270), only serves to reinforce the supposed 'naturally' different viewing patterns of

males and females and sustains the myth of the (male) 'armchair quarterback' and the (female) 'football widow' (Wenner and Gantz 1998: 233).

Furthermore, this sort of assumed division does not account for the female fans who *do* regularly watch sports 'live' or on television. For example, Wenner and Gantz (1998: 250) demonstrate that if the level of interest is statistically controlled, the motivational differences between men and women actually disappear and so both sexes are similar in their behaviours and feelings associated with television sports viewing. Davies (1992: 173) also provides an interesting account of a female football fan in England who no longer attends live games (due to childcare responsibilities), but 'as compensation, I devour any televised football'. Her own involvement or connection with the sport via watching football on television seems to be at least as powerful as her husband's. Hence, the broad, gendered generalizations in fandom made by many academics, *ignores* the many women who *are* involved in sports spectatorship both as 'armchair' supporters and live at sports events.

But although many women are active fans of sport, most of the established media continues to promote sport as a representation of deeply *masculine* values. For instance, Poynton and Hartley (1990) assess how televised professional Australian Rules Football appears to present an overtly masculine image involving sweat, blood and sometimes a few defeated tears. They argue that this marketable cliché serves to: 'illustrate the alliance between sport, media, capital and a specifically Australian representation of masculinity' (1990: 145). Drawing on the work of Easthope (1990), Kennedy (2004) has also examined how three characteristics which amount to the 'masculine style' (clarity, banter and obscenity) are apparent in contemporary football discussion

programmes. Boyle and Haynes (2000: 191) have also argued that televised sport continues to 'connote maleness'; hence the mass media deliberately excludes or alienates women from sport. If women are accommodated in the coverage of TV sport, 'it is in a marginal and trivial manner' (O'Connor and Boyle 1993: 116, see also Horne, 2006). Duncan and Messner (1998: 170) claim that this exclusion of women also provides opportunities for men to assert their dominance at a time when male hegemony is continually challenged.

This can be seen by the way that women have historically and today been under-represented in the media as athletes (see Duncan and Messner, 1998; Eastman and Billings, 2000; Kane and Greendorfer, 1994; Kinkema and Harris, 1998; Messner *et al.*, 2003). In 2003, the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) reported that a mere 5% of sports coverage in Britain was given over to women athletes, and set up a 'Campaign for Coverage' (WSFF Website, accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2010). Where they do appear in sports media coverage, females are usually 'belittled' (Eastman and Billings 2000: 209) or reported 'humorously' (Messner *et al.*, 2003). Even in Norway where football is the most popular sport for both sexes, male domination in media coverage is still apparent. In sports coverage only 10% of space is dedicated to female sport and the coverage which does appear is frequently about the 'trivialisation' of female achievements in comparison to men's sport (Skille, 2008). Hunter (2003) has considered how identities, nation and sport can be seen to comprise a male construct and/or male preserve, thus excluding women. This is illustrated by the way in which women's sports teams are not popularly accepted as worthy representatives of the nation in the same way as male sports teams.

The media can also trivialise womens' sporting achievements by emphasising their domestic roles (as wives or mothers), or emphasising their physical weakness (Duncan and Messner, 1998; Williams, 1994) and/or reducing them to sexual objects (Bernstein, 2002; Duncan and Messner, 1998; Harris, 2004; Harris and Clayton, 2002; Kinkema and Harris: 1998; Messner *et al.*, 2003). Plymire and Forman (2000: 143-144) point out that this marginalization is even more apparent for lesbian women, where the 'code of silence' ensures that lesbian women are 'virtually invisible to the media' - justified on the alleged premise that their presence would 'repel' fans from women's sport. Chapter Three examines how women participating in traditionally 'male' sports such as football and rugby feel compelled to find ways to emphasise their 'femininity' and heterosexuality; this may also be experienced by elite female athletes participating in non-contact sports.

Perhaps more optimistically, there have been claims that the media representation of female athletes is beginning to change. King (2007), for example, in a content analysis of British newspaper coverage of male and female athletes competing at the Olympic Games found that from female athletes received less coverage between 1948-1980. But from 1980 onwards female athletes began to receive more media coverage and by the 2004 Athens Games, female athletes received *more* coverage than male athletes. Coverage of women had doubled since 1996 and unlike previous findings, the sportswomens' achievements at the 2004 Games 'did not appear to be denigrated, trivialized or sexualized in newspaper articles' (2007: 196). This increased media coverage for women might be the result of the individual female athletes competing in this particular Olympic Games, but nonetheless these findings do seem to indicate media coverage of female athletes is increasing, certainly for the duration of this major

international sporting event (see also Crossman *et al.*, 2007; Higgs *et al.*, 2003; Vincent *et al.*, 2002). However, Bernstein (2002: 426) highlights the importance of examining the ‘type’ of media coverage afforded to female players and suggests it is ‘much too early for a victory lap’. Whilst increased media coverage of women’s sport might suggest that their athletic achievements are finally being valued (see Crossman *et al.*, 2007), Bernstein (2002) argues that more media coverage is not ‘better’ if this means more sexualised images of female athletes are portrayed in sport.

Cramer (1994: 159) also describes how, despite Equal Opportunities Legislation, sports journalism continues to be regarded as a mainly male domain. Williams (1994: 51) addresses how the sports section of newspapers has been slowest to accept women as sports writers. Thus, although there are now female sports journalists working on most of the broadsheet newspapers in Britain, women are still considerably underrepresented among sports reporters, and Messner *et al.*, (2003: 49) also describe how in the USA ‘sports commentary remains a world dominated by men’. Clayton and Harris (2004: 317) have looked at those women who are now most popularly represented in the media as having sporting connections - footballers’ wives. Here the image presented is that of a ‘traditionally feminine, hetero-sexy, and ‘expressive/supportive’ role’; these women are visible, but perhaps mostly for the pleasure of the male gaze. This image contributes to the ‘masculinisation’ of football and the manliness of the male partner whereas the ‘femininity’ of wives, in contrast, is connected with weakness and dependency.

Female fans are largely absent from the media’s representation of sport, again appearing only as ‘sexualised comic relief’, often involving ‘scantily clad female spectators, accompanied by verbal sexual innuendo by the commentators’ (Duncan *et al.*, 1994:

250, 254). This was perhaps best demonstrated at the recent 2006 World Cup finals in Germany, where often the only women fans shown in the crowd were those who were young and conventionally glamorous and occasionally topless, with their country's colours painted across their naked body. Similarly, Sandoval-García (2005: 223) describes how photographs of young women wearing skimpy tops and pouring beer over their chests were circulated on the internet after Costa Rica qualified for the World Cup finals in 2002, which could be, 'interpreted as a continuity defined by the male gaze, which transformed the spilling of beer on breasts into a masculine spectacle'.

Not much seems to have changed on this front in two decades. After examining six weeks of local sports coverage on a Los Angeles TV station in 1989, Duncan *et al.*, (1994: 254) found that the longest story featuring a woman was not one about a female athlete or a normative fan, but rather one on 'Morgana, the kissing Bandit', a woman with enormous breasts who has made a name for herself by running onto baseball fields and kissing players. The sexualised media presentation of female fans more recently can also be seen when Sky Sports launched 'Ladies Day' in April 2009. For the first time, female football fans commentated on 'FanZone', an option available to Sky Sports viewers for certain live matches. Whilst the four women selected were all active football fans, they were also conspicuously all under the age of 25, and images of the women were presented with captions based on their appearance, such as 'the eyelashes are gonna get ya' (Sky Sports Website, accessed on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2009).

Arguably, the media has real power to challenge the conventional representation of women in sport and shape a more accurate representation of female sports fans. Kane and Greendorfer (1994: 41), for example, argue that the 'ideological bias, once

recognized and acknowledged, is subject to modification'. Haynes (1995: 152) has also addressed how female fans have challenged the view that men are more 'natural' active supporters of football - for example by developing a women's football fanzine (*Born Kicking*), and he claims that the currently male-dominated football fanzines in England have the potential to:

'open up the possibility for alternative narratives on the construction of gender and sexuality within the sport...[Some fanzines have strong] cultural and political messages designed to transgress the dominant discourses of sexism, racism and homophobia'.

The recent rise of a small group of female sports presenters on British TV can perhaps be used as an example of the mass media's potential to challenge existing gender stereotyping in sport. Initially, women were almost completely absent from sports programming in both the USA and the UK, but Creedon (1994: 138, 142) describes how Elizabeth (Liz) Bishop became a weekend sports announcer in 1975 in the US, and was predictably described as a 'Venus in blue jeans'. However, by 1988 Lesley Visser had joined the rival CBS network and was 'the most notable of those hired for journalism and sports writing experience rather than beauty or athletic recognition'. Hence, although in the past women have either been unable to break into the world of male dominated sports programmes or have been hired mainly on the basis of their appearance, there might now be signs that this is beginning to change. This has coincided with recent changes in football in Britain designed to market the sport outside its traditional male, working class enclosures. Thompson (1997: 2) states that 'since [English] sport got seriously sexy in the nineties, there's been a broadcasting revolution: the once all-male preserve of sports presentation has been invaded by women'.



Although it is clear that some female sports presenters have been hired with the interests of male heterosexual sports fans uppermost in mind by taking ‘the two main focuses of male desire and obsession - sport and girls’ in producing the female sports presenter (see Welch 2001: 10), there is also, potentially at least, something of a clash between the aesthetic value and sign value of the female sports presenter: between those hired mainly for their appearance, and those with real knowledge of the sport – the two, of course, occasionally overlap. This is illustrated by BBC Radio Sports Presenter Eleanor Oldroyd’s claim that: ‘There is a distinction between the kind of girls who appear on Sky and the more ‘serious’ kind of presenter’. She cites the role of Kirsty Gallagher, the conventionally attractive daughter of ex-Ryder Cup golfer Bernard Gallagher, and one of the presenters on the rival Sky Sports TV channel as one who is there mainly to ‘make it [sport] more glamorous and sexy’ (Welch 2001: 11). Gallagher is also employed by Sky, of course, to help link the connected and overlapping spheres of sport and entertainment, a key theme on Sky TV, for example, in the presentation of ‘celebrity’ or charity sports events.

But this distinction – between looks and knowledge - may not be as clear cut as it first appears. Current TV sports presenters such as ITV’s football presenter Gaby Logan, daughter of the ex-Leeds United international Terry Yorath, may be conventionally glamorous, but she also ‘knows’ her football (Woodhouse and Williams: 1999). Logan - like Kirsty Gallagher - has also probably been raised in the sort of professional sporting household where knowledge of sport for women has been held in balance with tacit but clear understandings about existing relations between sport, gender and heterosexuality. As a result, such women are more likely to be respected than others because

of their argot and looks, their (male) parent's sporting background and to thrive in, rather than challenge, the sometimes 'laddish' cultures of TV sports presentation.

The recent apparent upsurge in female interest in football in England has also seen the production of popular literature challenging the position of women in football. For example, Torre and Brown's (2005) *Everything a Girl Needs to Know about Football* (2005) provides information for female football supporters who are not familiar with the sport. Its 'post-feminist' irony is perhaps best illustrated with the explanation of the off-side law, where the reader is asked to imagine a 'girlie' shoe shopping trip. In choosing a team to support, Torre and Brown (2005: 8-9) playfully suggest that you can select any team for any reason, but to maintain your credibility (with male fans) you have to give the reason as 'you were born near their ground'. This is because men will always say that they support a team because their father did, although it is probably the case that 'as a lad he quite liked the look of their stripy shirts' (2005: 9). Hence, the common knowledge or bond that men supposedly share around football is explicitly undercut (their *real* reasons for supporting a club are only imaginary), and information and statistics are provided to allow women to enter this otherwise excluding, fantasy world.

### ***iii) Research on female sports fans: The UK examples***

A large body of research has emerged recently which has addressed women's experiences of *playing* sport. Numerous studies have examined women playing football across the globe (see, for example, Caudwell, 1999, 2000, 2004, 2006; Cox and Thompson, 2000; 2001; Knoppers and Anthonissen, 2003; Lopez, 1997; Liston, 2006; Macbeth, 2005, 2007; Pelak, 2005, 2010; Scraton *et al.*, 1999, 2005; Skille, 2008; Welford and Kay, 2007; Williams, 2003, 2007). The edited collection *Soccer, Women*,

*Sexual Liberation* (2004) includes 14 articles on women's experiences of playing football in countries such as New Zealand, the United States, Canada, India and Norway to name but a few, and these studies were also published in a special issue of *Soccer and Society* in 2003 which was dedicated to women's football. A smaller number of studies have considered women's participation in rugby (see, for example, Carle, 1999; Gill, 2007; Taylor and Fleming, 2000). But research on female sports *fans* remains limited and there is an urgent need for more research in this area. The few studies which have been located are examined here.

Gosling (2007: 258-259) has recently bemoaned how women are marginalized in fan communities and academic research and literature on sports fans, and called for further research to address 'what it means to be a female sport fan and how this is located in women's everyday lives'. At least this signals some acknowledgement that this area is relatively under-researched, and recent changes in sport may also have prompted some academics to begin to address this - though most of this research is limited to female *football* fans. Recent quantitative studies have included both male and female fans, such as the *FA Premier League Fan Surveys* which revealed rising numbers of female fans (see Chapter Three). These surveys have also been useful for producing data which allows us to make comparisons both over time and between the characteristics of 'typical' male and female football fans. For instance, the surveys suggest that female fans are, on average, younger than male fans, and are also more likely to attend matches with a partner or spouse.

Woodhouse and Williams (1999: 53) outline the misconception that women have never been active football fans - before, for example, TV coverage of the 1990 World Cup

finals in Italy. Women's real story as fans starts much earlier, and Preston North End's decision to abolish women's free entry to matches back in the 1890s is cited as an early example of the growth of female football support in England and a sign that, women were increasingly attracted to games, possibly in their thousands (Woodhouse and Williams 1999: 53-54). Hence, it is clearly erroneous to assume that women attending football in England was something completely new. We learn in fact that women have been following, and playing, the sport for at least as long as the men (Coddington 1997: 6). It was not just the World Cup in 1990 that helped to spark female interest in the sport. Many earlier tournaments featuring (successful) English teams have helped to generate interest among women. Both ex-England international player Lopez (1997) and Williams and Woodhouse (1991) discuss how the success of the men's national football team in 1966 and 1990 led to an upsurge of interest in the sport among women, and Harris (1999: 106) argues that England's hosting of Euro 96 allowed 'a wider number of people to be exposed to the national sport'. In analysing coverage of the tournament and the representation of women in the British tabloid newspaper *The Sun*, Harris (1999: 102) found that there were two roles for women during the competition:

- The scantily clad 'page 3' model.
- The admiring woman (a role usually played by wives or girlfriends, or the 'WAG's' as the British press has recently labelled them).

Harris (1999: 105) argues that the extent to which the national side has aroused the interest of the whole country - including women - was shown by a feature in the 'Sun Woman' section of the newspaper clumsily entitled 'En-Girl-And'. In many ways, as Harris points out, 'Sun Woman' represents something of an escape from the dominant, heavily gendered, narrative within the newspaper. Hence, it was highly significant that

coverage of football had reached this part of the newspaper and, in doing so, that women's legitimate interest in the sport - rather than in the celebrity cultures around it - was finally acknowledged.

Euro 96 did, in fact, feature the first national marketing initiative in England designed to actively target women fans and was organized by the FA (Coddington 1997: 211). The Football Association may have had an ulterior motive in encouraging more women to attend England matches in 1996 in order to try and prevent or limit outbreaks of fan violence. But the FA attitude towards women was certainly different to that established back in 1921, when the FA had effectively destroyed the embryonic women's game by banning matches staged on pitches licensed by the FA (see Coddington 1997: 39). Seventy five years later in 1996 the FA embarked on a poster campaign for Euro 96 using slogans such as: 'How can I lie back and think of England, when [Terry] Venables [the England coach] hasn't finalised the squad?' (see Harris 1999: 96). These posters featured conventionally attractive women, who supposedly symbolized the 'new woman' supporter for the sport in England: knowledgeable female fans 'for whom football was not just about looking at the legs of the male players'. Coddington (1997: 212) also describes how these adverts appeared in popular women's magazines such as *Elle* and *Marie Clare*, so reflecting the widely held view that the fastest growing group of fans - and players - in the sport at that time in England were young, single women.

Jones (2008) provides a recent academic study of female football fans in Britain. Jones (2008: 52) interviewed 38 female fans of men's football, and the focus of this research was upon 'how women engage with insulting masculine fan practices and the extent to which this engagement affects their identities as women and as fans'. Three strategies

were found to be adopted by female fans which allowed them to respond to abusive masculine behaviour, while negotiating their own gender identities:

- *'Defining sexist and abusive behaviour as disgusting'*. This varied from outright confrontation to individual boycotts (for example, by refusing to join in with swearing), to a redefinition of 'proper' fan practices. This final strategy involved the use of gender identities to challenge the meaning of fandom; for them, 'fandom and femininity are entirely compatible, whereas fandom and abusive masculinity are not' (2008: 524).
- *'Downplaying sexist and homophobic abuse'*. This included: claims that sexism was not as important as racism as there were no female players; denying that sexism occurred because abuse is directed at men and women; and claiming that sexism and homophobia were 'funny' and therefore harmless.
- *'Embracing gender stereotypes as part of the game'*. This involved agreeing with hegemonic masculine definitions about which women should be regarded as 'proper' fans and distancing themselves from 'emphasized femininity', with claims that women who did not understand the laws, found players attractive and/or were dressed up in a heterosexually attractive way did not 'do' fandom properly. A further group suggested that sexism and homophobia were fundamental to football.

Jones (2008: 532) concludes that there is a tension between women's fan identities and gender and that this must be negotiated. In some cases, their fan identity is prioritized over gender identity - some of Jones's respondents 'did not want to be seen as *women* at football matches because of the negative connotations surrounding emphasized femininity within this setting'. This could help to explain why other female sports fans

demand to be identified as fans, rather than women fans. For example, Woodhouse (1991) conducted broadly sociological research on a sample of female fans - she sent out a postal survey to all registered female members of the Football Supporters Association (FSA), a national activist fan pressure group that had been set up following the Heysel Stadium disaster in 1985. This sample was hardly representative of female fans more widely in England, but the survey covered a wide range of issues, including how female fans had been recruited to the sport, with whom they attended matches, and their treatment by male fans. Many of the (younger) respondents had experienced sexist behaviour (physical or verbal) at football, and 73 percent felt that football authorities and clubs could do more to attract women to football. There was also a strong belief among the sample that more women should be represented in the sport, for example, as match officials and as media commentators (Woodhouse, 1991).

But one of the most interesting findings of this 1991 study was that the female fans concerned wanted to be identified, first and foremost, as football fans, rather than as women. Thus they expressed, 'a strong preference not to be singled out by sex' as they felt that this was 'irrelevant to their involvement as a fan' (Woodhouse 1991: 30). This sort of response has also been reflected in the work of Coddington (1997), Crolley (1999), Crolley and Long (2001), and Woodhouse and Williams (1999). Coddington (1997: 86) is especially critical of singling women out as a potential 'civilizing' influence on men in football crowds. She argues that this is: 'an idea that makes your average female fan sick with disgust. They go to games to enjoy the football just like any other fan'. Here, new female fans are directly implicated in the alleged gentrification of the football crowd: their presence is required merely to 'soften' the

behaviour of males, which in turn implies that women are 'inauthentic' in their own support.

This notion that female sports fans are somehow 'inauthentic' supporters is, as we have seen, a theme which runs throughout much of the literature on female sports fandom. Davis and Duncan (2006) in their study on fantasy sport league participation, describe how nearly all fantasy sport league enthusiasts in America are male, and their findings showed this involved creating an environment that was hostile to women. Where women did participate this was simply to make up numbers, and in these cases it was the men who would help to construct their team as they are judged to be more knowledgeable, thus serving to reinforce their symbolic superiority over women in fantasy sport leagues.

Crawford and Gosling (2004) also conducted a study of male and female fans of (men's) ice hockey in Britain. But female fans were marginalized here and reported that they felt labelled by male supporters as not 'real' fans but simply 'puck bunnies': fans who are there simply to 'lust' after the players (2004: 477). The term 'puck bunny' is applied almost exclusively to female ice hockey fans, and implies that these supporters lack dedication in their support, and are more interested in the sexual attractiveness of the players rather than in the sport itself (2004: 478). The attitude of many male interviewees towards younger female fans was often that female ice hockey followers are largely 'silly young girls' who show little knowledge or commitment to their team (2004: 486). However, Gosling (2007: 258) has also proposed that in some ways it may be easier to target women supporters for ice hockey, as this sport is relatively free from



the “baggage” of the masculine history of British sport, so can be marketed more easily towards the family (and thus women).

Perhaps some academics have failed to look beyond female fans as ‘puck bunnies’. For example, one of King’s (2002) identified groups of ‘new consumer’ fans are teenage girls who attend football matches in the 1990s for the ‘sexual attractiveness’ of players. Conn (1997: 44) also cites the example of Welsh international Ryan Giggs, who has been marketed as a ‘heart throb’ to adolescent girls identified as a growing element of Manchester United’s fan base. Certainly, English Premier League football is now marketed as part of the entertainment industry and top players are increasingly sexualised in promotional campaigns. But female fans also complain that they are perceived (by men) as ‘fickle, as not true fans, people who are ignorant of footballing matters, or who only go to football because they “fancy” the players’ (Crolley and Long 2001: 208). They may feel that all female supporters have been ‘lumped together’ and are seen ‘as slags or girlies who just go to look at the footballers’ legs’ (Crolley 1999: 62). Collins (2009: 93) also suggests that notions of inauthenticity are apparent for female rugby fans. He posits: ‘the idea that women attended matches because of their interest in men remains common to almost all discourses about women and rugby’. This point is illustrated by the short-lived weekly *Rugger* column for women which, on 10 October 1931, dealt with issues such as ‘How to be beautiful, though cold’ (2009: 93).

However, these stereotypes of female supporters circulated by male fans and academics - and sometimes also by females - are challenged by the Crawford and Gosling study. These authors found no evidence to suggest that female supporters at UK ice hockey games were any less dedicated or knowledgeable in their patterns of support, and

further research by Crawford (2001) suggests that there are no significant differences in attendance patterns between male and female supporters at the now defunct Manchester Storm hockey club. Similar attendance patterns comparing the sexes are found in English football by the *FA Premier League Fan Surveys* (1997, 2001, 2002), and in other research which has attempted to explore supposed differences between men and women as sports fans. Here respective supporter styles or viewing habits of males and females have been found to be very similar (see, for example, Wenner and Gantz, 1998).

Coddington (1997: 1), more optimistically, has detailed the increasing presence of women at every level of football in England (as fans, administrators, in the media etc.) and argues that the near monopoly men once had on Britain's national game is finally beginning to break up. However, she also argues that women 'still have to fight to be taken seriously as fans' and that they may feel that they are 'on trial' and have to prove that they know what they are talking about (1997: 9, 79) - usually to male fans. This is an interesting response, as is the suggestion that female fans feel most criticized by other women. For instance, in the collection of fan stories about football fandom, *We'll Support You Evermore* (1992) all three female contributors argued that it is other women who are always more surprised by their interest in football than men. Thomasson (1992: 40) describes how she rarely came across sexism from men in the early 1990s, and Rowlings (1992: 167) explains how not looking 'the type' to be interested in football is more usually an opinion voiced by other women rather than by men. Thus, maybe women (fans) actually feel most 'on trial' with other women (non-fans), especially those women who bring questions of 'femininity' and sport into sharper focus. It is difficult to imagine that there could be rising numbers of women at

football matches in England if *all* men were as openly sexist and hostile as is suggested by some of the popular literature about the sport. Indeed, Pope (2005) found that many active male fans today actually welcomed new female fans into the game, believing that these supporters would eventually become as dedicated as themselves. New female fans were also seen as positive attributes in helping the club they held in common support to survive.

***iv) Research on female sports fans: Beyond the UK***

It is possible (but perhaps unlikely) that many more empirical studies on female sports fans have been carried out elsewhere but have not yet been unearthed due to language barriers or other limitations of the current research. This section will mainly focus on a few research studies carried out in Australia, Korea, Italy, Israel, Spain and Argentina, and is mostly focused upon female football fans. I could find no studies at all on female rugby fans.

Mewitt and Toffoletti (2008) conducted research on female fans of Australian Football League, which centred on female views of players' sexual misconduct. Claims about players behaving inappropriately towards women, including accusations of rape were brought to public attention through the media in 2004, prompting Mewitt and Toffoletti to ask female fans how they made sense of these allegations, given that the victims were overwhelmingly female. After conducting 16 semi-structured interviews with female fans, the findings were organised into two broad themes: 'predatory women' and 'rogue men'.

According to the 'predatory women' group, women's behaviour is often responsible for triggering a primal, biologically driven, sexual desire amongst players, and so the onus is on women to monitor their actions to control male sexuality. Sexual violence, though condemned, was often viewed as the result of the victims' behaviour - women are expected to understand the potential consequences of socialising with footballers, which could also 'imply that the victim is complicit in their own abuse' (2008: 170). The 'rogue men' group contradicted the constructions of players as the 'victims' of 'predatory women' - here there was an awareness that male players are sexually promiscuous and may expect casual sex from women. A number of different explanations for this behaviour were put forward, including: players' sense of entitlement over women; the impact of drinking and team bonding; and men's biological makeup (2008: 172). Here (hetero) sexual desire was seen as a natural component of being male - it would be abnormal for a footballer to decline the advances of women, and by not speaking about women in derogatory terms this could as a consequence result in them losing face in the eyes of other males (2008: 175). Footballers' actions were found to be justified by drawing on both socio-cultural and essentialist arguments about gender behaviour - often simultaneously. Mewitt and Toffoletti (2008: 176) conclude that this 'creates a space for them [women fans] to critique football culture while actively participating in it through their support of the game'.

The World Cup in 2002 (hosted by Japan and South Korea) saw the appearance of Korean women as fans as the 'biggest unexpected event' (Kim 2004: 42). Rodríguez (2005: 238) in her study which examines the increase of female representations within media discourse in Argentina, describes how in Argentina, the 1990 World Cup saw

women portrayed only in 'domestic roles' (such as players' wives or girlfriends), but by 1998, 'their fandom was legitimately accepted in the domain of representations, women at that point became "national supporters"'. Consequently, it could be argued that global (male) tournaments can spark female fan interest in football worldwide, and that this, in turn, can lead towards a relative 'feminization' of football culture at both club and national levels. The Italian national side for men often progresses well in World Cup competitions (they won their fourth World Cup in 2006), so perhaps this is why football in Italy has commanded rather more female support than in other equivalent European societies (Cere 2003: 168). There is no doubt that the huge leap in female football support in Korea after the 2002 World Cup was a response to South Korea being a host nation.

However, the term 'feminization' may have a slightly different meaning in other countries. Although it has been used to refer to the social and cultural effects of increasing numbers of females at matches (as in Britain), there also seems to be more emphasis abroad on more women being drawn by the sexual attractiveness of players. For example, Kim (2004: 42) argues that Korea's 'feminization' of football is illustrated by the fact that it is claimed 'half or two thirds of those cheering the games were women' *and* women having 'transformed the soccer games into a space where they could project their 'sexual desires''. She even goes as far as to suggest that in Korea's sexually repressive society (where women are largely defined as 'asexual beings') women could project their own desires upon World Cup players 'as if they were potential buyers looking through an exhibit' (2004: 45). This can be compared to other new football nations with cultural similarities, such as China or Japan, where 'celebrity

figures are more prominent, to attract new especially female supporters' (Giulianotti and Robertson 2004: 555).

Rodríguez (2005: 240-41) has taken the 'feminization' of football to refer to 'a process that involves an increasing number of women at matches but also one that shows qualitative differences between the past and present'. This 'qualitative difference' refers to the fact that young girls or teenagers go to stadiums dressed up and sometimes even made up for the occasion, to flirt with casual male acquaintances. This definition of 'feminization' is taken to suggest that changes in the game have made it possible for young women to enjoy gazing at male spectators (as opposed to players) and possibly to continue liaisons with them outside of the football ground. Nevertheless, in line with aspects of the British definition, the 'feminization' of football has also referred in Argentina to women 'civilizing' the behaviour of men and so helping to prevent outbreaks of spectator violence. In Korea, it has been theorised that the high proportion of females at matches was why the country had not experienced serious problems of hooliganism (Kim, 2004).

Much research on female football fans examines how women negotiate their position in what is usually a male-dominated environment. For example, Llopis Goig (2007: 180) examines how some female Spanish fans have formed women-only *peñas* (groups of friends and supporters that meet to watch matches of their club and to discuss the club when they are not playing) as they feel 'uncomfortable in traditional *peñas* due to the strong male ethos and masculine undertones associated with such *peñas*'. Cere (2003: 167) has considered the experiences of female Italian fans in what is often a violent and overtly masculine space. She discusses how the term 'Ultras/ultrà' has been adopted to

describe dedicated football supporters in Italy who go to great lengths to enrich the experience of the match. They can be distinguished from ‘official’ supporters or non-ultras, as ‘their support goes beyond winning or losing. In concrete terms this means spending a good part of the week, if not all, preparing the ‘choreography’ [stadium spectacle at matches], organizing the trip to the away game or collecting money from the members’. The ‘*Curve*’ or ‘*curva*’ depicts the part of the football stadium where the ultras congregate (usually the curved stand behind the goals) and Cere (2003: 184) argues that women-only *ultrà* groups, as well as women within male groups could bring ‘positive changes to the *curve* especially in the light of the increase in racist and violent culture among some groups’. Women’s reluctance to participate in violence is perhaps best illustrated by one female Lazio supporter who stated that: ‘If we go all together to an away match and something happens, it’s obvious that the men have to protect us’ (Cere 2003: 177). Similarly, in Argentina it is suggested that: ‘in terms of violence, there is a reproduction of male domination in which the woman (mother, wife, girlfriend) must be protected by the male’ (Rodríguez 2005: 237).

Although these accounts imply that the presence of women can, in fact, change definitions of sporting contexts and so ‘soften’ the behaviour of men and restrict forms of physical and verbal abuse, the ‘feminization’ theory is somewhat challenged by how some women clearly do participate in and/or approve of violence at football matches. In Italy, for example, women ultras were present in the background of ‘scuffles with the enemy’; either as a helping hand to ‘bail someone out or to act as a “base” and hold onto the banners and the drums’. Younger generations may hold a different attitude towards fan violence, and it is important to note the ‘small, but nonetheless important, percentage of young women involved (8.4 percent)’ in violence, found in another Italian

study (Cere 2003: 178-9, 181). Furthermore, female fans in Italy have also been found to participate directly in racism and verbal abuse at football. For example, in 2001 the match between Inter Milan and Lazio witnessed that 'Jungle noises' were coming from women and children, not just 'right-wing, male skin-heads' (Cere 2003: 182). Thus, it cannot be assumed that the mere presence of women at sporting events will help to prevent violence and racism.

In Korea, despite a huge female presence at the 2002 World Cup finals, which appeared to herald wider social change and stripped 'the Korean national flag of its heavy solemnity and nationalism', in reality, Korea's ethnocentrism still seems to have 'too much of a strong hold over them' (Kim 2004: 42, 47). Therefore, these female fans have simply slotted into an existing framework of xenophobia and nationalism; they were accepted by the rest of society as they directed their enthusiasm at Korean players such as Nam-II - who 'stood his ground' one on nine against USA players - rather than Western football players (Kim 2004: 48).

The Korean popular media in 2002 treated Japanese women with contempt for expressing their 'love' for the Englishman David Beckham, so this clearly shows the line that Korean women 'should not dare cross', and in a society where 'there is still a strong belief in the sexual union of the full bloods...It is so much easier to shout out that they want the 'yellow bodies' of our own race' (Kim 2004: 48). In Argentina during the 1998 World Cup finals the longest-surviving domestic sports magazine *El Gráfico* included photos of female fashion models in provocative poses and clothes in colours representing Argentina's opponents. But when Argentina and England finally clashed, a 'sexy', playful pose in an England shirt was not on the agenda for these female models,



given the recent uneasy history and political disputes between the two countries (Rodríguez 2005: 244).

Like in Britain, female football fans in these countries occupied a marginalized position in their status as supporters. For instance, although females make up to 40 percent of the 'Red Devils', members of South Korea female supporters are taken as 'not even knowing the rules, but just liking the players' (Kim 2004: 43). Similarly, in Spain, Llopis Goig (2007) describes how one of the reasons some female fans form women only *peñas* is because their authenticity as fans is questioned by male fans - if they express an opinion about football they are ridiculed by male supporters. In Italy, things seem different but still highly gender specific: it has been claimed that the tasks for male and female ultras, for example, are divided along gendered lines (women, for example, look after the choreography of the *curva*, and men deal with public and club relations), although some female supporters claim that they can establish themselves in the male ultras' world, as love for the team and commonality always prevails (Cere 2003: 177-178).

The stereotypes that many male supporters have of 'inauthentic' female fans also exist in Argentina, where men 'believe women to be incapable of knowing anything about football, and they resist the idea that women can have a 'real' passion' (Rodríguez 2005: 234). It is interesting that men's justification for these attitudes is that women have never *played* football, yet the possibility of women 'learning' by playing football is disregarded, even by females. This acceptance of a subordinate position might be the result of a more patriarchal society in Argentina, one in which women do not have as much general freedom as in Britain.

Ben-Porat (2009: 883) also provides a recent empirical study which examines the experiences of the minority supporter in a predominantly male-dominated society - Israeli female football fans. She examines three main themes: how women become football fans, fandom as a 'way of life' and behaviour in the stadium. Males were found to play a key role in first introducing women to the sport (usually the father or a brother at a younger age or a male friend or boyfriend when older) which she argues indicates that it is not 'proper' for a woman to attend alone and instead she must be accompanied, preferably by a male. Many of the female fans in this research did not miss a home match and consumed vast amounts of information on their club. Thus, Ben-Porat (2009: 892) suggests that many of the interviewees in her study are 'traditional' fans (which in this context is taken to suggest football is a central part of their life), and found that 'exhibiting a club's identity is almost inevitable to the traditional fan - 'this is the real me''. This research also challenges the 'feminization' thesis, as rather than attempting to restrain the crowd, perhaps by avoiding taunting the opposing team, some female fans opted for similar behaviour to that of male fans. Thus, they may 'go with the flow (crowd)' and so some women Israeli fans refuse 'to carry the role implicitly imposed of her, of an instrumental moderator of the crowd's behaviour in the stadium' (Ben-Porat 2009: 893-894).

Finally, the media coverage of female spectators in these countries also reflects the more 'typical' portrayal of women involved in the sport, including in Britain. In Italy, for example, Cere (2003: 168) argues that the most important thing to note about female football supporters (especially female *ultrà* supporters), is their 'invisibility' in Italian society at large, in the mass media and consequently, within academia. It is claimed that as women *ultrà* are rarely involved in clashes with opposing teams, they are rarely

discussed in the public sphere (2003: 181-82). Rodríguez (2005: 239-240) describes how in Argentinean sport 'women's bodies become objects of some form of panoptic masculine gaze', and that the focus on 'young sexy women as a representation of all women' means that the variety of women involved as football fans is ignored. In Argentina, football is a place where the male public sphere can apparently be 'completed' allowing men to achieve 'complete self-representation' (2005: 233), and perhaps this male domination is how football is used in all countries, especially where football is the most popular of the national sports.

## **2.6 Summary**

This chapter began by unpacking some of the stereotypical definitions of fandom, and the problems for the Academy when scholars are influenced by constructs mapped out by popular journalism. Thus, I contend that there has been a tendency for female sports fans to be labelled as 'irrational' or 'inauthentic' - their primary interest in sport is often assumed to be not a serious interest in the game, its tactics and cultural practices, but mainly a sexual interest in players. I moved on to examine some of the core motivations for sports fans, which served to demonstrate how sports fandom is different to other types of fandom. I addressed the complex issue of consumption and fandom - especially in relation to football supporters - and I considered how this has helped to produce a hierarchy in research between authentic (often male) fans and new, consumer (usually female) fans.

The relative invisibility of females in sport both in the media and in academic research was raised as a major issue, providing further impetus for this current research on female fandom. Studies conducted on female sports fandom across the globe reveal

important cultural differences, but they have also raised similar themes to those in the UK, such as the importance of major (male) tournaments in arousing female interest and the routine positioning of women fans as 'inauthentic' supporters. Females - even members of ultras groups - are seldom perceived as 'real' fans, though national and cultural differences often bring out different nuances in this respect. Issues such as those identified above will be explored further in this research.

I now turn in Chapter Three to offering some background concerning the issue of women's leisure in the UK.

## **Chapter 3**

# **Women, Leisure and Sport in the UK**

## ***Some History and Recent Developments***

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins by offering a brief account of some of the key changes in women's lives as we move into the late-modern period, changes which may have made them more eligible as both spectators and players in previously male dominated sports. This review is then connected to the wider changes in both professional football and rugby union experienced notably in the 1990s. Here I examine how professionalism and the new consumer era for sport has possibly helped to 'open up' spectator sports to more women. Finally, I provide a brief background description of the city of Leicester, offering some context for the case study which constitutes the basis for this research.

### **3.2 Sport and Leisure in Women's Changing Lives**

#### ***i) Leisure theory, research and women's invisibility***

Henderson and Shaw (1995: 133) bemoan how early theories of leisure often did not incorporate, or even consider women's experiences. They remained largely androcentric, so Henderson and Shaw suggest that the topics of women's leisure and gender issues have been discussed more frequently in the leisure research literature in the 1980s and 1990s than ever before in the past. Roberts (1999: 88-89) suggests that this bias had arisen by focusing upon trends in working time and leisure which in earlier decades did not include the vast majority of women, and by the mid-1980s a critique of so-called 'malestream' leisure research was underway. Thus, the early, groundbreaking work of Rosemary Deem (1986) in her study on women's leisure in Milton Keynes, and

other researchers such as Green *et al.*, (1990) in their work on gender and leisure in Sheffield, was largely spurred on by the fact that most of women's leisure experiences was effectively being ignored by male academics.

Green (1996) critiques how the 'male' concept of leisure was also applied to women - the traditional work/leisure distinction is rooted in ideas about appropriate male and female roles and assumes that everyone has access to 'free time'. But women's involvement in unpaid work and domestic responsibilities means that this 'free' time is usually restricted or non-existent (see also Deem, 1986; Henderson and Bialeschki, 1992). Green (1996) suggests that women's leisure occurs mainly in the domestic sphere - due to demands to cater for the needs of others and/or because of a fear of going out alone after dark (see also Scraton and Watson, 1998; Green and Singleton, 2006). Thus, early studies of women's leisure in the UK and elsewhere typically reveal women's most frequent leisure activities to have been watching television, reading and home-based crafts (see also Wimbush and Talbot, 1988; Green *et al.*, 1990; Wearing and Wearing, 1988). More recently, Henderson *et al.*, (2002: 263) outline numerous studies which have shown how 'family continues to define leisure for many women' (e.g. Larson *et al.*, 1997; Peters and Raaijmakers, 1998). They also highlight the importance of examining the differences between women's experiences - whilst the 'ethic of care' may act to constrain some women, it can also be a source of power in the family for some women.

Although many studies of women's leisure from the 1980s have succeeded in making women's experiences rather more visible, perhaps many of these accounts are also guilty of being situated in the very assumptions or ideologies of 'masculinity' and

‘femininity’ which originally helped to invisibilise women’s leisure. Thus, they continue to ignore important areas of female leisure - especially, perhaps, sport. Roberts (1999: 89) after highlighting the problems of trying to include women’s experiences in the male definition of leisure, goes on to assert that there are problems in trying to measure women’s leisure participation because, ‘when males have visited sport centres and cinemas it may be reasonable to assume that they will have gone to pursue their own leisure interests. Women are more likely to have been accompanying other family members’. But perhaps most revealing is Green *et al.*’s. (1990) approach towards women and watching live televised sport. In relation, for example, to the shift towards home-based leisure post-World War II and later changes in televised sport it is stated that:

‘As far as women are concerned, what is perhaps important is the supreme indifference of many women to much televised sport. This is not entirely surprising, given the kinds of sport that predominate and indeed the nature of the coverage itself’. (1990: 54).

It seems likely that football was one of the sports that women are allegedly indifferent to here, and Green *et al.*, (1990) also posit that the decline of cinema-going would have had a far greater effect on women after the Second World War than the decline in (largely male) football spectatorship. When recent studies have attempted to challenge the dearth of research on women’s leisure - see for instance Clare Langhamer (2000) - women’s involvement in sports such as football and rugby is barely mentioned. Although women’s leisure in the domestic sphere is undoubtedly important, when incorporating women’s experiences into a broader analysis of leisure patterns, surely this should address *all* forms of leisure, including participation in traditionally male sports - even if these women were, or are, in the minority? Hargreaves (1988: 131) bemoans how: ‘most analyses have been written by men and are predominantly about

*male* leisure and *male* sport'. Thus, 'inserting' women into research on leisure does not seem to have changed pre-existing assumptions about men's and women's different 'natural' interests and so has not prompted an influx of research on women's leisure and sport. Scraton (1994: 253) also complains about how: 'there has been little empirical research on women's leisure since the main studies of the 1980s. There appears to be a gap in leisure research with research on women or gender relations having fallen from the agenda'. Indeed, the impetus for Aitchison's book *Gender and Leisure* in 2003 was that: 'it is well over ten years since the last book on gender and leisure was written by anyone in the UK' (2003: 2). This helps to explain the relative lack of research on female sports fans, as well as on other forms of 'untypical' female leisure.

***ii) The segregation of male and female spheres and women's exclusion from sport***

Historically, English sport has been associated with 'traditional' forms of (mainly working class) masculinities. Modern sport developed simultaneously out of rural working class settings and in its codified versions in the male public schools of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Initially, sport played a key role in upper class boys' character building and in the construction of specific qualities of leadership and of a 'proper manliness' for English gentlemen. Public schools sport was deemed crucial to the management of potential deviant sexualities amongst the young English male aristocracy and also to the rather larger job of the maintenance of the British Empire in its 'civilising' mission abroad (see Holt, 1989; Russell, 1997). Here, English gentlemen learned the ethic of 'fair' competition, and also how to demonstrate controlled aggression (Hargreaves, 1994), as well as establishing gentlemanly conduct, both on and off the sports field. When football began to develop as a spectator sport in England in the 1870s, this was



largely because of its dissemination by public school graduates and its consequent appropriation by local industrial elites and sections of the male working class.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and up until the 1940s and 1950s, watching professional football in England provided an escape from drudgery mainly for working class men, whose lives centred on ‘the works, the pub, and the match’ (Holt 1992: 297, see also Russell, 1997), and has no doubt been used in this way for much of its history. It would also have allowed such men a (brief) escape from paid work, as well as from demasculinising domestic constraints. Football could also help to cement head of household status by offering a ‘way of knowing’ the world of sport, which effectively excluded women.

Rugby union, though more restricted to the middle classes in England at least, would still be strictly off limits to women. Collins (2009: 91) describes how, ‘as far as we can tell, there were no examples of women playing rugby union in England for at least the first seventy-five years of its existence’, and the RFU’s social arrangements provided: ‘an entirely masculine domain, an arena where men could socialise without the presence of women, a realm in which they could drink heavily, sing obscene songs’. Chandler and Nauright (1996: 2) also discuss how throughout its history (and arguably this continues today) rugby union has been, ‘an activity controlled by males, played by males, written about by males and utilized by male politicians’ - in the rugby nation of South Africa, for example, the sport was ‘clearly dominated by members of the old white power structures that existed during the apartheid era’. In their edited collection *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity* Chandler and Nauright provide numerous examples of how rugby has been a key cultural tool for ‘doing’ masculinity - although

their more recent edited collection does indeed include one chapter on rugby, females and *feminine* identities (see Carle and Nauright, 1999), an indication that perhaps the male domination of the sport is at least beginning to be chipped away at.

The development of modern sport as a site for the expression of hegemonic masculinities fitted well, of course, with the social and cultural separation of the male and female spheres which accelerated during the Victorian period. These developments probably also aided segregation by sex in sport. Men were popularly associated with culture, rationality, reason, and the physical, so were deemed to be 'more suited' to action in the public sphere. Women were popularly associated with nature, irrationality, emotion and passivity, so were largely subordinated to the private sphere (see Ortner, 1998; Lloyd, 1993; Prokhovnik, 1999). Social Darwinism proved 'scientifically' to the Victorians, in sport and elsewhere that women were biologically inferior to men, and so their role was largely to be 'good wives and mothers' and thus, physical exertion was deemed unnatural for women (see, for instance, Woodhouse and Williams, 1999; Parker, 1996; Scraton, 1992; Hargreaves, 1993, 1994). Women's role certainly did not typically involve playing - or even watching - 'male' team sports such as football or rugby. There is some evidence, however, that female fans watched Victorian team sports and even that sports administrators tried to entice women to attend matches (by making entry free) presumably as a means of 'gentling' the male crowd (see Mason, 1980). Collins (2009: 92) also describes how prior to the 1895 split in rugby (between amateur Rugby Union and semi-professional Rugby League), women were a noted feature of crowds in both the north of England and London.

These dominant ideas about sport and gender ran on into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hargreaves (1994: 152) has discussed how in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s the main purpose of education for females was to prepare girls to become good wives and mothers, so that: 'at a time when the ideology of gender difference and education for motherhood was integral to educational theories and practice...not surprisingly, PE [Physical Education] continued to be sex-specific'. But this exclusion of females from sport began to be more strongly challenged in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### *iii) Changes in women's lives in late-modernity*

In today's 'late-modern' or (for some) post-structuralist society it is often argued that increasing numbers of women have been able to 'escape' aspects of the traditional, modernist constraints of gender. One sign of this perhaps is the fact that more women today engage in forms of behaviour and in their collective use of public space in a way that had been largely culturally proscribed before. Indeed, statistics seem to indicate that the numbers of women at League football matches have increased in recent years, with female Premier League fans making up 14% of the crowd in 2000, and more than 20% at some clubs (Williams, 2001). Many women, it is argued, now have greater control over their lives than did previous generations. In some early work on these societal changes for women, Wilkinson (1994) coined the term 'genderquake' in order to signal 'a fundamental shift in power and values between men and women' thus leading to a society where male and female values are converging and in which there is a blurring of gender boundaries (Wilkinson 1999: 44, 37). This development, it is argued, has allowed women much greater freedom and choice, and they can now, supposedly, finally realise their true potential, having been 'liberated from the shackles of patriarchy' (Whelehan 2000: 3).

The signs of this alleged major structural shift, which has empowered women, relatively speaking, are well known. Pilcher (1999) for example describes key changes for women in the spheres of: work; education; and access to contraception, hence family size declining and women having their first babies later. Women's employment has been increasing in Britain, especially amongst mothers (see Kay, 2000), and thus we are arguably 'witnessing a 'masculinization' of the female life course, driven probably more by choice than by constraints' (Skille 2008: 528). Scraton (1994) for example, discusses how, in the post-feminist stage of development, it is now supposedly a woman's choice to have a career, family, marry or cohabit, or even to play football rather than netball. Changes such as these seem to have contributed to equalizing power relations between the sexes to an extent and may have allowed more women to become involved in 'former' male preserves such as sport (see Liston, 2006).

Pilcher (1999) also notes how these changes have been aided by changes in legislation such as the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 - and here we can perhaps add the introduction of the new national curriculum in schools (introduced via the 1988 Education Act). This guaranteed equal subject access for boys and girls up until 16 years, and contributed to claims that girls were now outperforming boys in most areas of the syllabus and almost all levels of education (see Mitsos and Browne, 1998). But women were also now *choosing* to engage in forms of behaviour that would have been beyond the scope of most 'modern' women - certainly those outside of the elite classes. The increasing relative control that women are able to exercise over their lives and bodies, in comparison to previous generations, can arguably be further seen in the increasing numbers of women who participate in traditionally male sports. For example, Taylor and Fleming (2000) describe how women's rugby from the 1990s was claimed

to be amongst the fastest growing sports in the UK. Similar arguments can be applied to women's football: Cox and Thompson (2000: 5), for example, state that: 'during the past 30 years, participation in women's soccer has expanded exponentially; with approximately 30 million registered participants, it is one of the fastest-growing sports in the world'. Women are even found to be participating today in the overtly aggressive (and violent) sports of boxing (see Mennesson, 2000), wrestling (see Sisjord and Kristiansen, 2009) and tackle football in the USA (see Migliaccio and Berg, 2007).

According to reports in the popular press, aggressive and demanding 'ladettes' are 'a late twentieth and early twenty-first century phenomenon and an alleged product of women's increased equality with men in late modern society' and could be the result of anxieties which have emerged following the recent periods of alleged or actual equity advances for women in British society (Jackson and Tinkler, 2007: 251, 265). Although originally applied to young women, Jackson (2006: 342) describes how, more recently, this has also incorporated schoolgirls, who apparently display 'ladette' traits. The term is usually applied to the 'young women who 'smoke, 'binge' drink, party and have casual heterosexual encounters', and from certain feminist perspectives these so-called 'troublesome' features of youthful femininity could be viewed as a positive development. For example, by 'taking over' the once male-dominated spaces of pubs and bars, 'ladettes' are asserting 'their right to use public space, to be heard and seen, and to engage in pleasures that are considered relatively unproblematic for boys and young men' (see Jackson and Tinkler, 2007: 268, 254, 267). Here we can perhaps add attending sports events and behaving in similar ways to some male spectators as an indicator of women's relative freedom to enjoy expressively previously male spaces.

However, Jackson suggests that in media representations the 'ladette' is taken as an example of the problems that can arise when liberal feminists 'go too far' so that women change their lives to mimic male behaviour. She lists problems that 'ladettes' have been blamed for, including rising levels of alcoholism, heart disease, child neglect, crime and violence (2006: 355, 341). The recent concerns about a growing binge-drinking culture for some young people and the connections drawn here with anti-social behaviour have featured in recent popular media coverage and also government policy (see Measham and Brain, 2005), which could perhaps help to explain the public 'backlash' against women who supposedly ape male behaviour in this way. For some feminist researchers by taking on male attributes, 'the ladette offers the most shallow model of gender equality; it suggests that women could or should adopt the most anti-social and pointless of "male" behaviour as a sign of empowerment' (Whelehan 2000: 9). Jackson and Tinkler (2007: 268) also raise concerns that the negative discourses surrounding young women threaten to restrict them in areas in which they have only recently begun to gain more freedom and opportunities.

According to these accounts, Wilkinson and Howard's (1997) predictions that there would be an extreme shift in the balance of power between men and women by 2010 have not really been realised. Women still face barriers for example to their involvement in serious sport. Fifteen years ago Hargreaves (1994: 191) was describing how some schools and PE departments tried to overcome the most obvious aspects of sexism. But this continues to operate in the hidden curriculum in both the classroom and on the sports field, and others have found a relative lack of support from teachers for girls playing 'male' sports such as football (see, for example, Scraton, 1992; Swain,

2000; Skelton, 2000). Those women who do opt to participate in aggressive sports are still constrained by conventional 'feminine' identities (see iv).

Scruton (1994: 252) warns of the consequences of embracing a simple post-structuralism as from this position: 'the universal categories and binary opposites – women/men, femininity/masculinity - have become increasingly differentiated and fragmented, such that they will eventually disappear as meaningful terms/categories/concepts' with feminism viewed as 'just' another grand theory. She argues that as there is no real post-modern or post-structural world, so in empirical terms it is important to look at the everyday experiences of ordinary women. At this grounded level, and despite the recent, if limited, shift towards greater equality, inequalities between the sexes remain profound. For example, women often earn less than men, occupations continue to be gender differentiated and the glass ceiling remains with only small numbers of female senior managers in top businesses. Furthermore, provision for under five childcare in Britain is among the worst in Europe and women still retain primary responsibility for housework and childcare. Kay (2000: 254-255) has also found that it is, 'almost always the woman's employment status that is affected if parents' paid work commitments cannot be fully reconciled with the availability of childcare'. This situation is likely to have severe consequences, of course, for the way in which leisure is organised. Although there have been claims that we should analyse gender relations from a postmodernist feminist perspective (for example, Fraser and Nicholson, 1989), Pilcher (1999: 9) is surely correct to note that this proposal represents something of a contradiction in terms: 'In other words, feminism is an example of a 'grand narrative', the relevance of which postmodernism fundamentally questions'. It

seems that equality between the sexes has not yet been achieved to such an extent that feminism has been rendered either redundant or extinct.

*iv) Gender relations and the gender order in society: masculinities and femininities*

A number of studies have examined how female athletes negotiate their approaches to femininity in sport. For example, Davis-Delano *et al.*, (2009) suggest that many female athletes engage in ‘apologetic behaviours’, most commonly involving attempts to look ‘feminine’, apologising for aggression and marking themselves out as heterosexual (see also Sisjord and Kristiansen, 2009). Other studies have shown how heterosexual women who play sports such as football (Cox and Thompson, 2000; Caudwell, 2000; Harris, 2005) and rugby (Wright and Clarke, 1999) feel they must clearly demarcate their conventional heterosexual femininity. For example, for Cox and Thompson (2000) female soccer players necessarily showed the capacity to explore at different moments and in different contexts four distinct, but interconnected, representations of the body: the soccer body; the private body; the feminine body; and the heterosexual body. Heterosexual female boxers and wrestlers are also constrained to emphasise their femininity in different contexts, for example, by wearing dresses, make-up and jewellery after tournaments and sporting long hair (see Mennesson, 2000; Sisjord and Kristiansen, 2009). Here I will draw especially on Sisjord and Kristiansen’s (2009) research on how female wrestlers ‘perform’ femininity.

Sisjord and Kristiansen (2009) draw theoretically upon perspectives of gender relations and the gender order in society and various conceptions of masculinities and femininities. Connell (1987, 1995, 2002) has used patterns of power relations to explain the operation of the gender order and how men’s dominance over women is maintained.



‘Hegemonic masculinity’ is at the apex of the gender hierarchy, above both subordinated masculinities and femininities. Hegemonic masculinity is the ‘ideal of masculinity [which is] centred around authority, physical toughness and strength, heterosexuality and paid work’ (Pilcher 1999: 12). Connell proposes that those men who received the hegemonic benefits of patriarchy without performing a strong version of this masculine dominance could be regarded as demonstrating a ‘complicit masculinity’ and ‘it was in relation to this group, and to compliance among heterosexual women, that the concept of hegemony was most powerful’ (see Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832).

The concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ was originally developed in tandem with the concept of ‘hegemonic femininity’, but this was soon renamed ‘emphasized femininity’ in order to acknowledge the asymmetrical position of masculinities and femininities in the patriarchal gender order (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 848). Emphasized femininity is normatively ‘oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men’ (Connell 1987: 183). It is characterized by displays of sociability rather than technical competence and is especially linked to the private domain, especially in the arenas of marriage and childcare.

More recently, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 848) have called for a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy, one which recognises ‘the agency of subordinated groups as much as the power of dominant groups’. Sisjord and Kristiansen (2009) suggest that those subordinated femininities which reject emphasized femininity have remained largely ‘invisible’ because of the attention devoted to maintaining a version of emphasised femininity as the norm in society. Ussher (1997) provides a useful account

of subordinated femininities that rejects 'emphasized femininity' and Sisjord and Kristiansen (2009) have used this theoretical underpinning to examine the different ways in which their heterosexual female wrestlers were 'doing' femininity. Ussher (1997) suggests that women actively negotiate the various 'scripts' of femininity and she discusses four positions or 'performances' that women might adopt. None of these are said to be concrete or fixed and women may shift between them in different situations and at different points in time - they may even adopt more than one position simultaneously. Ussher (1997: 462) also proposes that there may be more than the four positions she outlines, configurations within which women deal with the fantasies of femininity. But these four main options capture the essence of the main strategies of negotiation and resistance in which most women engage. These four femininities can be summarised thus:

- '*Being girl*' - The archetypal position for most women, the position 'taken up when a woman wants to *be* rather than merely *do* femininity...beauty, goodness and the ability to attract the admiration of men are the key attributes of being girl' (Ussher 1997: 445).
- '*Doing girl*' - Here the woman might reflexively 'perform the feminine masquerade' but she knows that essentially 'doing girl' is about 'playing a part' (Ussher 1997: 450).
- '*Resisting girl*' - When adopting this position women ignore or deny the traditionally signified 'femininity', such as the necessity for body discipline and adoption of the mask of beauty but 'this doesn't necessarily mean a rejection of

all that is associated with what it is to be 'woman' - attention to appearance, motherhood or sex with men' (Ussher 1997: 455).

- '*Subverting femininity*' - These women 'knowingly play with gender as a performance, twisting, imitating and parodying traditional scripts of femininity (or indeed masculinity) in a very public, polished display' (Ussher 1997: 458).

Sisjord and Kristiansen (2009) found several variations of 'doing gender' in their analysis, related mainly to athletic requirements and embodiment. A major distinction was apparent between their junior and senior female wrestlers, especially with regard to strength training which directly affected bodily appearance. These authors conclude that women wrestlers manifest a kind of 'resistant femininity' by participating in one of the most masculine sports in the world and so transgressing traditional gender norms. However, their behaviour also associates with 'emphasized femininity' in the feminizing strategies that were adopted by some wrestlers or their preferred subordination to men, which was especially demonstrated during a date with a male partner.

Drawing on Ussher's (1997) conceptualization, Sisjord and Kristiansen suggest that junior wrestlers mainly position themselves within the 'being girl' and 'doing girl' categorisations - 'doing', for example, because of their participation in a masculine sport and so ridiculing the very performance of conventional femininities, but also 'being' when 'holding back' in their workouts as they were concerned about developing large muscles and so gave emphasis to their feminised 'private body'. The seniors were said to perform 'doing girl' and 'resisting girl' variants - they 'resisted' or neglected

body discipline according to the traditional scripts of femininity by admitting and accepting the necessity of gaining muscle strength and mass and so embracing the ‘athletic body’ (Sisjord and Kristiansen 2009: 238, 244).

Whilst collecting and analysing my own data I found this a useful framework for beginning to think about the different ways in which heterosexual female sports fans might typically ‘perform’ femininities in what is largely regarded as a ‘male preserve’ (Dunning, 1994). I later draw on this to develop my own preliminary model of female fandom and gender performance (see Chapter Eight).

### **3.3 The New Era of Football and Rugby Union**

#### ***i) The ‘feminization’ of football post-1989***

Evidence suggests (including in this thesis) that many women may have been deterred from attending football matches in England during the so-called ‘hooligan years’ of the 1970s and 1980s because of their fear of male fan violence at games. This ‘hooligan’ development certainly alienated some *male* fans too, as match attendances declined markedly between the early 1970s and 1985 (see Russell, 1997), and the image of the sport suffered badly as top stadia in England were converted into a collection of penned compounds designed mainly to keep warring male fans apart (see Woodhouse and Williams, 1999). Stadium disasters such as the Bradford City fire in 1985 in which 56 fans died, and in that same year at the European Cup final between Liverpool and Juventus that saw 39 fans lose their lives in an incident provoked by hooliganism, produced something of a governance crisis in the sport. The traditionally ‘topophilic’ sentiments (see Bale, 1994) which many fans harboured about English football stadia undoubtedly suffered as a consequence.

However, it was the Hillsborough Stadium disaster of 1989 in Sheffield, when 96 Liverpool supporters died after police mismanagement and mis-perception of the crowd, that really changed the public image and also the material culture of the sport in England (Taylor, 1991). For one thing, there was a change in the prevailing national public discourse about football fans. The media coverage of Hillsborough had the effect of displacing prevailing stereotypes in England of football fans as ‘hooligans’, and instead replaced them with discourses focused much more around a sense of ‘family’ and ‘belonging’ (see Brunt, 1989). Whereas, previously, English football fans had tended to be described in tabloid media coverage as ‘beasts’ or ‘savages’, *after* Hillsborough fans were depicted more as ‘victims’; as people who had been abused by the authorities; as ‘ordinary’ people from ‘ordinary’ backgrounds. The public mourning in the city of Liverpool and involving football fans around the world suggested ‘nothing less than a deep-felt family loss which was experienced by the international “community” of football followers’ (Williams 1994: 10). Suddenly women were an obviously integral part of this mourning, sports ‘family’: after all, nine female fans died at Hillsborough. One personal tragedy much discussed in the media at the time was that of the middle class articulate Hicks family from Liverpool who had tragically lost their twin teenage daughters in the disaster.

The resulting Taylor Report (1990) recommended that all major clubs in England should convert their stadia to all-seater status by the start of the 1994-5 season, a proposal that was later restricted to clubs in the top two levels of the sport. A new, sometimes suffocating, rhetoric about fan ‘safety’ now pervaded the sport in England, and it was arguably only after Hillsborough that supporters were treated by clubs as valued paying customers, using new technologies to cement these new consumer

relationships. The formation of the FA Premier League (now the Premier League) in 1992 saw football become a much more competitive segment of the sports/leisure marketplace - the sport now required women as consumers as well as men, and so women now found themselves more legitimised as fans - or at least as paying customers, something rather different.

The invoked modernisation of English football involved 'the forced disappearance of the largely working-class populated standing terraces at major grounds' (Williams 2006: 97), and although the subsequent increase in the number of 'family' supporters at football matches in England was widely viewed in the industry and by politicians as a positive development, it has also been described as being much more consciously and commercially driven: as a means, 'to attract specific kinds of people to the FA Premier League Football - the reasonably affluent and 'well behaved'; families with children who will want and be able to purchase merchandise' (Williams, 1999: 6).

As a condition of the formation of the FA Premier League in England it was widely presumed - and also claimed by the game's administrators - that selling the exclusive TV rights for the new league to the satellite BSkyB channel for over £300 million would help to keep the price of match tickets down (see Williams, 1999). According to Holt and Mason (2000: 105) BSkyB brought about 'the biggest change in the game since the FA had agreed to the setting up of the Football League in 1888'. Income from satellite television and other sponsorships led to spiralling transfer fees and huge salaries for players, with ticket prices for spectators actually rising (Holt and Mason, 2000). This ensured, according to some claims, that major grounds in England were

‘increasingly unlikely to host their old working class audience for top games’ (Giulianotti 1999: 78).

The new Foucauldian-like emphasis on extensive in-ground CCTV surveillance in British football stadiums has led many fans to argue that the ‘new’ football in England has become simply, ‘*too* peaceful, too regimented and too much aimed at attracting high spending consumers’ (Williams 2006: 98). Armstrong and Young (2000) argue that the introduction of seating inside major stadia has destroyed the old participatory working class terrace culture of the sport, and that recent changes have led to a ‘blandification’ of the game, epitomized by the growth in the popularity of benign and consumption-driven family-stands. All of this means that while hooliganism seems to have been largely driven out of major football venues in England, it has been at a considerable price. Some supporters feel that the surveillance cultures and gentrification of the stadium mean that football venues at the top level are now essentially rather dull and boring places to be (Williams 1999: 20).

The structural changes that were occurring in and around English football stadia post-1989 also coincided with the England national team reaching the semi-finals at the 1990 World Cup in Italy. Not only did the ‘operatic’ TV presentation of the finals contribute to more ‘middle-class entry to the game’ in England (Giulianotti 1999: 35), it also seems to have aroused more active female fan interest in English football (see Chapter Two). Debates surrounding the recent ‘gentrification’ and/or ‘feminization’ of football in England are therefore closely linked to ideas that ‘new’ football is being shaped increasingly by patterns of middle class consumption reflecting the recent ‘bourgeoisification’ of football (Crawford and Gosling 2004: 478). In this sense, too, in

some accounts the growing active, *female* support for English football post-1989 has also been associated with notable class changes in the makeup of the typical football crowd in this country. This connection between gender and class has also been aided by the promotion of the sport as a (middle class) ‘family’ product, and by attempts to utilise the greater presence of female fans as a ‘solution’ to the sport’s various fan problems. For example, football’s governing body the FA (Football Association) established an ‘officially’ sanctioned supporter group *Englandfans* in 2001, following concerns about the perceived re-emergence of hooliganism during England’s participation in the 1998 World Cup in France and the Euro 2000 tournament in Belgium. But this initiative was regarded suspiciously by some, leading to press headlines such as ‘England Seeks the Perfect Fan: Female, Asian and Friendly’ (see Hughson and Poulton, 2008: 512). Football fan and researcher Coddington (1997: 12) has argued that in this climate of recent class and gender transformations in the game, ‘our alleged class is being used as a convenient mask to attack our gender’. This alleged new ‘feminization’ of sporting cultures in England is taken to suggest, therefore, more than increasing numbers of females: it also implies gentrification and that the presence of females is increasingly significant in softening (*sic*) the behaviour of (male) football crowds (see Crolley and Long, 2001).

This specific association of more women fans at football with both processes of gentrification and *class* changes in the sport obviously raises a number of different issues. Rising ticket prices have meant that it now seems to be assumed that the mere presence of more women at football is *in itself* a sign that the sport is becoming more ‘middle class’. Woodhouse and Williams (1999: 58-59) explain how Lord Justice Taylor may have sincerely believed that all-seater stadia would offer ‘female fans and



children the best opportunity to watch the sport in safety', but in this context there seems to have been something of a 'backlash' against the new female fan in England who is 'assumed to have been attracted into football more by the new club shops and pop-star lifestyles of top players than by the game itself'.

In this wider context, Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004) have referred to the ubiquitous nature of football, the Premiership and its 'celebrity' players as a kind of late-modern 'soap opera', with global icon David Beckham having a 'spin off' series with his wife – 'The Beckhams'. Undoubtedly, the new celebrity cultures around the sport have played a key role in glamorizing the sport and opening it up to a wider audience, presumably including both male and female fans. We should be careful to avoid assumptions that new female fans will be interested in the sport solely or mainly because of this media hype - but see Chapter Two for a discussion on the gendered hierarchy between male ('traditional', authentic) fans and female ('consumer', inauthentic) fans.

## ***ii) Rugby union & the rise of professionalism***

Both football and rugby union have their origins in folk football, and in the way in which 19<sup>th</sup> century violent forms of sport were taken up and codified by the English public schools as a means of civilizing and disciplining young males. At first there was much confusion between public schools due to the variants in rules, so new sets of laws were established, and in 1863 the National Association (later The FA) prohibited running with the ball, a code which eventually developed into Association football as we know it today. Although initially the FA Cup (established in 1871) was dominated by mainly southern public school clubs, the sport soon spread to the working classes and in 1885 the FA accepted professionalism. The Football League (formed in 1888),

according to Tomlinson (1991), was an inevitable outcome of this dissemination of football 'downwards' in class terms. Rugby union, however, would be more firmly rooted in England as a sport for the middle classes.

In 1871 after lengthy disagreements about the role of hacking in football, eventually the RFU was established and it laid down a code of laws for the sport (Richards, 2006). But tensions continued to mount over the issue of payment for players. Collins (2006) describes how in the North of England support for the values of amateurism declined as the sport involved working class participation and was beginning to attract large crowds. By 1891 demands for 'broken time' payments for players, combined with pressure for the formation of League competitions in Lancashire and Yorkshire led to a campaign to return to pre-1886 days when payment for time off work was accepted in the game. Thus, at this stage this was not a call for 'open professionalism' like that accepted by The FA in football (Collins 2006: 105). But, nevertheless, this request was rejected and would eventually lead to the split between the northern 13-a-side semi-professional Rugby League and the southern 15-a-side amateur Rugby Union in 1895.

Holt and Mason (2000: 132) describe how this split amounted to a class division of the sport which expressed itself in regional terms. This meant that in England, 'rugby union was a predominantly southern public school phenomenon. There was no national competitive structure. Clubs played their own fixtures and were run for their middle-class members as players and spectators'. Thus, unlike football, only certain types of people in England could typically play rugby union at junior levels throughout much of the sport's history (usually males who had played the sport as part of their private education or in grammar schools), and the sport did not reach out to the wider English

public. There are exceptions here: for example, rugby union dominated in parts of the West Country and the 'Celtish' English South West, where football was less able to establish itself. Furthermore, in parts of south Wales the 'amateur' values of sport were hugely popular in an overwhelmingly working class area. As Holt put it (1992: 248), however, the sport was not 'amateur' in the same way as was English and Scottish rugby union, since 'a good deal of broken-time payment in the form of 'reasonable expenses' was connived at by the clubs'. This ensured that players were not lured away to the semi-professional code as they could make as much by remaining 'amateur', even if the Welsh Rugby Union had officially endorsed the amateur code.

But generally, it is accepted that English rugby union is largely a middle class game (Collins 2009: 98), and certainly prior to the early 1990s, rugby union had always been 'militantly amateur' (Holt and Mason 2000: 49). The sport was played in poorly appointed stadia in front of small crowds. In fact, it was not until the 1970s and the live televising on BBC of the Five Nations international rugby championship that rugby union began to be demystified for those who had not gone to rugby playing schools and it began to become a more accessible popular sport for the spectator (Holt and Mason, 2000; Richards, 2006). In 1971-72 the first knock-out cup competition was introduced for rugby union (from 1975 this became the John Player Cup), and it was only after the Burgess report of 1980 that league tables were established in English rugby union, mainly because lack of serious competition was identified as the cause of the English national team's underachievement (see Richards, 2006).

This brief historical snapshot illustrates rugby union's historical commitment to amateurism and its militant anti-commercial stance before 1995. In contrast to modern

football, discussions of money and pay for play in English rugby union were perceived as vulgar and players could be banned for simply discussing a move to professional rugby league, so any contact with rugby league's grounds, players, referees and officials was forbidden (see Richards, 2006).

However, this was all to change with the move to professionalism for rugby union in 1995. The 1991 Rugby World Cup in England increased pressure for this historic shift: not only did England reach the final, but the 13.6 million TV audience for this event exceeded all expectations. It demonstrated the marketable nature of rugby union internationals (see Holt and Mason, 2000; Collins, 2009). It was around the time of the 1995 Rugby World Cup that rugby union's fate was finally settled - on the 22 June the Australian, New Zealand and South African unions signed a £340 million ten-year deal with the News Corporation broadcasting company, and on 27 August 1995 professionalism was legalised by the International Board (Collins, 2009). Professionalism in rugby union meant that the sport became a much more saleable commodity, and the increased hype of the sport probably served to recruit some new female (and male) fans. Just as the advent of the FA Premier League in 1992 helped to promote football and bring about major changes in the sport, rugby union in this period was also transforming, but even more rapidly.

Ironically, it was a *football* man, Newcastle United owner John Hall, who began a panic in the newly professionalised rugby union by offering six figure salaries for players, though these rocketing costs were finally halted in 1999 by the introduction of a salary cap, initially of £1.8 million per club per season. The new money in the sport brought in: the glamour of imported players; the European Heineken Cup was introduced; and

some rugby union clubs began to ground share with football stadiums to improve capacities and facilities at a stroke (see Richards, 2006). In fact, England were almost forced out of the Five Nations competition in 1996 after negotiating an exclusive deal for TV rights with Murdoch's BSkyB - a far cry, this, from the game's long-standing 'amateur' values. Former amateur club giants, including the Nottingham and Moseley clubs, were simply unable to compete in the new sports marketplace driven by the ethos and ideologies of advanced capitalism (see Collins, 2009).

However, moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, rugby union clubs were able to stabilise financially - Richards (2006) describes how the average Premiership crowd rose by more than 50%, from 5,507 to 8,438 between 1999 and 2003. By 2008, this figure was up to 10,880, still way short of elite football crowds. Collins (2009) attributes this surge of active spectatorship to the way rugby clubs adopted modern marketing methods (taken from rugby league - and perhaps also football) to create a more 'colourful' and 'noisy' 'match day experience', but this also suggests that the sport was now more 'fashionable'. This cultural and commercial shift would certainly have been accelerated especially by the English national side winning the rugby union World Cup in 2003 and reaching the final again in 2007. In comparison to football, the sport has yet to produce as many high profile, media-driven 'celebrity' players (perhaps the result of rugby union's salary cap and its social class base), but there can be no doubt that some players have become glamorized in a similar way to late-modern footballers. Tabloid 'pin-ups' such as the hard-working, intelligent and focused Englishman Johnny Wilkinson and the lounge lizard, Welsh back Gavin Henson who regularly feature in the media, may have introduced the sport to some, otherwise reluctant, fans.

Furthermore, when compared to rugby union matches in the 1980s, the game ‘became faster, the ball was in play longer and the scores were higher’ (Collins 2009: 211), in part resulting from various law changes, but also the result of increased player fitness in the era of full-time professionalism. Rugby union was responding to the new demands of becoming a popular *television* sport. Yet despite these major transformations in the sport which (in theory at least) would be likely to open it up to both players and spectators drawn from across the social classes, the sport of rugby union did not completely lose its strong middle and upper class associations, especially in England. For Collins (2009: 208) ‘everything had changed, yet everything had stayed the same’. He cites the *Premier Rugby National Fan Survey* (Williams, 2003) which found that 61% of spectators came from the upper middle and middle classes, with just 17% describing themselves as working class. Collins also makes reference to how, in the 2007 World Cup, 15 of the 22 man squad selected for England had attended fee paying schools. Core, residual social class distinctions between football and rugby union remain and they are a clear feature of my own research. Let me say a little now about football and rugby union in Leicester.

### **3.4 Rugby and Football City: The ‘Sport City’ of Leicester**

#### ***i) Some recent history of the city***

Located in the British East Midlands, Leicester was given city status in 1919, and is now the most populated city in the East Midlands. Leicester made the transition to a manufacturing economy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and this then led to the development of its two major modern manufacturing industries, historically the basis of the local economy, hosiery and footwear. According to Beazley (2006), engineering falls third behind these. Nash and Reeder (1993) describe how the city’s economy was thriving up

until the 1970s, and that the origins of the city's reputation as a prosperous industrial centre can be traced back to the inter-war years. Up until the 1960s and 1970s, as Nash and Reeder (1993: xiv) suggest, 'the overall social character of the city was set by its indigenous working-class factory population. With so many women factory workers, it shared some of the characteristics of the older manufacturing textile centres of the north'. The city's unusual tradition of *women* workers - single and married - which was established early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century provides some useful background information for this current research. According to Nash and Reeder (1993) historically Leicester's hosiery and boot and shoe industries drew strongly on female workers; in 1891 the proportion of women in paid employment in Leicester was 48% (compared to the national average of 34%), but by 1973 this gap had closed (41% in Leicester compared to 39.2% nationally).

However, these authors also note that the working rates for married women have traditionally been higher in Leicester than those for all British females, supporting claims for Leicester's strong local tradition of 'working wives'. It was this contribution from married women to household income which was the major factor in Leicester's prosperity pre-1970s, and this was also crucial during the recession years of 1979-1981. Some reports indicate that in some households Leicester women became the main breadwinner. We can speculate here that this involvement in work may have contributed to a greater sense of independence for these Leicester women in earlier decades, and perhaps that they were more likely to demand entry to traditionally male spaces, such as the local sports ground, in a way that women in other cities which were more divided and dependent on substantially male industries, might not.

The onset of recession in the late 1970s brought major changes to the city of Leicester, and as Beazley (2006: 127) confirms 'a major problem for the declining fortunes of Leicester's economy was that both of its traditional industries were hit at the same time'. He examines how British manufacturers were unable to compete with foreign exports, and Leicester's previously independent industries were taken over. Charles Clore, for example, established a hegemony over the shoe industry and national chain stores such as Marks and Spencer gradually tied hosiery manufacturers strongly to themselves. This, combined with many local factories closing due to the recession, meant that representatives of these traditional industries began to disappear from the city around this time. The population of the city also changed dramatically during this period - between the 1950s and the mid-1970s large waves of immigration were experienced by the city and its indigenous people. Singh (2003: 43) describes well how the sudden changes in the demography of the city set off instances of local racism, and led to scenes in the early 1980s similar to the riots more familiar in industrial towns in the north and south in more recent years.

However, the city of Leicester - certainly in terms of its public perception - would change from this early reputation for racism to one in which it was widely known as a leading international example of successful civic multiculturalism. Singh (2003) examines how this has been made possible mainly through the integrative role of local political leadership, the city's relatively prosperous and diverse economy, and the entrepreneurial skills of certain arriving migrant groups, such as the East African Asians in the mid-1970s. The city of Leicester has been held up recently as a model of multiculturalism and the Commission for Racial Equality has predicted that Leicester will be the first city in the UK in which ethnic minorities move to majority status, by



2011 (see CRE, 2006). This emphasis on ethnic diversity is not a major feature of local sport or this research. Ethnic minority groups still feature very poorly as a constituent part of football and rugby crowds in the city. As a result, predictably, nearly all the female respondents who agreed to participate in this research were white.

*ii) A social profile of the city of Leicester today*

Although now slightly dated, the most recent census data in 2001 showed Leicester's overall population to be 279,923. Of these, 53% of all people aged 16-74 were in employment (compared to the England and Wales average of 60.6%) and the figure for unemployment was 4.9%, slightly above the national average of 3.4%. Leicester is also home to a reasonably large number of students, with 3.9% of the population made up of economically active students (compared to an average of 2.6% for England and Wales) and 8.8% economically inactive students, compared to the 4.7% national average (Census 2001 Profiles- Leicester, accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2010). This figure will have grown in recent years as universities have expanded. The city's historical association with the manufacturing industries discussed above has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with manufacturing remaining as the largest source of employment in the city. The 2001 census showed that 23.4% of the workforce were employed in manufacturing, compared with 14.96% for England and Wales, and the most notable deficit in employment in comparison to the national average was in the financial services sector dealing with business activities and real estate, where Leicester's figure of 9.08% is slightly below the England and Wales average of 12.97% (see Leicester City Council, Census 2001, accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2010).

The occupational structure of the city's residents is heavily biased towards manual labour compared to the national picture, as the following table demonstrates:

**Table 3.1: Occupational Status of Leicester City Residents**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Leicester (%)</b>	<b>England and Wales (%)</b>
Managers and senior officials	9.69	15.11
Professional occupations	9.91	11.17
Associate professional and technical occupations	10.79	13.78
Administrative and secretarial occupations	11.74	13.33
Skilled trades occupations	10.61	11.64
Personal service occupations	6.77	6.91
Sales and customer service occupations	8.75	7.67
Process, plant and machine operatives	15.54	8.51
Elementary Occupations	16.20	11.87

(Source: Leicester City Council, Census 2001, accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2010).

Gotham (2002: 1735-36) has examined how the place promotion of cities has been transformed in late-modernity into a professionalised and highly organised industry in order to encourage the growth of tourism within cities. He proposes that:

‘In many cities, tourism has become the main strategy of urban revitalisation as local governments and the tourism industry have forged close institutional and financial ties to ‘sell’ the city to potential ‘consumers’ and invest in costly infrastructure to support tourism...Place marketing, the use of imagery and theming, and the selling of places have become central components of the political economy of tourism and the revitalisation strategies of cities’.

In Leicester, the merger of Leicester City Council and Leicester Shire Promotions in 2006 can be used to illustrate this new ‘place marketing’ of cities. This led to the

creation of the 'One Leicester' brand to coincide with the planned regeneration of the city. In 2002 Leicester City Council was awarded the prestigious Beacon Council award for 'Promoting Racial Equality', and it seems Leicester's reputation as a multicultural and ethnically diverse city was one of the areas exploited to try and give Leicester that 'unique competitive edge' in place marketing terms (Zukin 1995: 2). The 'One Leicester' brand supposedly represents how the city is: 'A city whose people are unified as one. A city with a unique history. A city where global cultures co-exist' (One Leicester Story, accessed 7<sup>th</sup> January 2010). Gotham (2002) describes how the urban revitalisation of post-industrial cities is based on 'cultural' strategies (see also Short and Kim, 1999; Strom, 1999), and examples of this in Leicester have recently included the building of a new £350 million 'Highcross' shopping development (which opened in September 2008), the development of a new 'Cultural Quarter' (including a performing arts centre and three screen digital media centre), and the regeneration of the river and canalside areas to transform the city's waterfront (One Leicester-Developing Leicester, accessed on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2010).

Smith (2001) suggests that due to the contemporary cultural dominance of the media and the popularity and exposure of media sport, it has become increasingly common for cities to use sport for their 'image enhancement' and 'branding' in late-modernity. In Leicester, sport has certainly been used in a variety of ways in the city's aggressive new place marketing - Leicester is in fact promoted as a 'sports city'. Leicester was awarded 'European City of Sport' in 2008, judged by representatives from ACES (the European Capitals of Sport Association) and this means that the city now ranks as a major European centre for sporting excellence and good practice (Leicester City Council News, accessed on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2010). In 2009 Leicester also hosted the Special

Olympics, which is recognised as the third member of the Olympic family and provides year round sports, training, and local, regional, national, and international competitions for all levels of learning disability athletes. Prime Minister Gordon Brown attended the opening ceremony in July 2009 and celebrity sports figures such as former Leicester City player Gary Lineker (now BBC commentator) and former Leicester Tigers player Martin Johnson (now England coach) also made appearances, thus helping to locate the city firmly (if briefly) in the national sporting media spotlight. In 2009, Leicester was also one of 15 cities bidding to be a host city for the FIFA World Cup in England in 2018, although the city was not in the final selection to be a host city.

### *iii) Overview of the city's major professional sports clubs*

In many ways, Leicester was an ideal case study for the proposed research on female sports fans because it is one of the few cities in Britain in which a strong public interest in professional football is relatively balanced, locally, by public interest in other sports. For example, Leicester hosts a senior county cricket club and a top level basketball club, while the city and county together supports an (amateur) elite women's hockey club, as well as a 'classed' male team sport to rival football in the shape of a highly successful rugby union club. By focusing on fans of the professional (men's) football club (Leicester City, also known as the Foxes or the City) and the leading local rugby union club (the Leicester Tigers), I was able to address some of these class and other differences in local sports fandom, but using the prism of gender as my main focus.

The respective stadia of the Foxes and Tigers are within half a mile of each other near the city centre (see map below) - so there is no obvious 'tribal' division between fans of the clubs in the city, at least not one which is based on simple territorial or spatial

distinctions. Instead recruitment of support for the football club is strongly city based and still has a large working class and lower middle class constituency (see Williams 2004a). The rugby union club draws its fans much more strongly from the more expensive residential areas of the city and county of Leicestershire to the south of the city centre. It has a rather more affluent, professional base to its active fan support. This is reflected in some recent quantitative studies of the fans of the two sports clubs:

- 27% of City fans were found to live 1-5 miles from the city based stadium and 42% within 6-20 miles. In contrast Tigers fans live *on average* 27 miles away from Welford Road.
- 35% of football fans in Leicester earned over £30,000, while the figure was 48% for rugby union supporters.
- 47% of rugby fans were university educated (see Williams, 2003; 2004a and see also Appendix one for age and social class demographic data).

The city of Leicester is perhaps unique in Britain as a provincial centre in which rugby union legitimately challenges professional football in its local dominance. It is therefore an ideal site for examining female fandom in two, highly distinctive and successful, local sporting cultures. The map provided below shows the location of the city's three major sports clubs today. In 2002, Leicester City Football Club moved from Filbert Street, the club's home ground since 1891, to the nearby new Walkers Stadium. The Walkers Stadium was built on a brownfield city centre site almost next door to the club's former home ground, as it was not viable to extend the stadium capacity and improve the facilities of Filbert Street. This ground move meant that the embattled Filbert Street with its historic association with violence and hooliganism was replaced by a much more modern, stylish and spacious stadium (although see Chapter Seven for

respondents' views on the ground move). The images below illustrate Filbert Street's four different stands - built at different points in the club's history and later referred to by some of my respondents. It can also be seen how the new Walkers Stadium's 'bowl' shape means that the stands today are continuous and so lack any real kind of distinction. The new capacity at Leicester City increased from 21,500 at Filbert Street to 32,500 at the Walkers Stadium.

Welford Road, home of Leicester Tigers, can be seen on the map to be within close proximity of the football ground, with the Leicestershire County Cricket ground at Grace Road only a short distance away. Welford Road has undergone its own recent redevelopment programme and following the building of the new Caterpillar Stand, Welford Road's capacity now stands at 24,000 with plans underway to extend this figure to some 30,000, the largest designated club rugby stadium in England.

### 3.2 Map of Leicester and the Location of the Sports Grounds



(Adapted from Google Maps, accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2010).

### **3.3 Leicester City Football Club's Former Ground, Filbert Street**



(Source: [www.WorldStadiums.com](http://www.WorldStadiums.com), accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2010).

### **3.4 Leicester City Football Club's new Walkers Stadium ground**



(Source: [www.WorldStadiums.com](http://www.WorldStadiums.com), accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2010).



**3.5 Image of Welford Road before the redevelopment programme commenced in 2008**



(Source: BBC Sport - Rugby Union, accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2009).

**3.6 Welford Road's new Caterpillar Stand, completed in 2009**



(Source: Leicester Tigers Website, accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2010).

### **3.5 Summary**

This chapter began by emphasising the relative absence of initiatives to bring women's leisure experiences to the fore, and the importance of avoiding gendered stereotypes which might automatically exclude women's involvement in sport from academic debates on leisure. I offered some context for the ways in which women from earlier generations tended to be more marginalized from sport. But I also examined, briefly, some of the major structural shifts in late-modernity which have arguably re-orientated, relatively speaking, the balance of power between the sexes. This, combined with crucial structural, commercial and cultural changes in football and rugby union, especially in the 1990s, may have helped to 'open up' these sports to more women, as both players and spectators. I will examine this issue in two very different sports in one English city. These sports exhibit a rather different social and cultural background, but they have explored a rather similar trajectory in the new commercial age of sport over the past decade.

This brief discussion about the background and recent developments in the two sports, the city of Leicester, and the role of football and rugby union in that city, is crucial in order to better contextualise the experiences of my female respondent fans. Older women in my samples, for example, have lived through all these key changes. How will this experience have shaped their 'careers' as sports fans? What were female experiences of these sports both before and after their respective cultural and commercial transformations? To what extent do women of different generations in my sample experience changes in 'female equality' in sport during these different eras?

The city of Leicester offers an excellent base for this sort of comparative research, given the variety of spectator sports available here, in contrast to those in most other major British cities. Although generalizations cannot easily be made from an in-depth qualitative study of this kind, it seems likely that many women in Britain will share similar experiences and barriers in their attempts to access sport, as those highlighted by female fans drawn from different generations in Leicester.

In the next chapter I consider key methodological issues.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodological Issues**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of different generations of female football and rugby union fans and more specifically, to consider the extent to which, and how, sports fandom figures in the leisure lives of women in different sporting contexts today and in the recent past. I begin this chapter with an account of the methods chosen to undertake this research, and briefly how they connect with my own epistemological standpoint. I move on to look at more specific methodological issues, including sampling, negotiating access to participants, ethical considerations and gender as a research variable. Finally, I discuss how the research methods were employed, including a focus on data collection and analysis, and how a ‘grounded theory’ approach was adopted for the analysis.

#### **4.2 Methodological Considerations and Negotiating Access**

##### ***i) Combining research paradigms***

Clarke (2001) discusses how quantitative and qualitative approaches to research are often presented as opposing research traditions in social sciences - as representing, crudely speaking, either positivist or interpretative positions. The positivist tradition has claimed: ‘there is an objective, external world that exists independently of human perception, which is amenable to quantitative methods. The researcher acquires knowledge of this world through following a scientific mode of enquiry similar to that

found in the natural sciences' (Clarke 2001: 32). The interpretativist tradition rejects claims that there is an objective reality, and instead argues that individuals construct their own versions of reality. This view therefore challenges the positivist tradition, and is predicated upon the position that: 'a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action' (Bryman 2004: 13).

However, recent methodological debates in sociology indicate that this division is not quite as clear cut as it first appears. The supposed distinction between the two paradigms is actually best understood as ambiguous and has been judged by many researchers as no longer useful, or as even presenting a false dualism (see Frazer, 1995), something, 'we would be better off without' (Gorard 2004: 10). Although there are obvious differences between the use of, say, statistics and the analysis of textual data drawn from interview transcripts, arguably the line between qualitative and quantitative methods is best seen as blurred. Gorard (2004: 10) suggests that: 'to some extent all methods of social science deal with qualities, even when the observed qualities are counted. Similarly, all methods of analysis use some form of number...Words can be counted and numbers can be descriptive'. In the same way, Bryman (2004) suggests that qualitative researchers are engaged in 'quasi-quantification' by using terms such as 'many', 'often' and 'some' and thus counting the number of cases in data analysis in his appropriately titled chapter: *'Breaking down the quantitative/qualitative divide'*. This leads to a discussion about 'multi-strategy research' (combining quantitative and qualitative research), and Bryman lists projects where this has been successfully used (see, for example, Halford, Savage and Witz, 1997; Wajcman and Martin, 2002). However, although he posits that combining more varied findings will be 'a good thing'

he also points to some of the drawbacks of this approach, including the need for more time and resources to do research.

The research methods employed here are broadly informed by these recent revisions. They are largely qualitative in nature, but I also leaned towards the quantitative tradition and thus perhaps took on aspects of this so-called 'multi-strategy research'. The rationale for my approach was that I wanted to conduct rich, qualitative interviews in order to produce 'thick' data but with a relatively large number of individuals to try to address questions of representativeness and generalisability. I obtained my sample from survey questionnaire returns for Leicester City and Leicester Tigers fans, and chose quite a large number of cases ( $n=85$ ) to allow me to make some basic generational comparisons and to better examine trends and patterns in the data, combined with the insights offered by the depth of information one can collect from qualitative interviews. Thus, although my own viewpoint on the nature and status of knowledge swayed me towards more of an interpretivist position, I also acknowledge that there are real advantages in some of the lessons of the positivistic tradition. I would argue that *combining* elements of qualitative and quantitative approaches to research have added to the richness of this study and to its generalisability. Being able to offer some numeric data and patterning in my analysis, where appropriate, I hope has added more weight to the qualitative findings reflected in selected quotations.

## ***ii) Sampling techniques & initiating research***

Rather than facing the difficulties of relying on convenience or snowballing sampling techniques, I decided to try to select my respondents more systematically; I was concerned that placing advertisements for the research in local newspapers, for

example, would lead to self-selection and thus contain an inherent bias. As a researcher at the University of Leicester I fortunately had access to existing sampling frames of local sports fans: this was in the shape of responses to postal questionnaire surveys that had been conducted by the University of Leicester just a few years before my research began for the local football club (in 2006) and rugby club (in 2007).

Thus, the sampling frame used to select the sample for this thesis was the original survey replies from *A Survey of Leicester City FC Football Fans* (2004) and from *Premier Rugby National Fan Survey: Leicester Tigers Supporters* (2003). *A Survey of Leicester City FC Football Fans* (2004) produced responses from 5,892 fans, 1,414 (24%) of which were female. As contact details were provided on questionnaires, I was able to write to those respondents who were eventually selected for the research. These questionnaires also provided some very useful basic demographic details about potential respondents, and although the majority of returns were from regular attendees and club season ticket holders, not all female fans fitted this category. I hoped that by deciding on some systematic pre-selection and by writing to women personally and asking them to participate, I was more likely to obtain a suitable range of ages and female fans with different fan histories and patterns of attendance.

The 1,414 female survey replies were separated out and, in order to address generational differences, potential interviewees were then divided into three broad age groups:

- 16-24 years ('younger' fans).
- 25-54 years ('middle aged' fans).
- Over 55 years ('older' fans).

Systematic sampling techniques were then used to select potential female respondents from these three age groups - every fifth survey return for each group was selected until the details of 135 female Leicester City fans were pulled out from the original Leicester University sample in order to produce a working sample of around 50 supporters for interview. In total I sent out 135 letters to female football supporters, which generated a positive response from 51 female fans. This sample was slightly weighted towards 'middle aged' fan group as they formed the largest proportion of respondents in the football survey returns. Initially, I sent out 30 letters to 'younger' fans, 60 to 'middle aged' and 30 to 'older' fans, but later sent a 'booster' batch of 15 letters to 'younger' fans due to an initial lower response rate. After these adjustments my final active football fan sample consisted of 10 'younger' football fans (20%), 25 'middle aged' fans (49%) and 16 'older' supporters (31%).

Similar techniques were used to select my rugby fan sample from the existing Leicester University sampling frame - *Premier Rugby National Fan Survey: Leicester Tigers Supporters* (2003). This survey had produced replies from 2,249 Tigers fans, 630 of which (28%) were female. The age delineations for this survey were slightly different to that for the football fan survey, but I tried to match up rugby fans with the three age groups used for the football fans as closely as possible. Rugby fans were divided into three similar age categories:

- 15-30 years ('younger' fans)
- 31-50 years ('middle aged' fans)
- Over 51 years ('older' fans)



Because the rugby sample - and indeed the rugby union crowd at Leicester - was not as large as that for football, initially I sent out slightly fewer requests to rugby supporters. Once the female returns were identified systematic sampling techniques were used - again every fifth respondent was selected to be approached until 90 female Leicester Tigers supporters had been pulled out. But after the initial 90 letters were sent out (30 for each of the above age groups) it was then necessary to send out an extra 40 requests due to the initial lower response rate (130 letters in total were sent out). The final rugby fan sample included 34 respondents (a response rate of 26%) – 12 ‘younger’ fans (35%), 10 ‘middle aged’ fans (30%) and 12 ‘older’ supporters (35%).

Age and social class demographic data of all football and rugby fans who participated in the 2003 and 2004 fan surveys have been included in the Appendices. These data indicate that Tigers fans are older than City supporters and are typically drawn from higher social class groups. Below I have included more detailed demographic data on the 85 female fans who agreed to participate in my own research. Many ‘older’ female football fans agreed to participate in the research which does not necessarily reflect the more general age trends (see Appendix one), and may perhaps be a result of people in retired ‘older’ age groups having more time to be able to participate in the research. The pseudonyms or fan numbers in the tables are the same as those used for the data analysis, so can be used as a useful reference point.

**Table 4.1 Female Football Fan Sample - Demographic Data**

No.	Age	Season Ticket Holder?	Away Matches?	Born in Leicester? Or If Not Where?	Supporter status	Occupation	Marital Status
F1	23	Yes	No	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Gap year after degree	Single
F2	23	Yes	Yes- Some Cup games	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Accounts Manager	Single
F3	23	No	No	Yes	Long-term, 'cool' fan	Ambulance trainee	Single
F4	26	Yes	Not today-in past	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	PhD Student	Engaged
F5	26	Yes	Yes- Cup matches	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Receptionist	Single
F6	26	No	Not today-in past	No, Northampton	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Police Officer	Married
F7	23	No-in past	Not today-in past	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Estate Agent	Single
F8	27	Yes	Yes-Occasionally	No, Coventry	New, 'hot' fan	Account Manager	Partner
F9	24	Yes	No	Yes	New, 'hot' fan	Finance Assistant	Single
F10	20	Yes	Yes-Occasionally	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan (also R2)	Undergraduate Student	Partner
F11	28	No	No	Yes	New, 'cool' fan	Book shop assistant	Partner
F12	35	Yes	Not today-in past	Yes	New, 'hot' fan	Recruitment Manager	Married
F13	37	Yes	Occasional	Moved from Canterbury	New, 'hot' fan	Immigration Officer	Married
F14	37	Yes	Yes- Some	Yes	Returned, 'hot' fan	Tenancy Support Worker	Married
F15	39	Yes	No	No, Warwick	New, 'hot' fan (also R21)	Company Director	Single
F16	38	Yes	Yes-14	Yes	New, 'hot' fan	Warehouse Personnel	Single
F17	35	No-8 matches	No-in past	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Sales Manager	Married
F18	40	Yes	No	Moved from Devon	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Self employed accountant	Married
F19	45	No-3 matches	No	Yes	On-off, Long-term, 'cool' fan	Teacher/Researcher	Married
F20	48	Yes	Yes-local	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Office Clark	Married
F21	46	Yes	Yes-all	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Accounts Administrator	Divorced
F22	42	Yes	No	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Supply Nursery Officer	Married
F23	48	Yes	No	Moved aged two	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Teacher	Partner
F24	51	Member-10	No-in past	Leicestershire-Rutland	Returned, 'hot' fan	Production Operative	Divorced
F25	53	Occasional	No	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Community Support Officer	Single

F26	51	Occasional	No	Moved from Manchester	New City fan, 'hot' fan	Teacher	Married
F27	56	Member	No	Yes	New, 'hot' fan	Sales Assistant	Married
F28	50	Yes	No	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Self employed book keeper	Single
F29	52	Yes	No	Yes	New, 'cool' fan	Sales Administrator	Married
F30	50	Yes	A few local	Melton Mowbray	Returned, Long-term, 'hot' fan	Senior Staff Nurse	Married
F31	50	Occasional	No	Yes	New, 'hot' fan	Teacher	Married
F32	50	Yes	No-in past	Moved when aged three to Leicester	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Trade Union Official	Divorced
F33	50	Yes	Yes all	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Retired	Married
F34	54	No-8 matches	No	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Home Helper	Married
F35	59	Occasional	No	Yes	On-off, 'cool' fan	Administrator at Uni	Married
F36	68	Occasional	No	Yes	New, 'hot' fan	Retired- Secretary	Married
F37	63	Occasional	No	Leicestershire- Melton Mowbray	Returned, 'hot' fan	Retired- Factory	Widowed
F38	60	Yes	Odd matches	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Retired- Clerical	Married
F39	60	Yes	No-in past	Yes	New, 'hot' fan	Chef	Married
F40	64	Yes	Very occasionally	Moved from Reading	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Community Social Worker	Single
F41	64	Yes	No-in past	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Retired- Bank	Divorced
F42	68	No- 5 matches	No	Yes	New, 'cool' fan	Retired- Newsagents	Married
F43	69	Yes	No	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Retired- School meals cook	Married
F44	60	Occasional	No	Now lives in Gillingham	Long-term, 'cool' fan	Retired- Nurse	Married
F45	80	Yes	No	Yes	Returned, 'hot' fan	Retired- PA	Widowed
F46	73	Yes	Around 2	Moved from Yorkshire	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Retired- Nurse	Married
F47	78	Yes	Yes-Occasional	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Retired- In sewing	Married
F48	79	Member	No	Leicestershire-Rothwell	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Retired- Banking	Widowed
F49	70	Yes	No-in past	No, Barlestone	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Retired- Secretary	Single
F50	73	Yes	No	Moved from Ipswich	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Retired- Nursing	Widowed
F51	71	Occasional	No	Yes	Long-term, 'cool' fan	Retired- British Gas	Married

**Table 4.2 Female Rugby Fan Sample - Demographic Data**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Season Ticket Holder?</b>	<b>Away Matches?</b>	<b>Born in Leicester- Or If Not Where?</b>	<b>Supporter status</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>
R1	25	Yes	Yes	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Principal Clark, University	Single
R2	20	Occasional	No	Yes	Long-term, 'cool' fan (also F10)	Archaeology Undergraduate	Single
R3	26	Yes	No	No, Warwickshire	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Charity Worker	Single
R4	23	No- in past	No	Yes	Long-term, 'cool' fan	Beauty Therapist	Partner
R5	31	No, 6 matches	Occasionally	Yes	Long-term, 'cool' fan	Admin Assistant	Single
R6	32	Yes	Yes, occasionally	Yes	New, 'cool' fan	Works with children	Partner
R7	33	Yes	Yes, occasionally	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Dispensing Optician	Married
R8	19	Yes	No, just finals	Yes	New, 'cool' fan	Student	Single
R9	32	Yes	Finals, semis	Yes- now in Doncaster	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Town Planner	Married
R10	27	Yes	Yes, occasionally	Yes, now lives in Leeds	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Speech Therapist	Single
R11	27	Occasional	No	Yes, now in Northants	New, 'cool' fan	Teacher	Partner
R12	35	Occasional	Just Twickenham	Yes	Long-term, 'cool' fan	Part time Conveyancer	Partner
R13	42	Shares ST	No	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Housewife	Married
R14	45	Yes	No-in past	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Learning Mentor	Partner
R15	55	Yes	Some European	No, Nottingham	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Financial Advisor	Partner
R16	53	Yes	Yes, occasionally	Yes	New, 'cool' fan	Company Secretary	Married
R17	55	Yes	Yes, occasionally	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Clark	Married
R18	47	Yes	Yes, occasionally	No, Lutterworth	New, 'cool' fan	Scenes of Crime Officer	Married
R19	54	Yes	Yes, occasionally	Yes	New, 'hot' fan	Direct Payments Advisor	Married
R20	37	Yes	Yes, especially European	Yes	New, 'hot' fan	Financial Director	Married
R21	39	12-15 matches	Some European	Moved from Warwick	New, 'cool' fan (also F15)	Company Director	Single
R22	48	Yes	Some European	No, Wolverhampton	New, 'hot' fan	P/T Teacher/Designer	Married
R23	65	Yes	Occasionally	Moved from Lincolnshire	Long-term, 'cool' fan	Retired	Widowed

R24	68	Yes	Some 'big' matches	Moved from Nottingham to Leicester	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Retired-Civil Servant	Divorced
R25	70	Yes	Occasionally	Yes	Long-term, 'hot' fan	Retired-Machinst Supervisor	Single
R26	58	Yes	No	Yes	New, 'cool' fan	Retired-P/T library Asst	Married
R27	62	Yes	Just Twickenham	Moved from Barrow	New, 'cool' fan	Retired- Maths Teacher	Married
R28	58	Yes	1-2 matches	Moved from Lincoln	New, 'cool' fan	Manager at Relate	Married
R29	56	Yes	No	Moved from near Blackpool	Long-term, 'cool' fan	Equal Opps Manager	Married
R30	61	Yes	Yes, big matches	Yes	Long-term, 'cool' fan	Retired- Nursing Manager	Married
R31	57	Yes	Only finals	Moved from St Helens	New, 'hot' fan	Geneticist	Married
R32	60	Occasional	No-in past	Yes	Long-term, 'cool' fan	Retired-P/T in Admin	Married
R33	57	Yes	Some	Moved from Scotland	New, 'hot' fan	Computer Supervisor-	Divorced
R34	57	Yes	Yes, especially European	Moved from Scotland	Long-term, 'cool' fan	Teacher	Married

A number of techniques were employed to try and boost response rates. Assurances of confidentiality were provided to my sample, and a stamped addressed envelope was included for responses (see Pole and Lampard, 2002). Fowler (2002: 48) argues that response rates can be enhanced with ‘almost anything that makes a mail questionnaire look more professional, more personalized, or more attractive’. So to highlight my professional credentials I made it clear that the research was sponsored by an official funding body (ESRC) and was based at the University of Leicester (see Appendix two for sample copy of invitation letter). The reply sheet was printed on club coloured paper (blue for football fans and green for rugby fans), and supporters were assured that interviews would take place at a time and location that suited them, including in their own homes. Those who agreed to take part in the research were asked to provide a contact telephone number. It has been suggested that the recruitment process for research should be personalized and repetitive, with follow-up phone calls serving to reinforce the importance of the meeting and reminding participants who may have forgotten about the scheduled meeting (see Krueger, 2004; Krueger and Casey, 2000). As well as sending out personal letters, I phoned those respondents who agreed to take part in the research to organise a date, time and location that suited them. This also allowed me the opportunity to answer any queries about the research.

Fontana and Frey (2005: 707) describe how ‘accessing the setting’ for interviews will vary depending on the group being studied, and for some research it is necessary to ‘gain access anew with each and every interviewee’. This was certainly the case in my research. I did not face any major access barriers initially but there was never a stage in my research where complete access was granted until all the data had been collected. Thus, a further reminder phone call was made to respondents nearer to the date of the

scheduled interview (usually one to two days before) to check this was still convenient and to ensure subjects had not forgotten the interview. Although there were a small number of instances where I arrived at a respondent's home only to be treated with blank looks, generally this technique proved effective and most interviews took place as planned.

The sampling techniques employed in this research along with the strategies used to try and increase response rates meant that almost four-out-of-ten football fans approached (38%), and just over one quarter of the rugby fans contacted (26%) agreed to participate. These are acceptable if slightly low response rates and it is useful to consider any potential response bias here by comparing the thesis sample with the original University survey samples. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 compare my final sample with the original University samples by age, one of the key dimensions of interest to the thesis.

**Table 4.3: A comparison Between the Ages of Female Football Fans in my Sample with the University sample (see Williams, 2004a)**

	Female fans in the original 2004 Football Survey	Female fans in my football Sample
'Younger' (16-24)	12%	20%
'Middle aged' (25-54)	61%	49%
'Older' (over 55)	21%	31%

**Table 4.4: A comparison Between the Ages of Female Rugby Fans in my Sample with the University Sample (see Williams, 2003)**

	Female and male fans in the original 2003 Rugby Survey	Female fans in my Rugby Sample
‘Younger’ (15-30)	8%	35%
‘Middle aged’ (31-50)	39%	30%
‘Older’ (over 51)	50%	35%

(N.B. Data on female rugby fans only is not available).

Some obvious discrepancies are apparent here. For example my ‘older’ football sample group includes 12 respondents out of the 16 who were over 64 years old (24%), whereas only 8% made up this group for all the women in the original survey. Table 4.4 shows that ‘older’ Leicester Tigers fans (aged 51 and over) make up 50% of all supporters, but for my research this age group consisted of 35% of my overall sample. These issues need to be taken into account when considering the representativeness of these responses. However, my main focus here is on collecting more *qualitative* data on the experiences of female sports fans and my sample, for all its deficiencies, offers very promising opportunities in this respect. Many of the topic areas I was interested in were not covered by the University surveys of 2003 and 2004, so it was not possible to assess how the thesis sample differed from the original survey on other key dimensions of the thesis. The sampling techniques used enabled me to interview a wide range of female sports fans, including women of different ages and from different occupations, who had attended their respective sports for different periods of time.



However, there were other issues raised by the sampling methods employed. The sampling frames used meant that women from ethnic minority communities were very poorly represented in the final samples. The rugby fan survey had produced only 0.4% British Asian fans and 0.1% Black British fans, whilst the football survey produced just 1.7% Asian and 0.2% Black fans. The proportion of *female* ethnic minority fans who offered addresses within this tiny sample was even lower. Consequently, of the 85 female fans interviewed, only one was self-defined as being from an ethnic minority. Ethnic minority fans are not typically well represented in sports crowds (see, for example, Williams 2004b), so these sampling frames are broadly representative of more general trends. The experiences of female ethnic minority fans would obviously be an excellent avenue for further research, but it would require rather different sampling techniques to those used for this research. Most, if not all, of the women who agreed to participate in the research were heterosexual, with the majority of them living with male partners. Again, the experiences of lesbian sports fans might be an interesting new direction for further research.

Before sending out the letters to potential interviewees I also produced a draft interview schedule and piloted my proposed questions. This involved ‘testing’ the interview schedule on one football and one rugby female supporter of Leicester City and Leicester Tigers, respectively, who were known to the researcher in a professional capacity. These pilot interviews took place in a University office. Following this piloting process, the interview data collected therein were transcribed and analysed, and a period of time was allowed to make amendments to the interview schedule in order to ensure that interviews would run smoothly (see Appendices for sample copy of interview). As a result of the piloting process it was decided to move the questions relating specifically

to gender from the last section to section four of the schedule, to ensure that there would be ample time to cover this important area should some interviews be subjected to tight time constraints (see Appendices for sample copies of final interview schedules).

Before commencing the interviews I also contacted the clubs concerned to make them aware of the research and to offer them access to the findings. The football club were extremely helpful; I was invited for a meeting with the Chair to discuss the research, and he granted me access to the club's facilities and referred me to staff at the club who it might be useful for me to contact. This was extremely useful as I was able to inform potential respondents that I had the support of the football club, which could have enhanced response rates. The Leicester Tigers club was rather less supportive so I was not confident enough to say that I had the official backing of the rugby club to respondents in the same way. This may have been a contributory factor in the lower response rate from female rugby fans.

The football fan interviews mostly took place at respondents' homes - an informal, relaxed setting where levels of hospitality were high. This was reflected in the average length of the football interviews. Although the research letter had stated that interviews would take around 45 minutes, most respondents were very happy to exceed this period and interviews actually averaged closer to two hours in length. A small number verged on life-history narratives, lasting up to four hours. Some of the rugby fan interviews also took place at respondents' homes, but it was more common for rugby fans to request that the interview was carried out at their workplace, on a lunch break, or at my office at the university. Although this arrangement usually ensured that the interview was not affected by interruptions (such as from children or male partners) this meant

that the rugby interviews were generally shorter, and that the same level of depth of information was not always achieved.

### *iii) Research Ethics*

Data collection for this thesis took place between July 2006 and March 2008. Thus, it was not subject to the new research ethics review at the University of Leicester as this was not introduced until October 2007. However, the ethical guidelines which were available from the beginning of the study were strictly adhered to at all times throughout the research process and thereafter. This included those as set out by the British Sociological Association (see Statement of Ethical Practice for the BSA, 2002), and the ESRC's Research Ethics Framework (2005).

Hence, before commencing interviews, informed consent was obtained from participants, and it was explained in detail before interviews took place: 'in terms meaningful to the participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be disseminated and used' (British Sociological Association 2002: 3; see also ESRC Research Ethics Framework 2005: 23). In accordance with guidelines from the ESRC and BSA participants were made aware of their right to refuse participation and to withdraw from the process at any time. Permission to audio record the session was requested - all interviewees agreed to this but had they refused notes would have been taken during the interview instead (with their consent). Guidelines concerning obligations under the Data Protection Acts were also followed, and as in accordance with the BSA 'where appropriate and practical, methods for preserving anonymity should be used including the removal of identifiers, the use of pseudonyms and other technical means for breaking the link

between data and identifiable individuals' (British Sociological Association 2002: 5). Hence, the names of participants have not been revealed in this thesis, and pseudonyms will also be used to protect anonymity in any future publications. Respondents have been numbered, with the football sample coded as 'F' and rugby fans 'R'. The numbers used are also representative of the different generations, thus:

F1-F10 and R1-R12: 'Younger' fans

F11-F35 and R13-R22: 'Middle aged' fans

F36-F51 and R23-R34: 'Older' fans.

The contact details provided on the returned University questionnaires of 2003 and 2004 were used to contact potential interviewees. This did not pose specific ethical concerns because contact details were requested from those respondents who were happy for their data to be stored and who were interested in being involved in future research. By supplying these contact details both the football and rugby respondents provided their consent that these details could be used for research purposes at the University of Leicester.

Ethical guidelines were also followed relating to the researcher's safety. The BSA states that 'safety issues need to be considered in the design and conduct of social research projects and procedures should be adopted to reduce the risk to researchers' (British Sociological Association 2002: 2). Pole and Lampard (2002: 143) suggest that in the interests of researcher safety, interviewers should inform: 'colleagues, secretaries, friends or family members, whichever is most appropriate, of their interview location, providing the address, telephone number and name of the interviewee or contact person'

and should also make them aware of the conventions of confidentiality. Following these guidelines close family relations were provided information about the time and location of the interview, and were contacted once the interview had been completed. Finally, guidelines involving research on vulnerable groups such as children (see British Sociological Association, 2002; ESRC Research Ethics Framework 2005) did not apply to this research. The youngest age group used in the research from the 2004 football fan survey was ages 16-24. The 2003 rugby fan survey included an age group of 15-20, but no ethical issues were raised for the 'younger' rugby fan category as by the time the research was conducted all these fans would have been at least 19 years old.

*iv) Gender and research: A feminist epistemology?*

Feminists have criticized the alleged male bias in sociology research, with claims that 'quantitative research techniques...may distort women's experiences and result in a silencing of women's own voices' (Bhopal 2000: 70). For example, in some early defining work on this issue Finch (1984) and Oakley (1981) claimed that highly structured interviews serve to create a hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee, and they also posit that women's shared experiences or structural position in society means that an automatic rapport is likely to develop when a woman interviews another woman. Thus, feminist methodologists usually favour qualitative research methods (see O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994), although some are wary of this connection. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), for example, have pointed out that no research technique in itself is feminist, and Hammersley (1992) claims that unstructured methods are simply not appropriate for all research.

Finch (1984: 74) argued that: 'In the setting of the interviewee's own home, an interview conducted in an informal way by another woman can easily take on the character of an intimate conversation', and this makes it especially likely that female subjects will want to talk to a 'sympathetic listener'. Perhaps this was apparent in my research to an extent; in some cases the women I interviewed at home revealed quite intimate details about their lives to me, as some feminist researchers have also found to be the case (see, for example, Bhopal's (2000) research on South Asian women). For Bhopal, there will always be a power relationship between the interviewer and interviewee because ultimately it is the interviewer's aim to gather information. But her respondents felt empowered by someone valuing and wanting to listen to their experiences. This can be compared, I think, to the experiences of some of my respondents (perhaps especially female rugby fans) who informed me that they were glad that their sporting experiences were finally being acknowledged, with some even requesting that I pull together the responses from other women fans and use them to challenge the policies of the male dominated (rugby) club.

Finch (1984), in her early, important work, also experienced a gender specific identification between interviewer and interviewee, illustrated by comments such as: 'Fella's don't see it that way, do they?' As a female researcher I may have been able to ask questions about male fans and experiences of sexism in sport in a way that may have been more difficult for a male researcher. However, Hammersley (1992: 193, 195) also warns of the dangers of the assumptions regarding 'shared gender' and 'shared oppression' in research. He suggests that there are problems with the feminist standpoint epistemology (see Harding, 1987; Stanley and Wise, 1990) which assumes that women will have unique insights denied to men, as this is similar to arguments

ascribing privileged insight to other groups, such as claims that ‘only a black person can understand other black people’. Thus, for Hammersley, people cannot simply be divided into the ‘oppressor’ and ‘oppressed.’ Moreover, the lives of women and men are so closely ‘interrelated’ it would be difficult - and inappropriate - for women to study only women.

More recently, the early connections between feminist research and qualitative methods have been questioned. Devault (1996: 36) discusses how there is ‘no single feminist method’ (see also Sampson *et al.*, 2008) and describes how although some feminist researchers claim that qualitative methods will fit well with feminist goals, many feminists ‘advocate combining quantitative and qualitative tools, often through collaboration with other researchers’. Indeed, Oakley (1998: 707) has more recently changed her position on qualitative methods; she now argues: ‘in favour of rehabilitating quantitative methods and integrating a range of methods in the task of creating an emancipatory social science’. Oakley (2004: 192) proposes a need to move away from the ‘paradigm wars’ between ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’ methods which she claims are an example of the ‘gendered social tensions produced within a patriarchal social structure’.

Other factors will influence the power dynamics of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee besides gender. Tang (2002) for example, found in her research interviewing ‘peers’ - academic mothers in China and the UK - that Oakley’s (1981) ‘non-hierarchical relationship’ did not exist due to the structural inequalities in academia, the variety of personal backgrounds and academic disciplines, and cultural differences especially in relation to the researcher’s native language. Gender, race and

sexuality cannot be considered in isolation. They are, instead, ‘part of the complex, yet often ignored, elements that shape interviewing’ (Fontana and Frey 2005: 713). It is impossible to judge the extent to which my personal characteristics as a young, white, female researcher may have shaped the research process, or the effect - if any - a shared gender has on the success of the interview (see Pope, 2008). Oakley (1981: 41) had suggested that the most effective interviews are those where there is, if possible, a non-hierarchical relationship and the interviewer invests their own ‘personal identity’ in the relationship. It was certainly apparent to me that my identity as a female *sports fan* had an influence on the character and ‘feel’ of the interviews. My local ties to the city and background knowledge of the sports clubs aided the interview process. The football interviewees were keen to establish that I was ‘One of them’, and would usually either make the assumption that I was a supporter or ask me directly at the start of interviews if this was the case. This common ground meant that I experienced a degree of acceptance as an ‘insider’, and certainly made it easier to establish a good rapport with football interviewees. I could chat informally about football before the interviews began and this seemed to relax participants; I felt that some regarded me more as a ‘friend’ and a fellow supporter rather than a stranger conducting research.

When asking ‘older’ female fans about their experiences of sport in earlier years, my (younger) age may also have been an advantage - it seemed only ‘natural’ that I would want to know about this period as both a supporter and a researcher, and I could ask more ‘naïve’ question about their memories, often prompting more detailed replies. But this also raised a degree of researcher anxiety in relation to the rugby interviews as my knowledge of the history of Leicester Tigers and its players was not quite so reliable. However, by the time I conducted these rugby interviews I had acquired a wide range of



experience interviewing female fans, and discussions prompted by respondents about the club before interviews were not as common.

***v) Gender in research: Experiences of interviewing women fans***

Some reply slips from younger respondents contacted contained an apology stating that they were unable to take part in the research. This was often because such respondents had young children to care for - they could not allocate any spare time for the interview. One rugby fan who had a young baby did agree to take part but the interview was truncated because her child needed constant attention. This situation was not helped by the noisy location where she agreed to meet me - at a child friendly café! This is a useful illustration of how changes in women's lives discussed in Chapter Three impact upon women only to varying degrees - many women are still considerably restricted in their access to personal leisure time, even to be interviewed for a few minutes.

There were also some problems in trying to negotiate a suitable space and time for some interviews without external interruption. As has already been noted, many of the interviews took place at respondents' homes. The difficulty here was that some of my interviewees were visibly 'policed' by the presence of male partners during interview sessions. Some male partners had no obvious interest in sport, but they were still reluctant to allow me to interview their partners alone. Others were sports fans and may have felt 'left out' of the research process. There were a number of instances where male partners became extremely frustrated if I asked to carry out the interview in a separate room, alone with their wife or partner. This would often generate tension, as the following extract from my research diary shows:

‘About 15 minutes into the interview I heard something creak. Bizarrely it became apparent that there was someone *hiding* behind the door. Betty shouted at her husband and asked what he was doing. He came into the lounge and sat in-between us. I explained that I needed to spend a few minutes alone with Betty, and that was how all of the other interviews had been done, but no, he wasn’t going to budge. Next, he began answering the questions on behalf of his wife! Again I explained I was interested in the experiences of female fans - perhaps I could come back at a later stage to interview him? This simply prompted him to pick up a book and ‘pretend’ to read, whilst listening intently to the interview.

It became apparent that Betty was now very uncomfortable - her answers were much shorter and rushed - it was clear she didn’t want her husband there and listening in, and this made me feel more on edge. She kept telling him he needed to be elsewhere until eventually, reluctantly, he left. Betty was very apologetic and even felt embarrassed, and kept saying she couldn’t believe the way her husband had behaved. Which made me feel even more awkward, and half-guilty that it was likely I was going to be the cause of a domestic dispute’. (*Field notes, 3.9. 2007*)

Experiences of this kind tended to be more common with football interviewees. Particularly men from working class and lower middle class backgrounds acted as though they had a ‘right’ to be at the interview. Perhaps some felt that my interviewing their partner undermined their own preferred position as the main, knowledgeable sports fan in the household (see Pope, 2008)? Other sorts of male interventions included: conspicuously waiting in the car outside the interview location; phoning up persistently to ‘check up’ on progress; or demanding that their partner hurry up because they needed her freed up and available to cook the tea.

This contrasted with my experiences of interviewing more middle class women, those employed in professional jobs. Here the power dynamics of the home relationship were often clearly more equal and the female interviewee would often instruct her male partner to make us both a cup of tea, prepare dinner and also ensure that the door was firmly closed as a clear indicator that she did not want to be disturbed. Not all male partners attempted to intervene in the research, and some working class male fans were

genuinely interested in the process and supportive of their wives or partners. Once I had explained that I was focusing only on *female* fans they were happy enough to leave the room and return at the end to discuss the research further.

Deem (1986: 25), in much earlier study on women's leisure in Milton Keynes, found that some of her questionnaires for women were returned by men with comments such as: 'I write to say my wife won't be filling your form in - what a cheek - her time is my business'. None of my returned responses contained such comments so I am *unaware* of any cases where women might have been forbidden by men from participating in the research. Although I was sometimes told on the phone by male partners *when* I was allowed to ring their partner (albeit for a brief conversation), and in one case a list of household chores was reeled off to me that their wife must complete before I could phone them. Over 20 years after Deem's pioneering study, negotiating access to some women as research subjects remains problematic. Deem (1986: 16) reported that: 'anyone who has tried to interview a woman at home, for example, will be well aware of how men often "police" such interviews, by popping in and out of the room or by hovering like a bird of prey, attempting to restrict access...or refusing permission altogether'. The same issues pertain today. It seems highly unlikely that *female* partners would have behaved in the way described, had the research been conducted by a male academic on male fans.

A further issue I had to face in gaining access to potential respondents arose when interviewing 'older' fans. A large number of these interviews lasted longer than others - perhaps the result of these respondents having more spare time, if retired, and more memories to share over the years. In some cases it also took these respondents rather

longer to recall earlier memories. However, in a small number of cases, family members were obviously concerned about the safety of their older relatives and they had arranged to be at their house for the duration of the interview. These interviews tended to be much shorter, and answers were less focused, given the distractions of visiting grandchildren, etc. Although I was told at the end of interviews like these that I could return at a later date when they would arrange to be alone, time restrictions made this option difficult for me to pursue.

My sex also played a role in my experiences of accessing women fans - especially at their homes. For my own safety I provided to close relations details about the interview such as the location and expected start time and I said I would contact them after I had completed the interview. The vast majority of interviews did not raise any safety issues. But there were a small number of cases where male relatives of female fans made me feel slightly insecure - for example in making personal comments about my appearance. The following extract is one example where I felt slightly concerned about my safety as a female researcher:

‘I knocked on the door which was answered by an older male, whose opening sentence was: “It’s unusual to see women in these parts, especially young ones”, followed by: “We don’t usually get any attractive women round here.” Whilst staring intently at me he then shouted to his (male) neighbour in the house opposite to come out and have a look! I told him who I was there to see and he said to come inside and she would be down in a minute. The house was very dimly lit and he locked the door behind, which didn’t exactly make me feel any more comfortable. I was also concerned that the name I had for my interviewee didn’t match the response slip I had received and was trying to think of an explanation for this. Finally, my interviewee emerged, and I was a lot more at ease.’

*(Field notes, 6.2.07)*

This type of experience is not to suggest that women cannot and should not conduct interviews in respondents' homes, and it should be emphasised that although I did have to deal with cases of male comment which bordered on sexual harassment, these were quite rare. However, my experiences do suggest that women researchers still have to negotiate a different set of issues to those which confront most male researchers. It is also likely that my age - as well as my sex - may have played a role in producing some of these responses.

#### **4.3 Research Methods Employed**

##### ***i) Data collection***

The interviews were semi-structured in nature to ensure certain topics would be covered, whilst also allowing the interviewee more freedom in how they respond, and so as not to neglect the importance of issues raised by the interviewee (see Pole and Lampard, 2002; Bryman, 2004). May (2001: 123) discusses how semi-structured interviews allow: 'people to answer more on their own terms than the standardized interview permits, but still provide a greater structure for comparability over that of the focused interview'. By utilising limited demographic data and semi-structured techniques this approach was again effectively combining aspects of the positivist and interpretivist positions. The interview schedule was divided into eight different themes or issues, but there was flexibility built in to allow me to change the order of these eight themes if necessary, in order to maintain the flow of the discussion. Burgess (1982) cites Webb and Webb (1932) who described the interview as a 'conversation with a purpose', and goes on to suggest that the interview can be 'flexible' but should also be 'controlled'. Preparing an interview schedule allowed me not to lose sight of the

underlying structure of interviews, and it also gave me freedom to probe interesting responses further as I had included a number of ‘prompts’ to encourage interviewees to expand on certain topics, if necessary. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews also allowed me the freedom to ask new questions during the interview if topics emerged which had not been covered by the interview schedule. In line with guidelines on designing interview schedules or guides, questions were unambiguous and posed in the sort of language which would be understood by interviewees and ‘ice-breaking’ questions were asked at the start of the conversation, before moving on to the more complex and sensitive issues and then ‘winding the conversation down’ towards the end (see Pole and Lampard 2002: 141, 136).

I was always conscious during the research process of how various factors could impact upon the quality of data collected; I myself was an ‘active’ participant in the research process so I needed to demonstrate that I was listening, as well as ‘effective attending’ (by physical position, posture and eye contact), since ‘part of a researcher’s critical awareness includes becoming conscious of how mannerisms and responses can affect the participant’ (King 1996: 185). Numerous texts have been written on how to maximise the success of interviews, and I tried to incorporate some of these tips into my approach. For example, Pole and Lampard (2002) provide guidelines on pace of the interview, types of question, location, listening, time available and recording the data, and Seidman (1998) proposes that interviewers should: ‘listen more, talk less’, follow up on interviewees’ responses, avoid interrupting participants, and share experiences on occasion.

In relation specifically to using interviews in sports research, Gratton and Jones (2004) look at issues such as asking sensitive questions and avoiding 'loaded' questions. When actually 'doing' research out in the field it was also useful to generate a relationship with respondents. Perhaps by using semi-structured interviews which allowed my female respondents the flexibility to discuss their thoughts, I adopted what Fontana and Frey (2005) have termed an 'empathetic' approach to interviewing - I did not favour a cold and distant approach based on the 'scientific image of interviewing' and 'neutrality'. Instead, I was open with respondents when asked my thoughts and experiences of sport, and tried to establish a good rapport with them. Empathetic approaches are said to:

'take an ethical stance in favour of the individual or group being studied. The interviewer becomes an advocate and partner in the study, hoping to be able to use the results to advocate social policies and ameliorate the conditions of the interviewee. The preference is to study oppressed and underdeveloped groups' (Fontana and Frey, 2005: 696).

The specific focus of this thesis - the largely under-researched area of female sports fans - further indicated how I might have adopted an 'empathetic' approach in my interviewing style. When conducting interviews at respondents' homes, some of the interviewees exhibited an overt public expression of their fandom. The interiors of homes were sometimes 'dressed' in club colours and products. Some interviewees wore club products when I arrived, had fingernails painted in club colours and/or club mugs, scarves and pictures were on open display. This was more common in the football fan interviews, and although some sporting 'props' (see Goffman, 1990) could have been put on display in order to demonstrate the strength of their fandom, some homes were so liberally decorated that it seemed almost impossible that this could have been staged

simply for my visit. A small number of interviewees also had vivid tattoos expressing their allegiance to the (football) club.

Thus, the research also involved the preliminary use of visual research methods - I took photographs of the fan memorabilia on display (where permission was granted) as well as copies of photos that some fans showed me in relation to their support (see Appendix five for examples). Pole (2004: 7) argues that visual research: 'has the capacity to offer a different way of understanding the social world...visual methods provide access to different aspects of the social world, not possible by other means'. The photographs have thus far been used simply for contextualising the data – they served as a useful aid to jog my memory of certain respondents' homes and the interview itself - but they may also be used at a later stage in future research and publications.

## *ii) Data analysis & grounded theory*

I fully transcribed all of the interviews which, whilst time consuming, was also 'an excellent way of getting to know the data' (Pole and Lampard 2002: 202). Field notes were also typed up to help remind me of the specific context of individual interviews. Lee and Fielding (2004: 529, 532) describe how the introduction of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) or 'theory-building software' such as Atlas-ti, NUD\*IST and NVivo, aims to emphasise the relationships between the codes whilst also supporting code-and-retrieve work and have: 'focused attention on procedural aspects of qualitative data analysis, invited the comparison of approaches, and raised conceptual questions, for example, about the nature of 'coding' as an analytic procedure'. I seriously considered using such software packages to code my data; I went on various training workshops to gain an understanding of how the software operated,



and spoke to a number of academics who had experience of both software and non-software approaches to analysing data.

However, there were some issues with the software package available at the university at the time I was analysing the data. Lee and Fielding (2004) suggest that Glaser and Strauss's (1967) 'analytic memos' are helpful in explaining why data was assigned to a particular code and are also useful when a researcher 'changes heart about a code' as moving data around needs to be documented. I was concerned that I may need to move some of the data around at a later stage, and that the software packages available simply did not have the flexibility to allow me to do this easily. Dey (1995, 1999) highlights a further problem with the use of qualitative software in that text segments with the same code have a relationship to one another but, once retrieved, each segment is separated from the context in which it originally appeared. Thus, I was also concerned that by using software I would risk a destructive fragmentation of my data. For example, for my first stage of data analysis I intended to break my transcripts down into the eight main sections or topics of my interview schedule, but I could only include a maximum of 10,000 characters per code on the software available. Given the length of my transcripts I was simply not able to do this. Concerns have also been raised about researchers being 'distanced' from the data when using software packages (see Lee and Fielding, 2004: 538), and this summed up my feelings entirely when piloting the software. Hence, the knowledge I acquired on training courses combined with my personal experiences of using the software available led me to conclude that using a word processor for my analysis would be less restrictive for my needs, and would not make me feel detached from the data.

Furthermore, the interview schedule I had designed suited my needs for an analysis of this kind (see Appendices). The structure provided by the eight subsections served as an effective base from which to code the data. My first stage of data analysis was to break the transcripts down into the eight sections, before moving on to compare the different concepts or themes that had emerged in interviews within these different eight different topic areas, thus employing Glaser and Strauss's (2008) 'grounded theory' approach to data analysis (see Chapter One). This also allowed me to record the numbers of cases where similar themes emerged, as has been used throughout the data analysis (see Appendix four for sample interview transcript).

I coded my data by drawing upon Glaser and Strauss's (2008) 'constant comparative method', and initially used highlighter pens for coding on printed transcripts, along with handwritten notes or 'analytic memos', before recording the different emergent themes in separate word files. Material on these different themes were then printed off and after further analysis were eventually used as a basis for writing up my results chapters.

Corbin and Strauss (2008: 71) suggest that the method of comparing incident with incident, looking for similarities and differences (see also Glaser and Strauss, 2008) is essential to data analysis because: 'it allows the researcher to differentiate one category/theme from another and to identify properties and dimensions specific to that category/theme'. As discussed in Chapter One, concepts can be lower or higher level, but all concepts will arise out of the data (see Corbin and Strauss, 2008). By grouping together lower-level concepts, I was able to develop higher-level categories or themes representing relevant phenomena, effectively allowing me to reduce and combine my data (see Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Data collection and analysis continued until I

reached a point of ‘theoretical saturation’, whereby the categories were well developed and further data gathering was adding nothing or little new to the conceptualization (see Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Glaser and Strauss, 2008; Holton, 2007; Hood, 2007). Glaser and Strauss (2008: 69) suggest that ‘the depth of theoretical sampling refers to the amount of data collected on a group and on a category’, and during data analysis it became clear that my sampling techniques had produced enough interview data to develop detailed higher level concepts or themes.

Different models have been put forward as devices for developing grounded theory method, such as Glaser’s (1978) ‘Six Cs’: ‘Causes, Context, Contingencies, Consequences, Covariances, and Conditions’, and Strauss and Corbin’s (1998, 2008) ‘conditional matrix’. But Charmaz (2006) suggests that grounded theory methods such as these consist of flexible guidelines and general principles rather than fixed rules, and this appears to be supported by the way in which *none* of the contributors to Bryant and Charmaz’s (2007) edited collection on grounded theory had sought to apply either Glaser (1978) or Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) approaches to their own grounded theory research. The methods I employed in my own research were designed to collect and analyse qualitative data to construct theories that were ‘grounded’ in the data (Charmaz, 2006) and so there was an emphasis throughout on the emergence of theory from the data.

#### **4.4 Summary**

The research methods employed for this thesis were selected because of the kind of knowledge I wanted to yield. I wanted to try to combine the richness of qualitative techniques with some of the advantages of looking at trends and patterns in the data

when examining women's changing experiences of sports fandom. My approach swayed more towards an interpretivist position, but I have also argued that the line between qualitative and quantitative research methods is, in reality, at best blurred, and it is possible to successfully combine these two approaches, at least to an extent.

Thus, I adopted a relatively structured approach to qualitative interviewing using a relatively large sample of respondents. This approach led to a feasible system of coding consistent with grounded theory, and this was the theoretical position used to interpret my findings. This chapter has also described how the realities of conducting research by women on women out in the field meant that sometimes obstacles must simply be negotiated rather than overcome, including freely accessing some female respondents in their own homes.

In the next chapter I move on to examine some of my findings in detail.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Continuity and Change in Women's Sporting Lives**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins by locating the role of sport in the lives of female fans. Drawing on Glaser and Strauss's (2008) 'grounded theory' approach to data analysis, women's early experiences of sport at school emerged as a central theme, so will be explored here. I then move on to look at women's perceptions of change in terms of sporting opportunities, as well as the limits to this alleged change. When discussing early experiences of *sport at school*, generally speaking it can be said that:

- References to 'younger' women in the sample are referring mostly to experiences in the 1990s (in a few cases the late 1980s).
- 'Middle aged' respondents are discussing experiences in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.
- The 'older' generation refer mostly to the 1940s and 1950s, and in a few cases the early 1960s.

#### **5.2 Women's Early Experiences of Sport at School**

Chapter Three examined how early theories of leisure largely ignored women's experiences, so when researching (especially older) women's accounts of early involvement in sport and leisure it has been rather difficult to locate similar studies. Williams (2003: 28) describes how 'the lack of organised school-based play for girls has undoubtedly been a major factor in encouraging women *not* to play football for over a century'. However, my own research suggests perhaps unsurprisingly there are large generational differences in opportunities to play organised football at school. Half of the

‘younger’ football fans interviewed agreed that they had had opportunities to play football at school (F1, F2, F3, F4, F7) and had played themselves to varying levels and for varying amounts of time: F7 had played at County level. Around 80% of the ‘younger’ football fans had experienced *playing* football either for an organised school team, or by having a ‘kickabout’ with ‘lads’ at lunchtimes, or with male relatives outside school, or both.

However, for ‘middle aged’ and ‘older’ fans, there had been many fewer opportunities to play football (or rugby) at school. For ‘middle aged’ football respondents, 24 out of 25 (96%) discussed a clear gender divide in sport at school which effectively prohibited them from playing football. *All* respondents in the ‘older’ football sample stated that playing football *at school* was not an option for girls. But in the ‘middle aged’ and ‘older’ groups a number of respondents did discuss having a ‘kickabout’, often with ‘lads’ at lunchtimes at school, or on the streets, or with male relatives (see F11, F14, F17, F18, F20, F21, F25, F26, F31, F33, F39, F43, F47, F50). This challenges claims made a decade ago that young girls are usually *excluded* from playing football even in the playground (see, for example, Renold, 1997; Connolly, 1998; Swain, 2000).

It has been widely suggested, of course, that football is closely associated with the production of what Connell (1995) calls ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (see Swain, 2000, 2003; Skelton, 2000). In short, it helps define what it means to be a ‘real man’. Yet my findings suggest that some girls were at least tolerated in this supposed ‘all-male’ domain, and unlike the girls in Skelton’s (2000) study, they did not find the ‘masculine ethos’ of participating in mostly male groups especially off-putting. Thus, for the

majority of female football supporters at least there does seem to be a correlation of sorts between *playing* football, in one form or another, and becoming a football *fan*.

For the rugby sample, generally speaking, opportunities to play their sport were much bleaker. As with the football fans, some generational differences were observed, but these were more minor by comparison. Rugby does not appear to have ‘opened up’ in quite the same way for females as players. Even in the ‘younger’ rugby fan group, only two respondents (out of 12) reported opportunities to play the sport at school (although they chose not to play), and for the ‘middle aged’ and ‘older’ rugby fans, *none* of the respondents were able to play school rugby. For one of the ‘younger’ respondents who *did* have the option to play rugby at school (R9), the mother of former Tigers and England captain Martin Johnson was a PE teacher there, a woman who spearheaded the ‘underlying rugby sort of feeling’ that was present. Proselytising individual staff can clearly have an impact, although this school was probably a fairly unusual case.

One-quarter of the ‘younger’ rugby fans (R7, R10, R12) did, however, say that playing *football* at school had been a possibility for girls, and a very small number in the ‘middle aged’ and ‘older’ rugby groups also discussed having a ‘kickabout’ at football (R14, R18, R27). But, interestingly, out of the 34 female rugby fans interviewed, only one (R22) spoke about attempting to *play* rugby when young: she played casually with brothers in the back garden and was taught how to tackle and play in the scrum half position. The only respondent who had any experience of playing rugby *for a team* was actually a football fan (F13) - who had played briefly whilst at University. Hence, any links between playing the sport and becoming an active supporter were much less apparent for female rugby fans than they were for football supporters.

Women and girl's football has recently witnessed a major expansion - in 2002 it was announced that it was the largest participation sport for girls and women (see Jeanes, 2005). But Scraton's (1997) earlier observations that football (and we can also say rugby) is still marginalized for girls in favour of sports such as field hockey and netball seem to be reflected in my own research findings, especially with the 'middle-aged' and 'older' generations of women. Other sports more typically played by my respondents included athletics, rounders and tennis, and for some of the younger fans, basketball and running were also a possibility. Lenskyj (1988) and Hargreaves (1988) have both described how sport is a major source of gender distinction: men's sports require strength and endurance and the sportsman is the symbolic focus of male power. 'Feminine-appropriate' sports will often emphasise an aesthetically pleasing performance displaying flexibility and balance. In relation to playing sport at school, most of my respondents had clearly been channelled into playing sports which, 'idealise popular images of femininity' (Hargreaves 1988: 140) rather than challenge or question them.

Many respondents - especially the 'middle aged' and 'older' women - were keen to stress the specific *type* of school they attended as a barrier to playing what they described as 'male sports'. Perhaps the restructuring of the English education system, especially with the 1988 Education Act introducing the National Curriculum (which in theory at least guaranteed equal subject access for boys and girls up to the age of 16), along with legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, has meant that younger women have not experienced quite the same levels of gender inequality in school. For a number of the football 'middle aged' and 'older' respondents, their attendance at an all-girls *grammar* school, with its class and status concerns, was argued



to have effectively excluded even the possibility of football for girls. This was especially apparent in the ‘middle aged’ group for women aged over 45 years and in the ‘older’ age group (see F19, F23, F25, F26, F28, F34, F36, F37, F39, F51).

In the context of wider ideologies in play at the time about gender and education, playing football (or indeed any exercise perceived to involve too much physical exertion or contact) would certainly not have been on the agenda. It would not have been considered ‘womanly’ - which explains the highly demonstrative reactions from women in these age groups even to the suggestion that females might play ‘male’ team sports:

‘GOOD LORD NO! NO, NO, NO. No way. We weren’t allowed to do it.’ (F27)

‘Oh God no, girls didn’t play football, absolutely not!’ (F40)

All-girls grammar schools meant bringing up ‘ladies’ thus instilling certain rituals, codes and understandings concerning ‘appropriate’ female behaviour. Words such as ‘traditional’ were often used by interviewees when describing the defining girls’ grammar school ethos, and there was a definite sense here that, ‘Girls were still considered to be ladylike in those days’ (F27). Clearly most girls’ education in this period helped to reinforce this notion.

Respondents who had attended *mixed* schools (often the old secondary moderns) were also clearly restricted in the sports they could play. But they were at least able to play football at lunchtimes with boys (even if they were aware that this was frowned upon by the school authorities), and some football and rugby fans alike were able to *watch* boys

playing football and/or rugby. Indeed, in this context it was usually the rugby fans who discussed the ‘type’ of school they attended as a potential barrier in their access to playing football. Some discussed how they were able to go and watch the boys play rugby at the grammar school (R23). One respondent, who grew up in northern England near the rugby league town St Helens, discussed how *class* identities often interpolated with, and occasionally overlaid, those of gender:

‘The boys all played rugby union because that’s what happened. We played rugby union in the grammar schools and rugby league was more working class, although we were all working class...So all my friends and my friends’ brothers and cousins all played rugby union. So I used to go and watch school matches with them, but we all went to the [professional] rugby league matches.’ (R31, Age 57, *STH*, *New fan*, *Geneticist*)

In the period R31 is referring to, Rugby Union was amateur and Rugby League was professional, more typically associated with the working classes (see Chapter Three), and the two codes have different variations of laws.

An underlying theme which ran through the general comments of ‘middle aged’ and ‘older’ interviewees about gender and education was the revelation that boys and girls did not ‘mix’ much at all at school, let alone for PE lessons. In these accounts mixed schools were essentially divided by sex, both spatially and culturally. For instance: ‘The boys’ school was on the same grounds as ours, but they went up one side of the path and we had to go up the other side of the path and *never the twain shall meet*’ (R27). This metaphorical (and indeed real) division between boys and girls in mixed schools was imposed even more stringently for those attending single-sex schools. Here, boys and girls were encouraged to have as little contact with the opposite sex as possible. This situation would hardly have helped to generate a common interest beyond gender differences in attending local professional sport. The divisions between the sexes at

school and beyond seemed to fit with popular ideologies of the time, i.e. that men and women were predisposed to fulfil very separate roles in life: men were more suited for the public (work) sphere, while females were ‘naturally’ suited to the private (domestic) sphere and a ‘career’ in marriage. For F27 the supposed post-war transformation of gender relations seems to have had little impact on her own experience of schooling:

‘It just wasn’t a girl’s thing... You just, girls didn’t do it [play sport] in those days. Boys didn’t do cookery. They do now, but it was a different world then. It was [...] boys go to work, girls stay at home and raise the children. It was very different [...]. I talk as though I’m from the Victorian times, don’t I? But this is only in the (19)60s I’m talking about.’ (F27, Age 56, Member, New fan, Sales Assistant)

Perhaps this explains why the gender divide in PE was seen as ‘natural’ by respondents and is discussed in such a matter-of-fact way now? Virtually *all* of the ‘middle aged’ and ‘older’ respondents in my sample (and some of the ‘younger’ ones too) experienced a stringent division in PE between activities and interests for boys and girls, which effectively mapped out ‘male’ sports as being appropriately inaccessible to them. Victorian assumptions that the ideal woman was antithetical to sport - that women were inherently emotional, passive and gentle, unsuited to take part in physical, competitive sport, the domain of men (see McCrone, 1987; Hargreaves, 1994; Delamont and Duffin, 1978; Vertinsky, 1990) - seem to have carried through well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A large number of ‘middle-aged’ and ‘older’ respondents related the restrictions placed on them in ‘male’ sport and their own relative passivity in response: ‘You just accepted it’ (F12). ‘You’re going back a long time you see. You’re going back to the late 50s, early 60s...football wouldn’t even be on the radar, it was hockey or netball or tennis’ (F39) (see also F13, F19, F20, F22, F23, F26, F29, F30, F31, F32, F36, F37, F38, F40, F41, F45, F51). Even for some of the ‘younger’ football fans who could not play football at school there was also a sense that this was the way ‘it had always been’ (F5, F8), and so

this supposed 'natural' gender order was not strongly questioned by some, even as late as the 1990s.

Rugby fans also made reference to a rather passive resignation: that girls' expectations were different and reduced in that earlier era (see R16, R30, R32):

'You didn't particularly think it was anything unusual because that's the way it was. It was only as you grow older and you suddenly realise well there's nothing stopping ladies playing football or rugby or you know, men playing netball if they want. It was just one of those things, that's how it was, it was put into categories and it was just accepted.' (*R16, Age 53, STH, New fan, Company Secretary*)

These women would have lived through the wider societal changes discussed in Chapter Three and the feminist movement which finally brought legislation that, formally at least, gave women equality with men (Pilcher, 1999). But many female respondents of both sports seem to have been socialized into dominant ideologies that females are physically inferior to men, and this biological 'fact' helps to explain why the gender divide in sport was not typically questioned. Lenskyj (1988: 239) argued two decades ago that patterns of female sporting participation probably reflect the socializing processes which direct females into those activities viewed by parents and teachers as 'conducive to femininity'. Whereas playing 'male' sports such as football in the school setting can contribute to the development of boys' 'masculine' identity, Jeanes (2005) suggests that for girls' their 'femininity' may be defined by *not* playing football. The fact that many respondents seem to have accepted that women should not play 'men's sports', is perhaps evidence that normative forms of proscription from PE teachers (along with parents and peers) had successfully socialized young girls into accepting these pre-determined gender roles.

All the PE teachers Scraton (1992: 50, 57) interviewed dismissed ‘masculine’ sporting pursuits, such as rugby, football and boxing as ‘undesirable and unsuitable for girls’, and other researchers report that some teacher unwillingness to support girls in playing football, even today, helps to ensure its male dominance (see Swain, 2000; Skelton, 2000; Welford and Kay, 2007). In my own research, a large number of the football and rugby interviewees made references to how PE teachers viewed both football and rugby as ‘man’s sports’. Throughout their schooling, teachers had imposed the belief that as *girls* they were physically inferior and so were at greater risk of physical harm if they tried to engage in typically ‘masculine’ activities. One respondent described how, when she was at primary school and played football in the playground with boys, she was: ‘Told that I shouldn’t be because I was too small and I might get knocked over and hurt myself’ (F18). Others were also conditioned into accepting PE teachers’ beliefs that boys were inherently ‘rougher than girls’ and that they (girls) were not as ‘physically strong as boys’ (e.g. F17, F18, F25, F27, F36, F41). Some respondents also discussed how the normatively enforced sex segregation for PE at school meant that there was a separate sports headmistress for the girls and a sports master for the boys, which again helped to reinforce this ‘natural’ division. The normative consumption of sport in school settings was typically confirmed along a strictly essentialist gender divide. For example:

‘The boys would go to Twickenham or [...] the football master would have taken the boys to Wembley to see, perhaps, schoolboy football. But [...] we would take the girls to Wembley to watch the women’s hockey, as it was then. Cos that was a big thing then in the late 60s, early 70s, to go and watch England ladies play hockey.’ (R17, Age 55, *STH, Long-term fan, Office Clark*)

These normatively sexist attitudes of PE teachers, male and female, were not discussed in the same way by ‘younger’ football fans (presumably because many of these *did* have opportunities to play football at school). However they were hinted at across all three

generations of *rugby* supporters (possibly because opportunities to play this sport were virtually non-existent in all generations). The strength of this anti-female football and rugby attitude is perhaps illustrated best by R27: ‘I mean, even when we used to stand and watch the boys: “Don’t you think you’re going to get involved in that”, was sort of the attitude you used to get’.

However, this was not the only way in which girls were being channelled by gender. Williams (2007: 129) has described how the Theresa Bennett case of 1978 (the FA ruled that Bennett could not continue playing for her local mixed football team at age 12) was based on the widely held notion that young women are so ‘physically deficient’ that the State was needed to protect them from participating in vigorous exercise. As the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act exempted sport from its provisions for equality, boys and girls continued to be kept apart in team sports by legislation outside of school. Some respondents reported severe parental pressure to conform to acceptable female behaviour, especially from dominant mothers:

‘I mean, the direction that you’re sent in when you’re a child by your parents is important because in those days boys would go down the avenue of sport and girls would go down the avenue of needlework and gentle things like that, you know [...]. Consequently it [sport] doesn’t play an important part in your life. You go mainly down the route of gentle things, like you know, my mother used to sew a lot, so I was encouraged to sew a lot - and I had a machine.’ (**F36, Age 68, Occasional attendee, New fan, Retired- worked as a Secretary**)

Archer and Lloyd (2002: 63) found considerable differences in the ways parents treated boys and girls, citing Pomerleau *et al.*, (1990) who found that boys were given sports equipment as presents while girls were usually given dolls and dressed in pink. Kane (2006) also describes how the literature in the area of gender and childhood studies has documented definite parental tendencies towards gendered treatment of children,

including differential treatment of sons and daughters in selection of toys, clothing and children's room décor. The encouragement of this sort of 'sex-typed' behaviour from parents had its obvious impact in sporting choices. 'Middle aged' football respondents typically experienced both direct and indirect parental pressure to stop playing football and to make more female friends. F14 played football with boys on the street until she was around 14, but this became secondary when she made female friends, which her mum was 'really pleased' about. F24 laughed later about her mother's aims at encouraging conventional heterosexuality in the face of a threatening football interest: 'Why don't you get your hair permed and wear a skirt?' to which she would reply, 'How can you play football in a skirt?'.

However, for some respondents in all three generations the family also played a key role in *encouraging* an interest in sport - in some cases even in football and rugby. Fathers and brothers were clearly important here, but two of the 'middle aged' rugby fans discussed how having a mother who was a PE teacher encouraged an interest among their daughters in sport. An 'older' rugby fan (R32) described perhaps a more unusual case: her mother had been a games mistress in the 1930s, a woman who had been to a sports college in Denmark and later became an international hockey player. This respondent was encouraged by her mother to play a variety of sports - although this did not extend to playing rugby.

### **5.3 'Body Conscious Girls' and the 'Culture of Femininity'**

A problem routinely discussed by the 'younger' respondents was that even sporty girls 'dropped off' their sporting interests during teenage years. The football respondents especially - presumably because some of these were actively involved in playing a

supposed 'masculine' sport - sometimes came under severe pressure from peers to stop playing sport. For Thorne (1993: 51-52) gender separation peaks in early adolescence, and some of my 'younger' football respondents discussed how boys and girls would 'drift apart at a certain age' (F2, F3, F10), making it difficult for those who wanted to continue playing football because they were 'stuck in the middle' of this gender divide (F10). Welford and Kay (2007) have also discussed how female football players recalled how they experienced tensions between femininity and athleticism during their adolescent years, as these are often viewed as incompatible.

The idea that heterosexual teenage girls become interested in different things to boys - in appearance, friendships, dating and attracting boys as potential sexual partners for example - was mentioned by some of the football and rugby fans (see F2, F3, F24, F25, R7, R21) as a crucial moment in a potential sporting 'career'. Among the 'girlie things' listed that teenage girls were supposedly preoccupied with included: 'make-up', 'hair', 'dolls', 'dogs', and perhaps most importantly in this context 'their bodies'. Scraton (1996: 119, 125) in her early, important work in this area, discussed how young women's experiences at adolescence centre around the 'culture of femininity', which directly contradicts what is expected of young girls in PE. Further anxiety can be caused here by the 'sexlessness' of the traditional PE uniform, and also the trials of the changing room area, as some young women become increasingly uncomfortable about exposing their bodies to peers. In a similar vein, O'Donovan (2003, see also O'Donovan and Kirk, 2008) reports how conflicts often arise in PE between the dominant cultural messages of femininity and the sports tasks girls are expected to complete. In her research, girls perceived their femininity was under threat in what was regarded as a masculine site and so made frequent attempts to disobey the PE department rules by



wearing labelled clothing instead of the PE kit, jewellery, make-up and not tying their hair up, producing resistance and conflict with teachers from the start of each class. A further illustration of this uneasy relationship between girls' appearance and PE can be seen in a recent initiative to boost girls' involvement in PE which involved hair straighteners being installed in changing rooms (BBC News Website: accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2009). The following extract supports some of these culturally induced body phobias ideas:

'That's part of being 14, 15 isn't it? [...] I don't know whether it's because they're very, very body conscious at that age. And they're probably more worried about what they're going to look like in a pair of shorts and trainers...It might sound a bit daft to you but that's how I was, I just really didn't want to do PE [be]cause I didn't want to be in a PE kit and I just didn't want to go swimming because I didn't want to be in a swimming costume. And I didn't want to break a nail and stuff (*laughs*).' (*F2, Age 23, STH, Long-term fan, Accounts Manager*)

F2 now looks back on this period with regret; she could perhaps have carried on with long distance running and playing football to a higher level were it not for this sort of peer pressure. But by the time girls are confident enough to stand up to such pressure and resist the constraints of acceptable femininities, it may be too late: they are in their 20s and sport may have already passed them by. The notion that some teenage girls are simply 'too preoccupied' with their body image and with fears about 'trial by showers' to contemplate playing sport is supported by F24, who described how her female PE teacher, who was 'like a man', used to cram teenage girls into the communal showers with a hockey stick. Girls here were, 'All bothered about their bodies...they'd always got make-up on and didn't want to get their hair wet'. Consequently, many young girls brought notes from parents to say that they were unable to do PE as has been found in O'Donovan's (2003) research on young girls' experiences of PE today. A number of initiatives have recently tried to address the problem of adolescent girls dropping out of

sport, such as the Youth Sport Trust's (YTS) 'GirlsActive' and 'Fit for Girls' programmes which try and encourage girls to adopt more active lifestyles and to continue this into adulthood (Our Programmes Youth Sport Trust Website, accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2010).

Respondents who continued to play 'masculine' sports such as football in this difficult period were required to balance this enthusiasm for sport with conformity to the requirements of conventional femininities. As Woodhouse and Williams (1999) argue, heterosexual masculinities are somehow 'completed' by involvement in team sport (see also Jeanes, 2005), while conventional femininities - including concerns about body image - are apparently threatened by it:

'They [other girls] took the piss a bit, but it [playing football] was my hobby. It's not exactly like I'm obese am I? Well it's true; all the people that took the piss are fat now.' (*F3, Age 23, Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Ambulance Trainee*)

Although no respondents explicitly cited pressure from friends as a key reason for dropping out of sport (see Scraton, 1996) perhaps this occurred more subtly. If girls continued to play sports such as football they certainly had to deal with the consequences of being mocked and ridiculed in school and social settings, as O'Donovan (2003, see also O'Donovan and Kirk, 2008) has found for girls displaying competence in PE lessons. These conditioning processes in adolescence are so powerful that many of the respondents were never in the position to question the sporting gender divide at school. Indeed some developed real hostility to the idea of girls playing football or rugby due to the supposed risk of injury. 'Younger' rugby interviewees (R9, R11) turned down opportunities to play after leaving school because of this fear. But not all young women were constrained in this way. Football supporters (F12, F17, F18,

F21, F25, F30, F35) felt ‘frustrated’ and ‘annoyed’ that they were not given the opportunity to play their sport as were a smaller number of rugby fans (R3, R19). Rugby is rather more physical than football and has developed for women at a much slower rate. As recently as the 2006/07 season there fewer than 200 women’s teams registered with the Rugby Football Union for Women (RFUW), and many professional men’s clubs (including Leicester Tigers) have yet to produce a women’s club (see Rugby Football Union Official Website, accessed on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2009). In a small number of cases, respondents had actively *opposed* the gendered division of sports (or at least had tried to) at school and elsewhere. F27 was one of those who had actively rejected women’s supposed biological inferiority (see Hargreaves, 1987):

‘I actually fought; I was one of the campaigners at my school for girls to be allowed to do cross country [...]. We were told we can’t do cross country [be]cause we were not as physically strong as the boys. So I said right, give us a chance, put us in a race with the boys and out of I don’t know how many, I came third. And it proved the point.’ (F27, Age 56, Member, New fan, Sales Assistant)

Scruton’s (1992: 49) interviews with female PE teachers in the early 1990s revealed that football was deemed ‘undesirable’ by them mainly because of the challenges it posed to conventional femininities. Here was another barrier to overcome. And openly challenging the gendering of sport was certainly not always successful. Young girls - possibly even today - still face some pretty familiar barriers at school:

‘The school definitely didn’t want the girls to play [football]. We did ask for a girls’ team at one point but they wouldn’t let us do it [...]. They really weren’t bothered. I mean you could tell...They were like: “Umm, do we have to?” It was a bit disappointing. They were kind of a bit stuck in their sexist ways.’ (F10, Age 20, STH, Long-term fan, Undergraduate Student)

#### 5.4 ‘One of the Lads’: Street Sport and ‘Tomboy’ Identities

Paechter and Clark (2007) discuss how most authors in the field argue that females taking part in stereotypically masculine activities is a defining feature of the ‘tomboy’ identity. The two main attributes teachers and parents focus upon in this context were: ‘being physically active, and go-gettingness and determination, often in combination’ (Paechter and Clark 2007: 345). Girls who were labelled ‘tomboys’ or who claimed the title for themselves generally took sport seriously, or were perceived to do so. My findings here are mostly focused upon the football sample - few rugby fans revealed they had adopted a ‘tomboy’ persona. But respondents who had early experiences of playing football with males invariably explored this option: ‘I was a real tomboy’ or ‘I used to be a tomboy’ (see F3, F7, F9, F10, F14, F17, F20, F24, F25, F31, F33, F43, F47, F50 and R22, R27). Other studies have found links between females playing football and a ‘tomboy’ identity (see Scraton *et al.*, 1999; Caudwell, 2000; Cox and Thompson, 2000; Kay and Welford, 2007; Liston, 2006; Reay, 2001; Paechter and Clark, 2007; Welford and Kay, 2007). Two of my ‘older’ respondents took this one step further by reporting that they were deemed to be ‘boys’ when younger, with mothers protesting: ‘You should have been a lad’ (see F43, F47). Paechter and Clark (2007) found that young girls in their study acknowledged that they would have to ‘give up’ their tomboy behaviour when older, and many of my respondents connected a ‘tomboy’ identity with the period of adolescence. At this point of the life cycle they were perhaps less constrained by conventionally acceptable standards of femininity:

‘I always used to play football and wrestling and all that: didn’t really see any of the doll side of it or anything. Just used to be a bit of a tomboy [...]. Not so much now as I’ve grown up. But obviously when I was younger I used to be a tomboy and I used to dress in like my trackies and my hoodie and trainers. So I wasn’t really Little Miss or anything.’ (F7, Age 23, *Occasional Attendee, Long-term fan, Estate Agent*)

For R22 (the only interviewee who had attempted to play rugby in family settings), assuming and performing this sort of ‘masculinist’ identity as an adolescent had clearly helped to shape her identity today as a heterosexual ‘unwomanly woman’:

‘I always think I’m a very unwomanly woman, coz apart from the fact I have 50 pairs of high-heeled shoes (*laughs*), I’m not into soap operas and I’m not into *America’s Next Top Model* [Reality TV show] ...My idea of a perfect day is to take my dogs out for a run, have a quick shower and watch the rugby [...]. We watch sport [...] then films, I like things like *Terminator* and *Star Wars*, I’m not into chick flicks, they irritate me...I don’t do things like that and I never have done. But I think it’s probably my upbringing. It was a very male dominated household, my dad and my brothers, so that’s how I was brought up.’ (**R22, Age 48, STH, New fan, Part-time Teacher and Designer**)

Nearly all the football respondents who described themselves as ‘tomboys’ also discussed how this marked them out as *different* from other girls (see Cox and Thompson 2000; Reay, 2001; Paechter, 2006). For instance:

‘I was sort of brought up as one of the lads sort of thing...I’ve always got on with the lads better as I’ve grown up and I think its because of the interest in football. And even at work now it’s the same.’ (F14)

‘I’ve always had a lot of male friends throughout my life, just cos, obviously, I do have this sporting side inside of me, which they can relate to.’ (F10)

Inhabiting and performing a ‘tomboy’ identity seems to be one of the main ways in which girls could achieve better access to sport (especially football, in this context). Paechter (2006) argues that by rejecting stereotypical femininity and indeed acting as an ‘honorary boy’, these girls are also rejecting the disempowerment that comes with conventional femininity. More adventurous leisure activities were certainly favoured by the ‘tomboys’ including tree climbing, birds nesting, and even using machinery for tree cutting. Although many ‘tomboys’ reported how they were seen as ‘strange’ and ‘odd’ by ‘more feminine’ girls, and they were aware that playing football was unusual, the

confidence and enjoyment they obtained from this activity made it seem quite an empowering and enjoyable experience. Other studies have found similarly (see Cox and Thompson, 2000; Reay, 2001; Paechter, 2006). Girls who eventually graduated to play in women's football teams felt that they had benefited most from competing against males (F3, F7, F25). They also enjoyed how males 'Didn't see me as though I was just a girl, it was just a team mate' (F7). Williams (2003) has argued that this kind of 'she-bloke' attitude could be a liberation from the perceived limits of femininity in sport; including the residual fear of being hurt. Here it certainly seems that taking on a 'tomboy' identity allowed some girls some of the freedom necessary to take part in activities which would otherwise have been out of their reach.

Williams (2003) also points out that hardly anything is known about street football involving females in the early part of the twentieth century. My research can make a small contribution here. Four of the 'older' football fans (F39, F43, F47, F50) mentioned playing street football (mostly with other males) during their childhood. But it was usually girls from obviously *working class* backgrounds who were best able to access football in this manner. F50 describes how the lives of middle class girls were rather more controlled:

'I played football during the school holidays because then I grew up on quite a tough council estate, you were part of what you were. And I mean if you played cricket you were expected to get in there and do your bit [...]. And I remember the environment I was growing up in because the secondary school I went to there was a lot different. A lot of them came from private housing and they were different, there was no doubt about it. We were different. And they didn't mix like we mixed, nice girls I mean [...] I suppose they were a bit more restricted in what they did.' (F50, Age 73, *STH, Long-term fan, Retired- was in Nursing*)

Social class clearly has a key role to play here in policing acceptable femininities. For instance, F25 is from a working class background - she was brought up on one of the

council estates in the city but also attended a local girls grammar school, a ‘real ladies sort of school’. Rugby respondent R27 attended an all-girls grammar school, too, but she was also from a working class background and so both had opportunities to play football with other boys outside of school. Although it is often assumed that a working class background means stricter role segregation and a more rigid sexual division of labour (Suttles, 1968) this does not necessarily mean all working class girls face the same demands to be conventionally feminine. A working class cultural resource might also mean tougher, more independent girls, girls who have a greater freedom in what they could attempt in sport and in other street activities (Murphy *et al.*, 1991). By the same token, middle class girls sometimes had their sporting wings clipped. As F51 put it: ‘I wasn’t allowed, very many times, to go and play in the street. Mother didn’t like me to mix with the riff raff’. Lenskyj (1986: 57) also found class differences in parental tolerance towards sporting activities and ‘tomboys’. More middle class girls (especially in older generations) might have found it more difficult to assume a ‘tomboy’ identity especially if it involved playing contact team sport.

## **5.5 Women’s Perceptions of Change**

### ***i) Living in a different world?***

Older respondents from both sports and from different social classes agreed that there are opportunities for young girls to play sport today which simply did not exist when they themselves were younger (see F20, F22, F25, F27, F30, F31 and R22, R26, R34). Some gave examples of female relatives or friends (usually daughters) being able to play sport in a way that they simply could not (see F14, F24, F33, F37, F39, F45 and R14, R24, R26, R27, R29, R30, R32). For instance:

‘When I wanted to play it was just a flat “No.” You know, there was no opportunities. There was no girl’s football team [...]. But now, like my daughter, she played at school and that. So, you know, it’s better now than it ever was. I mean they’ve got so many opportunities now.’ (*F24, Age 51, Member, Long-term fan, Production Operative*)

It was generally assumed here that young women were now more ‘accepted into the man’s world’ (F14) and, hence, were more able to play traditionally ‘masculine’ sports. However, by drawing a comparison between their own lives and those of the ‘younger’ generation, perhaps these older women also have a rather idealised view of the lives of young women in late-modernity. Not all of the ‘younger’ respondents had opportunities to play sport (see F2, F5, F9 and R1, R3, R8, R9), despite wide-ranging changes in women’s lives.

It was also clear that the *daughters* and grand-daughters of some subjects continued to be denied opportunities to play football and/or rugby today (F27, F37, F39 and R14, R15, R30). R30 and F37, for example, both knew of the ‘cut-off’ age for boys and girls to play competitive sport together and the detrimental effect that this has on young girls trying to continue playing competitive team sport when few structures exist to support it:

‘You see, when they get to a certain age then the girls have to drop out. I do know that through my grandson...I think it was 11 [...]. A couple of girls playing in his team, they’ve had to drop out, and they can’t find a football team to go in, there isn’t one. So there you go again you see. Girls are stuck aren’t they? [...] And they’re ever so disappointed. They’re both 12 years old now. So give them another few months and they’ll be disinterested you see.’ (*F37, Age 63, Occasional attendee, Returned fan, Retired-worked at Thorne Lighting*)

Perhaps not surprisingly, some rugby respondents were actually extremely opposed to the idea that their own daughters might play the sport. The aggressively invasive nature of modern rugby combined with the risk of injury might mean that some parents would



resist their daughters - and indeed their sons - being involved. Playing rugby was simply too transgressive for most parents - and for their female children - even to contemplate, and this seems to be reflected in recent statistics which show that despite significant growth in numbers of female participants, just 1 in 1,000 women currently play rugby union (Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation Rugby Union Factsheet 2009, accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2010). R31 scolded herself for her 'illogical' stance on women's rugby - a view strongly opposed by R19, who returned to neo-Victorian sensibilities - while R23 was first introduced to rugby when her son started playing for a prominent local club, which she continued to watch. But when asked about women's rugby, her response was reflexive but also predictably more terse:

'I've watched the female [matches] on the television, but I don't know...it sounds very sexist but I always worry about them, that they're going to get hurt. You know, I worry that the men get hurt but you feel they can take it a bit more than women and I think that's just tradition, just the way I've been brought up, that only men play it. My friend's dad said [...] he quite happily goes and watches his son, but he goes and watches his daughter and says he's on edge the whole game and that is pure sexist really because they're only playing other females, just like the men are.' (**R31, Age 57, STH, New fan, Geneticist**)

'It worries me that they play [women's rugby]. It's just another string of thoughts really about whether we should be playing as women [...]. It worries me about the long-term effects of if you're playing on a regular basis, and the contact, because we're different from men, you know, from an anatomy point of view. We're very different [...] If you're being knocked to the ground regularly I just wonder about our internal organs and the way we're made really.' (**R19, Age 54, STH, New fan, Direct Payments Advisor**)

R23: No, I'm not interested in female rugby and I wouldn't want my daughter playing either. But she wouldn't, she wouldn't play.

*Res:* Why? Would some women be put off by the physical side of the sport?

R23: I think so yes...I mean she goes and watches some of the chaps play because she's in the army, so she goes and watches some of the chaps play sometimes on a Sunday. But she wouldn't take part herself. (**R23, Age 65, STH, Long-term fan, Retired**)

Interviewees from both sports, and across all age groups, reported on how prescribed gender roles in earlier decades had been cemented by assumptions about the male 'breadwinner' and the female 'housewife'. This was expressed most strongly by 'younger' fans: 'In the past, it was more so that women would stay at home: housewife, do cooking, look after children' (F7, see also F2, F4, F7, F9 and R3, R4, R7, R8). Consequently, *public* spaces such as sports grounds were predominantly assumed to be places for *men's* leisure:

'[It] would have probably been early 70s when my grandfather used to go and watch [rugby], probably through to 80s [...]. It was mostly you went to the pub, you went down to the bookies. If there wasn't anything else on, you'd maybe go down and watch the game [...] and then he'd maybe roll up for tea. That was all part of the [...] pint, the beer and the betting shop culture that he came from. And again, it was very much a manly thing. My Nan [...] wouldn't go to the rugby with him.' (R7, Age 33, *STH, Long-term fan, Dispensing Optician*)

Football fans were more likely to link major transformations in women's lives, and the supposed recent relative increased power of women to make choices in the leisure and work spheres, to more opportunities for women to establish themselves as active sports fans. The notion of greater equality or 'women's lib' was a recurring feature among 'younger' fans, but it was also brought up by some of the 'middle aged' and 'older' football supporters (F12, F25, F31, F35, F36). The rugby sample was less likely to identify a correlation between societal changes for women and attendance at sport. None of these respondents made any reference to greater equality for women today as a key feature of recent changes in sports crowds, suggesting interesting class differences in this respect. Differences between the two sports may also have played a role in shaping women's access to them; for instance, it is quite likely that hooliganism in the 1970s and 1980s would have had a detrimental effect on the numbers of women attending football matches (see Taylor, 1992; Woodhouse and Williams, 1999).

Many respondents gave examples of how women's new 'independence' and changing general attitudes had in turn led to different ambitions and aspirations:

'If you go back to the 1940s, 1950s, most women were the housewives, didn't necessarily have an income of their own. So if they'd wanted to go somewhere they'd ask their husband. [But] now we're more independent as a general rule...So we say "Well I wanna go to the football, so I shall go"' (*F28, Age 50, STH, Long-term fan, Book Keeper*)

'Women have more freedom than they had thirty or forty years ago. I think the thing is that women have a different set of expectations. When I was at school, a lot of women just expected to leave school, work in a factory, get married, have babies and that was it. Women want more from life. Women are much freer to demand that they have those things...there's a lot more opportunities for women. Women's lib sort of thing has opened up a whole new culture for women.' (*F31, Age 50, Occasional attendee, New fan, Teacher*)

The message here seemed to be that the traditionally gendered and modernist social roles that typically divided men and women for much of the twentieth century are not quite so clear cut today. One interpretation in this context might be that gender roles are converging (Wilkinson, 1999). According to this view, younger women today are no longer prepared to accept a subordinated position in sport, or indeed anything else:

'I think women in general are more...sort of less restricted in what is a man thing and what's a girl thing or you know female thing, especially. I think younger girls, women are sort of growing up thinking "Well if I want to do it, I'll do it."' (*F12, Age 35, STH, New fan, Recruitment Manager*)

Respondents across all age groups routinely use empowering terms such as 'independent', 'powerful', 'strong minded', 'freer' and 'more forceful' to describe the women of today, who will 'Do what they wanna do. Sod it if it's not stereotypical'. One of the outcomes of these presumed wider social changes has been more women at sports events (see F7, F9, F12, F13, F25, F26, F28, F29, F30, F32, F39, F40, F44 and R16, R20, R24). Walby (1997: 11) claims that women of different birth cohorts are

likely to have ‘different values and moralities, different political agendas and priorities’ especially regarding gender issues and feminism. However, despite obvious differences in my respondents by age (all three age groups suggested that their own generation had been more patriarchal than the one which followed), they also *shared* the general belief that there has been some kind of major structural shift in this respect. This supposed new balance of power between the sexes was widely regarded in a positive light.

The suggestion that we are now living in a society where male and female values are converging (see Wilkinson 1999: 37) - a development which has allowed women much greater freedom and choice - is, of course, a highly contested one. Such changes are at best uneven and they are refracted by structures of race and class. But the majority of women in my sample claimed to have observed wider changes in society signalling, for them at least, greater gender equality. Some occupationally successful women were able to articulate these changes convincingly across a number of domains:

‘I don’t know whether that’s just the way of the world if you like [...] the fact that you’ve got more women at work and possibly some households have perhaps got a little bit more disposable income because they’ve got two incomes, they can afford for them both to go [to rugby] [...] or whether because women have become more independent and perhaps more assertive, they make their own choices a little bit more. And I think you know, people get married later [...] and possibly having children later, so they’re not at home tied up with the children [...]. I don’t know whether those things connected.’ (*R20, Age 37, STH, New fan, Financial Director, Married*)

‘I think women are becoming more equal, I suppose. We’ve got women’s football now as well haven’t we? [...] So women are generally becoming more around I suppose, more involved in all sorts of things. I think there’s more of the workforce that’s made up of women now as well.’ (*F30, Age 50, STH, Long-term fan, Senior Staff Nurse, Married*)

F39 used the example of her daughter not marrying until she was in her 30s as evidence that women’s priorities have changed, and F44 reported on how women are now

entering previously male only careers, such as plumbing and engineering. The link between women later marrying, having children later and prioritising careers is crucial here; work in these accounts, especially, offers a route to entitlement. Some respondents (especially football fans) suggested that women have been able to attend sports more legitimately today *because* they have careers and so greater financial independence (see F13, F25, F28, F29, F30, F35, F39, F44 and R20). For Deem (1986: 40), writing more than 20 years ago, men felt they have a ‘right to leisure’ whereas many women do not. My respondents suggest here that if women are in paid work they are therefore *entitled* to leisure time in largely the same way as men.

Finally, it was suggested that specific changes in relationships with men and in the family could serve as an explanation for women’s increased involvement in sport as fans. None of the ‘older’ respondents discussed changes in relationships between heterosexual men and women - perhaps the ‘older’ married fans were more likely to have lived their lives in a ‘traditional’ relationship in which male and female roles were questioned less? The following exchange provides a good illustration of women’s more restricted access to leisure in the past. What would have been the response twenty-five years ago to asking one’s spouse to take charge at home whilst you attended football?

F24: He’d have said, “What! Do you think I’m gonna have all the four kids for the afternoon? You must be joking.” [...] For him to have looked after the kids while I went football would have been outrageous. Because men in those days didn’t do as much as they do now, the work load was on you.

*Res: Could most women at this time not go [to football] then?*

F24: I wouldn’t have thought so: especially not on your own. He wouldn’t have let me go on my own anyway. Not that it [going alone] would have bothered me.

*Res: Why would he not be happy for you to go?*

F24: In case somebody chatted me up or something. You don’t realize how men used to be (*laughs*). (**F24, Age 51, Member, Returned fan, Production Operative**)

This example of the typical 'male' policing of heterosexual women's lives illustrates not only women's traditional relative subordination to men, but it also shows how many women from this generation may have been pressed to internalise ideas about the 'safe zones' of the city for women's use. The football stadium was no part of Taylor *et al.*'s (1996) subordinated 'women's city' - and consequently this was a space that most women were strongly discouraged from entering, especially alone. The historian Holt (1992) has argued that watching professional football in England historically provided an escape from drudgery for (working class) men. This highly masculinised role of English spectator sport was also internalised by many women, as the following account indicates:

'It was a *man's game*, you know, a man used to watch [...]. Women weren't encouraged particularly to go to football matches [...]. That's how it was in the 1970s and 1960s. Oh yes, a lot of men wouldn't want their women, their wives, girlfriends, partners to go down to the football match with them. No way. They wanted to go with their mates. Some women would have wanted to go, but a lot of it was just the men wanting to be with other men. [...] Generally speaking we've moved on a bit from all that.' (*F34, Age 54, Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Home Helper*)

This perception - from both men and women - of the football stadium as a space for *men's* collective leisure, led to the 'natural' exclusion of many women from sporting enclosures. But today's regenerated sports stadiums seem to be much more contested spaces. Going to football with a husband or partner may once have been a way for some women - perhaps reluctantly in some cases - to share joint leisure time. But the perception today is that many more women are in a position to make a more conscious *choice* in terms of their leisure and partners, as R16 points out:

'I would think, going back quite a long way, football and rugby [were] predominantly male, because that was the men's time, that's what they did. So whether that's changed now because...we tend to mix more, we don't have just

female time and male time [...]. It's not ...“That's a man only thing, we all meet up in the pub and then we go and watch the football and women aren't included””. (*R16, Age 53, STH, New fan, Company Secretary*)

A small number of interviewees from both sports argued that changes in relationships and family structures have allowed more women to attend matches with partners or perhaps even attend alone if their partner is not interested (see F4, F9, F24, F34, F35 and R5, R11, R15, R16, R17). For instance, F24, after divorcing her husband, now has a very different relationship with her new partner, and she attends matches alone. Again this is a generalisation, but men are rather less likely to exert control over their spouse's actions in quite the same way as they once did. 'Older' women were socialized into avoiding certain public spaces - especially alone. As F4 puts it, using representational cartoon figures to illustrate: '[In] the *Flintstones* Fred and Barney Rubble kind of go bowling or something and Wilma and Betty gossip and go shopping [...]. I think things like that...show traditional marriages, like they're not now'. In combination, these changes have provided - unevenly, certainly - more opportunities for women to 'escape' aspects of the traditional, modernist constraints of gender - one sign of this being women's greater presence in sports stadiums. However, not all respondents were in favour of the recent transformations in the lives of some women.

## *ii) 'Women push into everything'*

Some older female respondents suggested that women's push for greater equality was having a detrimental effect on the social order: women were too easily crossing into activities and careers which were once strictly and securely mapped out for males. These subjects were fearful of some of the possible consequences of women's increased power and ambition:

‘Women decided that they wanted to do things that men did. I mean how stupid...And I have to go on the front line in the forces and stupid things like that. Women aren’t made to do everything that men do, are they? But somehow they want to and they’ve lost a lot, through trying to get everything. They’ve lost some things.’ (F41, Age 64, *STH, Long-term fan, Retired-worked in Banking*)

Some football respondents also suggested that sport is simply more important to men than women; that women have other core interests and responsibilities - the home, children - while men ‘just stick to the football’ (see Chapter Eight). Women like these who accepted these domestic conventions were often critical that men’s traditional gender roles have been challenged today in sport and other domains - often by other women. Connell (1995) has argued that this challenge has been so powerful that one response from men might be a distorted (hyper) ‘protest masculinity’, one born of male alienation and frustration. By admonishing other women for being as apparently committed to football as men, these female respondents describe the role of sport in ‘doing’ masculinity in the same way that many men and male academics talk normatively about the links between sport and the reproduction of masculinity. For example:

‘I think men are losing their way. I think they’re losing what they’re supposed to be as a man, what their role is, and who they are. I think that’s quite frightening for them [...]. For men, football is the culture isn’t it?... I think there’s certainly a lack of things that blokes can do together as blokes, because *women* push into everything and want to be included and take part. But I’m happy for blokes to do football, as I think it’s important that they retain something that they can do together *as men*.’ (F19, Age 45, *Occasional attendee, On-off fan, Researcher*)

Women like F19 may occasionally attend football partly to spend leisure time with their partner, but sport is still seen very much as *his* world. In this sort of view, challenging conventional ideas about sport and gender threatens wider societal problems - ‘A lack of things that blokes can do together as blokes’. If women want to be involved in sport it is argued here they should remain on the relative periphery. They should allow men to



retain their assumed place as core sports supporters: in short, football stadia should offer stability and continuity, as a culturally prescribed space for ‘performing’ normative and hegemonic masculinities.

### *iii) Fan Breaks*

The ‘shape’ of typical female spectating careers are typically rather different from those for men. For example, some respondents were compelled to take ‘fan breaks’ for many years after having children - despite in some cases their partners continuing to attend matches. Not all women were subject to this arrangement, although cases where *men* remained at home to look after children or where the couple took it in turns to attend matches were much more unusual. F17 describes her very atypical match day arrangements:

F17: We’ll only go down together if we take the kids with us. If not, he’ll stay at home and look after them and I’ll go down and we’ll do that.

*Res: Your husband doesn’t mind helping out?*

F17: No, he has to do it most of the time anyway, cos I work full time.

*Res: Does anyone ever perhaps find this arrangement unusual?*

F17: Yeah absolutely. I mean he works term time, so he takes all the summer holidays off. He’s generally the one that drops them off at [the] childminders, picks them up at night and all that sort of thing. I think people maybe think it’s unusual, I think there’s an element of jealousy in it. That you know, I wish my wife worked and earned the money so that I could go part time...I think there’s envy in it to be honest. **(F17, Age 35, Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Sales Manager)**

Pilcher (1998: 19) has described this type of ‘role reversal’ household as ‘unconventional and remarkable’. F17’s primary role as the main breadwinner seems to have ‘naturally’ extended into the leisure arena. This was a unique case in my data, but it represents a challenge to strict role segregation, which is a key factor in the generalised inequalities women face in society compared to men (Walby, 1990). For respondents who continued to attend matches when their children were young, it was

often the case that they had a greater interest in the club than their male spouse. Some (F22 and F38) found Saturday babysitters, while F21, agreed to a move to Glasgow for a year with her (now ex) husband only on condition that she could continue to attend all Leicester City's matches, home and away: 'I was at home with the kids all day, all week...so Saturday was *my* day'. Few women seemed able to offer the same sort of case to challenge conventional childcare arrangements on match days.

In a small number of cases *both* parents stopped attending matches to care for young children. More usually, respondents claimed greater responsibilities towards children as a *mother* effectively prohibited them from continuing their former match-day routine. These 'naturalised' domestic responsibilities disrupted prized sporting rituals that may be more widely regarded as the preserve of male supporters. They were certainly unlikely to affect male parents in quite the same way:

'You can't go on the half eleven train and go on a bender before you get to the ground, then go on a bender on the way back from the ground [be]cause you've got kids to look after when you get home. So I think being a mother of small children wouldn't restrict you going if you could get somebody to look after the kids. But it restricts the whole ethos of going on the piss all the way there and all the way back again [...]. That used to be half the fun of it when I was younger.' (F30, Age 50, STH, *Returned fan, Senior Staff Nurse*)

F14: No one would dream that dad would miss a football match and stay at home, and the lady would go on her own, it wouldn't work...It's the accepted thing. [But] there was a few arguments in the house when he was going and I was stuck here listening to it on the radio. But that's just the way it goes isn't it? [...] My friends are the same, I've got other friends down there that have got children, and if the children are ill, they won't be at the game but their husband will.

Res: *Doesn't seem very fair...*

F14: I know. It's just the way it is (*whispered*). (F14, Age 37, STH, *Returned fan, Tenancy Support Worker*)

R24 waited until all of her children had grown up and left home before beginning to actively follow Leicester Tigers, confirming Green *et al.*'s (1990: ix) assertion that for most women leisure cannot be explored in isolation from other parts of their lives, as a woman's right to leisure is 'circumscribed by her employment status and income level, her family situation and most important, her lack of status as a woman in a patriarchal society'. Moreover, Aitchison (2003: 42) claims that defining leisure as 'free time' raises issues for many women for whom 'freedom' is dependent on the financial support of a male partner or is constrained by the need to provide care for others. This is one reason why some men feel they can control - or attempt to control - their partners' leisure time, as in the case of this football fan whose husband follows rugby. When is a present something quite different?

'Three Christmas's ago he never asked me what I wanted for my Christmas box. [...]. And it was a season ticket for the Tigers. Oh, I went berserk, "That's my Christmas ruined, I don't want that. How can I go to watch the City away when you've bought me that?" [...] Of course, my family [said] "You ungrateful thing mother. He wants you to sit with him, he wants your company" (*angry voice*). [...] So now I go to the rugby when the City are away.' (*Whispers*). (**F43, Age 69, STH, Long-term fan, Retired- worked as School Meals Cook**)

These cases suggest that despite advances elsewhere, we should probably remain sceptical about any major shift towards general equality concerning issues of domesticity and childcare. My only 'younger' respondent who had a child (R12) had to organise our meeting around baby feeding times, and the interview was continuously interrupted by the child's needs for attention. This fan had attended no Leicester Tigers matches since her pregnancy but her spouse continued to watch *his* football club Aston Villa. The rare occasions when the couple was able to employ a babysitter were spent watching *his* club.

## 5.6 Watching Women's Sport

How did recent gender shifts apply to views about women's sports? Most sporting women's experiences of watching *female* team sport is likely to be extremely limited, usually to four-yearly TV coverage of various Olympic ball sports and perhaps the (very) occasional international women's football match. Sky Sports' recent live coverage of women's netball attracts a tiny national audience of mainly core supporters. Coverage of women's team sport in the national press is very limited (see Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2008). Some respondents did discuss how they would like the opportunity to watch a female Leicester City or Leicester Tigers team perform, and how they had enjoyed watching live televised women's matches. But general views on this were quite diverse, ranging from deep hostility (F22) to enthusiastic support (F25). In a very small number of cases the women's game was even preferred to the male equivalent because of the latter's various dysfunctions, though it should be noted that F25 had once herself been an elite female footballer:

'It's not right. It's just slow and they can't, they can't play football. I know I shouldn't say that as a woman [...] But there isn't that sort of real competitive aggressiveness I suppose: it just doesn't seem right. The brief few games, or parts of games, I've seen on television are a bit of a joke as far as I'm concerned [...]. I just don't enjoy it. I just don't like watching it.' (F22, Age 42, *STH, Long-term fan, Supply Nursery Officer*)

'I watched some really good football matches. I thought: "They're every bit as good as the men." The thing with the ladies game, I found, [was] it was slower, but I found it better to watch [be]cause it was so free flowing. Not like the men's football now, I hate it because it's stop start, there's too many free kicks. There's too much money in [men's] football now, I think. I just think there's so much at stake, that the professional foul has got worse [...] I don't enjoy watching professional football as much as I used to.' (F25, Age 53, *Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Community Support Officer*)

Lopez (1997) found that some male fans view the slower pace of women's football as reminiscent of the men's game before it allegedly became so aggressive, marketised and corrupt. F3 also described how she enjoyed watching women's football because its players were, 'not as big headed as some of the men...I suppose [be]cause the money's not there'. F45 also found the women's game more appealing because female players are not so 'dirty' [foulers]. Some football respondents from all age groups expressed an interest in watching women's football and discussed how they had enjoyed watching the Women's World Cup or other televised or local women's football - although it should be noted here that the 2007 Women's World Cup was actually taking place during one of my key interview periods. There were complaints that there was not enough TV coverage, especially of women's football (F1, F3, F9, F16, F20, F25, F29, F33, F39, F42, F44, F45, F48, F49, F51). Some of my rugby sample also claimed they would at least like to 'give women's rugby a chance' (R5, R6, R7, R15, R16, R17, R20, R22, R24, R27, R29, R30, R33), but opportunities to do this were even more limited. Only one respondent (R17) brought up the experience of actually watching a women's rugby match on TV.

As we have already observed, the media generally trivialises women's sporting achievements, for example by emphasising females' *physical* weaknesses and reducing them to sexual objects (see Chapter Two). Perhaps this helps to construct and reinforce ideas about women's natural 'inferior' bodily status in sport, reinforcing the view that the female body is somehow lacking in both physical power and sporting capital. For many football and rugby respondents, it was because women's sport *lacked* this real aggression or physicality, that it had little appeal, despite some expressing surprise at the abilities of some female players (see F17, F18, F19).

Women playing football and rugby seriously were derided here as ‘funny’, ‘odd’, and ‘silly’, lacking the ‘natural movement’ and skill levels of men. The men’s game, in contrast, was perceived as ‘quicker’, ‘sharper’, ‘harder’, shows ‘true grit’ and has more of an ‘edge’. Female versions of these sports were not classed as the ‘real game’ and were ‘not very exciting’. Respondents of both sports across all generations broadly shared these sorts of views (F1, F10, F13, F14, F17, F18, F19, F21, F22, F26, F30, F34, F38, F40, F43, F44, F51 and R1, R2, R3, R8, R11, R13, R14, R18, R25, R28, R33, R34). Moreover - and perhaps this is the key issue - men were also obviously playing *for* something - financial rewards and established championships and trophies - while women still seemed to be competing needlessly - and therefore unattractively - for very little:

‘Obviously because men’s football has been going so much longer, it’s faster and more skilful on the whole. I mean it’s a massive generalization but I would say that it is faster and more at stake, a lot more at stake. But I would imagine that girl’s football, women’s football I should say will get better and stronger as years go on.’ (F26, Age 51, *Occasional attendee, New fan, Teacher*)

Very few female rugby fans discussed the possibilities or desirability of raising the profile of women’s rugby. Some respondents also worried about the potential time and cost involved in supporting *both* the men’s and women’s games. Women’s sport lost out here because it had little of the media impact, crowd appeal and commercial attractions of established men’s sport. ‘Who could name an England women’s footballer?’ asks F8 rhetorically. It is a familiar chicken and egg scenario for pretty much all women’s sport. Would F19 consider watching a ‘live’ women’s football match?

F19: I don’t think [so]...Well, if Leicester had a women’s team and they’d got, like, the Walkers Stadium for women, I probably would. Cos it would have the same status in a way, do you know what I mean?

Res: Why? Would you need to have other people watching then?

F19: Yes. It's about the experience of the match and everything that goes with it. And if the team is all women, well fine, no problem. (*F19, Age 45, Occasional Attendee, On-off fan, Researcher*)

In these sorts of accounts, the media's important role in marginalizing women's position in top level sport had not escaped my respondents' notice:

'When the women's World Cup is on, there's probably only women that play football that even know about it or bother watching it. When England [men's team] are in the World Cup, you've got cars going around with flags on and houses all decked out with flags. But I mean I can just never see that happening for the women's World Cup, I just don't think it's advertised.' (*F25, Age 53, Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Community Support Officer*)

As Cahn (1994) points out, of course heterosexual female athletes are often faced with a central contradiction between their athletic prowess and the requirements of conventional femininity. Pfister *et al.*, (2002: 70) remind us that women's football teams such as the Dick, Kerr's Ladies around the early 1920s were criticised for their lack of skill, but if they demonstrated their ball-playing qualities they were attacked because of their lack of 'femininity'. Almost a century later, my findings reveal this same complex double bind for female athletes. Moreover, we need to add a further dimension to this equation: 'feminine' athletes must also clearly be marked as *heterosexual* (see Cox and Thompson, 2000; Caudwell, 2000). F28 (among others) worried that successful sporting women might seek to ape men on the playing field, thus challenging conventional femininities and sexualities and the wider social and sporting order:

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

can have an attractive game. Don't forget you're a woman whilst you're doing it. So don't sort of shave your head and all the rest of it, just to think you're gonna be better at it. You're not. Keep your ponytail or whatever suits you. Still look pretty, go out there and have fun and play to the best of your ability. And if you've got great skill, great. Then you can be as good as the blokes.' (F28, *Age 50, STH, Long-term fan, Book Keeper*)

F28 went on to argue that, in her view, it is more difficult to balance the demands of conventional femininity with playing rugby. Terms such as: 'manly', 'big butch ladies', 'unfeminine', 'not very elegant' and 'lesbians' (R4, R10, R23, R24, R32) were all used by many female rugby fans to describe female rugby players. A small number made the assumption that some heterosexual women watch male rugby simply to admire and desire toned male bodies; that men's legs and buttocks were particularly subject to the *female gaze*, and therefore these women would hardly be interested in *women's* rugby (e.g. R4, R9, R21, R23, R26). Academics have typically demonstrated how the mass media reduce female sporting bodies to sexual objects (see Chapter Two). At least some of my respondents - both in football and rugby - might have seen the male athletic body in a similar way, thus risking the label of 'puck bunny' or 'inauthentic' supporter in an era when the sporting body, both male and female, has become fetishised (Crawford and Gosling, 2004). F50 also touches on the notion here of separate male and female roles and spheres; for some of my respondents, women's football and/or rugby did not appeal as these sports were viewed as exclusively 'men's sports' on the playing side (F41, F43 and R25, R32). Two football interviewees even claimed (not ironically) that women's 'make-up' was not suited to females playing football (F36, F50), whilst other respondents objected to women's rugby, often relating this to the dangers of injury and nineteenth century concerns about risk of infertility (R3, R17, R19, R23, R31, R34 and F20, F50). Several 'middle aged' and 'older' fans placed their arm across their chest in



a protective manner and shuddered at the thought of a football, rugby ball or tackle damaging or harming female players.

## **5.7 Summary**

These findings offer some insights into females' early sporting experiences and the ways in which these may later help to shape women's wider involvement in sport. This may be the first study of its kind to attempt to make this sort of connection looking at different generations of women. I began by offering a discussion of how the educational experience of girls can influence later views of sport and leisure, and how various socializing agents, including teachers, parents and peers can play a key role in channelling girls into - or away from - sporting involvement.

I also examine here generational shifts in women's leisure lives, in part lending support to various academic and popular accounts that there have been major transformations in women's lives which have led to greater gender equality between the sexes (see, for example, Pilcher, 1999; Wilkinson, 1994). Changes in women's lives in the work and leisure spheres, as well as changes for heterosexual women in domestic relations with spouses, have produced more freedom and control for women over their own lives. This, in turn, has encouraged some of them to break down barriers and challenge social and cultural restrictions that previously prohibited them from accessing sport, as both as players and spectators.

However, my findings also show how these changes are very unevenly experienced among women. Many women in my sample were still highly constrained in their access to and use of leisure time. Just like the older women's experiences of sport at school,

women continue to be constrained by conventional femininities and sexualities in their involvement in sport today. This lends weight to Scraton's (1994) warning that we must not dismiss feminist research agendas in the light of this recent shift towards greater equality for women. Inequalities in sport and elsewhere are still gravely apparent. Instead, leisure research should acknowledge the continued exploitation of many women *and* be sensitive to these recent changes in the sporting lives of women. It is also crucial in this respect to examine the differences *between* women and how structures such as race, class and sexuality impact upon women's experiences, in order to be able to recognise, as Scraton (1994: 258) argues, the 'importance of difference and the significance of shared experiences' for women in sport.

In the next chapter I examine women's experiences of sport in earlier decades, in terms of the social and cultural developments which have occurred in their lives and in the sports they now follow as spectators.

## **Chapter 6**

# **Female Sports Spectatorship and Social Change**

### **6.1 Introduction**

My main research aim is to explore the extent to which, and how, sports fandom figures in the leisure lives of women in different sporting contexts today and in the recent past. Thus, this chapter looks *historically* at women's experiences of attending male team sport in England. I begin by examining memories from the so-called 'golden' eras of these two sports. For rugby union, arguably, this was the period before professionalism arrived in England in 1995. But for football, crowds started to fall alarmingly in the 1960s as hooliganism and home leisure grew, so the period from the late 1940s to the early 1960s is often suggested as the boom years for the sport. I then move on to show how these sports as cultural practices and economic products transformed in different ways and on very different schedules in the post-war period and how this impacted on the experiences of female spectators and on the public consumption of football and rugby. Finally, I consider explanations for recent changes in the attractiveness to women of UK male team sport.

### **6.2 Belonging, Ownership & Togetherness: Football's 'Golden Era' for Women?**

Drawing on the principles of Glaser and Strauss's (2008) 'grounded theory', a number of 'higher level concepts' were found to emerge within each of the key historical periods under discussion. Here I begin by examining the substantive theory that emerged from data analysis in football's 'golden era' - rugby union's 'golden years' are discussed in section 6.3.

Oral history accounts of sports fandom have often excluded or marginalized women (see, for instance, Bull, 1992; Taylor and Ward, 1993). Although women and some middle class male supporters attended post-war football it was mainly watched in this 'golden era' by the male working class (see Holt, 1992; Fishwick, 1989). Accounts from women from this period are few and far between, although Watt's (1993) history of Highbury's North Bank does examine the experiences of female Arsenal supporters. Not only have female fans been largely invisibilised here, but women have also been widely blamed for the declining attendance of men at football, post-1949. For instance, Walvin (1994) claims that from the 1950s onwards women exerted more control over how men spent their leisure time and money, drawing them away from spectator sport. Fishwick (1989) also argues that football had always encouraged men collectively to spend time *away* from women, and that the trend towards more family based leisure pursuits in the 1950s coincided with a major decline in football attendances - aggregate League crowds fell by 11.25 million (around 30%) between 1949 and 1962 (see Russell, 1997, Walvin, 2001). The suggestion that women are responsible for declining football attendances can also be seen in a 1962 Football League survey which states, 'Women themselves do not display much interest in football' and proposes that attempts should be made to encourage women 'to be a little more self-sacrificing by letting their menfolk out to watch League matches' (see BBC Sport Website, accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2010). It is perhaps telling that the role of women in sport in this period is often measured by their alleged negative impact on male attendance rather than by research-based accounts of the experiences of active female supporters of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

These ‘golden years’ of English football, are usually assumed to be the years immediately following World War II when the post-war leisure boom saw Football League attendances reach an all time high in 1948/9 (see Phelps, 2001; Walvin, 2001). Here, I stretch this period into the early 1960s as the game begins to move into the TV era. Football crowds had declined from the post-war high, but they were still high compared to the periods which immediately followed. The term ‘golden age’ is clichéd but it seems appropriate here because of the warmth with which this period is recalled by my respondents: players still earned plausible wages and mixed easily with supporters; they were class ‘located’ in Critcher’s (1979) terms. Mass car ownership, home-based leisure and organized hooliganism all lay in football’s future. The footballer was a ‘hero’ known largely to, and embraced by, his local communities; the player as a national or global ‘celebrity’ (Giulianotti, 1999) generally was yet to emerge.

*i) ‘It was safe’*

Fishwick (1989) describes how FA records show that there were only 22 cases of football crowd trouble demanding FA consideration recorded in the years 1948-49 when Football League attendances peaked, and it is also remarkable that so many millions of people entered unpleasant and even dangerous environments each week and returned unscathed (Walvin, 2001). Indeed, my ‘older’ football fans described their relative lack of fear of attending football during this period: ‘When you’re young you don’t care’, and that any risks involved were, ‘All part of the afternoon, the entertainment’ (see F45, F47). If they ever needed ‘assistance’ at football during this period they were protected by the eponymous British ‘Bobby’:

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

This is an idealized picture, of course, but the police presence at football - or the relative lack of it - only served to reinforce the notion of the 1950’s football ground as a safe space for both men and women. F43 remembers the ‘good times’ of attending matches in the years from 1949 with a certain nostalgia when the ‘policeman would take off his helmet so you could see’. This is a powerful image, signifying the pre-hooligan period of relative crowd harmony - though other accounts suggest that supporter violence was already a feature of post-war English football culture (see Williams, 2010). A range of terms were used here to describe the football experience: a ‘friendly atmosphere’; ‘you never saw any trouble’ or heard ‘bad language’; one never felt ‘scared’, ‘intimidated’ or ‘afraid’ (e.g. F40, F43, F45, F46, F47, F50, F51). Johnes and Mellor (2006) similarly argue that a real sense of national ‘togetherness’ had already begun to develop around the shared experiences of sport following the recent privations of the Second World War. A key moment here perhaps was the live television coverage of the Coronation in 1953 and the mass TV audience for the so-called ‘Matthews’ FA Cup final of the same year. The early 1950s were also a period of relative national optimism in Britain when its people assumed the nation would enjoy greater ‘social solidarity and attain global significance and glory thanks to the Commonwealth’ (Johnes and Mellor 2006: 269). At football this meant that:

‘People were more careful about the way they treated each other. You didn’t rush along and knock people over, the atmosphere was sort of friendly...And people were more...well, I certainly didn’t see any sign of people being rude or aggressive.’ (*F40, Age 64, STH, Long-term fan, Community Social Worker*)

Hood and Joyce (1999) have tracked similar sentiments: men and women growing up in London working class neighbourhoods in the 1930s and 1950s who stressed that still binding structures such as family, community and class solidarity, seemed more important and more stable in these periods. My own respondents seem to share similar ideas about supposed greater communal trust in others, perhaps best illustrated when F47 described how large numbers of football supporters paid football ground residents three pence to look after their bikes whilst they watched the match. This was also a period when generational relationships in public are remembered as being experienced rather differently. A number of my 'older' respondents, for example, described how they witnessed children being passed down to the front over the heads of other football crowd members - or how they experienced this themselves (e.g. F32, F40, F43, F46, F47, F51). There was little apparent fear here of children being abused, 'crushed' or lost; there seems to have been relatively little public concern or panic, either, about relations between children and 'stranger' adults in sports crowds. F43 recalls:

'I thought it was very exciting, I mean they were big crowds in those days. I've been down at one time at half past seven in the morning to get on the wall for a cup match [...]. We were there early, but if I wasn't you were passed down. If you wanted to go toilet you were passed up coz they [the toilets] were at the back (*laughs*). You made friends and they'd save you a place on the wall, you know, they'd spread out.' (F43, Age 69, *STH, Long-term fan, Retired-worked as a School Meals Cook*)

Football culture was also less prescriptive and certainly less profit-focused. Watching football was described as a form of 'cheap entertainment' which would often be combined with 'dancing' in the evening (F45) to complete a Saturday of local leisure. Football grounds seem to be viewed broadly as 'friendly' and 'safe' spaces in this period by female supporters, places characterized by the easy mixing of rival supporters

in the stadium. Some respondents suggested that mixing with away supporters was an important part of the sociability of the event (e.g. F48, F49, F51):

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

As well as the term ‘electric’, descriptions such as ‘buoyed up’, ‘elated’ ‘enjoyable’ and ‘excited’ were generally used to describe the packed post-war audiences which, like great animals, were ‘surging forward’ with the crowd ‘swaying’ (F45, F47, F49, F51). One of Watt’s (1993: 275) male interviewees described how male fans at Arsenal used to warm their hands under the arms of unfamiliar females, with no objections. The notion that there was rather more sexual innocence and trust between the sexes in these years was also touched upon by my respondents. Those older women who were standing fans claim not to have been threatened at all by being ‘body to body’ (F50) with men; it helped them keep warm (e.g. F47, F50). Social class also shaped the stadium crowd, of course. F50 recalled how in this period the seating was for ‘the hierarchy’; only a relatively small part of the stadium capacity was made up of seating and this was where the higher classes, directors and shareholders sat - the ‘posh people’ (F47) in other words. Thus, perhaps a stronger shared *working class* identity added to this greater community spirit at the football ground, and feelings of collective solidarity in society more generally. This ‘friendly’ match day climate at football would be challenged, of course, in the 1960s and 1970s.



*ii) Styles of support – ‘Everybody was in tune’*

Exactly *how* did women support their sports clubs during this period? Some carnival was involved. Some discussed the matchday costumes they made or purchased: F47 describes what she wore to the 1949 FA Cup final (against Wolverhampton Wanderers) with her female friend:

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

FA Cup Finals were social and community occasions in this era, a welcome opportunity for the carnivalesque. After losing the 1953 FA Cup final the Bolton mayor praised the club’s players for promoting and adding ‘lustre’ to the town (Johnes and Mellor 2006: 267). Thus, reaching the FA Cup final contributed to a palpable sense of civic pride and a strengthening of local identity for both men and women of the city, generating a sense of community and togetherness which affected female supporters as much as it did men. A sign of greater equality between clubs was the appearance of modest Leicester City in four FA Cup finals (1949, 1961, 1963 and 1969). F38 described how ‘tickets were few and far between’ for Cup finals so many supporters were unable to attend. Cup finals not only involved football fans, but the city as a whole:

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

Dressing up for football may also have been a way of seeking male fan approval, a legitimated way for females to express both their (hetero)sexuality *and* their support and club loyalty. F47, for example, remembers receiving compliments for her costume from the male group she stood at matches with, and F38 and three other young women wore the same outfits to all home and away matches, including the 1963 FA Cup final:

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

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

F38: Oh yes, yes. Wonderful! (*laughs*) (**F38, Age 60, STH, Long-term fan, Retired- worked in Clerical**)

The image of the football ground of the 1940s and 1950s as a safe, if highly masculinised, space was expressed very strongly by my 'younger' respondents, and many of my 'older' respondents also claimed that women were a distinct minority at matches in these earlier years (F36, F37, F38, F40, F47, F51). Some early attendees found the numbers and habits of men intimidating; for instance, F36 went to one football match as a child but was put off attending by the large numbers of men present who were smoking: she did not return until the late 1990s. This smoky atmosphere was mentioned by other 'older' fans (e.g. F37, F47). Of the eleven 'older' fans who did attend matches during these years, a number attended at some stage (usually as teenagers) in female groups (F38, F43, F47, F49). Gender also presented some special privileges - access to star players and being chaperoned and generally 'protected' by chauvinistic men, for example. F40 described how, because hardly any of her female friends went to football, she enjoyed some distinction. She could boast: 'Oh I saw him. Oh and he's so handsome, this man, this footballer'. Others discussed how, as teenagers

attending matches in the 1940s and 1950s, they had player ‘favourites’ (e.g. F40, F43, F45, F46, F47, F49, F50) and some stayed behind with other female fans after games to collect autographs. Players, it seems - even these modernist heroes - had something of a sexual aura surrounding them, although the profile of the professional football player has changed dramatically, over time.

*iii) ‘They [players] were just like one of us’*

First team players were lauded in the 1940s and 1950s but they were also strongly located in the local community (Cricher, 1979). They could be met at the local food market, in shops or at one’s place of work; some women fans had relatives who were ‘friends’ with players (e.g. F45, F50, F51). There was a sense here that players were ‘Leicester people’ who would walk to the ground along with everyone else on a match day (F49), and words and phrases such as: ‘approachable’, ‘closer’, ‘one of us’ ‘ordinary guys’ who lived in ‘ordinary houses’ (F37, F40, F43, F46, F47) were frequently used when discussing players of this period. A number of older respondents either lived near Leicester City players or knew people who did; players were a part of the local working class community (F25, F39, F40, F43, F46) and some recalled seeing players socially after important matches. F39 remembered how her pub-owning parents from Belgrave Road in the city gave lodgings to a Sunderland player who was on loan at City in the 1950s. Lodging a player was no great social marker. F43 even described how later World Cup winning goalkeeper Gordon Banks had living and childcare arrangements in Leicester which meant connections with ‘ordinary’ women’s lives, including mixing regularly with local mothers:

‘I used to take her [daughter] to school, and I used to walk with Gordon Banks when he took his chap to school. [...] He was just in an ordinary semi-detached house up the road near the school, and mixed with all the mothers. [Be]cause

there weren't that many men that took the children to school. He was a very nice chap.' (F43, Age 69, STH, Long-term fan, Retired- worked as a School Meals Chef)

Thus, women fans may have been in awe of footballers to a degree, but because players mixed locally and were earning not massively superior wages to other local people, they were socially and culturally located: they did not 'think they were up on a pedestal like some do now' (F37). Players today were seen as being more 'cut off' as they live separately in 'big mansions' (F40, F43). Holt and Mason (2000: 122) similarly suggest that, 'this was a world where local heroes were still ordinary men. Great players were often seen on the street or in the pub'. Some had jobs alongside playing football and despite attendances increasing after World War II, most players did not benefit from this rise in club income (see Walvin, 2001). Players may have been 'soccer slaves' in this period (Russell 1997: 92) but their modest earnings offered a greater moral sense to their established position in the local community (e.g. F19, F29, F30, F36, F37, F40, F45, F46, F49, F51).

Older respondents remember fondly this era partly because of the imagined greater sense of stability associated with the period and also because - unlike today - football was perceived as an important local site for the expression of belonging and national virtues often defined by a common ethnicity. Today's global game was rather more difficult for some respondents to identify with and accept:

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

In these terms, local players were deemed to be more ‘dedicated’ to local clubs and hence fans got ‘better value for money’ compared with the footballers of today (e.g. F19, F36, F40, F45, F46, F49). Today’s ‘superstars’ are ‘not really hungry enough for the game’ (F40), and do not show the same levels of commitment and effort as players of the ‘golden’ era:

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

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

This is the perceived ‘chaos of reward’ of Young’s (1999) late-modern world - the widely held perception today that society is less meritocratic and that working hard is no guarantee of just rewards and opportunities. Players of this ‘golden’ era are idealised for their supposed love of the game, which was ‘their hobby as well as their sport and their profession’ (F49). This idea that ‘there were no super heroes years ago; they all played as a team (F43) also echoes Phelps’ (2001: 47) suggestion that the ethos of the ‘starless’ Portsmouth championship winning sides of 1948-49 and 1949-50 embodied the same industriousness admired in the North and Midlands. As for my respondents, he found that the key qualities admired in players of this period included fair play and a ‘gentlemen’ reputation; being reserved, showing courage and heroic forms of traditional toughness.

### **6.3 Rugby Union's 'Golden Era': Before the Professionals**

There is little in the way of detailed academic research on the social history of British rugby union or, more especially, on fandom in rugby union. This present research therefore modestly breaks some new ground. English football had much higher attendances than amateur rugby union in the 1950s though club rugby crowds were actually steadily increasing into the 1970s as football's audience was drifting away. If football's key period when values and relationships between players and spectators began to change was the lifting of the maximum wage in 1961, in rugby union the tipping point arguably occurred much later, in 1995, when the sport finally professionalized. A nostalgic fondness for a period that was less money orientated and media saturated, with more emphasis on local players, was certainly similar to accounts from football fans about football's 'golden age' located some 40 years before.

#### ***i) The rise of the Tigers***

The city of Leicester is relatively unusual in England in hosting senior football and rugby union clubs in the same part of the city, and in recent years rugby European champions Leicester Tigers have even attracted similar numbers of spectators as struggling Leicester City. But, historically football was clearly marked out as the most important sport in the city, a point well noted by rugby followers: 'It was just football. It was football in the winter and cricket in the summer and that was it. Rugby wasn't something' (R33). Rugby union was also traditionally much more 'closed' to women spectators on the grounds of both gender and social class: there were very few opportunities for women to play rugby (see Chapter Five) and working class women in most parts of England were directed away from the sport by both its on-pitch roughness and its class exclusivity (see Chapter Seven).

Nearly half of my ‘middle aged’ and ‘older’ rugby respondents claimed that they knew more about football than rugby when they were younger, with some of these regularly watching football (usually but not always Leicester City) before only later becoming active rugby supporters (R14, R16, R18, R19, R20, R24, R26, R27, R33, R34). R19, for example, explained that watching Leicester City was: ‘The thing to do as teenagers [it] never entered my head to go to rugby, [I] didn’t know anything about rugby, I don’t remember any of the boys at school playing rugby’. R26 claimed that rugby players would not have been discussed in the same terms as footballers. Instead a number of my ‘older’ rugby respondents could still remember the ‘lost world’ of the old amateur days of the sport when crowds were sparse and popular media interest in club rugby was very limited indeed. How loyal was the current rugby fan base by comparison?

‘We’ve been to grounds, particularly Extras [reserves] matches...when there would be, like, 30 of us... Over the last, what ten years shall we say? I mean it’s taken off beyond all recognition. [...] Yeah, there’s been a big influx...I guess success breeds success, if they get success on the field then that gets more people interested and people like to be associated with a winning team...[Before] people went for the love of the game. [Now] we often say I wonder what would happen if we had a run of five or six defeats? Would you notice absences? *(R17, Age 55, STH, Long-term fan, Office Clerk)*

It is almost impossible to provide exact data on the numbers of spectators attending Leicester Tigers in the early post-war years. Records are unavailable or unreliable. However, the Tigers official website reports that the Welford Road capacity stood at 10,250 until 1995, and it was not until the 1970s that attendances slowly began to increase from a very low base: ‘At the start of the decade, the club had just 600-700 members and gates less than 1,000. By the end of the ‘70s, Tigers had reached their first cup final and the club was on its way towards a substantial period of growth’. When Tigers faced the select Barbarians side at its annual Christmas match spectator numbers increased from the ‘usual’ 750-2,000 in this period, to play in front of a packed house

(Leicester Tigers Website, accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2010). Nash (1993) links Leicester Tigers winning the knock-out John Player Cup three times in the late 1970s to the club's increasing support. This would also have coincided with rugby's early emergence as a TV sport. However, rugby was not transformed by television in the way that football was and it did not receive the same kind of media exposure. Although BBC TV's *Rugby Special* programme began to be broadcast to shadow football's *Match of the Day*, it was aimed at a small, niche market, being screened on Sunday afternoons rather than the prime time Saturday evening slot. Leicester City's post-war crowds reached over 40,000 at Filbert Street, and usually averaged between 20,000 and 30,000 in later periods, while rugby union in the city drew barely one-tenth of that number right up until the early 1980s.

Rather like post-war footballers from generations before, amateur rugby players pre-1995 were described by female rugby supporters as 'approachable', 'closer' and 'friendly' and it was claimed that there were more opportunities then to 'talk' or 'chat' to them compared with today (e.g. R13, R14, R17, R19, R23, R24, R25, R27, R29, R33). Here the move to professionalism had led to players becoming much more distanced, and the 'intimacy' with supporters had been substantially lost (R13). For example, R23 explained how new training and preparation regimes in rugby had taken players out of reach of fans and R29 argued that professionalism had brought entirely new values and commercial priorities into rugby:

'Compared to how it used to be, it was just a game where the players would be in the bar afterwards and you'd go in and chat to them. [Now] you don't see them because they're all whisked off to the corporate hospitality after the match. [...]. It's not as laissez faire as it used to be.' (R29, Age 56, *STH*, *Long-term fan*, *Equal Opportunities Manager*)



As with many professional footballers in the early 1950s, elite amateur rugby players, three decades later, were still argued to be locked into local community networks and bonds by the paid work they did inside the community, but away from sport: ‘They were doctors and they played rugby on a Saturday. Or they were builders and they played rugby on a Saturday’. R24 explained how Tigers players, ‘had a huge variety of jobs from being an RAF pilot to being a scaffolder’. R17 knew that scrum-half Aadel Kardooni was an accountant, international forward Richard Cockerill was an antiques restorer and front row man Darren Garforth had a scaffolding business. R13 recalled that future England World Cup-winning captain Martin Johnson worked in a bank when first playing at Leicester, and R25 noted that fellow international forward Dean Richards was a policeman. These were local sporting heroes but also ‘ordinary men’, as in Holt and Mason’s (2000: 122) description of post-war footballers. As R33 put it, ‘You were probably more likely to bump into them shopping than you are today’. Thus, like the football players of the post-war ‘golden’ era, these rugby players fell squarely into Critcher’s (1979) ‘traditional/located’ player group; they were still embedded within the local community even if their class status was very different from the round ball game.

The fact that rugby players were more likely to have been raised locally pre-1995 was also then connected by my respondents to issues of presumed loyalty. For example, R25 claimed this local connection once meant that players were ‘proud to put on a Tigers jersey’. Before professionalization, ‘Amateur players don’t get paid they just throw themselves into the game so there’s a passion about it’ (R10); they played for the ‘love of the sport’ (R5), and ‘not because of the money’ (R10). But in today’s global game, ‘How dedicated some of them are to the club I wouldn’t like to say...Whether the

loyalty is there the same, especially from players abroad, I don't know' (R25). Others voiced similar concerns about the new markets and mobility for rugby players:

'There are more players now than when it was amateur, because they used to play a match, go out, get drunk, go to work, and then, whether they were injured or not - unless it was something broken - they'd play again the next week. [...] It was like the same 20 players, week in, week out. Now you could see, like 30 different players over two weekends.' (*R1, Age 25, STH, Long-term fan, Principal Clerk*)

## *ii) Watching rugby union pre-1995: a 'relaxed' atmosphere?*

Respondents used terms such as 'relaxed', 'informal', and a 'family sort of atmosphere' (R17, R24, R29, R32) to describe the experience of watching Tigers at Welford Road pre-1995, and it seems there was a close knit (if highly gendered) 'club feel' for those who attended in this period, where 'wives and mothers used to go in and cook the meal for [players] after the game, and then you'd have volunteers working behind the bar' (R20). There was a presumed strong sense of 'ownership' of space and also considerable trust between supporters. For instance: 'Kids used to go off if they got a bit fed up and sort of kick a ball around at the other end where the Alliance and Leicester [Stand] is now' (R34, see also R29). 'You could just walk up to the turnstile and get in', so that people could sit where they wanted (R30, see also R9, R17, R23, R32, R33). But R17 explains how the increased pricing, new commercial emphasis and growing numbers of spectators has since produced a rather different atmosphere at Welford Road:

'Everybody used to get there quite early and all you had to do was lay your scarf on the seat and you'd go off to the bar, and then you'd come back and your scarf would still be there...I mean nowadays you have the season ticket [...]. That was a big change at the Tigers...once it became that you were either a Diamond or a Gold or a Silver or a Bronze [grades of ticket holder] then that became very different [...]. It wasn't as relaxed.' (*R17, Age 55, STH, Long-term fan, Office Clerk*)

Rugby union may have been a more middle class sport than football, but its amateur status and values, low prices and small crowds meant some very basic facilities - even compared to the local football ground Filbert Street. The ecology of Welford Road changed radically in the 1990s. For example, R25 states: 'Welford Road then was totally different because each end was a bank just made of earth, and that's where they used to stand, behind the goal'. At the half time interval - again stressing the informal, amateur ethos of the sport - players 'just had an orange on the pitch and carried on playing' (R28, see also R33), thus implying that there may not have been the same opportunities - or club imperative - for spectators to purchase refreshments. The notion that the players - like the sport itself - were somehow 'rougher' pre-1995 was also suggested by other respondents (e.g. R9, R17, R19, R30). Some enjoyed the fact that 'you'd see more fights' on the field, but today there is more emphasis upon civilized play and a greater safety for players:

'There's lots of things now that are classed as not acceptable that probably were acceptable in those days. [...]. I suppose from my memory it seemed a lot rougher. I think there's a lot more concern now with injury...they're conscious, there's the arms round the necks, things like that. That was all done all the while (*laughs*) and you didn't class that as dirty play - that was just rugby.' (**R30, Age 61, STH, Long-term fan, Retired- worked as Nursing Manager**)

Despite this more overt and sometimes illegal physicality, the amateur ethos of rugby union meant for its followers that it did not have the same 'win at all costs' mentality of the professional football. Here there were traces of the class superiority of rugby. However, a number of rugby respondents were not dewy eyed about the sport, suggesting that cheating - revealed most recently in the 'Bloodgate' scandal in 2009 at the famous London Harlequins club - has always been a part of the sport: 'If you could get away with it you would' (e.g. R17, R18, R24, R25, R29, R32, R33, R34). It was in

fact former Leicester player Dean Richards who was ruled by the European Rugby Cup (ERC) appeal committee to have had 'central control' over this incident and the subsequent cover up, and by orchestrating a fake blood injury to Harlequins wing Tom Williams, Richards was deemed to be prepared to 'cheat' by the ERC by bringing on a player who was not entitled to return (Gibson, 2009).

R18 argues that the advent of live television coverage and action replays for club rugby exposed certain longstanding illicit aspects of the sport. Leicester's Neil Back had cheated at a scrum in Leicester's 2002 Heineken Cup win and had been laid bare in the TV and press coverage which followed:

'Before it wasn't televised so you didn't see it, there wasn't all the replays and there was no television ref to call upon...things just happened [...]. I mean...had it not been for television you would never have known that Neil Back [Leicester player] had done what he did, you just wouldn't. The players would have probably shouted and said something, but as a supporter you just wouldn't have seen it.' (*R18, Age 47, STH, New fan, Scenes of Crime Officer*)

When describing experiences of watching rugby in earlier years, respondents generally did not draw upon shared iconic events or particular matches in the way that football fans typically had - indeed there were no national rugby union cup competitions in the UK until the 1970s and no leagues until the 1980s (see Chapter Three). The annual invitation Barbarians fixture on Boxing Day was the Tigers' 'game of the season' and R14 also recalled the London finals for the John Player Cup: 'And that was a big thing, to go on a nice trip to Twickenham so that we could actually hopefully win this trophy'. These Cup final fixtures for rugby union certainly did not quite capture the wider public imagination in the city as did a trip to Wembley for football, but they began to signal a new direction for English rugby as crowds swelled for cup fixtures. More general changes were also observed later as some of the clubs which Leicester Tigers played

regularly in earlier years ‘weren’t successful enough to make the transition’ (F24) and had ended up, in the commercial era, two or three divisions - and effectively in a different sport - below the financially powerful and professional Tigers.

## **6.4 Transformation of Football: From Local Heroes to National Celebrities**

### ***i) The Munich air disaster and female fans***

If the 1953 FA Cup final between Blackpool and Bolton was the first UK club football fixture to reach a mass television audience (Johnes and Mellor, 2006), it was the media coverage of the Munich air crash of 1958 which best illustrated how football was now increasingly followed and reported nationally; for instance, 11 out of 16 of my ‘older’ respondents had some personal memories of this extraordinary event (F36, F37, F38, F39, F40, F41, F42, F43, F47, F50, F51). Holt and Mason (2000: 99) describe how Matt Busby’s young Manchester United side went from ‘heroes’ to ‘martyrs’ when seven of the team were killed on 6 February 1958 when returning from a European Cup fixture. The sense of national loss and the conversion of the players and the United club into a national sporting cause echoed in accounts even from my respondents who were based in Leicester:

‘I remember that sort of made heroes of people that were just football players before in a way [...]. There was this sort of sentiment about those remaining football players, the whole country felt it would be brilliant if they won something after the disaster and of course they did. And that sort of elevated them into rather more than the mundane. Now they were like heroes [...]. And then of course the whole sort of press changed...there were always small papers and tabloids but the whole of the way football was treated became quite different.’ (F40, Age 64, *STH, Long-term fan, Community Social Worker*)

The Munich air crash touched all sports fans in England, but perhaps women supporters experienced this tragedy differently to men, and may have even been more affected by it. After all, the press coverage centred on issues of family and loss, and followed

personal narratives; F47 described how although football did not usually feature much in the non-sports media, the Munich air crash ‘covered the papers for more than a week I would think, and then into the funerals and then into [United manager] Matt Busby getting better in hospital’. My ‘older’ football respondents were clearly deeply moved by Munich and used terms such as ‘heartbreaking’, ‘shook up’, ‘awful’, ‘dreadful’, ‘a tragedy’, and ‘I won’t ever forget that’ to describe their feelings (e.g. F43, F47, F50, F51). After Munich, top players gradually started to move from being ‘ordinary guys’ and ‘local heroes’ to becoming ‘celebrities’. Munich may also have played a role in generating increased female interest in football throughout the country, especially given that some of my respondents who described their vivid memories of the event were not actually following football as active spectators at that time. Iconic events receiving mass media coverage were likely to be seen to signify social change in a society still mired in the privations of the aftermath of war (Marwick, 1990):

‘You’ve got to remember that late 40s, early 50s, was still sweet rationing... There was an awful lot of austerity post-war, it took a long time for the country to get back into sort of normal [...]. I suppose Manchester United and Busby, that era might have been something changing. And that awful plane crash, that seemed to sort of bring it into more profile. But up until then...sport wasn’t a priority. I mean everyone was just sort of licking their wounds really and trying to get back into normality’. (F39, Age 60, *STH*, *New fan*, *Chef*)

## *ii) A new Britain and a new football*

Goldthorpe *et al.*, (1969: 157) have described the alleged ‘embourgeoisement’ of the British working classes as Britain slowly recovered from war and entered into a period of rising aspirations. Home-centred consumption and improved living standards became an increasing feature of post-war Britain as car ownership and relative affluence spread. It was estimated that average earnings of industrial workers increased by more than 20% between 1951 and 1958. Holt and Mason (2000: 73) describe how by 1958 the

maximum wage for professional footballers had crawled to £20 in the season and £15 in the summer (plus potential bonuses for wins and draws), but only about 30 per cent of professionals received this figure. By this time the average weekly earnings of adult males in manufacturing was £15 a week. In 1958 Jimmy Hill became President of the renamed Professional Footballers' Association, and transformed the debate about players' wages (see Walvin, 2001). After PFA members threatened strike action it was finally agreed by clubs in January 1961 that the maximum player wage would be abolished. Complete freedom of contract would not arrive until 1978, although a new system finally negotiated in 1964 would help to vastly improve the players' situation (Russell 1997: 150).

As Britain became a more prosperous society from the late 1950s onwards, the best and most photogenic football players could now reap the benefits of that growth in consumerism and the rise in televised sport. It was the rapid diffusion of TV which would eventually help to make a small number of young footballers into rich men. F49 also linked this lifting of the maximum wage to football players distancing themselves from local communities; they had 'intermingled' with the people of the city, to a situation in which 'all of a sudden they started to move out of town...they always seemed to move to the south of the country where it was...a little more upmarket. So that's when it started, when they lived separately' (F49). Critcher (1979) divides post-war footballers into four analytical types:

- The 'traditional/located' group of the 1950s, who remained embedded in their working class communities.
- The 'traditional/mobile' group, who began to find acceptance in overtly middle class lifestyles.

- The ‘incorporated/embourgeoised’ group of small-scale entrepreneurs, who were incorporated into the ‘new’ middle class.
- The ‘superstars/dislocated’ group, who could not remain an ‘ordinary’ working class person but for whom incorporation was resisted or could not be attained.

Broadly speaking, and even as football crowds continued to fall, in two decades many top professional football players had moved from the ‘traditional/located’ group of the ‘golden’ era to the ‘incorporated/embourgeoised’ category, with a small number of its wayward stars being catapulted into the anomic ‘superstars/dislocated’ category. The lifting of the maximum wage had begun to change football but the World Cup held in England in 1966 also had a considerable impact on women as football fans and as players (Williams and Woodhouse, 1991). For some of my ‘older’ respondents the 1966 World Cup finals was the first time they had encountered football, and many remembered watching as part of a family experience in the home (e.g. F30, F34, F37, F41, F43). Finals such as this were authentic national occasions - football’s traditionally class and masculinist frame is relaxed temporarily at such moments and women and people from the higher social classes are invited to be involved as part of the national celebrations as club and class loyalties are temporarily subordinated. My respondents sensed this moment of relative national unity via sport and the temporary relaxation of the usually masculinist barriers to sport. Some used terms such as ‘everybody stopped in’, ‘the whole country was behind the team’, and ‘most football people were into it’, as well as the fact that ‘ordinary people that didn’t even know anything about football’ were involved (F37, F38, F40, F43, F47, F49). The victory prompted feelings of national unity perhaps not seen on this scale since 1953. For example, F49 described



how following England's win 'everybody' came onto the streets to talk about the triumph, and F47 described the mood of the country thus:

'Oh Jesus! Flags everywhere. Cars hooting...Everyone got into it, because it were England you see? Everybody were delighted. You couldn't even go down the shop and somebody would say "What did you think about that match?" "Oh yeah, it were brilliant" you used to say [...] England welcomed it really because it boosted us a bit. You know, it boosted everybody... It were just that it were the England flag, and you were flying it, and it was our country, and we'd won the World Cup. It was a fantastic time, a big achievement.' (F47, Age 78, *STH, Long-term fan, Retired- worked in sewing*)

The impact of television, combined with the World Cup win, signalled important changes in the game, including greater national celebrity status for some of its players. For F40: 'Certainly the World Cup I think promoted the idea of footballers as individuals, and players that were worth special regard for whatever reason, because we'd won something', and F49 argues that: '1966 made them stars in their own right'. Being able to follow players on BBC's *Match of the Day* highlights programme (from August 1964) meant that some women could admire these newly packaged and affluent players for their skills and ambitions, as well as their looks. By 1966, 81 per cent of British households had televisions, and this helped to transform the nature of sports stardom. The actions, words and - importantly here - the appearances of sports stars, 'attained a more generalised familiarity beyond the more narrow world of sports fandom. In particular, television shifted focus onto the face' (Whannel 2002: 34).

This was a key moment, recalled by F49, who remembers the social impact of players being interviewed on BBC's *Match of the Day* for the first time: 'You would see them. They are really talking as if they're in your living room. So you get to know them'. These star players were, 'a bit of alright and pleasing on the eye'. Other respondents also picked out attractive young male players for their looks and associations with new

youth styles after the austerity and reserve of the 1950s in which ‘the people in that same age group always look like that, with the partings and the flat hair’ (F41). The emergence of the teenager, who had their own tastes and leisure needs and who purchased products related to these activities (see Marwick 1998: 42), contributed to the new consumption of English football. Thus, Sandbrook (2006: 438) describes how it was ‘no accident’ that the male pop stars of the late fifties and early sixties were ‘good looking young men groomed to appeal to a female teenage audience’.

*iii) ‘Living large’: Leicester women’s experiences of 1960s and 1970’s celebrities in football*

Women more generally were now being encouraged to think about their own sexuality in much more explicit and personal ways. Marwick (1998: 18) for example, describes one of the characteristics of this so-called ‘unique era’ as: ‘permissiveness - that is to say, a general sexual liberation, entailing striking changes in public and private morals and...a new frankness, openness, and indeed honesty in personal relations and modes of expression’. This is rather sweeping and may be exaggerated, but the sense of sexual and personal liberation for women in the 1960s was also reflected in changes in legislation which allowed women easier access to abortion, contraceptives and divorce. In short, the sixties brought both a generational and gender shift and imported some of this new sex and glamour into English football:

*Res: Were the England players glamorous then? Were there any players women watching would have liked?*

F37: Oh yes, oh dear...Bobby Moore. He was always...yes. He was quite young I think. I think it was his blond hair. And in those days, they always used to have longer hair than what they have now. It was always more down the shoulders. And I’ll tell you what I do notice from those days to this...is the hair and also the shorts. In those days they were short, whereas now I mean they’re not. I mean you’ve only got to see old footage haven’t you? And you can see, God, yeah! Whatever next! And they used to sort of wear a jersey top and it

always looked tight. (*F37, Age 63, Occasional attendee, Returned fan, Retired-worked in a Factory*)

These changes were not absolute of course; some footballers - such as Ashington's Charlton brothers, Jack and Bobby, for example - continued to convey their older class and occupational roots. The young England captain Bobby Moore, on the other hand, was a different type of player and man, someone who clearly relished the new stylistic explorations of relative affluence and fame, and who often appeared alongside the charismatic, long-haired Northern Irishman George Best in fashion magazines and adverts. These new football stars signified, for some women fans at least, a society deeply in social and cultural transition during a period in which questions were generally being raised for women about issues of sexuality and potential liberation:

'Bobby Moore was handsome, blond, curly haired, looked fit. Whereas they [the Charltons] looked like the older style players somehow...They'd come up from a working class background. They'd been miners or children of miners and then got into football...Bobby Moore...he was definitely a different sort of player. And George Best certainly was. But that was when the whole of society was changing really...When I grew up, you dressed in what your mother wore. But then I was in that first bit when rock and roll was there and Elvis and you just wanted to dress differently. Younger people started to become individuals, you know, rather than clones of their parents. And that happened definitely from the '60s onwards.' (*F40, Age 64, STH, Long-term fan, Community Social Worker*)

Holt (1992: 316) describes how sportsmen - especially footballers - found an important place in the new 'youth culture' (which had in part resulted from rising real incomes, minimal unemployment and greater personal freedom). A number of my (mostly 'older') respondents were able to describe the extensive tabloid media coverage of George Best's antics during his football career, even if they were not following football at the time: 'We'd never heard anything like that before' (see F30, F36, F40, F41, F47, F51):

‘Everybody adored him. The way he played; he was just a magnificent player [...]. Bestie had the charisma. [Women] adored him, he had the good looks. He had everything. [...]. He had fantastic feet, he had a fantastic face. He was really good looking. He was every girl’s dream.’ (F47, Age 78, STH, Long-term fan, Retired- worked in Sewing)

‘I just thought he was absolutely stunning, he was so beautiful and such a good footballer. And you could get a real buzz from watching him. But if he hadn’t been a good footballer, it would have just been oh he’s a playboy, you know, I wouldn’t have admired him; it’s knowing he had the skill.’ (F40, Age 64, STH, Long-term fan, Community Social Worker)

This fusing of youth culture and football and these associated processes of extended media coverage and the ‘glamorisation’ of sport meant that although most of my respondents grew up in Leicester, they and other females often selected ‘glamour’ football clubs such as Tottenham Hotspur, Liverpool, Leeds United and Manchester United as ones to follow (e.g. R11, F19, F26, F27, F31, F34). Provincial Leicester had no one to quite match Best or the England World Cup winners in the mid-1960s. Indeed, Whannel (2002: 124, 45) describes how Best is often celebrated today by the ‘laddish’ cultural world of *Loaded* for a hedonism measured in the consumption of objects, the male culture of drinking and the objectification of women. He claims that sport heroes are often ‘self-sufficient’, without a need for women. But women fans such as F40 (above) also admired Best because of his skill as a player. Although Best can be viewed perhaps as a symbol of Connell’s (1995) ‘hegemonic masculinity’, his appeal seems somehow to stretch beyond the narrow realm of the masculine.

Leicester City players of these years were perceived locally to be somewhat glamorous, but also within reach. They were certainly less subject than are players today to public envy and media exposure. They ‘mingled’ and were ‘more approachable’ (F37). Unlike today, ‘ordinary people’ would still see upwardly mobile players in the local

neighbourhood, perhaps in a greengrocer's store or at a local school or else out drinking in the evening in accessible city bars and clubs (F23, F37). However, there was an increasingly glamorous 'aura' (F47) around this new generation of City players, which arguably stemmed partly from the capacity of the new manager Jimmy Bloomfield to recruit players from London in the 1970s to play in the rather unfashionable East Midlands. F49 explains why this was important for the image of the club:

'Then Jimmy Bloomfield became manager, and he started to bring the London footballers' in, Keith Weller and various other players...and they were celebrities because they'd come from London [...]. It was the London image; they brought the London image with them...And its "Keith Weller's playing for us" and all of a sudden it took on a new persona. And of course, when our Frank come, Frank Worthington I mean, well, I mean, he took us all up a notch didn't he? Because he lived large.' (F49, Age 70, STH, Long-term fan, Retired-worked as a Secretary)

Kennedy and Williams (2004: 169-170) report how players from the famous Liverpool teams of the 1970s and 1980s were banned from a number of local bars because of their heavy drinking and rowdy antics. Local sports reporters on Merseyside enjoyed these lively drinking sessions with famous players, so reported little of this deviant activity. At Leicester most players in this period would have been able to enjoy their drinking without worrying too much about the press. There was a greater trust between fans, journalists and players, in contrast to relationships today. But supporters *knew* stories about rising imported stars such as Keith Weller and Frank Worthington and the personalities or specific 'characters' of local players were admired and celebrated, both on the football pitch and beyond:

'Frank Worthington was a character....[be]cause he used to do Elvis impressions, and Keith Weller with his white leggings on (*laughs*). They were all characters of the game, which is missing now. [...] Worthington, I mean he always used to dress up...They'd all got sort of bright clothing on or something that you would really notice. Checked jackets or something like that...You'd

know them when you walked by them.’ (F38, Age 60, STH, Long-term fan, Retired- worked in Clerical)

Whannel (2002: 203) suggests that David Beckham’s media image - and the core of his celebrity - is anchorless and free-floating and that just one of the paradoxes in Beckham’s identity is his media portrayal as ‘ordinary’ yet ‘glamorous’. Much of the appeal of celebrities for fans is that they appear accessible, but yet still out of reach. Weller and ex-Huddersfield man Worthington - both England internationals while at Leicester - epitomised this seductive sense of being both unobtainably glamorous and dangerously sexualised and yet being immediately accessible in the 1970s. Worthington especially was a known womaniser whose autobiography was oafishly titled *One Hump or Two?* The deviant ‘soap opera’ for TV and press consumption which Premier League football has since become (see Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004) was actually played out informally in local settings in England throughout the 1970s. In this specifically local sense footballer’s WAGs (the wives and girlfriends of players) have actually been in existence for over 30 years:

‘It was just the same. I mean Frank Worthington’s wife was a Swedish girl...Gosh when Peter Shilton left Leicester there was all in the press [that] he’d left because his wife had been having an affair with Frank Worthington. [...] [But] nobody really looked at Frank Worthington’s girlfriend other than the fact that they always had the most beautiful women, that’s all. Not what they were wearing. But you always knew that it was the most gorgeous women about, that the top footballers would have.’ (F21, Age 46, STH, Long-term fan, Accounts Administrator)

But another ‘glamorous’ option, of a very different kind, now faced English football and it would impact directly on the experience of female supporters: the football hooligan was on the rise.

*iv) The Rise of Football Hooliganism - and the (fragmented) female response*

Walvin (2001: 156) notes that by the end of the 1960s fan behaviour at football in England was being discussed as a rising social problem and more serious incidents soon pitched rival groups of male hooligans against each other. Perhaps unsurprising then, football attendances fell once again during these years as older and more 'respectable' supporters began to desert the game (see Russell, 1997; Walvin, 1994; Holt and Mason, 2000). A new type of realism emerged around football in this period, bringing an end to the modernist optimism and collective solidarity of the 'golden era'. How did female supporters respond to the increasing visibility of these so-called 'troubled' masculinities? Some stopped attending matches altogether to return later, or were deterred from attending *because* of the violence (e.g. F35, F36, F39, F40, F51). For example, F40 stopped attending matches and resorted (like many others) to watching football on television:

'Going home after the match there would be running street battles almost, with crowds like surging forwards...Stuff was being lobbed about, it was really quite awful. [...] I thought, well, why I am putting myself through this? Being frightened to go somewhere...it was not nice, I thought this is supposed to be a sport, we're supposed to enjoy this. Why is it so horrible? [...] And it got really, really difficult and I thought I'm just not willing to put up with this, you know. And I just stopped going.' (*F40, Age 64, STH, Long-term fan, Community Social Worker*)

Many respondents who continued to attend recall instances where they felt afraid and concerned for their own safety. F38 was hurt when a miniature bottle hit her on the head at a match, and both F21 and F51 remembered the 'running riots' outside grounds, and people being pushed into the River Trent at a local derby match against Nottingham Forest. F21 experienced both police and fan violence whilst watching England in the European Championships in 1980. Walvin (1994, 2001) notes that in the 1970s and 1980s the media provided the sort of publicity which hooligan gangs enjoyed, and F37

also argued that: ‘There was too much media coverage, that’s what people liked about it. They got themselves in the papers and on the television’. F41 noted how hooliganism swamped the culture: ‘It took over from football; it was more in the news than the football’. The impact this sort of media coverage had on many women can be especially seen from F11’s experiences:

‘I was scared of going to Filbert Street [City’s old stadium] because most of what you see in the media about football is the hooliganism...I thought if I went down there, I’d get beaten up. So it was only after being reassured by various people who went, and also the comfort of going down there with a bloke that’s a bit hard, that I thought I’ll probably be quite safe.’ (F11, Age 28, *Occasional attendee, New fan, Shop Assistant*)

A range of terms were used to express feelings of anxiety by those who attended matches during these years including: ‘nasty’, ‘wary’, ‘dangerous’, ‘scary’, ‘frightening’, ‘nervous’, ‘horrid’, ‘intimidating’, and ‘awful’ (F20, F21, F22, F26, F28, F31, F32, F34, F38, F41, F43, F44). But some women continued attending because they always felt ‘safe’. For instance, F22 states ‘I’ve never ever felt intimidated or been involved or seen any trouble, all those years, never’ and others claimed that if they had experienced ‘trouble’ this was on a very small number of occasions (F17, F23, F26, F32). For others, gender offered its own protection. F41 and F47 recalled, for example, how they were advised not to go to matches because it was ‘dangerous’. But this supposed ‘unsafe’ space for women was actually safer than many imagined:

‘For a single woman to go on her own would be like “Are you sure? It’s a bit violent, aren’t you scared you’ll get your head kicked in?” But I think *because (my emphasis)* you are a female, I think away fans wouldn’t have bothered you anyway to be honest, so I think you were relatively safe.’ (F17, Age 35, *Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Sales Manager*)



Many respondents felt that being female generally meant that they would not be the target of violence, and if their safety was threatened, male City supporters would offer protection (F17, F28, F38, F41). F28 described how 'If something cracked off, you weren't on your own....There was like an unspoken thing. Women supporting our team...you'd be protected...You kind of got "they're ours, we'll look after you"'. From an international perspective, Cere (2003) and Rodriguez (2005) also give examples of this 'unwritten' code, that when violence threatens male supporters will defend female fans of their own club. But strategies were also adopted by females explicitly to avoid violence. Cognitive maps around sport have typically been assumed to be a male trope - but these data show that female fans also became 'street wise' and 'learned where an incident could arise; you knew very easily how to avoid it' (F21). This involved avoiding 'hot' areas inside and outside the stadium and generally, keeping a 'low profile' (e.g. F20, F21, F34, F37, F38, F41, F47, F48, F49). Some respondents continue to adopt this safety-first approach today in the so-called post-hooligan era.

Although the perpetrators of hooliganism in the UK are widely assumed to be male (e.g. Holt, 1992; Russell, 1997; Walvin, 2001) it is clear that there were some women supporters who actually enjoyed going to football matches *because* of the basic facilities and the potential dangers then associated with the sport. For example, F21 and F26 found the crowd 'surges' associated with standing 'exciting' as well as 'scary'. Hooliganism and crowd violence was also viewed by some as 'exciting':

'I think I liked all that hooliganism. I liked it when people...I'm awful really.... [be]cause I liked it when people were ripping seats up. You know, as a teenager it was really exciting. [...] I went to see Leicester play at Villa once...He [friend] said if you're asked where you come from, say you come from Leamington Spa, you could definitely be a Villa fan if you came from Leamington Spa. And that was kind of scary, but there's something thrilling about it as well. (F23, Age 48, *STH, Long-term fan, Teacher*)

In a small number of cases, female fans claimed that they had directly participated in fan violence. According to F24, for example, the hooligan years ‘were great days’ and she was ‘one of the thug element’, one of the very few females to be directly involved in hooliganism, which itself accentuated her sense of ‘belonging’:

F24: Being involved in it [hooliganism] was quite good yeah, I really enjoyed it. And people say “How can you say that?” But I did, I really looked forward to it, it was just such a good adrenaline rush..... Before the game we used to meet somewhere, obviously in a pub, and then about 40 of us would walk up to the ground, and then you’d get their fans coming from the station or off the buses, and then there used to be a bit of a scuffle, and then we’d chase them and they chase us, and perhaps some bricks were thrown or whatever. And then the police would find out where we were and split us up and that.

*Res: Were you ever scared?*

F24: No, no, oh no...I mean it wasn’t a good thing, but I did enjoy it, I felt part of everything that was going on, I was one of those that was you know, “Did you hear who got arrested?”...That’s how it was, and the write up in the paper to see who got the most arrested, “Oh well, at least we beat ’em at that, even if we didn’t beat ’em at the game!” (*laughs*).  
**(F24, Age 51, Member, Returned fan, Production Operative)**

F33 also appeared keen to demonstrate what we might describe as her ‘masculinist’ credentials at football: ‘I’m hard as nails. So if anybody started anything near me [at football] that deserved a smack in the teeth, they’d get one’. When hit by coins at matches she claimed: ‘I don’t take no notice. I put it in my 2p jar, I do’. Female respondents who were willing to take part in a football fight should the situation arise were in the minority of course, and many more were deterred from attending football because of fan misbehaviour. Yet these few examples do challenge ideas that hooliganism is always a male-only activity and that it is never enjoyed by non-hooligan fans. In rugby union, meanwhile, there were concerns other than hooliganism to confront.

## 6.5 The Transformation of Club Rugby: From 'Barrels' to 'Washboard Stomachs'

Traditionally, the staunchly amateur ethos in rugby union had been strongly opposed and resistant to the sort of celebrity culture that began to develop in football from the mid-1960s. But since the professionalization of rugby, the cult of celebrity is becoming increasingly part of the new media coverage of rugby on satellite TV:

'Sky [Sports] have the *Rugby Club*, which is like the rugby version of *Match of the Day*, and they do have interviews with the players each week, so they [the players] are more apparent than they used to be. Because I think in the good old days you had one good looking back and then everyone else had got cauliflower ears and no neck and they didn't perhaps want to be in the media spotlight. So it's more noticeable...they're not as bad as footballers...but there are those that like the media side of it.' (R1, Age 25, STH, Long-term fan, Principal Clerk)

The lifestyles and profiles of 1970's club rugby union players featured little in the media - few players would have had the appropriate class background, the looks or the media profile to propel them into any sort of local or national celebrity status. Rugby union has its class and spatial restraints and most rugby players were not typically on the same sort of local social circuits as footballers and they offered rather different kind of attractions to the typical female fans of rugby - a different body capital - than those offered by footballers in the 1970s and 1980s. Their involvement as key figures at local nightclubs, for example, was not at all a prominent feature in the interviews with female rugby fans - who may not have been nightclub goers either. But female rugby fans who followed the sport pre-1995 did claim that there had always been attractive players or 'eye candy' for women in rugby, even if these players were not celebrity stars (R13, R14, R15, R20, R25, R29, R30, R32, R33, R34). For example: 'There was good looking guys, and there are good looking guys now' (R14); 'There were some fantastic rugby players and, yes, you would have crushes on them' (R15) or 'They were a bit of a hunk; muscley blokes' (R30).

R21 and R26 claim that it was only international players that most rugby supporters would have recognized in this period. The hulking forwards were ‘more brute force than beauty’ but at Leicester the international England centre partnership of the amateur era, Paul Dodge and Clive Woodward (later, England coach), were among the early ‘glamour boys’ (R25 see also R13, R14). These were the creative players, the romantic sinewy runners in an often hectically violent sport. Full back Dusty Hare (R14) was another who represented both Tigers and England, as did the flying wingers the RAF men the Underwood brothers (Rory and Tony) and policeman forward Dean Richards (R20, R30, R34). The annual televising by the BBC of the Five Nations championships (between the home nations, France and Ireland) was then the only regular live TV exposure for rugby, whose players often trained spasmodically and drank prodigiously and lacked the sort of athletic fitness and professionalism demanded of footballers. In England, playing senior rugby remained largely the preserve of the higher classes, the self-employed and young men who had careers outside the game which allowed them, because of the prestige involved, to pursue sporting excellence alongside ‘full-time’ work. In working class South Wales and in the south of France the game was officially amateur, but informally was rather less regimented than that.

As a consequence of all this, the rise in celebrity status for rugby players in England was largely delayed until after 1995. Rugby respondents noted how, after that date, the senior players became much fitter, and consequently more attractive for female fans (R1, R13, R17, R19, R20, R23, R24, R25, R26, R29, R30, R34). Many rugby union players had full time jobs pre-1995 so would have been unable to ‘train properly’ (R24) and their sporting body capital was relatively low. Now with salaries available, young middle class men could delay a career choice to train and play professionally for a few

years or even opt for chasing a full time job in sport for the whole of their working lives. For R26, the more ‘disciplined’ and well prepared players of today are shown by changes in the typical rugby player physique. Many players now had ‘washboard stomachs and lovely legs’. These changes, which had led to a stricter diet for players (e.g. R20, R25), an end to players ‘in the bar afterwards downing ten pints of beer’ (R29), and perhaps even to the severing of previously intensive player ties to the local community, were often viewed as ‘progress’ (R34). For R13, for example, the rugby of today ‘is obviously more exciting; it’s a lot higher standard of play, so it is better to watch’. Others noted how the higher standards of play could not be sustained without the intensive training involved, and consequently the ‘intensity of the game on the pitch’ has improved (R19, R20). An illustration of this is in R1’s description of how players are now ‘faster, harder, leaner, stronger’ in a sport in which no winger would be willing to ‘wait five minutes for you to catch up’. Extended coverage of club rugby on satellite TV and magazine coverage of the sport’s new stars could also highlight some of the class and educational differences between players in the two codes. Rugby union’s first superstar - England’s brushed up and obsessive Jonny Wilkinson - was a very different media product than football’s global icon David Beckham.

The ‘glamorisation’ of some rugby players and their new celebrity status would inevitably lead to new types of relations between female fans and players. Despite the wage cap, players could now make a career out of playing rugby, theoretically opening the sport up to a broader spectrum of social classes (see Chapter Seven). Although the local ties of players may not have been severed to the same extreme as in football post-1992, rugby players were undoubtedly more geographically mobile than in the pre-professional era. But many respondents claimed that rugby players continued to be

‘approachable’ and that it was still possible to have personal contact with them (R14, R17, R24, R25, R33). The possibility of losing this relationship with players had (mistakenly) been a concern for some when the sport had professionalized:

‘When they turned professional I thought they’d be more like the footballers, with the ‘us and them’. But it’s not like that; I don’t see it like that. I just think they’re just as approachable as they were then [...]. They’re all really nice. If you meet them in the street they’ll speak to you and stuff.’ (**R33, Age 57, STH, Long-term fan, Computer Supervisor**)

These players seem to have more in common with the football players immediately after football’s ‘golden’ era, and especially the City players of the 1970s. The lucrative marketing deals for the more attractive rugby union players has propelled a small number into sexualised celebrity stars who arguably, like the City players of the 1970s, have the appeal of being ‘glamorous’ yet accessible. Some respondents were fearful that lifting the wage cap in rugby union would lead to players becoming like today’s footballers - a part of Critcher’s (1979) ‘superstars/dislocated’ group - although in this case they would perhaps lose their upper middle class roots in taking on a ‘celebrity’ identity. Thus, perhaps rugby players will move more towards footballers post-1992 as the sport becomes more media saturated and money driven? For now, it seems that rugby men can be ‘pin up’ boys and ‘located’ (Critcher, 1979) heroes for female supporters.

## **6.6 The Rise of Women Spectators at Rugby Union and Football**

How have the very different trajectories in the development of these two sports in one city impacted in terms of attracting new female spectators? Nearly eight-out-of-ten (78.4%) of football respondents claim that the numbers of women fans at football has *increased* in recent years (see Table 6.1). A survey in 2001 found that Leicester City

had the highest proportion of female season ticket holders in the Premier League - at 26% (Williams, 2001). Surveys have also shown the average number of female fans to have steadily increased to around 15% of all Premier League fans (Williams, 2001).

**Table 6.1: Football fans' views on the numbers of female fans at matches today**

	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	Data unavailable
'Younger' (N = 10)	7 70%	1 10%	0 0%	2 20%
'Middle aged' (N = 25)	19 76%	0 0%	0 0%	6 24%
'Older' (N = 16)	14 87.5%	0 0%	0 0%	2 12.5%
<b>Total (N = 51)</b>	<b>78.4%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>19.6%</b>

In 2003 it was also found that Leicester Tigers had the highest number of female fans in Premier Rugby - 28% compared to the 21% national average (Williams, 2003). A large proportion of the rugby union respondents also felt that recent changes had attracted more women to rugby matches today (see Table 6.2). Leicester, it is clear, has an unusually strong female sports audience.

**Table 6.2: Rugby fans' views on the numbers of female fans at matches today**

	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	Data unavailable
'Younger' (N = 12)	10 83.3%	2 16.7%	0 0%	0 0%
'Middle aged' (N = 10)	7 70%	2 20%	0 0%	1 10%
'Older' (N = 12)	10 83.3%	1 8.3%	0 0%	1 8.3%
<b>Total (N = 34)</b>	<b>79.4%</b>	<b>14.7%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>5.9%</b>

If these perceptions are reasonable - and the survey data seems to back them up - why has the proportion of active female fans at these sports in Leicester and elsewhere increased so markedly? In Chapter Five I discussed the alleged relative increased power of women to make choices in the leisure sphere as a key factor in the rising number of female fans, but other explanations were also put forward. Certainly, conventional ideas about sport and gender have changed, as have notions of gender appropriate behaviour more generally. As F50 puts it: 'Females were more female then'. Other respondents commented on how in the past, 'Girls weren't supposed to like football...we were expected to be ladies', or it was not the 'done thing' for women to watch the 'manly sport' of rugby (e.g. F5, F8, F20, F27, F28, F34, F36, F39, F40, F41, F46, F50 and R11, R15, R23). The world had since changed, but the notion that involvement in these sports - even as spectators - somehow served to reinforce conventional masculinities, whereas it normatively undermined femininity, was still apparent even for some of the 'younger' generation of female sports fans who argued that gender/sport correspondences were still established very early on:

'Lads, when they're at primary school, everyone plays football...Then you choose your football team you want to support. I think that's when lads start getting their identity, "I support Manchester United", "I support Leicester", that's when they get to do it [...]. But I still think women and girls have got this thing about not liking football'. (*F2, Age 23, STH, Long-term fan, Accounts Manager*)

The typical 'tomboy' labelling (which may also have extended to questions surrounding sexuality) associated with girls enjoying 'masculine' team sports in school traditionally led some parents to take active measures to prevent their daughters' involvement in sport, even as fans. F51 explained how she had been brought up by 'Victorian' parents, hence her mother was opposed to her watching football. F20 discussed how a cherished daughter watching football 'concerned' her mother, who



encouraged her to dress in more ‘feminine’ clothing. Parallels can be drawn here perhaps with studies which show how female athletes have been pressed to demonstrate their ‘femininity’ and confirm their heterosexuality through appropriate dress and hair comportment (e.g. Cahn, 1994; Cox and Thompson, 2000; Kay and Welford, 2007). For the mother of F20, football support had certainly raised some very difficult questions:

‘Her daughter, who’d been what she would class as very well brought up, what the Dickens did she want to go to Middlesbrough for on a Wednesday night with a load of blokes? Why the Dickens was she watching football?... I can remember her saying to my dad “Why did you ever take her down [to football] ?”[...] I think she did start to wonder when I kept buying the shell suits and the shirts and things. “Well why don’t you wear *girl* (her emphasis) clothes?” “Why don’t you wear something more ladylike?”’ (*F21, age 46, STH, Long-term, fan, Accounts Administrator*)

A common theme amongst both football and rugby respondents was how these increasingly media driven sports have publicly become much more ‘family orientated’ in recent years, and that this, in turn, had led to a higher female attendance. Much of this was a marketing gloss, but some rugby fans argued that professionalism in rugby union, with salaries to pay and books to be balanced, had meant the sport had been forced to market itself to a much wider range of people (including women) than had been necessary in the past:

‘I think Tigers when it professionalized, it was very aware of selling itself because it’s got to make the money, whereas when it was amateur days you didn’t have to worry so much about getting the money in. Tigers was one of the most prepared clubs to go professional...It’s not just about pulling in the old faithful ones that have been there for the last 60 years. You’ve got to pull in the families.’ (*R3, Age 26, STH, Long-term fan, Charity Worker*)

This alleged targeting of ‘the family’ by a sport marketed for TV was raised by both rugby and football respondents as a central feature of the new media/commercial era of spectator sport. R13 suggested that Tigers now ‘consciously try to appeal to a wider

range of people', an approach which had obvious gender implications. Thus, it was claimed, sports clubs had moved on from targeting 'dads and lads' and were now actively 'encouraging women' to attend (e.g. F4, F12, F16, F22, F27, F28, F32, F46 and R5, R6, R30, R33). Some proposed that the increasing numbers of women may be accompanied by children (who often played the sport themselves) and/or spouses - usually in the case of rugby fans - as part of this late-modern 'family day' of leisure (F6, F14, F17, F20, F21, F29, F34, F38, F39, F40, F44 and R13, R24, R28, R29). But for some football fans, especially, these changes in fan demographics went beyond a simple gender shift; they heralded instead a new era of middle class consumption, or even the 'bourgeoisification' of sport (Crawford and Gosling, 2004):

'I think it's not just women. I think there are different classes of people going down...You hear a lot of different accents when you go to football. A lot of working class young people still go, but so do [the] middle class. There's a whole mix of people now, so it's a bigger change than just women going, though that's helped women I think because that sort of macho, male, aggressive thing is quite a turn off really.' (F40, Age 64, STH, Long-term fan, Community Social Worker)

This new 'family orientated', and supposedly 'female friendly' atmosphere at *football* has only been possible following the major transformations in the sport post-1989 (see Chapter Three). Football respondents from all generations cited the new stadium emphasis upon safety as one possible explanation for the increasing numbers of women attendees, and this was also often associated with the decline of stadium hooliganism (e.g. F5, F9, F10, F11, F12, F15, F17, F18, F23, F27, F28, F31, F34, F36, F38, F42, F47). The improved facilities at football grounds - the Filbert Street to the Walkers Stadium switch - for example, were also proposed as a possible reason for the increasing numbers of female spectators (e.g. F15, F16, F20, F21, F23, F27, F42, F44). Only one rugby respondent claimed improved facilities may have played a role in

increasing numbers of women attending *rugby* matches (R7). The Welford Road facilities had simply not been transformed in the same way (see Chapter Seven).

Williams (1999) has described how supporters of 'new' football claim that the more 'civilized' climate in grounds has helped the sport overcome problems of hooliganism and racism, and - as argued by some of my respondents - helped attract more females to matches. But not all women fans agreed these were changes for good. F14, for example, echoes Armstrong and Young's (2000: 177, 205) criticisms of the alleged recent 'blandification' of the game:

'I think they're trying to recruit supporters and not giving any consideration to the ones that have been there through thick and thin. And I know you've gotta get kids into the game, but not at the expense of the adults that wanna sit with adults [in the Kop] and pay full ticket prices...Come in, come in and it's like no don't do that, [be]cause you're ruining it for everybody.' (**F14, Age 37, *STH, Returned fan, Tenancy Support Worker***)

For some women, the new 'family' environment at football has been to the detriment of the overall 'atmosphere' at football grounds. As F20 put it: 'It's not really the families that make the noise'. Evidence historically suggests that not all female sports fans want to sit (Woodhouse, 1991) and surprisingly, perhaps, a substantial number of female football fans were in favour of bringing back limited standing areas (e.g. F10, F14, F15, F17, F22, F24, F25, F30, F32, F33, F41, F43, F49) because the introduction of seating has led to football stadia becoming too 'controlling' (F10, F14). These fans, like many men, had typically enjoyed the 'freedom' and mobility that came with standing which, it was argued, added to the overall experience of watching football - it was said to produce 'more of an atmosphere' (F30, see also F10), with 'more energy' (F33). In a similar way that moving grounds or demolishing old stands had produced allegedly sterile, modern, rationalised 'non places' which are cold and anonymous (Canter *et al.*,

1989; Duke, 1994), so the introduction of all-seater stadia may also have played a role in standardizing matchdays and cutting the crucial sensory experience of live attendance:

*Res: Was this all part of the experience then? Standing up? Being cold?*

F17: Yeah, absolutely...Now the games just seem to merge into one another; you maybe feel cold but it's not something that's really vivid in your mind. I don't think it gives you any vivid memories like it did then because I think now all you experience is what you're watching. But then you experienced what you were *feeling*, so it appealed to different parts of your senses. Now all you do is you're just looking with your eyes. You can't hear any atmosphere, you can't feel any cold, whereas then you'd got your touch, you'd got your hearing, you'd got your sight. **(F17, Age 35, Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Sales Manager)**

Finally, a number of my respondents discussed how television coverage and/or 'celebrity' players were contributing towards generating new female interest in sport. Holt and Mason (2000: 94) suggest the contemporary media has helped turn sport into 'male soap opera'. A number of respondents from both sports suggested that television had indeed 'opened sport up' for women in recent years - made it accessible and more attractive in its presentational styles and focus on personalities (F6, F15, F17, F30, F38, F46, F48, F50, F51 and R1, R7, R10, R14, R17, R19, R32). Rugby fans argued that a combination of new 'celebrity' players which had enhanced the 'profile of rugby' and the 'player appeal' (R7), emerging from the associated move to professional rugby, and the influence of television, had together brought new women to the sport. These were supporters who may go on to become knowledgeable about its core features:

'There's a huge amount of television coverage now then there ever was. You know, you would get one game a year, the John Player Cup, and you would get the internationals on the TV, and that would be it... Now... obviously with Sky you know, you've got this weekend full, Friday night to Sunday night solid...It was the popularity of the game and the awareness raising of the game that obviously has brought them [women] into it.' **(R14, Age 45, STH, Long-term fan, Learning Mentor)**

‘The pin ups, the Johnny Wilkinson’s and that sort of thing, it might get women interested to start with, and hopefully they get interested in the game then and not just... *(laughs)*.’ **(R13, Age 42, STH, Long-term fan, Housewife)**

Some football respondents also claimed that ‘celebrity’ players might have had a role in popularizing football for some women and the possible role of the so-called football WAGS (wives and girlfriends of players) was rather more prominent in this respect for the football respondents:

‘There is a lot of the glamour side of it put on when you see it on the television, what with the WAG’s and so on. Perhaps that gets ladies more interested to begin with? But I still think if you go to a football match you’ve got to be interested in football, you can’t just go for whatever glamour there is in it.’ **(F27, Age 56, Member, New fan, Sales Assistant)**

Whannel (2002: 207), in relation to Beckham, claims that it would be hard to identify other sporting stars ‘whose fame has so specifically spread into the largely sports free world of publishing aimed at women’. He attributes this largely - and perhaps unfairly - to Beckham’s marriage to ex-Spice Girl Victoria Adams. The increased media profile of football (and perhaps rugby union) beyond the sports pages and into the magazine circuit and gossip columns has apparently meant it is almost like a ‘fashion thing’ (F18) to be interested in the sport, and that some women might think they ‘look cool’ (F4) for being involved. As F19 put it: ‘It’s much more a media circus, isn’t it, for footballers these days? They’re celebrities, they’re not just footballers, so their whole life is of interest to people’. She abhorred the new ‘sensationalistic’ reporting of footballers, whose ‘celebrity’ lifestyle is constantly in the public spotlight (see Walvin, 2001). Not all women, as we have seen, agreed.

## 6.7 Summary

Much material is available on men's experiences of sports fandom and their interpretations of iconic events, but this chapter has examined how *women* have experienced sport as a changing cultural product - from the post-war period through to major transformations of football and rugby union in the 1990s. It is likely that both male and female fans will be nostalgic when discussing their sporting history memories, but these data, uniquely reveal a female perspective on early sporting memories. Themes such as 'belonging' and 'togetherness' were important during football and rugby union's so-called 'golden' eras for female supporters, in a way that might be more expected for male fans. Female fans also experienced a sense of 'ownership' of local male sports players, who were relatively integrated into the local community.

However, experiences around the Munich air crash and hooliganism in football, and the onset of professionalism in rugby union suggest that female fans might have different perspectives and interpretations of events to male fans. This is perhaps especially apparent in the rise of the 'celebrity' player. In football, the lifting of the maximum wage led to the greater sexualisation and glamorisation of players, in an era when women were arguably beginning to be sexually liberated. But it would be the changes in the sport post-1992 which led to elite players becoming culturally and socially detached from the 'ordinary' people.

For rugby union, professionalism in 1995 brought a new 'type' of sexualised player; though for both sports respondents discussed heterosexually attractive players, even back in the 'golden' eras. Thus, women's experiences cannot simply be incorporated into mainstream, male oral history accounts - differences between male and female

interpretations and experiences of events are also crucial when seeking to 'add' women to the existing literature on sports history and fandom. Perhaps most importantly, in this context, male fans have not encountered the same barriers and obstacles to their involvement in sport. This issue was also discussed in Chapter Five in terms of women's access to playing traditionally male-defined sports. In the next chapter I move on to look at female experiences of the sport/space axis.

## **Chapter 7**

# **Sports Fandom, Women and a Sense of Place**

## **7.1 Introduction**

Applying the principles of Glaser and Strauss's 'grounded theory', one of the key sub-issues that *emerged* during data analysis was the extent to which sport fosters a positive 'sense of place' for female fans and the differences between football and rugby union fans in this respect. Thus, this chapter begins by examining the importance of place for female sports fans, and also the nature of women's attachment to the local sports club and stadium. I then move on to consider some of the core features of the rivalry between the football and rugby union codes and how this is reflected specifically in perceptions and relations between female fans in Leicester. I conclude by examining women's views on fan behaviour and sporting 'atmosphere'.

## **7.2 Space and Place: Female Sports Fandom and the Late-modern City**

### ***i) Localism and fandom***

Sports fan surveys have revealed that, even in an era of globalisation, localism is still an important factor in determining sports club support (Williams, 2001). For example, recent surveys of football crowds show that around 70% of all Premier League fans were born within 20 miles of their club's home ground (at Leicester City in 2000 this figure was 74%). Around 25% lived within five miles of their club's ground, and 64% within 20 miles (see Williams, 2000, 2001). There has been rather less research on rugby union supporters, though the national Premiership Rugby Survey in 2003 indicated that most rugby union fans tend to live only slightly further from the club's home ground than do football fans. The average distance travelled to home games for



all Premiership rugby fans was 24 miles; at Leicester Tigers this figure rose to 27 miles (Williams, 2003).

80% (41/51) of my female football fan sample was born in Leicester and 65% (22/34) of rugby supporters were locally born. Of the 26% of all female respondents who were not born locally, all except one had family or other ties to the city. Only four respondents from my sample travelled over 50 miles to home matches. Despite these strong local links something of a gendered binary seems to have been opened up in recent research between so-called 'traditional' (male) and 'new' (female) sports fans. For Nash's (2000) 'new fandom' group it is suggested that new (typically female) fans do not have the same local ties as 'traditional' fans - theirs is a weaker identification with the club and so they do not have the same intensive connection to the sport as the local (male) fans. Some of my female football and rugby respondents might beg to differ:

'I've lived here all my life. Dad's from Knighton, mum's from Loughborough... I wouldn't dream of supporting anyone else apart from Leicester.' (F2)

'I'm just a big believer in, if you come from somewhere then that's the team that you should support... It's definitely that sense of "I come from Leicester and therefore I'm a true Leicester fan."' (F17)

'I'm Leicester born and bred. And I'm a Leicester City supporter no matter what. Leicester's me.' (F47)

'You should always support your local team.' (R5)

'I'd certainly pick Tigers over any other team because they're local to me, regardless of whether they were doing well or not, they're the local team.' (R12).

Coddington (1997: 74-75) has argued that this intense promotion and celebration of localism in football supporter cultures can serve to exclude women (as well as ethnic

minorities) as 'authentic' fans. Giulianotti and Armstrong (1997: 7) claim that football ferments antagonisms between males in what Bromberger (1993) calls 'ritualised warfare'. But for many of my respondents this usually symbolic 'warfare' against the 'other' - against rival fans or those who were simply not a part of their city through sport - was certainly not gender-specific:

'It's the thing that actually does come through in women as well, it's a territorial thing. It's Leicester and that's my home and that's my club, and never the twain shall meet with somebody else who doesn't... It's Leicester; Leicester's my home town, Leicester's my team and I want them to do well at whatever sport it is they're doing. Because it's part of me.' (F21, Age 46, *STH*, *Long-term fan, Accounts Administrator*)

At present, Leicester Tigers might well have a wider fan base than the football club, so the relationship between locality and strength of support was not a straightforward one in rugby. Interestingly, a small number of rugby fans asserted that their own 'local' attachment was much more to the shires - to the *county* of Leicestershire, where they lived - rather than to the city where the Tigers played. In such accounts - which had obvious social class, as well as spatial and possibly gender implications too - connections usually drawn between spectator sport, community identities and urban space came strongly under fire. These issues effectively 'loosened' aspects of the impact of traditional forms of urban localism in British sport. As R15 put it: 'I love Leicestershire...I hate Leicester city centre but I love Leicestershire'. R18 expressed similar views:

'I don't feel as though I've got an allegiance to Leicester, the city. I don't equate the city itself with Leicester Tigers so much; Leicester Tigers for me is *Leicestershire* Tigers, if that makes any sense. Not the city...I live in Leicestershire and Leicester Tigers play for...they're not just playing for the city, they're playing for Leicestershire...Like the cricket, it's *county* cricket, it's not the city cricket, and I think that in a similar way to the rugby it's more county wide than the city.' (R18, Age 47, *originally from Lutterworth, STH, New fan, Scenes of Crime Officer*)

Giulianotti (2005) in research on Scottish football fans found regular supporters disparaged 'glory hunters' who followed clubs because of their success. For female *football* supporters in my sample, the Leicester Tigers equivalent in football - a commercially powerful club with county and national appeal and also plenty of detractors - is Manchester United and its television focused, 'glory hunter' following: 'We don't really call Man U fans 'fans', cos they're not really. To me if you don't go, you're not a supporter. Just glory supporters they are' (F33). In the late-modern era of increased mobility, fragmented identities and processes of de-traditionalisation and globalization (Bauman, 1998, 2000; Heelas *et al.*, 1996), local sport can still anchor its supporters, in place terms. So F21 asks, rhetorically, 'How can you have an affinity with something that's not yours?', and suggests that the local club is 'Part of me'. Similarly, F31 says: 'I couldn't be somebody who lived in Leicester and then went to watch Man United. I'd sooner support the team where I come from. It's growing up here, it's my home town and I think it made me...it's a part of me'.

With these sentiments in mind, and drawing on Giulianotti's (2002) taxonomy of spectator identities in football, these sorts of local respondents epitomise his 'traditional/hot' fans category. 'Glory supporters' are instead 'cool/consumer' spectators (less committed high spending fans) or else 'flâneurs' (who can switch allegiances between clubs) or 'traditional/cool 'followers' (reserved, low spenders). Giulianotti (2002: 34) suggests that some of those in the 'hot' supporters group will seek to perform and display variants of subcultural capital in an attempt to authenticate their support and claim greater status over fellow supporters.

Similarly, my own female respondents - especially the football fans - claimed considerable distinction and superiority as 'authentic' fans over 'glory supporters' who they perceive to be inauthentic hangers-on; 'flâneurs' or contingent 'followers' for whom the necessary suffering of fandom is ruled out of court and the electronic media plays a (too) key role in establishing their identification with a club. There was a more general insistence amongst my football, rather than rugby, respondents that if you did not follow your *local* club you could not really be regarded as a 'real' club fan at all. There was also obviously sensitivity among some Tigers' fans that this same charge might well be levelled at them:

'I can't be doing with these people, the glory supporters; it bugs the hell out of me. If you're from a certain place, you support your local team...I've got people I work with that are all Man United fans, Arsenal fans, Chelsea fans, I'm like "Why?"... Try being a Leicester fan, its hard work! Going every week and not seeing a win.' (*F5, Age 26, STH, Long-term fan, Receptionist*)

'Obviously, you get your people who say: "Oh you're a glory supporter" I can go: "No, I was born there; how dare you say that, I'm Leicester born and bred"...Like Manchester United, obviously you have your people that are glory supporters that have never probably even been to Manchester before but they support them, and I'm sure you're bound to get people like that for Leicester Tigers.' (*R4, Age 23, Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Beauty Therapist*)

Indeed, some of my rugby respondents saw themselves as the very backbone of support for the Tigers club. R20, for example, 'will support the Tigers through the highs and lows'. This middle class, middle aged female rugby union supporter actually voiced very similar concerns to King's (2002) working class 'lads' at Old Trafford: that if their club's current success levels drop, would those who are not 'organic', local supporters continue to attend? Such accounts tend to challenge some underlying assumptions (especially in football research) that female fans are typically contingent; that they are inorganic, 'new consumer fans' who lack significant place attachments through sport,

rather than those who strongly value local attachments and the tradition and heritage of their sports clubs.

*ii) Sport and place marketing*

Following the near-disappearance in some locations of local manufacturing industries, British cities have been forced into competition with each other to host major sporting events or ‘mega-events’ (see Roche, 2000; Andranovich *et al.*, 2001). It has become increasingly common for cities to use sport for their ‘image enhancement’ and ‘branding’ in late-modernity (see Chapter Three) and many of my female fans were sympathetic to the notion that Leicester’s future might rest on its designation and success as a ‘sport city’: ‘I don’t feel it’s a huge city and I don’t feel it’s got a hell of a lot going for it. So they can concentrate on the sport, I think they might need to’ (F2):

‘It [sport] promotes a good image of the city if the teams are doing well. Especially when we’ve got so many, sort of, top level teams. Not many cities have a top rugby club, and cricket and football... I think it’s a good thing for the city if they’ve got something to sell I suppose.’ (R13, Age 42, *STH, Long-term fan, Housewife* )

Others made similar comments (F1, F2, F4, F6, F8, F10, F17, F20, F22, F24, F28, F49 and R1, R2, R8, R9, R10, R14, R16, R17, R19), so the success of local sport was seen to be of paramount importance in promoting the city in potentially hard times. Some 86% of all football respondents and 76% of rugby fans claimed that successful local sports clubs were ‘good’/‘important’ for the city. Some football fans also described their wider civic pride through sport that extended to monitoring the success of other Leicester sports clubs and four rugby respondents (R2, R9, R11, R31) mentioned actively looking out for the results of other Leicester sports clubs on television, radio and in the press.

The sports geographer Bale (1993) has suggested that cities and towns in England are barely recognised nationally as ‘real’ places if they lack a professional football club. Many of my female fans felt that successful sports clubs were important in putting their city on ‘the sporting map’ (F18 & F20); they showed the city ‘in a better light’ (R27) so that ‘other cities will know who you are’ (F11). These sorts of sentiments were widespread (see also F1, F7, F11, F12, F14, F16, F19, F22, F24, F25, F29, F30, F32, F34, F36, F38, F41, F42 and R4, R7, R11, R14, R15, R19, R27, R33, R34). Bale (1993: 57) also suggests that: ‘collective identification, especially when coupled with success makes people feel better and engenders a sense of place pride’. In such accounts, supporters of both codes were certainly well aware that success and sport were two sides of the same valuable coin. That sport, ‘keeps you in the news, adds an interest to the city. So yeah, I suppose it helps. A bit like the royal family; good when it’s good, bad when it’s not’ (F14). The general consensus here seemed to be that: ‘if you’ve got a winning team it attracts people to you’ (F20), and that people were more likely to visit the city and invest in it if the sports clubs are successful. In the case of the football club this was usually taken to mean being in the globally popular Premier League (F16, F16, F38). Successful sports clubs can ‘big up the city’ (F9) or ‘talk up the area’ (F12) and this also has the effect of lifting the overall mood, the psychology, of local people:

‘The whole morale of everybody going into work, I think [sporting success] has a real knock on effect. So if they’re doing well I would say that the city can only benefit.’ (F22)

‘I think it probably makes people feel a little bit happier and then I think that permeates through to the general atmosphere.’ (F26)

‘It definitely buoys the spirit up. I mean you just have to look in the local press...it’s always sort of a big thing. I still think that has quite a big sort of push on the Leicester people...I think it definitely does reflect the mood.’ (R7)

Successful sports clubs were felt to bring benefits for *all* residents living in the city, regardless of whether they were active sport supporters. Nash and Johnstone (2001: 109) claim that, at their most successful, major sports tournaments such as the Olympic Games or the [football] World Cup can, ‘enormously improve the economic status and tourist appeal of a city or region’. But interestingly, Euchner (1993) describes how 15 sports clubs in the USA were seduced to move to different sites or cities between 1970 and 1990 (a practice which has continued into more recent years), even though there is little evidence to suggest that sport affects local economic chances. Female sports fans in Leicester assumed something different: ‘You know other businesses wouldn’t necessarily want to move to the area if Leicester was seen, sporting wise, as not a success’ (F12).

The ‘talking down’ of the city or the ‘calling Leicester’ (R32) in the local argot, was a cause of considerable frustration here, prompting suggestions that the city needed to do much more to promote local *sports* in order to generate a more positive local and national response. Even an international sports award for Leicester was not enough; more needed to be done:

‘I think, as a city, we should be promoting things that are good about us... [And] I don’t always think that we promote it [sport] enough as a city. A classic example is that this year [2008] Leicester is the European City of Sport... You’d think we’d be having events. You’d think the city would be doing something, wouldn’t you? Hosting a day, or an event, or something.’ (**R20, Age 37, *STH*, *New fan, Financial Director***)

### ***iii) Sociability and the Shirt: ‘Like a passport to be accepted’***

In this sort of context, in which women saw sport as an important facet of local booster politics, ‘wearing the shirt’ was a personal extension of a similar principle: it gave people greater ‘pride in where they come from’ (F4, F16 and R12, R30) and also

showed that they are ‘proud’ of their team (F5, F47 and R12, R15). The wearing of the club sports shirt *away* from the stadium, for these female fans at least, was an important ‘prop’ used as part of a preferred ‘presentation of self’ (Goffman, 1990). It was something which was argued to be quite culturally specific to, ‘especially English people; it seems to be something that’s become part of the way we express ourselves now. That we wear something that says “This is where I belong and this is what I’m proud of”’ (F40). But it was also a reassuring signifier designed to prompt conversations with other (usually English) sports fans. Recognition of the shirt helped bond or gel people around a common cultural association - it reconstitutes and reaffirms local identities, often in unfamiliar locales and establishes solidarities and friendships perhaps more typical of *female* social interaction than that of males (Spencer and Pahl, 2006):

‘It’s an advertisement isn’t it? I’m from Leicester. Several times we’ve just started up a conversation with complete strangers; just because we’ve got our Leicester City stuff on...We’ve found it actually is a conversation opener. That if you’re wandering around in a Leicester City shirt and you see somebody else in a Leicester City shirt, it starts a conversation.’ (F20, Age 48, *STH, Long-term fan, Office Clerk*)

‘When you go abroad.... and you spot the City fans and you’re like “Hey up...” I go mad, I go crazy. You don’t even know each other and you go and sit with them and talk to them. You do feel that connection between people and that warmth. If you hear anyone with a slight accent that sounds local, instantly go up there and it’s: “Are you a football fan?”’ (F2, Age 23, *STH, Long-term fan, Accounts Manager*)

This intimate form of communication via sporting symbols underlay a more general theme: that sharing an interest in football or rugby gave people a ‘common bond’ (R12) or a ‘connection with this person that you’ve never met’ (R2). This was argued to be the case by nearly 60% (57%) of football fans and 62% of rugby supporters. For F17, for example: ‘Instantly you can see you’ve got something in common with this person’, and



for F13: 'It's like seeing a friend'. This kind of sporting sociability and intimacy - again more characteristic generally of *female* social interaction - was also linked in some cases with the notion that this 'camaraderie' was actually a key feature of each of these sports (F14, F21, R17), and that this shared sporting interest or connection could act as a social facilitator, thus easily breaking down geographic or cultural barriers and inviting more-or-less spontaneous social interaction of a type probably less favoured by men who wear club shirts:

'When I go away with the girls for a weekend I always wear my Leicester shirt. And, like, if we're staying in Blackpool I'll wear it for breakfast with all the Sunderland fans, so we have a bit of banter there... There's always someone who will talk to you... You can go anywhere in the world and talk football, and you're connected to someone... It's like a passport to be accepted.' (**F24, Age 51, Member, Returned fan, Production Operative**)

'When we were in New Zealand with the [British] Lions tour... and again people were like "Oh you've come over, fantastic." And people would be stopping and talking to you on the street and it was great... It is that whole thing of an international language... It does introduce you to a whole different class of people; definitely starts whole networks of conversations' (**R7, Age 33, STH, Long-term fan, Dispensing Optician**).

Such connections often made right across the world - with rugby fans in Wellington and football supporters in Vienna - did not always extend, however, to other local communities in Leicester. Neither of these sports has a stainless reputation in the city for 'reaching out' to Leicester's large ethnic minority communities and some respondents did little to hide their own hostility towards established migrant communities in the city who remained out with the main sports spectator subcultures:

'Considering the Asian population in Leicester, there's hardly any that go [to football]. In fact, they talk about it's a multi-cultural city, well it isn't really. It *is* a multi-cultural city, but they [minorities] all stick. Everybody sticks to their own sections don't they? [...]. I mean they keep saying "This racialism" "Foxes Against...." Well, God, that gets up my nose, because they don't want to mix

with us. They want to keep whatever they've got in their own little section, in their own community...And how many of them play in Leicestershire County Cricket? They are cricketers really aren't they, the Indian and Pakistanis?' (*F41, Age 64, STH, Long-term fan, Retired- worked in Banking*)

'You don't see many of those, do you? You see [them] at cricket, it's normally a lot of Asians are playing cricket. I feel awful. I shouldn't call them, I shouldn't go to church. But they'll only come if it's nothing [no admission charge]. You could see them, they'd all got bundles of tickets they'd been given. They didn't support it'. (*F43, Age 69, STH, Long-term fan, Retired- worked as School Meals Cook*)

In Leicester it was simply assumed that Asians were followers of cricket, but Long and Hylton (2002: 95) found 'whiteness' in local cricket in Yorkshire to be defended through a form of cultural essentialism of a sort clearly also on show here. The trope of English 'tradition' was used to resist the intrusion of different ways of playing or behaving in the game. Similarly, the ethnic 'traditions' of Englishness and the closures of social class in rugby union were used by both 'younger' and 'older' fans in Leicester to try to explain the almost complete absence of black and Asian faces in the Welford Road crowd:

'At the rugby I don't think I've really seen an ethnic mix, just because it's more of an English sport. I mean at football there's the different ethnicities dotted all over the place, but I don't think rugby really appeals to...Not because they're being pushed out, but just because they don't really like to watch it.' (*R2*)

'Ethnicity-wise I only ever see white.... Come to think about it, you never see any Asians following rugby, I don't think I've ever seen any Chinese people. It is quite a British sport.' (*R8*)

'It's always, historically, been a white middle class sport.' (*R29*)

R11 also claimed in this context that rugby is a 'truer English sport' than football - apparently referring to football's more aggressive commercialization: here the market was seen, potentially, as a mechanism to 'open up' sport to ethnic minorities. But these sorts of oppositional sentiments were by no means universal. R19, for example,

suggested that successful sports clubs could actually help to promote Leicester's multiculturalism, as this 'encompasses everything, our diversity, I think that's good. I think the more people know about Leicester and how diverse it is and how we all live in harmony the better, really'. But, more generally, female sports fans seemed relatively unsympathetic to the view that sporting communities in the city were, and should be, much more inclusive of members of its growing ethnic minority communities.

*iv) Sports stadia, topophilia and social change*

Scruton and Watson (1998) in their study of women's leisure more than a decade ago, found that many women developed adaptive strategies in planning or 'mapping' safe routes through and in the city: they had very clear ideas of 'no-go' areas for women. The notion that women's leisure must always be framed in terms of safety concerns and the ever-present threat or fear of male violence and/or harassment has been explored elsewhere, of course (e.g. Deem, 1986; Green *et al.*, 1990; Green and Singleton, 2006; Pain, 2001; Taylor *et al.*, 1996, Valentine, 1989; Wesely and Gaarder, 2004). Scruton and Watson (1998) insist that work in cultural geography demonstrates that space is socially constructed, and Massey (1994) has also bemoaned the dearth of attention paid to either the work of feminists or the ideas of feminism generally within cultural geography. She contends that space continues to be theorized from the patriarchal premise of the universal male norm, while women are generally regarded as the 'other'. Perhaps it is unsurprising, therefore, that McDowell (1999: 12) has called for feminist geography to: 'investigate, make visible and challenge the relationships between gender divisions and spatial divisions, to uncover their mutual constitution and problematize their apparent naturalness'. Typically historically male-dominated sports grounds might be expected to be a 'landscape of fear' or a 'no-go' area for many women, prompting

‘topophobic’ feelings among female supporters (Bale, 1993, 1994). Female football and rugby fans’ attitudes towards the ‘home’ stadium or ground are thus briefly explored here.

Welford Road, home of the Leicester Tigers, is slowly modernizing from its relatively primitive spectator facilities left over from the pre-1995 amateur era. At the time of the research it had only one modern stand, but has recently completed the building of another for the start of the 2009/2010 season. Elsewhere, its facilities are rudimentary. In 2002 Leicester City left the nearby Filbert Street ground - home of the football club in a compact residential area for over one hundred years - and moved to a larger, newly built, all-seated Walkers Stadium on a brownfield site a few hundred yards away. This move was nothing especially unusual in football; following the Hillsborough Stadium disaster of 1989 and recommendations made in the 1990 Taylor Report, many senior football clubs redeveloped their existing stadium or moved elsewhere. Some even opted to ground share with a nearby rugby club. Research on sports fans seems to assert that female supporters typically favour a ‘civil’ or ‘celebratory’ stadium environment, rather than the ‘offensive’ or ‘aggressive’ culture more favoured by ‘traditional’ male fans (see Chapter Two, especially King, 2002). Would my female subjects prefer the ‘sanitised’ or ‘civilised’ experience, which has led some to observe that stadia are now unexciting and sterile spaces (see Williams, 1999)?

#### *From Filbert Street to the Walkers*

Bale (1994: 121-122) points out that: ‘ordinary, humdrum places may appear crude and even ugly to the outsider but to those who regularly occupy particular spaces - for example, on football terraces - they become redolent of fond and vivid memories’.

Some of my football respondents were certainly aware of the poor appearance of Filbert Street to ‘outsiders’. Words such as ‘horrible’ (F2), ‘crappy’ (F22), ‘a bit worn’ (F14), ‘old and crumbly’ (F30) and ‘looked a bit like a shed’ (F3, F6, F10, F12, F31, F37), were used to describe the old ground. Fawbert (2005: 99) suggests that ‘the notion of the football club acting as a metaphor for pride in the local-working class community was passed down through successive generations of *male* progeny’ (see also King’s ‘lads’, 2002). Yet in some cases the ground’s objectively ‘ugly’ appearance did help to generate strong emotional attachments among my *female* supporters. In such accounts Filbert Street represented the essential character of the club, with Leicester City supposedly relying more on hard work and effort than the glamour and flamboyance of more successful clubs. Even some ‘younger’ fans shared this view:

‘I preferred Filbert Street. I think it suited the team...A bit rough and ready and not pretending to be anything that they’re not...’ (*F1, Age 23, STH, Long-term fan, on a gap year*)

‘Filbert Street was so old and so run down that it made it brilliant. It was like... it felt like a cow shed, it really did. But it was nice [be]cause it felt like home for football. The Walkers is great [be]cause it’s so big and it’s such a nice stadium, but the atmosphere can get lost a little bit. When I think of the football ground that is Leicester’s true home, I always still think its Filbert Street.’ (*F10, Age 20, STH, Long-term, fan, Undergraduate Student*)

Of all the football respondents interviewed 75% made positive comments about Filbert Street, even if this was combined, in some cases, with an acknowledgement that the appearance and facilities of the new ground were superior. Some even confessed to crying at the last game at ‘Filbo’, and others purchased ‘their’ old seat before the ground was demolished, or took a souvenir brick from the ground (F2, F4, F21, F46). Bale (1994) suggests the affection fans have for sports places comes close in intimacy and strength to the affection and awe shown by those with an obsessive adherence to

religious places, as in F4's reaction to the loss of her familiar football 'temple' now ingloriously replaced by student accommodation:

F4: Well to me, that is like pulling down Durham cathedral and building a brothel where it is. I hated it, I just hated it. I know it had to be done, but it's just not the same. There are just things like my dad and I...we came back from the Southampton match, got back to Filbert Street at eight o'clock on the away bus, came back [home], had a couple of hours sleep and a shower and arrived back at Filbert Street at three o'clock in the morning so we could queue to get the [Wembley] tickets at seven o'clock. And I can't see myself doing that now at Walkers; there's just memories tied up at Filbert Street.

*Res: So your attachment is linked with these memories?*

F4: Yeah, I think so.... Like Filbert Street was special [...]. I suppose we did sort of believe in some mystical thing around the football club...we thought if there was any meaning to life or any kind of divine thing then football was somehow part of that. [...] Now I'm too old to kind of build these stories around somewhere else. (*F4, Age 26, STH, Long-term fan, PhD student*)

Some respondents were in fact opposed to the new, more rationalised Walkers Stadium and missed the attractions of the former ground Filbert Street in a way that might be expected of 'traditional' or 'authentic' male fans. Similar sentiments may be expected from fans of both sexes at other clubs which have re-located; the 'Maine Road men (*sic*)' of Manchester City, for example, are said to preserve the memory of the club's former ground by continuing the chant of "We are City, super City, we are City, from Maine Road" (Talkfootball Website, accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2010).

Others also linked Filbert Street to an appreciation or respect for the club's history and its achievements directly connected to this ground. Over half (55%) of all football respondents complained that the 'atmosphere' today is less compelling at the Walkers Stadium. Giulianotti (1999: 69) describes how the spatial organization of the ground in either permitting or undermining relationships between two sets of fans in football plays an important part in constructing 'atmosphere' and generating topophilic sensations of

participation. The new Leicester venue was 'placeless', too 'peaceful' and 'regimented', too *comfortable* - issues typically assumed to be masculinist concerns (Williams 2006: 98). The ground is linked in such accounts to the experience of overweening control and also a vital loss of intimidatory home advantage:

'I wish we hadn't knocked Filbert Street down, I wish we'd never moved because we've lost all the atmosphere in this stadium, it's horrible. [...] This ground's got nothing, it's got no atmosphere; it's got no feel about it. Everyone used to fear coming to Filbert Street, it was like the fortress...it's just not the same, not at all. It's lacking everything, the stewards are on a bit of a power trip, you only have to sneeze the wrong way and they're there. You're told to stay in your seat or you can be thrown out, you're told if you use any abusive language you can be thrown out [and] it's took all the enjoyment out of the game. Filbert Street was a bit worn, but it had a lot of character and it had a lot of memories. Just the walk down Filbert Street used to make your hairs on the back of your neck go up. It's got no soul in there anymore; it's just like a concrete mass...It's lost it.' (F14, Age 37, *STH, Returned fan, Tenancy Support Worker*)

Bale (1994) and others suggest that in recent decades there has been an increasing 'sameness' in sports stadium design, a new sanitized standardisation in the case of football grounds. For my football respondents, the new Walkers Stadium represented the club as a 'business' rather than as a 'supporters' club' (F14, F26). Some even complained about the name 'Walkers Stadium' (after a local snacks manufacturer), and were concerned about initial plans to call the ground the Walkers Bowl - or what some mocked as the 'Crisp Bowl' (see also F1, F24, F27, F48). Filbert Street represented in this sense a mythologised period, a football heritage, before processes of Americanisation and commercialisation in the game escalated post-1992; in the words of F30, the club had moved from a 'proper football ground' to a 'show ground' or an 'American Super bowl'.

However, it would be too simplistic to draw a binary here between some undifferentiated nostalgia for Filbert Street and contempt for the Walkers Stadium.

Attitudes towards the two stadia were complex and frequently contradictory. Many respondents mentioned the superior view (with pillars no longer obstructing the pitch) at the Walkers, the better organisation and safety of the ground and improved facilities (see F11, F12, F13, F16, F19, F20, F28, F29, F34, F42, F43, F48, F51). Respondents who demonstrably felt a strong emotional attachment to Filbert Street also took civic pride in the Walkers Stadium for its modernity and sleek customer service (see F1, F3, F4, F5, F10, F17, F18, F21, F24, F25, F26, F27, F31, F32, F33, F35, F37, F38, F39, F40, F41, F47, F49, F50). It takes time to build an attachment to a new ground and female supporters broadly understood this. For F22, for example: ‘You don’t feel the Walkers is *our* ground yet - there’s no history there, no tradition there yet’. No matter the attachments to ‘Filbo’, and as was the case for Lightbown’s (1992) aggressive male Millwall fans’ welcome for the New Den - the new City stadium signalled both ambition and aesthetic appeal:

‘I think the Walkers Stadium is a lot more (sic) nicer and safer and suitable to fulfill the functions that it needs to fulfill [...]. I’m proud of it in a different way. I’m proud of it in that I think its one of the best stadiums in the country and I’ve been to a lot of them... And I think it does a lot for the city.’ (**F4, Age 26, STH, Long-term fan, PhD student**)

*Welford Road: ‘One of my favourite places in the world’*

In 2004 plans were announced for the football and rugby clubs in Leicester to share the Walkers Stadium from 2006, and although it was eventually decided instead to extend Welford Road, a number of major Leicester Tigers matches were played at the larger football ground. Thus, many rugby respondents were able to contrast their experiences of watching Tigers at Welford Road to the Walkers Stadium. Welford Road has its own history (the Crumbie Stand, for example, dates back to the 1920s) so, unsurprisingly, many rugby fans expressed feelings of topophilic attachment similar to those of their



football counterparts. For some rugby fans it was the distinctive stadium ‘smellscape’ (presumably combined with sound and sight) that were also important here:

‘One of my favourite places in the world is Welford Road; it just is magic when you get in [...]. I love it. I love...just the smell. Cos where we stand, we’re near the tunnel, cos that’s where the players sit. I can be anywhere and get a whiff of Deep Heat [the Mentholatum]. I’m on the terrace in the rain smelling Deep Heat on a Friday night or a Saturday afternoon. ...I’ve not been to another stadium that has made me feel like Welford Road feels; there is a buzz about the place [...]. The Walkers Stadium is a lovely stadium; it is *not* a rugby stadium. It’s like when we go to matches at Twickenham, the atmosphere’s not there and it was like that at the Walkers.’ (R1, Age 25, *STH, Long-term fan, Principal Office Clerk*)

Some 85% of all rugby respondents were critical of the Walkers Stadium with only five (R11, R21, R28, R32, R34) favouring the proposed ground sharing option. Words such as ‘electric’, ‘unique’, ‘special’, ‘incredible’, ‘fantastic’ and ‘intense’ (R2, R5, R13, R15, R16, R17, R18, R20, R23) were used by rugby fans to describe the Welford Road atmosphere. Many contrasted the ‘smaller’, more ‘compact’ and ‘enclosed’ Welford Road to the larger Walkers Stadium, which for some felt ‘empty’, ‘more spread out’ and lost the ‘personal thing’ or ‘intimacy’ of the older venue (R2, R5, R6, R9, R12, R15, R16, R25, R26, R27, R29, R31, R33). At Welford Road, ‘You can almost touch the players’ (R10, R14, R15, R16, R22, R24, R25, R30, R31, R33). Here the very design of the stadium mitigated against what was taken to be the different type of sociability generated by rugby culture; complaints were raised that this regimentation and individualising aspect of fan organization prevented rival supporters from mixing which, unlike at football, is an important part of the cultural event (R7, R18, R24). R20 explains:

‘I actually think the Walkers is a fantastic stadium. I think my only criticism would be the fact that it’s a very social sport, rugby, and it doesn’t seem to have the same problems that football has. And so in the Walkers Stadium [it’s] built

so that people are quite isolated and there's no bar so you can't mix. Whereas at Welford Road there's quite a number of bars and you'll see everybody having a drink and a chat afterwards, and I would be concerned that you would lose that.' (R20, Age 37, *STH*, *New fan*, *Financial Director*)

History, social class differences and the local rivalry between football and rugby fans (see section 7.3) clearly flavoured the ground share debate, but rugby fans felt more strongly that football's inherent spectator problems were not shared by rugby. Again, class condescension may have played a part here, but material differences were also in evidence. For example: the standing areas still valued at rugby; the possibility of not being able to drink alcohol during matches (R6, R18); and the stewards at football, which were simply 'not necessary for rugby fans' (R18). Bale (1993) suggests that although ground sharing and relocation might appear to be rational plans for sports clubs, the strongly topophilic sentiments supporters feel for home grounds makes this unlikely in the UK where female, as well as male, fans exhibit extraordinary ties to historic sporting spaces, especially concerning discourses about the stadium as inheritance and 'home':

'It's the history of all those people that have trampled out onto the pitch, and the generations of fans that have been there...there's the heritage there. It's where we belong, that's where we have made it home and we've made it a great home as well.' (R3, Age 26, *STH*, *Long-term fan*, *Charity Worker*)

'There's something about the Tigers ground. There's just something about the place. When they were going to move us to the Walkers, you know, I really didn't want to move. It's just something I want to.... I took the grandchildren, but it's something I want my grandchildren's children to go to. You know, it becomes part of you I think.' (R33, Age 57, *STH*, *New fan*, *Computer Supervisor*)

Some rugby respondents expressed concern about ambitious plans to re-develop the Welford Road ground, plans which were finally enacted upon in 2009. The Tigers need to grow the stadium to match their European ambitions. But Welford Road will not die

easily for female fans - despite the extraordinary privations they have to face there in terms of facilities

***v) Stadium facilities for women: 'The gripe, gripe, gripe that I have is ladies toilets'***

Over two decades ago Matrix (1984) were established as a group of women who aimed to try and subvert 'how we are 'placed' as women in a man-made environment'. Other feminists such as Darke (1996), have examined how, despite legal barriers to women's access to jobs and buildings largely being removed, they often continue to be excluded from urban space in ways that may be more difficult to negotiate. The story is certainly true for sport. Despite describing their respect for the old 'traditional' sports ground, some female respondents acknowledged that this meant that the stadium was 'built for males' and/or 'designed by men'. Almost half (47%) of football fans and nearly three-quarters (73.5%) of rugby supporters across all age groups complained about numbers of women's toilets at old sports grounds and/or the 'abysmal' state of those facilities that do exist.

For football, the world is changing: witness the now 'amazing', 'marvellous' or 'fantastic' facilities at the Walkers Stadium. But for rugby it was a long haul. Some interviewees were explicitly hopeful that the 'primitive' outdoor toilets at Welford Road would be improved upon when the ground is redeveloped (R23, R24, R26, R27, R29). McDowell (1999: 11) claims there are assumptions about the 'natural' and built environments as well as sets of regulations which influence who should occupy which spaces and who should be excluded; thus we need to challenge the apparent 'naturalness' of gender and spatial divisions - including the historically patriarchal design and control of the typical British sports ground:

‘The gripe, gripe, gripe that I have is ladies toilets. Lack of them and lack of... just general understanding of what a lady might want in a toilet! Like some have got seats missing, some don’t flush, there’s only freezing cold water in the taps, there’s no towels, they run out of toilet roll. We’ve come to accept, and I think that’s not right. We shouldn’t. And I’ve complained about it before but it falls on deaf ears [...]. My view is it is a man’s club, it is a man’s world and until women start to get on the board or whatever...but I don’t think that’s going to happen for a few years yet.’ (*R14, Age 45, STH, Long-term fan, Learning Mentor*)

‘They could have more toilets and put hooks on the back of doors of toilets...No woman goes down to rugby without a coat on...Obviously men actually designed it’. (*R5, Age 31, Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Administrative Assistant*)

These responses seem to echo Darke’s (1996) earlier claims that it requires energy and organisation to gain the most basic acknowledgement of women’s presence in buildings. Clearly, more needed to be done here. Even some football fans were disappointed, to an extent, with the new Walkers Stadium, and its female toilets (F10, F26, F33, F36, F46). ‘Younger’ respondent F4 reasoned that the (male) designers of the stadium had not included mirrors in toilets as a perverse nod to greater gender sensitivity: ‘Trying to pay us a compliment by saying: “We know you girls aren’t all stereotypical girls” and all of that’. Perhaps the design is in line with a more general societal shift towards more women’s equality - in this case of terms of uniformly unattractive facilities. Some older female fans felt that men’s spatial interests had been more widely prioritized in stadia, with the new concrete concourses at the Walkers promoting a conventionally ‘masculine’ space and image:

‘This area you wait in before you actually go up to sit in your seat, you can buy drinks and you can buy eats but there’s actually nowhere to sit at all. It’s just a concrete floor and you have to stand around and you can’t sit...So men are used to standing. So it’s the image for the men, isn’t it? They like to stand up and drink a pint.’ (*F36, Age 68, Occasional attendee, New fan, Retired- worked as a Secretary*)

Crolley and Long (2001: 209) argue that no real sports fan, male or female, could be put off following their team because of a dirty toilet or a cold, stale pie. But more female fans might be recruited to sport if clubs were to 'lose the male image a bit more' by acknowledging that the 'pint and a pie' culture does not typically appeal to all men *or* women (F10). When debating issues which *do* specifically apply to women at sports grounds, females must inevitably try to balance these gender issues with their generic identity as fans (see, for example, Woodhouse, 1991; Coddington, 1997; Crolley, 1999; Crolley and Long, 2001; Woodhouse and Williams, 1999, Jones, 2008). But any change here was actually perceived to be heavily gendered and especially risky for women, for example if more 'healthy' food options were ever introduced at football grounds:

'It's not really like a woman's issue, but I can see what would happen, if you start selling healthy snacks then everyone will go "Oh these bloody women...bloody women on a diet" [*male voice*]. But the thing is everyone is saying we should eat more healthily now.' (F4, Age 26, STH, Long-term fan, PhD Student)

Loyalty and commitment to the club as *fans* - and the unending need for more important expenditure elsewhere - led some respondents to simply accept current facilities for women with a relatively sanguine shrug as just an unavoidable part of the 'live' sports experience:

'There's always going to be queues at ladies loos...Our toilets are a bit scrappy round the edges but that's fine. All you're gonna do is sit down and pee! If you're ending up having to go to the loo during the game you don't want to be there for very long. You don't need mirrors to look at. You just wanna get out there again (*laughs*).' (R3, Age 26, STH, Long-term fan, Charity Worker)

'The facilities are fine, as you would expect them to be. Would you rather the money go into the rugby rather than into posh facilities? As long as you've got somewhere to go for a pee (*laughs*).' (R29, Age 56, STH, Long-term fan, Equal Opportunities Manager)

For some respondents, more primitive facilities than one might find elsewhere effectively *defined* live sport attendance, and not necessarily in a negative way: ‘You go and sit out in the cold and get your burger at half time and then go back up’ (F2, F38). F32 claimed that the facilities for women have been improved as much as they can be given their location, and F37 agreed that the new facilities at the Walkers Stadium are ‘bland’ but that facilities should not be too ‘namby pamby’. She went on: ‘You don’t want to be all softy. You go to a football match, you’ve got your seat, you sit down and you enjoy it’. Thus, sports fandom ultimately triumphs over other concerns - even if they may be more pressing for women in spaces designed by men. By recognising that all facilities at live sport are likely to be quite basic, one accepts that suffering mildly at live sports events confirms one as an included and committed fan.

### **7.3 The Best of Enemies: Women and Sport in a Divided City**

#### ***i) ‘It’s just such a class thing’***

Although there has been a relatively large body of research exploring club rivalries and especially hooliganism in English football (See Chapter Two), there is very little sociological work on fan perceptions of other sports and their fan cultures. These data offer a brief insight into the cross-sport perceptions of my female sample, which show the complex intersection between space, gender and social class in this unusual social and cultural landscape.

A small number of (mostly football) respondents suggested that some people followed and watched both sports in Leicester (F28, F29, F34, F35, F39, F41, F42, F49, F50 and R27), but out of the 85 female fans I interviewed, only three confessed to actively supporting both football and rugby in Leicester (a small number of others attended the

other sport occasionally, usually to accompany family members). Even here, these fans had a clear preference for *one* sport. There seemed to be a general assumption here that football and rugby people are essentially different:

‘It’s a different people that go to the rugby than they do to the football.’ (F3)

‘I think there’s rugger fans, and there’s football fans and I don’t think many go to both.’ (F38)

‘If you’re a football fan, you’re a football fan and if you’re a rugby fan, you’re a rugby fan. You can appreciate the other but you will stick with your sport.’ (R5)

‘True supporters are either football or rugby supporters. You know, true, passionate ones.’ (R15)

Socialisation and education - rather than social class *per se* - was often used by subjects to explain their current sporting affinities. The influence of the family, especially the male parent, was argued to play a crucial role here, with the trope of the family displacing class as a key agent in connecting respondents to their different sporting codes (e.g. F5, F7, F9, F16, F17, F20, F21, F22, F24, F25, F36, F47, F51 and R6, R9, R10, R13, R22, R23, R26, R27, R29, R31). *The FA Premier League Fan Surveys* (Williams, 1997, 2001) found that half the national sample followed the club their father had supported and male relatives were shown to play an important role in first recruiting women to sport as spectators (see Chapter Eight).

Although, as we have seen, there were generally positive feelings expressed about local sport and civic pride, feelings of hostility soon emerged when discussing the rival code. Social class, mediated by family attachments, was a key variable here. Although various attempts have been made to define or ‘measure’ social class, it has been argued that there is no single ‘correct’ definition of class nor any single correct choice of method to identify class groups (see, for example, Crompton, 2008; Roberts, 2001). Crompton and

Mann (1994: ix, 10) have however highlighted criticisms of the recent attempts to investigate social class by taking an ‘employment-aggregation’ position (assigning individuals by their class positions often by their job or occupation). They suggest it is important to recognise that ‘gender matters’ in stratification theory. Certainly, changes in gender roles both in the home and labour market have made it more difficult to classify the population by class (Roberts, 2001), but I still felt there was something to be gained by collecting demographic data on female fans employment status. However, the complexities of social class became further apparent when it became clear whilst conducting the research that some women’s social class was still effectively determined by their partners’ occupation. For example, some women may have worked in part-time, lowly paid work but they could live in large homes boasting obvious high levels of consumption. Therefore, in this discussion I have also included information on women’s occupations and that of their parents to try to provide some basic background information relating to class and social mobility.

Only three respondents (F7 and R24, R27) claimed that there were no differences in the *kinds* of people who watch football and rugby in Leicester. Fans generally spoke openly about how these differences were the indirect outcome of class distinctions, which were manifested in the different histories of the two sports. These differences were typically linked to the varying types of school in Leicester and Leicestershire that usually sanctioned play for one of these two sports for *males*. Even the younger female fans suggested that most private and selective grammar schools historically (and possibly today) place greater emphasis for middle class boys on rugby union, and that people from this sort of class and educational background were thus more likely to follow rugby rather than football (F2, F3, F4, F6 and R2, R3, R7, R8):



‘It’s just such a class thing...Cos I’m working class, that’s why I go to the football. Posh people go to the rugby...I think in this village there’s an “in crowd” that goes fox hunting and played rugby (*posh voice*) And then there’s, like, the other people that work in petrol stations and things... Now I look back on it I can see there is this kind of rugby and class divide.’ (*F4, Age 26, STH, Long-term fan, PhD Student, Dad=Mechanic, Mum=works in Garage*)

‘I think rugby was more... public school orientated. That was the sort of following if you like that it had...and the universities as well because obviously Oxford and Cambridge was a big thing of rugby. And the public schools like Eton and Harrow...and even Loughborough Grammar, and I think rugby was played more at rugby schools than it was at state schools...There would definitely be more...those sort of followers I think of rugby than your normal Joe Soaps.’ (*R17, Age 55, STH, Long-term fan, Office Clerk, Dad=Coach Builder on Railways, Mum= Machinist*)

A small number of mainly ‘younger’ rugby fans did challenge the idea that class and school background largely determined which sport you followed, reflecting perhaps the more fluid nature and role of social class today and the class-mixed player recruitment tradition at Leicester Tigers. R5 suggested that, in earlier years, rugby was played more in private schools, but this is no longer the case and so class influence has declined. The Tigers have certainly recently mixed players from more lower-middle and working class backgrounds with those drawn from public schools. Nevertheless, a substantial minority of my female respondents suggested that people schooled in ‘middle class’ institutions watched rugby union, and that those from the ‘working class’ equivalents were football fans (e.g. F12, F19, F20, F21, F28, F31, F34, F35, F36, F37, F39, F40, F44, F46, F50, F51 and R14, R17, R19, R21, R22, R23, R29, R31).

Other respondents drew class distinctions without linking this matter directly to school background. Here rugby fans were simply more ‘middle’ or ‘upper’ class - more ‘wealthy’, ‘moneyed’, ‘better off’, ‘well to do’ or a ‘better class’, possibly travelling into matches from the county, and football fans were more ‘working class’ or ‘less

wealthy’ and could be assumed to be more city based (see F1, F11, F14, F16, F17, F18, F22, F23, F24, F25, F26, F27, F32, F39, F41, F42, F43, F48, F49, F50 and R11, R13, R15, R20, R21, R26, R30, R33).

Nearly 80% of football fans (78.4%) and 62% of rugby respondents made explicit reference here to social class differences based on schooling and/or on acquired wealth or status. But this relative exclusivity for sport based on social class background could also work the other way. Private schools sometimes favoured football and F37’s business-owning parents, for example, would not ‘lower themselves’ to watch football. She and her brother responded to their stilted upbringing when they developed this round ball interest:

‘I suppose my family, my aunties, they’re all quite superior and it [football] wasn’t the thing...I was probably brought up, but veered the other way, are you with me? You see my brother, he went to...a private school. And he played football instead of rugby. Now my dad didn’t like that. ...He never took an interest in his football [be]cause it wasn’t the game to play...it wasn’t the thing, you know. It just wasn’t good enough. It was the working man’s game...rugby was for the middle class, simple as that.’ (*F37, Age 63, Occasional attendee, Returned fan, Retired- worked in a Factory, Dad=Owned Business, Mum= Worked in Dad’s family firm*)

In an era in which class differences are argued to have declined in importance - after all, amateur/professional distinctions in British sport have lost many of their crucial class connotations over time - have some of these sporting class barriers now been eroded? R15 for example, suggests that the advent of BSkyB televised sport and professionalism in rugby union had made the sport ‘more accessible’ to people from working class backgrounds (see also F49). R13 also claimed that although traditionally rugby union had been a sport for the middle and upper classes, there was a sense that the sport was now trying to appeal to people of ‘different backgrounds’. Also, as football has become

‘big business’ (F37), it was now appealing to the monied middle classes, implying that traditional class distinctions between the two sports are effectively blurring.

All this may seem superficially convincing, but the following accounts from rugby fans illustrate how and why union is still widely perceived - even in Leicester - to be holding on to much of its traditional class heritage. Without access to a private school education and adult supervision, it is difficult for children to learn the highly complex laws and/or practices of playing the sport. Football, by contrast, can be played and organised in virtually any urban space and unsupervised:

‘Your [rugby] players are coming from potentially a more well to do background, whereas any kid that shows any talent with a football can potentially become anything, because it’s there and its available and its free. People just grab a ball and they just kick it around and I think that means that people who are from very poor backgrounds have better access to football..... Whereas rugby, it’s not so easy to just play it because you can’t just play “keepy uppy” with a ball by yourself and develop those football skills. Rugby, it’s about passing so you need someone to pass it to, so it ends up being something that is more focused on school rugby.’ (R3, Age 26, *STH, Long-term fan, Charity Worker, Dad=Vicar, Mum=Housewife*)

This division between the ‘proper’ (R3) rugby playing private schools, or ‘good schools’ (F46) and the football playing state schools or the ‘ordinary’ schools (F40, R17) which the ‘normal’ children attend (R17, F48) had a more general relevance for some. Rugby fans were more ‘businessy people’ (F3), and some football respondents implied that rugby fans viewed themselves as socially and intellectually superior. F11, for example says: ‘People seem to think they’re a better person for going to the rugby. That’s the impression I get. Whereas you’re viewed as a...a bit of a ‘derrrr’ for going to the football...Rugby people do see themselves as better citizens, kind of thing’. F44, who once worked in nursing, described how the senior staff at her workplace followed rugby, and were keen to demonstrate their class distinction and superiority: ‘They used

to make out it was their private school background' and thus rugby fans, 'think they're different'.

Bourdieu (1984) has argued that 'working-class' or 'popular' culture is defined in terms of its deficiencies in relation to 'high' culture' (Bottero 2005: 154), and Swartz (1997: 163), argues that Bourdieu's lifestyle characteristics suggest: 'It matters little whether professionals prefer tennis, hockey, rugby, boxing or cricket. What matters is that their preferences express systematic opposition to those of other classes'. Bourdieu's (1985) 'social space' is made up of economic, cultural, social and symbolic elements, with the two most important being economic and cultural capital as people 'tend to draw disproportionately from either cultural or economic resources in their struggle to maintain and enhance their positions in the social order' (Swartz 1997: 137). Wilson's (2002: 13) research on sport consumption in America found that among both sexes those richest in cultural capital and economic capital were most likely to be involved in sports generally, both as spectators and players. But those who were rich in cultural capital were 'less likely to be involved in 'prole' sport, and this implies that sports consumption is to a large degree motivated by preferences, tastes, skills, and knowledge that vary by social class'. Some sports were avoided by the upper classes and these so-called 'prole' sports (which have consequently become associated with the working class) attracted spectators and participants from the lower classes. In my research it could be suggested that football was widely viewed as reflecting 'low' culture, or was regarded as a 'prole' sport, and rugby union was often seen as symbolizing something rather more upmarket and aspirational.

Rugby union fans were generally identified here - especially by their football equivalents - as having had more privileges and more advantages in life; that they had reached their position via ascription, rather than necessarily 'earning' it:

'I have a suspicion that slightly posher people watch rugby...I'm thinking about people I work with. And the people that are football fans I would say on the whole are more down to earth types who perhaps have worked their way up from you know, humble beginnings. And the people who support rugby tend to be people who've come from families who were quite comfortably well off themselves.... I think backgrounds got to have something to do with it.' (F26, Age 51, Occasional attendee, New fan, Teacher, Dad=Electrician, Mum=Shop Keeper)

Skeggs (1997) has argued that working class women have tried to combat their 'stigmatized' class identity by emphasising their 'respectability'. In her earlier study of 83 White working class women, she argued that social class was central to the young women's identities. However, this was not discussed in the traditional sense of recognition; instead it was displayed in their efforts *not* to be recognized as working class, stemming from their experiences of being made to feel invisible and yet under close examination by the middle classes. But Frazer's (1992) research on upper-class girls also shows that class antipathy does not just flow one way. Indeed, class hostility 'from below' can be a powerful unifier and even a source of cultural resistance through sporting affiliation:

F28: I mean years ago they never used to say down the City how the Tigers were doing, although I believe the Tigers used to feed back on the City....Perhaps it was a case of inverted snobbery in the olden days.

Res: *Inverted snobbery? What do you mean?*

F28: No doubt, anybody who was a bit of a snob would look down on Leicester City say, on working class [people] going down to Leicester City. Well sometimes people in the working class can have the same type of attitude of people higher up, but it's usually going down. So it's a bit of inverted

snobbery to think Tigers, *puff.*' (F28, Age 50, STH, Long-term fan, Self-employed Book Keeper, Dad=Sales and Marketing, Mum=Housewife)

Many of my football respondents seemed to feel that they were 'under scrutiny' from middle class rugby fans. They claimed they were variously labelled by rugby fans as: 'thugs' (F15, F24), 'riff-raff' (F2), 'hooligans' (F2, F9, F14, F20), and 'oddities' (F20). By the same token, rugby fans typically regarded themselves (it was said) as both a superior type of fandom and people. This sort of oppositional class conflict, played out by women in the cultural arena of sport, provoked a barely hidden antipathy articulated in class terms, especially among football fans:

'I think they consider themselves to be a higher class of fan, don't they? They consider that it's a gentleman's game, don't they? So I think that rugby fans would see themselves as a slightly higher level of fan than a football fan...I think that they do really think that they are a different kind of fan; a gentlemanly fan I think.' (F32, Age 50, STH, Long-term fan, Trade Union Official, Dad=Building Trade, Mum=Caretaker)

Skeggs (1997) argues that it is an 'imaginary' middle class her working class women aspired to; they did not want to take on the whole package of middle class dispositions. Instead the middle classes were often a source of ridicule and contempt, behaving in ways they did not want to be associated with, such as talking too much, and ordering things in a 'hoity toity' manner. My female football respondents described rugby fans as more 'civilized', 'reserved', 'refined', and who were 'well behaved' at matches (F2, F8, F16, F20, F24, F25, F29). But many football fans did not want to take on these traits and critiqued the 'calm' (F8) and withdrawn behaviour typically exhibited at rugby matches: 'Boring people go to rugby and the people with lots of energy go to football' (F33).

‘I think rugby fans are a bit, they’re a bit up themselves, to be quite honest. I think the football is a bit more of a working class game than the rugby. The rugby [fans] tend to look down their nose at football supporters, and think that they should get preferential treatment for fixtures etc. If we’ve got a game on the same day, they’ll walk past you with their nose in the air if you’ve got a football shirt on...I think they see football fans as hooligans. And I know that most people... that like rugby didn’t want the ground share at all. [Be]cause they said “We’re civilized people, we can stand together and drink and mix. You lot have to be segregated like animals”....There’s quite a lot of animosity in Leicester between football and rugby, I think there’s just accepted hatred...It’s just accepted that they’re the rugby and we’re the football and there’s no room to mingle.’ (F14, Age 37, STH, *Returned fan, Tenancy Support Worker, Dad=Electrician, Mum=Packer*).

This ritual demeaning of rugby union crowds might be construed as a sign of class envy or a sort of symbolic class revenge in which the ‘egg chuckers’ or ‘egg chasers’ (F5, F32, F33) of rugby and their dress styles, clipped language and modes of support were quite mercilessly mocked:

‘One match we always went to was the annual match against the Barbarians, the Baa Baas match [in the 80s], and it was just amazing. We used to call it the sheep, the suede coat, brigade. Sheep skinned coats (*laughs*). Because you’d go down there and there’d be people there who went once a year, and they’d be there in their sheep-skinned coats with the hip flask.’ (F31, Age 50, *Occasional attendee, New fan, Teacher, Dad=Warehouse Manager, Mum= worked in Hosiery*)

‘They’re a different sort of people who go the rugby to the football. I mean when I first went with my husband, I said “Ohhh, snobby lot. Pipes and cigars”. You know what I mean? *And how they spoke!*’ (F43, Age 69, STH, *Long-term fan, Retired- worked as School Meals Cook, Dad =Clark, Mum= worked as School Meals Cook*)

These sorts of social class signifiers, in turn, somehow sealed off union supporters - at least in the eyes of their football critics - from even the possibility of claiming ‘authentic’ sporting knowledge or of deep emotional or cultural attachments to their sport or club:

‘I always remember there was this one woman, who [said] “Oh yes, I’m certainly looking forward, it should be a good game shouldn’t it?” (*said in posh voice*). “Oh so and so, which one’s Dusty Hare?” (*laughs*). And I’m thinking oh my goodness. You’re trying to sound *so* knowledgeable. And there was a certain element of that down at the Tigers at that time [1980s].’ (**F31, Age 50, Occasional attendee, New fan, Teacher, Dad=Warehouse Manager, Mum=worked in Hosiery**)

‘You get fans at the Tigers that are sort of, you know, drive up in their Range Rovers, with their green wellies and [are] more sort of like country set. You go to the match because you want to go and watch a game, rather than going because, sort of, it’s in your blood, like football.’ (**F13, Age 37, STH, New fan, Immigration Officer, Dad=Army, Mum=Nurse**)

Interestingly, some rugby fans claimed that attaching *too much* importance to sport was actually a negative aspect of football fandom, something which could lead to a more intimidating atmosphere, or even to fan violence:

‘You usually know when you’re going to lose...it hurts. But...it’s not like it’s the end of the world, I’ve seen some football fans like they’re going to die because they’ve lost a game. I don’t feel that.’ (**R3**)

‘I think the whole thing of yes, it’s just a game, you know? Football fans seem to think it’s life and death. At the end of the day it’s something you do on a Saturday afternoon. It’s not the fact of somebody has switched off a machine and somebody is not breathing any more, it’s a different attitude completely.’ (**R7**)

These views did not apply to *all* rugby fans, but there were many complaints about the supposed dominance of football in the city, especially given the class primacy of rugby. Some respondents gave examples of how football is supposedly ‘in your face all the time’ (R5), in the ‘limelight’ (R2) or ‘public eye a lot more’ (R4) thus taking priority. For others, football’s supposed media superiority and general preferential treatment was more blatant in TV coverage at both the local and national levels:



‘Even now, more so, football rules okay? That irritates me. Like when you’re watching *East Midlands Today* and the Tigers have won something or like the basketball... and the first piece of news on the sports is football. Why? Why is that deemed more important than anything else? It gets more coverage and more emphasis and that irritates me because I think how can you say to that team who have just gone through everything and won whatever, that it’s not as important as the football?’ (R1, Age 25, STH, Long-term fan, Principal Office Clerk, Dad=Handyman, Mum=NVQ Assessor)

In these sorts of accounts football had done little to deserve this media obsession. It was claimed football fans are ‘more thuggish’ or ‘thug-looking’ (R4), more ‘violent’ (R8), ‘aggressive’ (R18), and that football supporters include the ‘rougher element’ (R19, R25) who take part in hooliganism. By contrast, R22 felt that male rugby supporters played a more chauvinistic and protective role in being ‘respectful of the women’ and generally behaving in a ‘gentlemanly’ manner (see also R33). Although a small number of rugby fans pointed out that the ‘yobs’ at football were not the ‘true supporters’ (R32, R34), there was a tendency to generalize yobbishness to *all* football fans and gentlemanly behaviour to all rugby equivalents. R9 for example says: ‘I just don’t like football fans, I think they’re evil’, and R20 confessed: ‘You sort of come across football fans; I’ve no desire to mix with that really’ (see also R19). R21’s experiences (who follows both City and Tigers), further support the widely held view among rugby fans that football harbours violent followers:

‘There’s definitely a looking down their noses at the football fans from the vast majority of the rugby fans so there is rivalry there [...]. Rugby fans view football fans as being complete thugs and that is the general consensus. I’m still called the football hooligan by the gang that sits behind us...And it’s said with general banter, but there is a general conception that football fans are thugs and rugby fans are gentlemen.’ (R21/F15, Age 39, LCFC STH and also attends Tigers matches, Company Director, Dad=Shop Steward, Mum=Part-time work)

It might be argued that much of the above concerns class rather than gender distinctions, but gender is also invoked in the way that female rugby fans routinely align their sport

to a morally superior masculinity code - to a benign and honourable version of Connell's dominant 'hegemonic masculinity' (1995). They ridiculed football fans, for example, for following and playing a supposedly more 'femininised' sport, one characterized by 'subordinate' forms of masculinity that drew obviously homophobic connotations:

'A City supporter would say that football is a really skilful game, but a rugby player, a rugby supporter would probably.... make some derogatory comment about how weak they are, or namby pamby, you know. They'd be a bit more homophobic than that, if you get what I'm saying (*laughs*). They'd basically say you're a woman or you're a poofteer, you know; that sort of comment. It doesn't take much to play football, but to play rugby you've got to be a real man (*laughs*).' (R19, Age 54, STH, New fan, Direct Payments Advisor, Dad=Building Supervisor, Mum= worked at Gas Board)

Rugby here was defined by its female followers as a sport played by 'real men'; the way in which football players 'feign injuries' was taken as more evidence of this fact (R19). Rugby players could better dish out violence, but they also accepted physical punishment more stoically, thus emphasizing their greater personal control and qualities of yeoman British reserve. By contrast, football *fans* lacked both manly discipline and civic honour: 'You get the impression that football people are a lot more rowdy and beer swilling people that would get drunk and fall over and get very vocal about their team whereas rugby fans are a lot more subdued' (R11). Football fans argued that their highly expressive and passionate styles of support, and their intense rivalries with opposition fans, was actually superior to the 'reined-in' repressed forms of fandom typically exhibited by stiff-lipped rugby fans. One respondent, who watched both sports, described how each called on different sides of her character:

'It's like having two sides of the personality. My passionate, need to win personality loves the football atmosphere, [be]cause it's so much of a Leicester are my team and I will support them whatever. Whereas the rugby, it's like...my

passion for the sport and how much I love being around other sports fans no matter what team they're from...In the rugby you can sit and you can talk, you talk about their team, that's the...the kind of social side of me I suppose.' (F10/R2, Age 20, LCFC STH, Tigers Occasional attendee, Undergraduate Student)

## *ii) Repression versus expression? Managing acceptable fandoms*

Giulianotti (1999: 69) describes how a competitive tension of both 'warmth' and 'distance' is required between identifiable blocks of rival fans if football fixtures are to exhibit a satisfying atmosphere. Hence, fans from opposing teams are routinely segregated in football stadia. Many rugby respondents, quite unused to this separation, found this type of aggressively competitive 'atmosphere' at football, and the fan segregation it demanded, highly intimidating. Indeed the contrast between fan responses when they try out each other's codes is quite stark - fright v boredom:

'We went to this [football] game and I was just absolutely petrified. It was aggressive...And the fans seemed different, you know. You go to the rugby game and the game might be quite a hard game, there might be a lot of aggression in the game and the fans are all up tight and that. But as soon as the game is over the fans are all talking to each other, you know, the away fans. But at this football game it just felt really...I hated it. In fact my sister said to me "You look really ill, you look really white, are you alright?" I was like "No, actually, I'm not"... It frightens me to death, honestly.' (R33, Age 57, STH, New fan, Computer Supervisor)

'I've only been to one rugby match, and I will never ever, ever, ever, not even in my coffin, go again...It was horrendous [...]. I couldn't understand why when they took a penalty kick, everybody went: "Sshhhhh". And I said "What's the matter? He's gonna kick the ball". I said "It's a sport, it's not bingo". I thought what is all this? It's garbage... At a sport like that, I just couldn't imagine you would have to be quiet. And you could have heard a pin drop in that place...I'd rather watch paint dry.' (F33, Age 50, STH, Long-term fan, Retired, Parents=Both Engineers)

Many rugby followers confessed to feeling 'intimidated', not 'safe' or finding the overall atmosphere at football more 'threatening', 'charged' or 'hostile' in comparison to rugby (e.g. R1, R3, R4, R6, R9, R11, R12, R13, R15, R22, R23, R24, R27, R32,

R33). Some of this was undoubtedly a case of ‘dreadful enclosures’ because rugby fans had also avoided going to football matches because of what they had *heard* about the sport. Furthermore, it was felt football fans should show more respect towards the officials, the referee, and not ‘slag off a player on the pitch’ (R3, R11, R14), or be ‘disrespectful’ (R15, R30). Tigers fans, like most rugby fans, remain silent for opposition penalty kicks and may even cheer for both teams (R11, R23). Above all, mixing and talking with opposition fans added to a sense of security for rugby followers: ‘Some of the away fans will also be there, and you can have a pint with them, talk about the game in a very civil manner...it just encourages the fact that I feel safe. We don’t need any segregation because everybody is so well behaved’ (R12).

The intense banter, aggression and occasional violence between rival supports at football might be centred on young men, but it was also enjoyed by many women. Many female football fans, felt strongly that the rivalry and segregation between opposing supporters at matches was actually an important and constituent part of the event, something which enhanced the occasion, making their experience a much more rewarding one than at ‘posh’ rugby:

‘I don’t think there would be any atmosphere if there were no rivalry: the singing and the banter. I mean, you sit there and you hear the away fans singing and you’re like “I’ve gotta sing back at them now.” You just *have* to do it...That’s the bit I enjoy and that’s the bit that makes it into a football match, compared to something like rugby.’ (F2)

‘I know for some people, part of the fun of coming to the match was just to taunt...I mean do *you* like a friendly match? Not really, do you? No, you think “What’s the point?”...And it must help, it must build the players up.’ (F44)

A majority, 55% of female football fans, described how they enjoyed the banter between the segregated home and away fans. For F5 this was ‘Great...because it’s like

an edge...a bit of a spark'. For F10, 'It does make the matches a lot more exciting, and there's a lot more riding on it', and F13 argued that this fan intensity: 'Adds a bit of competition...It's not just entertainment, but you're sort of competing with the other side, who can sing the loudest or whatever'. With no away fans there is no distinctive football 'atmosphere' (Giulianotti 1999: 69). 'There's something missing' (F20). Young male fans dominate sections near visiting fans at football, but F38 described how she sat as close to the away fans as possible because: 'You get the atmosphere, the banter from the two lots of fans'. She suggested that 'It's a man's game and you shouldn't go if you're not willing to hear the banter and a bit of swearing'.

Football fans were a much more active and participatory part of the sporting text in this respect; the spectating culture of football was much more creative and spontaneous than its audience-like rugby equivalent. Football had chants which were often, 'Made up on the spot' (F4) and which were 'funny' and 'clever' (F13, F14, F24, F25, F29, F38, F39). Rugby supporting cultures, in comparison, were described (by football supporters) as: 'Boring...there's nobody out there making up songs and trying to be funny. There's a whole sort of football humour culture which I find really good fun' (F15). For F24 the lack of banter at rugby made the atmosphere feel 'dead'. F33 also mocked the 'atmosphere' at rugby: 'I didn't actually think there was an atmosphere to be quite honest...our crowds [are] more rowdy, we've got more songs. And they've only got one'. Rugby respondents viewed mixing with opposition fans inside the stadium as evidence of a 'caring' ethic of 'respect' that existed between rival supporters, which was largely absent from football. For football fans the intensive fan rivalry was an enjoyable part of the football experience. But it was also a mask that obscured the much

deeper bonds of emotion and belonging that was claimed to exist between football people and which were revealed, for example, by tragedy:

‘There’s a guy who plays the drums at the back of the East Stand, and he has all these tattoos and stuff...The thing is I just think it gives the whole thing such a tribal air, and it is kind of like really going back to the roots of human nature....So I quite like it...and yeah, it’s us and them...But at the same time it’s not like us and them, because whenever something happens, everyone is together. Like when Rhys Jones [child Everton fan] got shot, *everyone* at the Liverpool match [came together]. Or if a player dies then the other team will take part in the minute silence as well. So when it comes to the important things, everyone does feel like these things cross over those boundaries.’ (F4, Age 26, *STH, Long-term fan, PhD Student*)

In accordance with this deep-seated football solidarity, some respondents made it clear that there was a limit of acceptable partisanship; that fan rivalry was only enjoyable as long as it remained ‘light hearted’ and did not go ‘too far’ (F8, F10, F12, F22, F25, F26, F28, F32, F37, F46). A small number of mostly ‘older’ football respondents explicitly did not enjoy the rivalry between fans (F19, F21, F34, F40, F48, F49, F50); they did not ‘hate’ other clubs, so found it difficult to understand this form of expression. But, generally, football fans valued this ‘inbuilt’ or ‘embedded’ local rivalry; these symbolic struggles for ‘Midlands pride’ (F13, F20, F32). Some football fans admired the different supporter culture at rugby but most found the behaviour of rugby people ‘bizarre’ (F17) or ‘too regimented and strict’ (F2). The rugby approach to fandom was ‘boring’ (F6, F24). Football fans were especially critical of the lack of creative partisanship at rugby: *not* the best way of showing committed support for your team.

### *iii) Mind yer language*

Language as a basic form of human exchange and communication can quite easily help define class and cultural boundaries, perhaps especially in sport. Respondents were divided in their views on the appropriateness and extent of ‘bad language’ (usually

swearing) at sports events. Broadly speaking, football swearing was deemed to be more expressive or even gratuitous: 'every other word is a swear word', whereas at rugby swearing was more selective and used instrumentally, or in 'outrage', without 'malice' (e.g. R1, R2). This distinction in language use was felt by some to be one of the defining differences between football and rugby cultures:

'We don't hear people swearing [at rugby], you just don't [...]. That was the reason that my husband said he wouldn't take my son to the football [be]cause of the language, you know, it was people shouting at players and at the ref swearing, and it's not as if they're talking to each other swearing in a conversation, when you're yelling it's something that your kids can hear'. (**R18**, Age 47, *STH*, *New fan*, *Scenes of Crime Officer*)

Social class distinctions were clearly invoked here, with some rugby fans associating swearing with the 'industrial' language of the (male) working classes. Importantly, Coddington (1997: 14) reminds us that: 'One woman's idea of civilized behaviour might be another's idea of censorship. It shouldn't be forgotten that plenty of women can swear, drink, stand and sing with the worst of them'. Crolley (1999: 65) similarly claims that women fans are not discouraged from football by abusive or aggressive language and, like Coddington she highlights the risk of treating women as one homogenous group in this respect. This is further supported by Jones' (2008) research, where women were found to employ three different strategies or responses to abusive or insulting behaviour at football from male fans, including swearing. Of all the rugby fans interviewed, 50% (17/34) explicitly disapproved of swearing but around one-quarter (9/34) had no problem with such language - at least as it was expressed at rugby. More football fans - nearly four-out-of-ten (37.2%) - were tolerant or in favour of swearing, but one-quarter explicitly objected (F1, F7, F9, F12, F18, F19, F20, F26, F34, F37, F42, F45, F48). Again there were suggestions here that swearing was more acceptable as a 'reflex' reaction rather something that occurred more routinely (F10), and provided this

was not 'extensive swearing' (F28) it was taken by many in football to be 'part and parcel' of going the match (F22, F29). For others, swearing was 'just fun' (F2) and was believed to add to the 'excitement' of the event, especially for men: 'It's the one time where a lot of men get the chance to exercise some aggression, support: get behind something when in their everyday lives it's often quite subdued isn't it?' (F11). F33 also argued that established traditions of class and masculinity should ultimately prevail in this respect: 'If you go to the football, it's football. It's a working man's sport. I don't think it's a posh sport...and swearing should be allowed'.

*iv) 'The true support sits in the Kop'*

As well as observing different cultural and social traits *between* these two rival sporting codes in the same city, my respondents had also developed quite sophisticated hierarchical mental maps about different types of supporter and their location *within* their own respective sporting culture. This was detailed 'anthropological' knowledge, signs of deep fandom. No female supporters sought out or wanted areas specifically for women. For example, some football respondents chose to sit in the goal-end Kop, the stand 'Where you get the most noise' (F32, see also F10, F14) and where the 'fanatical' fans sat (F35). F33 and F38 both sat in the home area closest to away fans (referred to as block L1 in the East Stand), because there was a better 'atmosphere' in this part of the ground, with 'banter from the two lots of fans'. In many such accounts perceptions about social class and club business were linked to the ecology of the stadium, thus defining who the 'real supporters' (F12) were. These females did not want to be consigned to areas for 'family' fans - or to the corporate wastelands:



‘The true support sits in the Kop. The Corporates just sit there and half of them are there for free anyway...There’s no point sitting there in silence; you should get behind your team really, and support them. That’s what you’re there to do [...]. I have sat in the Corporate [area] and I don’t know why the women are there to be honest, ‘cause they moan all the way through it. And they go before half time to get their drinks...In the Kop they’re there because they want to be there.’ (F14, Age 37, *STH, Returned fan, Tenancy Support Worker*)

‘The West Stand is awful... Sorry, but it’s probably all the stuck up people and directors and things like that. And they just sit there and watch.’ (F25, Age 53, *Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Community Support Officer*)

Welford Road has no equivalent to Leicester City’s Kop, but standing on the touchline ‘Crumbie’ terrace was where it was agreed supporters could be more ‘supportive and lively’ (R4). R10 suggested that those who stood there were the ‘hard people’ (a possible reference to being more exposed to the elements) who are ‘really into the game’, and R22 felt that standing up allowed more involvement in the sport because you can ‘stand and shout and swear, good stress release. And that’s easier if you’re standing’. R33 also suggested that the ‘Crumbie’ was more ‘friendly’ in comparison to other stands, which also lack ‘atmosphere’. One rugby fan suggested that the Tigers crowd lacked some of the inner distinctions by social class like those at football, which meant that ‘you’ve got managing directors sitting next to road sweepers...everybody seems to mix, nobody seems to be bothered about background or who you are or what you are’ (R16). But others, like R6, agreed that standing supporters were more ‘boisterous’ - and R31 admitted, ‘We’re probably a bit more refined in the seating’. Others offered often quite complex accounts of the ‘natural areas’ of the Welford Road stadium:

‘The older, more conservative people sit in the Next Stand, the Members Stand. The young upstarts sit in the Alliance and Leicester stand...like people with excess income, no kids. Because when that stand was built that was the most expensive to sit in. So it was all like the business types and they’ve got like the debenture boxes, the sponsor boxes at the top. So it still is a bit like that... The

Crumbie Stand I would say is probably the biggest, the most noticeable. That's where the kids are, and the families'. (*R1, Age 25, STH, Long-term fan, Principal Office Clerk*)

Tigers supporters were also convinced that they had a superior style of spectating, not just over football fans, but when compared to 'rougher' followers of other rugby clubs, such as at working class Gloucester (with one stand at this ground referred to as 'the Shed') which did not welcome opposition fans: 'Their fans aren't pleasant...I felt intimidated, I felt like I was at a Leicester City game' (R1). R19 was surprised at this allegedly 'nasty crowd' which used racist language, but argued that: 'We always say it's because they [Gloucester] haven't got a local football team to support. You're getting a bit of the football mentality there'. R14 was appalled when Gloucester fans spat on the visiting players as they came onto the pitch: 'Gloucester haven't got a football team and so we suggested that some of their football mentality was in the Shed' (see also R23). Watching rugby in stadiums shared with football clubs could also provoke aspects of this so-called 'football mentality' when supporters were 'herded in' to matches, and trips to working class clubs in south Wales could prove especially testing:

'They're [the Welsh] really horrible fans. I think you very much judge the opposition team by the fans, how respectful they are. And when you've got Llanelli Scarlett fans threatening to bottle you because you're not wearing the right shirt or you're not speaking the right language, I just think that's appalling, I just don't think there's a place for it in rugby.' (*R3, age 26, STH, Long-term fan, Charity Worker*)

In contrast, at Welford Road, as R9 explained, if visiting fans are 'gobby' and shout and swear, local supporters will self-police and say: 'Shut up, we don't do that here'. Or, 'if it's really bad the guy on the tannoy will say, you know: You're at Welford Road now, shut up'. This was part of a wider view held by Tigers fans that they had their 'own

code' for spectating (R32). R12 provided an example: a Llanelli Scarlett fan was swearing in the Crumbie, provoking a local response:

'Literally 40 people surrounding us, guys turned round and stared at him, and then one guy said you shouldn't be speaking like that, and he shut up. And that was it, end of... It was as if to say "We don't behave like that here, be polite to your colleagues and the people surrounding you." It's respect, I think, for the people around you and that's very good.' (*R12, Age 35, Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Part-time Conveyancer*)

Others provided similar examples, where culprits had been shamed into modifying their behaviour or to leaving the ground (e.g. R7, R9, R11, R14, R18, R23, R24, R27, R30, R32), and this probably enhanced Tigers' fans feelings of safety - certainly at home matches. There was little to compare in football. R7 explained how she has always felt that if there was ever a problem at a rugby match, assistance would soon come, but from *within* the crowd rather than from an external agency.

## 7.4 Summary

Little if any empirical research has *compared* fans of different sports, as has been attempted in this thesis. Thus these data offer a highly original insight into fans of two different sports in one English city. I began this chapter by looking at place attachments for female sports fans, and I challenged some of the underlying assumptions that imply that female fans typically lack these sorts of connections. Instead, these data demonstrate that some women do indeed strongly value local attachments and the tradition and heritage of their sports clubs in a similar way to male supporters.

Previous research has examined the 'topophilic' attachments that male fans have been argued to experience towards their respective home grounds (see Bale, 1994), but this research shows how female fans also express similar sentiments, despite the often

‘unfriendly’ female landscape of sports stadia. I then moved on to examine the barely concealed rivalry and hostility that exists between female fans of the two sports. This friction between supporters was largely attributed to social class differences resulting from the very different histories and sporting cultures of football and rugby union in the local area. Despite the recent major transformations of these sports, rugby union was still strongly associated with a middle or upper class identity, whereas football seemed to be more strongly identified with the working classes. This produced differences in urban or non-urban sporting affiliations, despite fans of both sports positing that it was important for all local sports clubs to be successful because this could play a key role in raising the profile of the city.

Differences in what constitutes a ‘good’ sporting atmosphere at matches and acceptable behaviour for supporters were also found to exist between fans of the two sports, and these differences seemed to further help encourage fans in their derogatory perceptions of fans of the ‘other’. Gender was often superseded by social class in this discussion, and these class differences will be an important factor in my final results chapter, when I consider the differences in the importance of these sports for women’s identity construction.

## **Chapter 8**

### **The Wider Meanings of Sport for Female Fans**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins by revisiting the debate touched upon in Chapter Two about different approaches to theorising female fandom. This then leads into a central discussion of the importance of sports fandom in the lives of late-modern women in Leicester. Here I use a simple typology to examine different styles of female sports fandom. Finally, I consider female fans' views of male fans and reflections on their own treatment today as committed followers of sport.

#### **8.2 Sport and Other Fandoms: 'Waiting for Something to Unravel'**

We saw in Chapter Two that there is a perceived hierarchy between male sports fans and female media fans; unlike popular culture fans, sports fans are not typically stigmatized or marginalized (Harrington and Bielby 1995; Schimmel *et al.*, 2007), and the supposedly more feminine types of fandom - such as around TV soaps - are often subject to more critical scrutiny than sports fandom (see Jones and Lawrence, 2000). So how do my female sports fans respond to this debate about media, gender and fandom?

Just under one-quarter of football and rugby fans challenged the division often drawn between sports and popular cultural forms of fandom, suggesting that connections could be made between being a sports fan and/or a fan with a different interest, such as movies, music and/or soaps (e.g. F1, F4, F5, F10, F16, F18, F22, F19, F25, F28, F30, F34, F42, F47 and R4, R5, R7, R8, R11, R29, R30). After all, many were also fans of other things. R7, for example, argued that her conversations about sport were actually

quite similar to two women talking about a soap, and F30, though not a fan of soaps herself, appreciated people ‘screaming at the television like I scream at the footballer on the pitch’. In these sorts of responses, fandom for women was often defined in fairly generic terms: ‘Being a fan of anything just means you’re into something enough to either want to go and see something or pay to go and see something, or make time for a certain thing in your life’ (F2):

‘I suppose a fan is just somebody who likes to go and watch something, so regardless of what it is...If you’re a fan, it’s like the anticipation of knowing that that event is coming up, thinking about what might happen, what the consequences of it might be. And then just taking part in it; whether you’re sat on the sofa watching TV, waiting for something to unravel, or at the stadium itself.’ (*R11, Age 27, Occasional attendee, New fan, Part-time Conveyancer*)

R5 also challenged the view that different types of female fandom normatively raise questions about conventional femininities and even acceptable sexualities:

‘I guess in people’s eyes there is probably this preconception that if you are a sporting fan, regardless of what sport that is, you spend your time in tracksuits and trainers and you’re probably a lesbian (*laughs*). But if you actually watch soap operas, you like going out shopping and things, then you’re that way inclined. But I think the two completely merge...I don’t think the two are mutually exclusive.’ (*R5, Age 31, Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Administration Assistant*)

However, others hinted at more essentialist explanations; that females are ‘naturally’ more interested in soaps. R4, for example, defined herself as a ‘soap addict’, linking this interest to her self-expressed ‘girly’ identity. F16 (a fan of both football and soaps) reasoned that: ‘You might find the average female football fan is one that likes all the soaps as well’, and F19 defined herself as more a fan of soaps rather than football, suggesting that women are attracted to soaps in a way they simply cannot be attracted to sport: they are able to relate and identify with the characters in a soap more than they

can with men playing football. Many women - more, one suspects, than men - could see real correspondences between different types of fandom, TV soaps and sport.

But still the majority did not share this view. F17 argued that those who watched soaps were simply different - more passive - to committed fans of sport. A number pointed out how you had to 'physically' go to watch sport rather than consume it at home and that one felt more 'involved' as a result (F3, F11, F12, F17, F20, F22, F29, F31, F32, F37, F50 and R1, R3, R12, R13, R14, R24). Here some even suggested that one could actively influence the result - shape the text - by being in the crowd and supporting your club (F20, F32 and R3, R14), though interactive reality TV now offers a similar opportunity for home viewers. Sports fandom was also widely claimed to be different from media fandoms because it was premised on interaction with other people and invoked the sociability of the crowd (F3, F20, F21, F29 and R6, R20, R28, R33). The financial investment required to be an active sports fan was another measure of commitment and of sport's greater importance (F2, F12, F22 and R24, R34). Finally, sports fandom also involved a greater 'emotional' investment (F11, R20) and was 'more part of life' or 'impinges more on my everyday life' (F10, F26) than other types of fandom.

This distinctive sporting narrative meant that there was simply more at stake in sport in terms of identity construction and sustenance: the outcomes of sport were deliciously and painfully unpredictable - unscripted - and important in a way which emphasised the outcomes of soaps were peripheral and marginal (see F6, F7, F14, F22, F32, F41 and R1, R11). Soaps have typically been viewed by academics as mere 'chewing gum for the eyes' (Kilborn 1992: 9), and in dominant discourses they are often still spoken of as

‘trash’ (Brown 1994: 18), with (female) viewers seeking to compensate for their own inadequate lives (Spence, 2005). Here, many female sports fans wanted to reaffirm the fandom hierarchies often drawn between the domesticised and passive ‘loser’ fans of soaps (Harrington and Bielby, 1995) and active and ‘public’ sports fans:

‘I’m just thinking about the people that I know that watch a lot of soap opera.... They go home, they shut the door, they have their tea, they sit and watch television all night...Most people that I know that watch football also have a lot of other hobbies. They’ll be heavily into something else or they’ll do other things or they’ll be into sport generally [...]. And I just think soap operas are just pointless, I really do. And it’s not real is it? It’s just nonsense, I mean they’re trying to portray real life, but it’s not real life. [But] there are some daft people out there; I mean you hear about it all the time, don’t you? When Arthur died on *EastEnders* people sent letters of condolence to Pauline and all that sort of thing...because there is an element of society that absolutely live and breathe it. Oh, God!’ (F17, age 35, *Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Sales Manager*)

Here soaps were seen in a rather pathological way as a substitute for inadequate lives. Sport, by contrast, was deemed an ‘escape’ or ‘stress relief’ from everyday life - from the ‘daily grind’ or ‘routine life’. It was an opportunity - not available to all women - to ‘escape’ from mundane domesticity, from ‘family life or thinking about family’ (F18, R13) or work. Words and phrases such as ‘adrenaline rush’, ‘release’ and ‘letting off steam’ were frequently used to describe the sport experience (e.g. F1, F2, F6, F7, F8, F12, F14, F17, F20, F27, F30, F39, F36, F40 and R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R9, R11, R13, R14, R16, R20, R21, R22, R23, R30, R31, R33). Female fans also use sport as a break from the strains of everyday work - a ‘therapeutic’ space (F12, R33) where they can exercise ‘anger management’ or ‘relaxation’ (F2, R1 & R30, R31) in a way which is perhaps more traditionally associated with male fans. The new world of work for women makes the ‘bubble’ of sport even more important: ‘We’re in a little bubble for a couple of hours and it’s really nice, you walk into the ground and you just think about football and talk about football for two hours and not think about anything else. So it is



quite a nice escape sometimes if I'm stressed from work' (F8). 'If I've had a really bad week at work I'm like I don't care, I'm going football on Saturday' (F2).

### **8.3 Hot and Cool Fans: Measuring the Importance of Sports Fandom**

Chapter Two discussed how quantitative attempts to measure fan motivations and differences in levels of motivation have been widely criticized because of their positivist character and because adapting and refining such scales makes comparisons between different studies extremely difficult. Giulianotti (2002) offers a more qualitative method of assessing different types of sports fandom with his taxonomy of spectator identities in football. Here he divides football supporters into four ideal-types: Traditional/Hot Spectators (Supporters), Traditional/Cool Spectators (Followers), Hot/Consumer Spectators (Fans) and Cool/Consumer Spectators (Flâneurs). The main framework used to 'measure' respondents' level of fandom in my analysis is respondents' response to the question: 'Is being a City/Tigers fan an important part of who you are?'. Thus, female fans were given the opportunity to reflect discursively on the importance of sport in their lives rather than being pressed into some prepared researcher categorization measured simply by time, expenditure or any other quantitative measure alone. Other indicators used in the analysis included:

- How they are affected when the club wins/loses.
- How much time is spent watching/thinking about sport.
- If people who know them normatively relate to them as a fan.

The framework used for organising these data draws tentatively on Giulianotti's (2002) 'hot' and 'cool' axis which is used to indicate the different degrees to which the club is central to the individual's project of self-formation: 'hot' forms of loyalty suggest an

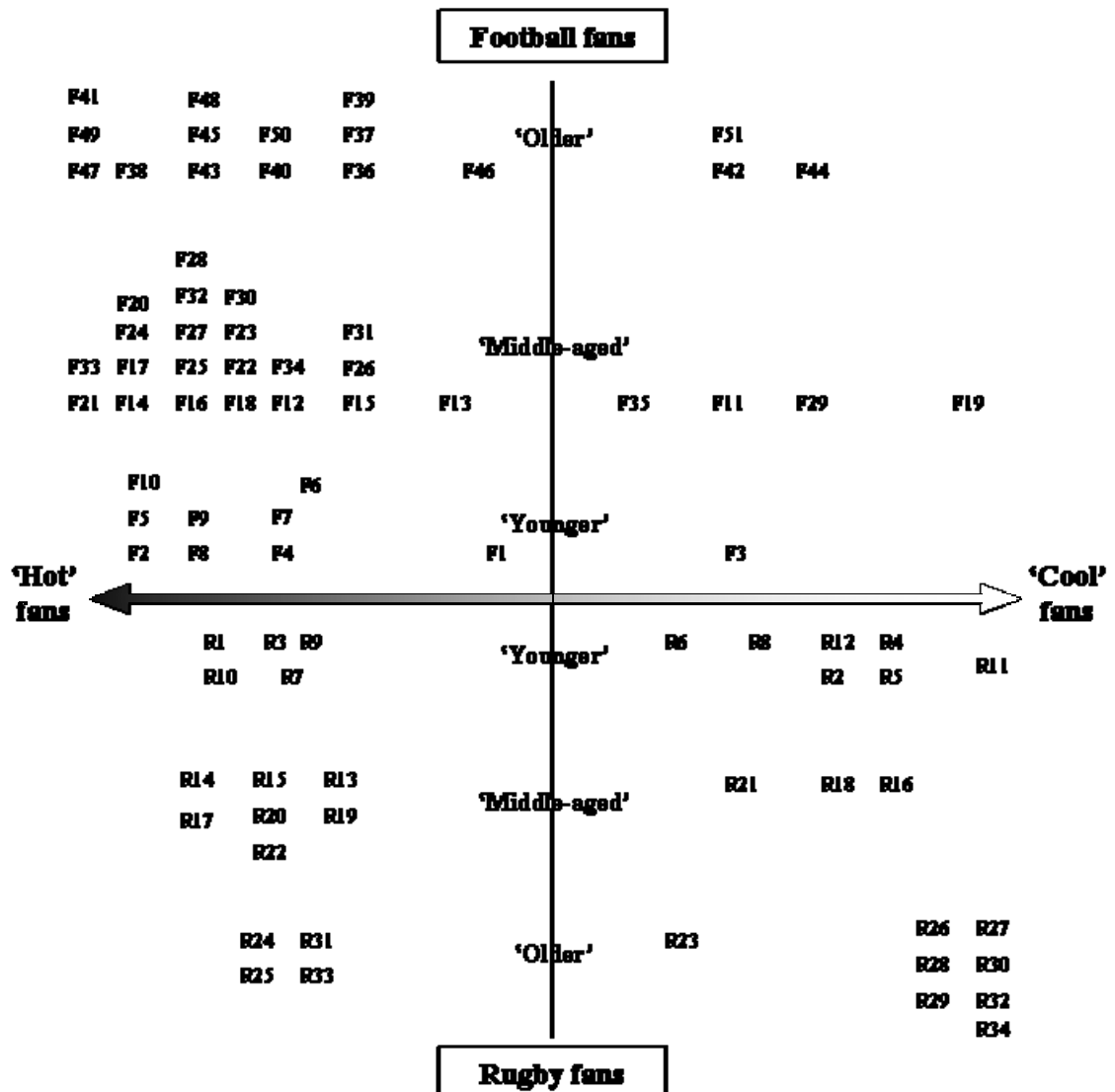
intense and 'organic' identification and solidarity with sports clubs and 'cool' is the reverse of this. Giulianotti sub-divides those in the 'hot' category into two further groups: 'supporters' and 'fans', and posits that traditional 'supporters' will have a longer, more local identification with their club. The consumer 'fan' relationship will be more market-centred. Although he acknowledges that the classic supporter has a long-term personal and emotional investment in the club, which may also be supplemented by a market-centred investment such as buying club merchandise, he suggests that the rationale for this consumption is to offer financial support to the club. Giulianotti's (2002) hot/consumer spectator, on the other hand, is one who enjoys sport's new celebrity status. Giulianotti claims that although 'hot' in terms of identification, the relationship of these fans with their club is weaker than that enjoyed by 'supporters' and their identification is 'authenticated' mostly via the consumption of club products. Using this schema, sports fans, allegedly, 'refer to stars by first name, discuss their private lives and traits, collect biographical snippets, surround the family home or workplace with their images' (Giulianotti 2002: 37).

This is enlightening and important work. However, I would suggest that this distinction between 'supporters' and 'fans' is relatively unhelpful in my own study of female fans. When employing a 'grounded theory' approach to data analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 2008), my data revealed considerable overlap between these two categories. 'Hot' fans can be 'traditional' as local supporters for whom switching to a rival club is impossible and the body is used to communicate solidarity with the club/community (Giulianotti 2002: 33). But they can also be overt sports 'consumers', with the workplace or home bedecked in club colours, posters of players and other merchandise. I also suspect that these different categories are designed to perpetuate the gendered hierarchy in sports

fandom research between more 'traditional' masculinist types of fandom - for example, King's (2002) 'lads' - and female 'new consumer fans'. In terms of the latter, Giulianotti (2002: 37) tellingly suggests that 'fans' will 'perhaps even fantasize about a loving, caring relationship with their objects of fandom'.

Giulianotti's (2002) 'cool' fan groups is perhaps most helpful in describing fans of 'global' football clubs who interact with their club largely through the medium of television and the internet. It is less useful when examining active supporters of smaller, local sports clubs. Unlike 'flâneurs', my 'cool' fans did not switch allegiances between teams or players, and although some may have followed the results of other clubs and/or supported a 'glamour' club as a child, all (except F26 a Manchester United follower) now had a clear commitment to a local sports club. Thus, my respondents did not typically fit Giulianotti's (2002: 36) 'followers' group for whom: 'there may be no simply ranked pyramid set of affiliations that the follower has for organizing his or her allegiances'. In my own work, 'cool' fans are defined as those for whom the club is not a central life interest but they still attend matches - occasionally or regularly - though this is usually viewed as one of many leisure activities. It should be noted that when referring to 'hot' and 'cool' fans, these are ideal fandom types - some cases do not fit easily into either category. But within this continuum between 'hot' and 'cool' there were also varying levels of fan attachment. In Figure 8.1 I have plotted my 85 cases as a crude visual reference point for general distinctions between 'hot' and 'cool' football and rugby fans. The vertical axis also allows for preliminary age comparisons to be drawn between the three generations. Fans to the left of the graphic are typically 'hot' and to the right are generally 'cool'.

**Figure 8.1: Female Fandom**



The number of matches respondents attended was not typically used centrally as a ‘measure’ of the intensity of their fandom. Some football and rugby fans had season tickets but in their comments and attitude to sport clearly fitted better in the ‘cool’ fan category. Indeed, a season ticket was usually necessary at Leicester Tigers in order to be able to attend any home matches due to the club’s limited capacity. Likewise, some ‘hot’ fans did not have season tickets (often due to financial reasons) but the club was clearly still extremely important to them.

*i) Sport & identity: 'The core of what makes you'.*

We saw in Chapter Two that a deep commitment to sport has traditionally been argued to be almost exclusively important for the construction of *men's* identities. But sport is also clearly central to the lives and identity interests of many women too. Nearly 85% of my football sample could best be described as 'hot' sports fans; just under half (47%) of the rugby fans could be described in the same way (see Figure 8.1). Rugby fans were less likely to have determined their own active support - they were more likely to be drawn in by the support of others. There were no obvious generational distinctions here, except for the fact that 'older' football fans were much more likely to fit the 'hot' fan category (81%) than were 'older' rugby fans (33%), who were also more likely to be at the extreme 'cooler' end of the axis (7/12 'older' rugby fan cases were plotted here).

For female respondents in the 'hot' fan category - especially football fans - sport was clearly an important facet of their identity. This might be illustrated by mentioning football on a personal CV, or a conscious determination to make new acquaintances aware of sport's centrality to a personal narrative, thus: 'Oh hello, I'm Kate, and I'm a Leicester City fan' (also, F1, F5, F12, F13, F14, F17, F20, F26, F30, F32, F38, F40, F41, F46, F49). Others commented positively on identity questions and the large amount of time they spent watching or thinking about football, using phrases such as: 'I'm a Leicester fan all of the time'; or that the club is 'A big part of your life'; or it 'Makes me, really'; or it is 'The core of what makes you' (e.g. F1, F2, F8, F9, F10, F13, F14, F16, F18, F20, F21, F22, F23, F25, F26, F27, F28, F30, F31, F32, F34, F38, F39, F41, F45, F47, F49, F50). Unlike most forms of leisure freely chosen from a range of alternatives, some 'hot' football fans posited their relationship to sport in more neo-pharmacological terms: that you do not always 'choose' to go to football. Instead it has

a 'druggy' or 'addictive thing' (F23), so 'You've gotta be there for the next one, the next fix' (F24) or to experience the 'happy rush' (F21). For others, identity and club had seemingly become fused: if you don't like my club, 'then they're not going to like me' (F6). For F9 and F42, attending football was comparable to membership of a family, the only other arena where one could experience a similar sense of 'belonging'.

Being a sports fan was also one of the 'props' used by some fans to project a more positive and interesting 'presentation of self' (Goffman, 1990) a way of completing or adding to identity. For example, F16 believed that describing herself as a football fan made her less 'boring' to other people, and for F28 watching football had made her more 'outgoing', providing her with something to talk about to other people. Being a loyal fan here was clearly a matter of considerable personal substance: 'Being a football fan of a particular club through thick and thin identifies me' (F22). Football support could be characterful: 'You've got some depth to your character rather than you're fairly shallow...it shows that you've supported a team for the last thirty years and you know, that you stick by them' (F17). Strong emotional responses often resulted from the question: 'Is being a City fan an important part of who you are?'

'It's an identity, and I think if you're a football fan, your football team is part of your identity and who you are and where you're proud of...I'm such a big football fan that it means a lot to me and it is part of my identity. It's part of me and it's part of how I spend my money and how I spend my weekends and how I spend my thinking geared round my week...So if people were to, like, say to me "Describe yourself" and "What are your interests?" It would be a big part of me to say this is what I like doing, this is who I am.' (F2, Age 23, *STH, Long-term fan, Accounts Manager*)

'Football's always been my life. Like I said, playing it, watching it...I like lots of different sports but football's always been the one if you like...the love of my life. That's me; that's part of me.' (F25, Age 53, *Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Community Support Officer*)

In general terms, sports fandom was more important to ‘hot’ football fans than to their (fewer) rugby fan equivalents. But for a smaller proportion of ‘hot’ rugby fans, sport also seemed to play a key role in their everyday lives and sense of self-identity. Responses ran along similar lines to those from the football: the club is, ‘part of who you are and is a statement that you make about yourself’ (R3); it was ‘part of me, part of my life’ (R13, see also R25); or ‘part of who I am’ (R1, R9, R14, R15, R20, R24). People who meet these rugby women are very soon made aware that they follow the club (R3, R9, R15, R31). As for many of the football fans, a few rugby respondents had being a Tigers fan as a key personal identifier, and they often used a family discourse to site the sport and the Tigers club in their lives:

‘It’s what I’ve known for more than half my life, and it’s like an extension of my family, like the team is like another part of who I am, and I’m quite sad, I don’t get out very often, that’s what I do..... The majority of my social environment revolves around rugby matches and people I know from the rugby. I haven’t found anything else that I love as much as the Tigers...there’s nothing else as important, apart from my family.’ **(R1, Age 25, STH, Long-term fan, Principal Clerk)**

‘In order of priority it’s sort of, it’s Tigers and then it’s my other half and then it’s the kids and the grandkids you know, and everybody, they all know it. They’ve been told that that’s the order of importance.’ **(R24, Age 68, STH, Long-term fan, Retired- worked as a Civil Servant)**

Rugby did not seem to ‘leak’ into other areas of the lives of rugby fans in quite the same way as it did for football fans. This may be a social class effect - previous surveys have highlighted that rugby fans generally have higher incomes and come from a narrower class range than football fans and this is confirmed by my own samples (see Williams 2003, 2004 for average income of Leicester City and Tigers fans). Crudely speaking here, more rugby fans in the sample tended to fit typical middle class identifiers than did football fans (see Chapter Seven). Perhaps women (and men) from more middle class

origins have other things going on in their lives besides sport - a higher level of job satisfaction, or other leisure activities which they are more deeply involved in - thus making it more likely that sport will be just one of a range of their leisure activities. In this context sport is likely to form just a small part, rather than a more significant dimension, of a fan's identity.

For the larger group of 'cool' rugby fans, detachment and choice were strongly to the fore in their descriptions of sporting options: 'There's plenty of other things. It's just one of the things I do in my spare time. I mean I'd be very disappointed if I couldn't go, but I don't think it would be the end of the world' (R27). Identity issues were relatively insignificant here: 'If I had to describe myself, I don't think being a rugby fan would come into it to be honest with you' (R11). Some subjects seemed fairly rooted into either 'hot' or 'cool' sports follower camps, but the typical heterosexual female life cycle also meant some considerable shifting between the 'hot' and 'cool' nodes. For example, having children was one of the main factors which affected movement from a 'hot' to a rather 'cooler' fan affiliation - and then perhaps back up to 'hot' (or planning to return) after offspring had grown. Others found it difficult, emotionally, to invest strongly in sport when their children were young, so they postponed their active, committed fandom until their children were older (e.g. F17, F18, F21, F32, F37, F45, F47, F51 and R13, R18, R26).

Such domestic barriers are liable to be much less significant for male fans, of course. For men, sport is typically seen as one of the key definers of acceptable masculinities and a release from the feminising constraints of children and home. Women are much more likely to self-define - and be defined by others - by their enduring and essentialist



responsibility as chief home carer. They will also be judged - and often judge themselves - on the same basis. For F17, for example:

‘Before, it’s your football club you have this camaraderie with everybody else around you and whatever. All of a sudden, this responsibility of having children just completely... everything else goes. And it’s only now that they’ve got older and they can sort of look after themselves a bit that the football starts to creep back in a bit...When I first had children, I just sat there and I thought “Oh my God!” The responsibility of having children was just overwhelming. You just think everything that this child does is my responsibility. So I think that for women, naturally, they take on that, and the men think: “Oh, she’s coping, so I’ll carry on doing whatever.”’ (*F17, Age 35, Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Sales Manager*)

In some cases, having children pressed women to seriously examine their commitment to sport. Before having children F21 was affected by City’s results to ‘ridiculous proportions’. But now, ‘it is almost as if I put it [football] away on Saturdays’ in case it impacted upon her children. Becoming a mother also meant adapting to this new identity: avoiding being viewed as a ‘weirdo’ because football is apparently ‘strange to most women’. For some more extreme ‘hot’ fans *not* having children was one of the main reasons they could actively commit to their club: ‘There’s only two of us; we haven’t got any children so we are both quite involved’ (R22). Other factors which reshaped fan identities and commitment included moving house (moving further away from the club could lead to more detachment, see F44, for example), and relative satisfaction in other aspects of one’s life. For instance, being unhappy in a job or a relationship might increase the importance attached to sport. F4 was an extreme ‘hot’ fan as a teenager while being bullied at school. She used football as a space where she felt ‘safe and loved’. As these problems diminished so did the intensity of her attachment to football, although she still remained a ‘hot’ fan.

## *ii) 'Masculine' femininities and 'feminine' femininities*

As I have already indicated (see Chapter Three) Ussher (1997) has suggested that there are typically four 'performances' of femininity available to most women: 'being girl', 'doing girl', 'resisting girl', and 'subverting femininity', and Sisjord and Kristiansen (2009) have drawn on this model for their research on female wrestlers. This position has been useful in my analysis of the diversity of supporter styles and motives revealed amongst my sample of female sports fans. Like Sisjord and Kristiansen's (2009: 238) female wrestlers, many of my respondents could be said to be 'doing girl' as they were spectating at a predominantly masculine sporting event. In this sense they could be said, in some respects, to be 'ridiculing the very performance of [conventional] femininity'. Drawing upon Ussher's (1997) framework, and Sisjord and Kristiansen's (2009) application of it to the life-world of female wrestlers, crudely speaking, there were two different kinds of gender 'performance' which can help to connote female fan types:

- 'Masculine' femininities (those characterised by 'doing girl' and 'resisting girl' approaches to presentation of self. This was more typically displayed by 'hot' fans).
- 'Feminine' femininities (those characterised by 'doing girl' and 'being girl' approaches. This was more typically expressed by 'cooler' fans).

This is a schematic frame, a heuristic device - not all 'hot' fans for, example, took on aspects of a normative 'masculine' femininity, and there was a considerable blurring between the two spectator types as women carefully 'balanced' and nuanced their gender and sporting identities. But this is a helpful, if simple, framework to begin to

unpack some of the general themes that emerged around the gender/sport axis in female sports spectatorship.

Many of those respondents who performed strong 'masculine' femininities in their supporter identities described themselves as 'tomboys', who had often played competitive team sport (see Chapter Five). In some cases these women identified more strongly with men and male fans than they did with most females. F21, for example, played badminton to a high level and suggested that this offered a connection with many male fans: 'A lot of people that go to a lot of these games have been very sporty...So they have that will to win, need to win.' F18 played national league hockey for Leicester Ladies and F17 visited the gym regularly and felt physically strong enough to compete on equal terms with men: 'I can probably out run anybody. I can lift more weights than most men'. These kinds of responses seem to echo some of the narratives of Sisjord and Kristiansen's (2009) wrestlers who have accepted the 'athletic body' and thus 'resist' body discipline according to traditionally signified femininity (see Chapter T. In Chapter Five we also noted how many of these heterosexual women maintain aspects of this 'tomboy' identity into adulthood and express an enduring hostility to what they perceive to be extreme forms of conventional femininity - to 'girlie girls' or to those who more typically perform 'being girl'.

Jones (2008: 528-529) has argued that there were three main gender strategies used by female fans to respond to their minority status in football: 'defining sexist and abusive behaviour as disgusting', 'downplaying sexist and homophobic abuse' and 'embracing gender stereotypes as part of the game' (see Chapter Two). Women who adopted the third strategy accepted traditional ideas about gender within football. They distanced

themselves from ‘emphasized femininity’ and rejected those women who they felt did not ‘do fandom properly’. They complained about women getting ‘dolled up’ to go to football matches, arguing that there was ‘no place’ for women of this kind in the stadium. Like many of Jones’s (2008) respondents, some of my own interviewees tried to differentiate themselves from women spectators who were not ‘real’ fans - they wanted to be seen, in this context, as gender neutral supporters. Sisjord and Kristiansen’s (2009: 241) wrestlers were compatible with ‘resistant girl’ as they adhered to ‘the wrestling ethos of fighting - to beat the opponents and be able to take a beating - reflecting hegemonic masculinity’. This conceptualization seems applicable to the small number of female fans in my research who were prepared to use violence at football if necessary.

F33, for example, admittedly in an extreme case, cautioned that if women fans were *not* prepared to fight at football should the need arise then they should not sit in her almost exclusively male, sometimes unruly section of the Walkers Stadium. F24 - who strongly objected to the ‘culture of femininity’ (Scruton, 1996) among girls who were opposed to physical exertion in PE lessons - was contemptuous of women who see football as an ‘afternoon out.’ These were typically ‘feminine’ women who took ‘hot drinks and cakes’ to games, and who wore high heels and lipstick, which was all ‘very strange’ or ‘boring’. This football fan had been involved in fan violence with young men during the 1970s and 1980s (see Chapter Six), and she strongly identified with men and archetypically aggressive male fans:

‘I’ve always been one of the lads, cos I’ve always done what they’ve done. Apart from having to use the ladies toilets (*laughs*). I’ve always been on the stag weekends and everything. Because I talk about football so much, men are more entertaining for me than women are. They [women] talk about shopping and the latest clothes from wherever, all this designer stuff. I just haven’t got a clue.

Whereas you can go anywhere in the world and with your knowledge of football, you can have a conversation with anyone. Well any *man* anyway. So I've always been in men's company.' (F24, age 51, Member, Returned fan, Production Operative)

Russell and Tyler (2002) in their study of identity construction of younger girls (aged 10-11 years) found that 'doing' femininity was a complex process at this age. Girls defined themselves as 'half-girlie' because although they participated in the 'girlie' activity of shopping and were already conscious of their appearance, they also played football at lunchtimes. Thus, a blurring of conventional forms of the 'masculine' and 'feminine' led to some early identity confusion. As girls got older, most of this confusion usually disappeared as a commitment to sport or to conventional femininities forced many women into opposing camps. But some younger adult women had successfully managed potentially conflicting aspects of gender identity skilfully and with confidence, in contrast to those who struggled to 'balance' these different identity traits:

'I'm not like a girl football fan, who isn't into anything else. I love shopping, absolutely obsessed with it... I've always been the girlie girl but I've just always been [into] football. And I've always got on with the lads really well, but probably because I can talk about football...I've only ever been described by one person as a 'ladette': which was the next door neighbour. But he's really into football, so I have proper in-depth conversations with him about the football, and he's like "Ohh, you're such a tomboy". And I'm like "Yeah, but I'm not really, am I?" Maybe that's people's stereotypes or opinions on women who like football. Maybe they expect them to be a tomboy...Maybe what they expect a woman who likes football to be, is not what I am[...] I was a little bit shocked by that. [...] But I think maybe it's cos I've got a bit of confidence when it comes to talking about stuff, especially football[...] I'll just go off on one, talk about it, chat away to them, and they're kind of like "Where's all this come from?"' (F2, Age 23, STH, Long-term fan, Accounts Manager)

Those who typically performed more 'feminine' femininities did not tend to self-identify as tomboys or to play team sport. Playing rugby was simply out of reach for

most women and playing football, was often perceived as something that ‘girls did not do’ (see Chapter Five).

### *iii) The intensity of women’s sporting attachments*

More ‘masculine’ football respondents also described their proto-addictive allegiance to the club and to the sport in a way that might typically be expected of committed male fans. For F8, for example: ‘I’m just hooked...it’s got into my blood and I’ve just developed this passion and I just can’t imagine not being a Leicester fan’. For F17, ‘When you really get into it, it just runs through your veins...you can live and breathe every bit of it’. F18 identifies intensely with the football club as a means of escaping other, more ‘feminine’ identities (as mum, daughter etc.) and it reflected back her own preferred sense of self which was often masked or damaged by these other constraining responsibilities:

F18: I just think during that era, you know, [1990s] Leicester never say die or whatever it was...that did seem to emphasise what Leicester were about. But, you know, for me that’s what I like. That is how I try to play my hockey, so I suppose that really grabbed me. Because that’s how I saw Leicester at the time...That’s how I like to see myself. [...]

*Res: How about in other areas of your life, can you relate to this there?*

F18: Yeah, I’d like to think I’m a grafter. And just get stuck in and get a job done. (*F18, Age 40, STH, Long-term fan, Self-employed Accountant*)

‘When we’re at the football, I swear, but it’s not because I’m being horrible, it’s because I’ve got all these emotions inside me. So this is your football mum, it’s not your mum at home.’ (*F24, Age 51, Member, Returned fan, Production Operative*)

‘It’s an escape for me from being mum, wife, mentor at college, it’s me. It’s me, it’s individual and who I am, you know...it’s me. It’s my time (*laughs*).’ (*R14, Age 45, STH, Long-term fan, Learning Mentor*)

In these terms, for some women following sport clearly acts as a significant 'backstage' Goffman (1990) - a space where they feel they can actually be themselves, and explore this otherwise hidden or suppressed part of their identity. This also demonstrates a relative fragmentation of late-modern identities for many women, who must mobilise different aspects of their identities at different moments in their lives. Yet balancing these different identity fragments may prove difficult: sport is not so easily 'contained' in this sense. Sport - especially football - can produce extremes in terms of emotional responses: 'bouncing', 'upbeat', 'elated', 'cheerful' or 'euphoria' in the case of victory (F2, F7, F27, F39, F40, F47, F48, F50), but 'foul' or 'bad' moods or 'bad-tempered', 'depressed', or 'down' when defeated (F2, F8, F9, F13, F20, F39, F41, F47, F48, F49) or even being 'gutted', 'sick', 'upset' or 'devastated' (F4, F5, F6, F7, F22, F24, F27, F28, F32, F40, F50), with some needing time to 'sulk' and 'recover' (F2, F10).

For F9, when the team is not performing you: 'crush yourself'. Like the 'hot' football fans, some of my rugby respondents in this group also described how they were either 'buzzing', 'happy' or 'lifted' (R1, R9, R13, R14, R17, R20, R24) when Tigers won, or 'gutted', 'snappy', 'emotive', 'down', 'grumpy' or 'depressed' (R1, R7, R14, R22, R24, R25) when they lost. Some rugby respondents could also give more extreme examples of how results had deeply affected them. After defeat in a cup final, R22 cried and R14 recalled thinking, 'I can't go through this again. I do not want to go through this pain again'. But rugby supporters were also dismissive of the alleged emotional incontinence of football supporters who, 'Look like they're going to die because they've lost a game' (R3) (see also Chapter Seven).

Of course, 'cool' football fans were not affected by results in this way and 'cool' rugby fans were even less affected, a function perhaps of the class base of this group and the sport's residual amateur ethos (see Richards, 2006). Those who watched *both* football and rugby confessed to being more affected by the results of the football, rather than the rugby club (R2/F10 and R21/F15). As 'duel' fan R2/F10 put it in relation to rugby: 'As long as they put on a good show, it's: Oh well, there's always next week sort of atmosphere to it' (see also R8). For others, any deep feelings connected to the outcome did not last very long (R5, R8, R11, R16, R23, R27, R29, R32). For 'cool' fans such as these, phrases such as, 'It's a game at the end of the day' (e.g. R18, R23, R27, R29, R32) were used much more frequently, thus implying an emotional distance from the effects of losing. For 'cool' female fans - in football but especially in rugby union - sport was more of a 'leisure activity' (R28, R32) or a type of 'entertainment' (R23) rather than a central life interest.

'Cool' fans typically do not spend too much time watching or thinking about sport in a typical week, but for 'hot' fans things could be very different: 'We'll be miserable, the kids will be miserable at the same time, so everyone's just on a downer' (F14). F20 took refuge in shared gloom: 'I think it helps when the husband's in the same mood as well, cos he's down as well if they've lost, or up when we've won. So we both just ignore each other'. For some 'hot' fans, this led to friction in their relationships and caused problems in their personal lives. These more extreme 'hot' fans confessed to thinking about sport or their club 'constantly' (F24, F33). R22 confessed that, '50 per cent of the week you're thinking about it [rugby] or you're doing something about it' (see also R20). For F17 it was '25 per cent of my time'. Given the amount of time these 'hot' fans devoted to their club and the impact results usually had on their mood, relations



with close relatives were also demonstrably affected. Sport could lead to severe problems in close personal relationships, especially for women whose husbands or partners were *not* sports fans. This sort of gender transgression or role dissonance could lead to abuse towards female fans - or towards their male partners. For example, F2's ex-boyfriend did not attend matches with her, and others found this role reversal 'really strange' and would 'make fun' of her boyfriend. R14 protested that although she introduced her partner to rugby and explained the laws of the sport to him, people always 'presume that it is the other way round'.

For some subjects, sporting obsession went well beyond the post-match mood. With commitment levels so high, organising other life activities became increasingly difficult. Even family marriages were scheduled not to coincide with football (e.g. F20, F21, F43). The sports club was the focal point of their lives: 'Nothing comes in the way of it...and you sort of plan your life around the fixtures list' (F14):

'I mean, once the season's finished we're waiting for the fixtures list to come out, we can't book anything. Everything has to wait till the fixture list comes out, so we can see when we're free...It's priority one, is the football. Everything else has to be worked round it.' (F20, Age 48, *STH, Long-term fan, Office Clerk*)

When *both* partners were interested in sport - especially football, as in the cases above - this could also herald serious life impacts. Some women could not contemplate a personal relationship with a non-Leicester City fan, for example. As F24 put it: 'It's a big part of my life, and if he can't accept me as a Leicester fan then I'm afraid I don't want to know you, sort of thing'. A younger football fan (F2) explained why marriage to a City fan was crucial for domestic harmony:

‘I would never marry a Forest fan; it would be an absolute nightmare. I couldn’t do it, I couldn’t do it. I’d have to find someone to go football with me, or just let me go...I think it would cause a lot of problems actually if they were massive football fans...I couldn’t go to a home match [with them] if Leicester were playing and we were at home [...]. It would be so much easier and it would be so great if you could find someone to go to the football with. To share an interest and to both be passionate about going to the football - and to want to watch the same team.’ (*F2, Age 23, STH, Long-term fan, Accounts Manager, Single*)

In another, more extreme, example of the role of football in family life, F33 described how she had told her husband, a man who initially ‘hated’ football: ‘Either go and live with someone else, or take me [to] football’. They now go to all home and away matches together. For ‘cool’ fans the club was usually not important enough to impact upon personal relationships in the same way or to bleed into the everyday work lives as it did for ‘hot’ fans. A large number of football fans, especially, discussed the importance of sports banter in the workplace - usually, though not always, with male colleagues. For some it was very difficult to enter normal work relations, especially with those who supported other local clubs:

F24: One of my team leaders at work at the minute is a Derby [County] fan. I hate him, I absolutely hate him. He’s such an idiot...I used to find it hard to talk to people that were Forest fans.

*Res: So if you find out that people at work support Derby or Forest...*

F24: I wouldn’t be that friendly. Although saying that there is a guy at work who works quite close with me, and he’s a Forest fan [...]. When I first knew him, I couldn’t speak to him. I was very offish with him [...]. It’s because of the football, I can’t help it. I’ve just got this hatred for anyone who says they’re a Forest fan’. (*F24, Age 51, Member, Returned fan, Production Operative*)

Rugby fans seemed far less likely to experience this sort of local banter - Tigers have few serious local rivals - or to express this sort of hostility, although R14 described how there was some rivalry between the football and rugby staff at her workplace and how this had led to exchanges on Monday morning depending on local results.

#### *iv) Consumption and female fandom*

Crawford (2004: 34) suggests that although not all fan activity involves acts of consumption, being a sports fan, 'most often (and increasingly) is associated with consuming; be that attending a 'live' sport event, watching it on television, buying a team's replica jersey...or any other multitude of fan related consumer practices'. 'Hot' fans in my sample consumed live sport more than others - some attended *all* Leicester City's matches (e.g. F21, F33). An important distinction was made by football respondents between supporters at home matches and those who also travelled away from home: 'If you're willing to travel miles and miles and miles to get to a match in the cold...like with Chelsea, we didn't get back till 3am. If you're willing to do that, it means you actually want to go. You're a proper supporter, you know what I mean?' (F2). Others also made reference to this implicit supporter hierarchy - that away fans were 'hard core' supporters (F6, F8), with more 'passion' (F14).

Although some 'cool' fans did attend sport regularly, most were more occasional attendees and, unlike most 'hot' fans, this pattern of attendance was usually articulated using the language of consumer choice rather than by reference to other restrictions. As R34 put it: 'I might be getting a bit bored with it now' and R29 says: 'Sometimes you think: "Oh I can't be bothered to go down"'. Many of the 'cooler' fans - especially rugby followers - continued to view sport as something that was not really *that* important to them, but rather was more an opportunity to spend time with their sports-attending partner - 'something we could do together' in the words of R26 (and also F19, F29, R16, R18, R26, R29, R32, R34).

Going to matches solely to spend time with (male) partners could, however, have negative consequences for some women. Crabbe *et al.*'s (2006) 'football widows' group revealed that sport caused many domestic tensions. Typically, men in relationships can still use football as a 'time out' to spend with their 'mates', while 'trapped' women feel obliged to sanction this gender divide. Some of my 'cool' female fans experienced other problems: their 'reward' for actively sharing in a male partner's sporting interest was the potential saturation of their free time with gossip - inevitably about sport. At the end of one interview, F29 whispered to me just before I left that: 'He [her husband] is too much sometimes'. Here was a man who continuously plied his partner with information about the club and would never let her 'switch off'.

Buying club products can be read as a sign of strategic sporting devotion or else a 'front' for occasional attenders - tourist fans (see King, 2002). Pretty much every subject in my sample bought *something* connected with their club; for some this simply included buying and wearing the club shirt or sporting colours on match days or buying club clothing such as jumpers, coats and gloves to wear throughout the week. Some 'hot' fans had rooms, or even a home, dressed in club colours and products, thus fusing the domestic and public realms. F33, for example, hangs City flags out of the windows of her home, had bought carpets in the club's royal blue and had decorated her lounge in Leicester City merchandise and pictures. Some football and rugby fans opted to devote a smaller section of their homes to club products: a display cabinet, perhaps, which typically included club pictures, glasses, teddies, and books. 'Hot' City fans avoided Forest red in home decor. The more extreme cases of club merchandise consumption usually came from football fans, though a small number of rugby fans decorated their homes in a similar way. Football fan F14 deliberately purchased a house which

overlooked Leicester City's training ground, and some football women sported tattoos of the club to demonstrate their allegiance (F24, F33). Many supporters suggested that being a fan meant that: 'You've got to wear the gear' (F36): that wearing the shirt was part of a necessary match day 'uniform' or 'outfit' (F20). While F8 felt you had to purchase the latest club shirt to be a 'proper' fan, F17 described how she always wears an older club shirt simply to demonstrate that she is not a consumer orientated 'fickle fan'.

#### **8.4 Sport, Gender & Inclusion**

##### ***i) 'It keeps me going'***

Some older female sports fans insisted that being an active fan was much more than consumption and club devotion: it helped keep them alive. After retirement, actively going to football was, for some, their sole remaining leisure focus and also a symbol of their independence. Sport provided, 'Somewhere to go on a Saturday afternoon and get out' (F48), so it constituted a brief period in which older people were able to escape the boundaries of the home:

'I think that's what keeps me going to tell you the truth. I mean some people sit in all weekend...If you got me away from the match I think that would...I wouldn't find it very interesting cos, you know, you'd be confined to the house.'  
(F47, Age 78, STH, Long-term fan, Retired- worked in sewing, Married)

For some of these quite senior fans, sport had increased in importance following the death of a close relative - usually their husband. Attending sport now provided life-affirming opportunities, in a narrowing social milieu and range of contacts, to meet and socialise with other people. This is why sporting fixtures were so eagerly anticipated - to reassert structure and meaning in one's life. For 80 year old F45, since the death of her husband, 'Football keeps me going'. F48 (also widowed) explains:

‘When you go regularly [to games] you get more attached and I’ll tell you this much...I’ve lost my husband, and I find that I’ve got to have an interest and that is my interest now, Leicester. I think: “Thank goodness I’m going on Saturday.” Because, otherwise, sometimes if I don’t see them [daughter and son-in-law] I might be on my own, Saturday and Sunday. Do you know what I mean? A bit lonely.’ (*F48, Age 79, Member, Long-term fan, Retired- worked in Banking, Widowed*)

Recent research shows that friendships are increasing in importance as the relative significance of family relationships declines (Allan, 2009). Spencer and Pahl (2006: 108) have used the term ‘suffusion’ to explore the idea that ‘‘family’ and ‘friend’ are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories’, and Allan (2009: 4) lends weight to the notion that ‘friend’ and ‘family’ boundaries are becoming blurred. He proposes that unlike in previous generations, people now have more choice in how they manage friend and family relationships, so ‘some friends are like family and some family members are also friends’. He claims that ‘instead of a kinship-based family, some individuals have a generally close-knit set of largely non-kin friends whom they trust to provide them with the practical and emotional support they need’.

Friends at sports matches seem to fulfil this role for some women. For 61% of football fans and 59% of rugby respondents the social interactions they shared at sport events were an important aspect of the match day routine. F28, like many others, argued that sport helped ‘break down barriers’ between people (see also F2, F12, F25, F27, F28, F35, F37, F40 and R1, R10, R19, R20). Some respondents missed the social relationships that came with sitting in the same area of the stadium regularly when they no longer had a season ticket (F17, F25, F37 and R5). Many arranged to meet up with friends before matches or else arrived at the ground early to meet up with others. Some female fans arranged to go for meals - more a feature of the rugby sample - either before or after matches to give more time for these social interactions (e.g. R6, R7, R14, R15,

R19, R20). A good illustration of this is R14's social group who arranged to meet up at different people's homes on the mornings of match days. The restaurant and the home - and in some cases the pub (see below) - complemented the sociability of the sports stadium for many women.

Respondents varied in how important they regarded the relationships with people they met on match days. For some these friendships were contingent and limited: 'They're your Saturday afternoon friends' (F25). For F28, rather more precisely: 'They're somewhere in-between football acquaintances and friends.' But for others they were definitely 'proper friends' (R10) or even people who could be considered as part of their sporting 'family'. These sorts of sporting friendships corresponded to Spencer and Pahl's (2006: 60) range of friendship 'types' which moved, broadly speaking, from 'simple' to 'complex' friendships. In some cases, these sports-related interactions stretched beyond mere sports 'talk' towards complex friendships. For example, some respondents relied on these friends for advice about a variety of issues regarding their personal lives, and they often kept in touch on social networking internet sites. They arranged to meet sports friends *away* from matches: at birthday parties, christenings and weddings, or simply for watching Sky Sports, and World Cup TV matches at each other's homes (F14, F21, F32 and R7, R19). F5 also described how she enjoyed the way football offered opportunities to meet *new* people each week, though she also enjoyed seeing familiar 'friendly faces'. One woman in the stadium was affectionately referred to by people around her as 'mother' - no-one knew her name - because she always brought pre-prepared food supplies for all. R14 and her husband were unsure whether to renew their Tigers' season tickets due to financial pressures. They decided to go ahead

because the people at rugby had become, 'part of our social life' to the extent that their rugby friends visited each other's homes at Christmas.

Traditionally, of course, both the football ground and the match-day pub have been sites for communal masculine expression - spaces where women have been, typically, largely excluded (see Holt, 1989). Crabbe *et al.*, (2006) have examined how male TV football watching at local pubs often leads to excessive alcohol consumption, creating tension and conflict in personal relationships: female fans who attend pubs as part of the football experience were not discussed in their research. However, my own data show that the pub was an important sporting meeting place for some of my female respondents. The pub was an important site for bonding with other fans or sports-made friends (e.g. F2, F5, F9, F11, F12, F13, F21, F24, F30, F31, F32, F33, F35 and R6, R7, R15, R19, R20). The relationship between alcohol, men and sport has a long history in Britain, of course (see Collins and Vamplew, 2002), but alcohol consumption in pubs was important for some female fans too. As well as providing a convenient meeting space, public houses added to the sociability of the live sporting experience:

'It's a big thing, a big sociable thing, we all meet down the pub first and sometimes we carry it on after the game...Part of the build up is to have a few, just a couple of pints I think before the match, and you know, chew things over and reading the *Sporting Blue* and catch up on social stuff as well.' (F12, Age 35, *STH, New fan, Recruitment Manager*)

Some respondents discussed the interpenetration of the mediated and 'live' football event on matchdays: watching communally a match in the pub on television before going to a live game. F30 even hired a room in a local pub with some of her friends as a venue for following England during World Cup matches. Meeting at pubs was more important for the 'younger' and 'middle aged' female football fans than others. The pub



may still be perceived by older women as an inappropriate space for female use. Although some respondents went to sports pubs as part of large, mixed sex groups, for a number of the female football fans - self-professed 'tomboys' - they were sometimes the only female present in a male group. Green (1998: 171) has claimed that 'women doing friendship' can be an important source of empowerment in female friendships. She claims that, 'women's talk' is a key aspect of women's friendships and can, 'enable women to "mirror" traditional aspects of femininity...whilst at the same time allowing for contradictory or counter discourses of difference'. My own data show that some 'sporty' women's closest friends are probably males, and that participation in otherwise male-dominated activities, such as drinking and watching sport, can also lead to a sense of independence and empowerment for some women.

## *ii) Comparing male and female sports fans*

A large proportion of the female respondents suggested that there were actually *no* important differences in the behaviour of men and women at sport: that fans of both sexes often shout and participate at matches and they invest broadly the same emotionally in their club (F1, F2, F4, F6, F10, F12, F14, F15, F16, F17, F20, F21, F25, F26, F30, F31, F32, F33, F39, F40, F41, F43, F44, F45, F47, F48, F50, F51 and R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R11, R14, R15, R16, R18, R20, R24, R26, R27, R28, R30, R31, R33). For *football* fans it was more usually asserted that men were more likely than women to get 'aggressive', 'wound up' or 'abusive' at sport (F3, F5, F9, F18, F19, F21, F22, F23, F27, F28, F29, F34, F35, F38). Rugby fans typically proposed that there were no important differences between the sexes in this respect; the behaviour of men at rugby was less abrasive than men at football. As R15 put it enigmatically: 'If you're a rugby supporter you're a rugby supporter'.

There were suggestions from a number of respondents that there were no real differences in sporting knowledge levels between the sexes - women understand sport in the same way, and with the same depth as men (e.g. F1, F2, F3, F5, F8, F9, F14, F16, F18, F21, F22, F25, F26, F32, F36, F40, F47, F48 and R2, R3, R5, R7, R11, R20, R23, R25, R28). A small minority even argued women have a *better* grasp and understanding of the fundamentals of football (F22, F28). ‘Hot’ (especially football) fans were more likely to claim women understand sport in the same way as men. Most women accepted that men generally spent more time reading about sport (especially on the statistics and technicalities surrounding it) and discussing it with other people (men), especially in the workplace. But men’s supposed superior sports knowledge was often attributed to men being more likely than women to have experience of *playing* team sport (F13, F17, F22, F25, F27, F38, F39, F41, F47, F51 and R1, R3, R4, R8, R9, R10, R12, R13, R15, R17, R18, R21, R22, R27, R29, R30, R31, R32).

More knowledge or not, males clearly played a very influential role in first recruiting women to sport. Liston (2006) found that male role models and especially fathers played a key role in enabling females to participate in male-dominated sports such as football in Ireland and Ben-Porat (2009) has also highlighted the importance of males in recruiting Israeli female fans to football. Table 8.2 shows that three-quarters (38/51) of my football sample cited a male or males as being the key figure(s) in their becoming a fan. In rugby the figure was smaller at 56% (19/34) suggesting perhaps a culture that is slightly less closed to women. The father was a key figure for female football fans (56%), and male partners were more influential for female fans of rugby union (24%). But this was no simple story of positive male facilitation: There were plenty of accounts of men who thought that, ‘Women in football is a bit of a joke’ (F22) and F14 recalled a

male response of: ‘Oh shut up, you’re a woman, what would you know?’. Finally, F33 described how some men at the Walkers refused even to talk to her because she did not belong in ‘their’ male-dominated area of the ground.

**Table 8.2: Who was the most influential figure in you becoming a fan?**

Who was most influential in getting you involved?	Football	Rugby
Dad	<b>23 (45%)</b>	<b>9 (26%)</b>
Other male relative	<b>4 (8%)</b>	<b>1 (3%)</b>
Male friend/s	<b>5 (10%)</b>	<b>1 (3%)</b>
Male partner	<b>6 (12%)</b>	<b>8 (24%)</b>
Family (e.g. taken with both parents or went with husband and children)	4 (8%)	10 (29%)
Mum	2 (4%)	1 (3%)
Female friend/s	7 (13%)	2 (6%)
Other female relative	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
Other	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>34</b>

The supposedly superior sporting knowledge of some men was used by some women to explain why men are more vocal at sport - some observed that only male fans are ‘wannabe managers’ (F14) who boast: ‘I could run this team with my eyes shut’ (F7, F11, F14, F19, F27, F29, F34, F37, F46, F48, F49 and R1, R13). Not all women understood all the laws of their sport (F13, F19, R4, R31, R33), a situation few men are likely to be able to admit to. As R33 puts it, ‘It is more important to a man that he appears to understand the game’. Perhaps the masculine competitive pressure on male

fans to present themselves as highly knowledgeable ‘hot’ fans is so great that they must demonstrate publicly their supposedly superior knowledge. Certainly, by seeking to humiliate women publically in the sporting arena, men can enhance their own supporter status:

‘They [men] joke about it, not knowing the off-side rule, who’s the top scorer, and they want you to quote stats at them. And sometimes I go along with it and sometimes I refuse (*laughs*). Cos I’m sick of hearing it...If you’re in a group of men they want you to be part of the chat and part of the gang. They try to include you. But at the same time they try to act “big” in front of their friends, and want to kind of prove that you’re not, you know, you’re not as big a fan as they are.’ (*F11, Age 28, Occasional attendee, New fan, Book shop Assistant*)

F14 was similarly frustrated by male fans’ attempts to, ‘put the women down in front of the others...some make out that they’re thick’. Other respondents gave examples of attempts by male fans to put them on the spot or make women ‘prove’ their sporting knowledge. For R1 when groups of males attend sport there is a ‘male pack mentality’: men want their opinions heard and talk about ‘technicalities’ in order to exclude females and others. It was clear that some respondents realized that men feel ‘threatened’ or ‘intimidated’ or ‘inferior’ (R7) by women who have some understanding of sport (F2, F21) especially when women are ‘encroaching on their patch’ (F14) or ‘infiltrating their cosy little environment’ (R12). Consequently, men become more ‘competitive’ or ‘challenging’.

In this sort of climate, women still needed to ‘make the point with men’ (F28) to gain ‘a bit of respect’ (F24), and prove their status as fans. Rugby fans also gave examples of situations where they faced ‘knowledge challenges’. R3 initially protected her right to be present at matches as a female by reading up on the sport intensely: ‘I felt that I needed to be more knowledgeable to sort of justify the fact that I was there’. There were

claims that men were often simply ‘winding them up’ or ‘joking’ with comments such as ‘You’re a woman, you wouldn’t understand that rule anyway’ (F5, F22, F25, F36, F37 and R29) - though F8 felt that there was ‘an undercurrent of them actually meaning it’. These data lend considerable support to Coddington’s (1997: 9, 79) suggestion that female fans routinely feel ‘on trial’ at football - and here rugby too - and feel they have to prove they know what they are talking about, usually to male fans.

### *iii) Women fans as ‘puck bunnies’*

Crawford and Gosling (2004: 477) in their study of fans of (men’s) ice hockey in Britain argue that female fans were labelled by male supporters as not ‘real’ fans but ‘puck bunnies’: fans who are there simply to ‘lust’ after male players. Other accounts have contested assumptions that female fans attend football primarily because of the sexual attractiveness of the players (see, for example, Crolley, 1999; Crolley and Long, 2001). My own data suggest that questioning the knowledge of female fans and/or implying they have a sexual interest in players was the most effective (male) way to challenge women’s fandom, whilst simultaneously enhancing the status of male fans. Some (mostly ‘cool’ rugby) fans were happy with the view that: ‘Men are just there for the sport’ whereas women fans attend ‘because they fancy the players’ and ‘appreciate the men more’ (R4 see also R16, R22, R26, R33 and F47). Some women expressed annoyance at men’s ‘small minded’ attitude that women ‘only go [to sport] for the legs’ and (men’s) assumptions that women are, ‘only there to ogle the men in shorts and they’re not real fans like the men are’ (R5, R9, R12, R29 and F4, F8, F12, F14, F22, F32).

A small number of 'hot' fans openly expressed hostility towards female fans who seemed to confirm this sort of male stereotype: the 'giggly little idiots' (R1) or the 'younger ones that are there because they fancy someone' (R3). F4 was also aggravated by the small number of women who go to matches exclusively because of a sexual interest in players - which meant she had to defend her own position as a 'serious' female fan. Again these accounts, firstly, demonstrate the multiplicity of femininities in play regarding the motivations of female fans for attending male team sport. Secondly, they confirm that women fans continuously need to 'prove' their fan status in a way that is simply not necessary for most men. Women were required to tread carefully or else risk losing their hard won credibility as supporters. Women needed to 'pick battles' (F28) or watch how far you 'stick your neck out' (F39) when seeking respect or approval from male fans. Thirdly, most women were well aware that despite recent 'gender shifts' traditional gender roles and domestic disciplines continued to intervene to confirm that sport is available as 'serious leisure' for most men in a way that is simply unconscionable for most women. Invariably, the latter had other, more consequential, responsibilities and interests that, perforce, took primacy over sport, almost irrespective of levels of female commitment or knowledge:

'I mean, women don't go into a pub and talk about football do they? They talk about men, don't they? And boyfriends and make-up and girly things. But for men, football features in a man's life doesn't it? [...] It's like a masculine thing: I'm interested in football, therefore I'm rugged and a man ... [But] women have lots of other things don't they? Run a home and bring kids up and cook and clean and iron.' (F36, Age 68, *Occasional attendee, New fan, Retired- worked as a Secretary*)

'Women are happy to see it at face value: going out for the afternoon. It's going to be dead nice, I'll go home, make tea, bla bla bla. Whereas blokes are... its life or death. The whole season rests on it. Yeah, I think men are definitely more competitive. Whereas women, it probably forms a small part of their life.' (R12, Age 35, *Occasional attendee, Long-term fan, Part-time Conveyancer*)

‘I think, for some men, their football team means everything...Their football team is their whole life. Whereas women would never get that involved; they’ve got other things. With a man, perhaps, football comes top, but with a woman the football might come third or fourth, after the children.’ (*F34, Age 54, Occasional attendee, On-off fan, Home-Helper*)

This imbalance of domestic responsibilities inevitably meant that women have a ‘fuller life’ and ‘by nature’ have more to ‘juggle’ than men. Men can usually prioritise sport, work and perhaps a little DIY (F46, see also F7, F9, F13, F19, F20, F27, F28, F29, F34, F35, F37, F40, F49, F50 and R4, R5, R13, R27, R34). R7 contrasted women’s constrained lot in this respect with what she described as men’s ‘selfish’ sports fandom:

‘It’s another aspect of my life, granted it is a big part...but it’s not the be all and end all. So yeah, I think that’s a bit of a different thing for men and women...Men are a bit more selfish about it, I think they don’t necessarily have to feel that they have to put other things aside to make room for that [sport]. It’s more of a priority. Cos I have a friend of mine whose husband is a Leicester City fan. And, yeah, there would have to be the house on fire to move him out of the front of the Sky Plus box when there’s a City game on...So you know, they’ve got two small children. He could easily record the game and watch it later, it’s not a problem. Or even delay it for a bit. But he is that bit more selfish.’ (*R7, Age 33, STH, Long-term fan, Dispensing Optician*)

F11 claimed that men are able to choose to make sport, ‘more part of their lives than women. Most of the time women will fit it around the rest of their lives’. Women were caught in a difficult double-bind here, as pointed out by F22. Other responsibilities should never get in the way of a ‘real’ fan, she agrees, but for women in her position when a sports team is defeated another reality kicks in: ‘I’ve gotta go home and play with the kids. It’s no good [me] going home and having a strop on’. Men by way of contrast can give full rein to their fandom frustrations: they ‘just go to the pub and get drunk’. Finally, and on a similar post-match theme, for F13 women, ‘realize that there’s more important things...I just sort of come home and I have to cook the dinner and then

I'll put the washing in, I get on with life'. The situation for men was quite different: for men, according to this view, 'It's never a game, it's their life'.

## **8.5 Summary**

This chapter offered a simple framework to examine the meaning of sports fandom for female fans. Drawing on Ussher's (1997) four 'performances' of femininity available to most women and Sisjord and Kristiansen's (2009) application of this model to female wrestlers, two different kinds of gender 'performance' helped to connote fan types for female sports fans: 'masculine' femininities (those characterised by Ussher's 'doing girl' and 'resisting girl' performances and typically displayed by 'hot' fans), and 'feminine' femininities (those characterised by Ussher's 'doing girl' and 'being girl' approaches and typically expressed by the 'cooler' fans). Thus, these findings demonstrate that it is crucial to examine the differences between women in terms of the wider meanings of sport in their fandom and the 'types' of gender 'performance' enacted, and thus avoid the mistakes of previous approaches where women are often, as Crolley (1999) claims, treated as a homogenous group and simply defined by their sex.

Women's early sporting experiences discussed in Chapter Five are likely play a key role in the type of gender 'performance' exhibited today. For example, there was often a correlation between those women who adopted a 'tomboy' persona as girls and the 'masculine' femininity typically exhibited by 'hot' fans. Social class differences discussed in Chapter Seven also appeared to play a role in exactly where female fans in my sample were likely to feature on this simple schema. Football fans were typically more likely to be 'hot' fans than were rugby followers and, crudely speaking, this was largely attributable to the fact that football fans were more likely to be drawn from



working class backgrounds and 'cooler' rugby fans more likely to be county based and from middle or higher class backgrounds. Thus, gender cannot be studied in isolation from other variables - women's experiences and identities will always be over-layered with other categorizations, such as the structural cleavages of class, age and race (see Skeggs, 1997). I now turn to my conclusion.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Conclusion**

#### **9.1 Introduction**

In this exploratory study I set out to undertake serious qualitative research on a sample of female sports fans. My thesis is a comparative study of female fans of football and rugby union, based in the UK city of Leicester. These sports were selected because they offered rather different social class bases and some distinctive spatial and cultural traditions, at least in England. By locating the research in the East Midlands city of Leicester I was able to examine the changing experience of female fans in a single location in which football is present but is not an overwhelmingly dominant sporting presence, as it tends to be in many other parts of Britain. My focus was shaped largely by the dearth of detailed empirical research on female sports fans. But there is also a lack of comparative sociological work which examines fans (male or female) of different sports. I also aimed to address this omission.

This conclusion begins by revisiting the main aims and objectives of the study in order to discuss the theoretical and empirical contributions of the research. I then move on to offer some reflections on the research process, before finally making some recommendations for future research.

#### **9.2 Theoretical & Empirical Contribution of the Study**

As discussed in Chapter One, my thesis emerges, broadly speaking, out of the recent feminist tradition of research on sport and leisure. The main aim of the study was to consider the extent to which, and how, sports fandom figures in the leisure lives of

women in different sporting contexts today and in the recent past. Thus, by addressing women's relative 'invisibility' as sports fans in research on largely 'male' sports, I wanted to make a small contribution towards bringing women's leisure experiences as sports spectators, both past and present, to the fore. In the course of the research I found 'grounded theory' a highly useful theoretical tool for the purposes of data collection and analysis, so, notwithstanding the feminist backdrop to my research, there has been an emphasis in my work on 'the discovery of theory from data' (Glaser and Strauss, 2008: 1, 5). My research produced 'substantive theory', that is, an empirical area of sociological inquiry which is specific to groups and place (Lempert, 2007). Thus, I developed theory about the substantive area on which I conducted the research (see Glaser and Strauss, 2008). Four central sub-issues emerged during the data analysis for this research which enabled me to address the main research aims of the thesis, and I will now return to these in order to summarise some of the main theoretical and empirical contribution/s of the study.

### ***i) Continuity and change in women's sporting lives***

Wimbush and Talbot's (1988) edited collection on women and leisure *Relative Freedoms* was a groundbreaking work for its time. Yet according to this early important text, sports fandom played little or no role in women's leisure in the 1980s. The only reference to team sports at all in the book is a chapter on the activities of female hockey players (see Talbot, 1988), and thus even this account is tied to women's participation in a 'feminine appropriate' sport (Hargreaves 1994: 155). Other accounts of physical activity or leisure for women back in 1988 are also in line with rather traditional and highly gendered expectations, including female involvement in swimming, dancing and bingo (see Griffiths, 1988; Dixey, 1988).

Although it is absent in *Relative Freedoms*, my thesis affirms that in fact many females have been able, over time, to overcome the barriers and obstacles to their leisure involvement in the ‘masculine’ sports of football and rugby union as both spectators and players. Thus, many women have, indeed, broken into this ‘male preserve’ (Dunning, 1994), and they have utilised these sports as sites for ‘doing’ leisure, from the post-war period right up to the present day. For example, my research shows how some young girls from earlier periods who were strictly prohibited from playing male sports such as football at school adopted a ‘tomboy’ persona, which offered something of a cultural passport to achieving better access to sport - especially football - outside of the institution of school. This perhaps helped to empower some young females to challenge some of the constraints of conventional femininity, as other studies have also shown (Cox and Thompson, 2000; Reay, 2001; Paechter, 2006). I would suggest that one of the original contributions of my research has been to explore different generations of females’ early sporting experiences and the ways in which these experiences may later connect to or help to shape their wider involvement in sport, especially as fans (see iv).

Many women also spectated at men’s football and rugby union matches in earlier decades (see ii). Thus, my thesis makes an important contribution towards ‘adding’ the lived experiences of women as *sports fans* over time to the existing research on women and leisure, and in doing so it calls for more research into this important and neglected area (see below).

By explicitly examining the experiences of three generations of women I was able to explore the ways in which some women’s sport and leisure patterns have changed over time. In today’s late-modern era of ‘family’ sport, in which some of the modernist

restraints of place, gender and class are taken to have been relaxed, it is certainly no longer quite so unusual for females to occupy these traditionally masculine leisure spaces. Major structural and cultural transformations have also occurred in women's lives in the post-war period, including their growing relative independence, growing numbers of women gaining superior educational qualifications and more women entering the workplace and pursuing professional careers (see Pilcher, 1999). My research shows how these changes have led to a growing sense of 'entitlement' to leisure for rising numbers of women. Female football fans, in particular, frequently linked the supposed recent relative increasing power of women to make choices in the family, leisure and work spheres to more opportunities for women to establish themselves as active sports fans.

Some researchers have discussed how this new found freedom has led to more women participating in overtly aggressive and competitive forms of sport, such as wrestling and boxing (see Mennesson, 2000; Sisjord and Kristiansen, 2009). In my research there was certainly a general assumption, especially from the 'middle aged' and 'older' generations, that there were now more opportunities for younger women to engage with previously male defined sports, both as participants and spectators. Generally speaking, older females had simply not been granted the same access to sport as their male counterparts, and a number of key socializing agents including teachers, family members, and peers, were identified as having played a prominent role in channelling older women away from sport. Although access to 'male' team sport has, broadly and relatively speaking, 'opened up' for the 'younger' age group, some younger women have also been denied opportunities to play sports in a similar way to those in the older generations, and a 'cult of adolescent femininity' (Hargreaves 1994: 156) continues to

operate to oppose some young girls' participation in PE and sport. Thus, women's participation in 'serious' sport remains marginalized at best, and whereas contact team sport serves to confirm or complete acceptable hetero-masculinities, sex-appropriate femininity is apparently still threatened by it. This issue was also illustrated by some of my female respondents' own enduring and essentialist critiques of women's team sports and of the involvement of female athletes in them (see also Woodhouse and Williams, 1999).

Thus, both change and continuity in women's leisure lives emerged as central themes or 'higher level concepts' (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) in my research. It might be expected that the highly gendered restrictions placed on women's leisure, due mainly to embedded patriarchal assumptions that leisure must be 'earned' through paid work (see, for example, Deem, 1988; Green and Hebron, 1988; Woodward and Green, 1988), would have largely disappeared some two decades on from the publication of *Relative Freedoms*. After all, in the late-modern era the majority of adult women in Britain are now established as paid workers. Skille (2008), for example, suggests that we are witnessing a 'masculinization' of the female life course as a result of the growing numbers of women who are mirroring men's lifetime employment, and consequently their leisure patterns.

But my research also suggests that issues of domestic duty and responsibility continue to act as serious impediments to women's leisure as sports spectators. The experiences of my respondents continue to reveal differential gendered restrictions and obstacles to their leisure involvement, which seems to remain largely 'trapped within a web of constraints' of the sort identified more than two decades ago (Wimbush and Talbot

1988: xiv). But whilst all women may share some core inequalities and exclusions in this respect, it is also important to acknowledge the *differences* between women, which were mediated by social class, locale, family and educational experiences, and indeed by the personalities of individual women.

There have been major structural changes in the realm of the family and, arguably, a relative loosening of family ties over the past two decades which, theoretically at least, has allowed more women (and men) much more choice over how they manage their family and friendship relationships (Allan, 2009). But my research also shows how women continue to struggle to balance their own preferred sporting and leisure interests against their ascribed roles and the routine demands made of them by men, motherhood and the family unit. This was hinted at very early on in the research process by the male ‘policing’ of female interviewees, a continuation of the problems faced by female researchers committed to research on women, which stretches right back into the 1980s and before (see, for example, Deem, 1986). Women’s sports fandom ‘careers’ remain typically, at best, secondary to men’s - many women, for example, were compelled to take ‘fan breaks’ after having children whilst their male partners continued to attend ‘their’ sport apparently undisturbed by new arrivals.

Thus, women’s involvement in sport as spectators and players continues to be constrained by an ‘ethic of care’ (Shaw, 1994), and my findings lend weight to Bialeschi’s (1994) suggestion that women’s lack of leisure is often perceived as inevitable - that many women are pressed to defer to the needs of other family members until later in life when their ‘caring’ roles are presumed to be rather less restrictive. In their later lives, of course, women will be expected - and may also feel a sense of

‘responsibility’ or ‘obligation’ - to become carers of older family members (see Aronson, 1992; Begley and Cahill, 2003; Finch and Mason, 1991). As a consequence, many women’s sporting fan ‘careers’ follow very different paths to those of male fans who, broadly speaking, do not seem to face the same competing demands and so do not typically need to adjust their sporting involvement as spectators at different stages of the life cycle in quite this fashion.

All this serves as a useful reminder about the ways in which many women’s lives and sporting involvement continues to be shaped by men. Hargreaves (1994), for example, has described how it is commonplace for women to operate mainly to service men’s leisure - perhaps especially in sport. Despite signs, described in this research, of an increasing independence among women over time as consumers of sport via their fandom for both rugby and football, my findings also confirm that women’s leisure is often enacted in the shadow of men’s demands and expectations.

## *ii) Female sport spectatorship and social change*

Women are largely invisible in oral history accounts of sports fandom, with most socio-historical approaches to the development of sport as a cultural product focusing almost exclusively on the experiences of males (see, for example, Bull, 1992; Taylor and Ward, 1993). As my main research question was to consider the extent to which, and how, sports fandom figures in the leisure lives of women in different sporting contexts today and in the recent past, one of the major contributions of my study has simply been to make more visible the specific sporting histories of women. Exploring this vast area of largely uncharted territory led to the development of a number of lower level concepts, which I was able to group in my data analysis to form a collection of higher level



categories or themes (see Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Here I will briefly summarise the main themes which emerged from the data for this important sub-issue.

Drawing on oral history accounts from respondents, I examined how women both ‘connected’ with and helped shape football’s and rugby union’s respective so-called ‘golden eras’. For football, these ‘golden years’ spanned the period post-World War II into the 1960s when crowds remained high and hooliganism relatively low. For rugby union this was the period immediately before professionalism (pre-1995) and thus before the new commercial tensions began to emerge in this sport. But some common themes emerged across both sports during these periods. According to my respondents, for example, these eras seemed to symbolise for them a strong sense of cultural ‘innocence’, community solidarity and more coherent local identity construction through sport. These highly masculine leisure arenas were also found to offer many women a strong sense of ‘belonging’ and togetherness in the sporting context (often with male fans) which has been difficult to recapture for some older respondents and which is probably more than simple nostalgia.

Female fans’ distinctive experiences of the transformation of sport, along with their conceptualisations of the general movement of players from the status of local heroes to sexualised celebrities - or from Critcher’s (1979) ‘traditional/located’ sports players to the ‘superstars/dislocated’ categories of today - were also core themes to emerge from my research. I tracked female football fans’ memories and experiences of the movement of professional football players from being firmly rooted in family networks in the local community in the 1950s and 1960s, to being in some ways ‘unobtainably’ glamorous figures, and yet also still accessible ones, in the 1970s. For rugby union fans the

‘glamorization’ process for players occurred rather later - the new celebrity status of some rugby union players followed the advent of professionalism in 1995 - but has not yet provoked some of the economic and cultural divisions between fans and performers which are so prominent today in post-Premier League football (Williams, 2006). The comparative approach adopted here and the specifically female perspectives on these changes, especially the distinctive ways in which women ‘locate’ earlier cohorts of players in this way - and indeed their relationships with the new ‘types’ of sexualised players that emerged at different moments in these sports - are highly original contributions of the research.

I also postulated that iconic events in earlier decades in sport, such as the Munich air crash of 1958, may have had more of an impact upon women because of prevailing discourses they draw upon around notions of family, community and loss. Events such as World Cup tournaments and knock-out cups in both football and rugby were also argued to possibly play a more prominent role in arousing *female* fan interest in sport because of the ways in which barriers to their full involvement as sports fans are temporarily relaxed during such ‘national’ events. This phenomenon has also been explored in previous research (see, for example, Williams and Woodhouse, 1991; Lopez, 1997; Harris, 1999) but with very little of the empirical depth offered here. When seeking to ‘add’ women to the existing literature on sports history and fandom in this way, my thesis thus demonstrates that, as well as similarities, there are also important differences between men’s and women’s historical experiences of sport which need to be acknowledged and further explored.

In football, the rise of fan hooliganism in England in the late-1960s was discussed as an important development which stalled some of the modernist optimism and the collective solidarities around soccer of the 'golden era'. Some women stopped attending matches during the 1970s and 1980s, and some potential new fans were also deterred from attending in this period. But I have also been able to point out how some older female fans actually *enjoyed* the excitement of attending matches during the sport's 'hooligan era' and a small number of women interviewed actively took part in stadium violence. The behaviour and viewpoints of some women fans thus strongly challenged their supposed role in sport as spectators; especially the alleged 'softening' effect female spectators supposedly have on the behaviour of their male equivalents (see, for example, Murphy *et al.*, 1991).

Key transformative developments in football and rugby union in England as increasingly television-driven, family-focused leisure/entertainment options were the formation of the FA Premier League in football in 1992 and rugby union's conversion to professionalism in 1995. Some accounts seem to suggest that the 'feminization' or 'gentrification' of sporting cultures which allegedly followed may have helped to 'open up' these sports to female fans (see, for example, King, 2002). This is almost certainly true but, as my research shows, not all female football fans favoured changes to the culture and context of their sport, including the recent modernisation of stadium facilities, and the loss of standing areas in football. In this sense I have built on some early insights from Woodhouse (1991) who first predicted this might be the case nearly twenty years ago. Some female rugby fans also explicitly expressed grave concern at recent ground 'improvements' - in part aimed at attracting more female supporters - and the cultural damage that they might bring to their own fan communities.

Thus, in exploring women's historic experiences of sports fandom and their responses to recent changes in the commercialisation and commodification of sport, my research emphasises the need to examine the *diversity* of women's experiences, and to avoid the pitfalls of previous approaches in which women sports fans were often treated unproblematically as a homogenous group (see Crolley, 1999).

*iii) The extent to which sport fosters a positive 'sense of place' for female fans*

By examining female fans of *two* highly class specific sports in England - football and rugby union - I was able to explore, briefly, the intersections of gender and class in the production of sports fandom. Barely any research has explored this complex terrain or has *compared* fans of different sports in England, let alone *female* fans of sport, perhaps partly as a consequence of the dominance of existing research on football fandom (see section 9.3). Thus, my research offers a very novel approach in this respect, one that requires further and more detailed investigation. But here I will briefly summarise the 'substantive theory' (Glaser and Strauss, 2008) which emerged from my research in this largely neglected area.

Perhaps predictably, fans of both sports generally asserted that professional sport was of paramount importance in the place promotion of the city of Leicester, and a strong sense of civic pride and local identity was routinely articulated by women around the activities and symbolism of these local sports clubs. Place affiliation is seldom discussed in the literature on women and sport but, as is the case for many male fans (see Bale, 1994), many female fans in my study expressed strong 'topophilic' sentiments towards their club's respective home stadium, despite their often very poor, basic facilities specifically available for women. However, crucial differences also

emerged between football and rugby fans in their adherence to, and articulation of, urban or non-urban affiliations, respectively.

These highly specific spatial and place associations may also have played a part in generating - and may also reflect - what turned out to be a deeply entrenched and barely concealed sense of mutual hostility between football and rugby union fans in Leicester. This was argued to be largely shaped by and expressed through the combined impact of relations of place, gender and social class. For suburban and county-based female rugby fans for example, local football supporters in Leicester were typically branded as 'thuggish' or 'violent', while largely city-based football fans critiqued the supposed social superiority of rugby union fans and their (middle class) styles of dress and highly restrained modes of support. Thus, despite the recent major transformations in the marketing and promotion of both football and rugby union which have arguably provided something of a convergence of spectator appeal across the social classes, my findings show that rugby union and football actually remain strongly segmented in terms of their class appeal and that these differences are strongly articulated by women as well as male fans.

This focus on perceptions of place and sport for females - the importance and differences identified in terms of urban and county affiliations and perceptions, for example - and on the status and social impact of rival sporting codes in the same location, offers a very new contribution to the general research field of sports fandom. I would also suggest that these findings demonstrate why this is an important area for future research. This might map into research about the combined importance of gender

and class relations around sport some of the significant cultural and spatial identifiers which emerged in my research along the lines indicated above.

*iv) The wider meanings of sport for female fans*

Drawing loosely upon Giulianotti's (2002) 'hot' and 'cool' taxonomy axis, I developed my own framework to examine the 'meaning' of sport for female fans. I produced a crude visual reference point for an analysis of my football and rugby fans, which included a 'hot' and 'cool' continuum to demonstrate their varying levels of fan attachment in my samples. I suggested that Giulianotti's (2002) distinction between 'supporters' and 'fans' in his taxonomy of spectator identities in football was rather unhelpful in my own research, as my data demonstrates considerable overlap between these categories. As discussed above (see iii), crudely speaking, rugby fans tended to fit typical middle class identifiers more than football fans, and these social class differences probably played a part in shaping the different levels of commitment that were typically exhibited among these samples of football and rugby fans.

Football fans were significantly more likely, for example, to be categorised as 'hot' sports fans, and were more likely to inhabit the extreme end of this fan 'type' in my model. It was postulated that middle class female sports fans - more typically rugby union followers - might have more things 'going on' in their lives besides sport, making it more likely that their sports fandom will form a smaller and less important part of their leisure lives.

Drawing upon Ussher's (1997) framework of 'performances' of femininity and Sisjord and Kristiansen's (2009) application of it to female wrestlers, I went on to develop a

schematic frame to briefly examine how 'femininity' was typically constructed or 'performed' by women through their attachments to male sport. Crudely speaking, two different kinds of gender 'performance' helped to connote female fan types: 'masculine' femininities (those characterised by Ussher's 'doing girl' and 'resisting girl' approaches to presentation of self, and more typically displayed by 'hot' fans), and 'feminine' femininities (those characterised by Ussher's 'doing girl' and 'being girl' approaches, and more typically expressed by 'cooler' fans).

Women's varied and changing experiences of sport in school and childhood broadly connect I suggest to the formation of these 'types' of female sports fandoms and the later gender 'performance' they typically enacted. For example, 'hot' fans who typically performed 'masculine' femininities in their styles of fandom, were also more likely to have adopted a 'tomboy' persona as girls - to have rejected the disempowerment that comes with conventional femininity, and thus enjoy participation in sport. These women were likely to continue to identify more strongly with men and male fans than with females, were often hostile to 'emphasized femininity' (see also Jones, 2008) or 'feminine' femininities, and they typically demonstrated a strong commitment to their sports club.

'Cool' female fans, by contrast, showed pretty much the exact opposite propensities. They were less likely to have participated in 'male' sports as youngsters, conforming instead to the more limiting discourses and activities of conventional femininity. However, this was not always a straightforward correlation. My research shows how a blurring of the old 'masculine' and 'feminine' distinctions could also lead to some identity complexity and confusion for female sports fans, as has also been found

elsewhere (see Russell and Tyler, 2002). These different types of gender ‘performances’ via sport offered a very useful, simple framework for contextualising the very different viewpoints and experiences of the female sports fans in this study and may be helpful for future researchers who seek to explore the wider meanings of sport for female fans.

Thus, my research has shown something of the breadth of women’s changing sporting leisure experiences and the differences between women in terms of the wider meanings of their sport. This should be acknowledged via *research* (as here) rather than, for example, by reducing all women’s sporting involvement to that of ‘football widows’ (see Crabbe *et al.*, 2006) or else implying that they have entirely different ‘types’ of fandom available to them compared to men (see King, 2002). The associations drawn between ‘irrationality’ and female fandom resulting from the ways in which women are usually analysed in the context of media and TV fandom (see Jenson, 1992), were argued to play a possible role here in the typical assumptions and stereotypes that often surround female *sports* fans.

### **9.3 Reflections on the Research Process**

As has already been indicated, one of the main barriers to conducting this research was negotiating access to a suitable male-free space to conduct my interviews. I was surprised how difficult it was for some women to free themselves for interview. But despite these difficulties, I would suggest that the rapport I was able to build up with the majority of my respondents in the comfort of their own homes outweighed the potential and real negative dimensions to these encounters. When interviews were conducted in my office, at respondents’ workplaces or in public spaces, they were more likely to be shorter, and consequently the data generated was less dense and rich in comparison to



that produced from the interviews conducted at respondents' homes. For now, it seems that female social science researchers and their interviewees must continue to try and find ways to navigate around the normative 'obstructions' to women's leisure time as effectively as they can.

A further intellectual and practical issue I was confronted with was managing the sheer volume of data that was generated for the research. Corbin and Strauss (2008: 113) suggest a process of 'trimming the theory' if an excess of data is produced, and propose that any interesting concepts that are left out can be pursued at a later date. This was certainly necessary in my own research; a whole range of themes emerged from the data which were beyond what was possible to include within the parameters of the thesis. My findings chapters were thus restricted to the data which were deemed most directly relevant to my main research aim, eventually forming four key sub-issues. Other matters will await exploration in another context.

I must also admit that, despite my deep commitment to a convincing piece of comparative sports research over time, there remains something of an imbalance here in the treatment of the two sports under study. Schimmel *et al.*, (2007) bemoan how there has been an over 30-year long tradition of empirical research focusing on sport spectators and supporters, and that much of this has centred on football supporters in the UK, dominated by studies on fan deviance. Whilst some scholars have more recently called for a shift to the more 'ordinary' practices of sport fan cultures (see, for example, Crawford, 2004), this existing football dominance in the Academy was used in a sense to frame my study. My final study sample included more football supporters than rugby union fans - football remains the larger sport, even in Leicester - and in parts of the

thesis I draw rather more heavily on the football data rather than its rugby equivalent. There are some rather mundane reasons for this.

Firstly, I must concede that I am slightly more knowledgeable about football than rugby union, and so I was not able to show the same intimate knowledge of rugby and its history during the research interviews as I was of football. Whilst it is almost inevitable that researchers will have more expertise or involvement with one sport over another, this relative lack of sporting knowledge may have resulted in the rugby interviews being on average rather shorter than those covering football. My knowledge and shared cultural experience of football certainly aided in the football interviews, and my position as an ‘insider’ may have helped to generate rather more detailed, rich responses in that context.

However, I would suggest that this ‘imbalance’ should not - and does not - impact strongly on some of the conclusions that can be drawn from the study. After all, whilst the football interviews may have a slightly stronger presence here, my thesis, perhaps uniquely, does offer a voice for female rugby union fans. Also, although fewer interviews were conducted with rugby fans, this can perhaps be partially justified by the fact that I had reached a point of ‘theoretical saturation’ by this stage in the research process (Glaser and Strauss, 2008). That is, as I was transcribing and analysing my rugby interviews I realised that no new themes were emerging, and further data collection would be adding little or nothing new to my ‘substantive theory’ (see Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Glaser and Strauss, 2008; Holton, 2007; Hood, 2007). Therefore, it seemed sensible to reduce the total number of planned interviews involved. But both the rugby and football data generated were used to develop lower and higher level concepts

in my results chapters. My research focus here has avowedly been on *both* sports, even if sometimes football might seem to offer a stronger presence than the much more recently professionalised sport of rugby union.

#### **9.4 Recommendations for Future Research**

When I began my research in 2005 there was barely any empirical material available on female sports fans in Britain. But Jones's (2008) recent work hints that the tide might be turning in this respect. Like Jones's contribution, my own research offers a new direction for work on sports fandom, one that directly addresses and reflects on the real experiences of female fans. Whilst this might mark the beginning of a new chapter in the study of sports fandom, it is clear that there is a need for future research to further extend work in this largely neglected area. In 2010, the FA announced that eight women's clubs will be competing in the first full-time professional Women's sports league - the Super League - in Britain, which is planned from 2011 and will be staged over the summer months. Part of the agenda for playing female football fixtures at this time of the year (which will not clash with those of the men's professional leagues) is certainly to try and recruit more active fans for women's football, both as live attendees and TV viewers.

This new development offers some exciting opportunities for future research designed to explore the motivations and experiences of both male and female fans of this new female soccer excursion in the UK. There is also a need for further research to examine fans of other women's team sports, such as women's rugby union and field hockey. The England women's cricket team retained the Ashes for the third time in 2009, as well as winning the Women's World Cup and the World Twenty20, and beating Australia 4-0

in their one-day international series. Future research on female fandom might also examine sociologically the fan base - male and female - of the highly successful England women's cricket team, and also some of the specific spectator attractions of female team sport and its prospects for becoming both culturally and commercially successful.

In Chapter Five, I briefly explored the relationship between playing and watching sport for women, and this was later connected to the formation of female fan 'types' and gender 'performance'. Clearly, this area of research also needs more detailed sociological investigation. Future research could examine young girls' experiences of playing and watching sport, which could potentially be useful in finding ways to encourage more young girls to take up 'serious' sport at a time when childhood obesity is at an all time high (see Every Child Matters Website, accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2010). Future research might also explore how sports fandom figures in the leisure lives of both ethnic minority and lesbian female fans, categories which were both largely absent from my own study. This would clearly require different sampling techniques to those used in my own research. Also, whilst Crawford and Gosling (2004) offer a brief account of the experiences of female ice hockey fans, female fans of other (men's) sports, including boxing, basketball and motor racing, constitute an interesting series of avenues for further research.

Finally, I would reiterate that my thesis offers a unique approach to fandom in comparing fans of different sports in one locale, the city of Leicester. It would be interesting to conduct comparative research on female fans in different UK cities - or with cities outside the UK - to test for local historical, spatial and other effects and for

different cultural sensibilities which may be in play in these respects. Findings generated from research of this kind could be compared to those in my thesis.

To conclude: this thesis, I would argue, marks a small but important contribution towards energising and illuminating the largely neglected area of the study of female sports fandom. It is sincerely hoped that, at the very least, this exploratory study will prompt others into important new and more substantive research directions in the field.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Football and Rugby Fan Survey Data – Age and Social Class**

These data have been taken from *A Survey of Leicester City FC Football Fans* (Williams, 2004a) and *Premier Rugby National Fan Survey: Leicester Tigers Supporters* (Williams, 2003). The football sample is based on survey replies from 5,892 fans and the rugby sample consisted of 2,249 Leicester Tigers fans.

Unless otherwise stated, the data below includes responses from male and female fans, as represented in the original survey data.

#### **Leicester City Football Fans by Age**

Age	All Football Fans (male and female)	Female Football Fans
Under 16	6%	7%
16-24	9%	12%
25-34	14%	18%
35-44	24%	21%
45-54	24%	22%
55-64	15%	13%
56-74	6%	6%
Over 75	2%	1%

**Leicester Tigers Fans by Age**

Age	Tigers Fans	All Premier Rugby Fans
30 years or less	8%	9%
31-50 years	39%	45%
Over 50 years	50%	43%

**Leicester City Football and Leicester Tigers Rugby Fans by Income**

Annual Income	Football Fans	Rugby Fans
£20,000 or under	35%	24%
£20,000-£30,000	30%	26%
£30,000-£50,000	23%	30%
Over £50,000	12%	18%

**Leicester City Football and Leicester Tigers Rugby Fans by Social Class**

Social Class	Football Fans	Rugby Fans
Professional	11%	17%
Managerial	30%	43%
Routine White Collar	30%	23%
Skilled Manual	20%	12%
Semi-Skilled	8%	5%
Unskilled	1%	Less than 1%

## **Appendix 2**

### **Sample Invitation Letter**

Dear

#### **Research on Leicester City Fans**

I am a researcher at the University of Leicester currently working on a project on female football and rugby fans in Leicester, and the role being a sports fan plays in their everyday lives. The research is publicly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, but I am also working in close partnership with Leicester City Football Club.

I have been able to contact you from the details you completed on the fan survey carried out for Leicester City in 2004. I hope you don't mind. Over the next few months I am conducting a large number of informal discussions with a range of female supporters in the city – from casual fans to season ticket regulars - and I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in one of these. These are really informal conversations, and usually last around 45 minutes.

This can be done when and wherever you feel most comfortable: either at your home or, if this is not possible, we can arrange an alternative location at a time most convenient to you. I am sure you would find it an enjoyable chance to talk about your football club, and discuss some of your football following experiences. The material I collect from this will be used in research at the University but also at the football club. It will help to shape the club's policies for its fans. The research is confidential: no fan is identified by name.

To let me know if you would like to be involved please complete the attached form and return it in the pre-paid envelope as indicated as soon as possible. Even if you *don't* want to be involved please return the form so I know you received it. If you are able to take part I will be in touch by telephone over the next few weeks to arrange a time for the session.

I do hope you are able to take part in this unique research project. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours,

Stacey Pope



## **Female Leicester City Fan Discussions**

*(Please circle)*

I AM NOT willing to take part in the research project.

I AM willing to be involved and here are my details:

Name.....

Daytime telephone number.....

**If you would like to take part in this research, please return  
this form as soon as possible in the pre-paid envelope  
provided.**

I will contact you on the above number to arrange a convenient  
time for you to carry out the interview.

**MANY THANKS FOR YOUR HELP.**

## **Appendix 3**

### **Interview Schedule: Football Fans**

#### **1. Background Information**

- **Let's start with your earliest memories of sport – what are they?**
  - Do you remember watching football on TV as a child?
  - Were any of your family involved in football? How? Was sport important in your home when you were growing up?
- **Was there some event that attracted you to football specifically?**
  - Did you like other sports? What singled football out from them?
- **Were there any barriers when you grew up for girls to be interested/involved in sport?**
  - Were boys favoured more?
  - Did you play football- or other sports- yourself? Was it easy to do this if you wanted to?
  - Did you ever get teased about sport? Give some examples.
  - What did other girls think or say then about girls who had sporting interests?
  - Can you remember any examples of discussions/comments about 'sporty' girls?
- **Do you watch any other forms of live sport today?**
  - Which? Ever watch Leicester Tigers? Did you watch the World Cup?
  - Do you watch TV football programmes? Which ones?

#### **2. Becoming a Leicester City fan**

- **Are you from Leicester originally?**
  - Why do you support Leicester City?
  - How did you first become interested in the club?
- **Tell me about how you first began watching Leicester City 'live'.**
  - When did you attend your first game?
  - What do you remember from that first experience? What stood out? E.g. crowd, floodlights, players? Were you 'hooked' right away?
- **Who was the most influential person in getting you involved with LCFC?**
  - Did your father/mother/friend first take you to a game?
  - How did it happen? Do you like other clubs too?
- **Have you been attending regularly since then? For how long?**
  - Did you have any time away from attending matches at Leicester?
  - If yes, tell me about that. Why did it happen?
  - How did you feel about stopping attending matches? Did you still want to go?
  - Did something spark you to start attending again?
  - Is it more difficult for female fans to watch without a break? Why is that?

#### **3. Your Experience of Leicester City Matches**

- **Do you remember anything about the Filbert Street ground?**
  - How does the experience compare to the Walkers Stadium?
  - Have things changed for the better/worse now or is it the same?

- **Do you feel the same attachment/pride to the home ground today?**
  - What do you like/dislike about watching in the Walkers?
  - Is the new stadium better for female fans – or not?
  - How do you feel about all-seated stadiums?
- **How many matches do you usually attend in a season – home and away?**
  - If don't attend away, why?
  - Where do you normally sit in the stadium? Why there?
- **Tell me what you usually do on matchdays at home**
  - How do you normally get to the ground?
  - What do you do before? Pub? Club shop?
  - What sort of time do you arrive in the ground? Why then?

**Only 'older' fans were asked sections four and five:**

**4. Early Experiences of Leicester City (instead of section two)**

- **Tell me about when & how you first began watching Leicester City 'live'.**
  - What do you remember from that first experience? What stood out? E.g. crowd, floodlights, players? Were you 'hooked' right away?
- **Have you been attending regularly since then? For how long?**
  - Did you have any time away from attending matches at Leicester?
  - If yes, tell me about that. Why did it happen?
  - How did you feel about stopping attending matches? Did you still want to go?
  - Did something spark you to start attending again?
  - Is it more difficult for female fans to watch without a break? Why is that?
- **Who was the most influential person in getting you involved with LCFC?**
  - Did your father/mother/friend first take you to a game?
  - How did it happen? Do you like other clubs too?
- **Tell me what football was like as an *experience*.**
  - What was it like going to the match? Scary? Were you ever worried?
  - Were there ever any dangers of going to football?
- **What was the ground/stadium like?**
  - What was the crowd like? I've seen footage of the huge crowds, what was it like to be in one of them?
  - Were you ever crushed? How could you see?
  - How did people generally behave?
- **Do you have any memories of any special or particular matches?**
  - E.g. FA Cup finals 1949, 1961, 1963, 1969. League Cup finals 1964, 1965. *Special* League matches?
  - Did Cup Finals involve the whole community? Did you feel part of that?
- **Tell me about what you would wear when you went to watch Leicester and why?**
  - Could City fans be identified? Did they wear club colours?
  - Do you have any visual symbols of LCFC around your house/work/car today? Why?
  - If no, who do you think buys this kind of merchandise?
- **(If applicable) Were you interested in football even if you were not going to matches?**

- Do you have any idea of what football was like? An image of what it was like? What types of people went? What were the crowds like? Why did you think it was not for you?
- Did you like *any* sports around this time? Did you follow big clubs? Other sports?

## **5. Football/sport in the 50s/60s**

- **How interested were you in football in the 1950s & 1960s?**
- **Was there much talk about players in the 50s/60s?**
- 
- Could you have much contact with players in this period?
- What types of things did you look for in a player?
- Who were the great heroes when you were young and why?
- **Did you value different qualities in players/the club?**
- What type of club was Leicester City? Did it have a character/identity of its own? Has this changed?
- What type of player best represented what the club stood/stands for?
- **Were there any attractive players for female fans in the 1950s**
- Can you give any examples at City? Young players who appealed to female fans e.g. more recent example Muzzy Izzet?
- Did you see the players as younger or older adults in the 50s? Were you distant from them or did you find them attractive?
- **What do you remember about changes in the game in the 1960s?**
- Munich Air Crash 1958 (fed into sense the game was changing)? Can you remember this?
- World Cup 1966 and aftermath?
- TV becomes more important for the sport.
- Maximum wage lifted 1964 and rise of the football celebrity e.g. *George Best*. Football becomes glamorous? Did you notice this?
- **Do you remember the image of footballers changing in the 1950s and 1960s?**
- What did you think about these new 'types' of players? E.g. Best, Moore, Alan Ball, Billy Wright. Ball and Moore looked different from Matthews.
- Do you remember if the crowd changed? E.g. young people separated from adults?
- Do you remember hearing stories about Best? Was this a new direction for football? Were you excited by this?
- **Did you notice players changing at City?**
- Can you think of equivalent City players?
- Did you notice players changing after 1963 FA Cup Final? How did the City players of the 1950s compare to the 1960s? Ordinary guys? Glamorous? Did players start to become more distant from fans?
- **Was the 1950s/1960s viewed as a time when City could win the Championship?**
- Did this change? When? Why?
- **How did LCFC connect to the community in the 1950s/60s?**
- Is it more difficult for the club to appeal to the whole community today? Changes in the city? Did the club used to appeal to the whole city?

- **(If applicable) Tell me about your experiences of going to matches in the 70s/80s.**
- How did you feel about the problems the game was experiencing in this period? Were you ever afraid? Was it part of the excitement? How did you balance being one of the lads with being a woman (if applicable)
- What was the media coverage like?
- Did you know of any women who stopped attending in this period because of the violence?
- Was the fan rivalry an important part of the event for you? Is that the case today?

## **6. Women as Fans**

### **'Older' Fans Only**

#### **When you first started to attend...**

- **How many women used to attend?**
  - Did you see other women at matches?
  - Did women talk much about football?
  - Did you know other girls at school who went to football or was this unusual?
  - Did the club ever say things about women fans? Did you ever see stories about women fans?
- **How was life as a fan different?**
  - Was it a hard struggle to be a fan and be accepted?
  - How were you selected to go to football? E.g. fathers, mothers influence? Did your mother have any interest in sport?
  - What 'types' of girls went to watch football? (E.g. tomboys?)
  - How did you balance being a football fan with being a woman? E.g. dress in a certain way? Do women do this today?
  - Were other women ever surprised at your interest or knowledge in football?
- **What did men say about women fans?**
  - How did men treat women at matches?
  - Did you speak to men about football? Ever have to prove your knowledge?
- **Did men and women act differently at football/ behave in the same way?**
  - Is this the case today?

#### **All Age Groups**

- **Women seem to be seen mainly as fans of soap operas or movies or music. Is this different to being a fan of football do you think?**
  - Would you describe yourself as a fan of anything else?
- **Research suggests more female fans are now going to football.**
  - Do you think that's true? Why do you think this is happening?
  - Were things different for women when you first became a fan?
  - Do you like seeing more female fans at Leicester City? Why?
  - Do you ever go to watch female football? Why/why not?
- **Do men and women act differently at football/ behave in the same way?**
  - If you attend with a partner- how is your behaviour similar/different? If partner is not interested in football, how do you manage your relationship? Do others find this arrangement odd?

- **How do you balance being one of the lads and a football fan with being a woman? (If applicable)**
  - E.g. do you dress in a certain way to reinforce being female?
- **Do you think men have a different idea of what it is to be a fan?**
  - Do they talk about football differently? Are they more competitive/ knowledgeable about the sport?
  - Do women discuss football in the same way as men?
  - Are there differences between men & women in their emotional involvement in football? Why is this? (E.g. women have other responsibilities. Sport more important to men's identities?)
  - Do women 'understand' or see the game differently from men?
  - Do you ever have to 'prove' you know what you are talking about at football- perhaps to men?
  - Are other women surprised at your interest or knowledge in football?
- **Are some females really interested in the new hype around the game?**
  - Are some women more attracted by the celebrity or attractiveness of players?
  - Are you? Are some younger fans interested in all this? Is that OK for you?
  - Do you ever seek out this sort of material – about players' lifestyles, wives or homes? Do you enjoy it? Who is this media coverage aimed at?
  - Is this what makes the Premiership different from the Championship? Why?
- **How do you feel when the club talks specifically about *female* supporters?**
  - Are there things the club does that offend you as a female fan?
  - Could the club do more to improve things for female fans?
- **Should women be involved more in the *running* of clubs or the game?**
  - Perhaps as pundits or match officials?
  - Would female commentators bring anything different?
  - Are women obviously involved today?
  - Is there still some resistance to women being involved in football in this way? Can you think of any good female role models who work in the sport today?

## **7. Why not support the Leicester Tigers?**

- **Did you ever think about following Leicester Tigers instead of Leicester City?**  
**Football Only Fans**
  - Why did you 'choose' football over rugby?
  - Do you 'follow' the Tigers at all? Did you ever go and watch the Tigers play?
  - Did you know other people who went?
  - How is attending football different to rugby?
- **What sort of sport was rugby in Leicester at that time?**
  - Was it taken 'seriously'? Was it much discussed, in the public eye? Could you have named any Tigers players?
- **What sorts of people became Tigers fans do you think? Are they different from football fans?**
  - How was rugby regarded among people you knew?
  - What sort of media coverage did rugby have then?
- **How was football different to rugby in Leicester at that time?**
  - Was it seen then as a direct competitor to football?
  - And now? Have things changed in this respect today? In what ways?

- Would you be happy to watch Tigers today? Are you happy when they win?

### **Rugby and Football Fans:**

- **Is the atmosphere different at the different sports?**
- Could the fans learn anything from each other?
- Is there a different feeling for women fans at the different clubs?

## **8. People at football**

- **Tell me something about the people you usually attend matches with.**
- Is football a family thing for you – or is it about getting away from the family?
- Is it better to go with male fans/female fans or a mixture? Does it matter?
- Would you like to go with a group of female friends?

### **Children**

- Do you/did you take *children*? What is good about taking them to football?
- Can kids learn things about the world at football matches?
- Does football offer good role models for kids?
- **Do you know the people who sit *around* you at football?**
- Are they the same each week? Tell me a little about them.
- Did you meet them at football?
- What do you talk about? Is there banter? What happens?
- **Is meeting and talking with these other people an important part of why you come to matches? Why?**
- Have you made any good friends at football matches?
- Do you ever see 'football' friends at other times during the week?
- **Is football just like any other form of entertainment for you?**
- Like the theatre or cinema? Or is there something special about football?
- What is it? How does it make you *feel*?
- Is it an 'escape' for you – or another kind of stress? If it hurts, why keep on attending?
- **Is the fan rivalry an important part of the event for you?**
- How do you generally behave at football – are you lively, animated? Do you shout? What are you like when City scores a goal – what do you do?
- Is it OK to 'swear' at games? Are there things that should never be said?
- What have you heard being said? Is sexism tolerated more?
- Are you ever uncomfortable at a football match because of your sex?
- **Are some fans always likely to lose control sometimes at matches?**
- Is this understandable?
- Do you ever feel intimidated by this? Or is it part of the excitement?
- **Is the *type* of supporter the club is trying to recruit today changing?**
- How? Women?
- More 'middle class' fans?
- What do you feel about these changes?

## **9. What do you get from being a fan?**

- **How does it affect you if Leicester City wins/loses?**
- How do you feel when the club wins an important match?

- How long does this last? Does it ever affect your work or family relationships? Does it affect male fans differently?
- **Do you discuss the club during the week? At work? With friends?**
  - How often do you spend thinking about football? How much of your spare time is spent watching/thinking about football?
  - Do you have contact with people who support other clubs? Banter with them?
- **What do you most enjoy about going to matches?**
  - Friendships? Belonging? A great piece of play? The uncertainty? Excitement?
  - If you travel a long-distance to matches, why do you do it?
- **Is your attachment always to the club or to individual players?**
  - What type of player represents the best of the club - what the club stands for?
  - Who is your favourite ever player – and why?
  - What type of club is Leicester City? Does the team have a *character/identity* of its own? What words would you use to describe it?
  - Is it still possible for fans like you to meet and have contact with players?
  - Or is it better to keep them separate from fans, perhaps with a mystique surrounding them?
- **Is being a City fan an important part of who you are? Why?**
  - Would 'being a Leicester City fan' figure on a list describing you?
  - Are most people who know you aware that you support Leicester City? How often do you check for information about Leicester City? How?
  - E.g. newspapers, club website, fanzines, club match-day programmes, TV?

## **10. Media, Consumption & Identity**

- **Tell me about what you wear when you go to watch Leicester and why?**
  - Do you have any visual symbols of LCFC around your house/work/car? Why?
  - If no, what types of people do you think buy this kind of merchandise?
- **How often do you buy club merchandise?**
  - Is this part of what being a fan is about?
  - Would you ever wear Leicester City items away from football? Why do you/others do this?
- **Does supporting Leicester City give you a strong feeling of belonging/attachment to other people & the city of Leicester?**
  - Do you get this feeling in the crowd?
  - What do you feel when you see other obviously Leicester City fans – perhaps on TV or abroad somewhere? Why wear club merchandise abroad?
- **How important is the club is to the city of Leicester?**
  - If the sports teams are doing well, is this good for the city of Leicester? Why?
  - Is the identity or representation of Leicester as a 'sports city' important for you?
- **What do you think about the way football is presented on TV (sky and terrestrial) and in the newspapers?**
  - Do you like the type of reporting you get?
  - Do you think this coverage is shaped well *for* both male and female fans? Is there anything you would prefer to be done differently?



- **Do you support England as well as Leicester City?**
  - How important is England to you?
  - Has England changed its appeal recently to female fans? How?
  - Have you ever watched an England game 'live'? Would you be more likely to go and watch England today?

## **Appendix 4**

### **Interview Schedule: Rugby Fans**

#### **1. Background Information**

- **Let's start with your earliest memories of sport – what are they?**
  - Do you remember watching sport on TV as a child?
  - Were any of your family involved in rugby? How? Was sport important in your home when you were growing up?
- **Was there some event that attracted you to rugby specifically?**
  - Did you like other sports – what singled rugby out from them?
- **Were there any barriers when you grew up for girls to be interested/involved in sport?**
  - Were boys favoured more?
  - Did you play rugby- or other sports- yourself? Was it easy to do this if you wanted to?
  - Did you ever get teased about sport? Give some examples.
  - What did other girls think or say then about girls who had sporting interests?
  - Can you remember any examples of discussions/comments about 'sporty' girls?
- **Do you watch any other forms of live sport today?**
  - Which? Ever watch Leicester City? Do you watch rugby and/or football World Cups?
  - Do you watch TV sport programmes? Which ones?

#### **2. Becoming a Leicester Tigers fan**

- **Are you from Leicester originally?**
  - Why do you support Leicester Tigers?
  - How did you first become interested in the club?
- **Tell me about how you first began watching Leicester Tigers 'live'.**
  - When did you attend your first game?
  - What do you remember from that first experience? What stood out? E.g. crowd, players? Were you 'hooked' right away?
- **Who was the most influential person in getting you involved with Tigers?**
  - Did your father/mother/friend first take you to a game?
  - How did it happen? Do you like other clubs too?
- **Have you been attending regularly since then? For how long?**
  - Did you have any time away from attending matches at Leicester?
  - If yes, tell me about that. Why did it happen?
  - How did you feel about stopping attending matches? Did you still want to go?
  - Did something spark you to start attending again?
  - Is it more difficult for female fans to watch without a break? Why is that?

#### **3. Your Experience of Leicester Tigers Matches**

- **How would you describe the experience of watching Tigers at Welford Road?**
  - Have you been to other grounds? How does Welford Road compare to other stadiums?
  - Did you watch Tigers play at the Walkers Stadium? How did you find this?
  - Would you be in favour of re-locating to a bigger ground? Why/why not?

- **Do you feel a strong sense of attachment/pride to Welford Road as the club's home ground?**
  - What do you like/dislike about watching at Welford Road?
  - Does the ground cater for female fans well – or not?
- **How many matches do you usually attend in a season – home and away?**
  - If don't attend away, why?
  - Where do you normally sit/stand in the stadium? Why there?
  - (If applicable) How is standing in the Crumbie Stand different to sitting in other areas of the ground? Are there differences in the facilities available?
- **Tell me what you usually do on matchdays at home**
  - How do you normally get to the ground?
  - What do you do before? Pub? Club shop?
  - What sort of time do you arrive in the ground? Why then?

#### **'Middle aged' and 'Older' fans Only**

- **(If applicable) Tell me about your experiences of going to matches in the 70s/80s.**
  - Was watching rugby different before it became professional? How?
  - Have things changed for the better/worse?
  - In what ways is the sport different today? E.g. Has professionalism changed the values in the game? (N.B. Neil Back incident at 2002 Heineken Cup Final)
- **Was there much talk about the players in the 70s/80s?**
  - Could you have much contact with players in this period?
  - What types of things did you look for in a player? Who were the great heroes and why?
  - Were there any attractive players for female fans when you were younger?
- **Do you remember the image of rugby players changing after the sport became professional?**
  - What did you think about these new 'celebrity types' of players? E.g. Johnny Wilkinson, Gavin Henson. Has rugby always had players like this?
  - Can you think of examples of players changing at Tigers?
- **How did Leicester Tigers connect to the community in previous decades?**
  - Is it more difficult for the club to appeal to the whole community today?
  - Changes in the city? Did the club used to appeal to the whole city?

#### **4. Women as Fans**

- **Women seem to be seen mainly as fans of soap operas or movies or music. Is this different to being a fan of rugby do you think?**
  - Would you describe yourself as a fan of anything else?

#### **'Middle aged' and 'Older' fans only**

- **When you first started to attend, how many women went to matches?**
  - Did you see other women at Tigers? Did women talk much about rugby?
  - Did you know other girls at school who went to rugby or was this unusual?
  - What 'types' of girls went to watch rugby/football? Have you ever felt you've had to balance being a rugby fan with being a woman (i.e. watching what some might see as quite a macho, aggressive sport?)
  - Did the club ever say things about women fans? Did you ever see stories about women fans?

### All Age Groups

- **Do you think there have been any changes in the numbers of women going to rugby today? If so, why do you think this is happening?**
  - Do you have an image of what going to rugby was like in the past? How do you think watching rugby would have been different before the sport became professional?
  - Do you like seeing female fans at Leicester Tigers? Why?
  - Do you ever go to watch female rugby? Why/why not?
- **Do men and women act differently at rugby/ behave in the same way?**
  - If you attend with a partner- how is your behaviour similar/different?
  - If partner is not interested in rugby, how do you manage your relationship? Do others find this arrangement odd?
- **Have you ever felt you've had to balance being a rugby fan with being a woman? (i.e. watching what some might see as quite a macho, aggressive sport?)**
  - E.g. do you dress in a certain way to reinforce being female?
  - Did you know other girls at school who went to rugby/football or was this unusual? What 'types' of girls would watch these sports?
- **Do you think men have a different idea of what it is to be a fan?**
  - Do they talk about rugby differently? Are they more competitive/ knowledgeable about the sport?
  - Do women discuss rugby in the same way as men?
  - Are there differences between men & women in their emotional involvement in rugby? Why is this? (E.g. women have other responsibilities. Sport more important to men's identities?)
  - Do women 'understand' or see the game differently from men?
  - Do you ever have to 'prove' you know what you are talking about at rugby- perhaps to men?
  - Are other women surprised at your interest or knowledge in rugby?
- **Are some females really interested in the new hype around rugby today?**
  - Are some women more attracted by the celebrity or attractiveness of sports players? Are you?
  - Does this occur much in rugby or is it more apparent in other sports (e.g. material about players' lifestyles, wives, homes).
  - What do you think about these new 'celebrity types' of players? E.g. Johnny Wilkinson, Gavin Henson?
  - Do you ever seek out this sort of material? Do you enjoy it? Who is this media coverage aimed at?
- **How do you feel when the club talks specifically about *female* supporters?**
  - Are there things the club does that offend you as a female fan?
  - Could the club do more to improve things for female fans?
- **Should women be involved more in the *running* of clubs or the game?**
  - Perhaps as pundits or match officials?
  - Would female commentators bring anything different?
  - Are women obviously involved today?
  - Is there still some resistance to women being involved in rugby in this way? Can you think of any good female role models who work in the sport today?

## **5. Why not support Leicester City?**

- **Did you ever think about following Leicester City instead of Tigers?**

### **Rugby Only Fans**

- Why did you 'choose' rugby over football?
- Do you 'follow' Leicester City at all? Did you ever go and watch City play?
- Did you know other people who went?
- How is attending rugby different to football?
- **What sort of sport was football in Leicester at that time?**
  - Was it taken 'seriously'? Was it much discussed, in the public eye? Could you have named any City players?
- **What sorts of people became Leicester City fans do you think? Are they different from rugby fans?**
  - How was football regarded among people you knew?
  - What sort of media coverage did football have then?
- **How was rugby different to football in Leicester at that time?**
  - Was football seen then as a direct competitor to rugby?
  - And now? Have things changed in this respect today? In what ways?
  - Would you be happy to watch City today? Are you happy when they win?

### **Rugby and Football Fans**

- **Is the atmosphere different at the different sports?**
  - Do the fans behave differently? Could the fans learn anything from each other?
  - Is there a different feeling for women fans at the different clubs?

## **6. People at rugby**

- **Tell me something about the people you usually attend matches with.**
  - Is rugby a family thing for you – or is it about getting away from the family?
  - Is it better to go with male fans/female fans or a mixture? Does it matter?
  - Would you like to go with a group of female friends?

### **Children**

- Do you/did you take *children*? What is good about taking them to rugby?
- Can kids learn things about the world at rugby matches?
- Does rugby offer good role models for kids?
- **Do you know the people who sit or stand *around* you at rugby?**
  - Are they the same each week? Tell me a little about them.
  - Did you meet them at rugby?
  - What do you talk about? Is there banter? What happens?
- **Is meeting and talking with these other people an important part of why you come to matches? Why?**
  - Have you made any good friends at rugby matches?
  - Do you ever see 'rugby' friends at other times during the week?
- **Is rugby just like any other form of entertainment for you?**
  - Like the theatre or cinema? Or is there something special about rugby?
  - What is it? How does it make you *feel*?

- Is it an 'escape' for you – or another kind of stress? If it hurts, why keep on attending?
- **Is the fan rivalry/banter an important part of the event for you?**
- Are there any clubs that you dislike? Did you enjoy talking to visiting supporters?
- What do you think about crowd segregation at football?
- How do you generally behave at rugby – are you lively, animated? Do you shout?
- Is it OK to 'swear' at games? Are there things that should never be said?
- What have you heard being said? Is sexism tolerated more?
- Are you ever uncomfortable at a rugby match because of your sex?
- **Is the *type* of supporter the club is trying to recruit today changing?**
- How? Women?
- More 'middle class' fans?
- What do you feel about these changes?

## **7. What do you get from being a fan?**

- **How does it affect you if Leicester Tigers wins/loses?**
- How do you feel when the club wins or loses an important match?
- How long does this last? Does it ever affect your work or family relationships? Does it affect male fans differently?
- **Do you discuss the club during the week? At work? With friends?**
- How often do you spend thinking about rugby? How much of your spare time is spent watching/thinking about rugby?
- Do you have contact with people who support other clubs? Banter with them?
- **What do you most enjoy about going to matches?**
- Friendships? Belonging? A great piece of play? The uncertainty? Excitement?
- If you travel a long-distance to matches, why do you do it?
- **Is your attachment always to the club or to individual players?**
- What type of player represents the best of the club - what the club stands for?
- Who is your favourite ever player – and why?
- What type of club is Leicester Tigers? Does the team have a *character/identity* of its own? What words would you use to describe it?
- Is it still possible for fans like you to meet and have contact with players?
- Or is it better to keep them separate from fans, perhaps with a mystique surrounding them?
- **Is being a Tigers fan an important part of who you are? Why?**
- Would 'being a Leicester Tigers fan' figure on a list describing you?
- Are most people who know you aware that you support Leicester Tigers?
- How often do you check for information about Leicester Tigers? How?
- E.g. newspapers, club website, fanzines, club match-day programmes, TV?

## **8. Media, Consumption & Identity**

- **Tell me about what you wear when you go to watch Tigers and why?**
- Do you have any visual symbols of Tigers around your house/work/car? Why?
- If no, what types of people do you think buy this kind of merchandise?
- **How often do you buy club merchandise?**
- Is this part of what being a fan is about?

- Would you ever wear Leicester Tigers items away from rugby? Why do you/others do this?
- **Does supporting Leicester Tigers give you a strong feeling of belonging/attachment to other people & the city of Leicester?**
  - Do you get this feeling in the crowd?
  - What do you feel when you see other obviously Leicester Tigers fans – perhaps on TV or abroad somewhere? Why wear club merchandise abroad?
- **How important is the club is to the city of Leicester?**
  - If the sports teams are doing well, is this good for the city of Leicester? Why?
  - Is the identity or representation of Leicester as a ‘sports city’ important for you?
- **What do you think about the way rugby is presented on TV (sky and terrestrial) and in the newspapers?**
  - Do you like the type of reporting you get?
  - Is there anything you would prefer to be done differently?
- **Do you support England as well as Leicester Tigers?**
  - How important is England to you?
  - Do you follow the England team in World Cups? 2003? 2007? Six Nations?
  - How do you feel when you see Tigers players representing England? Do you think club games should be stopped for internationals?
  - Have you ever watched an England game ‘live’?

## Appendix 5

### Sample Interview Transcript

#### Interview with R30. Interviewed at her Home.

*Res: Okay, let's start with your earliest memories of sport-what are they?*

R30: My mother was very sporty, she actually ran for Leicestershire and went down to London, and I've still got all the badges and the letters from when she was a child and obviously permission from the Head Master, a letter to her parents. And she played tennis and our church had its own tennis courts. So I've sort of been brought up with sport.

*Res: Did this encourage you to take part in sport as well?*

R30: Yes I mean I played...I mean Junior school you don't do an awful lot of sport, but once I got to Secondary School I played, I was in the hockey team, tennis team that sort of thing. So I played quite a bit of sport.

*Res: Do you remember much about rugby at that time?*

R30: Well yes because the sports Master for the boys because obviously although it was a mixed school, you had different...a sports Headmistress for the girls and a Headmaster for the boys, and I mean he actually played for the Tigers when it was amateur, before it turned professional. So we knew, we'd heard a lot about the Tigers at school because obviously he'd played. And then I was doing Domestic Science and he came and asked our Domestic Science group if we would go to help do the meals for the boys who had a rugby match before the Tigers. They played late morning and had a lunch, and some of us went down and got the meals for them down at the Tigers ground. And then we were then allowed to stop and watch the match in the afternoon for free (*laughs*) So that was quite good.

*Res: When was this?*

R30: I would have been about 15 so it would have been about 1961, 62.

*Res: So would you ever have had the chance to play any rugby?*

R30: Oh no, no. It was...it was definitely the boys played football and rugby, and the girls played hockey and basketball. I mean I suppose it was one of those things you accepted that girls did one sport and boys did another in those days.

*Res: But you were able to get involved because of this link?*

R30: Yeah, I used to go and watch it, and I enjoyed watching it and sort of...we picked up the rules by sort of being in the club house and hearing what folks said, you'd sort of learn the rules.

*Res: Was it this that attracted you to watching rugby?*

R30: Definitely yes. I mean I watch football like the FA Cup final, but I wouldn't go and watch a football match. And I think really it's the crowds as much as anything. I mean you can go to a rugby match and sit in the middle of away supporters and feel comfortable. You wouldn't do that at a football match, you know, they're very much segregated, whereas rugby, you're all mixed up together and it doesn't matter. You know, and if one side is winning you say well done to their supporters, you know, it's all very amicable. You just felt it was a little more respectable as opposed to the football (*laughs*) And the fact that at the majority...you could sit down at a rugby match, whereas most at the football were standing.

*Res: Did any other girls get involved in rugby in this way?*

R30: Oh yes there was a few of us that went down yes.

*Res: So it wasn't something unusual to be going to watch Tigers?*

R30: No.

*Res: Did you know any girls that went to watch the football?*

R30: No, no I didn't.

*Res: This is really interesting...*

R30: I suppose with the Head Master asking us you sort of thought oh we'll go down, it's an opportunity to do something different, and it led from there.

*Res: Do you watch any other sports today?*



R30: It's mainly rugby that I actually go to matches. I like sport, like on the television I like watching golf, I like tennis, I like snooker, you know, a range of things, but I don't think I'd ever go to one other than the rugby. Cricket, I've been down to the cricket for the twenty-20s, coz that's, you know, it's a little bit more quick.

*Res: So it would be more the rugby you would be watching on a regular basis? But you are interested in other sports?*

R30: Yes. It's the cost as well, I mean you can't afford to go to everything.

*Res: Now let me ask you some questions about how you became a Tigers fan. Are you from the Leicester area originally?*

R30: Born and bred Enderby.

*Res: Is that important at all in your support of Tigers?*

R30: I suppose I mean it started me off really. I mean I suppose it's not important, it's something that started the seed and I've always liked watching the rugby from then on you know. And I suppose watching the boys, coz if we had a match with another school, the girls would play hockey and the boys would be playing rugby with another school. So you'd sort of, you'd have that link, if your match finished early you'd see them play. You know you got to sort of understand rugby a bit more.

*Res: So the first experiences you had at Welford Road in the 1960s, what stood out from those early experiences? What made you want to keep going?*

R30: Well I suppose once...I mean I did go to Birmingham to train for nursing, so I didn't obviously go as often, I didn't become a season ticket holder. But then some friends from church were ticket holders and when I came back and sort of first married and that, we joined. So it took it from there.

*Res: Were you hooked right away?*

R30: Well I mean I liked watching rugby and when I was in Birmingham I'd perhaps go and see, if I was off on a Saturday when there was a match, I'd go and watch one of the local matches in Birmingham, Mosely and that sort of place. You know, if it was...if I was home I'd go down the Tigers because you could just walk in and get a ticket then. You didn't have to be a season ticket holder, you could just walk in the gate and get a ticket.

*Res: So would it have been the atmosphere that really appealed to you?*

R30: Yes I think it is. I would feel far safer in a rugby match than in a football match. It's never appealed to me football.

*Res: So you liked being in that kind of atmosphere, the crowd, and then did you pick up the rules...*

R30: Yes that's right. Being with folks who...I mean the couple I used to go with and they'd got children the same age as ours so the children would sometimes come with us, but he played rugby in his school career so he would sort of explain one or two things if we couldn't understand it which helps.

*Res: So who would you say was most influential in getting you involved with Tigers? Sounds like quite an independent thing to do when you first went with the school...*

R30: Yes I suppose it was really and it was opportunistic that I met somebody; there was somebody in our church that was already going down the Tigers. So you think well it's nice to go with a crowd. And it started off with the Baa Baas matches because they used to be able to get one ticket for themselves and a ticket for a friend. So it gradually, you know, we sort of went down and then I became a season ticket holder myself. It just sort of gradually snowballed really, yes.

*Res: Have you been going to matches regularly ever since?*

R30: Yes, yes.

*Res: Then on-off when you were studying nursing?*

R30: Yes I mean obviously when I was not in Leicester I was not able to...and then obviously when the children were babies you didn't go Tigers often. But once, you know, once they were that little bit older, I sometimes went on my own, sometimes my husband came with me, you know, we were both season ticket holders for a while but he's got a motor bike, does trials biking, at that time he did, so obviously Saturday afternoon he went off to his club and I went down the Tigers with my friends which just made life easier really.

*Res: Do you think it might be more difficult for female fans to keep going to sport without a break?*

R30: Oh yeah, I think, it is possible, it depends obviously on your family situation whether you can get down or not. Yeah I mean it's easier probably now than it was I mean I've been married 40 years and it's a different type of relationship couples have these days, I think they're very much if ones got one sport thought and the other one has got another, they'll both go and do their own thing, whereas I suppose when we were first married the weekends were precious because it was the only time we had together because you know Dave was out and about working, you didn't see a lot of each other Monday to Friday and you'd got the children, so the weekends you didn't want to go off and do your own things, you tended to do things together. But as you're getting older, I suppose you mature in your relationship don't you really? You do, you sort of, it's okay to go and do your own thing. But in those days when we were first married, the husbands would never go off to the pub on their own, whereas they do now, coz I think society has changed in what's acceptable.

*Res: Others have mentioned having time away from matches when children were young...*

R30: But you see I notice now that some folks actually take their babies down to the rugby with them. I'd never have thought of that. But people take their children to lots of places where we never did. But I think that's a change in culture, it's like going to pubs for meals, you go in and there's little babies, and little children sitting there in the evening. My kids were in bed at six o'clock at night because that was the accepted thing, that's what you did. It's a cultural thing really isn't it? You'd never have thought of taking them to a rugby match on a Saturday afternoon.

*Res: So would it not have been an option for you to go to rugby and maybe take it in turns to look after children?*

R30: It just never occurred. It's the sort of thing I suppose in those days you wouldn't have thought about it. But I can see now, there are children go down, you know sometimes there's a crying baby next to you (*laughs*) As a granny I think hmm, the child shouldn't be here, but there you go, it's different people's...people take children wherever they go now, 40 years ago you didn't. That was the culture. That was the culture, it was accepted.

*Res: So tell me about your experiences of going to matches in these earlier decades, from the 1960s? Do you remember things being different in the amateur era?*

R30: Yes, there was a lot more banter I think. It was different when it was just amateur. The tickets were a lot cheaper (*laughs*) They were about £26 a year you know, which is a huge difference. Obviously all the facilities were a bit rougher, I suppose because it was amateur, coz you hadn't got the money coming in. It's how it's changed.

*Res: How about the numbers of people attending?*

R30: Oh I mean there was always spare seats, you know, it was never choc-a-block and you would literally, if the match was at three o'clock you could turn up at quarter to three without a booked seat but get a decent seat. You know, but now you've got to get there early, even though you've booked your seat, you've gotta get there early because there's queues to get in, I mean there were never queues, you could just walk up to the turnstile and get in.

*Res: More relaxed?*

R30: Yes, yes. I mean it would almost be a last minute thing. You know, whereas now the match is at quarter to three, we'll have to leave at...you've got to work out because you've got to park miles away. Whereas you could park very close, you could walk in easily, get a seat.

*Res: So what about any changes in the sport itself – was the game different before professionalism?*

R30: I suppose from my memory it seemed a lot rougher. I think there's a lot more concern now with injury and how bad some injuries can be, and I think they're probably more careful in their playing because of that, you know, they're conscious, there's the arms round the necks you know, things like that (*laughs*) that was done all the while and you didn't class that as dirty play, that was just rugby. You know, there's lot's of things now that are classed as not acceptable that probably were acceptable in those days. And it's gradually, and you can see why, because of the injuries that some people have sustained. And the fact that once they've finished playing if they have a bad injury it's their career, you know, where do they go to

because of their career if it damages them too much. And I suppose some folks couldn't play because of their work commitments. You know if you had to go somewhere abroad for your business, you couldn't play on Saturday, whereas it's professional, it's your job.

*Res: Would there be any sense that the amateur or fair play values have changed?*

R30: No, no, I don't think so. It's tidied it up a bit, slightly (*laughs*) And it's the fact that they've got to make a living out of it so they've got to be able to play every week. Week after week after week, they've gotta be fit to do it, whereas if they weren't fit before, if you weren't fit for a week, it didn't really matter coz you didn't get paid. I mean I don't know what they did in those days, they perhaps had a bit of beer money.

*Res: Would there have been much talk about players in previous years? 1960s, 1970s?*

R30: Oh yes because some of them worked for local businesses. I mean I know where one of the...because I actually go down, for the last few years my husband doesn't come, there's two chaps a bit older than me, with their two daughters and myself, so there's five of us go down. Well one of the chaps, one of the players used to work where he worked when he was an amateur, when they were amateurs, so there was contact and a lot of the Tigers players were Leicester people. I mean they are really, they've always tried, you know they've come from local schools. Somebody went to one of the schools that Dean Richards and one of the other chaps were at school together, and it's those sorts of things that you almost feel you know them because they are local lads.

*Res: So did the club connect well to the community in previous years?*

R30: Oh definitely yes. I think there's a good relationship with the Tigers and Leicester and Leicestershire, they do support each other. And because Martin Johnson worked for Midland Bank and my son worked for Midland Bank, I think before it was professional Steve and Martin were in the bank together, so he knew him.

*Res: Has the club always appealed to the city as a whole?*

R30: I think so. Yeah, yeah I think so. I'm sure because they have a lot of local lads. You would feel it is your team, you know, they're not all foreigners which in football, you can have half a team of foreigners. You know. I mean I do think the Tigers try to...I mean obviously they've got their academy school, so they do encourage locals, and they have the tag for schools that they support, the tag matches, so they're supporting local schools, and they go into...I know the Tigers lads go into local schools to encourage them playing rugby and it's all that sort of thing that's encouraging the next generation of rugby players. So I think that's quite good.

*Res: Can you remember who the great heroes were when you were first going to matches?*

R30: I suppose Dusty Hare.

*Res: Would you have had favourites?*

R30: No I don't think so. Deano I suppose was a bit of a favourite you know. From the RAF the two brothers, it's gone.

*Res: Would there have been any attractive players for female fans?*

R30: I suppose they were a bit of a hunk, muscley blokes, I wouldn't say it's part of the attraction but you know, there's a bit more meat to them than scrawny little footballers (*laughs*) And they can run as fast, you know, they have got the power. At school it would have been a big attraction yes. I suppose you talked about that, I don't remember that but.

*Res: Would there be any sense that girls' might typically pick out players who played in certain positions?*

R30: I think it's just the appeal overall. And I think it's surprising when you see them on the field and they don't seem that big when they're playing. But when you suddenly see them in the club house, you think crickey he's huge! You know, not all of them but quite a lot of them you know, they are sort of big players and you don't always appreciate that when you see them on the field coz they're all that size.

*Res: Do you remember the image of rugby players perhaps changing when the sport became professional? Maybe new celebrity types of players like Johnny Wilkinson, Gavin Henson?*

R30: I think they've always had certain players, you know, Billy Beaumont, you know, when you think of the really old ones, you know, there are one or two that have stuck out as nice chaps.

*Res: I guess someone like Johnny Wilkinson, people might know about him even if they don't know anything about rugby?*

R30: True yes. I suppose therefore folks that aren't into following rugby, they would know the odd names. And who they were, yeah I suppose they do. But I think the sport has always had various folks that have stood out.

*Res: How? Stood out for their qualities?*

R30: Yes, yes, you know, I think it's funny, rugby players, no matter how rough they are, you listen to them speaking on the television and they're very pleasant chaps and they can hold a conversation and they can talk. Put a football player in front of a microphone and some of them can't string two words together. And I just don't know, I don't know whether it's a class thing because I know a lot of schools it tended to be more the private schools that played rugby, the grammar schools, rather than the secondary schools, you know, so whether there was a class thing about rugby in the past I don't really know. It's strange because sometimes you do get some fans come down and they're a bit...almost football type fans. But they get squashed by the crowd, you know, if they get too...like obviously it's silent when there's a penalty being taken, you could hear a pin drop. And if you get a few in the crowd who start making a lot of noise, they get squashed, they get told off by the rest of the crowd. "It's not acceptable behaviour, you can do that over at Filbert Street, you don't do it here". It's almost that...that some younger lads that come, they don't understand the politeness of rugby. They see rugby almost as a rough sport, but I don't think it is. I don't know...it's just one of those things you sometimes think well is it football they're shouting and jeering all the way through the match, whereas rugby, there's times that it's silent and everybody respects that for the player. I mean you take a penalty in football, it's noisy. They don't let them concentrate. Yet penalties at the rugby it's silent.

*Res: Could this be to do with it being different sports? Would you link this to a class thing then?*

R30: I don't know. But sometimes what's acceptable behaviour in one class is not acceptable in another. You don't know, you don't like to call it a class thing but.

*Res: So you've observed at Welford Road new people coming in and standing out?*

R30: Not knowing how to behave. They come in late, disturb everybody coming in, they're out getting a beer, you just think sit down and watch the match please, we're here to watch a match, not to go and get beer. You just think ohhh, you don't like to think it's a class thing, but you wonder don't you sometimes?

*Res: So when you were first getting interested in Tigers, would you have ever followed City results? Would you have known much about the football?*

R30: Well I mean even now I'll look to see what the score is. I mean when we're coming home in the car we'll put Radio Leicester on and usually hear what the city have done. So we keep an eye on the City. I mean my son used to play football and go down the football, but I've converted him (*laughs*)

*Res: Were you never interested enough to go to watch City?*

R30: No, never.

*Res: Even when you son went?*

R30: Oh no, he went with all the lads. No I wouldn't have gone to a football match.

*Res: Why?*

R30: Well I think it's the, there's often a lot of trouble at football matches, there's segregation of fans, you know, I've been in town when the police are frog marching them from the station to...and I just think oh, I don't want to be part of that. That puts me off, and I just don't like watching, football is not a sport that I particularly like watching other than as I say the FA Cup final.

*Res: I guess if you didn't know people at school who were going either, this wouldn't have prompted you to go and find out what it was like?*

R30: No.

*Res: Would there have been much talk about football? Was it much discussed in the public eye?*

R30: Yeah I think you always had the reports in the *Mercury* and also the *Sports Mercury* that came out sort of on a Saturday evening.

Res: *Would there be any sense that the two sports could be seen as a competitor to each other?*

R30: Well I think the papers just did it so that everybody had got the results. You know, coz I mean they do a lot of local clubs, they do all of those results. I don't think competition, I just think, I mean at Leicester one year the Tigers won, the football won and the cricket, you know we had a year and all three sports won. So I don't think it's a rivalry I think it's you respect each other and you support each other.

Res: *And you might have known a bit about what was going on at Leicester because of this coverage?*

R30: Yes.

Res: *You've mentioned the segregation at football a bit, would this put you off going to football?*

R30: Well because the seats are separate, it would worry me that you're sitting in the right area (*laughs*) You know, if you just bought a ticket, you could end up sitting in the wrong side.

Res: *Do you think the two sports could learn things from each other?*

R30: I think they could actually yeah. I mean how you would do it, because every football match, they're separated, even at Wembley for Cup Finals, the area is all separated when they sell the tickets. Whereas you go to Twickenham and although they have blocks, you know, you have blocks of Leicester fans, blocks of Wasps fans and whatever, you're not that far away from each other, it's not like all that side is Leicester and all that side is Wasps, there's a mixture.

Res: *Did you know many people interested in football? Would there be any differences in the sorts of people more likely to become football or rugby fans?*

R30: I think there's more...there always seemed to be more male folks that I knew that went to the football. I didn't know that many folks that were female that went to the football. The odd one, but not many. Whether it's just the circle of friends I was in...I suppose it's a sweeping statement to say, but most of my friends weren't football fans, they were more rugby fans so.

Res: *Okay, so going back to Welford Road, how would you describe the experience of watching Tigers at Welford Road? Have you been to other grounds?*

R30: I've been to other grounds, I've been to Millennium stadium, been to Twickenham, we've been to Sale, Nottingham, there was a semi final at Nottingham one year. Been to Bath, been to Gloucester, I've been to one or two away matches, depending on if they're sort of quarter finals, semi finals, that sort of thing we've gone. Don't go to all the away matches by any means. Just obviously it's a whole day thing if you go to an away match. I'm keen but I have got a life (*laughs*) No, it's not something that we've gone to. The matches we've had at the Walkers Stadium, the first match the atmosphere was totally different, it was very different being in the Walkers Stadium for a rugby match. The second one was a little better. The first one was very cold, I don't know, there was something about the atmosphere just didn't feel right.

Res: *Would you be in favour of staying at Welford Road?*

R30: Oh definitely, yes, yes, definitely. The atmosphere was just so different.

Res: *What do you like about Welford Road?*

R30: Erm...I suppose you feel more part of it. Like the Walkers Stadium you felt a long way from the ground, whereas you sort of at the Tigers, no matter where you sit I think you don't feel that far. We used to be on the...Members Stand, on the right hand, we've had tickets there, we've had tickets on the Crumbie Stand, but we're now, we've been since they did the Alliance and Leicester we've been on that stand so I've sat all round and it's a good atmosphere no matter where you sit.

Res: *Do you feel a sense of attachment or pride in Welford Road as the club's home ground?*

R30: Yes, yes, I suppose it would be sad if it moved yes.

Res: *Is there anything you dislike about watching at Welford Road?*

R30: No I think it's all...ladies toilets are always a bit...there's not many. And there's always a queue.

Res: *Does the ground generally cater well for female fans?*

R30: It's getting there, I mean it's improving, but it's not there yet. Obviously each time that they do a bit of development they take that into account which you know, that's all you can do, you can't really just create things, it's just not possible is it?

*Res: What's good about the area of the ground you're in now?*

R30: Well we're just to the left of the goal post on the Alliance and Leicester Stand, so we get a good view of the whole match, I mean it's like sort of tennis if you're at the side you're going like that all the while (*turns head side to side*). Whereas sitting at the end, although if there's a lot going on down one end, although you've always got your binoculars anyway, it's not quite so easy to see what's going on but you know, hopefully when they're playing your way you see a lot of action that way. So it's a good position so I like that view rather than sideways views.

*Res: Would there be any differences in the facilities available in the different areas of the ground? Or maybe whether you're standing or sitting?*

R30: Well I'm not a standing person, I like to sit down.

*Res: Do you have any kind of match day routine when you go to matches today?*

R30: Well we do really, because really it's for parking. And it depends who's driving, but we've got one street that we tend to aim for to park, so we try to get there and then walk to the match. I mean if the match starts at three, we usually set off from here about quarter to two, to give ourselves really half an hour to get in, because the traffic going in is quite busy to park, and then you've got sort of a good time to walk because you don't want to be rushing as you walk down and crossing roads and things, and especially if there's a football match on at the same time, you've got an extra lot of cars trying to find the same car parking area really. That's the worst thing is car parking.

*Res: Would you stay after?*

R30: No we usually come out straight after the match has finished more or less.

*Res: So finding a place to park helps determine when you would leave?*

R30: Yes, yes. I mean we've paid for, obviously there's five of us in a car so we've clubbed together and we've had a parking space on the fruit and veg area, where the old cattle market was where there's industrial, coz some of those places you can actually buy a car parking space there. And one of the locals, was it Wiggi School? You used to be able to buy a car parking space. There's various spaces, but you know, it all adds up on the money. There's three of us pensioners now you see so we have to count the pennies. But you know, now we've found this street, one of the side streets sort of fairly near.

*Res: So get in before kick off?*

R30: Yeah, we like to get in and get settled in our seats, have a chat with the folks sitting around you. Coz it's been the same folks sitting around you for the same time, so catch up with those.

*Res: Okay, now let me ask you about women as fans. Women seem to be seen as fans of soap operas or movies or music. Is this different to being a fan of rugby do you think?*

R30: No I don't think so; I suppose it could be classed as the same sort of thing. It's not something I've thought of really.

*Res: Would you describe yourself as a fan of anything else?*

R30: Ohhh, I watch some of the soaps, my husband will tell you I watch every one (*laughs*) If I'm in I watch it, if I'm not in...I wouldn't stop in to watch something. You know, but if I'm around...obviously when I was at work I was in quite a stressful job so I'd come home, I'd sit down and watch *Home and Away*, and *Neighbours*, but that was my switching off, watching rubbish, you know, and I could use that as a complete switch off from work and then I was okay for the rest of the evening. You know, and I think that's...it's using soaps for a relaxation. They're easy things to watch if you've not seen it for three weeks you can come back and pick it up, you get the thread of what's happening, it's not the end of the world if you miss it.

*Res: Can you use sport in this way?*

R30: I suppose so, it is sort of a relaxation, a bit of an escapism, it's somebody else using energy, or not (*laughs*) so it could be.

*Res: So when you were first going to matches, do you remember how many women used to attend?*

R30: Probably not an awful lot, I suppose it's...yeah it's developed; I mean I know some folks went with their husbands for a long time. A lot of couples, it is something that couples go to rather than at football matches couples go to. It's something you can share together going to a rugby match which you don't see...when you're walking down you see a lot of couples walking to rugby, you don't see the couples walking to the football, you see gangs of blokes and lads, and fathers and sons more probably at the football.

*Res: So rugby is different in this way?*

R30: Yeah it's more a family thing, you know, you do get more whole families going.

*Res: Why would there be that difference?*

R30: I think it's because as a parent you would feel safer taking children to the rugby than the football. And I think it develops then in the families.

*Res: Did women talk much about rugby when you were first attending?*

R30: I mean obviously I knew a few that went so I did you know.

*Res: Did the club ever say much about women fans in earlier years? Did you ever see stories about women fans?*

R30: No, no never noticed them. There's always been some women down there and obviously there's more now.

*Res: Why do you think there might be more women going to matches today?*

R30: *(pauses)* I don't know whether it's more acceptable to watch sport now, erm...you know, you're not quite so...I think it's the whole culture thing of women going out these days. You know, it's like women didn't go into pubs a lot, you'd never dare, you'd never dream of going into a pub on your own as a woman, you know, years ago. I think the whole culture of society has changed that women are more acceptable anywhere, you know, there's no male and female that you do and don't go to. I think society has accepted that women can go everywhere. I suppose over the years it's one of those gradual things. And it's become more acceptable.

*Res: So this stretches beyond sport?*

R30: Yeah, the whole of social.

*Res: Would things have been different for you when you were first a female fan?*

R30: *(pauses)* I don't know really, I suppose, I suppose you were one of fewer women, but because I went with other women, you didn't notice it. It was just a group of friends went and that's it, husbands and wives.

*Res: Would you be interested in watching any female rugby?*

R30: Well when my daughter went to University, she started to play rugby. So since she went I've got an interest in women's rugby, if there's been any on television I have watched it. She obviously used to come down to the Tigers and in fact when she was at school, at Primary School, when it was her last year at school so she was 11 and obviously the lads were going off to play rugby and the girls hockey or netball or whatever and she said to the teacher at the time "I want to play rugby". And he went "Oh, alright then" and he just thought one week, you know. And she was good at it, so she was allowed to keep going. And then obviously there was a rule at that time that girls couldn't play, it was like the football wasn't it? The FA you know, had got these rules where there was a cut off. So she played for a while and then obviously was not allowed to because of the rules. But then obviously when she went to University they'd got a rugby club there so she joined that. So she played rugby. So I was always getting phone calls to say she was in casualty with this that and the other, or she'd got some damage to her knee and what should they do. Already got cold compressors in the freezer for her so she could treat herself coming out with bruises everywhere.

*Res: Do you think this has been a positive change which has enabled her to do this?*

R30: Oh yeah she likes her rugby. She played cricket as well. She was in the Leicester Ladies, or Leicester Women's, I can't remember what it was called now, the cricket team. And that was before she went to University...and sport was her sort of subject at University, although she was a Primary School teacher she then had sport and she's done a lot at the school she teachers at, she's got a little rugby team and a little football team, you know, she's got all the teams at the Junior School she works at.

*Res: Did she have to wait until she was at University before she could play in a women's team?*

R30: Yeah, I think it's because of the rules, it was the rules at the time.

Res: *Do the Tigers do anything for women's rugby?*

R30: Oh the Junior Schools that they do, they're mixed teams, at the tag it's all mixed teams, because Rachel's taken them from her school, she's had a team in the game and it's a mixture of girls and boys.

R30: Yeah, but I don't think the Tigers have done women's teams yet, have they?

Res: *What would you think if they set a women's team up?*

R30: Oh if they did I would support them.

Res: *You'd be happy to watch this?*

R30: Yeah.

Res: *And you've watched some women's rugby on TV?*

R30: Yeah and I've been up to Bangor if Rachel's been playing, if we've been up there for a weekend we've watched her play, watched the women's rugby.

Res: *Why would all the clubs not have women's teams set up?*

R30: I don't know whether it's the interest or the facilities. I suppose if there was enough women shouted, they'd probably support them.

Res: *Do you think men and women act differently at rugby or behave in the same way?*

R30: The supporters? I think some of the women are a bit more (*laughs*)...especially the younger ladies, are a little bit more rough in their shouting, probably because of their enthusiasm. Maybe it's just the ones I go with. Whether they're a bit more open at their vocalising I don't know, than men are. But I mean some of the men...it's where you sit around, you're aware sometimes if it's the women that are doing more shouting.

Res: *So there wouldn't be a tendency for women to be quieter?*

R30: Oh no, definitely not.

Res: *Do you think men might have a different idea of what it is to be a fan? Would they talk about rugby differently? Are they more competitive or knowledgeable about the sport?*

R30: Well I think if the men have played it through school, in the earlier days they've got more of an understanding with the rules probably than the females. But because the rules have changed so much lately, I think everybody has got the chance to learn what the rules are. Because it's in the papers, it's in the programmes, so that everybody has got more of an opportunity now to learn the rules. Whereas you didn't have that opportunity earlier on, whereas if you play a game, you learn the rules. Women didn't play it so they learn the rules, but now I think with them changing they've sort of re-vamped all the rules, everybody has got more of a chance. I mean obviously the younger ones that are playing now learn it but our generation you've all got the same thing of learning them.

Res: *Would women discuss the game in the same way as men? Do they understand the game in the same way?*

R30: Yeah I think so, I think you can have a good discussion, I suppose blokes if they're just on their own if you've got blokes you tend to go to the pub on a way back from a match and sit and discuss it a bit more than women would. But you know.

Res: *Would there be any differences between men and women in their emotional involvement in rugby?*

R30: I don't think so, I think it's equal.

Res: *Have you ever felt like you've been put on the spot or that you have to prove you know what you're talking about at rugby, perhaps to other men?*

R30: No, no, no. [Be] cause sometimes we'll all say "Come on why? Why did they get that penalty?" because nobody can see. And then somebody will say "I think it was..." "Oh I suppose it could have been". Because sometimes nobody has got an idea of why a penalty has been given, but you know, and it's a good discussion amongst everybody. One of the chaps that sits on the end, there's five of us and then there's a chap that actually we knew, we didn't realise he'd got the ticket on the end seat and he's got one of these ref things, so we'll always say "John, what have they given that for?" and he'll tell us you know, and you think oh right I didn't realise that. Sometimes nobody can work out why the hell it has been given.

Res: *Have any women ever been surprised at your interest or knowledge in rugby?*

R30: No. No. Most folks that I know, know I like rugby so you know.



*Res: Do you think some females today might have become interested in the sport because of the media coverage of the sport or the new hype? The celebrity or attractiveness of players?*

R30: They might have done but I can't see it being sustainable because of the cost. You know, you wouldn't fork out that amount of money just to go and see somebody, a bit of an icon getting dirty (*laughs*) I think you've got to want to watch the rugby match. Not particularly to see a person.

*Res: Would this media coverage occur much in rugby or is it more apparent in other sports? Material about players' lifestyles or wives, homes?*

R30: You don't see that in rugby players. It seems to be footballers' wives you know, that get all the hype. You know, you could walk down the street and meet Martin Johnson's wife or Austen Healey's wife, you wouldn't know them. David Beckham's wife you'd know. You know, they're very much the big houses, the millions, well footballers get paid a lot more than the rugby players, whether that's got something to do with it, but having some of the rugby players, you know, who I know live locally, well they live locally in Leicestershire, not in mansions, they live in normal society homes, you know, they're part of normal society.

*Res: Do you like this about rugby players?*

R30: Yeah, they're normal (*laughs*) Yeah, they're not...they're not superstars; they're not stuck on a pedestal waiting for the fall. They're just blokes that for their living they play a game, rugby.

*Res: Would you be concerned if rugby went down this path?*

R30: Yeah, I wouldn't like to think it went like that, I don't think it's good for the players.

*Res: So it's more in other sports where you'd see this material?*

R30: It seems to be football is probably the worst sport for that. Not many of the other sports have their wives dripping all over the papers. You know, and following their every movement.

*Res: Would you be interested in reading any of this stuff if it was available in rugby?*

R30: No it wouldn't interest me, I just think it's a shame if it got to that stage where their families were highlighted. I don't think it's good for anybody to be highlighted like that, because your husband does that, or your wife does that. You don't need to have it all plastered all over the papers.

*Res: Who do you think this kind of material is aimed at?*

R30: I suppose it is the younger ones that think there's something better out there for them. I don't know, I mean like Rooney's...is she married to him yet or not? But she was only a young girl and you know all of a sudden she's in a two and a half million mansion, you think oh I suppose all the young kids at school think oh I wish I could be a footballers' wife (*excited voice*) You know, you just think you know, that's an awful thing to want to achieve, to be a footballers' wife. You know, I think it gives a false sense of...I don't know what, but do you know what I'm meaning? It just doesn't feel right that that should be plastered over papers.

*Res: Do you think this is encouraging young girls to want to marry a footballer?*

R30: Well yeah, they sort of chase them round hotels some of the youngsters don't they? The young girls you know after footballers and throw themselves at them. You know, it's sad. And it's only coz it's all in the papers.

*Res: Does this concern you at all?*

R30: Oh definitely, yes, yes. It's the wrong message being sent out to young people I think.

*Res: Why? What message does this give to young girls?*

R30: Well now it's I want a man that's got money (*laughs*) You know, and that's your game in life, you know, to find a footballer that's got money. You know, and you just think that doesn't happen and it's the wrong message being sent out to young folks. I mean like athletics, you are getting them going into schools now encouraging youngsters to take up athletics which is a good thing.

*Res: What would you think if the club was to speak specifically about female supporters? Perhaps if a policy was aimed at women fans?*

R30: I think it should be for both male and female, it doesn't need to be specific these days, I don't think you should make anything specifically for female or male, it should be that it's acceptable for anybody to go to, if they have an open evening it's for everybody, not just one or the other.

*Res: Has the club ever done anything that's offended you as a female fan?*

*R30: No I don't think so.*

*Res: Would it be good to have more women involved in the running of clubs? Perhaps as referees? Pundits?*

*R30: I think if you've got the qualifications, it shouldn't matter what sex you are. There's probably not that many from the female side that have got the qualifications because until you get the professional women's rugby players a bit more prolific, you're not going to get them as referees and things. I mean there are one or two female referees but very few.*

*Res: Would there still be some resistance to women becoming involved in this way?*

*R30: I don't think so. I think it's just the qualification, I don't think there's anything from society would be against it.*

*Res: Would it be good to have more women involved in the running of clubs?*

*R30: If, you know, if somebody wanted desperately to be on the board and put themselves forward that's fine, it wouldn't matter to me whether they're male or female, you know, I've no qualms about that.*

*Res: Can you think of any good female role models in the sport today?*

*R30: No I wouldn't, as I say I've watched the women's rugby but I wouldn't know their names, I think because they're so infrequent on, you don't sort of pick up their names. I mean I know with the cricket there was Rachel...you know there's one or two in the cricket women's team that you tend to learn, or that I've heard of, but I haven't picked up the women's rugby names really.*

*Res: Any role models in rugby?*

*R30: Not that I know of no. No. There is a commentator in the rugby on BBC with short blonde hair, and she's a good commentator of rugby, you know, she knows the rules, she's got herself in a good position. But you know. So if they've got the qualifications, it doesn't matter who does the job.*

*Res: So now let me ask you a few questions about the people you watch rugby with. When you go to matches today there is a group of five of you? Same group?*

*R30: Yes.*

*Res: Would you see going to rugby as like a family thing, or maybe spending some time away from the family?*

*R30: Yeah it is a family thing, I mean it's obviously not personally for me a family thing anymore, but it's...it's a friendship group.*

*Res: Do you know any of the people who sit around you at rugby?*

*R30: Oh yes, yes, yes. The folks who sit in front, the folks who sit behind you, to the side of you. Yeah we always sort of...it's the same people who sit there, have done for years. You always you know, say hello, pass the time of day.*

*Res: Are these people you've actually met at the rugby?*

*R30: Oh yes, I wouldn't know their names. And when we've gone to Twickenham, we've probably seen them at Twickenham and said oh hello! But we don't know the names of everybody, its faces because you've been there and seen them for years.*

*Res: Would you just be talking about the rugby or would you be talking about other things as well?*

*R30: It's probably more about the rugby.*

*Res: Have you ever met any good friends at the rugby? Would you ever see them at other times in the week?*

*R30: Well obviously the folks I go with I see them at other times, but nobody else that I've met down there no.*

*Res: Is meeting and talking with people an important part of why you would go to matches?*

*R30: I think the social side, as opposed to just watching it on the television each week, I mean if the Tigers was on television...I suppose the cost of it as well, if every match was on the telly each week you probably wouldn't go down. But you know, it's nice to go and see your own local team while you can.*

*Res: So what was good about taking children to matches? Can they learn things at rugby?*

R30: I think yes, I think it shows them a team spirit, a team game, a way to watch and they learnt, I mean my friends son, he actually played for a Junior Rugby team on a Sunday, you know, that sort of thing, so he was learning things by watching the adults play. I think that's the team spirit.

*Res: Does rugby offer any good role models for children when they go to matches?*

R30: Erm, yeah I think it shows, you know, they do show respect for each other as a player, and I think that's sort of good for kids to see. They can take that back with them.

*Res: Is going to rugby just like any other form of entertainment for you, like the theatre or cinema? Or is there something special about going to a rugby match?*

R30: Erm, I think it's the fact that you're outside; it's something you're doing in the fresh air, so you're getting fresh air. And as I say, it's just the social side of it, whereas the picture house, it's dark and you're just sitting watching, you're not participating. Although you're not playing in a rugby match, you feel as though you are participating in it. And you get the feeling, the hype and the adrenelines going, it's all good for your body isn't it? It gives you a feel good factor especially if you win. Definitely different to anything else.

*Res: So why do people continue attending when they lose? Does this add to stress?*

R30: Well yeah, you don't quite get annoyed that they've lost, you don't get stressed out. It's only a match, it's only a game of two halves.

*Res: So do you enjoy being able to speak to opposition fans?*

R30: Yeah, yeah I think it's a bit of banter if there's somebody about...friendly banter as well. I mean I know we went to the Millennium for the final against Munster and my son was coming with us, I'd got a ticket for him and he woke up on the Saturday morning, he'd got the flu, couldn't come and there was nobody else locally that I knew to sort of get them to come with us. So I took the ticket with me, walking up the street, this couple walking down said "Anybody got a spare ticket?" And I said "Yes I have" and he said "How much do you want for it?" And I said "I paid twelve pounds, give me twelve pounds". And he went "You're joking?" I said "No". He said "I'll give you twenty" I was only asking for twelve, and I said "Fine". Anyway, he obviously came and sat amongst us. Well it was fantastic because when we were winning he was cheering along saying "Well done" and when Munster were winning we said "Well done". And it was a really lovely atmosphere and it was one little Munster amongst a whole crowd of us. And he's got a ticket for his wife, he'd paid about a hundred pounds and he said "You were a fool" I said "I didn't want it. I wasn't there to make a profit, I just didn't want there to be an empty ticket". But you do get that banter with fans and it's nice that yes.

*Res: How would you normally behave at rugby? Are you lively? Animated?*

R30: Sometimes. If it's really getting exciting you do a bit of shouting.

*Res: Is there anything you think should never be said at matches?*

R30: I don't approve of swearing at all, I don't like it at all. In fact we've had an away fan sit, there was one empty seat near us and one week we did have a chap sat there and his language, and in the end I said to him "I'm sorry but can you stop using that foul language, I cannot stand it". And he went "Oh sorry madam". You know, I didn't realise, I said you're just getting too obscene and I just don't like. And he just apologised and half time he never came back after half time he went and found somewhere else to sit and that's fine. But I can't tolerate swearing at all so I always say something. I mean the odd word, okay. But when it's constant swearing I just...I have to say something no matter where I am. Whatever situation I'm in.

*Res: Have you ever heard any racist or sexist remarks?*

R30: No not really, it's just been the swearing that's gone over the top. But I mean where we sit we've never heard...as I say it was just an away fan that happened to be sitting near us, was getting a bit het up.

*Res: So how does it affect you if Tigers have won or lost? Does it have any affect on your mood?*

R30: No, we'll have a little chunter if they've lost on the way as we're walking back to the car. We'll get in the car quick to see what...what's the bloke who's on Radio Leicester...Bleddyn Jones, we always want to hear what he says about it, we put Radio Leicester on quick because he usually has a good moan about it and says where we've gone

wrong or where we've done well, it's good to hear his comments. And he usually gets a player or two to interview which is quite nice to hear.

*Res: How long would that feeling last?*

R30: Probably by the time I've got home, the subject has changed.

*Res: Wouldn't carry on over the weekend?*

R30: Oh no, no, no.

*Res: Would this affect male fans differently?*

R30: No I don't think so. I think you're happy for the day and that's it really.

*Res: Would you discuss the club much during the week? Would you check for information about Tigers?*

R30: Yeah usually see, if somebody has been injured you check up how they are and if they've recovered, if they're going to be fit enough for the next match. See what the team is for the next week. Not too in depth, but a bit of a general interest.

*Res: In newspapers?*

R30: Yeah, yeah. It's quite interesting to read the report sometimes, you think was I actually at that match. It's a different match to me (*laughs*) Depending who's reporting on it.

*Res: Would you have much contact with people in the week who are also Tigers fans? Would you chat much about the club?*

R30: Occasionally I see one or two folks. I mean as I say my son's been down coz he's married now, if he comes down in the week and he's been down you know, we have a chat about it. Coz he's usually in the Corporate boxes, so he's fortunate like that with his work (*laughs*)

*Res: Would you watch rugby if it's on TV?*

R30: Oh yes.

*Res: So how much of your spare time would you spend either watching or talking or thinking about rugby in a week?*

R30: Well not a great amount of it, I mean if there's a match on I'll watch it. The other Saturday where there was three of the Six Nations matches on, fortunately with my knee at the moment, I've got a good reason to sit here and watch rugby. I'll watch it all.

*Res: So would it be more Saturdays you'd usually spend thinking about rugby?*

R30: Yeah, it's more the Saturday.

*Res: Is being a Tigers fan an important part of who you are?*

R30: No. I mean I'd say I was a Tigers fan but it wouldn't be high on the list of what I am and who I am. A profile of me, it would be fairly low down on a profile. The fact that I'm a sports...I've an interest in sports and a Tigers fan, but wouldn't be high on my CV I don't think.

*Res: So it would be on there but not at the top end of importance?*

R30: That's right. But you know at interviews where they say have you got any other interests? Especially if you go for a job that's specific, it's always something you mention because it's giving a wider picture of yourself isn't it because it's giving something different, especially from nursing. You know, rugby is completely different. So you mention I've an interest in rugby and I'm a Tigers fan.

*Res: Would this help to single you out?*

R30: Well it's something completely different to what the job is, the interview you're going for the job.

*Res: Is your attachment always to the club or to individual players?*

R30: Oh no it's definitely a whole team thing, it's not specific. I mean obviously there are players that stand out, but it's a team game and it's a team that wins and it's a team that loses. I would never say it's down to one person that's made the team win, or down to one person that's made the team lose. I think it's a team game, definitely.

*Res: Is there a type of players who represents the best of the club or what the club stands for? Do you have a favourite player?*

R30: No, I think they've all got their own characters, you know, they've all got something to offer as a team player.

*Res: How would you describe Leicester Tigers? Does the team have a character or identity of it's own?*

R30: Yeah I think they have got a really good team concept. And they've got more players than they need for a team so you know, they've all got to be on their toes to be in the first team, but they don't hold it against each other if they're not picked. You know, if somebody is in the first team this week and they're not the next week, they think oh okay, probably I'm not good enough this week. You know, and it's acceptable.

*Res: So you see the Tigers as having quite a strong team ethic?*

R30: Yeah. I think a lot of the rugby teams are like that these days, you know, they pick the best team for the day and that's it, you know.

*Res: Is it good for fans to be able to have contact with players today, or is it maybe better to keep them separate, perhaps with a mystique surrounding them?*

R30: No, I think it's good that they mix, you know, they have their evenings that they do chats at. So I think it's good, they go in schools and sort of do a lot of things for charity as well.

*Res: So you'd prefer to keep them out and about, mixing with people?*

R30: Yeah, yeah, it shows their human.

*Res: Okay, so tell me what you would usually wear when you go to watch Tigers?*

R30: Warm clothes (*laughs*) Warm and comfy, that's all. I mean I've got a top, I don't always wear it. I do if I go to Twickenham I'd wear it. But you know, not necessarily down to the Tigers, as I say it's warm clothes. I've got my scarf, I wear my Tigers scarf most weeks.

*Res: Is it important to show people you're a supporter?*

R30: I don't think it's over important, I suppose folks know where you're going if you've got your Tigers scarf on. No, it's not the be all and end all.

*Res: Do you buy club merchandise often?*

R30: No. I must admit I've never bought anything for myself, it's always been birthday present or Christmas present somebody has bought me. I mean I've got the old scarf, and then my son bought me....there was a special one, a black one with a gold badge on, he bought me one Christmas. My daughter bought me a new top, you know, when they changed the top, I had a new top for Christmas. But it's always been presents from other people rather than me going down and actually buying something specific myself.

*Res: So this wouldn't be overly important to you?*

R30: No.

*Res: Would you ever wear Tigers stuff perhaps away from the rugby?*

R30: Yes, I've took it on...we've been to Africa, and I've taken it to Africa a few times to have my photograph taken somewhere different, I keep meaning to send one into...coz in the Tigers magazine it's where you wear it. So it's more for a bit of fun than anything. The thing is the shirts are quite...a useful warm shirt, you know, it's a cosy shirt to wear, it's quite practical.

*Res: How would you feel if you saw other Tigers fans wearing the shirt abroad?*

R30: I've seen them occasionally, spoken to them yes. It's something you recognise, you speak to people.

*Res: Does supporting Tigers give you a strong feeling of belonging or attachment to the people of Leicester or the city?*

R30: Yeah I think it does maybe, yeah it does show where you come from, anything like that does yes.

*Res: Would this be why people might wear the shirt abroad?*

R30: Probably yes. And I think it's probably because it's in the thing, you know, having your photo taken in an unusual place wearing the Tigers shirt.

*Res: How important is the club to the city?*

R30: It's a good revenue to the city, it's you know, we pay a lot of money to Leicester City, so you know, if it moved out of the city they'd lose a lot of money.

*Res: If the sports teams are doing well, is this good for the city?*

R30: Oh definitely, yeah, yeah. I think it brings people into the city and obviously people from a distance would come in in the morning, be in the city itself before they went to the matches, so it's an income.

*Res: Does the representation of Leicester as a sports city hold any feelings for you? Don't know if you've seen the statue in the city...*

R30: Oh I think that was good, I think that was something that they recognised that you know, there was an achievement that year. And it was good to see that. And it was good that the city acknowledged that achievement, because it shows that some folks (*laughs*) in the council or whatever had taken notice of what's going on, which is quite good.

*Res: Do you support England as well as Tigers? How important is England?*

R30: Oh yeah, I mean at one point, I mean this year it wasn't so much but last year I mean I think we had about eight or nine players playing for England from the Tigers. The only trouble is if they're out for England matches, they're not free to play for Leicester. You know and it's that balance, you know, you've got a lot of your own players out and it doesn't help you with the Championship. If your club has got a lot of England players missing it's not helping you with the Championship, with the club Championship, you know, it's sort of a shame really, your own success is being knocked down because if another team has not got anybody out of their own team then they're at an advantage.

*Res: How do you feel when you see Tigers players playing for England?*

R30: Oh I'm very proud. It's good that we've had so many, I mean obviously a lot of those have retired now, but we've got a new generation of players coming up so hopefully some of those will get to be selected for England.

*Res: How do you normally watch World Cup matches?*

R30: There's usually a few of us get together and get a few bottles of wine or beer or whatever, have some food and watch it as a group.

*Res: So does this make it more of an event?*

R30: Yeah, and it's the social side.

*Res: Have you ever been to watch England live?*

R30: I have yes. We always used to apply, because with the Tigers you can apply for tickets and we were successful once and we went down, but that was quite a while ago.

*Res: Would you want to go again today?*

R30: Well, it's the travelling...yeah, if it was all laid on for me I probably wouldn't say no if somebody offered it to me.

*Res: So lastly, what do you think about how rugby is presented on TV and in newspapers, do you like the reporting you get?*

R30: Yes, it's pretty fair. You don't always get the results, you know, you get football results right down to...so many local games, and then they've not told you the rugby scores you know, and they've run out of time. And you think come on, you know. Especially if it's an away match and you've not heard it, I mean obviously radio Leicester is very good at it, my son bought me a digital, dab radio, so that's quite useful, you can hear the rugby on it. Coz most of the time radio Leicester, you'd only hear, if it was a football match, you'd have half the rugby and half the football, I mean you know, or all the football, all the football and no rugby. So with the dab you do get the rugby on now so that's good if there's an away match.

*Res: Are you happy with the rugby reporting you get? Would you like to see anything be done differently?*

R30: I think it could be a bit more balanced between football and rugby on the television, it seems to be...especially Saturday, the results, *Match of the Day*, it's always the football, there's never a *Match of the Day* rugby match. You know, perhaps BBC 2 could do a *Match of the Day* for rugby, so then you get the opportunity to watch a rugby match. I mean the local newspaper, the *Mercury* is very good at reporting both matches, and the national papers are pretty good, the Sunday papers have usually got it in, or the Monday, in the national Monday paper if it's not in the Sunday.

*Res: Thanks for taking part in the research (collect demographic data).*

## Appendix 6

### Photographic Examples of House Dressing at Respondents' Homes

F33 - Table in Lounge



F47- Display Cabinet in Lounge





**F29- LCFC Framed Pictures Decorating Downstairs Walls**



**R19- Martin Johnson Picture Next to Lounge Television Set**





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