

SPORT IN THE GLOBAL SOCIETY CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES



Women's Football in the UK

Continuing with Gender Analyses

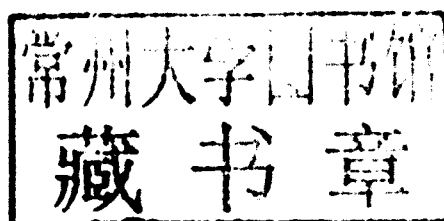
Edited by Jayne Caudwell



Women's Football in the UK

Continuing with Gender Analyses

Edited by
Jayne Caudwell



First published 2012
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2012 Taylor & Francis

This book is a reproduction of *Soccer and Society*, vol. 12, issue 3. The Publisher requests to those authors who may be citing this book to state, also, the bibliographical details of the special issue on which the book was based.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

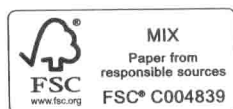
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN13: 978-0-415-56087-0

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Taylor & Francis Books

Disclaimer

The publisher would like to make readers aware that the chapters in this book are referred to as articles as they had been in the special issue. The publisher accepts responsibility for any inconsistencies that may have arisen in the course of preparing this volume for print.



Printed and bound in Great Britain by the MPG Books Group

Women's Football in the UK

This book examines the complex ways in which girls and women experience football cultures in Britain. It extends current debate surrounding women and football (namely, how gender has functioned to shape women's experiences of playing the game), by focusing on organisational, administrative and coaching practices, alongside the particular issues surrounding sexuality, ethnicity and disability (not only gender).

The book analyses football and gender to reveal the subtle forms of discrimination that persist. It is important to highlight the many challenges and transformations made by girls and women but more importantly to consider the ways power continues to operate to devalue and undermine girls and women involved in the game. The UK-based authors make use of their recent research findings to offer critical debate on girls' and women's current experiences of British football cultures. Overall the book reveals the present day complexities of marginalisation and exclusion.

This book was published as a special issue of *Sport and Society*.

Jayne Caudwell is a Senior Lecturer in Sport Studies at the University of Brighton, UK. Her publications include *Sport, Sexualities and Queer/Theory* (also published by Routledge); and, as co-editor, *Women, Football and Europe; Relocating the Leisure Society: Media, Consumption and Spaces*, and *Sport, Active Leisure and Youth Cultures*.

SPORT IN THE GLOBAL SOCIETY –
CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

Series Editor: Boria Majumdar

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN THE UK

Continuing with Gender Analyses

Sport in the Global Society – Contemporary Perspectives

Series Editor: Boria Majumdar

The social, cultural (including media) and political study of sport is an expanding area of scholarship and related research. While this area has been well served by the *Sport in the Global Society Series*, the surge in quality scholarship over the last few years has necessitated the creation of *Sport in the Global Society: Contemporary Perspectives*. The series will publish the work of leading scholars in fields as diverse as sociology, cultural studies, media studies, gender studies, cultural geography and history, political science and political economy. If the social and cultural study of sport is to receive the scholarly attention and readership it warrants, a cross-disciplinary series dedicated to taking sport beyond the narrow confines of physical education and sport science academic domains is necessary. *Sport in the Global Society: Contemporary Perspectives* will answer this need.

Titles in the Series

Australian Sport

Antipodean Waves of Change

Edited by Kristine Toohey and Tracy Taylor

Australia's Asian Sporting Context

1920s and 1930s

Edited by Sean Brawley and Nick Guoth

'Critical Support' for Sport

Bruce Kidd

Disability in the Global Sport Arena

A Sporting Chance

Edited by Jill M. Clair

Diversity and Division – Race, Ethnicity and Sport in Australia

Christopher J. Hallinan

Documenting the Beijing Olympics

Edited by D. P. Martinez

Football in Brazil

Edited by Martin Curi

Football's Relationship with Art: The Beautiful Game?

John E. Hughson

Forty Years of Sport and Social Change, 1968-2008

"To Remember is to Resist"

Edited by Russell Field and Bruce Kidd

Global Perspectives on Football in Africa Visualising the Game

Edited by Susann Baller, Giorgio Miescher and Raffaele Poli

Global Sport Business

Community Impacts of Commercial Sport

Edited by Hans Westerbeek

Governance, Citizenship and the New European Football Championships

The European Spectacle

Edited by Wolfram Manzenreiter and Georg Spitaler

Indigenous People, Race Relations and Australian Sport

Edited by Christopher J. Hallinan and Barry Judd

Soccer in the Middle East

Edited by Issam Khalidi and Alon Raab

South Africa and the Global Game

Football, Apartheid and Beyond

Edited by Peter Alegi and Chris Bolsmann

Sport – Race, Ethnicity and Identity

Building Global Understanding

Edited by Daryl Adair

Sport and the Community

Edited by Allan Edwards and

David Hassan

Sport, Culture and Identity in the State of Israel

Edited by Yair Galily and

Amir Ben-Porat

Sport in Australian National Identity

Kicking Goals

Tony Ward

Sport in the City

Cultural Connections

Edited by Michael P. Sam and John E. Hughson

The Changing Face of Cricket

From Imperial to Global Game

Edited by Dominic Malcolm, Jon Gemmell and Nalin Mehta

The Containment of Soccer in Australia

Fencing Off the World Game

Edited by Christopher J. Hallinan and John E. Hughson

The Flame Relay and the Olympic Movement

John J. MacAloon

The Making of Sporting Cultures

John E. Hughson

The Politics of Sport

Community, Mobility, Identity

Edited by Paul Gilchrist and Russell Holden

The Politics of Sport in South Asia

Edited by Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty,

Shantanu Chakrabarti and

Kingshuk Chatterjee

The Social Impact of Sport

Edited by Ramón Spaaij

Who Owns Football?

The Governance and Management of the Club Game Worldwide

Edited by David Hassan and Sean Hamil

Why Minorities Play or Don't Play Soccer

A Global Exploration

Edited by Kausik Bandyopadhyay

Women's Football in the UK

Continuing with Gender Analyses

Edited by Jayne Caudwell

Contents

<i>Series pages</i>	vii
1. Reviewing UK football cultures: continuing with gender analyses <i>Jayne Caudwell</i>	1
2. Gender, feminism and football studies <i>Jayne Caudwell</i>	8
3. 'I don't think I can catch it': women, confidence and responsibility in football coach education <i>Beth Fielding-Lloyd and Lindsey Meân</i>	23
4. Tokenism, ties and talking too quietly: women's experiences in non-playing football roles <i>Jo Welford</i>	43
5. 'Who wants to make aloo gobi when you can bend it like Beckham?' British Asian females and their racialised experiences of gender and identity in women's football <i>Aarti Ratna</i>	60
6. 'I'm into high heels and make up but I still love football': exploring gender identity and football participation with preadolescent girls <i>Ruth Jeanes</i>	80
7. 'It seems really inclusive in some ways, but ... inclusive just for people who identify as lesbian': discourses of gender and sexuality in a lesbian-identified football club <i>Scarlett Drury</i>	99
8. British football: where are the Muslim female footballers? Exploring the connections between gender, ethnicity and Islam <i>Aisha Ahmad</i>	121
9. Girls with learning disabilities and 'football on the brain' <i>Annette Stride and Hayley F. Fitzgerald</i>	135
<i>Index</i>	149

Reviewing UK football cultures: continuing with gender analyses

Jayne Caudwell

University of Brighton, Eastbourne, UK

The militiamen had to be kept out of the riding-school while the women were drilling there because they laughed at the women and put them off. A few months earlier no one would have seen anything comic in a woman handling a gun.

(Orwell, 1962, p.11)

Women's and girls' active involvement in football and football cultures, and how their participation is registered in popular culture and viewed by the popular imaginary, is complex. Women and girls have been, and continue to be, active in all aspects of football culture, including playing, coaching, managing and spectating. And at almost all levels of the game – including playtime games, recreational kick-about, grass-roots development, competitive fixtures and professional play – they are active participants, albeit to varying degrees, and not to the same extent as their male counterparts. Women's and girls' past and current involvement in football in the United Kingdom – and elsewhere around the world – is visible, and has been acknowledged as such.¹ However, it remains that their engagement with football is highly contingent on gender, and the general assumption is that the activity is something *men* and *boys* do. Such ideas are socially constructed, as Orwell's observations in the above quote emphasize. They are a result of how the social, cultural and historical operate to affirm and reaffirm men's and boys' 'entitlement' to the game.

The acceptance of women and girls into UK football has fluctuated, and variations exist between the different football cultures and at different levels of play. For instance, it is still beyond the imagination of many involved in the game that a woman could manage and/or coach a men's professional club/team. This idea would be regarded as comical by many men, not least those in the tabloid press. However, it might be viewed as acceptable that a woman is managing and/or coaching a boys' youth squad/team. A woman taking charge of the men's international side might be seen in the same way as a non-white man, and, up until fairly recently (pre-Sven-Göran Eriksson), a non-English man in this position. The general opinion is that such leadership is unlikely and impossible: this is based on norms, values and traditions surrounding the game in the UK. These 'common-sense' beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions, which influence the entitlement to football, present obdurate, and often impenetrable, barriers that women and girls continually negotiate in their quest to be actively involved.

The particular, and nuanced, experiences of women and girls in UK football cultures are documented within both the academic and popular literature.² These

existing accounts demonstrate a variety of approaches to understanding how gender relations and gendered social power influence the opportunities available for them. This special issue of *Soccer & Society* seeks to offer a further contribution. The special issue reflects my on-going critical approach to football and football cultures in the UK and the emergence of a generation of women football scholars. The women who are now completing doctoral research and writing their PhD theses continue to use gender as a lens through which to explain women's and girls' lived experiences of the game and its many cultures. Building on earlier critical work – evident during the late 1990s and early 2000s – by women and some men academics, this new generation have moved the focus beyond histories of struggles to participate and the treatment of girls and women as players. Instead, they turn to emerging issues such as coach education and volunteering. They have also broadened the gender lens to highlight the significant relationships and intersectionalities between gender and ethnicity, girlhood, sexuality, religion and disability.

As a collection, this special issue provides another surge of feminist work, which adds to the previous contributions that challenge football – or soccer – studies, as a singularly male concern. This collection is a timely contribution, given that some of the first literature demonstrating gender analyses is now over a decade old,³ and that the last special issue on the topic in this journal (*Soccer & Society*) was in 2003.⁴

It is only more recently that authors of work on football have specifically marked the game as male and/or as white. For example, Dan Burdsey, in his article entitled 'Forgotten Fields? Centralizing the Experiences of Minority Ethnic Men's Football Clubs in England', is one of few writers to distinguish his research through the use of the term 'men's football'. Similarly, Chris Bolsmann, uses the modifier 'white': *White Football in South Africa: Empire, Apartheid and Change, 1892–1977*. Most of the time, 'football' goes unmarked when in fact it is men and/or boys and football that are being referred to and discussed. Women's involvement is always marked by making use of 'women' and 'girls' to prefix the term football, or using 'gender' as a code for women's and girls' footballing experience. (Of interest is the fact that the term 'feminism' rarely appears explicitly.)

The first article in this collection provides an address to the title of the issue: 'Reviewing UK Football Cultures: Continuing with Gender Analyses'. Jayne Caudwell discusses gender, feminism and football. She draws on existing related work and highlights the role of feminism in these analyses. Her focus on feminism explores the schisms and ruptures evident in feminist thinking since the so-called second wave. She goes on to demonstrate how these shifts in feminist thinking are useful for further and future critical engagement with UK football cultures. The point is made that feminism offers a range of approaches and that there are many ways to explain women and girls, and their relationships to football. The articles in this collection highlight this point, which becomes evident to the reader.

In the second article, Beth Fielding-Lloyd and Lindsey Meân take a specific approach to their research on football coach education. They draw on critical discourse analysis to examine interview transcripts from 27 interviews with individuals involved in providing and/or participating in coach education. The people they interviewed either work, or have trained at, one of the 43 UK's County Football Associations – the research is based in a northern English city – and the words, language, speech and rhetoric of these individuals are critically scrutinized.

The rationale for their research stems from the premise that coaching and coach education in football are gendered practices and that this can be evidenced via critical

discourse analysis. Male dominance prevails in coach education and an affirmative culture ensures the continuation of this dominance. The authors offer a convincing argument to support the claim that within the organization and organizational practices (in the UK), gender inequity is common, even the norm. During the processes that constitute teaching, learning and assessing football skills, the authors show how women are positioned, through the speech, rhetoric and discursive practices of those providing coach education, as lacking confidence. Perhaps more significantly, women's engagement with coach education is generally understood, by the organizations and individuals delivering coach education, to be the responsibility of individual women. In other words, this is often interpreted as 'women are responsible for their own failures'. Fielding-Lloyd and Meân argue that this organization of provision is viewed as satisfactory, even liberalizing, by those in charge, and that this is an example of the liberal individualism that pervades structures of football, which invariably function to benefit the progress of men.

Jo Welford's article presents some similar arguments, although the focus and analyses are different. In her research with women 'involved behind the scenes' in a range of different roles, mostly voluntary, Welford shows how gendered assumptions exist within local football clubs *and* in the broader structures of the game (for example, at regional committee meetings). She draws on research with 12 women involved in 10 clubs in one geographic region of the UK. These women do volunteer work in clubs that are either independent of men's clubs, linked to men's clubs or in partnership with men's clubs. The women work in formal roles such as secretarial, management and coaching and, are rather unsurprisingly and stereotypically involved in informal roles such as washing kit, making food and organizing transport.

Referencing existing feminist work on organizations/employment dominated by men, Welford shows how both the structures and the culture within a regional football league impact negatively on women's deeper involvement. Applying organizational/employment feminism to a football context allows for a detailed analysis of the strategies women adopt to ensure they continue in their voluntary work role. Welford's research demonstrates that a culture of individual liberalism prevails and that this contributes to shaping – and limiting – women's opportunities 'behind the scenes'. The example of the woman having 'made it' to the Football Association's regional committee (an all-male committee) only to be awarded a tie for her endeavours is a reminder of how traditional, and gendered, some aspects of the game remain.

In the next three articles, the authors move away from the broader organizational structures and concomitant dominant culture to consider how gender is linked to other social signifiers such as ethnicity, girlhood and sexuality.

Aarti Ratna's research with young British Asian women footballers reveals the ways 'race', ethnicity, gender, culture and religion all operate to influence the perceptions of these players. She demonstrates how the young women in her research challenge and negotiate prevailing attitudes towards South Asian women and British Asian women – Ratna provides discussion on how these identities are not the same and the ways in which they may differ. She highlights how these women are subject to misperceptions and racial stereotyping from the broader white-English/British dominant culture. Also discussed in the article, and of interest, is another layer of challenge and negotiation the players face from within British Asian and South Asian culture. From the testimonies provided by the research participants, it is clear that these young women are sensitive to the attitudes and expectations of friends and family. They work hard to balance demands made of them as women and are shown

not to forsake their playing opportunities. That said, school sport is experienced as particularly troublesome and the young women tend to play outside the educational setting.

Ratna is careful not to present her research group as homogenous, and provides a candid analysis of how the young women in the research view other British Asian footballers and South Asian footballers. This discussion exposes the nuances of subjectivity and subject formation and is an important approach to take to the intersectionalities of gender and ethnicity. The discussions on methodology are similarly intricate and provide a detailed reflexivity. In this way, the processes involved in completing this kind of research are shown to be bound into the broader issues surrounding ethnicity.

In her article, Ruth Jeanes also takes a detailed methodological approach in her research with children. She explores the multiple ways to involve a group of preadolescent girls – at the same time maintaining ethical procedures – in research on their football participation and the construction of their gender identity. By taking into account principles of feminism and childhood studies to her research, Jeanes succeeds in engaging a group of middle-class girls (from the Midlands) in football *and* in conversations about playing football. The research is based in a private educational setting and Jeanes highlights the ways this might impact on the girls' experiences of recreational play, physical activity and femininity. The discussions include the ways white femininity may be constructed and how educational privilege impacts on performances of normative childhood femininities.

The girls are very conscious of adopting a feminine identity and despite being preadolescent they are self-conscious of the limits of this identity. The findings show how the boundaries of acceptable girlhood femininity are produced by the group of girls themselves. In addition, the girls are aware of how football participation affects boys' gendered identities. One of the young girls, aged between 10 and 11, commented: 'they [boys] like football because it helps their masculinity'. For this group of girls, gender is a legible construct and they are highly sensitive to legitimate performances of femininity during football participation.

Scarlett Drury's article shifts attention to the many issues surrounding sexuality. Focusing on notions of inclusion – and through her research on the broader topic of 'gay sport' – she is able to identify the tensions that exist for a particular group of women football players. She draws on in-depth interview research with five women (living in the south of England) who are members of a lesbian-identified football team. By highlighting the ways gay sport seeks to embrace inclusion via challenges to homophobia and heteronormativity, she is able to apply broader debate to the specificities of football. In this way, the article teases out the contradictions related to inclusion that exist at the football club where the five women play.

By forging a theoretical frame based on feminism, poststructuralism and queer theory, Drury assesses the discourses that are apparent in football contexts in relation to 'outness'. Visibly out lesbian players at the club appear to subvert and transgress dominant and prevailing heteronormative football practices. However, Drury is careful to point out that subversion and transgression do not always amount to transformation and that normalizing processes are hugely powerful when it comes to sexuality. In this vein, women at the club create their own normativity – homonormativity, and this renders bisexual and heterosexual participants as problematic. Similarly, and at another level of the game, it is evident that lesbian involvement in

gay sport culture, such as gay football, is marginalized through discourses of gender that place men's – gay men's – involvement as more legitimate than lesbian participation.

Inclusion of sexual minorities in mainstream football continues to be a significant issue. Drury demonstrates that even within gay sport culture, inclusion is complex and that dominant social relations of sexuality and gender persist. Lesbian players appear to have made important inroads and yet, from a queer perspective, 'other' sexual minorities remain marginalized.

Two research articles also appear in this special issue. These contributions highlight very interesting on-going work. First, Aisha Ahmad presents findings from a larger study with the British Muslim Women's Football Team (BMWFT) and their participation in the Women's Islamic Games in 2005. Second, Annette Stride and Hayley Fitzgerald deploy critical non-fiction, as an evocative research methodology, to offer an animated article on football, girls and learning difficulties.

Ahmad's research with Muslim young women footballers who live in the UK and play for university and club teams as well as for the British Muslim Women's Football Team, demonstrates the ways these players must continually deal with dominant perceptions of Islam and gender. The 16 women interviewed are, or have been, university students, and have had access to British women's football culture through their participation in university leagues and/or local/regional leagues. Prior to joining the BMWFT, some of these women played for teams where they were regarded – and positioned – as the 'Other'⁵ and as a result were deliberately marginalized. Ahmad focuses on how it is the individual player's decision to wear the hijab that influences the reception they receive. Many stereotypical views surround the hijab and Muslim women's physicality. For the players in Ahmad's research, many aspects of British women's football culture discourage the wearing of the hijab (from university and club teams to the governing bodies of the game such as the FA and FIFA). For the Muslim young women who want to embody their religious beliefs by wearing the hijab, the most comfortable option they appear to have is to play for a team that collectively celebrates the embodiment of Muslim identity and the wearing of the hijab – BMWFT. As Ahmad points out, these women have found a way to play-on, despite feeling devalued and trivialised in 'mainstream' women's football in the UK. The irony is that these women played at an international event and represented their country – Britain.

Stride and Fitzgerald, in their research article on girls with learning disabilities and football participation, provide an invaluable account of this much-marginalised aspect of UK football culture. They make the point that even within sport for disabled people, learning disabilities are often ignored and/or omitted. Taking an intersectionality approach to gender, girlhood and learning disabilities, the authors advocate the need to understand inequality, girls and disability as linked, multiple and layered. They are critical of additive approaches and show that add-on models are often evident in sport policy and practice as well as in academic literature. As a way to reveal the intersectionalities and capture the issues surrounding policy and provision for girls with learning disabilities, the authors present their research findings in the form of critical non-fiction narratives. The three stories offered reflect the experiences of different stakeholders involved in a local football project. The three stories allow the reader to gain further insight through the perspective of the coach, the girl players and the head teacher of one of the schools. As a qualitative research method that is gaining in popularity, this method re-presents the research participants

and helps provide an avenue for the voices of young people and children, especially girls with learning disabilities.

Although this special issue is UK-centric, it does not suggest that important critical work is not evident elsewhere around the world. Contributions to the gender and football project are gaining in number and, hopefully, will continue to do so. Further work is still required, work that considers gender relations beyond the player herself; she is important, but so too are the many women who are involved in the organization of the game. These women face structures that are challenging, resistant and oppressive, and cultures that affirm and reaffirm male dominance.

Acknowledgement

I'll take this opportunity to thank the team of anonymous women reviewers who provided critical feedback for the articles that appear here; their comments have been appreciated by the authors. I also thank John Hughson and Boria Majumdar for their support and encouragement.

Notes

1. Hong and Mangan, *Soccer, Women, and Sexual Liberation*; and Magee *et al.*, *Women, Football and Europe*.
2. See, for example, the following: Caudwell, 'Women's Football in the United Kingdom'; Coddington, *One of the Lads*; Hong and Mangan, 'Soccer, Women, and Sexual Liberation', *Soccer, Women, and Sexual Liberation*; Jones, 'Female Fandom'; Liston, 'Women's Soccer in the Republic of Ireland'; Lopez, *Women on the Ball*; Magee *et al.*, *Women, Football and Europe*; Scraton *et al.*, 'It's Still a Man's Game?', 'Bend it Like Patel'; Williams, *A Game for Rough Girls*.
3. For example, Scraton *et al.*, 'It's Still a Man's Game?'.
4. Hong and Mangan, 'Soccer, Women, Sexual Liberation'.
5. Said, *Orientalism*.

References

- Bolsmann, Chris. 'White Football in South Africa: Empire, Apartheid and Change, 1892–1977'. *Soccer & Society* 11, nos. 1/2 (2010): 29–45.
- Burdsey, Daniel. 'Forgotten Fields? Centralizing the Experiences of Minority Ethnic Men's Football Clubs in England'. *Soccer & Society* 10, no. 6 (2009): 704–21.
- Caudwell, Jayne. 'Women's Football in the United Kingdom: Theorising Gender and Unpacking the Butch Lesbian Image'. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 23, no. 4 (1999): 390–402.
- Coddington, Ann. *One of the Lads: Women Who Follow Football*. London: Harper Collins, 1997.
- Hong, Fan and Joseph Mangan. 'Soccer Women, Sexual Liberation: Kicking Off a New Era'. *Soccer & Society* 4, nos. 2–3 (2003) [Special Issue].
- Hong, Fan and Joseph Mangan. *Soccer, Women, Sexual Liberation: Kicking Off a New Era*. London: Frank Cass, 2004.
- Jones, Katharine. 'Female Fandom: Identity, Sexism and Men's Professional Football in England'. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 25, no. 4 (2008): 516–37.
- Liston, Katie. 'Women's Soccer in the Republic of Ireland: Some Preliminary Sociological Comments'. *Soccer & Society* 7, nos. 2–3 (2006): 346–84.
- Lopez, Sue. *Women on the Ball. A Guide to Women's Football*. London: Scarlett Press, 1996.
- Magee, Jonathan, Jayne Caudwell, Katie Liston, and Sheila Scraton (eds). *Women, Football and Europe: Histories, Equity and Experiences*. Oxford: Meyer and Meyer, 2007.
- Orwell, George. *Homage to Catalonia*. London: Penguin, 1962.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- Scraton, Sheila, Jayne Caudwell, and Samantha Holland. "'Bend it like Patel': Centring "Race", Ethnicity and Gender in Feminist Analysis of Women's Football in England". *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 40, no. 1 (2005): 71–88.

Scruton, Sheila, Kari Fasting, Gertrude Phister, and Ana Bunuel. 'It's Still a Man's Game? The Experiences of Top-Level European Women Footballers.' *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 34, no. 2 (1999): 99–111.

Williams, Jean. *A Game for Rough Girls? A History of Women's Football in Britain*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Gender, feminism and football studies

Jayne Caudwell

University of Brighton, Eastbourne, UK

In this article, I explore some of the ways gender has been interpreted over time within different feminisms and how this might be of use to a critical football studies. I move between different feminist emphases, which include consideration of the 'category of woman', the 'category of gender' and the 'category of femininities' and specifically in relation to football contexts. This simple model of feminist categories ('woman', 'gender' and 'femininities') intends to capture some of the histories of feminist theoretical development and available modes of feminist analyses. I use these categories to demonstrate the depth and breadth of feminism and the range of feminist theory available for future research and study of football and its many cultures.

Introduction

In her book, *Women on the Ball*, Sue Lopez recounts an event her generation of players experienced at the hands of the media in the late 1960s:

... the *Daily Mirror* was the perpetrator of one of the most damaging incidents in press coverage – the 'Joan Tench' affair. As the Mirror Group of Newspapers had sponsored the competition they wished to publicise the final between Fodens and Westhorn at Willesden Sports stadium, and so they contrived a photograph of Fodens' Joan Tench going up to head the ball and then finding her shorts around her knees.¹

Throughout our histories of football participation, in the UK and elsewhere, it is evident that women have faced harassment, discrimination and abuse. This unfair and inequitable treatment, usually perpetrated by men and male-run organizations and institutions, has received severe criticism. As a result of such protests, by both women and men, there has been change – not least the Football Association's (FA) adoption of the Women's Football Association in 1993 – and this change has meant that most girls and women now find it much easier and more comfortable to play and be involved in the game. On the whole, blatant and overt forms of misogyny and sexism are not tolerated; however, it would be inaccurate to claim that misogyny and sexism have been eradicated. For example, Mike Newell's (manager of Luton men's football team 2003–7) verbal outburst at Amy Rayner (assistant referee) in 2006: 'What are women doing here?'² and 'She shouldn't be here, I know that sounds sexist but I am sexist'³ epitomizes some men's response to the presence of women on the football pitch.

Newell's self-confessed sexist comments continued to resonate when, on 9 February 2010, Amy Fern (nee Rayner) actually refereed Coventry City versus Nottingham Forest men's game for 20 minutes because the male referee suffered an injury. This time the media were the perpetrators of the sexism. *The Sun* newspaper⁴ ran the headline 'Can Women Referee Men's Footie?' And the caption 'Oi, Ref! Are You Blonde?'. The article goes on to consider the first question and provides responses from two individuals – a woman and a man. In answering, Wendy Toms (the Premier League's first woman assistant referee) argues 'yes' women can referee men's football and Perry Groves (former Arsenal player) claims 'no' they can't. Groves' answer is accompanied by a litany of sexist rationale, including 'would women refs be banned during their "time of the month" because they might be more emotional, depressed or aggressive?' and 'a female commentator was tried out on *Match of the Day*. She knew her stuff but didn't sound right'. Needless-to-say the FA does not endorse such remarks and men who have made similar comments have paid a price: Newell was fined £6500 and made to apologize publicly.

Sexism and misogyny are also enduring and common occurrences within football-fan cultures, and Jones' research findings⁵ illustrate the extent and nature of sexist commentary evident on fan Internet sites and sexist verbal abuse at live games. Sexism and misogyny are very sharp and chilling reminders that gendered social relations remain significant influencing forces in society and in football contexts.

Gender relations clearly implicate gender, and gender – as a concept – is central to feminism (including feminist activism, feminist politics and feminist theorizing). In this article, I explore some of the ways gender has been interpreted over time within different feminisms and how this might be of use to a critical football studies. I move between different feminist emphases, which include consideration of the 'category of woman', the 'category of gender' and the 'category of femininities' to demonstrate the value of continuing a gender analysis of football and its many cultures.

The 'category of woman' reflects feminist thinking during the so-called second wave (1970s and 1980s) of feminism and is based on the foundational premise that sex and gender are distinct. The term – 'category of woman' – indicates the value of commonality, shared oppressions and political solidarity. However, this category was later criticized for universalizing and essentializing women and their experiences of gender relations. A shift to the 'category of gender', in the post second-wave period (1990s), reflects the impact Judith Butler's work had on feminism and on the theorizing of gender. Butler's contribution helped denaturalize sex and destabilize the sex–gender distinction. Butler, and other gender theorists, re-examined concepts such as 'identity' (and identity politics) and developed critical arguments in relation to the effects of heterosexual hegemony. Finally, the more recent 'category of femininities' demonstrates a feminist engagement with a so-called postfeminist era and debate surrounding the contemporary proliferation of popular cultural and/or media cultural articulations of femininities.

Gender and football studies

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s within the Anglo-American context, one term came gradually to dominate the feminist lexicon: gender.⁶

Gender, as an important concept within the critical social sciences and humanities, is a complicated term. It tends to be most insightfully used by feminists and pro feminists. Within the lay persons' parlance, gender, frequently denotes biological