Introduction

Sport has historically been (and in many respects still is) a profoundly male preserve (Theberge, 1985). Arguably, for some male fans the football stadium represents one of the few spaces in today’s society where they can prove that they are ‘real men’ (Pfister et al., 2013: 858). Two-and-a-half decades ago Duke (1991) called for more research in the sociology of football to examine women’s experiences and Free and Hughson (2003: 152) have similarly expressed the hope that ‘women’s voices will be heard in future studies’ when commenting on the ‘startling’ absence of women in ethnographies of male football supporters. But most academic research on football fandom to date has typically focused upon male supporters, including (male) hooligan cultures and/or issues of fan rivalry (see, for example, Armstrong, 1998; Stott and Pearson, 2007; Spaaij, 2008). Thus, the experiences of female football fans have been largely neglected by this male-centric approach to the study of football fandom. This is especially surprising when we consider that female fans now make up a substantial minority of fans at the football stadium. In the UK, female fans are estimated to make up around 15–19 per cent of all Premier League fans and around one-quarter of fans at some clubs (Williams, 2001; European Professional Football Leagues Website, 2015). Pfister et al. (2013) suggest that in Denmark around 10 per cent of fans are women and in Germany this figure is as high as 20–30 per cent at some Bundesliga matches.

This invisibility of female football fans provides the impetus for this chapter. The chapter draws on the small, but growing body of research which has focused upon female football supporters, in order to bring women’s experiences as fans to the fore. I draw on research findings from my own research which has focused on female football fans in the UK, along with research which has examined female football fans in a few other countries worldwide. I begin by examining the recent wider changes in football which can be connected to assumptions of homogeneity in research whereby female fans are positioned as ‘inferior’ to male fans. I move on to examine research on the experiences of female fans and how they are typically perceived as ‘inauthentic’ in their support before finally considering female fan ‘types’ and gender performance. Here I also consider how issues of ‘inauthenticity’ may impact upon females ‘doing fandom’ in this male-dominated arena. To conclude, I discuss the need for future research in football studies to incorporate women’s experiences as fans.
**The ‘feminisation’ of football and issues of homogeneity in fan research**

It is important to overview some of the recent shifts in the nature and consumption of football as such changes can be connected to wider issues of ‘inauthenticity’ and female fandom and wider problems of homogeneity in fan research. The Hillsborough Stadium disaster of 1989 represents a major turning point for football in England and prompted the ‘reinvention’ of football in the early 1990s (Dixon, 2014). There were 96 Liverpool supporters who died from being crushed at an FA Cup semi-final in Sheffield (Holt and Mason, 2000). This disaster led to the 1990 Taylor Report, which recommended that all major clubs in England convert their stadiums to all-seater status by the 1994–5 season (Taylor, 1990), although this proposal was later restricted to the top two divisions of the sport. This enforced stadium modernisation saw a new emphasis upon fan ‘safety’ and a focus on recruiting ‘family supporters’ to matches, leading some fans to claim that: ‘English stadiums were far too peaceful, too regimented, and too much aimed at attracting high-spending consumers’ (Williams, 2006: 98).

The rise of the FA Premier League (now Premier League) in 1992 and the income resulting from the selling of TV rights to the satellite BSkyB channel saw an influx of money into the game, with ticket prices rising rapidly (Holt and Mason, 2000). This led some to claim that major football grounds in England are, ‘increasingly unlikely to host their old working class audience for top games’ (Giulianotti, 1999: 79). The structural changes that were occurring in English football around this time also coincided with the England national team reaching the semi-finals at the 1990 World Cup in Italy and here the ‘marriage of opera and football’ in the TV presentation of the finals also contributed to more ‘middle class’ interest in the sport in England (Giulianotti, 1999: 35). I have argued that debates surrounding the recent ‘gentrification’ and/or ‘feminisation’ of football in England are closely linked to ideas that ‘new’ football is being shaped increasingly by patterns of ‘middle class’ consumption and in some accounts the growing active female support for English football post-1989 has been connected to the recent class changes in the sport (see Pope, 2011). The mere presence of female fans in the stadium has been taken to represent the alleged ‘middle class takeover’ of football (Coddington, 1997: 13), and the subsequent ‘civilised’ or ‘sanitised’ environment at matches.

Thus, the alleged new ‘feminisation’ of sporting cultures suggests more than increasing numbers of females: it also implies gentrification and that the presence of females is significant in ‘softening’ the behaviour of the male football crowd (Crolley and Long, 2001; Pope, 2011, 2012). Dixon (2014) has suggested that the popular perception of female fans as ‘new’ to football can be linked to recommendations of government reports (for example, Popplewell, 1986; Taylor, 1990) that identified women and children as a group that could help to ‘civilise’ (male) football crowds. The association of female fans with processes of gentrification and the alleged ‘bourgeoisification’ of football (Crawford and Gosling, 2004: 478) raises issues around women’s authenticity as fans (Pope, 2012). The suggestion that female fans will have a ‘civilising’ or ‘softening’ effect on the (male) football crowd suggests that women’s behaviour and involvement in football is different from that of male fans, thus implying that women are ‘inauthentic’ in their support. This seems to have prompted something of a ‘backlash’ against the (new) female fan in England, which has been aided by attempts to use female fans as a ‘solution’ to the sport’s various fan problems (Pope, 2011). A recent illustration of this can be seen in the Turkish Football Association’s attempt to use female fans as a ‘solution’ to tackle hooliganism by banning male fans from stadiums; in September 2011, 41,000 women and children attended Fenerbačı’s match against Manisaspor (BBC Sport Website, 2011). Such policies seem to reinforce assumptions that the behaviour of female fans will be different from that of their male counterparts, with female fans treated as a homogeneous group which can be
used to ‘civilise’ the unruly (male) football crowd. Claims that a greater presence of female fans will deter violence at matches are challenged by research studies which have shown that some female fans do in fact participate in and/or approve of violence at matches (see, for example, Pope, 2010; Cere, 2012).

Furthermore, I have argued that recent changes in professional football in England have impacted upon academic research on football fans. In the few cases where women’s experiences as football fans have been included in research, the notion of women as ‘authentic’ or ‘real’ fans appears to be absent, which can be connected to wider problems of homogeneity in research on male and female fans (Pope, 2011). The recent changes in English football which have followed the rise of the Premier League and the domination of satellite television coverage by the satellite television company BSkyB are often associated with the hyper-commercialisation of English football (Gibbons and Dixon, 2010). The recent transformation of English football in the 1990s has led to the rise of ‘new’ football as a highly marketised version of the sport, with the Premier League the first major sports league in Europe to be developed by and for television (Williams, 2006). Such developments have had implications for research on football fans. Nash (2000: 466) argues that ‘the transformation in the 1990s of English football has revolved around an ideological struggle between an old fan tradition (working class terrace culture from the 1960s, here called “traditionality”) and “modernization”’. Nash (2000) constructs some broad characteristics of supporters in these two groups. Whereas those in the ‘traditionality’ category will be passionate, have a close personal identification with the club, are loud and aggressive and attend in groups, those in the ‘modernisation’ or ‘new fandom’ category have a weaker identification with the club, are ‘civil’ on match days and attend individually or as part of the family audience.

I have argued that these two schools of fandom which are apparent in recent research on football fans demonstrate wider issues of homogeneity in gender research on fandom (Pope, 2011). For example, in King’s (2002) research on Manchester United fans, a gendered distinction is made between ‘the lads’, who will fit the ‘traditionality’ category and female ‘new consumer’ fans, who reflect the ‘new fandom’ category. By labelling female fans as ‘new consumer’ fans it is assumed that they will have a weaker attachment to the football club and thus where female fans are included in research they are typically perceived as ‘inferior’ to traditional male fans. Drawing on research findings which showed that there was a variety of motives and attachments for female fans and that female fans did not fit comfortably within either of these schools of fandom, I have argued that future research on football fandom needs greater sensitivity to heterogeneity when examining the experiences of female (and male) fans. Researchers need to move away from assumptions of homogeneity in research where male fans are typically labelled as ‘working class’ and ‘authentic’ and female fans are presented as ‘inauthentic’ and ‘middle class’ (see Pope, 2011). Free and Hughson (2003) have suggested that many ethnographies of male football supporters have suffered from gender blindness in research. Arguably, some researchers have continued to remain silent on issues of gender in football fandom, which perhaps makes an inherent assumption that it is male supporters who will be ‘authentic’ football fans. For example, Davis (2015) offers a recent discussion about ‘what it really means to be an “authentic” football fan’ through a critical discussion of football fandom literature. Yet although much of this discussion examines issues of social class, there is no mention of female fandom and issues of ‘authenticity’.

I will now move on to consider research studies on female fandom and how female fans are perceived as ‘inauthentic’ in their support, which has partly been the result of the recent changes in football that I have discussed.
Female football fans and inauthenticity

Media representations of football fans have typically confirmed gendered stereotypes around the role of males and females in football. For example, Harris (1999) has examined the representation of women in the British tabloid newspaper The Sun during the European Championships in 1996. These findings showed that there were two roles for women during the tournament: the scantily clad page 3 model and the admiring woman (a role played by the players’ wives or girlfriends or the WAGs as the British press has recently labelled them). One ‘story’ featured a woman who sold her television as she was fed up with the amount of football her boyfriend was watching and Harris (1999) argues that this confirms the roles men and women are traditionally meant to fill within British culture: men like football whereas women do not. Recent media coverage of the FIFA World Cup in 2014 revealed similar gendered stereotypes, with women widely depicted as football ‘widows’ trying to escape the coverage of the World Cup. For example, one article led with the headline: ‘A Survival Guide for World Cup Widows’ and the piece advised women to ‘head out for a World Cup Widows’ night on the town’ and leave their male partners to watch the World Cup (Etherington, 2014). Another article offered advice for women on ‘how to sound like an expert while your partner’s watching football’ (Telegraph, 2014). Such gendered assumptions that females will not be interested in football and/or will lack knowledge of the sport that are presented in the media may serve to reinforce perceptions of women as ‘inauthentic’ fans in the stadium.

Research on female fandom from a number of countries has shown that female fans are widely perceived as ‘inauthentic’ in their support, with their status as ‘real’ fans routinely challenged. In England, the recent transformation of professional football in the early 1990s has meant that the sport is now part of the entertainment industry, with ‘celebrity’ players increasingly sexualised in marketing campaigns. But female fans have complained 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). Crawford and Gosling (2004: 477) in research on male and female fans of men’s ice hockey found that female fans felt that they were labelled by male fans as ‘puck bunnies’ – fans who attend matches to ‘lust’ after male fans and so lack dedication in their support. In a similar vein, female football fans may feel that they have been ‘lumped together’ (Crolley, 1999) as a homogeneous group who are only interested in football due to the sexual attractiveness of the players.

Toffoletti and Mewett (2012: 99) note that existing research on sports fandom currently lacks ‘a nuanced examination of how women look at the athletic male body in sexually desiring ways’. Their research on female fans of Australian rules football showed that female fans were conscious of being stereotyped as ‘less-serious’ supporters than male fans if they expressed pleasure in looking at male players and so recognised and contested assumptions that they only attend matches to watch sexually attractive sportsmen. Thus, voyeuristic looking was perceived as inconsistent with ‘authentic’ fandom and female fans stressed their knowledge and commitment over any voyeuristic pleasure that they might experience. By rejecting expressions of female heterosexual desire, Toffoletti and Mewett (2012: 110) propose that female fans, ‘claim authentic fanship and significant commitment to the sport in masculine, heterosexual terms’. Clearly, there is a need for future research studies in football to examine this somewhat neglected area.

Pfister et al. (2013: 858) in research on female football fans in Denmark argue that male fans will deny women the ‘cultural ticket’ to fandom by depicting them as: ‘football groupies who do not know the rules, want to “score” the players or are only in the stadium to find a boyfriend’. Such practices help to maintain football as a male-dominated arena. Furthermore, it is claimed
that because women have less experience of playing football in comparison to males, this contributes to doubts about their knowledge of the sport and thus their credibility and ‘authenticity’ as supporters. The stereotypes that many male supporters have of ‘inauthentic’ female fans are apparent elsewhere. For example, in Argentina men: ‘believe women to be incapable of knowing anything about football, and they resist the idea that women can have a “real” passion’ (Rodriguez, 2005: 234). In the UK my research has shown that female fans felt frustrated at their apparent lack of sporting knowledge, according to male fans (Pope, 2010). Here there were plenty of accounts of men who thought that, ‘Women in football is a bit of a joke’ and female fans gave examples of attempts by male fans to put them on the spot or make women ‘prove’ their sporting knowledge by questioning their understanding of the laws of the sport. Thus, despite their levels of knowledge, female fans need to consistently ‘prove’ their fan status in order to avoid derogatory labels cast by male fans (Dixon, 2014). This lends weight to Coddington’s (1997: 79) suggestion that female fans routinely feel ‘on trial’ at football. Dunn’s (2015) research on female fans and the supporters’ trust movement has also shown that some female fans experienced issues of sexism, despite there being a focus on inclusion and equality with the supporters’ trust movement. For example, one respondent reported a sense that she was not taken ‘seriously’ by male fans and believed that the men on the trust felt that women should fit into a female ‘domestic’ role by providing a supportive element to the trust’s main activities which would be undertaken by men.

Much existing research on female fandom has examined how women negotiate their position as fans in this male-dominated environment. One response female fans have used to challenge perceptions of their ‘inauthenticity’ has been to establish women-only fan groups. For example, in Denmark, Pfister et al. (2013) consider how some women have responded to sexism by establishing the women-only fan group the ‘Pink Lions’ in 2012. This fan group regularly attend matches and so have a good standing within the fan community and have challenged stereotypes about female fans. Mintert and Pfister (2015) also discuss how the women-only fan club the ‘Female Vikings’ was ‘founded by hard-core female fans with the aim of creating a space in which women can be fans and follow their own agenda’. In Spain, Llopis Goig (2007) discusses how some females 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 a response to the exclusion women have experienced in the stadium. These women-only peñas have allowed women to challenge male stereotypes that they lack knowledge of football and serve as a space in which women can demonstrate their understanding of football and express this without ridicule. Cere (2012) has also noted that there are women-only ultras groups in Italy, which have been left relatively unexamined in existing sociological research to date.

**Female fan types and the importance of football for women**

In this section I draw largely on my own research findings in the UK, as well as research undertaken on female football fans in Denmark and Israel to examine female fan types and the importance of football for female fans. Drawing on 85 interviews with female sports fans, I have developed a preliminary model of female fandom (see Pope, 2013). The main framework used to ‘measure’ respondents’ level of fandom was their response to a question on whether being a fan of their club was an important part of ‘who they are’. Other indicators included how respondents were affected when the club wins/loses, how much time they spent watching/thinking about the club and if people who knew them related to them as a fan. The framework used to organise the data drew on Giulianotti’s (2002) ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ axis which is used to indicate the different degrees to which the club is central to football fans’ self-formation: ‘hot’
forms of loyalty emphasise intense forms of identification and solidarity with the club, whereas ‘cool’ denotes the reverse of this. My findings revealed two female fan types: ‘hot’ committed fans and ‘cool’, more casual fans. For ‘cool’ fans, the club was not a central life interest; with football fandom viewed as one of many leisure activities. There was a continuum between ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ with varying levels of fan attachment between these extremes.

Although it has been noted that issues of ‘inauthenticity’ typically surround female football fans who are supposedly only interested in the sexual attractiveness of the male players and so lack dedication in their support (see, for example, Crolley and Long, 2001; Crawford and Gosling, 2004), my findings have shown that football is central to the lives and identities of many women. Nearly 85 per cent (43/51) of football fans across the generations were best described as ‘hot’ sports fans (Pope, 2013). For these female fans, football formed an important aspect of their identity and a large amount of their leisure time would be taken up by watching or thinking about football. Results typically impacted upon their mood, meaning that relations with close relatives were also affected. As the club formed such an important component of their lives, organising other daily activities became extremely complex. For example, some female fans described how family marriages needed to be organised so that they did not coincide with club fixtures. ‘Hot’ fans would typically wear club merchandise and in some cases would have rooms, or even a home dressed in club colours and products (see Pope, 2013).

Other research which examines the importance of football for women lends weight to these findings. Mintert and Pfi ster (2015) undertook 12 interviews with female fans in Denmark who were all dedicated fans who were deeply involved with their club, teams and players. These female fans were defined as ‘hot’ fans as they were all loyal supporters of a football club since childhood and had a high degree of attachment to their club. Mintert and Pfi ster (2015) argue that these results show that female fans can be as dedicated and loyal as male supporters and share with male fans their football-related emotions and practices such as consumption of football through the mass media, attachment to the club and attendance at matches. These female fans similarly spent a significant amount of time and money on football consumption and would typically wear club-related clothing as a display of their loyalty. Some female fans even combined their interest in football with holiday activities, for example, by visiting Spain for a vacation and watching FC Barcelona. In one extreme example of the importance of fandom in the lives of females, one female fan arranged her wedding at the Danish club Lyngby BK stadium and then had a second celebration with her football friends in Crete at the Platanias FC stadium. My research has also shown that for ‘hot’ fans football played a significant role in heterosexual relationships and heralded serious life impacts for women. For example, some female fans would only enter relationships with partners who supported the same club and threatened to split up if male partners did not accompany female fans to matches (see Pope, 2014).

Ben-Porat’s (2009: 890) research on female football fans also illustrates the role of football in the lives of females. Drawing on 17 interviews with female fans in Israel, these findings showed that many respondents did not miss a home match and also consumed vast amounts of information about the club. Football fandom impacted upon the intimate social relations of these female fans, who were confronted with difficult situations when football fixtures coincided with family events. This was likely to lead to conflict, especially when female fans prioritised football fixtures over family events such as weddings. The importance of sport for female fans can also be seen in Mewett and Toffoletti’s (2010: 2) research where female fans of Australian rules football were found to organise their time to facilitate attendance at matches and follow sport more generally, with friends and family aware of the need to organise events ‘around the football season’. Ben-Porat (2009: 982) concludes that football plays a central part in the lives of Israeli female fans and fandom is a crucial element of their identity; exhibiting the club’s
Female fans of men’s football

Female fans’ identity was a way of showing ‘this is the real me’ for these female fans. Research studies which have focused on the importance of football for women can therefore be used to challenge the perceptions of women as ‘inauthentic’ fans in popular and academic accounts.

Gender performance and ‘doing’ female fandom

In this final section I will consider different kinds of gender performance that have been exhibited by female fans. I will also examine some of the strategies that have been used by female fans in an attempt to present themselves as ‘authentic’ or ‘real’ fans. Drawing on Ussher’s (1997) four performances of femininity and Sisjord and Kristiansen’s (2009) application of this model to research on female wrestlers, I have examined the diversity of supporter styles revealed among female sports fans (see Pope, 2013). For Ussher (1997: 445–61) women actively negotiate the various ‘scripts’ of femininity and she discusses four ‘performances’ of femininity that women might adopt. ‘Being girl’ refers to the archetypal position for most women, taken up when women want to ‘be’ rather than ‘do’ femininity, with beauty, goodness and the ability to attract men the main attributes of ‘being girl’. ‘Doing girl’ refers to the position of performing the ‘feminine masquerade’ but knowing that this is about ‘playing a part’. ‘Resisting girl’ refers to women who deny the traditionally signified ‘femininity’ although that does not necessarily mean a rejection of all that is associated with what it is to be “woman” – attention to appearance, motherhood or sex with men (although it can). ‘Subverting femininity’ refers to those women who ‘knowingly play with gender as a performance’. In my research (Pope, 2013) two different kinds of gender performance helped to connote the two female fan types: ‘masculine’ femininities (characterised by ‘doing girl’ and ‘resisting girl’ approaches to presentation of self and displayed by ‘hot’ fans) and ‘feminine’ femininities (characterised by ‘doing girl’ and ‘being girl’ approaches and displayed by ‘cool’ fans). Many of the respondents who performed ‘masculine’ femininities described themselves as ‘tomboys’ when younger who had often played competitive team sport (often football) and in many cases these women maintained aspects of this tomboy identity into adulthood and identified more strongly with men and male fans than with females. Those performing ‘feminine’ femininities on the other hand did not tend to self-identify as tomboys or have experiences of playing contact team sports. In contrast to ‘hot’ female fans performing ‘masculine’ femininities, these female fans often viewed sport as ‘naturally’ more important for men (see Pope, 2013).

I have discussed how notions of ‘inauthenticity’ typically surround female sports fandom, with female fans needing to ‘prove’ their fan status, usually to male fans (see, for example, Coddington, 1997; Rodriguez, 2005; Pope, 2010; Dixon, 2014). Arguably, these issues of ‘inauthenticity’ have had implications for women when ‘doing’ fandom in the male-dominated space of football. For example, my research findings have shown that those ‘hot’ fans who typically performed ‘masculine’ femininities were keen to separate themselves from other female fans. Such women often expressed hostility to what they perceived as extreme forms of conventional femininity – or those women who performed ‘feminine’ femininities – in an attempt to present themselves as ‘authentic’ fans. These women were frustrated by ‘cool’ female fans who performed ‘feminine’ femininities as they were perceived as lacking sporting knowledge and they were aggravated by female fans who said that their main interest in football was a sexual interest in the players as this meant that they would have to defend their own position as a ‘real’ fan (see Pope, 2014).

Other studies have shown support for these research findings. Dixon (2014: 11) similarly found that: ‘one of the strategies female fans have adopted in order to overcome gender discrimination is to position themselves as “similar to” males and to adopt the associated style of
masculine communication, or as it is otherwise termed “banter”. This serves to segregate or marginalise those female fans who are not willing to participate in such ‘masculine’ styles of behaviour. Thus, female fans may contribute to their own subordinate positioning by adopting masculine norms and outcasting other female fans who refuse to comply. Thus, in order to be considered a ‘real fan’, respondents in Dixon’s (2014) research who perhaps typically performed ‘masculine’ femininities (see Pope, 2013) felt that they must embrace ‘masculine characteristics’ and ‘banter’ which has history and authenticity. However, Dixon (2014: 13) argues that this means that equity for female fans will be slow as ‘fitting in’ with masculine culture does not contribute to equality. Hoeber and Kerwin (2013) in a collaborative self-ethnography as female fans of Major League Baseball and Canadian Football League also found that they distanced themselves from other female fans who they perceived as ‘inauthentic’ in an attempt to legitimise their own identities as ‘authentic’ sports fans. By reinforcing the stereotypes of other women as ‘inauthentic’ fans this served to further marginalise female fans, while protecting their own position in the sport fan hierarchy.

Jones (2008: 528), in research on female fans in the UK, found that three strategies were adopted by female football fans which allowed them to respond to abusive male behaviour and one of these strategies involved ‘embracing gender stereotypes as part of the game’. Here female fans agreed with hegemonic masculine definitions about which women should be regarded as ‘proper’ fans. These female fans rejected those women who they felt did not ‘do’ fandom properly, for example, by getting ‘dolled up’ to go to football matches, not having appropriate levels of knowledge or finding players heterosexually attractive. Thus, Jones (2008: 532) argues that some female fans may feel that they have to downplay femininity and prioritise their fan identities over their gender identities in order to be considered as ‘real fans’. This is in part due to the recent transformations in English football and the negative connotations surrounding emphasised femininity; these women are aware that they are ‘doing fandom at a time when there is nostalgia in the wider football fan culture for a traditional masculine past and resentment at the (perceived) feminized and gentrified present’. Other research studies have also shown that some female fans want to be identified first and foremost as football fans, rather than as females (see, for example, Coddington, 1997; Crolley and Long, 2001; Pope, 2013). Mintert and Pfister’s (2015: 418) research on female fans in Denmark showed that fandom was perceived as gender neutral but there were certain gendered expectations that needed to be met – perhaps typical of women who performed ‘masculine’ femininities (see Pope, 2013). This included, for example, being ‘football ugly’ by wearing jeans, T-shirts and flat shoes, showing their dedication through working for the club during their leisure time and demonstrating football expertise and knowledge.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have examined the recent ‘reinvention’ of English football in the early 1990s (Dixon, 2014) which I argue can be connected to wider issues of ‘inauthenticity’ for female fans. I have considered how rising numbers of female fans have been associated with the alleged ‘bourgeoisification’ of football (Crawford and Gosling, 2004: 478) and how assumptions that female fans can be used to ‘soften’ or civilize the (male) football crowd implies that female fans are ‘inauthentic’ in their own support. I have argued that future research in the field of football studies needs to move away from assumptions of homogeneity whereby male fans are typically labelled as ‘working-class’ and ‘authentic’ and female fans are presented as ‘middle-class’ and ‘inauthentic’ (Pope, 2011). Drawing on a range of research studies on female fandom I considered how female fans are widely perceived as ‘inauthentic’ in the male-dominated space of football. Research has shown that female sports fans may feel that they are labelled as ‘puck
bunnies’ who are supposedly only interested in the sexual attractiveness of male players (Crawford and Gosling, 2004). Toffoletti and Mewett (2012) have examined how female fans of Australian rules football look at male athletes in sexually desiring ways. I would suggest there is a need for future research to examine the extent to which female football fans look at the male athletic body and how this is balanced against potential accusations that this undermines their ‘authenticity’ as fans.

The chapter considered how research studies which have focused upon the importance of football for women can be used to challenge perceptions of women as ‘inauthentic’ in their support. My own research findings (Pope, 2013) have shown the diversity of female fan ‘types’, ranging from ‘hot’ committed fans to ‘cool’, more casual supporters. For ‘hot’ female fans football was an important aspect of their identity and formed an important role in their everyday lives and other studies have similarly shown the importance of football for ‘hot’ female fans (see, for example, Ben-Porat, 2009; Mintert and Pfister, 2015). I also suggest that issues of ‘inauthenticity’ which typically surround female sports fans have implications for females when ‘doing’ fandom in the largely male preserve of football. For example, research has shown that female fans may adopt masculine styles of behaviour and reject other female fans in an attempt to gain legitimacy as ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ fans (see, for example, Jones, 2008; Pope, 2013, 2014; Dixon, 2014). This may serve to further reinforce women’s position as ‘inferior’ sports fans and as Dixon (2014) suggests, contradicts demands for equality for female fans.

Finally, while some research studies have recently emerged on female football fans, research on football fandom has largely focused upon male fans. There is a need for future sociological and socio-historical work to centralise the experiences of female football fans. There is also a lack of research on women’s interests and motives (or lack of motives) for watching women’s sport (Farrell et al., 2011) and so there is a need for future research in football studies to examine the motives, experiences and practices of female fans of women’s football.

References


333
Stacey Pope


