

## **A Woman's Place Recurring: Structuration, Football Fandom and Sub-Cultural Subservience.**

### **Abstract**

Whilst subject to much conjecture, female football fans are rarely heard in empirical investigations of fandom practice. This omission, I argue, is a significant one, not only for the purpose of gender equality but also for the accurate theorization of football fandom cultures and the sub-cultural subservience of female fans within. In order to address this issue, this paper focuses on qualitative interviews with a sample of female fans to explore and explain the spatial and temporal extension of gender subordination prevalent within football fandom cultures. To do so, it draws on Structuration theory as presented by Anthony Giddens and concentrates attention on routine interactions and encounters as key factors that shape the constitution of football fandom cultures and the sub-cultural struggles encountered by females.

**Keywords: Female football fans; Early experiences; Contemporary experiences; Football fandom culture; Structuration theory.**

This paper seeks to investigate the everyday life experiences of a sample of female football [1] fans (FFF's); a marginalised group within football fandom cultures (FFC's) and an under represented population in football fandom research (Free and Hughson 2003; Author forthcoming). In conjunction with this, the work seeks to explain those experiences in light of structuration theory (ST); an under used and yet largely relevant theoretical approach to studies of sub-cultural gender subordination. With brevity, ST offers a framework to explain the structuring of social relations across time and space

in virtue of the duality of structure (that is in virtue of the relationship between structure and agency as it is played out via the encounters of agents in everyday life). The line of argument taken is that ST is useful to researchers seeking to explain the broad spatial and temporal extension of gender subordination throughout FFC's. Before I outline the main tenants of this theory it is first appropriate to place this argument into the context of football fandom research.

*Afterthought: Football fandom... oh... and females*

Despite the fact that female football fans are growing in number (Nagle, Dodd, Ellis and Downer 2010, 22), there is an acceptance that inequalities on account of gender exist in sport fan communities (Crawford 2003; Author 2013; Author forthcoming). **Notwithstanding this, and whilst research dedicated to female football fans is a growing area of study, Pope (2014, 4) argues that even when female fans are cited in scholarly research,** they are often compared unfavourably against the image of dominant, uncontrollable masculine passion that is unleashed in response to sports victory or defeat.

Furthermore, Crawford (2001) argues that by contrast, females are unfairly depicted as sobbing, screaming, individuals motivated by the chance to see or touch a male idol; **a position that has been reiterated in the more recent scholarly literature (for example, see Mewett and Toffoletti [2012]).** This observation has been accentuated by the tendency of **some** academics to focus on female sports fans as synthetic, media dependent, consumer fans. In King's (1998) research on football fandom, for instance, he contrasts 'new fans' (e.g. placing emphasis on the growing number of FFF's as part of this process) as consumers, against 'traditional fans', or, as he labels them for the purposes of his study, 'the lads'. **This logic has been**

reinforced by research papers, arguing that whilst women have always attended football matches throughout the history of the game (albeit in smaller number than male counterparts) (Birley 1993; Williams 2003; Coddington 1997; Cashmore 2010); it was the marketing of Association Football in the early 1990s (for the inclusion of women, children and families) that is deemed to have bolstered aggregate numbers of female supporters. This marketing campaign was based on UK government reports that identified women and children as the demographic that could help to civilise football crowds following an intensive period of football hooliganism and stadium disasters (Popplewell 1986; Taylor 1990; Crolley and Long 2001; Dunning and Rojek 1992; Gibbons and Dixon 2010).

In keeping with this, much of the literature (particularly prior to 2007) has driven clumsily over the life experiences of female fans and thus, rather than investigating how fandom is practiced and the theoretical implications thereof, studies have been content to explain away the presence of female fans as a side-effect of the 'bourgeoisification' of contemporary sport (Jones and Lawrence, 2000; Nash 2000; 2001; Williams and Perkins 1998). Yet, by stigmatising minority groups of fans (in this instance, women) as inauthentic or less important, sports fandom research has arguably maintained a 'malestream' approach, leaving the exploration and understanding of female sports fandom underdeveloped (Scratton and Flintoff 2002).

A more recent series of studies have begun to question the dogma relating to female fans through qualitative interviews with sports fans. For instance Jones (2008) has investigated female fandom, identity and sexism in men's professional football in England; Ben-Porat (2009) has drawn reference to Israeli women who fancy football; and Mewett and Toffoletti (2011) have examined female fandom socialization in Australian Rules Football. By drawing on qualitative accounts, subsumed from fans in

practice, the authors have been able to glean valuable insight into the lived experience of female fandom. In very different cultures, the authors have begun to explore how intimate thoughts, personal explanations and recounting of the meaning and effect of interactions can impact on fan practice. In what follows, this paper seeks to add to this literature, by in a similar vein, focusing on verbatim interviews conducted with FFF's and building in a theoretical narrative to explain the *structuration* of sub-cultural subordination. Before the data is presented, and to provide theoretical context, key components of ST are briefly outlined below.

### *ST, Dominance and Subordination.*

Anthony Giddens' (1984) ST offers a post-dualist theoretical position that is based on one simple but original idea: 'that everything in social life, from encompassing world systems to an individual's state of mind, originates in social praxis; that is in the skilful performance of conduct and interaction' (Cohen 2008, 324). Favouring neither structure nor agency in his explanation of the constitution of society, Giddens expounds that it is through the duality of structure that cultural practice is produced and reproduced across time and space. Accordingly then, Giddens (1984, 374) argues that structural properties of social systems do not exist outside of action, but they are, instead, chronically implicated in its production and reproduction. This occurs, he suggests, through routine interaction between agents and institutions in the moment and extends across time as part of a 'practical consciousness' that involves tacit modes of knowing how to behave in the context of social life (Giddens 1982, 9). Thus, not only does structuration explain the recursive nature of social life, but it also acknowledges the recursive nature of dominance and subordination therein. To explain this position, Giddens refers to possession of resources:

Domination depends on the mobilization of two distinguished types of resource. Allocative resources...generating command over objects, goods or material phenomena. Authoritative...command over persons or actions (Giddens 1984, 33)

Here he explains that agents holding material or authoritative resources within any given cultural realm can use those resources to legitimise dominance through everyday encounters with others. Moreover, it is through seemingly trivial encounters, Giddens (1984, 33) insists, that rules are upheld and the generality of social conduct is produced and reproduced. Furthermore, rules, he asserts, can take many forms. They can be intensive or shallow, tacit or discursive, informal or formalized, weakly or strongly sanctioned and yet all the while they contribute to the maintenance of social practices. In other words, they become generalizable procedures which actors understand and use in various circumstances:

Let us regard the rules of social life, then, as techniques or generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social practices (Giddens 1984, 21).

Accordingly then, the key for Giddens, is to grasp how action is structured in everyday contexts of social life, while simultaneously recognising that the structural elements of society are reproduced by the performance of action (Elliott 2009, 136). Consequently, he explains that social practices and issues of dominance and subordination have a broad spatial and temporal extension, because they are acknowledged, and largely followed by agents in practice (Giddens 1982, 9).

Whilst this theoretical approach has been used across multiple disciplines and sociological fields, it is underused within the study of sport and the theorizing of football

fandom more specifically. I argue that its inclusion can offer a sound theoretical basis to explore and explain the subordinate position of women in FFC's. Before applying this theoretical approach to the experiences of female football fans, the methods of the research are outlined below.

## **Research Methods**

### *Prologue*

In response to recent calls for empirical investigations into the experiences of female football fans (Pope 2014), a sample of 24 interviews were taken into consideration for the purposes of this paper. Those interviews were originally conducted in 2008 as part of a larger study that combined interviews with male and female fans in an investigation of football fandom cultures and everyday practice (See Author 2013). Reminded of Pope's (2012) call for females to feature at the heart of fandom research rather than as a side show, a decision was taken to revisit the data and focus solely on the experiences of FFF's, with the aim to explore and explain the phenomenon of sub-cultural subordination in relation to gender.

Given that little is known about FFF's beyond conjecture, in-depth qualitative interviews are ideal for awarding space for participants to present issues that they regard as important within their fandom experiences (Silverman 2000; Hoffman 2007). When adopting this research strategy, however it is important to note that vernacular used to describe life history and notions of collective memory can be exaggerated or understated by participants as they seek to articulate a dominant memory (Gibbons, Dixon and Braye 2008). Consequently, as Franzosi (1998) infers, whilst personal narratives do not necessarily offer universal truths, they remain valuable to academic research in the sense that they take account of emotion and the relationship between

text, lived experience and social reality. With this in mind, and in order to communicate the main findings of the work, I highlight and interpret verbatim responses, giving a voice to those whose stories I have set out to uncover. This approach to writing allows the culture of the field to reveal itself to the reader via the discourse that FFF's have themselves constructed and which has constructed them (Author 2013). Accordingly, the data presented is representative of common themes and ideas that have emerged from the words of a sample of football fans.

In terms of interview schedule, two broad issues were used to offer a sense of continuity within and between interviews. The first was related to early experiences of football fandom, under the assumption that this would provide a central reference point from which understandings of fandom practice have developed. Second, given that the work aims to explore the lived experience of football fandom, the routine nature of fandom practice was discussed with all participants. Both issues are of central importance to ST as they provide a basis to discuss the connection of encounters with social reproduction, emphasising how those connections are formed and reformed in the duree of daily existence (Giddens 1984, 72). Moreover, it is through reflexion that 'actors in circumstances of marked social inferiority make manifest there awareness of oppression' (Giddens 1984, 91).

### *Recruitment Strategy*

A purposive sample of participants was selected for this study from a pool of football fans (situated in the North East of England]) that responded to a media call for volunteers [2]. On acknowledgement of interest, volunteers were consequently selected as participants for subsequent interview according to the following criteria: (1) They are women; (2) Given that scholars Malcolm, Jones and Waddington (2000)

point to the fact that season ticket holders are most frequently and disproportionately used within academic literature to represent all fans, the inclusion of fandom narratives from a wider range of experiential profiles were selected. (3) It was deemed important not to privilege fans of top tier teams (e.g. Manchester United, Chelsea, Arsenal) over and above the majority of fans that support teams outside of this elite group. This has been a common characteristic within recent academic research (see Author 2013).

Of all of the participants that responded to the media call (N=148), 35 were female (24% of the total of responses) and were selected for interview. However 11 withdrew from the programme of study and consequently, the discussion that follows is based on data extracted from 24 in depth, qualitative interviews.

### *Participants*

Of those participants interviewed, 12 were current season ticket holders. The remaining 12 were not current holders of season tickets although they did watch or listen to live football multiple times per-week via the media. Therefore, for the purposes of transparency within the transcript extracts, they are identified as (1) Season Ticket Holders (STH); (2) Media Fans (MF) to reflect their primary mode of live football consumption at the time of the interview. It is worth noting that this was not an attempt to categorise fans into a fixed, simplistic dichotomy representative of fandom type. Rather, sharing the belief that fandom can be a fluid process across one's life cycle (Crawford 2004), such labels are used solely to provide further information for the reader regarding the current status of live match consumption (at the time of interview) in relation to participants.

In terms of supported teams, 19 participants were fans of one of the following 2008 English Premier League Clubs: Newcastle; Middlesbrough; Sunderland; and

Liverpool. It is worth pointing out that (with the exception of Liverpool) those clubs represented here were not noted as top tier Premier League Clubs (at the time of research). In fact, in the season 2008-09 (e.g. the same season as data collection) both Newcastle and Middlesbrough were relegated from The Premier League into The Championship. Of the remaining participants, 6 were supporters of one of the following teams: Hartlepool and Darlington.

### **Data Analysis**

The duration of interviews ranged from 60-90 minutes and all were audio recorded for transcription. Verbatim transcripts served as raw data to be analysed using a framework of thematic analysis as described by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2013). Each transcript was read a number of times to gain a thorough understanding of the participant accounts. Transcripts were then re-read in full and emergent trends were recorded on each transcript. The emergent trends were summarised and organised to establish any inter-relationships between them. This process was repeated on each transcript. A combined list of trends was then produced and new trends were tested against earlier transcripts in a cyclical fashion until saturation (i.e. saturation is a stage in data analysis where no new or relevant information emerges in relation to the phenomena under study). The aim of this analytical process was to produce a thorough and accurate description of the range of opinions, experiences and reactions expressed by participants.

The findings below are arranged into two main sections that discuss (1) Early experiences of football fandom; and (2) Contemporary experiences of football fandom. Both are discussed in light of ST.

## **Early experiences of football fandom: Practical consciousness, and barriers to long-term participation.**

For Giddens (1984, 83) and ST, social systems are organized as regulated social practices that are sustained in encounters dispersed across time/space. However, he emphasizes the point that, within those systems, not all actors are equal. In specific terms, Giddens explains that actors are 'positioned'; and this involves the existence of definite and distinctive identities within a network of social relations to which a particular range of normative sanctions is relevant.

Positioning, it is worth noting, is always relative to authority within a cultural realm, and this can take many forms. It can involve the ownership and use of material and allocative resources, but equally, it can also relate directly to genetic composition, where agents can be positioned, for example, according to race, disability, or as in this case – 'gender'. To explain the mechanisms via which females are subordinately positioned within FFC's, this section investigates childhood experiences of fandom origins; recollections of peer relationships during adolescence; and finally, it acknowledges alternative routes into fandom that occur for agents in later life. When combined, I argue that those personal histories, unveiled within this section, highlight the utility of ST when explaining the enduring sub-cultural struggles encountered by females as they enter and attempt to sustain position within FFC's.

### *Early beginnings*

Of those participants whose fandom started in early childhood, all were introduced to the practice by influential 'male' figures. For instance, Louise [3] supports Liverpool because 'my dad always supported Liverpool'. For Lisa [4] the situation was similar: 'My dad was a big Darlo fan...it's a family tradition'. Furthermore, all that were

introduced to football in this way sought to extend gratitude to male gatekeepers for creating opportunities for them (as females) to enter a practice that is typically male dominated. Helen typifies this view:

Helen: [laughing] If you lived with my dad you'd support Sunderland too! No choice at all. No, seriously, he passed it on to us [participant and sister] and showed us how to play...Without dad, I'm sure we would just be like all other girls, playing with dolls and that, rather than football on muddy pitches and watching match of the day...I often think that without dad I wouldn't have football in my life and it's been such a big part. (Sunderland, aged 38 [MF])

It is not uncommon to note that male family members or 'significant male others' can play a pivotal role in encouraging females to develop an interest in sports per se (Liston 2006; Farrell, Fink and Fields 2011; Pope 2014) and in football fandom more specifically (Author 2012). However, it is worth stating that when participants, such as Helen (above) speak of having 'no choice' but to support Sunderland, she is in fact talking in the context of a positive relationship with her father, not a suppressive one. This is an important distinction to make in the context of ST given that introductions were not forged through autocratic systems of male supremacy, but rather, it was through everyday interactions with significant others that practice began to permeate to a new generation, albeit to a marginalized gender contingent.

Thus, for participants, early introductions to fandom as children tended to evoke positive nostalgic memories and yet there was a realization that the unconditional acceptance into FFC's (experienced in early childhood) is a time-phased phenomenon. For instance, Paula [5] explains that 'when you're really young, I would say that's the only time that you're no different to other fans. You're not labeled as 'those bloody women fans! [laughing]'; and Sarah [6] states, 'for some reason it is

perfectly ok for little girls to support football teams, everyone thinks it's adorable'. But beyond childhood experiences, participants cited adolescence (and the increasing awareness of femininity associated with this life stage) as a major barrier for FFF's to overcome as they maintained interest in football and simultaneously matured as women.

Here, for those approaching adolescent years, Holly [7] suggests that 'the biggest problem for a girl that likes football is your friends' or as Kirsy [8] articulates 'as a kid, I think you do what your friends do, and unfortunately, football was not a typical activity for girls'. Thus, female participants reported that it was the emergent awareness of 'feminine culture' and routine interactions between female peers that was cited as a key factor in discouraging many females from participating in masculine based activities such as football. Clair too acknowledges the point that participation in masculine cultures of sport (for adolescent females) can result in social out-casting enforced by female peers. She asserts:

'because I played football with the lads in my street and because I supported my local football team I was looked down upon by loads of bitchy girls at school'.

[Middlesbrough, aged 23 (STH)]

Thorne (1993) explains this type of situation as an implication of the process of gender separation in adolescence and similarly, Pope and Kirk (2014, 233) argue that 'the idea that heterosexual teenage girls become interested in different things to boys' is potentially damaging to the long-term involvement of many females in activities chiefly associated (historically speaking) with males. This explanation is upheld by participants in the current sample too. They have made reference to the onset of adolescence as crucial in the segregation of males and females and as a period of time when there is an expectation for the 'practical consciousness' of FFF's (gained

during early childhood) to be significantly re-written. When Giddens talks of practical consciousness he is referring to the learning of rules and tactics associated with the way that daily social life is constituted; and for females entering adolescence, it seems that everything that had been previously learned about the game of football, clashed with new ideas of femininity and the social pressure to embrace them. Nats [9] reports, 'It was like someone turned a switch and you were expected to do woman things, you know. All of a sudden you are aware of difference and this has a knock on effect for what most girls do and how your life goes from their'. Furthermore Kate suggests that:

When we were in middle school [aged 9-12], boys and girls did the same activities, we played football together, supported football teams, boys and girls were almost the same. But like, as soon as we turned, say, twelve it all changed and boys broke away with their activities and we had to play netball and rounder's and other lame stuff that girls were 'supposed to do'. (Middlesbrough, aged 18 [MF])

Doing activities that girls were 'supposed to do' highlights conscious recognition that the 'gender order' is a constructed (but unavoidable), culturally embedded ideological concept (extended across time and space), and participants illustrate that during adolescence a new 'gender appropriate' practical consciousness (derived through personal encounters) is formed. For instance, Ruth [10] emphasizes that at an early age (up to 10 years old) others reacted to her interest in football as 'cute', but 'as soon as you start getting boobs (breasts), suddenly people try to put you off sport'.

Scratton, Fasting *and* Pfister (1999, 108) make a similar point when they speak of 'reshaped feminine identity'. They argue that identity performed during childhood is temporary and is usually discarded once girls move into adolescence where they are under increasing pressure to present themselves in a way that reflects more traditional

norms. Likewise, participants were able to demonstrate the complexity for FFF's during teenage years, given that football as a discursive topic became a taboo subject and was overwritten by a consumed interest in beauty and fashion as female peers were seeking to develop an appropriate identity that was reinforced by the approval (or otherwise) of significant matriarchal females (Charlton 2007). As Laura [11] explains, 'I would say that my Grandma's, my older sisters and my mother wanted me to give up on the football and become normal. [Laughing] All the girls in my family didn't approve'.

Thus, as growing children, participants were made aware of the conceptual conflict that exists between football and widely held conceptions of gender appropriate action (outside of FFC's). In addition to this, participants acknowledged that conceptual distinctions (on account of gender) were also made 'within' FFC's and those distinctions served to limit the perceived authenticity of FFF's. Before moving on to discuss this issue in more depth when addressing the contemporary experiences of fan encounters (in the following section) it should be noted that not all participants had become fans of football as children. Others were inducted into the practice as adults.

Hence, whilst knowledge acquisition and encounters during childhood set out the routine patterns from which agents will practice, it is entirely possible (because of the duality of structure and the internal dynamics of fluid systems of encounters) that in the patterns of daily existence, new routines can be forged on the back of new interactions. Consequently, in the manner that ST advocates, some participants were able to overcome dominant messages from childhood tradition (i.e. a personal history that was opposed or indifferent to football) by fully embracing a practice that once sat outside of one's practical consciousness. Take the following as an example:

Carol: My ex hubby was a big football fan so it was always on in the house. I used to hate the game, but learned to love it. Once I knew the rules, appreciated the skills and tactics and experienced the atmosphere, I was hooked. [Hartlepool, aged 43 (STH)].

Participant Wanda (below) also provides details of a life estranged from football until one chance meeting with a friend at college. She explains how her mother had never encouraged involvement in football, believing that it was a game for hooligans, but in 2005, an external opportunity to attend a football match presented itself:

Wanda: In 2005 I had just gone to college and made new friends when one girl that I was in the same class with won a competition for a free box at Darlington for ten people and she invited me to go. I didn't really know what to expect, but that was it. I haven't looked back since. [Darlington, aged 21 (STH)]

Those examples presented here demonstrate the role that new interactions can play in order to change life direction and consequently provide opportunities for agents to engage with. Thus, whilst agents were constrained by pre-understanding experiences, they were not imprisoned by them. In the system of structuration, agents are not consigned to a particular fate of social reproduction, but rather, fate is made and remade by social encounters and the implications of them.

### **Contemporary experiences: Routine encounters and the pursuit of cultural approval**

Using the conceptual framework of Erving Goffman (1959), Giddens claims that the evanescence of routine encounters (espoused by Goffman), express the temporality of daily life and the contingent character of all structuration. He focuses particularly on the contours of interaction and argues that in order to grasp the connection of

seminally trivial encounters with social reproduction, it is important to understand how social actors perceive encounters with others (Giddens 1984, 73).

For Giddens, encounters are formed and reformed as sequenced phenomena in the sense that they are incorporated within and yet give form to the seriality of day to day life. Consequently, whilst often considered as 'mundane or trivial experiences' by those in the moment, Giddens argues that they are in fact significant components within the structuration of social life. He explains:

'the routinization of encounters is of major significance in binding the fleeting encounter to social reproduction and thus to the seemingly 'fixity' of institutions'.  
(1984, 72)

As well as sustaining the position of dominant groups, Giddens clarifies that the fixity of institutions can be repressive to others. In what follows I draw on verbatim extracts from participants to explain how patterns of continued subordination are maintained for FFF's and enforced by all, through everyday social encounters in contemporary practice. Initially I draw on the marginalization of females in everyday discourse before illustrating the role that FFF's play in their own suppression.

### *Contemporary experiences*

Results indicate that female fans found it frustrating when peers did not share passion for football and yet it was they that tended to feel marginalised by female peers:

Holly: I have to try and completely avoid the subject! Especially if I'm with the girls, I mention it and they're 'just like shut the fuck up Holly'. I know those who I can talk with and those that I can't. [Hartlepool, aged 22 (MF)]

Participants feel that there is a gender difference, not necessarily in relation to the desire for knowledge acquisition and conversational engagement, but in relation to the

perceived rules of everyday discursive practice. Thus, whilst female fans routinely consume and discuss football, they are conscious of when to apply knowledge in conversation and they do not appear to have the ease of exchange that is perceived to be enjoyed by male counterparts:

Rohna: I get frustrated with the attitudes of some people. The other day for example, two lads I work with were chatting about football, and like, I made a comment and they just laughed...They laughed at my comment simply because I'm a girl that has strong opinions about the game...As a girl it is difficult to get treated seriously as a genuine fan sometimes. [Newcastle, aged 23 (MF)]

This poses further questions in relation to extent to which reflexivity (i.e. the capacity of the agent to recognize forces of socialization and consequently alter their place in the social structure) is apparent for females in late-modern life, and it is on this point that Adkins (2002) challenges the assumption that reflexivity is always transforming. She explains that reflexivity is forever related to normative values of any given time and space, including those of gender distinctions. Consequently, agents are only as reflexive as ones practical consciousness, and that of others, allows.

In the context of FFC's, then, females can find themselves incapable of instituting desired changes to practice on account of the authority that one has to use and disseminate knowledge effectively. Moreover, despite possessing levels of knowledgeability and competencies which ought to bolster authoritative positioning, participants felt that they had to consistently prove their status in order to avoid derogatory labels cast by others:

Wanda: People see me with a shirt on and think 'oh yeah'! It's only when they talk to you that they realise that you know what you are talking about, rather than just being a girl in a shirt. [Darlington, aged 21 (STH)]

Similarly, in his study of ice hockey fans, Crawford (2001) revealed that although half of the regular audiences at live matches were women, they were typecast as 'puck bunnies' (a term that is used to generalise and trivialise the status of female fans whose alleged primary interest is in the sexual attractiveness of male athletes) and they were often excluded from progressing into the highest echelons of this supporting community. Such findings are affirmed in relation to football when Pope and Williams (2014, 4) argue that female fans are stereotyped as lacking detailed knowledge about their club and consequently, they are labelled as inauthentic. Thus, Scratton *et al* (1999) make a valuable point when they assert that scholars ought to look beyond rising levels of participation to satisfy claims of equality. After all, it is at the level of social encounters that the subtleties of gender relations within FFC's are revealed:

Kelly: I'm not saying all, but some male supporters treat us differently. Most are cool but you always get the occasional guy who says like 'get your kit off for the lads' or even the ones that are sensible patronise you a bit by dumbing down opinions and such. They presume that because I'm a girl I won't quite follow what they are saying...They don't like it when I disagree with them and put my own valid points across. [Newcastle, aged 25 (MF)]

In addition to this, many more female fans were frustrated by the attitudes that were cast towards their overt behaviour during a match:

Clair: ...when I go to football games I get like really quite into it and things and I shout. Now, it's alright if a man shouted it, but I just get like really dirty looks.

I'm like 'why should I get them looks when it's just the same as when a lad shouts it'? [Middlesbrough, aged 23 (STH)].

Kelly and Clair (above) hold the view that female fans have to work harder to earn their place as authentic members of a fan group, often against a backlash of stereotypical masculine bravado which permeates down through all modes of fandom. Female participation, therefore, does not necessarily disrupt established gender discourses (Jeanes 2011, 403) but perhaps offers a sense of blindness to gender inequality issues, given that participation is perceived by some as a measure of equality. In addition to negative experiences at the live venue, Tina (below) emphasises similar concerns within the virtual fan environment:

Tina: I entered a Vodafone 'Full on Fan' competition. When I got selected to go on the radio a few of the guys I know told me to go on the forums (interactive internet websites) and ask for people to vote for me, which I did, but the further I got in the competition the more comments were made about women and football... It seems my opinion isn't valid on that forum coz I'm a woman and they are knob heads... [Middlesbrough, aged 25 (MF)]

Thus, a number of female fans have experienced what Muggleton (2000, 153) describes as 'the effects of core membership'. This evokes masculine criterion and privileges the views of the established who tend always to be men. Additionally, given that the goal of many female fans was to fit into the practice as authentic supporters, one of the strategies that 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':

Nicola: I think if you integrate properly, if you become a proper fan and have fun with the men by giving them banter back just as hard, then they respect you. That's been my experience. [Newcastle, aged 27 (MF)]

Thus, as Welford (2011, 372) has described in a study of female football coaches, females often feel pressure to adapt to masculine styles of communication when practicing in sporting cultures that are historical sites of masculine domination. Applying masculine styles, of course, will 'pose little challenge to wider dialectical understanding of gender behaviour'. In fact, being complicit in the use of banter (i.e. a mutually accepted light-hearted form of dark humor, with masculine connotations), she suggests, does nothing more than celebrate the practice of masculinity and segregate those females that are unwilling to participate:

Suzi: I just think of myself as one of the lads. I get on with everyone and can hold my own. If you can't do that as a girl, then my opinion is, just don't bother. [Middlesbrough, aged 23 (MF)].

As 'one of the lads', Suzi supports assertions made by Paechter and Clark (2007), that girls in masculine sports often attempt to construct identities centered on dominant forms of masculinity, and in doing so they tend to achieve elevated status (for females) within FFC's, but condemnation and harassment from female peers in wider realms of social life. Moreover, despite the presence of a siege mentality or a coherent response from female football fans (in this sample) as a reaction to unfair treatment on account of gender; it is worth noting that the same participants also displayed signs of in-gender disharmony more generally, with some casting blame on others for their contribution to a negative stereotype that has been adopted by male supporters:

Rachel: I do think that some female fans do us no favours. Some of them tend to go in groups to ogle at the blokes and others stand there in sexy clothes with their tits out. That's how we get a bad press. [Sunderland, aged 28 (STH)]

Here Rachel indicates that certain groups of female fans have ulterior motives for following football, i.e. as a tool for picking up boys or to worship attractive players. For Rachael, such behaviour will always fail to gain the acceptance of the 'male core' and thus, she too turns her back against this 'inauthentic' form of female fan.

Similar points have been raised by Cauldwell (2011, 334) when she explains that it is a mistake to think that solidarity exists between women and that they form a collective. She indicates that women are positioned differently within cultures of practice and seek cultural capital, just like male counterparts. Consequently, 'women are not only oppressed by men, male dominance, patriarchy and phallogocentrism, but they may also be oppressed by other women'. Thus, the lateral surveillance from which Rachael (above) makes such observations is fundamentally tied to the structuration of FFC's, and as Giddens (1991, 91) brings to attention, it is often the case that actors, in circumstances of marked inferiority are aware of, and can even be complicit in their oppression. This is reflected in Kirsty's understanding of female fandom:

Kirsty: Scepticism of female fans is only to be expected. At the end of the day I'm a girl involved in a typical manly activity ... Things are changing definitely, but in the mean time I can't change the fact that I'm a girl, so I have to live with any scepticism. I don't cry about it. That would be girly [laughing]. Like I say, it's to be expected. [Middlesbrough, aged 33 (STH)]

Kirsty's realisation of how the practice of football fandom works indicates that she is aware that lack of influence exists on account of gender. However, taken in this spirit

and embraced for what it is, the ontological security of the subject is not breached to an alarming extent. The acknowledgement that things are getting better for female fans, coupled with the understanding that football is culturally positioned as a typical masculine sport, is enough to pacify the subject. After all, Kirsty explains that expectations of acceptance were low, but improving. It appears, then, that agents like Kirsty are limited in their social mobility aspirations within FFC's as they acknowledge the status-quo as the natural order of things (Crawford, 2003). Consequently the recursive nature of fandom culture on account of gender continues.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have argued that ST is useful for researchers seeking to explain the broad spatial and temporal extension of gender subordination throughout FFC's. By drawing on the experiences of a sample of FFF's I contend that the structuration process (i.e. the production and reproduction across time and space) in this regard, occurs through the performance of routine encounters (with contingent histories of gendered normative practice) and not as the result of imposed autocratic systems of male supremacy. Rather, as ST suggests, participants were able to draw on a history of seemingly trivial encounters to explain the general positioning of females within the game. Moreover, those encounters form the sites in which the rules of practice are learned, authoritative positioning legitimized, and female fans typecast.

Participants have revealed however, that the typecast nature of females as inauthentic and subordinate to males did not feature within childhood initiations to the practice. Encounters with adults during childhood were primarily positive in nature, with many citing memorable and enjoyable introductions to FFC's. Once introduced to the practice, participants were able to appreciate the process of learning the game

and developing a practical consciousness for football fandom and expected codes of conduct that were shared across gender during childhood.

Whilst this may seem counterintuitive to the structuration of gender subordination, the situation of cross gender equality within FFC's was, in the experience of participants, short-lived. For pre-adolescent girls, football was perceived as 'cute', and yet those approaching adolescence were often steered away from football by family or else discredited by other females for continuing to participate as fans. Take for instance Clair's experience of being teased by girls in her street for involvement with football; or Laura's admission that her sisters and Grandmother were against her involvement in fandom practice, as she increased with age.

Moreover, encounters with female peers were acknowledged as sites for the promotion of normative conceptions of masculinity and femininity and the new 'gender centric' practical consciousness that adolescent girls were expected to adopt and embrace. Thus, in the manner that Giddens explains, participants described a process of informal teachings accompanied by the reflexive monitoring of self and others as a means to assess the implications of action. Continuing to practice football fandom (a largely masculine pursuit) against matriarchal advice, they explain, was not without consequence.

For instance, personal histories revealed that female fans perceived themselves to be inferiorly positioned within FFC's, and this, they suggest, is based purely on gender. Levels of knowledgability, enthusiasm and consumption (factors associated with cultural capital for male fans – see Author 2013) were not always recognized or rewarded for female fans in the same way. In fact, participants explained that encounters with others were often strained on account of involvement with football fandom. For instance, Holly explains that in the company of female peers (outside of

football culture) the ability to 'talk football' holds little value and is disparaged, whilst Kirsty explains that (within football culture) females are examined by male fans with skepticism. Consequently, and in line with ST, it seems that reflexivity (i.e. the awareness of the participants of gender subordination, in this instance) is not always a transforming feature of late modern life, but it depends, instead, on the 'practical consciousness' or dominant thought patterns of any particular culture. Furthermore, evidence suggests that masculine cultures can be upheld, however unintentionally, by reflexive female members.

Thus, in spite of the consolidation of evidence in relation to the inequality that exists within FFC's (and the solidarity that this infers), the findings demonstrate how, through personal encounters, female fans actually contribute to subordinate cultural positioning by adopting masculine norms (e.g. becoming one of the lads – see Tina) and out-casting the behavior of groups of female football fans that refuse to comply (see Rachel). To be a 'real fan', participants suggest, that one must embrace the masculine characteristics and 'banter' that has history and authenticity. This illustrates the unintended consequence for females in the system of structuration as transcendence or evolution of dominant practice, and thus, equity for female fans can be painfully slow. After all 'fitting in' with masculine culture does not necessarily contribute to the equality of practice that those participants in the current sample desire.

Notwithstanding this, there is little doubt that FFC's are altering form as late modern life extends its influence on the structuration of fandom practice. For instance, larger numbers of female fans are attending matches, buying football shirts, watching football in public houses and infiltrating other modes of practice, and yet, as Scratton et al remind us, rising levels of access should not satisfy claims of equality given that

subordination is implicated in the very fabric of social encounters and it is enforced by all. Thus, by using ST to explain the nature of gender subordination, female fans are not positioned as victims or dupes of autocratic masculine imposed institutions, nor are they explained as elusive individuals of post-modernity with destiny firmly in the hands of those seeking positive change for females. Instead, such action (unveiled by participants) demonstrates the multifaceted nature of dominance and subordination across time and space in light of the duality of structure, where 'human action' in encounters of the moment, 'presupposes that of institution' and consequently the structuration of gender subordination inevitably takes place.

### **Notes:**

[1] The term football is used throughout this paper to refer to the sport of Association Football, often abbreviated to 'soccer'.

[2] The following media outlets in the North East of England gave time and column inches to promote the research. Newspapers: *The Journal*; *The Northern Echo*; *Hartlepool Mail*; *The Sunderland Echo*; *evening Gazette*, *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*. Television: *BBC North East News*; *ITV North-East Tonight*. Radio: Durham FM 102.6; Century Radio 106; BBC Tees.

[3] Liverpool, aged 20, (MF).

[4] Darlington, aged 20 (STH)

[5] Sunderland, aged 32 (MF)

[6] Middlesbrough, aged 42 (MF)

[7] Hartlepool, aged 22 (MF)

[8] Hartlepool, aged 33 (STH)

[9] Middlesbrough, aged 24 (STH)

[10] Middlesbrough, aged 42 (STH)

[11] Hartlepool, aged 20 (STH)

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