Module 1. Understanding women's football fans – Motivations behind fandom

Unit 1.1

1.1.1 How do fans differ from consumers? Defining fandom

To find out what motivates football fans in general and fans of women's football specifically, one must first understand the concept of fandom and how fans differ from regular consumers.

Almost any individual, group of people, or even activity in the public sphere can become an object of fandom for someone. The Oxford Dictionary of English simply defines a fan as someone "who has a strong interest in or admiration for a particular sport, art form or famous person" (Stevenson, 2010, p. 631). This means that fandom implies a stronger connection to the object of fandom, rather than just liking or even loving it. Fans show enthusiastic and emotional responses to their object of fandom, possess expert knowledge of facts about it and usually show selective perception, such as, for example, overemphasising the positive aspects of their objective of fandoms and ignoring its flaws. At the same time, Crawford (2004) stresses that the word "fandom" does not always evoke a very positive response outside the respective fan communities. Mostly associated with popular culture, a fan is not considered as cultured and educated as, for example, an "aficionado" (Jensen, 1992), which can describe someone taking an interest in high culture, such as literature, art, and history, all of which are associated with a high status in society and a good education. Fandom is associated with activities that are not tied to such a status. This includes football, which has traditionally been considered a sport that was played and watched by the working classes.

Otte (2014) notes that being a fan can even change one's basic mannerisms and behaviour and those who are fans of the same person, activity, or entity show similar behavioural patterns, especially when engaging with the object of fandom. In the case of football fandom, this can include, but is not limited to the time, money, and effort that football fans invest to travel to games, but also rituals and customs that they associate with their experience of football games. Examples of this can include wearing a lucky shirt, socks, or scarf or visiting a particular pub or eating establishment before any given football

match. This short clip produced in Birmingham in the United Kingdom interviews some local football fans on the rituals they or loved ones have.

Source: Birmingham Repertory Theatre. (2017, May 23). Stadium – What are your match day rituals? [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8HYy_z6-Qo&ab_channel=BirminghamRepertoryTheatre

Levental, Carmi, and Lev (2021) explore this topic in a study on Israeli football fans and they found that there are two psychological reasons for such superstitious behaviours and rituals. First, it gives people an illusion of control as they feel they have a way of helping their team beyond just going to a match and cheering on from the stands. Moreover, it helps reduce the stress levels before a match and reduces uncertainty that fans feel over the outcome of a match. However, the performance of such rituals also serves another purpose: it fills individuals with a sense of belonging to a community, the members of which engage in the same or similar rituals. This gives people the sense of contributing to a common cause and shows there is much more to being a football fan rather than being a customer of any other brand.

Nonetheless, most fans, of course, are still consumers through their purchase of paraphernalia, such as clothing and branded household items, tickets to concerts or sports matches, (fan) club memberships, or multimedia packages offering exclusive content. It is noteworthy that this seems to contradict the aforementioned stereotype that football is a working-class sport. In fact, football fans are consumers of these products and services sold in relation to the club they support, and often they need relatively little marketing or incentive to make regular purchases. In this behaviour, fans differ from regular consumers through their high amount of brand loyalty. For example, sports fans usually continue to follow the team that they support throughout good and bad times alike. Meanwhile, regular consumers are much more likely to switch to another brand when the product or service fails to perform. While this sounds like they are an ideal customer, it is important to understand that fans, and also fan expectations, differ from those of other consumers. This changes the vertical relationship between fans as consumers, and the football clubs that they support in significant ways that are also looked at more deeply in module 3 and module 4 of this course.

Moreover, fans differ from regular consumers through their strong identification with their status as fans. Crawford explains that “being a fan is not just a label or category, it is also tied into individual and group identities and social performances” (2008, p. 92). This means there are aspects to fan experiences that regular consumers do not share. Certainly, identification with the community is an important aspect of this, a phenomenon that is further explored in module 2 of this course.

Understanding the ways in which fans differ from regular consumers is key to also understanding fan motivations. In the case of football, most fans are not driven by how

well or badly the football club performs or how many titles are won. Instead, fans continue to purchase goods and services associated with the football club due to their identification with the club and the fan community. Nonetheless, fan communities are extremely diverse and therefore motivations and expectations will also vary. Upon completion of this module, you will have a clearer understanding of how and why people become and stay football fans. This first unit focuses on who football fans are, how they become fans, and what being a fan means to them. Moreover, experiences and motivations of those who support women's football tend to differ a little from those following the men's game. The similarities and differences are specifically addressed in the second unit of this module.

Exercise
Are you a fan of someone or something? How do your feelings for this object of fandom differ from other services or products that you purchase or consume?

1.1.2 What types of football fans are there? Categorising fans

Anyone trying to understand football fans and their motivations on a deeper level will face the problem that football fan communities are incredibly diverse, and therefore the experiences of football fans also vary. Social researchers have therefore taken an interest in categorising football fans into different types of fans. This section highlights some of the most influential ones. However, all of them share a common problem when discussing fans of women's football: the large share of social research on football fandom has been done with mostly male and in some cases female supporters of men's football. Women's football fandom is a growing, but at the time of writing, largely under-researched area.

In an early attempt to categorise the motivations of football fans into two groups, Clarke (1978) distinguishes between "genuine fans", who care about a football club's history and traditions more than what actually happens during the matches and "other" fans, who watch football for the results and the entertainment that games provide. Since then, this kind of dual categorisation has been used and changed a little by several other researchers. Boyle and Haynes (2009) speak of "traditionalists" and "modernizers" that they met doing research with male British football fans in Liverpool and Glasgow. Again, the traditionalists see the primary purpose of supporting football in being part of a group with certain ethnic, historical, and geographical roots. Meanwhile, the modernizers are a group that "encompass the business and commercial community who view football as part of a wider media/leisure economy in which supporters are viewed as consumers" (Boyle and Haynes, 2009, p. 198). Nash (2000) identifies two similar groups, the "genuine" and the "corporate" fans, while Redhead (1993) speaks of "active" and "passive" fans. All these categorisations have one element in common: they always define one group of fans that are more invested in tradition and history – and are therefore usually labelled more

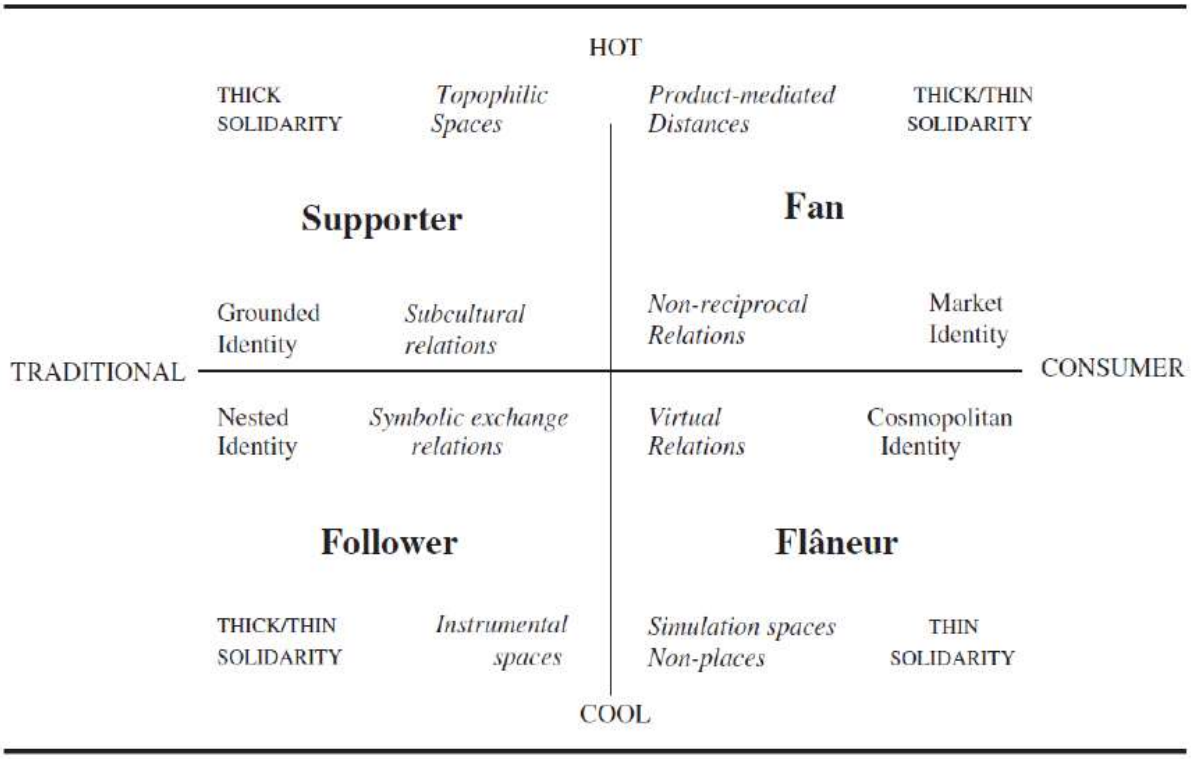
active or authentic fans of the football club in question. The other group of fans typically have started supporting the club more recently and may be more interested in results or entertainment value that they get out of spectating football matches.

There are, however, two issues with splitting football fans into two groups along those lines. Firstly, they do not show many nuances of fandom, fan experiences and fan motivations. Instead, they just categorise basic types of fans, assuming that a person is either a fan because a club has tradition or because a club is entertaining to watch. However, fan motivations and experiences have more nuances to them. For example, there may be different reasons why a person becomes a fan of a particular football club, as further explored in the next section.

Secondly, a category of fans that value history and tradition does not work well when examining fans of women's football. Most women's football clubs have been professionalised and started to draw in a larger number of spectators much later than it was the case for men's football clubs. For example, the Portland Thorns are one of the US women's football clubs that has drawn the largest attendances in 2021 (Worldfootball.net, n.d.). However, the club was only founded nine years prior, in 2012, and therefore does not share the same tradition or history that many of the European and South American men's football clubs can look back on.

To understand what types of women's football fans there are, we need a more complex and nuanced model like that of Giulianotti (2002), who categorises fans along two axes that form four different quadrants, signifying four fan types. The earlier labels still exist in this model, although Giulianotti distinguishes between "thick" and "thin solidarity". He also acknowledges that some people show traits of both aspects. Therefore, Giulianotti puts fans on a horizontal axis between the "traditional" fan and the "consumer" – two labels that are very similar to the categories discussed earlier. However, he also adds a vertical axis ranging from "cool" to "hot". This results in a diagram with four quadrants that Giualinotti (2002) labels "supporters", "followers", "fans" and "*flâneurs*".

Figure 1: Multi-dimensional model



Source: Giulianotti, 2002, p. 31

This categorisation is derived from Giulianotti's research with football fans in Scotland, most of whom were males following men's football, so it may have to be adapted when used in other contexts. For example, Pope (2017) uses her research on female football fans and, although she can make some use of Giulianotti's model, she also finds that many female fans exhibit traits that fit into more than one of the four categories. This shows that models and externally imposed categories may find values in some context, but have to be re-evaluated when applied to new contexts. The literature reviewed in this section, which proposes the use of such categories, specifically looks at football fandom within the context of the consumption of men's football by largely male crowds. However, one aspect stands out that is useful for the examination of fans of women's football: different groups of fans prioritise certain elements in their experience of football and therefore can be grouped together as a similar type of football fan. The first type of fan wish to have an experience that is linked to strong group identification and is often tied to local identity as well. This is especially the case for women's football clubs that are attached to an existing men's team and the history, tradition and local embeddedness that comes with that men's team. In other cases, fans watch women's football for the value they get out of experiencing the match day live or on television. These people watch women's football because it is entertaining, more family-friendly than local men's, or simply because women's football enjoys bigger sporting success than men's football and is therefore more exciting to watch, as it is the case in North America, for example. In these cases, the

reasons why fans watch football are less linked to tradition and "thick solidarity" with a team and more to fan experience and entertainment. This shows that while not all aspects of Giualianotti's model may work in women's football, some of the core elements of fans being traditional or consumers, hot or cool remain relevant in the discussion of women's football fandom. These topics are discussed in further depth and with the use of more examples in unit 2 of this module.

Exercise
Speak to a friend that watches football regularly and ask them why they are a fan. Try to fit their answer along Giulianotti's two axes, and find out what type of football fan they are: is your friend a traditional supporter or a consumer of entertainment? Do they feel hot or cool about football? Or are they a mixture of several aspects?

1.1.3 Development of spectator attendance and fandom in women's football

As mentioned before, most of the research done to categorise football fans was done with supporters of men's football teams rather than women's teams. This is a significant gap in the existing research, and these existing models and theories need to be adapted and put into the context of women's football. This course does so by drawing on many examples from the women's game, especially as women's football spectatorship is by no means a new phenomenon. The following section puts women's football spectatorship in context with fandom and spectator and fan motivations. It is important to remember though that those spectators and fans are not the same. Spectators can be more casual – like regular consumers. A spectator may purchase a ticket to a game out of interest, but there is a chance that they never return. There is, of course, also a chance that they like what they see and eventually become a fan as well. A fan exhibits an unusual amount of brand loyalty. Most fans are also regular spectators, but it is noteworthy that not all fans go and see matches in person regularly or view them on TV. Someone can also be a fan of a team that is based far away and therefore be unable to always spectate all matches. They can still be fans that fit the definition cited in the first section of this unit, though.

Women's football has been a spectator sport for over a century. In post-World War I Europe, the women's game drew considerable numbers to the stadium, peaking on Boxing Day in 1920 when Dick, Kerr Ladies faced St Helens Ladies at Goodison Park in Liverpool (usually known as the home of Everton FC). A crowd of 56,000 watched the game, supposedly another 14,000 waited outside, unable to get inside the stadium without a ticket. During the WWI-era, many munition factories that primarily employed women set up factory teams to keep the workers healthy and entertained. However, women's football was still far from being professionalised at the time and the players did not earn any money by playing football. The teams typically faced off in charity matches to raise funds for the soldiers and war veterans. These causes were generally well-

respected and drew large crowds. This includes the 1920 Boxing Day match, which also garnered attention from the FA. In an article commemorating the 100-year-anniversary of the match, Coleman (2020) speculates that this may have been the beginning of the end for women's football at the time. The men's Football League had plans to expand at the time, introducing a third tier, and it may have been the case that some officials worried the increasing popularity of women's football could be drawing the crowds away. Women's football was eventually banned by the FA nearly one year later, in December 1921.

A little over 100 years onwards, several women's matches have sold out at major venues. At the time of writing, FC Barcelona's women's team – Barça Femení – played Champions League matches for a crowd of over 90,000 people twice and national teams like the United States' Women's National Team (USWNT) and England's Lionesses have also played in front of attendances surpassing 75,000 people. While these are attendance figures that some successful men's teams have never reached, it needs to be noted that these matches are still outliers. It is, of course, impossible to use attendance figures since the 2019-20 season until the time of writing to determine any kind of upwards or downwards trends in spectatorship as viewership numbers have undoubtedly been impacted by local and national lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we can still use the numbers recorded just before the pandemic to determine where women's football attendances were headed. Covering women's football for *Deutsche Welle*, McCambridge (2019) notices that the previous season saw a decline in attendance of women's matches in most European countries. For example, average crowds in Wolfsburg – one of the most successful women's team in Germany – had dropped by 42% rather than five years prior. This fate is shared by most German women's clubs except for FC Bayern's women's team, something that McCambridge (2019) explains through the sheer popularity of the Bayern's men's team. Similar drops to the one's at Wolfsburg and elsewhere in Germany could be observed in France over that same time, and women's teams in Italy and Spain also saw a decline in attendance. England, as McCambridge (2019) observes, were the only outlier country in Europe where attendances increased during the 2018-19 season. This means spectator motivation has clearly dropped – people that kept their interest in women's football for a while have stopped going to the stadium in person. There is no clear answer as to why this is the case, but when asked for commentary on this, Daniel Ferguson, the Marketing Manager at England's Women's Super League (WSL) explains that England has seen a lot of financial investment into the women's game from sponsors and men's club and there are now also TV revenues to rely on. Most importantly, though, he explains that the WSL is teaching clubs to market themselves better, so they can capitalize on the increased awareness. Focusing on the right groups is key; girls between the ages of seven and 15 who play football and are likely to maintain a long-term interest in the game.

There is no in-depth research yet to back these claims, but it is noteworthy that many of the WSL clubs are attached to some of the biggest brands in world football, including Chelsea, Arsenal and the two Manchester clubs – and these are the teams that draw the largest attendances, a replication of the "Bayern effect" mentioned above. Valenti, Scelles, and Morrow (2019) look at the attendance for UEFA Women's Champions League (UWCL) matches in more detail, and they find that many viewers of women's football matches in Europe are indeed more motivated to attend matches if they are already attached to the club's brand via the men's team. In fact, the authors find that this element is more important for viewership numbers than the actual quality of the two competing teams. This shows that those people who continue to watch the women's matches are already fans of the club and the brand, and therefore already invested. This explains why women's clubs that are attached to men's teams enjoying a large fanbase also have higher returning viewership numbers. People who are already fans of this football brand are then motivated to also support the women's side. This appears to be a crucial factor in attracting more sustainable, long-term audiences and fostering fandom rather than just spectatorship. Therefore, the next section looks at this strategy in more detail. Overall, it is obvious that despite peak attendance records having been broken on several occasions in women's football, this does not automatically equate to rising average viewership figures in the long term. Not all casual spectators turn into long-term fans, and in that regard, women's football has not caught up with the men's game yet.

Exercise
Ask your friends, family, or colleagues: has anyone ever attended a women's football game? Why did they attend the match? How did they know the team that they went to see?

1.1.4 Women's football and the men's game – a rivalry or a symbiosis?

The final section of this unit explores the relationship between women's football clubs and the men's game in more depth, as clearly there is a strong correlation between the attachment to a men's club and the potential for the women's club to build a long-term audience of fans and therefore also economic stability.

When women's football became popular in post-WWI England, it may have been seen as a threat to the men's game that was in the early stages of its professionalisation and commercialisation. This perceived rivalry seems to be a matter of the past now: without a shadow of a doubt, men's football is the more popular spectator sport that attracts much larger audiences on average. As established in the last section, attendance of women's football games in Europe strongly correlates to their attachment with a men's team and whether that men's team already has a large, dedicated, and loyal fanbase. This concept of a women's team that is part of a club structure that is more well known for its men's football team is usually described as an integrated women's club. The development of this

system was also driven forward by several policies implemented by international governing bodies as well as many national football associations, who were hoping to boost women's football. The strategy of integration of men's and women's football clubs is considered a useful way to drive forward the visibility and professionalisation of women's football (Valenti et al., 2018; Valenti, Peng and Rocha, 2021). In most European countries, this is a common strategy now. In some cases, women's clubs that used to be independent and not attached to a men's club have now retroactively sought such a relationship. A prominent example of this is FFC Frankfurt in Germany, that was a women's only club since the late 1990s. In 2020, the club officially became an integrated team of Eintracht Frankfurt, the men's club based in the same city. Westhoff (2020) cites financial reasons as the main reason for the fusion of the two clubs. While FFC Frankfurt used to be a powerhouse in German football, it became increasingly difficult to compete with clubs like Wolfsburg and Bayern that are economically backed by the financial successes of their respective men's teams and thus have been able to afford to spend money on their women's team without requiring an immediate return on that investment. While a fusion like of FFC Frankfurt with Eintracht Frankfurt may make sense from an economic perspective, this decision weighs heavily on the club identity and the relationship that fans and players have with the club leadership. This example will be part of the discussion in module 3 of this course.

The case seems apparent in those countries where men's football is already one of the most popular spectator sports: from a financial perspective, building a symbiosis with an established men's club offers more perspectives to the women's team. This does not mean that women's players at those clubs have the same financial opportunities as the men, though. In fact, there is still a considerable gender pay gap between female and male footballers – for example, the figures from 2018 in England are included in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The gender pay gap in English football as of 2018

Club	**Women's mean pay is…**
Stoke City	92.5% lower
Burnley	88.4% lower
Manchester City	87.7% lower
Watford	87.0% lower

Southampton	84.4% lower
Newcastle	83.3% lower
Tottenham Hotspur	83.0% lower
Arsenal	79.6% lower
Liverpool	77.5% lower
Everton	75.1% lower
Brighton and Hove	59.7% lower

Source: adapted from Hellier, 2018, https://bloom.bg/3BvOtSv

At the time of writing, the only club in Europe that pays their female and male players equally is Lewes FC, who play in the seventh tier of English football. Nonetheless, in many parts of the world women's teams that are attached to men's teams have better opportunities when it comes to attracting the top players in the game, not necessarily because they pay the same wages, but simply because they do not have the pressure to turn around a profit. Meanwhile, the players that sign with these clubs automatically also gain access to highly professionalised workspaces and state-of-the-art infrastructure, which already exists in men's football. This makes integrating with men's clubs still an attractive option for existing women's clubs – even if it comes at the cost of their unique identity and culture.

Traditionally, there has been an exception to the rule – there are still several women's teams playing in the NWSL – the top tier of women's football in the United States – that are independent clubs. However, even in the US, some women's clubs have aligned with or been purchased by men's clubs. For example, the team formerly known as Seattle Reign FC was purchased by the French club Olympique Lyonnais in 2020 and subsequently rebranded into OL Reign. Again, this came with a changed identity as not only the club name, but also the crest was changed as part of this process to fit into the Lyonnais brand.

Overall, it can be said that football business has moved on from the early days when the women's game may have been a perceived threat. In most cases, it is now possible to

speak of a symbiosis – a mutually beneficial relationship – between the men's and the women's teams. The women's team get access to a more professional infrastructure and a financial backing that takes the economic pressure off them. Meanwhile, the men's clubs get to position themselves in an emerging market in their sport. In the cases of FFC Frankfurt and Seattle Reign FC, they have added already established brands with existing supporters, history, and traditions to their portfolio. This is undoubtedly a more straightforward process than building a women's team from the ground up. However, this process also has significant implications for the way not only players, but more importantly also the fans identify with the football club. Module 3 of this course picks up on this topic in its discussion of fan and club relationships.

Exercise:
Do some research online: pick two women's football leagues that are the top divisions in their respective countries and look at the clubs that play in these leagues. How many of them are integrated clubs that are attached to a men's team? How many are independent?

Unit 1.2

1.2.1 How does one become a football fan? Socialisation and rational choice

In the previous unit, we have defined what a fan is and explored different types of football fans. Furthermore, we have learnt about the context in which women's football currently operates and the way this impacts spectator number and fan experiences. What remains is the question of why people start supporting a particular football club in the first place, and why they then remain spectators and fans of this club. The following unit is concerned with answering that question.

In his book *Fever Pitch*, the author Nick Hornby describes the ups and downs of his life as an Arsenal London fan with humour. He writes about his experience of becoming an Arsenal fan: "Few of us have chosen our clubs, they have simply been presented to us" (Hornby, 2000, p. 127). It seems like many football fans share this sentiment. To them, fandom is a state of being, not something that they consciously choose to do. However, becoming a fan is a more complex process than that, which social scientists have attempted to break down and explain. The process of entering a group or subculture is usually referred to as socialisation, a term shaped by Bourdieu (1984). In the case of football fandom, any potential future football fan is exposed to different spaces (which Bourdieu calls "fields") from a young age. These spaces can consist of family, friendship group, school, or the workplace, where they form social relations and acquire social capital. The term "capital" being more familiar as part of economic capital, social capital refers to the norms, customs, functions, and values that are acquired through social relationships. The acquisition of capital happens automatically whenever the individual enters a new field. The relationship between all these elements is referred to as one's habitus. If you wish to understand Bourdieu's theories in more detail, you can also watch this short video that includes a more visual explanation.

Source: Dr Cheryl Reynolds. (2013). *Bourdieu – simple explanation* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87BPL62wyyU&t=1s&ab_channel=DrCherylReynolds

Bourdieu's explanation of how one assumes a certain habitus and acquires social capital via navigating different fields illustrates how socialisation into a subculture like that of football fandom works. It seems simple to most fans – the club appears to have "simply been presented" to them when, it is actually a complex process of individual actions and choices that are influenced by spaces someone inhabited earlier in life, such as one's family or friendship group in school being fans of a specific football team.

However, not everybody is a childhood football supporter. Some fans support a different club from their parents, whilst others only start following football as adults. This means

that there must be other ways in which football clubs seemingly present themselves to their potential fans. This is relevant in women's football. As mentioned earlier, one of the most popular women's teams in the US – the Portland Thorns – was only founded in 2012, and yet they drew the highest attendance figures in 2021. Roose, Schäfer, and Schmidt-Lux (2014) suggest that ration choice theory provides another interesting explanation for how people become fans of something. The authors admit that initially, rationality and fandom may seem contradictory. After all, the word "fanatic" signifies that fans are extreme in their passion and admiration. However, Roose et al. (2014) argues that making a rational choice is not the same as making a conscious, deliberate choice. In this case, rational choice theory means that an individual has a certain number of elements to choose from, such as being able to choose from twelve teams in the US-based National Women's Soccer League, and then they will select the option that seems to have the greatest use or appeal to them. This means they could pick the team that is closest to them, or they could pick a club that has their favourite player from the national team under contract. The important aspect here is that while this is a rational choice, an individual may not be aware of it – and hence they have the feeling that the football club has simply been presented to them.

Exercise:
Think of your favourite pastime, activity, or hobby. Why are you enjoying it, and why did you start? Do you feel like you were socialised into it through a field you inhabited, or do you think it was a rational – though, perhaps, unconscious – choice?

1.2.2 What does being a football fan mean? Emotions and rituals as part of the fan experience

This section delves into the meaning that their status as a fan has to people's lives, as this is crucial to understanding what motivates them to not just become, but also remain fans of a football team.

Football fandom can be a very important and defining experience for those that participate in fan culture. Emotions clearly carry important meaning for social life and social activity, and this is especially true for sports fandom where most instances of consumption – that is following the broadcast of a match or attending in person – ends in an emotional experience, either a win or a loss. In the following section, we use the concept of emotions to explain why sports fandom has sometimes been compared to other formative activities like practising religion. Before we consider the connection of emotions and identity in fandom, we must understand what both terms mean in this context, especially as they are not always used in coherently in academia.

In the first section of this module, it was already established that one important common attribute that fans share is the emotional response to or experience of their object of fandom. In the *Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology*, Barbalet explains that emotions "are

best regarded as experiences of involvement. Social circumstance, expressive communication, and actor intentions are crucial to the genesis of emotional experience and its quality. Thus, emotions can be seen to underscore values, interests, and meanings in social life" (2006, p. 164). Emotions naturally are core to the experience of sports, as each competition results on a win or a loss. Moreover, research by Vallerand et al. (2008) finds that the positive passion associated with football fandom positively impacts on fans' quality of life while negative emotions, for example towards a rival team, can have a negative impact. This shows that the emotions experienced as a football fan are intense.

Throughout this course, we also repeatedly refer to the concept of identity. Identity is clear when applied to an individual and the way they construct their sense of self. However, this concept is more problematic when applied to collective identity – that means a shared identity in a group or a subculture like that of football fans. According to Giesen, collective identity is a concept which is "a notoriously complex and essentially fuzzy one" (2014, p. 3). However, he concludes as follows:

> But although social boundaries are contested and communities are constructed, there are striking similarities between personal and collective identities: The constitution has to be set by a *pouvoir constituant*, by a sovereign who has an enduring existence independent from the constitution. We cannot hold nations responsible for their history if we do not accept the idea of a transgenerational and transconstitutional collective identity. We would have no reason for solidarity beyond kinship ties, etc. (Giesen, 2014, p. 3)

Group identity is important to the football fan experience and football fan communities are a prime example of people feeling solidarity beyond family relations, friendship groups, and even workplaces or social class. Moreover, there are often visual markers that set the group apart from the others, and these can often be observed by outsiders as well. In fact, one could argue that this is especially true for football fans, and the only other group of people that is as easily identified by a non-member of the group are those wearing work or school uniforms. On match days, most fans wear at least one item of clothing associated with their club and even outside of matches, many fans wear scarves or shirts with a club logo on them. Küpper (2007), who supports the club Werder Bremen in Germany, admits that an enjoyable feature of a weekend trip to Bremen is being able to go out in the evening after the match, wearing a Werder Bremen shirt without being the odd one out for a change. Wearing clothing associated with the fan community seems invigorating for him, as he finds a sense of belonging that he does not always feel in other parts of his life.

The strong in-group identification and emotion associated with sports has occasionally been compared to that of religious groups (e.g., Goodger, 1985). In sports, people create

symbolic structures through the ritualistic practice and share collective emotions, akin to ways in which most people also practice religion. Through this practice, the football club becomes an almost sacred entity – which in turn can lead to group cohesion, stabilisation, and formation of group identity – forming a subculture that is distinctively set apart from the rest of society. Some of the rituals and practices that football fans engage in were discussed in the first section of this unit. However, there is no practice that is more akin to religious customs like church choirs or renditions of hymns than the collective singing of a club anthem before a match and after an important win – or sometimes even after a loss to show the team that the fans are still behind them. The emotion of singing is shared among all fans present – except for those in the away supporters' section, of course. The perhaps most famous example of this is Liverpool FC fans' rendition of "You'll Never Walk Alone", which you can watch in the following video – this version is from the 2019 Men's Champions League win over Tottenham Hotspur.

Source: BT Sport. (2019). *Goosebumps! Spine tingling rendition of You'll Never Walk Alone by Liverpool fans and players* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weec_jzudc8

Watching this video, the collective emotional experience of both players and fans can be observed through their body language. "You'll Never Walk Alone" is especially emotionally charged as the song is usually sung in dedication to the 97 Liverpool FC supporters that lost their lives at the Hillsborough stadium disaster and one additional fan that died later due to the injuries sustained on the day. That means, even when the song is sung after a win, it carries a subtext of a collective trauma that further unifies the community.

Based on these observations, we can conclude that the identification with a fan community can be a strong and a defining experience for an individual. In other words, for many football fans their fandom provides essential meaning to their lives and in some cases may even help them overcome a collective trauma. This mirrors the way in which other people may turn to religion to provide them with a community and a meaningful purpose. This further explains why football fans cannot be seen as traditional types of consumers that do not feel the same kind of emotion attached to a product or service that they purchase.

Exercise

This is a reflective exercise: Think about groups and communities that you are part of – there is probably more than one and can range from family to hobbies like sports or music and cultural groups, including a church or a place where you volunteer. Describe how each group influenced or changed your life and therefore became a part of your identity in one or two sentences.

1.2.3. The national team and national identity as a way into football fandom

Motivation, emotion, and identity in football fandom are often also tied to geographical context. The most obvious example of this is the support of one's own national team during major sports events, where support of the national team can encourage feelings of national identity among the general population. Schiller (2015) discusses this in optimistic terms, when he reflects on the support for the German national team, its post-WWIII successes, and Germany's experience hosting the 2006 Men's World Cup. He argues that football has facilitated the emergence of a more positive, inclusive patriotism through its appeal to a wider population in Germany. Germans swept up in the hype that was created around the national team's participation in major events – especially after the 2006 World Cup saw the emergence of a young, multicultural team that featured several players with roots in other countries. At the same time, the German national team can also provide Germany with healthy reasons for being proud of their country and their nationality, despite the dark past. The importance of national identity in football fandom is also further explored in module 2 of this course, when we look at the question of how fan communities are formed and strengthened. Interestingly, ethnic or national identity is not only relevant in national team fandom, but sometimes specific football clubs and their fan cultures are also associated with (geo-)political movements. A very famous example of this are two major men's teams in Glasgow and in Scotland, where Celtic is considered a club for Irish-Catholic supporters and the Rangers in Glasgow for British-Protestant people. FC Barcelona and its positioning in the movement for Catalan independence is another excellent example of a football club fandom being associated with national identity (see module 2 for a more in-depth exploration of this example).

National identity and pride, patriotism, and simply being swept up in the hype that is created around a sports mega event are all reasons why people start following their national football teams. However, following a national team can also provide a gateway to watching a local team – and something like this is an especially important factor in women's football. Dunn (2016) looks at the impact of the 2015 Women's World Cup, where her home country, England, exceeded expectations and the media coverage of English women's football rose exponentially. Dunn (2016) finds that this subsequently also had a positive impact on attendances for the remaining fixtures of the women's domestic season after the team's return to England. In other words, some people that start following the national team due to a sense of national identity and the hype that is created during major sports events like the Olympics or a World Cup, may then become more interested in this sport in general and choose a local team to watch on a more regular basis. Thinking back to the ways someone becomes a football fan that were discussed in the earlier section, this is an excellent example of how both socialisation and rational choice theory can explain how an individual becomes a fan. It is possible to argue that following the national team in this case happens through the process of socialisation as it was defined in the first unit of this module. To put this into a practical example: if a person identifies as English, and they witness the public hype around the Lionesses' success during a major event like the 2015 World Cup, which is also reflected in one or

several of the social spaces they occupy like school and their family (which Bourdieu referred to as "fields"), then they are more likely to start following the team as well. They assume the habitus of a football fan, which they socialised into by their environment. However, international fixtures only take place on an irregular basis. This means that, after the World Cup is over, this person may turn to the WSL to continue and follow the players that they became fans of during the World Cup. This latter process is then an excellent example of becoming a football fan through rational choice theory. The individual in question may not even consciously choose to become a fan of a local club, but from their perspective, it is still a rational choice. They enjoyed watching the World Cup, so they want to continue watching football regularly. The best way to do so is to pick a local club to follow. This explains why attendance figures in the WSL climbed after the national team's unexpected success in 2015. There remains the question of how this can be turned into stable, long-term attendance. As the figures presented in section 3.1.3 this seems to work a little better in England than in other European countries, but spectator retention is still an issue for many women's clubs. This is a topic that will be picked up again in modules 3 and 4 of this course.

1.2.4 Football fandom and local identity

If following the national team comes with a strengthening of national identity and patriotism, then it can be expected that following a local club can also strengthen identification with and ties to the local community or region.

Crolley and Hand (2002) explain that local football clubs "symbolize a territory, the real or imagined values of which they are expected to convey"(p. 77). These local values and the identity of football teams and their fan cultures tend to be more clear-cut in cities that only have one football club. For example, if you are a Geordie, then you are most likely to grow up supporting Newcastle United – as you have been socialised into it from a young age. Often different cities or regions are associated with different socio-political values, and these will be incorporated into the local football fan culture. This can also be a determining factor in rivalries that are formed with clubs from other cities. Williams (2001) offers interesting insight into this in his study of fanzines[1] associated with Liverpool FC. Liverpool's fanzines typically discuss media coverage of Manchester United rather than just that of their club. This

> reflects something deeper about the city's character and conscious 'separateness' during recent hard times, when it has been such a focal point for the effects of damaging shifts in economic and industrial trends and policies – which have been much less powerfully felt in Manchester. (Williams, 2001, p. 120)

[1] Fanzines are magazines written and published by football fans for football fans.

In opposition to Manchester United, Liverpool has traditionally positioned itself as a club for the working class, reflecting the socio-economic background of many of the city's inhabitants and club fans.

This process is a lot less straightforward in cities that have more than one major football club. A prime example of this is Manchester in England. Both Manchester City and Manchester United have a men's and a women's football team. At least in the case of the men's teams, which have been around for longer, there is a long-standing rivalry between the two clubs. Writing at a time before Manchester City was purchased by the Abu Dhabi United Group and became one of the wealthiest football clubs in the world, Brown (2004) notes that the two football clubs also represent starkly contrasting values that further enhance the conflict. The financial and sporting struggle of Manchester City and its location in the centre of Manchester made it the more obviously local choice, while United had been a global brand for many years and is technically located in the town of Stretford. Again, Manchester United is considered to be the club that comes from money and is therefore more appealing to those with money. This resulted in the argumentation that United supporters are "southern, globally located" rather than "local, northern" (Brown, 2004, p. 181). Although Manchester City is now in an economically more viable situation, this image has not worn off yet and the rivalry between the clubs as well as associated values with both clubs remain. Furthermore, Bale (2000) argues that the communities that identify with a club are not necessarily always determined by geographic boundaries, but are determined by questions of identity. An example of this is the division between the fans of Celtic and Rangers in Glasgow, which were already mentioned in the previous section. Although the homes of the two clubs are only about five miles apart from each other in the same city, they are associated with different ethnic and religious identities and corresponding values.

Again, the focus of existing academic literature lies heavily on examining the local identity and rivalry of men's football clubs and, unfortunately, the literature on women's football clubs in the same context are practically non-existent at the time of writing. However, the concepts of national and local identity and values within the context of fandom will be a recurring theme throughout the next three modules of this course. This is a strong indicator that these parameters are not exclusive to fan cultures of men's teams, but are also essential to experience of women's football fandom.

Exercise
Think of the city or the region you are from or a different city that you know well. Are there any specific values associated with this region? What about the local football club(s)? Are they engaged in the local community? Do they perhaps reflect some of the values in their actions or in their marketing?

This module has defined what a football fan is and how fans are distinguished from consumers or more casual spectators. It has been highlighted that there are several

reasons why someone becomes a football fan. The motivation to stay a fan is strongly linked to identity, be it a national identity, the identification with local values or simply the fact that participating in a football fan culture provides an individual with a sense of community and purpose. The next three modules put these findings into context by exploring fan communities and fan-club-relationships in women's football.

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