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Jayne Caudwell

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## Gender, feminism and football studies

Jayne Caudwell\*

*University of Brighton, Eastbourne, UK*

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

### Introduction

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

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

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

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\*Email: J.C.Caudwell@brighton.ac.uk

Newell's self-confessed sexist comments continued to resonate when, on 9 February 2010, Amy Fern (nee Rayner) actually refereed Coventry City versus Nottingham Forest men's game for 20 minutes because the male referee suffered an injury. This time the media were the perpetrators of the sexism. *The Sun* newspaper<sup>4</sup> ran the headline 'Can Women Referee Men's Footie?' And the caption 'Oi, Ref! Are You Blonde?'. The article goes on to consider the first question and provides responses from two individuals – a woman and a man. In answering, Wendy Toms (the Premier League's first woman assistant referee) argues 'yes' women can referee men's football and Perry Groves (former Arsenal player) claims 'no' they can't. Groves' answer is accompanied by a litany of sexist rationale, including 'would women refs be banned during their "time of the month" because they might be more emotional, depressed or aggressive?' and 'a female commentator was tried out on *Match of the Day*. She knew her stuff but didn't sound right'. Needless-to-say the FA does not endorse such remarks and men who have made similar comments have paid a price: Newell was fined £6500 and made to apologize publicly.

Sexism and misogyny are also enduring and common occurrences within football-fan cultures, and Jones' research findings<sup>5</sup> illustrate the extent and nature of sexist commentary evident on fan Internet sites and sexist verbal abuse at live games. Sexism and misogyny are very sharp and chilling reminders that gendered social relations remain significant influencing forces in society and in football contexts.

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

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

### Gender and football studies

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

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

differences between women and men (e.g. the many forms we fill in often request 'gender' with the options being 'female' or 'male'). For those individuals who are more interested in a critical reading of the social world and who take heed of the feminists' advocacy – espoused during late 1960s and 1970s – that there is a distinction between sex and gender, gender tends to be understood as socially constructed and produced. Having said that, it remains that within certain circles gender provides a mere descriptor for the socially constructed and produced differences between men and women or between women and women, and/or men and men.

For the various strands of feminism that have developed in the Western world, gender has deep political meanings. Probably one of the most notable examples of this is the emphasis on the sex–gender distinction within a liberal politics for equality.<sup>7</sup> Over the past 120 years or so, liberal feminists in the USA and Western Europe have successfully challenged and transformed aspects of these societies through a reformist political agenda. Young makes the point that feminist appropriations of the sex–gender distinction 'were very theoretically and politically productive'.<sup>8</sup>

By demonstrating that biology is not destiny<sup>9</sup> and that, in fact, it is socialization that is the cause of women's lack of opportunities, liberal feminism has achieved on many fronts. This social and legal reform has meant that a younger generation of women *and men*, in the Western world, are more able to consider themselves as equals and this has helped young women and girls take up sports, such as football, in the UK.

It is important to note at this juncture that despite liberal intentions to seek collective reform, the gains made by this type of feminism tended to favour white women from predominantly middle-class backgrounds. Having said that, football in the UK is renowned for its working-class history and culture, and there is some evidence that minority ethnic women have successfully taken up the game. In fact, one of the most successful women in UK football to date is Hope Powell (OBE).

Powell has many achievements, at elite levels, as a player and as a coach. She made 66 playing appearances for England (between the early 1980s and mid 1990s) and has been manager of the international senior squad since 1998. Recently, she led the England team to the European Cup Final in Finland in 2009. As a UEFA (Union of European Football Association) pro-licence coach it is possible for her to coach men's professional football. In an interesting twist to the tale of Mike Newell's outspoken sexism, it was rumoured, by the football media, that Powell might be considered for the management position left after Newell's sacking by Grimsby Town.<sup>10</sup> In the end, the rumours were unfounded and the caretaker manager – Neil Woods – took the job.

The example of Hope Powell, which highlights success and potential successes for black women, does not necessarily signify the smooth inclusion of women and/or minority ethnic groups into elitist football cultures. However, as King makes the point,<sup>11</sup> Powell is an interesting case, especially since there are very few black male equivalents in the men's game. Paul Ince, who was sacked at the end of 2008, after only six months in his Premier League job, and the late Keith Alexander (died 2 March 2010), remain the only two examples of black managers, to date, in elite men's football.

Existing work on gender and football has rightly celebrated women's successes, and documented these occasions alongside the many struggles they have endured. In this work, gender is commonly regarded from a liberal perspective as a social relation to power. Within this relational dynamic, it is men and boys who dominate privileged positions in the game and the entitlement to these opportunities. This dominance is

exposed and criticized, by liberal feminists, as being taken for granted as a ‘naturally’ occurring phenomenon. Within the sociocultural processes that normalize men’s and boys’ involvement, women are placed as the ‘other’<sup>12</sup>. In such a binary, one group is dominant as they secure more power than the ‘other’. Returning to Hope Powell, and remaining mindful of the media treatment of Amy Fern (nee Rayner), it is interesting that *The Telegraph* ran the headline – ‘No Hope of Powell becoming Grimsby’s Gaffa’<sup>13</sup>. The ‘no-hope’ caption suggests some of the furore that might ensue if she were to secure employment in the men’s professional game. It is likely that her management of a men’s team would receive constant critical scrutiny because she is a black woman: she is the ‘other’.

A critical approach to gender, from a liberal perspective, is disparaging of gender relations that sustain inequitable social arrangements between men and women. Without doubt, during the relatively short history of the game (in the UK the game has developed during a period of industrialization, modernization and modernity, which reflects approximately 150 years), girls and women have struggled against sexism, misogyny and gendered stereotypes to be recognized as serious participants and legitimate members of its many cultures. However, there are signs of change and Hong and Mangan demonstrate this in their important collection of articles ‘Soccer, Women, Sexual liberation. Kicking Off a New Era’ published as a special issue of *Soccer & Society* in 2003. The 15 contributions included in the special issue reveal the ways the contemporary arrangements, around the world, that govern women’s playing opportunities, fare better than previously.

Many of the articles share similar concerns – although the contexts are different – and provide documented histories of women footballers’ participation, for example, histories of the emergence of teams, competitions and leagues. The circumstances vary in the 16 countries covered (including Brazil, China, India, Senegal, Nigeria and South Africa)<sup>14</sup> and these variations depend on the histories of when women took up playing and the responses, by those governing and controlling the game, to their involvement. Some countries have experienced ‘golden years’ when women’s participation appears relatively trouble-free.<sup>15</sup> However, these periods can fit a pattern of ‘rise and fall’ in some countries.<sup>16</sup> In most countries, despite the evidence of the increasing numbers of players, the Hong and Mangan collection highlights that women continue to face resistance to their active participation.<sup>17</sup> This is most apparent in how playing opportunities for women lack financial resourcing and positive sociocultural support.

In a later publication (2007), Magee *et al.*<sup>18</sup> present a range of work on *Women, Football and Europe: Histories, Equity and Experiences*. This book continues to chart the struggles, for women, throughout the game’s development, in some European countries, including England,<sup>19</sup> France,<sup>20</sup> Norway,<sup>21</sup> Scotland<sup>22</sup> and Spain.<sup>23</sup> As with the Hong and Mangan collection, the focus tends to remain on gender relations. In addition, there are three chapters that individually introduce and address whiteness,<sup>24</sup> ethnicity<sup>25</sup> and sexuality.<sup>26</sup> In these chapters, ‘race’, ethnicity and sexuality are linked to gender relations and, as a result, are shown to be strong influences on active involvement in the game. In other words, racism and homophobia as well as sexism (and misogyny) in football contexts are exposed as exclusionary for women players.

More recent articles in *Soccer & Society* in 2009 and 2010 also aim to make visible the ways gender is interconnected with ethnicity. For example the work of Palmer on young refugee women, ethnicity and religion, and Pelak’s study of South African women players’ increasing participation (1970 to present) and the impact of the combining social forces of gender, ‘race’ and class on this participation.

This emerging emphasis on particular groups of women and the diversity between women reflects the schisms evident in feminist thinking. To rally behind a 'category of woman' effectively reduces all women to one universalized unit. It also promotes the mistaken belief that there is solidarity between women and that they form a collective. What is apparent, however, is that not all women share the same social location or gendered identity and therefore, we cannot view women as a unitary group. Aspects of the liberal approach to gender are problematic when we realize that there are other social signifiers and markers, such as class, ethnicity, 'race', whiteness, sexuality, heteronormativity and disability, which differently position women. With this realization, the reliance on the transformative power of a shared-identity politics (based solely on gender) is tricky. 'Gender', therefore, must also be understood in relation to difference and non-shared gendered identities. Consequently, women are not only oppressed by men, male dominance, patriarchy and phallogocentrism, they may also be oppressed by other women. For example, the operation of racism, homophobia and able-bodiedness towards women at individual, institutional and structural levels can play out through intricate processes that also implicate women.

Lloyd captures these particular ruptures in feminist thinking and praxis – the shifts from sameness to difference – in her discussions on reform, emancipation, diversity and difference feminism.<sup>27</sup> However, despite seemingly rejecting shared-identity politics, some diversity feminists retain a hold on identity and the materiality of the body, and continue to rely on identity politics (for example, some black British feminists and some lesbian feminists), while other diversity feminists have turned to how these differences are formed. The latter reflects a turn to the concept of subjectivity, instead of identity, and this involves the centrality of language and discourse in subject formation. This emphasis on deconstructing subject formation and scrutinizing the ways in which the individual subject comes into being have meant that this group of feminists are often referred to as deconstruction feminists, as opposed to diversity feminists.<sup>28</sup> For deconstruction feminists (including poststructuralist feminists), their concern is the discursive formations of, for example, sex, gender and the body.<sup>29</sup> In the context of football studies, this approach to gender and how the construction of femininity and masculinity, through football language and football discourses, impact on participation indicates an engagement with gender theorists such as Judith Butler and the 'category of gender'.<sup>30</sup>

The significant shifts in feminist thinking over the past four to five decades reflect the many internal debates within feminism and the changing approaches to the concept 'gender'. McRobbie<sup>31</sup> suggests that: '... what feminism actually means varies, literally, from one self-declared feminist to the next, but this does not reduce its field of potential influence, quite the opposite'. Because of the ruptures within feminism, it is possible to speak of *feminisms* and Birrell,<sup>32</sup> in her review of sport feminist theory, argues that the varied and extensive discussions within feminist thinking are what give feminism its rigour, strength and depth of analysis.

Rather simplistically, some writers have interpreted these increasingly different approaches within feminism not as nuanced and developing arguments, but rather as delineating stages of development, progression and a clear-cut divide between the second and a so-called third wave of feminism.<sup>33</sup> However, such a modernist and linear approach to explaining these tensions and conflicts has been exposed as superficial, inaccurate and of limited usefulness<sup>34</sup> because it does not reflect the complexities of the second-wave era and the post-second-wave era (including the influences of poststructuralism, postmodernism and postfeminism).



The idea of a third wave of feminism has also been exposed for lacking a critical engagement with the nature of contemporary neoliberal politics (of both the New Left and the New Right). Genz<sup>35</sup> hints at the strong associations between neoliberal politics and third-wave feminism in her aptly titled article *Third Way/ve. The Politics of Postfeminism*. She links third-wave feminism with Third Way politics introduced by UK New Labour – in the late 1990s and early 2000s – simultaneously connecting third-wave feminism with postfeminism. For me, the associations highlight the need to question the political content of a third wave of feminism.

### **Feminisms and football studies**

The multiplicity of feminism, as we have seen, is easily relatable to football and women's involvement in the game. Increased access and opportunity to football by women and girls generally, and specifically in the UK, evidences the impact of a transformative politics associated with a liberal feminist agenda. The anti-racism and anti-homophobia campaigns evident in UK football policy and practice<sup>36</sup> indicate the increasing rights of different groups of women, including disabled women, lesbians, bisexual women, and black and South Asian women.

However, important issues remain to be explored. For example, studies of football in educational settings,<sup>37</sup> especially studies of informal play in school playgrounds,<sup>38</sup> suggest that girls continue to be excluded from dominant versions of the game. Three decades after the *Theresa Bennett v FA* court case (1978) – when the parents of Theresa took the FA to court for banning their 12-year-old daughter from playing in a boys' local league – young girls continue to struggle against opposition to their active involvement in hegemonic football cultures.

Governing bodies such as the FA and Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) remain stubborn in their efforts to keep football (men's football) and women's football separate. This desire to keep men and women separate was made very clear at the end of 2004. FIFA banned Maribel Dominguez (a Mexican woman who accepted a two-year playing contract with a second division men's professional club; Celaya) from playing in the men's professional league. The ban was immediate and within a few days of her accepting her contract with the club. In fact, FIFA held an emergency meeting to deal with this inaugural event, after which they issued the statement: 'There must be a clear separation between men's and women's football.'<sup>39</sup> Frustratingly, FIFA's pithy statement reflects an absolute ruling and does not provide any rationale for the blanket decision – or, apparently, any recourse.

And yet, the same governing bodies are keen to be seen promoting girls' and women's competitive football at local, national and international levels, that is, as long as women and girls' participation is distinct from men's competitive and men's elite football performances. In many ways, these governing bodies aim to differentiate not only women from men, but also femininity from masculinity. Sepp Blatter's (FIFA) now notorious statement 'the future of football is feminine' made at the closing of the 1999 Women's World Cup, signals the type of female footballer FIFA prefer: femininity is foremost. Rather ironically, this statement, and stance, coincided with the Brandi Chastain incident.

After the USA beat China, in a penalty shoot-out (5–4) in the final of the 1999 World Cup, Chastain, the ultimate goal scorer, sunk to her knees, ripped off her playing shirt and held it in clenched fists above her head. This pose, one that commonly denotes the pleasures of victory, was captured by a global media similarly

keen to frame women's football as 'feminine'. The media ignored the numerous photo opportunities apparent within the one-and-a-half hour final game *and* the nine-goal penalty shoot-out. Instead, Chastain and her Nike-crested chest were framed and produced as the epitome of the event. The media exposed Chastain and not the enormity of the footballing occasion. This exposure was done in a way that would partially satisfy the often-chanted requests of male fans. That is the commonly sung request by male fans and directed at women attending live games to 'get your tits out'.<sup>40</sup> Young's arguments become relevant here: 'Breasts are the most visible sign of a woman's femininity...'<sup>41</sup> Chastain, and her breasts, subsequently, became an iconic<sup>42</sup> – and obviously feminine – figure for football and for the future of football.

Feminists have critically analysed Western femininity and the ways this dominant femininity is produced and reproduced. For some traditional feminists,<sup>43</sup> 'femininity' is the root cause of women's subordination. This is because femininity is understood as patriarchally informed and patriarchally imposed and therefore constraining and oppressive. In addition, contemporary feminists who oppose the postfeminist movement argue that popular cultural media forms, including film, TV, advertising and magazines, are effectively re-centring 'both heterosexuality and whiteness, as well as fetishising a young, able-bodied, "fit" (understood as both healthy, and in its more contemporary sense as "attractive") female body'.<sup>44</sup>

As Genz<sup>45</sup> highlights, 'femininity' implicates dominant discourses of whiteness and heterosexuality. She makes the point that by conforming to normative femininity, many white Western women have made substantial gains in social as well as economic and political power. Such gains in power have been variously debated within feminism as reflecting sexual objectification or sexual subjectivity and white-female agency.<sup>46</sup> Feminist thinking on ideas of 'femininity' is divided and similar to feminist debate surrounding gender; feminist points of view on the meanings of contemporary femininities remain contested.

As with the changing and increasing opportunities for women and girls to participate in UK football cultures, footballing femininities have also metamorphosed. These changes and developing emphases on femininity must be understood in the context of the image of the women's game<sup>47</sup> and the imagined omnipresence of female masculinity.<sup>48</sup> Women, masculinity and football are readily elided and because of these slippages efforts are made to contain the stereotype of the mannish/butch female footballer. As I have highlighted above in relation to FIFA, Maribel Dominguez, Sepp Blatter and Brandi Chastain, there have been various practices to counter the signs of female masculinity. Mobilizing footballing femininity is one way to achieve this, and an aspect of UK football culture where a contemporary femininity is very visibly mobilized, and therefore provides an exemplar for critical analysis, is the merchandise aimed at women and girls who are interested in the game.

A self-proclaimed popular brand of football clothing and attire for girls and women was *footie chick*.<sup>49</sup> Their mission statement as it appeared on their website is as follows: 'Its (*sic*) simple ... to be the leading brand for female followers of football whether they watch, play or dream the game!'. In addition, the *footie chick* website provided interested and potential consumers with the following information about their football clothing and brand:

#### **About Footie Chick**

Passionate about both football and clothing, Footie Chick was set up in July 2002 to become the leading sports fashion brand for female followers of football around the world.



With this vision in mind Footie Chick was born. Footie Chick is the fun, funky girl that lies within every female footie fan! She has a zest for life, a longing for fun and is up for tackling her male counterpart – on the pitch, in the stands or in the pub! And, sometimes she may even have the cheek of the devil!

The driving force of the Footie Chick team together with the visionary Footie Chick brand has taken the female football market by storm. Growth and market penetration over the recent years have been phenomenal.

### The Footie Chick Brand

Footie chick is a fashion sportswear brand, aimed at females who are funky, fashionable and maybe even a little football mad! The brand and range has been developed to reflect the style and outlook of today's female football fans.<sup>50</sup>

Footie Chick made use of quotations from women players. Some of these women play at national and international level in England and consequently may have appeared to girls and young women who visited the website as role models. The trademark icon that accompanied the written text is a silhouetted, Charlie's Angels-type, very slim woman with her hands on her hips. The language of the website, as is evident from the above information and the rotating quotations, relied on interpellations of femaleness (the word 'chick' and the use of the colour pink on both the website and for the clothing), youthfulness (represented through references to funky, fashionable and fun) and success (of both female followers of football and the company *footie chick*). The clothing, including playing strips, training kit and casual wear, was available to clubs, teams and individuals. This range of clothing product, for instance there are *footie chick* pyjama sets, aimed to encourage girls and women to be *footie chicks* both on and off the football pitch. Despite the largely on-line retail transactions, the company also appeared at major events: for example, they had a stall at some of the Women's European Cup 2005 games hosted in the north east of England.

'Today's female football fans' are being encouraged, through conspicuous consumption, to embody football and femininity. As Gill makes the point, 'femininity is a bodily property'.<sup>51</sup> Women and girls' bodies become potential sites and sights for the adornment of feminine football attire and concomitantly the display of femininity. In this way, the *footie chick* footballing body is an emerging embodied femininity. The *footie chick* femininity is delicately laced with a new type of sexiness and suggests a heterosexualizing of women's football culture. This form of sexualization is less overt compared with 'the "Joan Tench" affair'. It is, in effect, concealed within neoliberal discourses of individual choice and individual empowerment and fits within a broader sexualization of culture<sup>52</sup> in Western countries.

The tenets of individual choice and individual empowerment, which encourage an emphasis on tenacity and taking control and/or responsibility, are evident when we consider women footballers and nudity. In 1999, women playing for the Australian national team posed naked for a nude-calendar: *Matildas – A New Fashion in Football*. The calendar was produced and sold to help augment both the funds for, and the profile of, the team's imminent 1999–2000 playing season and especially for their participation in the Sydney Olympics.<sup>53</sup> The emphasis on 'a new fashion in football' is haunted by the previous discussion on the future of the game and the sexualized commodification of the figure of the female footballer. The Australian team are not alone in their efforts to seek attention and funding through nude displays of their bodies. In 2003, Dutch football players were rumoured to be a part of a group of

sportswomen appearing naked to raise funds through a pay-per-view website. And more recently, in 2009, four players from the French national team, again frustrated with lack of media coverage for European Cup in Finland (2009), ‘stripped to draw the attention of the public’.<sup>54</sup> At club level, players have also appeared in various states of undress. In 2007, women from one of the leading Spanish teams posed completely naked (except the goalkeeper who wore gloves) in a picture – that depicted a goal area, a goalkeeper, a six-woman defensive wall and a direct free kick – to acquire money to supplement their meagre earnings.<sup>55</sup> And, local-league teams in Italy (Valencia) and England (Redditch)<sup>56</sup> have produced nude-calendars for 2010 in an attempt to increase funds for their clubs.

These women footballers’ decisions to appear nude and/or semi-nude are based on their desire to increase public awareness, boost media coverage and enhance their own and their teams’ financial standing. In this way, they are addressing the prevailing and common conditions evident in football culture; women and girls get a fraction of financial resourcing and limited positive sociocultural support compared with their male counterparts. However, appearing naked to challenge these conditions is a contentious resolution.

Gill argues that women and girls are no longer sexual objects in a traditional sense; that is, they are not presented as mute and passive. Instead they are ‘presented as active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so’.<sup>57</sup> In her critical analysis of the proliferation of a contemporary feminine sexiness, she draws on Radner’s term ‘technology of sexiness’.<sup>58</sup> The reference to ‘technology’ invokes Foucauldian theory, which identifies and explains governmentality and the ways individuals begin to govern (self-surveillance) and discipline (self-discipline) themselves (technologies of the self). The term ‘technologies of sexiness’ captures the complicated ways dominant forms of femininity and sexual subjectivity are produced and regulated, and how these dominant versions, with their basis in white–heterosexual femininity, persist in Western cultures. Gill identifies strong relationships between technologies of sexiness, individualism and neoliberalism. She concludes that femininity and embodied femininity remain problematic constructs in contemporary popular culture.<sup>59</sup>

Other feminist writers also draw our attention to neoliberal ideology, femininity and, in addition, resurgent patriarchy.<sup>60</sup> Renold and Ringrose, in accordance with McRobbie, argue that resurgent patriarchy re-orders Butler’s heterosexual matrix in new, but nevertheless heteronormative, ways. Implicit to Butler’s matrix is heteronormative hegemony. Heteronormativity is an exclusionary system, which rejects certain bodies as not ‘viable’ and not ‘legitimate’.<sup>61</sup> For Butler, these excluded bodies are positioned as abject because they fail to conform to compulsory sex–gender–desire norms. Lesbian footballing bodies have traditionally been positioned as abject and therefore excluded. As an aside, to date, there are no self-identified ‘out and proud’ elite players and/or officials (female or male) in UK football cultures. The exclusionary nature of heteronormativity, coupled with a resurgent patriarchy, means that exclusions continue and are, arguably, more covert and obdurate.

Observing the promotional posters for the England women’s international side indicates this kind of privileging of heteronormative bodies. Certain players are selected and these individuals receive the obligatory ‘feminine’ makeover. Katie Chapman, a white player with blond hair and mother of two sons, is usually one of these players. If England qualify for the play-offs later this year (2010) and make it to

the 2011 FIFA World Cup – to be held in Germany – which players will be picked to pose for the photographer? And how can this be interpreted by a broad feminist political agenda, which now stretches across the various categories of ‘woman’, ‘gender’ and ‘femininities’?

### Concluding commentary

In this article, I have introduced gender, feminism and football in an effort to make complex our approach to critical analyses of football cultures. As the gender project within football studies gains momentum, it is important that we stay in tune with the internal debates within broader reaches of feminism and apply these debates to the changing nature of women and girls’ relationships to the game. I have made the point that a traditional liberal feminist agenda is no longer sufficient for an extensive investigation of gender in UK football cultures. Having made this point, I also recognize the significance of existing contributions from this perspective. The shift to feminist gender theorists and the ‘category of gender’ would not have been possible without the substrate of a developed and coherent liberal agenda and the ‘category of woman’.

Much of the current work on women/girls and football, as is evidenced in this special issue, reflects this move away from a traditional liberal agenda and a move towards post-second-wave theorizing and the concomitant turn to difference, diversity and deconstruction. In the articles that follow, and as I have mentioned in the introductory article, the authors provide a range of contemporary feminist analyses. Fielding-Lloyd and Meán deconstruct the language used in football coach education to provide insights into how gender is produced in this context. Welford details the different strategies adopted by different women volunteering at football clubs. Ratna explores the intersections of ethnicity and gender. She also inserts a post-colonial politics into the football studies’ feminist agenda. Jeanes makes direct use of Butler’s heterosexual matrix and Drury draws from a broader poststructuralist and queer feminist agenda. Ahmad centres the experiences of Muslim women footballers and, like Ratna, she offers further important challenge to white Western accounts of the game. Stride and Fitzgerald provide an invaluable and much needed introduction to football provision and practice for girls with learning disabilities. This last contribution is one of a few examples – in both feminist sport studies and football studies – of research on gender and disability.

In this article, I have attended to some themes not apparent in the rest of the issue. Given the increasing participation of girls and women in competitive football cultures, I raise the controversial question: why should women’s and men’s football be kept separate? Some feminist work has been conducted within educational settings and children’s football cultures, which can help explore this theme further.<sup>62</sup> However, to date, nothing exists that analyses the spatiality of gender and sexuality in the competitive arena, and/or how discourses of normative gender and sexuality help propel this footballing binary. We have not asked the question – what is it about sociocultural understandings of women’s and men’s footballing bodies that mean it is impossible for them to appear – officially – on the same field of play?

It is likely that players such as Maribel Dominguez will emerge in the future. For how many more years can footballs’ governing bodies insist on the separation of ‘men’s football’ and ‘women’s football’? More importantly, why do they do so? And whom does it benefit? Dominguez lost a two-year playing contract and the privileges that go with earning a professional footballer’s salary.

In relation to this point, I highlight how the formal discourses within football governance and football media additionally insist on clear boundaries between men and masculinity, and women and femininity. Through this train of thought, I introduce feminist debate surrounding contemporary versions of heterosexualized femininity. Emerging footballing femininities (e.g. *footie chick* and promotional posters for national and international events) have received scant attention to date. By contrast, there are numerous recent feminist contributions<sup>63</sup> that explore the ways contemporary femininities are being articulated in troublesome ways and ‘the spectacular dimension of this visibility’.<sup>64</sup> Currently, we are aware that normative femininity reduces and restricts women’s relationships with football. However, the impact on football cultures in the UK of a popular cultural emphasis on ‘...a more glamorised and individualised feminine subjectivity’<sup>65</sup> and what Gill describes as the ‘makeover takeover’, remains largely under-theorized. For example, how do the powerful influences of the fashion-and-beauty complex further reify hegemonic whiteness, hegemonic heterosexuality and able-bodiness in football cultures?

The embodiment of sexualized footballing femininities is epitomized in the small flurry of nude-calendars. The point is that women footballers are reduced to their naked bodies – which is an enduring theme from feminist points of view – in an attempt to change conditions (publicity and funding) for their international, national and local teams. The interesting questions here involve an eye on neoliberal politics and the extent to which individuals are expected to improve their own circumstances regardless of broader societal inequalities. In many ways, nude-calendars, as a quest to improve footballing conditions, perfectly match the aims of footballing agencies. International, national and local clubs raise their own funds and public profile, and simultaneously promote the game as feminine *and* sexy.

Radner’s ‘technologies of sexiness’ provides a theoretically informed way to explore the debates surrounding women’s bodies, women’s sexual objectification and women’s sexual subjectivity. Poststructuralist feminists have, for some time, adapted the work of Foucault to help explain the complexities of female agency and freedom of choice. ‘Technologies of sexiness’ is an extension on ‘technologies of the self’ and both indicate the disciplinary nature of, in this case, white Western sexiness. Women’s bodies in football contexts are on display in environments that are usually male-dominated. As Young makes the point, young women ‘internalise how they are supposed to appear to others.’<sup>66</sup> All women, to greater or lesser extents, are influenced by discourses of sexiness. The dominant versions of female sexiness are contingent on able-bodiness, ethnicity, ‘race’, sexuality, class and gender. Some women in football are able to reproduce these dominant discourses through an embodied feminine sexiness, most are not.

The prominence of sexy femininities within popular culture and a broader politics of neoliberalism, which promotes individualism, have an impact on both feminism and football. The impact on feminism has been discussed at length by feminists outside football studies. These discussions involve serious debate on the existence of postfeminism, postfemininities and so-called third-wave feminism. More generally, feminists such as McRobbie argue that the current climate has meant that instead of an overt and blatant backlash to feminism, feminism has been subsumed into cultural and political fields:

Elements of feminism have been taken into account, and have been absolutely incorporated into political and institutional life. Drawing on a vocabulary that includes words

like ‘empowerment’ and ‘choice’, these elements are then converted into a much more individualistic discourse, and they are deployed in this new guise, particularly in media and popular culture, but also by agencies of the state, as a kind of substitute for feminism.<sup>67</sup>

The blending of feminism and neoliberalism, which McRobbie describes above, has traces in football cultures and footballing agencies. The now extensive football media (including new media and the World Wide Web) and the global network of football governing bodies (international, national, regional and local) are significant institutions that help produce UK football cultures. To date, we know little about the ways they incorporate elements of feminism and how this affects women’s and girls’ involvement. For example, do the women working for the FA experience the ‘political and institutional life’ of the association as problematic?

In this article, I have focused on gender, feminism and football to offer a specific and critical contribution to football – soccer – studies. I have raised more questions than answers in the hope that this will inspire further work and therefore maintain the momentum of the feminist project in football studies. To help explain the range of feminist theory available for future research, I rely on a simple model of feminist categories (‘woman’, ‘gender’ and ‘femininities’). The point I wish to make is that it is important not to lose sight of the histories of feminist theoretical development and available modes of analysis. It is this depth and breadth that gives feminism its substantial critical edge.

## Notes

1. Lopez, *Women on the Ball*, 214.
2. Cited in Kempson and Smyth, ‘It’s a Football Leagues First’.
3. Cited in Ley, ‘FA to Investigate’.
4. *The Sun*, April 7, 2010.
5. Jones, ‘Female Fandom’.
6. Lloyd, *Judith Butler*, 30.
7. Woodward, and Woodward, *Why Feminism Matters*.
8. Young, *On Female Body Experience*.
9. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.
10. Wilson, *The Telegraph*, October 22, 2009; *The Guardian*, October 22, 2009.
11. See King, ‘Football in England’.
12. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.
13. Cited in Norrish, *The Telegraph*, October 22, 2009.
14. USA, Canada, China, India, Denmark, England, West Germany, Norway, Republic of Ireland, Sweden, New Zealand, Senegal, Nigeria and South Africa and Brazil.
15. USA and Canada in the mid to late 1990s, Norway late 1970s to 2000s.
16. China mid 1960s to mid 1970s and again in the late 1980s.
17. Korea, India and Africa.
18. Magee *et al.*, *Women, Football and Europe*.
19. Jeanes and Kay, ‘Can Football be a Female Game?’. Welford and Kay, ‘Negotiating Barriers to Entering and Participating in Football’.
20. Prudhomme-Poncet, ‘Les femmes, balle au pied’.
21. Skogvang, ‘The Historical Development of Women’s Football in Norway’.
22. Macbeth, ‘Women’s Football in Scotland’.
23. Soler-Prat, ‘How is Football Taught’. Goig, ‘Female Football Supporters’ Communities’.
24. King, ‘Football in England and the Gendered White Mask’.
25. Ratna, ‘A Fair Game?’.
26. Caudwell, ‘Hackney Women’s Football Club’.
27. Lloyd, *Judith Butler*.
28. *Ibid.*

29. Ibid.
30. See, for example, Caudwell, 'Sporting Gender'.
31. McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, 2.
32. Birrell, *Feminist Theories for Sport*.
33. See, for example, Heywood and Dworkin, *Built to Win*; Thorpe, 'Feminism for a New Generation'.
34. See, for example, Hemmings, 'Telling Feminist Stories'; McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*.
35. Genz, 'Third Way/ve'.
36. See, for example, the official Football Association (FA) website: TheFA.com under the topic 'Equity'.
37. Hills, 'Friendship, Physicality and Physical Education'; Renold, "'They Won't Let Us Play'"; Skelton, "'A Passion for Football'".
38. Clark and Paechter, 'Why Can't Girls Play Football?'; Swain, Jon. "'The Money's Good'".
39. Tuckman, 'It's Still a Man's Game'.
40. Jones, 'Female Fandom'.
41. Young, *On Female Body Experience*, 78.
42. Schultz, 'Discipline and Push-Up'.
43. See, for example, Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer.
44. Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture', 162.
45. Genz, *Postfemininities in Popular Culture*.
46. Ibid.
47. Harris, 'The Image Problem in Women's Football'.
48. Caudwell, 'Women's Football in United Kingdom'.
49. This company went into administration and no longer exists in its original form. Their website no longer appears on the World Wide Web.
50. Quoted text no longer available online, as explained in previous note.
51. Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture', 162.
52. Ibid.
53. [www.womensoccer.com](http://www.womensoccer.com)
54. <http://en.calcioalpallone.com>
55. [www.theoffside.com](http://www.theoffside.com)
56. [www.womenssoccerscene.co.uk](http://www.womenssoccerscene.co.uk)
57. Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture', 158.
58. Radner, 'Compulsory Sexuality'.
59. Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture'.
60. McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*; Renold and Ringrose, 'Regulation and Rupture'.
61. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*.
62. See, for example, Clarke and Paechter, 'Why Can't Girls Play Football?'; Hills, 'Friendship, Physicality and Physical Education'; Renold, "'The Won't Let Us Play'"; Skelton, 'A Passion for Football'; Swain, "'The Money's Good'".
63. See, for example, Genz, *Postfemininities in Popular Culture*; Gill, 'Postfeminist Media Culture'; McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminsim*; Radner, 'Compulsory Sexulaity'; Renold and Ringrose, 'Regulation and Rupture'; Woodward and Woodward, *Why Feminsim Matters*.
64. McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, 9.
65. Ibid., 10.
66. Cited in Woodward and Woodward, *Why Feminism Matters*, 150.
67. McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, 1.

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