

The Female Vikings, a women's fan group in Denmark: Formation and development in the context of football and fan histories

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Abstract

Traditionally, football and fandom have been male domains and celebrations of masculinity. So far there has been some sociological and historical research on women's football; however, little is known about women's fandom, in particular about its formation and development. This article focuses on the historical development of a Danish women-only fan group called "The Female Vikings," which supports a professional football club, Lyngby Boldklub, in a city north of Copenhagen. The paper explores the backgrounds and motivations of female fans, as well as their ways of staging femininity in a man's world. Drawing on available information about football and fans in Denmark, we have re-constructed the developments of both Lyngby BK and its supporters. Special focus was placed on the histories and cultures as well as the experiences of female fans in this club. Insights into the foundation of the women's fan group were provided by problem-centered interviews which also contained open questions. The foundation and activities of the Female Vikings show how women can do gender in the fan stands and how they play a significant role in the fan movement. The interviews also reveal the loyalty of the female fans during the club's "crisis" and their "collective memories".

Keywords: Football, female fans, Denmark, football history, fan narratives

Introduction – the gender of football players and fans

In recent decades, football has gained increasing importance in Europe and beyond. The game and the players have become a focus of public attention, and a growing number of consumers and fans follow football matches live and via the mass media. Football has not only become "big business" but also an asset in the lives of countless fans. It goes without saying that from its beginnings the game was a male domain: football was men's football; "women's football" is a latecomer and is considered to be a different game.¹ Men also dominate the fan stands in the stadiums and form a vast majority among football consumers. However, broadcasts of matches, telemeter data of football

coverage on TV, as well as stadium observations or in public viewing areas reveal that a considerable number of women are interested in football.² This impression is supported by available studies and statistics. The percentage of women among the crowds in European stadiums is between ten and thirty percent depending on the game, the stadium, and the country.³

Since its beginnings, football has attracted the interest of scholars who have explored the various aspects of the game with different approaches and from different perspectives. Football research in Europe focuses mostly on historical developments and current situations of the game; on training, tactics, techniques and performances of players; but also on club politics or economic issues.⁴ There is also scholarly interest in football fans, although a relatively large number of these studies focus on fan violence.⁵ Another focus of research is on consumption, i.e. the question of whether and how people can be encouraged to spend more money on football, e.g. by attending games in the stadium or by buying fan articles. In contrast, little is known about the history of fandom in general and in Denmark in particular, although it can be assumed that the multiple developments in the world of football (e.g. as a consequence of the Bosman ruling) and the “revolution” in football consumption and communication based on the internet have changed the habits and practices of fans decisively.⁶ A booklet about Danish fans based on personal experiences and interviews contains at least some information about historical developments in fandom.⁷ Several studies have explored the activities and practices of women in the fan stands and their strategies for surviving and even having fun in an environment dominated by “hardcore” male fans.⁸ Another focus of research has been on “women-only” fan groups, which started to emerge after the turn of the millennium. Such groups have been founded by female football supporters in Germany,⁹ Italy,¹⁰ Spain¹¹ or Austria.¹² The narratives and histories of these groups provide insights into their situations, strategies, and the ways in which their members stage femininity in a men’s world. Like football scholars in general, Scandinavian researchers consider it to be self-evident that football consumers and fans are boys and men. Therefore, information about the gender of their target groups is generally lacking in their publications.¹³

One of three recent studies on female fans in Denmark has shown that women are highly underrepresented among football consumers and fans in this country. Two articles that are based on information provided by interviews with fans reveal that there

are dedicated female supporters and that even two women-only fan clubs exist in the country.¹⁴ However, these articles focus mainly on the current activities of fans and do not provide in-depth insights into their formation; neither do they embed their development in a historical context.

One of these fan groups, the “Female Vikings” (FV), is the subject of this article. It was founded in 2001 by female members of the “Blue Vikings,” a fan club dominated by men. Both groups, the Female and the Blue Vikings, support Lyngby Boldklub, a football club located in Kongens Lyngby, a town twelve kilometers to the north of Copenhagen. The club currently plays in the second highest league in the countries, called “First Division”. The club’s specific history as well as the history of its fans plays a decisive role in the foundation and development of the FV. Drawing on various materials, including historical studies, debate forum entries, blogs, newspaper articles, and internet websites, as well as on the narratives of the founders and members, we reconstruct the origin, the development, and the present situation of the FV. The sources are analyzed and interpreted according to the state of the art; the findings are embedded in the socio-historical context. The main questions refer to the development of Lyngby BK, the emergence, development, and activities of its fans and the influence of the club’s history on its supporters. A special focus is on the foundation of the Female Vikings: their aims, motives and practices, as well as on the role of the group in the club’s history.

Theoretical considerations

Exploring fandom and understanding gender relations among fans demand theoretical approaches which can provide – at least preliminary – answers to questions such as: How and why do people develop a long and often lasting relationship to a football club? Why are women underrepresented among football supporters? What does it mean to be a female fan in an environment dominated by men? And, last but not least, how can research on fandom use historical perspectives?

Numerous studies show that an interest in watching football and supporting a team develops in the course of socialization processes and depends on a person’s social and physical environment.¹⁵ Many fans already develop their commitment to a football club

as children and youths, with male family members and friends serving as the most important “socialization agents.” As football is considered a men’s game, girls are often not expected to play or watch football. In the community of female peers, sporting activities are often not supported; at least they do not confer much prestige. Most girls name horse-riding, ballet, gymnastics, or swimming as their favorite sports.¹⁶ However, these priorities may change. In addition to socialization concepts, theoretical approaches to gender and “doing gender” help us to understand the preferences of boys and girls, women and men in doing and consuming sport.¹⁷ In Bourdieu’s terms, the football stadium can be described as an arena where masculinity is staged and where men compete in “serious” games for dominant positions – on the football field and in the fan stands. Women are the spectators, the “flattering mirrors” which provide the background for men’s activities.¹⁸ Engaging in football fandom and identifying with male players and teams may contradict traditional ideals and roles of girls and women, but there are quite large numbers of female fans who adapt to the code of conduct in the stadium and may even gain a measure of respect – although not leading positions – among the male spectators.¹⁹ Being a fan means identifying with a specific football club and communicating one’s fandom to other fans.²⁰ Football can be the core of a common interest and enthusiasm, as well as the focus of real and imagined communities. It is a “site” of memory, where fandom and a specific fan identity can be produced and displayed. In doing so, fans create a “cultural memory,” which supports the coherence of their community and demands the permanent commitment of their members. Fandom enables “emotional bindings between personal memories and the supra-individual commemorations of the community.”²¹

Pierre Nora and scholars working in the field of “lieux de mémoire” draw attention not only to sites of memory but also to collective symbols and “invented traditions.”²² Football fans, both men and women, cherish the symbols and the memories associated with their club. They share the memories of victories and defeats, of promotions and relegations, of disasters and resurrections. The club’s tradition is “embodied” in logos and chants, celebrated in speeches and publications, and staged by the fans wearing the club’s attire. The entanglement of past and present ties the fans together and creates a community of people who identify with the same symbols, narratives and “subjects of desire”. Crawford,²³ Peitersen,²⁴ Sandvoss,²⁵ and other fan researchers explain the development of fandom in recent decades as a phenomenon of “late modernity.” They

assume that identification with significant subjects/objects gains importance as other forms of relationships have become fluid and “normal biographies” have become obsolete. At least in western industrialized countries, patchwork families and patchwork biographies have become the norm. In an age of individualization, people have to secure and present their identities in new ways; they have to find communities which are meaningful and provide a sense of belonging. Like other communities, the societies of fans, too, can be considered as “neo tribes.” Maffesoli coined this term “for communities which are united by the same tastes and forms of consumption.”²⁶ From his perspective, fans can be understood as neo tribes which are tied together by their taste for a football club; they are united by the same focus of attention, the same forms of consumption and the same “collective memories.” The theoretical approaches presented above are compatible and can – in their combination – provide insights into gendered ways of becoming and being a football fan.

Methods

The re-construction of the history of football and fandom in Denmark and in Lyngby is based on available sources like historical studies, debate forum entries, blogs and local newspaper articles as well as on information provided by the Danish Football Union and Lyngby BK. Information about the formation, development, and situation of the Female Vikings (FV) is supported in particular by the narratives of FV members shared with the first author in problem-centered interviews. Drawing on available information about Lyngby BK and its fans, as well as general information about the histories and cultures of football and its supporters, we constructed an interview guideline which contained mostly open questions.²⁷ The focus of the interviews was on the foundation and development of the group, on their aims and activities, as well as on their experiences as women in a men’s domain. The interviews contained narrative parts in which the women could address topics or enlarge upon questions asked or issues emerged during the discussion.²⁸ We interviewed six women within an age range of 30 and 52 years who were approached by the first author during football matches in Lyngby and then by snowball sampling. The selection criteria were, among others, an emotional bond to Lyngby BK and an attachment to the FV. All of them were, or still are, also members of the official fan club of Lyngby BK, the Blue Vikings, and most have had various

functions or served special roles in the club, for example as players, coaches or members of the governing board.²⁹ The interviewees showed a long-term and intense commitment to the club and were participants in and eyewitnesses of the history of the FV and Lyngby BK. Lasting between 42 and 69 minutes, the interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. The transcripts were coded and analyzed by means of qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti). Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the participants. In order to gain a more in-depth insight into the behavior of the Lyngby supporters and the roles and activities of the female fans, the first author attended several games of Lyngby BK and wrote down observations in the form of field notes. They served later as illustrations of the interview statements and helped us to gain an insight into and an understanding of the actions and reactions of the female fans.

The historical development of football and fan movements in Denmark

Football history

In the first half of the nineteenth century, football was “conceived” in England, where a rough folk game was tamed and used to discipline the students of boarding schools. The game quickly became popular – among workers, too – and attracted increasing crowds of spectators in the second half of the century.³⁰ Football was designed by men for men, although at the turn of the century a small number of women played football in some European countries.³¹ Football soon spread over the continent, and also to Denmark. In 1879, it was adopted by the Københavns Boldklub, founded in 1876 and continental Europe’s oldest football club,³² whose members were predominantly students and academics. According to the Danish historians Allan Grønkjær and David Holt Olsen, football quickly became popular not only in the cities but also in the most remote villages.³³ In 1889, the governing body of football “Dansk Boldspil Union” (DBU) was founded.³⁴ The influential leaders of the football movement supported the amateur ideal and introduced the game to Danish schools in 1898. Only in 1978 did Danish football turn “professional” and only since then could players “officially” get a salary.³⁵ The appreciation of volunteer work and amateurism is still strong in the Danish sport community.³⁶ Throughout sporting history, Danish players and teams were very

successful in the international sports arena, in particular if one takes into account the size of the country (five million inhabitants) and the amateur status of the players.

Lyngby BK was one of the most successful clubs in Denmark. It is based in Kongens Lyngby, a historic city near Copenhagen. After the turn of the twentieth century, some of its male inhabitants were carried away by the craze of football and in 1921 thirty young men founded the football section of Lyngby Sports Club. But it was not until the 1980s before football in Lyngby experienced a real boost: The team played in the highest league, won the Danish championship twice (1983 and 1992) and the Danish cup title three times (1984, 1985 and 1990). At the European level, Lyngby BK has qualified for the UEFA Cup eight times; and since 1982 the club has played twenty-four matches in the UEFA Europa League. Seventeen players from Lyngby BK have represented Denmark in the national team. These achievements are deeply rooted in the fans' memories.³⁷

However, the club could not meet the financial requirements necessary for international football, and its success on the football field, i.e. participation in the UEFA Cup, ended in a financial disaster. In 2001, Lyngby BK filed for bankruptcy and had to rely on amateur players – with the consequence that the team was relegated to the “Danmarksserie”, an amateur league.³⁸ But sporting success returned and, as a result, the club won promotion to the Second Division. In June 2005, Lyngby BK ended the season in third place and was promoted to the First Division.³⁹ In the 2006/07 season, the team finished in first place and finally, after five years, returned to the Super League. Today the club has about 1,300 members, which is a large number considering the city's population of 54,000. Lyngby BK claims to have a place for everyone, regardless of age, gender, nationality, and religion. At the same time, the club's officials have high aspirations with regard to the first team's performance on the football field and the numbers of spectators and fans.⁴⁰

Spectators and fans – past and present

Since the early twentieth century there has been a large interest in football in the Danish population, at least among boys and men. Information provided by the media and results of surveys show that ninety-five percent of football website users, seventy to eighty

percent of readers of the sports pages of the popular press and around ninety percent of spectators at football stadiums are men. Twice as many men as women tune into specialized sports channels. However, the interest of women in watching football is on the increase, i.e. when the national team is playing.⁴¹ Football consumption depends on socialization (in “real” life and via the media) and, in turn, socializes the consumers and increases expertise, interest, and identification. Thus, it is not surprising that the majority of fans are boys and men.

Dedicated fans attend matches at the stadium. Prior to the invention of television, this was the only way to watch football. Before WWI already, football pulled the crowds and filled even the largest stadium in Denmark, the football ground in Copenhagen built in 1911, where international matches and the games of FC Copenhagen took place (and still do). In the first decades of the twentieth century the national team’s matches attracted up to 20,000 fans, i.e. in 1922 at a game against Sweden. With the enlargement of the stadium the ground’s capacity increased to 50,000. Although international football matches have been broadcast on television since the end of the 1950s, this has not caused any decrease in stadium attendance. Since the 1990s, league matches have attracted 20,000 to 30,000 spectators. The record number of spectators at club level is 41,000, reached at a match between the “archenemies” of FC Copenhagen and Brøndby IF in 1998.⁴² Considering the size of the city, Lyngby BK, too, attracts relatively large audiences: The thirty-three matches of the 2012/13 season were attended by nearly 40,000 spectators, i.e. 1,240 on average (highest number: 2,600; lowest: 490). However, the club owners started modernizing the stadium to make it more attractive for the spectators, as well as for the sponsors and fans. The numbers of football consumers presented above show that interest in the game has a long tradition in Denmark and that large numbers of spectators and fans watch the matches of their teams in the stadium. While the numbers of fans do not seem to have changed considerably, fan identities and practices underwent significant changes. Whereas football stadiums were local meeting points in the 1950s, the increasing professionalization of football in the following decades led to a growing distance between players and their spectators, literally as well as verbally. The space between the football field and the spectator stands increased and, at the same time, players could no longer be approached after the game or in a nearby pub. In the 1970s and 80s, fans began to demonstrate their identification with their teams through various forms of fan attire and accessories such as scarves or flags in the

colors of their clubs.⁴³ Until that time fans were mostly “consumers” who watched the game, cheered – and perhaps instigated fights with the supporters of rival teams. Since then, an increasing number of fans in Europe attempt to “support” their team and gain influence and visibility. They believe that their cheers and chants, flags and fireworks have an impact on the players’ performances. However, current research does not support this claim.⁴⁴ Fan clubs emerged, some of which are acknowledged or even supported by their club and some of which also want to influence their club’s politics.

The fan movement in Denmark experienced a large boost in its development with the foundation of the Super League in 1991 and the parallel emergence of supporters’ clubs. At the beginning of the twenty-first century these clubs had 32,000 members.⁴⁵ Not only the fans’ self-concept but also their practices in the stadium changed decisively. As described by Peitersen in his book on Danish fans, even the fan songs transformed from being humorous chants into aggressive texts maligning the opponents and denigrating women and homosexuals. These new forms of fandom also reached Lyngby. A report in the book “See you at the stadium”, published in 2011 on the ninetieth anniversary of Lyngby BK’s founding, describes how young Lyngby fans, inspired by the Italian and English “supporter cultures,” founded the club “Blue Vikings” in the early 1990s. Members have to register and pay a fee that is used for banners, fireworks, smoke-bombs and other accessories of the choreographies which gained more and more importance at Lyngby stadium as well. The main activities of the Vikings are to support the men’s football team, create a good atmosphere for Lyngby fans both in and outside the stadium, organize social events, and inform all interested parties about the activities of the club, the players and other issues. Pictures, TV programs and live observations reveal that the large majority of Blue Vikings are men who cheer for their team using men’s body language like stretching out fists or stomping to hard music. However, there are also a number of women at the fringes. Lyngby BK is also supported by an ultras group called “Lyngby Syndikatet” and a hooligan group called “Blue Army”, both do not accept women. The Blue Vikings have around two hundred members, which is a high figure for a small city. In comparison, F.C. Copenhagen’s Lions, founded in 1991, total more than 20,000 fans.⁴⁶ These numbers demonstrate that in Denmark, too, fans have definitely become a group with symbolic and financial power and thus wield considerable influence on football culture.

Female football players and fans – on the long road to acceptance

As described above, football and fandom are “gendered,” with the result that the stadium is still a place where traditional masculinity is staged. It goes without saying that players and fans are men if their gender is not mentioned. Men’s football was – and still is – considered the “real” game. Therefore, we do not need to mention that the history of Lyngby BK outlined in the preceding paragraphs is the history of the men’s team and its male fans. However, there is a women’s football movement in Denmark, and the game is currently very popular among girls. According to DBU statistics 70,551 girls and women were members of the Danish Football Federation in 2012, which means that 21,8 percent of DBU members are girls and women.⁴⁷ Women’s football has a long tradition in Europe. In the early 20th century already, women played football in many countries, but most of the clubs and teams were disbanded in the 1930s at the latest.⁴⁸ Professional women’s teams emerged in the 1950s, for example in Germany and the Netherlands, but they did not survive long due to the refusal of football federations to acknowledge women as members. In Denmark, women detected the game in the 1960s and the players founded the *Dansk Kvinde Fodbold Union* because the DBU, too, refused to take over responsibility for girls and women. The rise of the women’s football movement in Denmark and abroad caused the DBU leaders to change their “gender politics” and to integrate female players and teams in 1972.⁴⁹

Lyngby BK’s ninetieth yearbook “See you at the stadium” also contains a short chapter on Lyngby BK’s women’s section, which was established in 1970. The beginnings meant a lot of improvisation, and the development of women’s football depended on the great efforts of a few enthusiastic women who had to live with the opposition, or at best indifference, of the majority of Lyngby BK’s male members and leaders. In the early 1990s, the chairman believed that “women’s football should be played in Siberia,” and another club representative declared that his daughters should not play football because this caused “crooked legs.” the players even had to wear the last year’s jerseys of the male Super League players.⁵⁰ Despite the resistance and later the indifference of club leaders and members, the number of female players increased. In recent years the club has changed its politics; now there is a special focus on girls’ and women’s football, not least because the women’s section “traditionally produced many volunteers.” But it should be noted that all the presidents, honorary members, players, and top scorers of

the year described in the commemorative book on Lyngby's ninetieth anniversary are men.

Women's football lives in the shadow of the men's game – not only in Lyngby BK but also in clubs all over the country. According to the information available, only a few fans attend women's matches.⁵¹ Observations of women's league games show clearly that they are watched in particular by the families and friends of the players. In contrast, men's games draw large crowds, as indicated above. Since the sources do not differentiate between genders, it is very difficult to identify the number of female spectators and fans of men's teams. As studies on football and fans mainly focus on male fans, on the fans of the men's national team or on those of successful clubs, little is known – either in Denmark or in other countries – about female fans and, in particular, on their situation in small cities. Based on information from other countries as well as observations, it can be assumed that in Lyngby, too, the percentage of female fans in the stadiums estimates to around ten to twenty percent. Many women watch the game from the “family seats”; only a small minority joins the men in the fan stands, where “hardcore” fans celebrate football and masculinity.⁵² Women have to learn the rules and practices prevailing in the fan zone in order to gain recognition as “authentic fans” and a measure of acceptance. However, as already stated, some groups, i.e. the casuals and hooligans in Lyngby's “Blue Army”, do not accept women in their groups. Observations of one of the authors revealed that in Lyngby, too, women formed a small minority in the fan zone but that dedicated female fans adhering to the “code of conduct” had no problem gaining access. Following the new trends, Lyngby fans, too, indulge in choreographies, and female club members are welcome to help prepare and rehearse them. A specific way of dealing with men's dominance among football fans is to found women-only fan groups such as the “Titten auswärts” (tits abroad), “TivoliTussen” or “Uschifront” in Germany,⁵³ the “AW 2005 – Ladies Austria Wien”⁵⁴ or the “Pink Lions” in Denmark.⁵⁵ Some of these groups already emerged soon after the turn of the new millennium. The FV thus seem to have been trendsetters, being founded as early as 2001. The aims and actions of the women's groups are typical of the new fan practices and identities, as well as the new culture of “active” football consumption, described above. The history, the development and the “survival” of the women's fan groups during the past decade show that female football fans are here to stay. The members of these clubs are football experts and dedicated fans, but they also enjoy the company and support of other women in a men's world. Some of the German women's

groups even make fun of the sexualized chat-up lines of male fans, and also the name of the Danish fan group “Pink Lions” has an ironic touch.⁵⁶

The Female Vikings – a case study of a women’s fan group in a small city

Histories and narratives of the interviewees

All the interviewees had a long history as football fans and a special connection to Lyngby BK. Their commitment to the club was one of the reasons why they appreciated the opportunity to talk to us about their memories as well as their attachment to football in general and to Lyngby BK in particular. As children already, the interviewees joined their parents, and later their friends, when attending the stadium. During their teenage years, they became members of Lyngby Boldklub’s official fan club, the “Blue Vikings,” because they enjoyed the activities and the community of these dedicated Lyngby BK supporters. The fan club was founded in 1994, at a time in which Lyngby BK became a professional club. The development of the Blue Vikings also mirrored the new trend of active fandom. After the bankruptcy of the club, the Blue Vikings had to be built up again by a group of loyal fans, many of whom had supported “the royal blue” team for many years.

All the women interviewed had been closely connected with Lyngby BK since the 1990s as previous players or coaches, or as board members of the Blue Vikings. They expressed their fandom in various ways, i.e. by getting married at the Lyngby stadium or passing on their enthusiasm for Lyngby BK to their children. As dedicated fans, they were willing to support the club, i.e. by organizing bus tours to away games or by editing the fan magazine. The interviewees considered the Blue Vikings as a part of their lives. Bente, for example, already joined the club at the time of its founding. She had met members of Blue Vikings when they “went around with a hat and collected money for the [club] flag.” “Of course,” she supported the group with a donation. Admiring the efforts and activities of the Vikings, Bente joined the club and was still a member at the time of the interviews.

However, not all the interviewees’ paths to fandom were straightforward. Frederike, for example, played football for Lyngby when she was a teenager. After all, she felt that playing and watching matches did not go together because the group of players and the

community fans were “too different.” She remembered: “When I started to play there [at Lyngby BK], some of the other players thought that the people in the fan club were crazy. So I stopped hanging out with fans.” It was looked upon as “weird to be a player and a member of the fan club at the same time.” Frederike had the impression that “there were too many troublemakers” among the fans and that they were “too fanatic in a way as well.” She still went to all the Lyngby games but did not feel comfortable among the hardcore fans and therefore joined her football friends, whom she considered to be “her community.” All the interviewees enjoyed the football, as well as the performances and skills of the players, and they felt connected to the club. According to Ditte, fans benefited enormously from the “congenial bond between their fan group and the football club.”

“The Female Vikings” – beginnings and early developments

The following brief history of the Female Vikings is based on information provided by the interviewees. On 4th June 2001, two devoted Lyngby fans, among them one of the interviewees, Caroline, founded the Female Vikings. Thus, they were among the first female fans in Europe to conform to the new identities of football supporters and establish a women-only group. One of the reasons for establishing this club was to “provide a structure to an already existing group of women who used to go to the stadium together.” It was relatively easy to persuade these women to join the new club. The only requirement to become a member of FV was, and still is, to be a dedicated Lyngby fan. Caroline emphasized “everyone was really positive about us organizing our group.” She explained further: “By giving the group a name we could invite other women to join us. We were more tangible and visible as Female Vikings than before as a group of friends.” Women who wanted to support Lyngby football team in an “organized” way were now able to get in touch with a person responsible for recruiting new members. The founder, Caroline, and her friend contacted the executive committee of Lyngby BK to ask for formal permission to officially found a fan group for women and were given the committee’s approval. Now the female fans had appropriated a space where they could share their love of football, demonstrate their loyalty to the club, and watch matches together. The main aims of the FV were to create a positive atmosphere during Lyngby BK’s matches, both at home and away, to support

Lyngby BK regardless of the team's success, and to organize events for the FV on and off season. Caroline was aware that she had done something extraordinary: she had claimed a space for women in the world of football, knowing that "we are in a man's world." The group of female fans grew quickly and in 2002, eighteen members had joined. They shared a common interest in football in general and Lyngby BK in particular, but they also discussed other topics than just matches and players. In this way, their conversations might have differed from those of men. According to Caroline, in a "male fan club you talk probably more about an actual football game, whereas we also talk a lot about guys in general, good-looking players and social activities." The Female Vikings did not see themselves as a substitute for or a rival of the Blue Vikings. According to their interview statements, they were only a small group of "cheerful girls" who stuck together. For them, the cohesion of their group was important, "the feeling of having something in common" and sharing good and bad times with each other, meaning irrespective of the team's success. Caroline's most notable statements provided insights into the formation of the women's fan group. When she founded the club, she was only eighteen years old and for her "it wasn't such a great thing". But today she knew that her initiative had made a difference and she "was so much ahead of the curve." Now she benefits from her efforts in many ways, for example she had gained recognition in the club and among the fans. Several observations of the first author confirm this claim: When attending Lyngby BK games, the group of Female Vikings stood among the Blue Vikings in the fan stands, and other (mostly male) fans and club representatives approached them, calling the women by their first names and greeting them enthusiastically.

The name "Female Vikings" and its symbolic meaning

The founding of a club immediately raises the question of its name. Thus, one of the first acts of its founders and the first initiative in the club's history was to choose a name which would express the aims and principles of the group. According to Caroline they "wanted to indicate that they were a group of girls and that they were fans of Lyngby BK." Therefore, they decided to use the official club logo, the head of a Viking, and call themselves the "Female Vikings," which also linked their group to the official fan club, the "Blue Vikings", whose name referred to the club's traditional colors.

Caroline was sure that “Female Vikings was a perfect name.” The name Vikings has connotations of assertiveness, aggressiveness, and power; and adding the adjective “female” refers to the gender of the fans. At first glance, “Vikings” and “female” appear to be a contradiction in terms; however, the incongruity of the qualities of warriors and those of women creates a kind of irony that might be used as a weapon against the misogyny of many male fans. German female fan groups have used this mocking of male fan’s prejudices as a form of resistance. However, we do not know whether the Female Vikings are aware of this interpretation of their name. They may not even have been confronted with open misogyny since all of them were also, at some point in their fan careers, members, some even board members, of the Blue Vikings. The work which the Female Vikings did for the club brought them a measure of acceptance and respect. Besides, the “everybody-knows-everybody” atmosphere in the small stadium of a small town may also have contributed to a women-friendly or even family-friendly ambience. One of the club members made a few drafts of a logo, and the group picked the one they “thought was the most beautiful,” showing an attractive girl with long red hair wearing a blue cheerleader uniform. The girl seems to represent the Female Vikings, i.e. young women cheering for their team. However, this picture raises several questions. Interviews with other female fans, for instance those of FC Copenhagen, have revealed that cheerleaders are not considered “authentic fans”: “real” fans should not appear in high heels and sexy outfits in the fan zone.⁵⁷ The emphasized femininity of the cheerleader on their logo draws the attention to the outer appearance of the Female Vikings rather than to their work and activities. On the other hand, it can be assumed that this demonstration of femininity facilitates the acceptance of the Female Vikings because they embody an image which presumably corresponds to the femininity ideals of the male fans. They do not compete with the Blue Vikings, but they help them in their support of the club.

Further activities of the Female Vikings: The election of Lyngby’s hottest player

Like many other football clubs, Lyngby BK has its “best player of the year,” who is voted by the official fan club, the Blue Vikings. Players are awarded this trophy for outstanding performance during the season. In 2002, Caroline and Ditte who acted at the time of the interview as the Blue Vikings’ president, decided to initiate an award for

“the hottest player of the year.” Ditte said that “it [the election] is still running and the players actually think it’s more fun and better to become the year’s hottest player than the year’s best player,” voted by fan club members and Lyngby BK players. In this contest, each member of the Female Vikings has three votes whereas members of the Blue Vikings and current players have only one. The trophy is awarded to the winner at a ceremony, including photos and press coverage. In 2010, a report of the ceremony appeared in the local newspaper *Lyngby Taarbek lokalavisen*.⁵⁸ Other newspapers also reported on the award and in this way drew attention to the activities of the Female Vikings.⁵⁹ Voting for the hottest player, too, is a balance between “role playing”, striving for visibility and complying with stereotypes as the Female Vikings seemed to assume that women were more interested in the players’ bodies than in their skills. However, the football expertise of the Female Vikings allowed them to initiate this contest without losing their position as authentic fans.

Website, merchandizing and member recruitment

In the first half year of their existence already, the Female Vikings “had everything running.” The FV club founders thought that it was crucial for the new fan club to have immediate visibility. Caroline explained that it “only took about a week to agree upon a webpage and only about a month to launch it.” The flyers and the website were entirely Caroline’s work. Later, some of the other women wrote in the fan blogs and posted pictures. The Female Vikings have been online since October 2001; and in December 2002 they received their own domain name and a webpage, which was free of advertisements. The current website mainly contains pictures of various events, for instance bus trips to away games or snapshots taken at parties. The pictures leave no doubt that the FVs and other fans have a good time. The FVs have designed fitted T-shirts with the imprints: “Get a life and a Lyngby jersey,” “Girls supporting Lyngby,” or simply “Female Vikings.” Especially the fan attire gives them a measure of visibility in and outside the football stadium. In the period after its founding, a major task of the club was to recruit new members. The FVs addressed other fans in the stadium or at social events like parties and invited them to join the Vikings. Wherever they could, they “spread the word about the Female Vikings and invited other women to become members.” However, these initiatives were not completely successful, and the club has

never had more than eighteen “official” members. But the network of female fans around the FVs seems to be relatively large and soon included the families of current and former members.

The crisis of Lyngby BK and its recovery

Soon after the founding of their club, the Female Vikings had to master an “acid test.” They were confronted, namely, with a serious crisis of “their” club, which was at least partly caused by the “modernization” of the sport and the increasing pressures of the “football market.” Clubs like Lyngby BK, traditionally based on volunteer work, could not survive in an age of rapid commercialization and professionalization of all the groups involved. In late summer 2001, it emerged that Lyngby BK’s finances were in a very poor state, and throughout the fall, the club leaders struggled to find funding. The attempt to gain public backing from the municipality failed. The fans were vehemently opposed to a merger with a football club in the nearby city of Farum. In December 2001, Lyngby BK went bankrupt, which also meant a year’s suspension from contract football. Lyngby BK’s application to be allowed to withdraw from the SAS League and play in the Second Division was rejected by the Danish Football Association (DBU). In the spring season the club had to play with amateur players and – after twenty-three seasons in the top league – was relegated two leagues to the Denmark Series in the summer of 2002. According to our interviewee, Ditte, “many fans lost their interest in the club” and the number of the Blue Vikings members decreased considerably.

Five of the six interviewees showed a large measure of loyalty to their club and continued to support Lyngby BK after the relegation of the team. Frederike emphasized, for example, that she still was a Lyngby fan because “it is not important that they are not in the best league.” However, after the team’s relegation to the Denmark Series, Frederike no longer attended matches at the stadium, but she still followed the club’s performance in the newspapers and pursued the team’s promotion back to the Second Division. Other interviewees remembered that they did not have any doubt whatever about continuing their support of the club during the crisis. Bente underlined the importance of the “unity of fans and thus being able to say ‘it’s my club’ and to be proud of it.” At that time she was a member of the club’s board and continued her work there. She remembered that some people “teased” her about Lyngby’s bankruptcy and

playing at the mere amateur level. But she was proud that she was “there when they [Lyngby BK] went bankrupt” and that she “helped to build it [the club] up again.” Lyngby BK’s success returned in 2003 when its football team won the Denmark Series championship. Bente was glad that she had been actively involved in the turnaround, commenting, “it’s not me who did it alone, but you could say I was there, too.” The memories of this dramatic phase in Lyngby BK’s history were still fresh, and the interviewees shared similar experiences during the ups and downs of their club. The Lyngby “crisis” was anchored in the collective memories of the interviewees, and the “resurrection” of the club was a source of pride shared by the community of the Female Vikings as well as Lyngby fans in general.

The Female Vikings and Lyngby BK – discussion and conclusion

The story of the Female Vikings is closely intertwined with developments in football and fandom, in particular with an increasing professionalization in all areas such as new business models in the football clubs and the emergence and consolidation of new supporter cultures and mentalities inspired by the ultra fan movement, i.e. in Italy. The history and tradition of Lyngby BK, as well as the club’s role as a “site of memory” and as a meeting place and “entertainment centre” in a small town, provided excellent conditions for the founding of the Female Vikings, whose members were, and still are, involved with the club in various ways. All the interviewees were children or adolescents when they joined the club (see the Table below), and playing sport in the club was part of their socialization. The crucial dates of the club’s history are collective memories which they share with each other. These strong ties with Lyngby BK may be one of the most important reasons for their dedication. They are more than mere “supporters”; they support Lyngby BK in many concrete ways, for example by editing the club’s magazine or by organizing trips to away games. Their close connection with the official fan club, Blue Vikings, which is dominated by men, made it possible to create and occupy a women’s space, and also to use the opportunities of a large group and enjoy the choreographies of their fellow supporters. The founding as well as the activities of the Female Vikings also indicate the conviction and convey the message that women are not inevitably the escorts of male supporters but can be fans in their own right and even play an important role in the fan movement. Using Maffesoli’s

terminology, the women's fan club can be seen as a sub-group of the "neo-tribe" of Lyngby fans.

According to the information provided by the interviewees, the founding of a women's fan group met with no resistance, either from the club or from the other fans. On the contrary, the FV club members seem to have been welcome in the fan stands. Their appearance and demeanor signaled that they were no "troublemakers" or women's libbers but just a group of "girls" wanting to have fun.

The positive attitude towards the new group may have been influenced not only by the character of Lyngby BK as a family-friendly club in a small town but also by its special situation. The financial crisis of the club and its bankruptcy, namely, had created a situation in which all support was welcome. It can also be assumed that the financial problems enhanced an openness towards new ideas and approaches to fandom. The "crisis" and the club's comeback also provided numerous "collective memories" which strengthened the bonding between the club and its male and female fans.

All Female Vikings are dedicated fans and share a passion for men's football. They have been socialized into fandom, and their commitment to the club can be regarded as a further socialization process. The identification with and their admiration of the men's team seems to have influenced their "football taste" in general and prevented the development of an interest in or even an attachment to women's football, even though some of them had played the game as children or adolescents. The FV logo with a "sexy" cheerleader, their slogan "Girls supporting Lyngby," and the election of the "hottest player" in particular reveal traditional gender roles and may have been chosen deliberately in the attempt to counteract their "unfeminine" fan activities. For women in the fan zone "doing gender" means achieving a balance between staging femininity and displaying expertise in a male domain. This "mindset" may also have prevented solidarity with the girls' and women's teams, which only play a marginal role in Lyngby BK.

Although the members of the women's fan club show considerable commitment to Lyngby BK, their attachment to the club seems to be neither very visible nor much appreciated. The Female Vikings, for example, are given no mention in the book commemorating the club's 90th anniversary which highlights solely the activities and performances of men – not only of players but also of coaches, officials and honorary

members. A further indication of the marginalization of the Female Vikings is their absence on the Blue Vikings' website. Nor does this site have a link to its sister club whereas the Female Vikings' site refers not only to the men's supporters club but also has a link to the picture gallery of male players in "Lyngby Media."

The Female Vikings may not have achieved the recognition which they hoped for, but they are well known in the club and among the supporters. They are fans in their own right, not just companions or escorts of men. They enjoy the company of other women in the buses to away games, at parties or when participating in fan activities. They have become part of the club's history and its everyday life, although only insiders know this. For the Female Vikings football has become an "attitude to life" and they support their team in good times and bad times – today and in the future.

Table 1. Information about the interviewees

Inter- viewee	Age	Length of attachment to Lyngby BK (since)	Activities and functions in the fan community	Occupation	Civil status
Amalie	52	3 years (1964)	Former member BV known among FV	Pedagogue at a nursery	Married, 2 children
Bente	37	9 years (1985)	Former board member, current member BV involved in FV activities	Paramedic	Married
Caroline	30	15 years (1998)	Member BV founder and activist FV former player in LBK	Office assistant	Single
Ditte	31	12 years (1994)	Administrator Lyngby BK former vice-president BV FV activist	Administrator (Lyngby BK)	Engaged
Emilie	34	12 years (1991)	Board member BV FV activist	Pharmacist	Married, 2 children
Frederike	37	11 years (1987)	Former player and coach in LBK former member BV	Head (of Communications)	Married, 2 children

Notes

¹ E.g. Fechtig, *Frauen und Fußball*; Jeanes & Kay, *Can football be a female game?*; Lopez, *Women on the Ball*; Magee, *Women Football and Europe*; Marschik, *Frauenfußball und Maskulinität*; Pfister, *The Future of Football*.

² Pfister, Lenneis and Mintert, "Female fans of men's football", 852 – 854.

³ See the literature and information in Pfister, Lenneis and Mintert, "Female fans".

⁴ An overview about current topics and projects is provided by the collection of working papers of the FREE website, see <http://www.free-project.eu/documents-free/Pages/Documents-Free.aspx>.

⁵ E.g. Pilz, *Wandlungen des Zuschauerverhaltens im Profifußball*; Radmann, "Hit and tell"; Langer, *Faszination Ultras*; Peitersen, *Dem der ikke hopper*.

⁶ E.g. Sonntag, *Les identités du football européen*.

⁷ Peitersen, *Dem der ikke hopper*, 49 – 70.

⁸ Sülzle, "Fußball als Schutzraum für Männlichkeiten"; *Fußball, Frauen, Männlichkeiten*;

⁹ Sülzle, *Fußballstadion*; "Fußball als Schutzraum für Männlichkeiten"; "Titten unterwegs"; *Fußball, Frauen, Männlichkeiten*.

¹⁰ Cere, "Witches of Our Age", 166 – 75.

¹¹ Llopis-Goig, "Learning and representation", 685 – 92.

¹² Kreisky and Spitaler, *Arena der Männlichkeit*, 21 – 40.

¹³ Hognestad, "Split loyalties", 378.

¹⁴ Pfister, Lenneis and Mintert, "Female football consumers and fans", 851 – 53.

¹⁵ E.g. Pfister, "Watching sport".

¹⁶ For an overview of available sources and statistics see Pfister, "Gender and Sport".

¹⁷ See e.g. Lorber, *Paradoxes of gender*; Connell, *Gender*.

¹⁸ Bourdieu, "Die männliche Herrschaft", 203.

¹⁹ E.g. Lenneis & Pfister, "Gender constructions".

²⁰ Sandvoss, *A game of two halves*, 17.

²¹ Francois and Schulze, *Worum geht es Nora, les Lieux de mémoire*.

²² E.g. Pfister, *Lieux de Mémoires*; Misztal, *Theories*.

²³ Crawford, *Consuming Sport*, 20 – 51.

²⁴ Peitersen, *Dem der ikke hopper*, 49 – 70.

²⁵ Sandvoss, *A game of two halves*, 13 – 44.

²⁶ Maffesoli, *The time of the tribes*, 9 – 96.

²⁷ See Crawford, *Consuming Sport*, 20 – 51; Giulianotti, *Supporters*, 25 – 40. Sandvoss, *A game of two halves*, 13 – 44.

²⁸ Denzin and Lincoln, *The SAGE Handbook*, 563 – 669.

²⁹ See Table 1.

³⁰ Pfister, "Wem gehört der Fußball", 37 ff.

³¹ Williams, *A beautiful game*, 47.

³² Sperling, Nordskilde, and Bergander, *Spillet uden for banen*, 294.

³³ Kayser, Nielsen, and Bale, "The Contribution of Sport", 232.

³⁴ See http://www.dbu.dk/oevrigt_indhold/Fodboldenspercent20historie/fodboldens_danmarks-historie.aspx [accessed January 11, 2014].

³⁵ See a short football history, based on various written sources, on the official website of the DBU; http://www.dbu.dk/oevrigt_indhold/Fodboldenspercent20historie/fodboldens_danmarks-historie.aspx [accessed January 4, 2014].

³⁶ One of the two umbrella sport organizations in Denmark: http://www.dif.dk/en/om_dif/oranisation-s-of-s-sports [accessed January 15, 2014].

³⁷ Detailed information on football events and players in Bjerg-Pedersen, *Vi ses på Stadion*, 164 – 185.

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- ³⁸ The Denmark Series is the fourth best football league and the top amateur series for male players in the Danish league system.
- ³⁹ First division, also known as NordicBet League (named after sponsor) is the second highest division in the football league system in Denmark.
- ⁴⁰ Sperling, Nordskilde, and Bergander, *Spillet uden for banen*, 92 ff.
- ⁴¹ More numbers and figures in Pfister, Lenneis and Mintert, “Female football consumers and fans”, 854 – 58.
- ⁴² Statistics of the Super League spectators,
<http://www.danskfodbold.com/tilskuere.php?ligaid=2001&seasonid=2013> [accessed January 5, 2014].
- ⁴³ Peitersen, *Dem der ikke hopper*, 17 – 26.
- ⁴⁴ E.g. Langer, *Faszination Ultras*; Strauß, *Sportzuschauer*.
- ⁴⁵ Peitersen, *Dem der ikke hopper*, 49.
- ⁴⁶ http://www.fck.dk/fanzone/fans/fck_fan_club/#/nyhed/fc-koebenhavn-fan-club [accessed January 21, 2014].
- ⁴⁷ <http://www.dbu.dk> [accessed January 17, 2014].
- ⁴⁸ Williams, “A beautiful game”, 138.
- ⁴⁹ Brus and Trangbæk, “Asserting the right to play”, 106 – 109.
- ⁵⁰ Bjerg-Pedersen, *Vi ses på Stadion*, 59 f.
- ⁵¹ Pfister, Lenneis & Mintert, “Female football consumers and fans”, 851.
- ⁵² Lenneis and Pfister, “Gender constructions and negotiations”.
- ⁵³ Selmer, “SenioritHas, TivoliTussen und Uschifront”, 30 f.
- ⁵⁴ <http://www.fk-austria.at/FAN-CLUBS.483.0.html> [accessed January 10, 2014].
- ⁵⁵ <http://pinklions.dk/> [accessed November 25, 2013].
- ⁵⁶ Lenneis and Pfister, “Gender constructions and negotiations”.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Lyngby Taarbæk Lokalavisen. Published December 8, 2010. See <http://lyngby-taarbaek.lokalavisen.dk/blue-vikings-sagde-farvel-til-morten-p/20101208/artikler/712089815> [accessed January 21, 2014].
- ⁵⁹ Lokalavisen Norddjurs. Published November 15, 2012. See <http://norddjurs.lokalavisen.dk/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20121115/artikler/711159887/&temp late=printart> [accessed January 30, 2014].

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