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DIVERSITY



Fans for Diversity: *Women at the match*

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Contents

Fans for Diversity: Women at the match

04.	Introduction
05.	Report Author: Fiona McGee
06.	Getting into football
08.	FSF Analysis
10.	Sexism at the match
12.	Challenging sexism
14.	That football girl by Amy Lawrence

About the FSF

The Football Supporters' Federation (FSF) is the democratic organisation for all football supporters, representing more than 500,000 members made up of individual fans and affiliated supporters' organisations from every club in the professional game and footballing pyramid.

How does the FSF work?

The FSF is a democratic organisation with an elected National Council (NC) which oversees campaigns and policy. Policy is set by members and affiliated/associated supporters' organisations at the FSF's annual general meeting. Campaigns and day-to-day activity are co-ordinated by the FSF office in Sunderland.

The FSF also has roles on the FA Council (at which Malcolm Clarke sits on behalf of the FSF and Supporters Direct as the fans' representative), at the Fixtures Working Party (Ian Todd), Football Supporters Europe (Kevin Miles), Kick It Out (Anwar Uddin), Rail Forum (Rick Duniec), and Supporters Direct (Ian Todd), and many other organisations. Regional divisions exist in some areas to provide members with a voice and the FSF Roadshow travels the country to provide a point of access.

If you think the FSF is missing a trick when it comes to campaigning get involved and make your argument via the FSF AGM – email info@fsf.org.uk, follow us on Twitter [@The_FSF](https://twitter.com/The_FSF) or call **0330 44 00044**.

About Kick It Out

Kick It Out is football's equality and inclusion organisation. Working throughout the football, educational and community sectors to challenge discrimination, encourage inclusive practices and campaign for positive change. The organisation is funded by the Football Association (FA), the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), the Premier League and the Football League.

A small independent charity, the 'Let's Kick Racism Out of Football' campaign was established in 1993 in response to widespread calls from clubs, players and fans to tackle racist attitudes existing within the game. Kick It Out was then established as a body in 1997 as it widened out its objectives to cover all aspects of inequality and exclusion.

FANS
FOR
DIVERSITY



Introduction

The Fans For Diversity programme

Welcome to the 'Fans for Diversity: Women at the match' report, based on findings garnered from thousands of women fans of men's football, jointly commissioned by the Football Supporters' Federation and Kick It Out.

'Fans for Diversity' is the banner under which our joint programme of campaigning activities on diversity issues affecting football fans is conducted. This encompasses a wide range of initiatives to encourage the involvement in the game, at all levels, of fans from a broad spectrum of backgrounds as diverse as the communities in which we live.

Our two organisations share a vision of an inclusive game, enhanced by the comfortable and confident presence and involvement of all sections of our society. We also share an understanding that the responsibility for ensuring that football lives up to this aspiration lies with everyone in the game, and a primary role belongs to fans ourselves.

Alongside the work carried out as part of the Fans for Diversity programme in encouraging new fans from BAME communities, promoting disability football and supporting the self-organisation and collaboration of LGBT fan groups, we are keen to develop initiatives to reinforce and build the participation of female fans. This piece of research is the essential first step: we needed to find out more substantively exactly how women see the game and what their experiences have been, to inform further discussions and a future plan of action.

We are very pleased to have been able to enlist the services of Fiona McGee to oversee this research and draw together its findings. Fiona is a Leeds United-supporting freelance researcher and writer, who has

been involved in football via her professional life over a number of years. She previously worked for Show Racism the Red Card, helping to research and write educational materials using football to talk to young people about racism; she currently works for a grassroots football project in Brixton, which uses football to deter young people from involvement in gangs. As an associate researcher for Substance, she has also worked on and helped to co-write briefing papers for Supporters Direct (e.g. Business Advantages of Supporter Community Ownership in Football).

Not least, Fiona is an active match-going fan, and an elected member of the FSF National Council and Executive Committee. Her interest in the issues of women's spectatorship of men's football is not only deeply personal, it is also long-standing: she was one of the first to research the subject academically, as it formed the basis of her MA dissertation as far back as 1995.

This is an important piece of work; our two organisations both intend to put its findings to good use as we prepare future activities.



Kevin Miles
Chief Executive,
Football Supporters' Federation



Roisin Wood
Director,
Kick It Out



Fiona McGee

Author of the Women at the match report

Welcome to the *Women at the match* report: the largest piece of research looking at women's experiences at men's football that there has ever been in this country.

Our survey was held over a six week period at the end of 2014 and beginning of 2015. Gathering responses from 2,984 people (including 255 men, whose answers were discounted), the survey consisted of 22 multiple-choice questions covering team supported, membership of fan groups, how respondents became football fans, factors influencing attendance and experiences of sexism. We also held focus groups after the survey, allowing us to explore in greater detail some of the issues raised.

The findings may surprise many - the split was fifty-fifty when it came to how many women had experienced sexism at the match.

Half of all the respondents reported having experienced some form of sexism as a result of attending football matches, additionally 8.5% reported received unwanted physical attention at some point. For many women, their love of the game comes at a price but only 2% said matchday sexism would stop them attending more games.

The survey tell us that women do not differ significantly from men when it comes to how they get into football (51% surveyed first attended with a parent) and 70.5% of women had been to the first match by the time they were 15.

Irrespective of whether you're female or male, it's the cost of following your team, particularly ticket prices, which is likely to bother you most – 59% of women said high ticket prices discourage them

from attending more games. The cost of travel also represented a significant barrier (34%).

We often hear sexism dismissed as "banter", that most pernicious of terms in modern football parlance – and that any attempts to tackle sexism at football grounds are simply the latest attempts by the 'PC Brigade' to spoil people's fun. We believe it is possible for it to be challenged, by fans and clubs, without losing the wit, atmosphere and humour found in football crowds. It's not about making the experience worse for men, it's about improving it for all fans.

Respondents told us they would like to see clubs do more to combat sexism. For women to have more than tokenistic roles at clubs, have a higher profile, and for stewards to receive better training on the issue. Women don't want special treatment. What's good for women fans, and what they want, is good for all fans: affordable tickets, lower travel costs and reasonable kick-off times.

This research will definitely influence the debate about women's experience at men's football and in the near future inform discussions between the FSF, Kick It Out and the footballing authorities on how to make the game more inclusive for all.



Fiona McGee
*Researcher and FSF
National Council*



Becoming a fan

How women develop the match-going habit



Bobby Robson's now widely repeated quote, about the little boy clambering up stadium steps for the first time, tells a long-standing truth about British footballing culture – that the overwhelming majority of football fans inherit their team from their parents.

One of the many things we have learned from this research, something the women surveyed were consistent on, is that Robson's story is as true for young girls as it is for boys.

Young women inherit their teams and the match-going habit just like men, dispelling the stereotype of women only attending football to please their partners or to "see men running around in shorts". Our survey shows 70.5% of women attended their

first match by the time they were 15 and 33.5% of these women had seen their first game before they were 10 years old. Another 15% watched their first professional men's game between 16 and 21.

One Tottenham Hotspur fan, first attending a match aged six, told us: "There's nothing else in the world when you're six that's going to introduce you to that many people, that kind of energy, that feeling when you walk up those stairs and you first see that pitch."

Family was the main route to football matches for most women – 65% attending their first match with a parent or other family member. Asked why they started supporting the team they did, 60% cited family, 55.5% said because they were the local team.

"I remember it being a really important thing for my Dad as well," an Aston Villa fan told us. "He wanted me to enjoy sport."

Once young female fans have the bug, the reasons they keep going are much the same as male fans – seeing football as an extremely sociable activity, strengthening existing relationships and fostering new ones.

Women said family still played an important role in keeping up regular match attendance, with 20% still going to matches with a parent into adulthood, 26% continue to go with a partner, and a further 20% attend with another family member.

A Sheffield United fan explains this feeling: "It's probably my most regular leisure activity. It's something that I historically do with my brother. It's time with him away from wives, husbands, boyfriends or whatever. It keeps me connected with Sheffield."



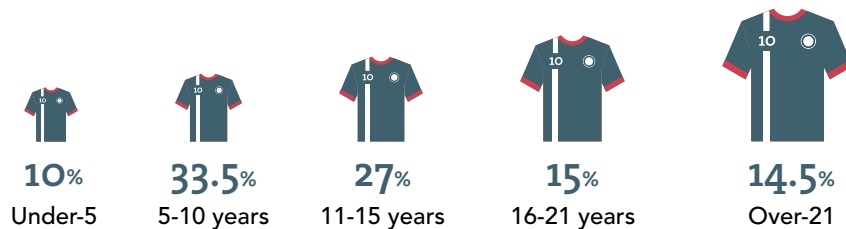


“We often joke that Saturday is a good day out ruined by a football match. So it can’t be completely about what happens with those 22 men and a ball on the pitch. A lot of it is the social element – the going to the pub before, the meeting up. And that feeling of, I want to say tribalism, but it’s not quite that, it’s that feeling of togetherness – we’re all elated when we win and we’re all in it together when we don’t and support each other.”

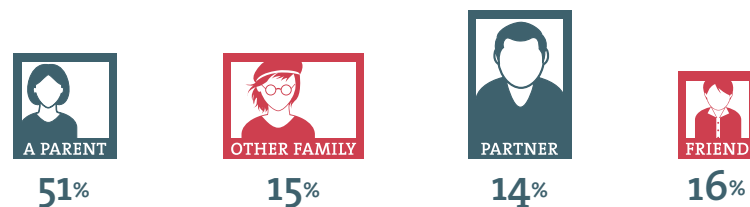
Wigan Athletic fan, aged 36-45

Survey results

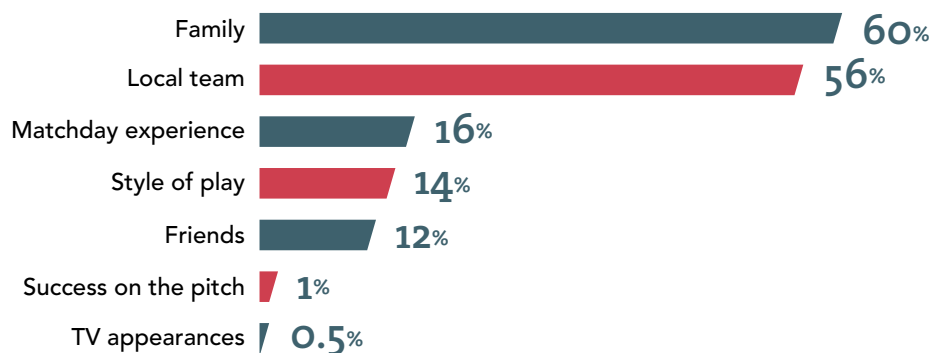
What age were you when you first went to a professional game?



Who did you first go to watch your team with?



Why do you support your team?



(Respondents were able to choose as many answers as applicable)



A great divide?

Fans for Diversity analysis

Our survey built up a comprehensive picture of match-going women, representing an excellent cross section of age groups: 60.5% of respondents are aged 18-45, with another 28.5% aged 46-65. Additionally, those questioned were regular attenders by any normal standards: 52% said they are season ticket holders and 10% said they attend 10-20 home games a season.

Premier League teams were most heavily represented, 62% of respondents supported Premier League teams and 34% Football League teams. However the majority, 64%, said they were not part of any supporters' organisations.

Women's passage into the matchday routine is much the same as their male counterparts – as we have seen in the previous chapter. One Leeds fan, in the 56-65 age bracket, said: "If you're a Leeds fan, you'll go. You won't think 'oh, I'm a woman, I can't go to football'."

Many of the women surveyed told us they will not let sexism put them off a game they love or that, sadly, sexism is so common in their day to day lives that they're used to putting up with it. "Ignored it," one respondent, a Liverpool fan said about matchday sexism. "It is so common across society, not just at football matches."

A Spurs fan told us: "I love football. I also have many debates with friends of mine – 'how can you be a feminist and love football?' And actually, they've got a point a lot of the time. It's a challenge, a personal challenge. But I've always loved football."

The reality of matchday sexism is no doubt worrying and presents many female fans with

unique barriers to attending. However, our survey also identified common barriers that women share with men to supporting their team. Respondents said, like fans from across the country tell us week-in week-out, that ticket prices, kick off times and transport were big issues and most likely to stop them going to matches.

A significant 62.5% of women in the survey said cheaper tickets would encourage them to go to more games, whilst only 10% said that greater efforts to tackle sexism in the ground would encourage them to attend more matches. The provision of family friendly activities on matchday barely figured at all as something that would encourage women to attend more often.

What is striking about the report is how women feel about away games – particularly as away attendances continue to suffer across the country. Women surveyed were far less likely to attend away games than to home games for a number of reasons – including the cost of tickets, travel and the perception of a different kind of atmosphere. As one Newcastle fan, in the 36-45 aged group, said: "I go to all home games, but do not feel safe at away games – standing, excessive drinking, flares are all issues."

"I've lost my appetite a bit – especially for away matches. It's directly related to the Ched Evans thing and the reaction of the fans. It opened up the door to very overt misogyny; chants about women and attitudes to women that were really quite uncomfortable."

Sheffield United fan





"I feel that at away games the stewards and police are a bit over zealous and seem to group all football fans together as hooligans and this I find extremely intimidating and it puts me off going to many away games."

Leyton Orient fan

Survey results

What puts you off going to matches?



59%

High ticket prices



2%

The male environment



34%

Travel costs



7.5%

Swearing

What would encourage you to attend more matches?



31.5%

Work commitments

Cheaper tickets **62.5%**

Better performances **26%**

Entertaining football **17%**

Improved travel **17%**

Tackling sexism **10%**

(Respondents were able to choose as many answers as applicable)



Sexism at the match

Challenges facing women at football matches



One of the aims of the survey was to find out how, if at all, women's experiences as football fans are affected by their gender.

Something women said again and again was that they felt they had to "prove" themselves as fans, before they were taken seriously. Women were often challenged to explain the offside rule, other football trivia tests, or to defend their attendance records – questions the respondents felt were not asked of men.

"I just shrugged it off," one Newcastle United fan told us. "I'm used to society treating women like objects and as though they are less intelligent than men, so experiencing it at football is no surprise.

"It definitely bothers me, but when I have spoken up before, I just get sneered at and ridiculed."

Respondents were evenly split as to whether or not they had ever witnessed or experienced something sexist at a match. A quarter of women surveyed had heard sexist comments, 18.5% had heard sexist chanting. Alongside the patronising questions about the offside rule, 21% of women were told they were only attending because "they fancied the players", and 9.5% were told they were only at the match because their husband or boyfriend was.

This low-level kind of verbal sexism seems common according to the respondents, but 8.5% of women said they had received unwanted physical attention (such as bum pinching) at a match.

Despite the disappointing figures on matchday sexism, the impact of women's attendance at men's matches shows progress for inclusivity within matchday crowds.



“It annoys, irritates me (angry or upset are too strong). It makes me feel self-conscious, suddenly aware that I am the ‘other’ and like my reaction is on trial. Ignore it and it looks as though I’m condoning it. Say something and be accused of being humourless or attract negative attention. But it also makes me more determined to keep going to matches.”

Leyton Orient fan

Only 5% of women said it made them feel as if they shouldn’t be there, with 2% saying sexism prevented them from going to as many games as they’d wish.

“It’s just sad that there are men who seem to have an attitude that football isn’t for girls. It needs much more challenging.”

Newcastle United fan, aged 26-35

Survey results



35.5%

“You know a lot for a girl!”

35.5% of women had been told this at a match.



21%

“You’re only here because you fancy the players!”

21% of women had been told this at a match.



What have women heard at matches?

25% heard sexist comments.

18.5% heard sexist chanting.

8.5% received unwanted physical attention.

9.5% told they only attend because their boyfriend or husband does.



How does matchday sexism make women feel?

31.5% of women embarrassed for the sexists.

29% made angry by sexist comments.

13% found it upsetting.

10% felt it was “part of the matchday experience.”

(Respondents were able to choose as many answers as applicable)



Challenging sexism

How women respond to matchday sexism



© Peterborough United

We have seen that women do experience sexist behaviour of varying kinds at men's professional football matches – but we also asked women how they respond to sexist behaviour at the match.

Several themes emerged from these questions on the issue of what women can do about the problem of sexist behaviour in the stands. Many women felt education was important, for instance, one Nottingham Forest fan told us: "It's really about education. Education and a clear message from the clubs will eventually change attitudes."

"I have grown up with sexist remarks, not just at a game, but at school and at home. I wasn't even allowed to play football at my first and middle schools – so I just got used to it."

Aston Villa fan, aged 26-35

"To be honest, the Ched Evans case really sums up the attitude of football towards women. They tolerate a great deal of misogyny. It has put me off the game in recent years."



Many women felt that the clubs and authorities should take the lead on the problem, one QPR fan wanted to see PA announcements before games denouncing sexist behaviour introduced. Others asked for more proactive stewarding – with progressive punishments from warnings to ground bans.

However, it is encouraging that countless women stressed the importance of the fans themselves challenging and policing this kind of sexist behaviour. An Aston Villa fan summed this up: “Football has changed over the years for the better, because people start to speak up in crowds. Throwing people out won’t alter their behaviour in the long term, but being made to feel isolated and out of touch by everyone around them will.”

Many parallels were drawn by survey respondents between the treatment of sexist incidents

and racism or homophobia – with the general feeling that sexist behaviour is not challenged as vigorously. One respondent, an Aston Villa fan, said: “Most people won’t dare say something racist these days in the stand, because other fans stand up and challenge them.”

“The players and managers should act as role models, not being sexist themselves, and speak up against it.”

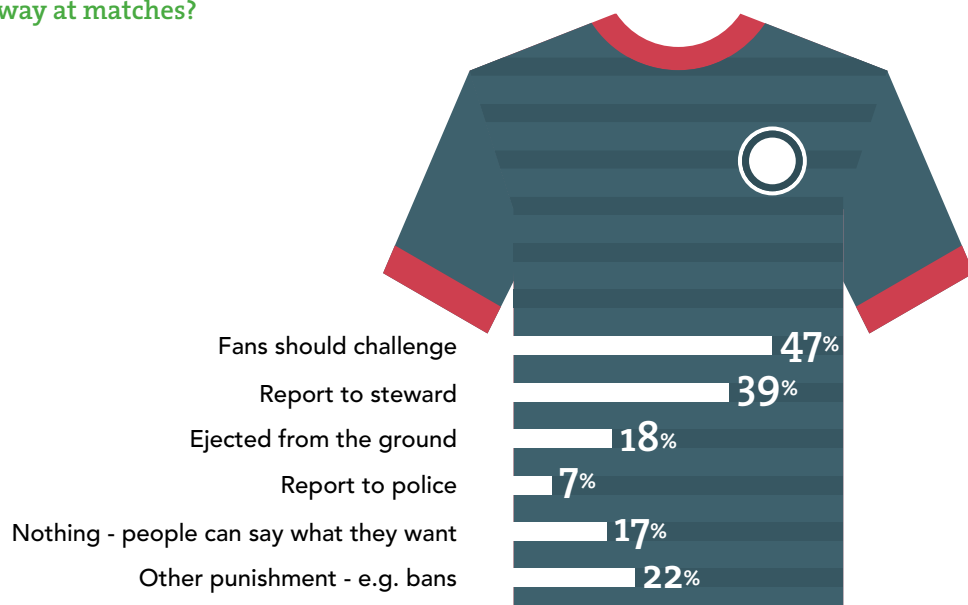
Arsenal fan, aged 26-35

“Women should feel strong enough to challenge comments or attitudes. Saying something in a calm way and challenging stereotypes is the way to change attitudes.”

Nottingham Forest fan, aged 46-55

Survey results

What should happen to people who behave in sexist way at matches?



(Respondents were able to choose as many answers as applicable)



That football girl

Amy Lawrence



The 2014 FSF Writer of the Year winner, Guardian journalist and Arsenal fan Amy Lawrence, tells us about her experiences as a women at the match and growing up as a football fan...

Looking back, the fact that people who didn't know me well enough for first name terms referred to me as "that football girl" was a bit of a giveaway. For as long as I can remember it seemed to be a part of my identity. I suppose football stood out as a characteristic all the more strongly because in the 1970s and 1980s, when I was growing up, football was not considered a natural domain for girls.

But for me, I always felt in my element. From the first experience of walking into a football ground at the age of six, with my best friend and some wombles to play with in case we got bored, I was reeled in. The scale of the noise and colour was so tremendously exciting. The Wombles, it turned out, were not necessary in my case. The years of

studying league tables, cutting headlines out of newspapers, daydreaming about matches and being swept along the emotional currents of football fandom began wholeheartedly.

As a teenager, being accepted amongst the lads on the terrace was mostly ok. Sometimes there was a derogatory remark to deal with, but it usually didn't take too long to engineer a change in attitude. Generally chatting did the trick. I could out-anorak almost anyone on the North Bank with the football knowledge I devoured. Making those who believed football was a man's game admit "she knows her stuff" was a small but satisfying victory. I felt I could stand shoulder to shoulder with any fan.

I recall going a school trip and striking up a conversation on the tube with a stranger wearing an Arsenal badge. My school friends were dumbfounded. What was I doing talking to a strange man and what on earth were we talking about? But this crystallised what being a fan was about - a shared experience that brought strangers together.

These days, the make-up of most football crowds in England are more diverse and welcoming. It has become more normal for women to have opinions on the game that are valued, as they should be.

As a football writer, I have the incredible fortune to have a legitimate excuse to be able to talk about football, watch football and think about football for many of my waking hours. Occasionally friends apologise for asking me about it as if I might somehow be fed up with mentioning it after hours as it is my job.

As if...



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