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'No Scotland, no party!': diversity, identity and fandom in Scottish women's football

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the fanbase of women's football in Scotland, focusing on supporters of the Scotland Women's National Team (SWNT). Drawing on a large-scale survey of over 2300 fans and participant observation at seven matches, the study explores the demographics, motivations, and experiences of supporters. By comparing fans of women's football with those of men's football, it highlights key differences in identity, values, and fan culture. Findings reveal a distinctive and diverse audience, including significant representation of women and LGBTQ+ communities, motivated by inclusivity, representation, and a welcoming matchday atmosphere. A typology of fan identities is developed, and tensions between traditional and emerging fan cultures are explored. The study argues that the growth of women's football in Scotland depends on increased visibility, and support for under-represented groups. By centring fans often overlooked in football research, it offers an original contribution to the sociology of sport and the study of fandom.

Introduction

Football scholarship has often overlooked fan culture as a serious area of study, particularly regarding how individuals become fans and sustain their engagement over time.¹ This gap is even more pronounced in women's football, where the experiences of supporters have been largely neglected. As Crawford notes, those who do not conform to the 'traditional' image of the fan are frequently marginalized in discussions of fandom, a pattern that continues today.²

This article addresses this omission by exploring the fandom surrounding women's football in Scotland, with a particular focus on the Scotland Women's National Team (SWNT). It examines when, why, and how fans engage with the sport, the motivations behind their support, and the various factors that shape their experiences. It also considers the role of the media in representing women's football, contributing to a broader understanding of the sport's development. The research is situated within

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a significant moment for Scottish women's football: the heightened interest following the SWNT's historic qualification for the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup.³

Academically, women's football in Scotland remains underrepresented. Between 1998 and 2020, only four published articles focused on the Scottish women's game, compared to 16 on women's football in England and 169 on men's football in Scotland. Where the women's game has been studied, the emphasis has largely been historical.⁴ Contemporary analyses of marketing, media, fandom, and sport management in Scottish women's football are rare. Moreover, while some scholarship claims to cover women's football across the UK, Macbeth argues that Scotland typically receives no more than 'a token mention'.⁵ This article seeks to redress that imbalance by focusing specifically on Scotland

To do so, it draws on the largest known survey of women's football fans in Scotland. The research generated 2359 completed responses from fans of women's, men's, or both forms of the game, substantially more than comparable studies. For instance, Guest and Luijten's⁶ work on Portland Thorns supporters surveyed 217 fans, and Giulianotti's⁷ seminal study of the (men's) Tartan Army drew on 440 responses. While the sample is self-selecting and non-random, its scale offers an unprecedented insight into a largely under-researched fan community and represents a significant empirical contribution to the study of football fandom.

While the broader field of sports fandom research is well established, it has historically centred on men's sports. Football has been framed through a masculine lens, with research largely focused on male-dominated supporter cultures and issues such as hooliganism, masculinity, and nationalism. In contrast, the fandom of women's football remains underexplored, despite its growing visibility.

Scotland offers a valuable case study in this regard. The women's game here has been historically marginalized but has recently gained momentum in both participation and public interest. This emerging fanbase provides an opportunity to examine alternative modes of fandom, shaped by different social, cultural, and gendered experiences.

This article begins by outlining the historical trajectory of women's football in Scotland and reviewing relevant theoretical frameworks in sports fandom. It then draws on both men's and women's football literature to identify gaps in the existing scholarship and establish a foundation for analysing the distinctive characteristics of women's football fandom in the Scottish context.

A brief history of women's football in Scotland

'We just don't approve of ladies playing football'. – Willie Allen, SFA chief executive (1972)⁸

The reasons why the women's game in Scotland continues to lag behind men's football, and many European counterparts, in support, funding, media coverage, and participation can be traced to its troubled history.⁹ Longstanding sexism, discrimination, and marginalization have shaped the conditions many players still face today. Similarly, as Skillen et al.¹⁰ note, researching this history is difficult due to limited source material. Scholars rely heavily on oral history and fragmented media coverage to reconstruct its complex past.

Despite recent growth, women's football in Scotland has deep roots, dating back to 1628, with the first recorded international match in 1881. The sport flourished briefly during the First World War, drawing large crowds, including 8000 at an unofficial match in 1918.¹¹ However, in 1921 the FA banned women's football, officially citing financial concerns. The SFA followed suit informally, formalizing the ban in 1948. This restricted access to facilities and stunted development, further marginalizing the sport.¹² And it wasn't until 1971, under pressure from UEFA, that women's football began to regain support. Scotland, the last European nation to lift its ban (in 1974), saw slow progress. The Scottish Women's Football Association (SWFA) was formed, but the SFA only took control of the national team in 1998. The Scottish Women's Premier League (SWPL) was launched in 2002 to boost professionalism and media visibility.¹³

Yet, women's football remains underdeveloped compared to the men's game, due largely to this legacy of neglect.¹⁴ The women's World Cup only began in 1991, 61 years after the men's tournament, highlighting global disparities. The 53-year ban and lack of investment continue to underpin the persistent gulf between men's and women's football in Scotland.

The current position of the women's game in Scotland

'Women's football will never be popular'. – *The Scottish Sun*¹⁵

In 2019, women's football in Scotland reached a pivotal milestone. On 28 May, a record crowd of 18,555 watched the SWNT defeat Jamaica 3–2 at Hampden Park, more than quadrupling the previous attendance record.¹⁶ Manager Shelley Kerr called it a 'watershed moment' for the game.¹⁷ While fuelled by the team's World Cup qualification, this surge also reflected a decade of sustained growth, driven by international success and greater involvement from major men's clubs.¹⁸ A Kantar¹⁹ report found that nearly one in three Scots expressed interest in the SWNT. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon described the World Cup qualification as potentially 'transformational' for women's sport. Ahead of the tournament, the Scottish Government introduced funding to enable part-time players to train full-time.²⁰ The impact was immediate: participation among women and girls rose by 85%, from 9286 in 2015 to 17,230 in 2020.²¹

This growing interest was also visible in attendance and broadcast figures. The SWNT set new records: 6445 attended a match in October 2021²² and 7804 watched the April 2022 qualifier against Spain.²³ The 2019 Women's World Cup reached nearly 1 billion viewers globally, 30% more than in 2015.²⁴ In the UK, 47% of the population tuned in, with 6.1 million watching Scotland vs. England, the most-watched women's football broadcast in UK history at the time.²⁵

Despite this growth, significant inequalities remain. Women still represent just 11% of players in Scotland,²⁶ mirroring global trends, only 0.93% of professional players worldwide were women in 2017.²⁷ Structural challenges too persist. In 2022, SWNT players criticized the SFA for limiting ticket availability for a key World Cup qualifier, asking, 'How are we expected to grow the game when limited tickets are available for our supporters?'²⁸ These tensions are amplified by a media landscape that has often trivialized women's football. In 2013, Tam Cowan wrote that Fir Park should have been

'torched' after hosting a women's match.²⁹ That same year, a Daily Record article questioned the SFA's £1.2 million investment, despite the SWNT ranking 11th in Europe, far ahead of the men's 29th-place.³⁰ In 2015, Glasgow City became the first Scottish club, men's or women's, to reach a UEFA Champions League quarter-final.

While the Scottish Government, SFA, and SWF have voiced support for the game's development, real progress requires sustained investment, structural reform, and increased media visibility. Following the 'Golden Triangle' logic, long-term sustainability hinges on boosting commercial revenue and public interest. At both national and club levels, women's football in Scotland remains in transition. While leagues like the SWPL work to professionalize the game,³¹ deep-rooted financial and organizational challenges remain.³² Without coordinated, long-term support, this progress risks stalling.

Theoretical frameworks on fandom

Research on sports fans has been a core focus of sport studies for over 60 years, covering themes such as violence, gender, national identity, and media representation. Football fandom, in particular, is often portrayed as a masculine domain that reinforces gender hierarchies.³³ In the United States, the field has expanded to include perspectives from social psychology and marketing, examining how and why people develop attachments to teams or athletes.³⁴ These studies highlight that fan engagement varies widely, with motivations including social interaction, entertainment, and team loyalty.³⁵

Much of this research has been shaped by a dominant 'malestream' perspective, with a strong emphasis on masculinity in fan cultures.³⁶ Early UK scholarship on football fans often focused on deviance and hooliganism,³⁷ linking working-class male identity with violence.³⁸ This body of work helped solidify the image of the male football fan as prone to 'drunken destructiveness'.³⁹

Football has also been framed as a key vehicle for expressing national identity.⁴⁰ However, research rarely considers this dynamic in women's sport. An exception is Bowes and Bairner,⁴¹ who argue that in international competition, female athletes often symbolize the nation, with their national identity taking precedence over gender, casting them as 'proxy warriors' on the global stage.

Several studies have explored the relationship between football and fandom in Scotland, where the sport has been described as 'an obsession that impacts its local, national, and global identity'.⁴² Among the most notable is Giulianotti's⁴³ ethnographic work on the Tartan Army, supporters of the Scotland men's national team. He highlighted how fans travel independently in large numbers, often engaging in heavy drinking and rowdy but generally good-humoured behaviour, especially when compared to English supporters. Giulianotti⁴⁴ described this as 'carnival' fandom and, by focusing on everyday supporters rather than hooligans, marked a shift in fan studies during the 1990s. Divisions based on region or club allegiance were softened by shared rituals of drinking, anti-English sentiment, and masculine identity.⁴⁵ Despite noting an increasing number of female fans, Giulianotti's work has been critiqued for its 'gender blindness', offering little insight into the experiences of women.⁴⁶ This mirrors a broader academic tendency to focus on violent masculinity and overlook gender diversity in football fandom.

Beyond academia, initiatives such as the Supporters Direct Scotland Fans' Survey⁴⁷ have captured data on pricing, governance and matchday experience, but focus almost exclusively on men's football. Female fans and women's football remain largely absent, reinforcing the male-dominated framing of fan culture. This article responds to that gap by centring the experiences of women who support the Scotland Women's National Team, offering a fresh contribution to the study of football fandom.

Female fans

In both academic and popular discourse, female sports fans are often portrayed as marginal or distinct from the 'typical' male fan. As Hoerber and Kerwin⁴⁸ observe, 'it is assumed a man is a sport fan unless he says he is not, while a woman is assumed not to be a sport fan, unless she proves she is'. This reflects a broader assumption that being a 'real fan' is inherently male.⁴⁹

Research on female fans remains limited, with most studies focusing on men and topics like hooliganism. Even in the UK, considered the 'cradle of football studies',⁵⁰ women's experiences remain underexplored.⁵¹ However, recent works have begun addressing this gap,⁵² showing that female fans are often viewed as less credible or authentic.⁵³

Women have long been part of football fandom,⁵⁴ yet in the 1990s were framed as 'new' when the UK government encouraged women and children to attend matches to 'civilise' crowds after the hooligan era.⁵⁵ Their presence was linked to football's 'bourgeoisification' rather than long-standing engagement.⁵⁶ This marginalization is evident in King's⁵⁷ study of Manchester United fans, which Pope⁵⁸ critiques for reducing women to three stereotypes: regulars who embrace modernization, mothers at family stands, and teenage girls drawn to players' appearances. Such representations imply weaker, less authentic fandom. As Dunn⁵⁹ summarizes, women are often positioned as exceptions rather than part of fandom's core. (Table 1)

Football supporter literature frequently positions women outside the 'imagined community' of fandom. They are stereotyped as less knowledgeable or sincere⁶¹ and are marginalized by masculine norms.⁶² Jones even described UK football culture as 'anti-women',⁶³ citing widespread misogyny and sexist chants.

Scholars have explored how women navigate these exclusionary environments. Some conform to dominant norms, reinforcing marginalization,⁶⁴ while others use fandom as a form of resistance and identity negotiation.⁶⁵ Although fandom has long been framed as a masculine domain,⁶⁶ research highlights women's enduring presence.⁶⁷ Pope⁶⁸ notes that sport plays a significant role in many women's lives and later⁶⁹ identified a growing

Table 1. Comparison of the representation of male and female fans⁶⁰.

Male football fans	female football fans
The norm, ungendered	Unusual if not invisible
Entitled	Uninvited
Traditional	Non-traditional
Authentic	Inauthentic
Working-class	Equated with the middle class
Aggressive	Civilising

'feminisation' of football fandom. This shift has been shaped by safer stadium environments post-Hillsborough and broader gender equality, alongside the professionalization of women's sport.

Historically, researchers treated male and female fans as fundamentally different, prompting numerous comparative studies in the early 2000s. These studies often used typologies and consumer scales.⁷⁰ Wann⁷¹ found men were more driven by self-esteem, escapism, and group affiliation, while women cited social and family factors.⁷² However, Dietz et al.'s⁷³ replicated study in 2021 found no significant gender differences, suggesting that fan motivations may be converging over time.

Methodology

This study aimed to explore the motivations of fans of women's football in Scotland and the origins of their fandom, with a specific focus on supporters of the Scotland Women's National Team (SWNT). A mixed-methods approach was adopted, centred around a large-scale online survey.

Survey design and rationale

A comprehensive online survey was developed to examine the demographics, motivations, and media practices of women's football fans in Scotland. This builds on the Scottish Football Supporters Survey,⁷⁴ which focused on the men's game but largely overlooked women's football. The survey included both closed and open-ended questions across seven sections. Participants followed tailored pathways based on whether they followed women's, men's, or both forms of the game, producing two overlapping datasets that enabled comparative analysis.

To ensure reliability and comparability, validated scales were adapted to the Scottish women's football context. These included the Sport Spectator Identification Scale,⁷⁵ fandom level items,⁷⁶ and measures of social connectivity.⁷⁷

Open-ended questions explored the personal meanings of fandom, such as 'How did you become a fan of the SWNT?' and 'What do you most enjoy about being a SWNT fan?' Despite typically lower engagement with qualitative items, response rates were strong: 72% answered the first question, and 67.1% the second.

While the online format may have excluded some without digital access or confidence, and the self-selected sample limits generalizability, the survey nonetheless offers one of the most detailed portraits of women's football fans in Scotland to date.

Survey sampling and procedure

Sampling was a critical consideration in designing this study to ensure sufficient data was gathered to address the research questions. The target population included fans of both women's and men's football in Scotland, allowing for comparative analysis between the two groups. However, constructing a formal sampling frame proved difficult, particularly due to the absence of any administrative dataset identifying supporters of women's football in Scotland.

Given these constraints, the goal of statistical representativeness was challenging. Instead, the strategy prioritized reaching the largest possible sample size to capture a broad and diverse range of fan experiences. While not fully representative of the population, the sample provides a robust foundation for estimating key trends and drawing tentative generalizations.

Survey dissemination relied primarily on two channels: social media and existing football fan networks. Social media proved especially effective in reaching women's football fans. The survey was open from 28 May to 28 June 2019, coinciding with Scotland's participation in the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup, a moment of unprecedented national attention for the SWNT.⁷⁸ It generated 2359 responses in total.

Observing fans

While surveys remain central to fan studies, they can struggle to capture the affective and social dimensions of fandom. To address this, participant observation was used alongside the survey to offer a more nuanced understanding of fan experiences surrounding the Scotland Women's National Team (SWNT) during the 2019 Women's World Cup. Fieldwork spanned seven matches over 14 months, including both domestic and international fixtures. Observations took place in varied fan environments, stadiums, fan zones, pubs, and online spaces, to reflect the diversity of settings in which fandom is enacted. Data collection included fieldnotes, photographs, and video recordings.

Common in feminist research, participant observation proved valuable for exploring how fans navigated gender, identity, and community. This immersive, ethnographic approach contextualized the survey data and offered deeper insight into supporter engagement with the women's game.

Data analysis, ethics and limitations

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS, with statistical tests exploring associations between variables such as age, gender, and fandom type. Results were reported only when significant at the $p < 0.05$ level and are presented as frequencies and percentages to highlight key patterns.

Open-ended responses were thematically analysed following Braun and Clarke's⁷⁹ framework: familiarization, coding, theme development, and interpretation in relation to research questions. Where relevant, themes were quantified to indicate prevalence, offering both depth and representativeness.⁸⁰

Theme frequencies were calculated as proportions of the total sample to support a 'realist account' of fan identities.⁸¹ Importantly, quantification followed inductive coding to ensure results reflected participants' own perspectives rather than pre-set categories.

While robust, the methodology is not without limitations. The self-selected sample may reflect response bias, as more engaged fans were likely to participate. Limited digital access may have excluded some potential respondents. However, the sample size of 2359 provides a strong empirical foundation for analysing trends in Scottish women's football fandom.

Who are the fans of women's football in Scotland?

The first objective of this study was to explore the characteristics of the women's football fanbase in Scotland. Survey respondents were grouped according to their football interests: fans of women's football only, men's football only, or both. This allowed for meaningful comparisons between different supporter communities. The demographic results are summarized in Table 2.

Consistent with previous research suggesting that women's sport attracts different audiences,⁸² clear distinctions emerged across gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. Among those who supported only women's football, 78 per cent identified as female, compared to just 8 per cent of those who supported only men's football. However, the overall women's football fanbase was slightly more male (52 per cent) than female (47 per cent), which aligns with broader trends, such as the 53 per cent male viewership of the 2019 Women's World Cup.⁸³ This supports the decision to analyse responses based on football interest rather than gender alone.

Differences in sexual orientation were also notable. Fewer than 2 per cent of men's football fans identified as lesbian or gay, while 30 per cent of women's football fans

Table 2. Demographics of the fanbase of men's and women's football in Scotland.

Characteristic	Fans of women's and men's football		Fans of women's football		Fans of men's football	
	Total Sample	%	Total Sample	%	Total Sample	%
Gender						
Female	304	41.82	96	78.05	31	8.14
Male	411	56.53	26	21.14	345	90.55
Other	4	0.55	1	0.81	1	0.26
Prefer not to say	4	0.55	0	0	4	1.05
Age						
Under 18	18	2.49	4	3.25	3	0.79
18–24	54	7.48	11	8.94	9	2.36
25–34	124	17.17	24	19.51	51	13.39
35–44	136	18.84	26	21.14	50	13.12
45–54	178	24.65	42	34.15	100	26.25
55–64	133	18.42	14	11.38	116	30.45
65+	79	10.94	2	1.63	52	13.65
Ethnicity						
White – Scottish	663	91.83	91	73.98	329	86.58
White – Other British	31	4.29	22	17.89	28	7.37
White – Irish	3	0.42	3	2.44	5	1.32
White – Any other white ethnic group	11	1.53	4	3.25	3	0.79
Other ethnicity	12	1.66	2	1.62	7	1.84
Prefer not to answer	2	0.28	1	0.81	8	2.11
Religion						
No religion	406	56.23	75	60.98	176	46.32
Christian (Church of Scotland)	167	23.13	16	13.01	99	26.05
Christian (Roman Catholic)	72	9.97	11	8.94	53	13.95
Prefer not to answer	36	4.99	11	8.94	28	7.37
Christian (other)	31	4.29	9	7.32	18	4.74
Other religion	10	1.39	1	0.81	4	1.06
Sexual orientation						
Heterosexual	600	83.22	81	65.85	356	93.68
Gay/lesbian	62	8.6	26	21.14	5	1.32
Bisexual	21	2.91	10	8.13	1	0.26
Other	5	0.69	1	0.81	1	0.26
Prefer not to say	33	4.58	5	4.07	17	4.47

Table 3. Comparison of the survey participants and Scottish population.

	Fans of women's football within this survey (2019) – %	Scottish Football Supporters Survey (2019) – %	Scottish population ⁸⁷ (2011) – %
Gender			
Male	52	88	49
Female	47	10.4	51
Other/prefer not to answer	1	1.6	Unknown
Ethnicity			
Majority ethnic population ⁸⁸	96.21	95	96
Minority ethnic population ⁸⁹	3.43	3.5	4
Prefer not to answer	0.36	1.5	Unknown
Religion			
Christian ⁹⁰	36.21	42.4	32 ⁹¹
No religion	56.92	52.4	37
Other	1.31	1.2	Unknown
Prefer not to answer	5.56	4	Unknown
Sexual Orientation			
Heterosexual	80.69	93.2	83.1
Gay/lesbian	10.43	1.1	0.9
Bisexual	3.67	0.9	0.4
Prefer not to answer	4.50	0.4	8.5
Other	0.71	4.4	0.9

identified as lesbian (21 per cent), bisexual (8 per cent), or other (1 per cent). This is significantly higher than the Scottish population average of 0.9 per cent and reflects previous research highlighting the visibility of LGBTQ+ identities in women's football,⁸⁴ often shaped by prominent out players such as SWNT captain Rachel Corsie. In contrast, no male players or coaches were openly gay or bisexual at the 2018 Men's World Cup.⁸⁵

Ethnic and religious differences were also observed. While the majority of respondents identified as White Scottish, this was less common among women's football fans (74 per cent) than among men's football fans (87 per cent) or fans of both (92 per cent). Religious affiliation followed a similar pattern. Sixty-one per cent of women's football fans reported no religion, compared to 46 per cent of men's football fans.

Compared to the 2019 Scottish Football Supporters Survey, which focused on men's football, this study's sample was significantly more female (47 per cent compared to 10.4 per cent) and included a higher proportion of lesbian, gay, and bisexual fans (14.8 per cent compared to 2.9 per cent). These findings challenge the dominant image of the white, heterosexual, working class male supporter who is often seen as the default football fan.⁸⁶ The results offer valuable insight into fan communities that have historically been underrepresented in football research. Broader demographic comparisons are presented in Table 3.

Segmentation of fans

As this article has shown, significant differences exist not only between fans of men's and women's football, but also within the fanbase for women's football itself. These fans are driven by a range of motivations and display diverse behaviours and attitudes. This

challenges the idea of football supporters as a single, uniform group. Drawing on survey data and field observations from matches and online spaces, this section identifies key characteristics of common SWNT fan types. While no typology can capture every individual, such categories can help organizations better understand their current and potential audiences.

The next generation

Labelled the 'Next Generation', this group consists mainly of young girls involved in youth football clubs, attending matches with teammates, coaches, and parents. At SWNT home games, they were often seen in club tracksuits, carrying flags that displayed their team names. Although some teams travelled to France for the World Cup, they were more commonly found at domestic fixtures. Their visibility reflects the growing number of girls participating in football in Scotland and highlights the strong link between playing and supporting the game.

The SFA's focus on targeting young female players, based on the assumption that they would be more easily drawn to women's football, appears to have been effective. Many fans reported that their interest in the SWNT developed through their own football participation. However, as Allison⁹² warns, focusing solely on one group risks limiting the sport's wider appeal. By concentrating efforts on young players, the SFA effectively shaped the fanbase it expected, with youth footballers becoming a dominant presence.

Family fans

The second type identified was family groups, usually made up of mothers, fathers, and children. These fans were especially prominent at domestic fixtures. Women's football in Scotland is often marketed as a family friendly day out, offering an inclusive and safe environment for shared experiences. Importantly, these families were not exclusively heterosexual. Same-sex couples were observed, and one lesbian respondent described how the inclusive atmosphere, affordability, and access to player role models positively influenced her daughters.

Demographic data showed a slightly higher number of male than female fans in the 25 to 54 age range, giving rise to the term 'Dadvocates', fathers who support women's football through their daughters' involvement. One father explained that he began attending matches because of his daughter's participation in the sport. This mirrors strategies employed by the English FA, which has sought to engage fathers who already follow men's football and encourage them to support the women's game through their children. However, such campaigns often overlook the role of mothers, who were also frequently present and play a vital role in sustaining fan interest.

'No Scotland, no party' fans

This group, mostly composed of female friendship circles, was especially visible at international fixtures. Dressed in tartan, kilts, and World Cup edition shirts, these fans brought colour, noise, and enthusiasm to the stands. Their chants and

celebratory presence created a lively, communal atmosphere and were regularly highlighted in media coverage, reinforcing the image of Scottish fans as joyful and spirited.

These fans resemble Giulianotti's 'carnival' supporters,⁹³ those who value the experience and celebration as much as the game itself. They embraced the festive mood of major tournaments, cheering regardless of results, and took pride in Scotland's rare appearance at a senior World Cup. However, some tensions emerged with fans who preferred a quieter, more family-oriented environment. A few 'No Scotland, no party' fans expressed frustration at the lack of separation between rival fans and the constraints they felt when trying to express their fandom in the usual vocal, and at times rowdy, manner. These tensions reflect similar dynamics identified by Guest and Luijten,⁹⁴ where adult fans sometimes felt that the presence of children limited their preferred modes of support.

Men's a team fans

The final group consisted of male fans typically associated with the men's national team. Most were seen at World Cup fixtures, and many were attending women's football for the first time. Journalist Alan Campbell had predicted a low turnout from the Tartan Army, yet their presence, especially for the Scotland versus England match, was notable, given it was Scotland's first senior World Cup appearance in over two decades. The lack of organized travel and supporter infrastructure, common in men's matches, frustrated some fans, and others perceived this absence as a reflection of unequal treatment of the women's team.

While some appreciated the event, others viewed it through a male-centric lens. One fan commented, 'Imagine what the crowds will be like if the men's team qualifies for a World Cup', implying that men's football remained the gold standard. This view created a cultural disconnect between these more traditional male fans and regular SWNT supporters, contributing to a different atmosphere at international fan zones compared to domestic matches. Many of these fans were interested in the novelty of a major tournament rather than the ongoing development of the women's game. This aligns with Pope's⁹⁵ notion of the 'new consumer' fan, someone attracted to the event more than the team itself. While some engaged positively, others left fan zones early, citing the absence of alcohol or familiar rituals as reasons for disengagement.

Long-term SWNT supporters, many of them women, were often frustrated by what they perceived as condescending or dismissive behaviour from these newer attendees. Remarks such as 'Why don't you f**k off and leave the real fans to it?' revealed tensions around authenticity and ownership of fan culture. This divide underscores how women's football fandom is often built on personal and emotional investment, in contrast to more casual or event-driven spectatorship.

Some of these traditional male fans also resisted certain rituals popular in women's football settings, including Mexican waves, noise metres, and half and half scarves. These elements, seen by some as symbols of commercialized or 'softened' football, were mocked online and used to draw boundaries between what is seen as authentic or acceptable fan behaviour.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the current state of women's football in Scotland, with a particular focus on its fanbase and media coverage. Using a cross-disciplinary and mixed-methods approach, and conducted in partnership with the SFA, the research examined the SWNT during the 2019 FIFA WWC as a case study to assess the sport's position within Scotland's sporting landscape.

The first key finding centred on the makeup and motivations of the women's football fanbase, particularly in contrast with that of the men's game. A large-scale survey revealed clear demographic differences, echoing previous studies.⁹⁶ Fans of women's football were more likely to be female and LGBTQ+, forming a distinct supporter community. Thematic analysis of open-ended responses highlighted the centrality of participation, either through playing or through family and social connections, as a key driver of fandom. Over 40 per cent of respondents cited participation as the primary reason for following the SWNT, indicating the value of strategies that engage girls already involved in the sport.

Motivations for supporting women's football also diverged from those typical of men's football fandom. SWNT fans valued the quality of the game, the inclusive and diverse community, and the opportunity to support women's rights. These responses directly challenged persistent stereotypes about the standard of women's football, many of which have been reinforced through limited and often dismissive media coverage. By contrast, fans of men's football frequently cited quality as a barrier to engaging with the women's game, and in some cases expressed attitudes that were overtly misogynistic. Such views were seen by SWNT fans as an obstacle to the sport's growth.

While these findings reflect broader trends noted elsewhere,⁹⁷ this study provides a uniquely Scottish perspective. It highlights the lasting impact of historical resistance to women's football in Scotland but also shows that participation remains a powerful catalyst for fandom. It calls for targeted outreach to girls already playing the game and greater effort to engage LGBTQ+ audiences, groups that have been largely overlooked in promotional and development strategies.

Perceptions of the barriers facing women's football also differed between the groups. SWNT fans emphasized the need for increased investment and better media coverage, while fans of the men's game focused on perceived limitations in skill or competitiveness. Some respondents echoed biological essentialist views, suggesting that women's football is inherently inferior, a view that continues to hinder the sport's legitimacy. At the same time, many fans of the women's game framed it as a refreshing alternative to men's football, praising its family friendly environment and the presence of positive role models. This reflects an ongoing shift in the culture of fandom, one that may be understood as part of the broader feminization of sport.⁹⁸ In this light, women's football in Scotland is not only attracting a more diverse audience but also redefining what it means to be a football fan.

In conclusion, this study suggests that women's football in Scotland is at a critical point of transformation. Its fanbase is distinct, engaged, and socially progressive. Future research should examine how national identity intersects with women's football fandom in the Scottish context, particularly as public interest continues to grow. Understanding

these dynamics will be vital to sustaining the momentum of women's football and ensuring that its growth is inclusive, representative, and enduring.

Notes

1. Pfister et al., 'One is Not Born, But Rather Becomes a Fan'.
2. Crawford, *Consuming Sport*.
3. Kantar Media, 'UEFA GROW'.
4. Fraser, 'Sisters Doing it for Themselves'; and Lawther, *Arrival*; Macbeth, 'The Development of Women's Football in Scotland'.
5. Macbeth, 'Women's Football in Scotland: An Interpretive Analysis', 4.
6. Guest and Luijten, 'Fan Culture and Motivation in the Context of Successful Women's Professional Team Sports'.
7. Giulianotti, 'Scoring Away From Home'.
8. Fraser, 'Sisters Doing it for Themselves'.
9. Macbeth, 'Women's Football in Scotland: An Interpretive Analysis'.
10. Skillen et al., 'The Game of Football is Quite Unsuitable for Females and Ought Not to be Encouraged'.
11. McCuaig, 'Honeyballers'.
12. Skillen, 'The History of Women's Football in Scotland'; and Fraser, 'Sisters Doing it for Themselves'.
13. Fraser, 'Sisters Doing it for Themselves'.
14. Williams, *Women's Football, Europe and Professionalization*; Palmer, 'Scotland Women'.
15. Lindner, 'Women's World Cup Heralds Progress, But a Level Playing Field in Football is Miles Off', para 7.
16. Smith, 'Women's Soccer was Having a Moment. Then the Clock Stopped'.
17. Murray, 'Record Crowd Set to Give Scotland Send-off for Women's World Cup'.
18. Smith, 'Women's Soccer was Having a Moment. Then the Clock Stopped'.
19. Kantar Media, 'UEFA GROW'.
20. BBC, 'All Players to be Full-time up to World Cup with Government Funding'.
21. Brown, 'Number of Women Playing Football and Rugby in Scotland Doubles'.
22. Batte, 'Scottish FA Turn on Their Own Women's Team Ahead of Spain Game'.
23. Meikle, 'Scotland 0-2 Spain'.
24. FIFA and Publicis Sport and Entertainment, *FIFA Women's World Cup France 2019*.
25. Farey-Jones, 'Women's Football Draws Record 6.9 m TV Viewers'.
26. McLaughlin, 'Football "Worth £1.25bn" to Scottish Society'.
27. Sporting Intelligence. 'Global Sports Salaries Survey'.
28. Corsie, 'Following Record Attendances at Recent Women's Football Matches, the SFA Have Only Opened a Fraction of a 50,000+ Capacity Hampden Park'.
29. Cowan, 'Fir Park Should Have Been Torched After it Hosted Women's Football'.
30. Parks, 'Spending £1.2 m on Women's Football Isn't Justified'.
31. Lewis, 'Pro Target for Scottish Women's Game'.
32. ECA. *Women's Club Football Analysis*.
33. Dolance and Messner, 'Taking the Field'.
34. Funk et al., 'Exploring Origins of Involvement'; and Robinson and Trail, 'Relationships Among Spectator Gender, Motives, Points of Attachment, and Sport Preference'.
35. Redden and Steiner. 'Fanatical Consumers: Towards a framework for research'; and Wann and Pierce, 'The Relationship Between Sport Team Identification and Social Well-being'.
36. Crawford and Gosling, 'The Myth of the "Puck Bunny"'; and Armstrong and Giulianotti, *Football Cultures and Identities*.
37. Spaaij, 'Men Like Us, Boys Like Them'; and Dunning, *Fighting Fans*.
38. Taylor, 'Football Mad'; Critcher, 'Football Since the War'.
39. Jensen, 'Fandom as Pathology'.

40. Hermes, 'Burnt orange: television, football, and the representation of ethnicity'; and Marschik, 'Left off the Stage: Mapping Inclusion and Exclusion in EURO 2008'.
41. Bowes and Bairner, 'England's proxy warriors? Women, War and Sport'.
42. Mason, *Sport in Britain*, 355.
43. Giulianotti, 'Scotland's Tartan Army in Italy'; and Giulianotti, 'Football and the Politics of Carnival'.
44. Giulianotti, 'Football and the Politics of Carnival'.
45. Giulianotti, 'Sport Spectators and the Social Consequences of Commodification'.
46. Free and Hughson. 'Settling Accounts with Hooligans'.
47. Supporters Direct Scotland, *Scottish Football Supporters Survey*.
48. Hoeber and Kerwin, 'Exploring the Experiences of Female Sport Fans', 328.
49. Pitti, 'Being Women in a Male Preserve: an Ethnography of Female Football Ultras'.
50. Antonowicz, Jakubowska, and Kossakowski, 'Marginalised, Patronised and Instrumentalised'.
51. Radmann and Hedenborg, 'Women's Football Supporter Culture in Sweden'.
52. Ben-Porat, 'Not Just for Men'; Crawford and Gosling, 'The Myth of the "Puck Bunny"'; Dunn, *Female Football Fans*; Pope, 'The Meaning of Sport in The Lives of "Hot" and "Cool" Female Fans of Football and Rugby Union'; Pope, "'The Love of my Life'"; Pope, 'Female Football Fans and Gender Performance'; Pope, 'Female Fans of Men's Football'; Pope, *The Feminization of Sports Fandom*; and Pope, "'Who Could Name an England Women's Footballer?'".
53. Esmonde, Cooky, and Andrews, "'It's Supposed to Be about the Love of the Game, Not the Love of Aaron Rodgers" Eyes'; and Sveinson and Hoeber. 'Overlooking the Obvious'.
54. Coddington, *One of the Lads*.
55. Crolley and Long, 'Sitting Pretty?'.
56. Taylor, 'Football Mad'.
57. King, 'The Lads'.
58. Pope, 'Like Pulling down Durham Cathedral and Building a Brothel'.
59. Dunn, 'The Experience of Female Football Fans in England'.
60. *Ibid.*, 50.
61. Armstrong, *Football Hooligans*.
62. Armstrong and Young, 'Fanatical Football Chants'.
63. Jones, 'Female Fandom'.
64. Selmer, *Watching the Boys Play*.
65. Mewett and Toffoletti. 'Finding Footy'.
66. King, 'The Lads'.
67. Williams and Woodhouse, *Can Play, Will Play*; Gosling, 'Girls allowed?'; and Pope, 'Like Pulling Down Durham Cathedral and Building a Brothel'.
68. Pope, 'The Meaning of Sport in The Lives of "Hot" And "Cool" Female Fans of Football and Rugby Union'.
69. Pope, *The feminization of sports fandom*.
70. Funk, 'Consumer-Based Marketing'; Tapp and Clowes, 'From "carefree casuals" to "professional wanderers"'.
71. Wann, 'Premilitary Validation of the Sport Fan Motivation Scale'.
72. Dietz-Uhler et al., 'Sex differences in Sport Fan Behavior and Reasons For Being a Sport Fan'.
73. Dietz, Bean and Omaitis. 'Gender Differences in Sport Fans'.
74. Supporters Direct Scotland, *Scottish Football Supporters Survey*.
75. Wann and Branscombe, 'Sports Fans'.
76. James and Ridinger. 'Female and Male Sport Fans'.
77. Wann, Polk and Franz, 'Examining the State Social Psychological Health Benefits of Identifying With a Distant Sport Team'.
78. Kantar Media, 'UEFA GROW'.
79. Braun and Clarke. 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology'.

80. Joffe, 'Thematic Analysis'.
81. Braun and Clarke. 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology'.
82. Lopiano, 'Tomorrow in Women's Sports'.
83. Buckle, 'Understanding the Women's World Cup Audience'.
84. Dunn, *Football and the Women's World Cup*.
85. Binley, 'Why Are More Female Footballers Openly Gay or Bisexual Than Male Players?'.
86. Crabbe and Brown. "'You're Not Welcome Anymore'".
87. Based on the 2011 census.
88. Including those who identified as White Scottish and White other British.
89. Including those who identified as White Non-British Groups (which include White Irish, White Polish, Traveller and other White), Asian, African and Caribbean.
90. Includes the Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic and other Christian denominations.
91. Only includes the Church of Scotland.
92. Allison, *Kicking Center*.
93. Giulianotti, 'Football and the Politics of Carnival'.
94. Guest and Luijten, 'Fan Culture and Motivation in The Context of Successful Women's Professional Team Sports'.
95. Pope, 'Female Football Fans and Gender Performance'.
96. Lopiano, 'Tomorrow in Women's Sports'.
97. Dunn, 'The Experience of Female Football Fans in England'; and Allison and Pope, 'Becoming Fans'.
98. Pope, *The Feminization of Sports Fandom*.

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