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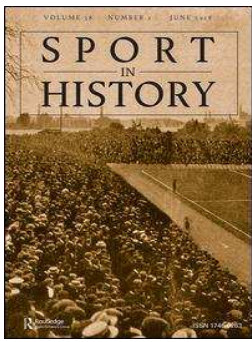
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Shirt tales: how adults adopted the replica football kit

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to identify when the replica football shirt transitioned from children's sportswear to adult leisurewear, and explain why this occurred. Four distinct facets of this process are examined – the production of adult sizes by manufacturers, the promotion of replica shirts by clubs and retailers, purchasing by adults, and the 'parading', i.e. wearing of shirts at matches. Data collected from manufacturer's catalogues, magazine adverts, match programmes and over 900 crowd photos indicates that replica shirt adoption by adult males as match-day clothing was not initially driven by an existing industry, but began as a fan-inspired process with roots in big-match fancy dress traditions, changes in wider social dress codes, and youth subcultures. Replica football shirts were adopted by adult males in distinct phases, each involving different sub-groups of fans, with the coincidental removal of barriers to wearing replica shirts more influential than manufacturer strategies or promotions. Moreover, the specific timings and drivers of each stage reflect the dramatic changes in English football culture over the last two decades of the twentieth century more accurately than the established but simplistic pre- and post-1990 World Cup or pre- and post-Premier League narratives.

Introduction

In 1981 Desmond Morris, in *The Soccer Tribe*, his anthropological study of English football, commented on supporters' match day attire.¹ He extensively detailed 'the adornments of the followers', highlighting the scarves, hats and flags in club colours that, almost four decades later, would still be familiar to the regular match-goer.² However, if confronted by a typical crowd scene from the present, it is likely that Morris would have instead focused on a single, overwhelmingly favoured item of twenty-first-century match day clothing: the replica football shirt.³

As noted by sport historians Richard Holt and Tony Mason less than two decades after Morris' study, the replica football shirt has become 'common dress'.⁴ Replica shirts drive the stadium's visual impact, creating displays of

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colour and uniformity, and forming part of a club's, town's or even a nation's wider identity.⁵ Replica shirts also make a substantial contribution to football's economic wellbeing.⁶ In 2016, sports business analysts Sporting Intelligence estimated the value of shirt sales to English Premier League football clubs for a single season at £265 million.⁷

Given that Morris failed to mention the replica shirt in his microscopic appraisal of supporter dress codes suggests that, as recently as the early 1980s, replica shirts were rarely if ever worn by fans.⁸ This is unlikely to be entirely due to (lack of) availability. As we will highlight later, the *opportunity* for the determined fan to source a satisfactory replica of a team's kit has existed since the dawn of the professional game in the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, the production and marketing of child-sized football kits specifically as a replica product began in the late 1950s and expanded dramatically in the mid 1970s.

The adoption of this sportswear item by adult fans as match day leisurewear therefore not only had a significant visual, cultural and economic impact, but also constitutes a dramatic recent change in behaviour. Nonetheless, although there has been substantial nostalgia-tinged documentation of kit designs, and a small literature exists on the meanings of the football kit, there is an absence of research into the development of the replica kit industry.⁹ This forms a large and tantalising gap in the social, business, fashion and sport history literatures. We seek to kick-start examination of this fascinating area by addressing two principal questions, focused on English football.

First, *when* did replica football shirts become adult match-day leisurewear in England? This inquiry has four dimensions, which we encapsulate as production, promotion, purchasing, and parading, and summarise as follows. When did kit manufacturers begin to produce replica shirts in adult sizes and identify them as replicas? When were these sportswear products first promoted as leisurewear? When did adults begin to purchase such replica football shirts? And finally, when did adults adopt the replica shirt as match day clothing, that is, 'parade' in them?

Second, *why* did the production, promotion, purchasing and parading of replica shirts in England occur when it did? Was it driven by social changes or fashion trends? Did perceived or tangible demand drive manufacturing and marketing, or did manufacturers create a market?

Locating the 'when', i.e. the timing and pattern of adoption, enables potential causes to be identified and assessed. Inspired by Wray Vamplew's plea for sports historians to utilise statistics, we examine the adoption process through quantitative indicators of production, promotion, purchasing and parading.¹⁰ Specifically we collected, coded and analysed replica kit catalogues; adverts from club programmes and magazines; responses from a survey of fans' replica kit buying histories; and crowd images. We supplemented this by interviewing manufacturers, kit designers and club shop owners. In this article we outline this methodology, present results, and use them to consider

the cultural, social and technological interventions that kick-started and boosted the replica-shirt industry.

We conclude that in England, the initial wearing of replica football shirts to matches preceded promotion, or even production specifically aimed at selling shirts as leisurewear. Adoption was largely a fan-inspired process with roots in big-match fancy dress traditions, changes in wider social dress codes, and youth subcultures. It developed in distinct phases involving different subgroups of fans, with the coincidental removal of barriers to wearing replica shirts more influential than manufacturers' targeted interventions or promotions. Furthermore, we argue that the timings and drivers of each stage map onto the dramatic changes in English football culture more accurately than the established but simplistic pre-and-post 1990 World Cup or pre-and-post-Premier League narratives – and match the stages in English football's eventual gentrification. Football's mid 1980s crises of hooliganism, neglected facilities, and negative public perception resulted in plummeting attendances and limited commercial exploitation, including the promotion of shirts as adult leisurewear. However, football's nadir also established both the authenticity of those supporters who did still turn up, and the replica shirt as a subcultural symbol of this authenticity. It also inspired a wave of fan-led campaigning and creativity, leading to the oft-ignored late 1980s/pre-Premier league revival in football's fortunes, and growth in the replica shirt's fashionability amongst a wider cohort of young adult males. This in turn primed football and the replica shirt for the final stage of gentrification, through the formation of the Premier League and the accompanying mass commodification. The replica shirt has become a match-day uniform, a totem of football's cultural hegemony – and symbolic of the all-enveloping consumerism of late-modern society: even traditionalists who decry the multi-sponsored, highly-priced current first-team strip will display their authenticity via retro-replica shirts.

The replica football kit: definitions and prehistory

To collect meaningful quantitative data, and select the temporal range for our study, the definitions of the replica shirt and the replica shirt industry require clarification. In this article a replica football shirt or kit is defined by two criteria. First, it is produced to achieve a resemblance – and promoted through this resemblance – to a specific team's playing attire. Second, it is purchased by fans primarily because it achieves a level of resemblance that satisfies their perception of the product as authentic, with use as sportswear a secondary consideration.

Given this definition, replica shirts have had the *potential* to exist in a purchaser's eyes from the dawn of the professional game in the late nineteenth century. Once playing kit began to be manufactured, individuals could

purchase football shirts from the manufacturers or distributors that serviced professional, amateur and youth teams, with badges and numbers sewn on if further authenticity was desired.¹¹ However, our interest lies in the production and promotion of shirts primarily for use as adult leisurewear. In the first half of the twentieth century, kit advert wording indicates that such apparel was produced and sold for teams to play in. As far back as 1885 the Derby Daily Telegraph published a notice from local sports shop Basford's, advertising football jerseys in Derby County colours but directed explicitly at 'Football Players'.¹² Figure 1 shows a page from a pre-war catalogue from Umbro (founded in 1924, and alongside Bukta, the dominant kit suppliers for much of the twentieth century), with shirts priced in batches of 12, i.e. a complete team.¹³

In 1959 Umbro launched the Umbroset for Boys.¹⁴ A boxed child-sized single full kit, it simultaneously constitutes the first selling of kit targeted at individuals rather than teams, and the first explicit use of 'dress like your heroes' marketing, with branding provided by Manchester United's manager Matt Busby, and later by striker Denis Law.¹⁵ The sale of a full kit with an 'Improve Your Game' soccer skills insert, indicates that, through being actively marketed as a replica, this was still assumed to be for child footballers to play in. The 'For Boys' title reflects the highly gendered nature of this product: the FA still considered football an 'unsuitable' game for females, and wouldn't rescind the ban on women using affiliated clubs' facilities for a further decade.¹⁶

Although the launch of the Umbroset might be seen as the conception of a *child* replica kit industry, a more realistic study baseline is the mid 1970s, a period in which the child replica kit industry added value by copyrighting kit designs. This process was led by Bert Patrick, owner of Leicester-based hosiery firm Cook and Hurst, who used the company's men's underwear brand, Admiral Sportswear, to enter the child replica kit market in the late 1960s.¹⁷ Patrick was frustrated by the limited authenticity of Admiral's replica sportswear. Not only could any team's replica outfit be produced by any manufacturer, but in an era where modish kit designs eschewed frippery, and sometimes club badges, several teams played in identical strips.¹⁸ This diminished the value of Admiral's products, and those of their rivals.

Patrick attempted to corner the child replica kit market by achieving exclusivity via the 1968 Copyright Act. In December 1973, he struck a deal with Leeds United's manager Don Revie, in which Admiral would redesign and copyright Leeds' away kit in return for a fee of £10,000.¹⁹ Admiral would then profit from sales of this replica kit, which other companies would not be able to reproduce. This venture's immediate success led to Admiral (and rival manufacturers) seeking further deals. By the 1977/1978 season, 84 of the 92 English football league clubs displayed a manufacturer's logo on their shirts, and there had been a wholesale incorporation of badges and distinctive trim to provide club specific kits.²⁰

ALWAYS THE BEST FOR BIG OCCASIONS

2

VERTICAL STRIPES
Less than half-dozen, 3d, each extra.

	Youths' per doz.	Men's per doz.
NIPPER. Sound British quality, suitable for Junior Clubs. B.I.C. dyes	22/-	23/3
WONDER. Improved British quality, better finished and heavier than "Nipper." B.I.C. dyes	29/6	31/-
RELIANCE. Super improved quality. The British Jersey, highly suitable for Clubs with limited funds. B.I.C. dyes	36/-	37/6
KUDOS. The Jersey with a high-class appearance. All British. Dyes fast in good shades	42/-	43/6
PUMA. A sturdily built Jersey. Heavier than "Kudos." Really brilliant shades and quite fast	56/6	58/6
LEOPARD. A substantial light heavy-weight Jersey, produced specially for Public Schools and Colleges, with reinforced seams. Brilliant outstanding colours, and perfectly fast	72/6	74/6
PANTHER. A quality of merit, made of heavy yarns, strongly reinforced to stand vigorous games, produced in all brilliant shades, absolutely fast	81/6	83/6

EXTRA Charge for 38 in., 3/6; EXTRA Charge for 40 in., 6/9 per dozen.

359 Maroon-Sky 360 Navy-Scarlet 361 Emerald-White 362 Royal-White 363 Royal-Amber
 364 Sky-White 365 Black-Scarlet 366 Black-Amber 367 Maroon-Amber
 368 Emerald-Amber 370 Navy-Sky 371 Maroon-White 373 Emerald-Scarlet
 372 Scarlet-White 374 Royal-Scarlet 375 Black-Royal 376 Black-Emerald 377 Purple-Amber
 378 Myrtle-White 379 Scarlet-Amber 390 White-Black 381 Myrtle-Amber 382 Navy-Amber

Figure 1. Umbro Catalogue, 1935 (Image supplied by Paul Lukas, courtesy of Umbro Ltd ©).

Nevertheless, this did not immediately result in an adult replica kit industry. Patrick admits that, in 1973, he still viewed replica-focused kit production, at least in the immediate future, as appealing to boys. Although he states in his autobiography, ‘we were beginning to see a future market . . . for mums and dads as well’, little was done to prepare the ground for exploiting it.²¹ More influential than Patrick’s future-gazing – Admiral slipped into bankruptcy within a decade – was the layer of exclusivity, club-specificity and hence authenticity that his design copyrighting had provided to the replica football shirt, permanently enhancing its appeal as fan merchandise beyond schoolboy footballers.

Data collection

Pilot study and choice of main study period

A number of authors have commented on spectator dress in the early-to-mid-twentieth century, yet none make reference to replica shirts.²² For example, David Goldblatt describes crowds of the early 1900s as dressed in ‘winter coats, mufflers and the ubiquitous flat caps’, and then, in the 1950s and 1960s, as wearing outfits that ‘barely vary across the generations, dark suits and jackets, white shirts, dark unpatterned ties’.²³ Essentially, adult fans wore their work clothes whilst younger fans wore their school jacket and cap. For the first half of the twentieth-century match-day dress showed little variation between fans, or from decade to decade.²⁴

However Goldblatt and others also note a change in crowd appearance from the 1960s onwards, particularly amongst younger fans.²⁵ Therefore we collected a small sample of kit suppliers’ catalogues and magazine adverts from the 1960s and 1970s (N = 15), and photos of English Football League, FA Cup and England international crowd scenes from these decades (N = 60).²⁶ This pilot sample yielded interesting pointers, described below, to the antecedents of adult replica shirt wearing – but neither the adverts nor images suggested promotion of adult-sized replica kits, or their use as matchday clothing beyond the odd eccentric, occurred before the late 1970s. For these reasons, we selected the 1978/1979 season as a baseline for collecting detailed production, promotion and parading data, with our study period concluding with the 1995/1996 season – we eventually extended the crowd image data collection until 2000 given initial findings which suggested that, whilst promotion and production had stabilised, parading was still increasing in 1996.

Measuring production and promotion

We measured the scope of production by recording the replica shirt sizes offered by manufacturers in catalogues and adverts. We aimed to code one match-day-programme kit advert per club per season from 1978/1979 to 1995/1996, from a sample of at least a quarter of the 92 Football League

and Premier League clubs (as of the 2015/2016 season), and the England national team. To insure against non-response, we randomly sampled a 50 team shortlist, deliberately excluding clubs who had played less than 10 seasons within the league within the study period.²⁷

Complete sets of match-programme adverts for each season from 1978/1979 to 1995/1996 were gathered from 18 teams, via club historians, club websites or social media.²⁸ These were supplemented by incomplete sets of programme adverts from other clubs in our shortlist, and by manufacturers' catalogues and magazine adverts (which typically featured many clubs simultaneously). The latter were sourced online, or from the English National Football Museum archive.²⁹ This yielded a total analysis sample of 547 shirt adverts or catalogues from which we recorded the sizes of shirts offered, including at least 20 adverts from each season between 1978/1979 and 1995/1996.³⁰

Data on the promotion of replica shirts was also obtained through coding the adverts described above. Specifically, we recorded the size of the advert, whether it featured images of children, adult fans/models who were not players, female fans, and/or players from the club in question; and whether they were dressed in full playing kit or wearing the shirt alongside typical leisurewear, e.g. jeans. To complement this quantitative data, we interviewed the founder of one leading kit manufacturer of the 1970s and 1980s, and senior managers of another manufacturer whose production spanned the entire study period.³¹ Interviewees were questioned on when they believed shirts were first produced for, and promoted to an adult market, and why this development occurred.

Measuring purchasing

We surveyed potential shirt purchasers, i.e. football fans, via an online survey. Participants were recruited via a survey link, accompanied by a brief study description and invitation, which we posted on 216 online supporter forums, including at least one club-specific forum for each of the 92 Football League and Premier League clubs as of the 2015/2016 season. The survey was conducted from 27 May to 29 June 2016.

The survey measured each respondent's replica shirt purchase history: whether they had ever owned an adult replica shirt; if so, when they obtained their first replica shirt, and when they first wore it to a match; if not, the reason why. Open-ended questions collected further motivations for purchasing (or not purchasing) replica shirts. We also requested each participant's gender, age, and the club they supported. We received 3594 completed responses, including 10 or more fans from 78 different clubs.

Measuring parading

We attempted to collect one crowd photo per club per season from 1978/1979 to 1999/2000 from the same shortlist of Football League and Premier League

clubs examined for production and promotion data, and from England international matches. Photos were primarily sourced from club historians, digital archives and match programmes, but also from newspaper archives, the English National Football Museum, and online image searches.³² When selecting crowd photos we prioritised images from early- and late-season matches, when shirts were less likely to be hidden under coats. For each photo we recorded the number of fans whose ‘first layer’ of dress could be clearly seen, split into adults, children (and where image quality was sufficient, female fans) – and the number of each subgroup wearing replica shirts. Proportions of all fans, of adults, children and women wearing replica shirts were then estimated.

To maximise reliability of measurement, all photos were coded by the second author, with the first author checking a 10 percent subsample. We obtained complete data (a useable crowd photo for each of the 22 seasons from 1978/1979 to 1999/2000) from 19 clubs and England international matches.³³ This was supplemented by photos from other sampled clubs for whom we were unable to collect complete data or that we found during the online searching process. Having averaged our crowd statistics within seasons for clubs with multiple photos in a season, our final analysis sample consisted of 619 observations, from 74 clubs and the England national team, across the 22 study seasons.

Empirical evidence for the development of the replica shirt industry

Pilot data

Supplier catalogues from the late 1970s show that while adult sizes were offered, they were sold without the club badge, enabling post-sale badging and use by amateur clubs as team kit, but reducing their appeal as replicas.³⁴ Until 1977, adverts were also all child-specific, and depicted children playing football in the full strip. However, Admiral’s revolutionary advertising for the 1977/1978 season range hinted at future developments. Set on the street, it featured boys wearing Admiral football shirts with jeans: that is, in a leisurewear context.³⁵ A season later, Admiral advertised their North America Soccer League (NASL) club shirts using both male and female adult models, again combining the replica shirts with casual clothes (see [Figure 2](#)).³⁶ NASL shirts resembled colourful summer-season T-shirts – and NASL teams were unlikely to have many partisan UK-based fans – hence this advert could be seen as targeting a different market and motivation to purchase compared to a hypothetical equivalent promoting an English club shirt. Still, in their representation of football shirts as leisurewear, and then as adult unisex leisurewear, both Admiral adverts represent seminal moments in the replica shirt industry.

Our pilot sample of crowd photos from the 1960s and 1970s did not provide evidence of replica shirts being worn as match-day apparel by either adult or child fans until the mid 1970s, and then only by male fans at cup finals. A photo of Newcastle supporters at the 1974 FA Cup Final depicts small numbers dressed in (unbranded) replica shirts – Admiral-manufactured teamwear can also be spotted on adult Manchester United fans at

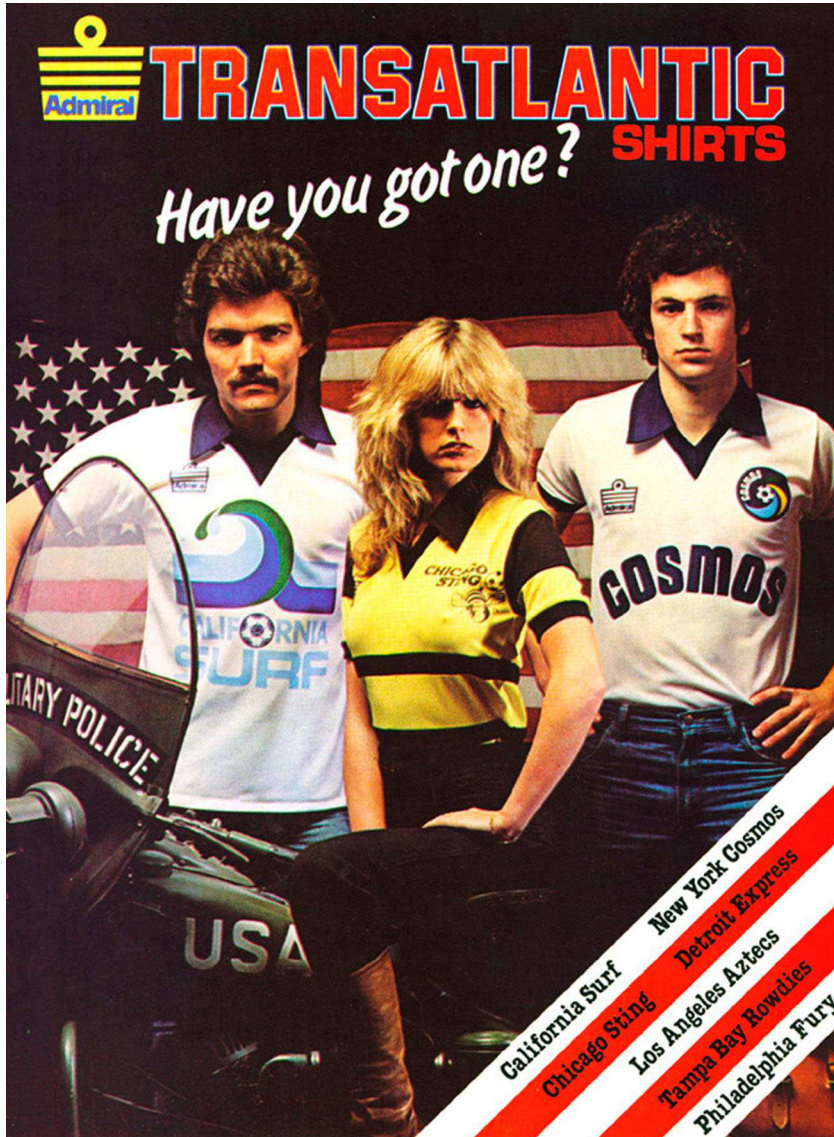


Figure 2. 'TRANSATLANTIC SHIRTS. Have you got one?', Admiral Sportswear advert, 1978 (Image courtesy of Admiral Sportswear Ltd. ©).

the 1979 final, though in both cases the tightness of the sleeves hints at large youth sizes (Figure 3).³⁷ Likewise a handful of Liverpool fans at their European Cup finals of 1977 and 1978 wore replica shirts, and the Scotland fans invading Trafalgar Square prior to the 1977 England vs Scotland international also featured replica-clad revellers.³⁸

Production

Changes in production scope over our main study period are summarised in Figure 4, which shows how the season median and maximum 'largest shirt size offered' increased in three distinct stages. Before 1980, the largest size offered in adverts and catalogues was typically a 36–38 inch chest, i.e. small adult or large youth. Few clubs specifically described this fit as 'adult': Bert Patrick notes that Admiral's small-adult-size badged replicas were 'targeted at the heftier adolescent'.³⁹ From 1980 to 1988, one, maybe two more adult sizes are available, giving a typical 'S', 'M' and 'L' range and largest size of 42 inches. Adults were now being catered for, if not proactively focused on, with the assumption that males were the only market: it would be another two decades before women's sizes and cuts emerged. For example, a 1983 Norwich City programme news snippet mentions that 'large men's sizes' were 'requested', and are now on sale.⁴⁰ Then, from 1989, we see a dramatic increase in available sizes, with the median largest size rising first to 44–46 inches ('XXL'), followed half a decade later by a further jump: by the mid 1990s largest sizes consistently exceeded a 50 inch chest.



Figure 3. Newcastle United FC fans, 1974 FA Cup Final, Wembley, May 1974 (Image courtesy of PA Images (C)).

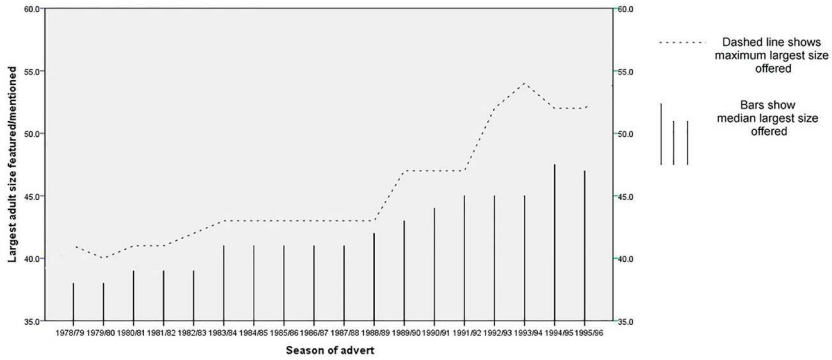


Figure 4. Median and maximum replica football shirt sizes offered in kit adverts, seasons 1978/1979 to 1995/1996.

Promotion

Figure 5 shows the proportion of adverts analysed that featured child models, adult (non-player) models, and players. Throughout the study period many adverts just show an image of the shirt. Where models are used, players have consistently been called upon. However, prior to 1988, advert images were even more likely to portray children dressed in full replica strips: a ‘dress like your heroes, play like your heroes’ strategy that positioned replica shirts as children’s sportswear. If club-shop advertising of this period featured adults who were not players, they almost always modelled club-branded casual leisurewear, not team shirts. A Wolverhampton Wanderers FC programme advert from 1980 (Figure 6) exemplifies this juxtaposition.

By 1988, adults who are not players (and who would presumably be interpreted as fans) begin to appear as kit models. Some adverts were

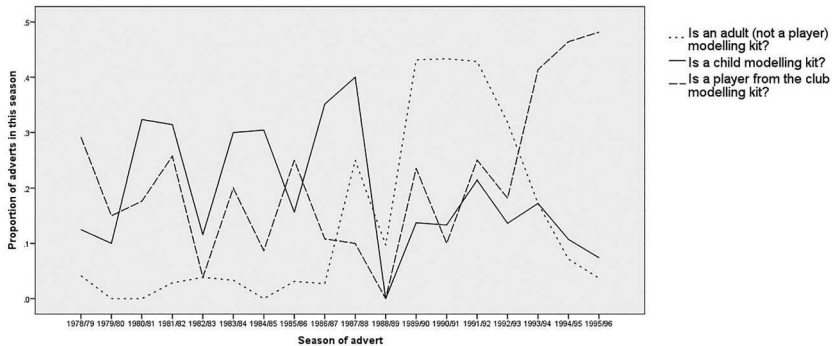


Figure 5. Proportion of kit adverts featuring child models, adult fan models, and players, seasons 1978/1979 to 1995/1996.

Christmas at the Official Souvenir Shop

Need Some Christmas Presents?


Have you tried the Wolves shop? We have that elusive official sweater, that hard to find official club strip, or track suit, plus all the stocking fillers you could ever need.

We will be opening every day, except Sunday, from 10 am to 5 pm from Monday November 24th until Tuesday 23rd December. Why not call in and browse at your leisure, or if you live too far away send an S.A.E. for a price list and take advantage of our speedy mail order service!

Send to: **Wolves Official Souvenir Shop, Molineux Grounds,
Waterloo Road, Wolverhampton.**



BLACK LAMBSWOOL SWEATER
with Gold Head design as worn by all players and staff and as seen on T.V. Sizes from 34 to 42 only
£14.99 plus 62p P&P



TOWEL BATHWRAP/BEACH ROBE. Gold with black Wolf Head motif on Pocket. Adult sizes only Small, Medium and Large all at £10.95 plus 44p P&P

FOOTBALL STRIP: Gold and black, long sleeves, or 'Away' strip short sleeves. Please state whether home or away shirt wanted

Size	Price	P&P
Size 26"/28"	£5.70	22p
Size 30"/32"	£6.20	27p
Size 34"/36"	£7.90	27p
Size 38"/40"	£9.95	38p
Size 42"/44"	£9.95	38p

SHORTS Home Style Only

Size 26"	£3.30	17p
Size 28"	£3.50	17p
Size 30"	£4.40	17p
Size 32"	£4.55	17p
Size 34"	£4.75	17p
Size 36"	£4.95	17p

SOCKS Home Only

Children's	£1.60	17p
Adult	£1.85	17p





Figure 6. Wolverhampton Wanderers FC programme advert, December 1980 (Image courtesy of Wolverhampton Wanderers FC ©).

mixed gender, although as in an Umbro advert from 1990 (Figure 7), the female model was usually tracksuited rather than wearing a shirt. From the early-to-mid 1990s, kit adverts typically featured only players, and occasionally they have been captured wearing the club shirt as leisurewear themselves (Figure 8).



Figure 7. Umbro 'Replikit' Advert, 1990 (Image courtesy of Umbro Ltd ©).

Purchasing

Of the respondents to our survey, 63% had owned a child-sized replica shirt, and 92% had purchased at least one adult-sized replica shirt. Although this estimate is likely to be biased dramatically upwards compared to the wider population of football fans, our primary interest in purchasing was in *variation across our study period*. Assuming any overestimate in raw purchasing levels was consistent across time, this would in itself affect assessment of temporal variation in purchasing.

The average age of respondents was 43 years, and 96% were male. The very low numbers of female respondents precluded any reliable comparisons between genders in shirt buying behaviour, but the response percentage itself suggests either that women have historically been less engaged in shirt buying (and hence were less likely to be interested in completing the survey) or that a huge gender bias exists in active football forum participation.

The age at which fans obtained their first adult-sized replica shirt changed over the study period. Fans born before 1960, who therefore reached young adulthood before child replica kits became popular, were only slightly less likely than younger fans to own a replica shirt – but were much more likely to have bought their first replica in the 1990s. Conversely, fans under 45 years old in 2016, whose childhoods were during or since the mid 1970s, and grew up with replica shirts as children, were more likely to have

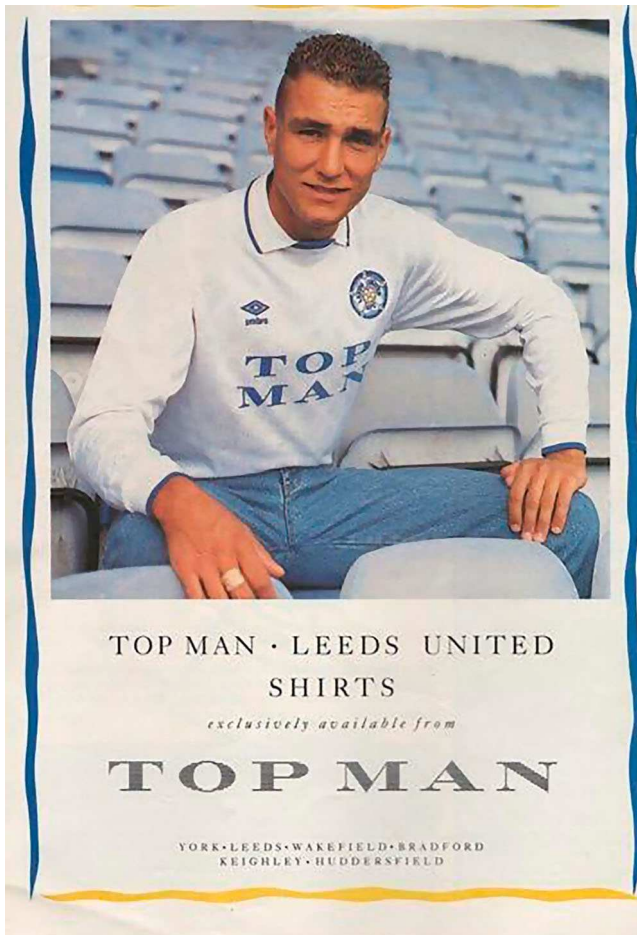


Figure 8. Leeds United/TopMan Kit Advert, 1989 (Image courtesy of Leeds United FC/TopMan ©).

purchased their first adult-size replica, and worn it to a match, at a younger age (Figure 9). The average age of fans buying their first adult-replica shirt, and wearing an adult-sized replica shirt to a match for the first time in each sequential half-decade rises from 19 to 25 (Figure 10). Collectively, this evidence suggests that in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, first-time buyers of adult-sized replica shirts were young adults, whereas in the 1990s the first-time-buyer market expanded to include older fans, including some whose childhoods preceded the mid 1970s child replica kit boom.

Amongst those who owned adult-replica shirts but had not bought them in the past for reasons other than size ($N = 1140$, 32% of the sample), the principal reasons for their initial abstinence were lack of availability (42%), and thinking that replica shirts were for children/younger people (26%).

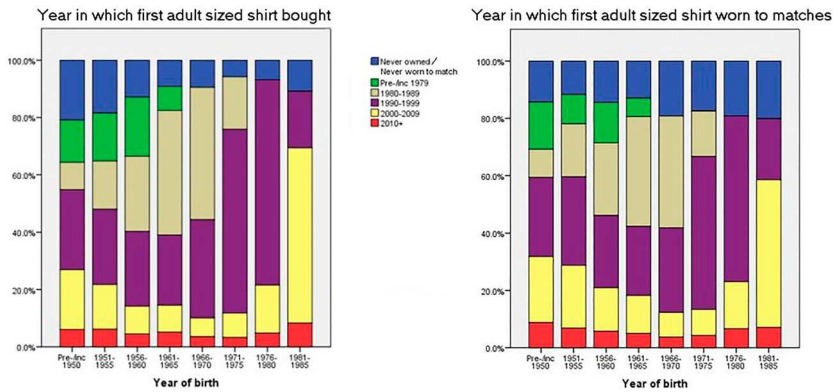


Figure 9. Percentages of purchasing survey sample who bought/were given their first adult-sized replica football shirt, and who first wore an adult-sized shirt to a match in each decade from 1970 onwards, by year of birth (grouped).

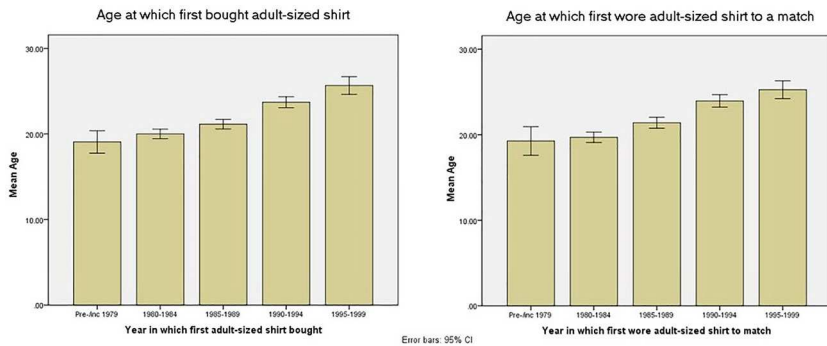


Figure 10. Mean ages at which first adult-sized replica football shirt was bought/received as a gift, and at which respondents first wore an adult-sized replica football shirt to a match, by year of birth (grouped).

Reasons cited for not wearing their first replica shirt to matches included thinking it was for children (36%), fashion reasons (34%), and safety (17%); similar reasons were given by those not buying adult-replica shirts at all (looking like a child: 50%, fashion: 17%).

Parading

The average proportion of adult fans in crowd scenes wearing replica shirts shows a non-linear increase across our study period (see Figure 11). The development of replica shirt wearing as a match-day fashion is very slow for the first three-quarters of the 1980s, stagnating at around 3% to 4% of the crowd. This is followed by two periods of rapid increase: one between

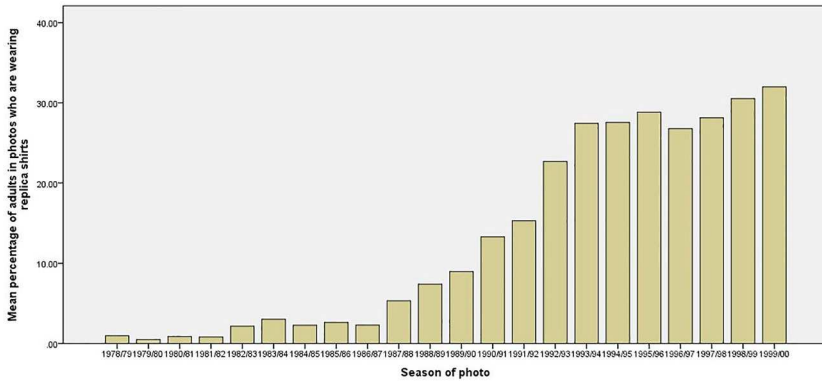


Figure 11. Average proportion of adult fans in crowd scenes wearing replica football shirts, seasons 1978/1979 to 1999/2000.

the 1987/1988 and 1990/1991 seasons, and an even sharper surge in 1992/1993. By 1995, the average proportion of replica-clad fans in crowd photos stabilised at around 25% to 30%.

The very low number of women in the crowd photos (over the 22 seasons, the median per photo rises from 1 to 4) makes percentages calculated purely for female fans less reliable. That said, up to 1990, we found only six instances of women wearing replica shirts and an average percentage of less than 1%; from 1991, the percentage rises steadily before flattening out at 15% from 1996.

From sportswear to leisurewear: a four stage process

Taken with our pilot data, the results collectively suggest four distinct periods that define the adoption of the replica football shirt from pioneer purchasers to market maturation amongst adult male fans in the late 1990s. Up to the late 1970s there is minimal availability or promotion, and bar the odd eccentric, no wearing of replica shirts, except at cup finals or other one-off big games. The second stage runs from 1981 to 1988, during which time purchasing replica shirts and wearing them to matches becomes established amongst young adult males, although only at a minor subcultural level, and is catered for but not fully commercially exploited. A third period, beginning in 1988, is heralded by a steepening increase in parading, followed by a step change in adult-focused production size and promotion style, although purchasing is still primarily confined to young adult males. A second increase in parading and production occurs around 1993, marking the start of the fourth phase, in which consumption of replica shirts by adult male fans of all ages becomes the norm.

We now consider each of the four stages described above, identifying the key drivers of progression from one stage to the next, and the obstacles that

were overcome. We also briefly discuss developments in the replica shirt industry beyond our study period and into the twenty-first century.

Phase 1: from child's dress to fancy dress

Until the 1960s, the absence of replica football shirts in match-day crowds can be explained by both finances and fashion. The economic obstacle to a replica-football-shirt industry is reflected in the homogeneity of spectator dress that existed prior to this decade. Many people could not afford multiple sets of clothes to cater for every occasion. Working hours were, on the whole, longer, and leisure time correspondingly less abundant. Multiple leisure garments, let alone clothing only worn for a fortnightly trip to watch football, were a luxury few could afford, especially the working class crowds that comprised the majority of football's audience. Many attended football after working a Saturday morning shift, and would not change outfits.

Second, male fashion dictated that those owning a football shirt, or indeed other sporting apparel, would only ever wear it to play sport. Mainstream British male clothing tastes had for centuries shied away from the bright colours that appear on football shirts, considering them 'unmasculine and too showy', even when they became more fashionable in the US.⁴¹ Support for the perceived lack of adult masculinity offered by football shirts comes from our purchasing survey. A substantial proportion of our purchasing-survey respondents who abstained, or still abstain, from shirt-buying or wearing replicas to matches did so for fashion reasons, be it the colours or just the idea of wearing sportswear as leisurewear. In the words of one, 'I did not want to look like a Christmas Tree'; another commented, 'My dad and grandad always maintained that the only people who should wear the kit are the 11 people on the pitch'.

Nonetheless a change in fan dress, and indeed behaviour, occurred in the mid-to-late 1960s, particularly amongst younger fans, who began to congregate as a separate 'crowd within a crowd'.⁴² Our pilot sample of photos confirm Goldblatt's claim that 'by the mid 1970s the shirt and ties were all but gone ... and the hat, but for the woolly bobbles in club colours, was a museum piece'.⁴³ Economic prosperity, resulting in fatter wallets and fuller wardrobes, and fashion's correspondingly increasing fluctuations, were driving this change, particularly among young adult males.

Football did not escape the extensive upheaval in youth and popular culture that occurred in the 1960s.⁴⁴ Large crowds offer an opportunity for escape, so it is unsurprising that football grounds became a venue for male adolescents and young adults to test and proclaim new-found freedoms.⁴⁵ A certain type of football fandom that veered towards chanting and outbreaks of territorial violence became a youth subculture.⁴⁶ Like other subcultures, it developed its own dress code, in turn influencing fans who would not have

considered themselves members of the gangs or 'firms' that claimed territorial rights behind the goals: by the early-to-mid 1970s the soccer fan 'look' was scruffy, with denim, numerous club scarves and sturdy boots to the fore.⁴⁷ However, match-day fashions were fluid and contested, with constant tension between escaping wider societal norms and conforming to new peer-group pressures. Established youth subcultures also popped up on the terraces, their styles coalescing with and influencing fan dress. The skinheads favoured the Fred Perry tennis shirt – first popularised by mods a decade before, and widely recognised as the first item of sportswear to be adopted as fashionable leisurewear.⁴⁸ In the late 1970s the soccer casual style emerged, initially in Merseyside and Manchester. An almost exclusively male scene, the dress code combined tennis and golf wear with European-brand tracksuit tops often acquired, legally or otherwise, by fans following their team in European club competitions.⁴⁹

The idea that sports clothing could be worn away from the pitch or the court, which only a generation earlier would have represented a taboo, was therefore quickly assimilated into football fan subculture from existing male youth fashions – and sometimes returned with interest. Giulianotti cites the casuals as 'cultural intermediaries' for the shellsuit and tracksuit low-end fashion trends of the 1980s.⁵⁰ Contemporaneous and less gender specific, the fitness boom 'imported' from the US had a different demographic reach, with the workout videos of Jane Fonda and Mr Motivator inspiring the middle-aged middle-classes to slip on a tracksuit.⁵¹ The training shoe gained cross-demographic traction through its multivalence, offering sub-cultural street credibility, athletic footwear, and a lifestyle statement. Breaking with the tradition of wearing a jacket and tie at work and at the weekend, people began to prioritise comfort, and adopt sportswear as leisurewear.⁵² As fashion historian Elizabeth Wilson notes, sportswear is 'possibly the most important twentieth century influence on fashion'.⁵³

The larger wardrobes and increased spending power of fans, the fertile fashion climate of the football terraces, and this wider acceptance of sportswear as adult leisurewear, made the adult adoption of replica football shirts a realistic possibility by the mid-to-late 1970s. Yet, as our parading data shows, even at the dawn of the 1980s, replica shirt wearing by adults at league matches was still confined to the occasional eccentric. A possible explanation is that, whilst wider resistance to wearing general purpose sportswear as leisurewear had been breached by the 1970s, the extra layer of team-specific authenticity that replica football shirts possess (compared to tennis shirts or trainers) set them apart as more sportswear than leisurewear. Several survey respondents who had resisted buying a replica shirt perceived that wearing one would suggest they believed themselves good enough to be a professional footballer. One replied 'It's just wrong, ... to try and look like a player when you should know better is weird ... no!' However, our survey comments

also suggest that a more substantial barrier to adult adoption of replica shirts in the late 1970s was the successful child replica kit industry of the time. This popularity, along with child-focused promotion and production, had posited replica football shirts as a 'kids' thing', making adult males embarrassed to wear them. In the words of one, 'They look ridiculous on grown adults'.

Given this perception, why do replica football shirts slowly appear in crowd scenes after 1979? We believe that two barrier-breaking forces existed in this period. The first was the sense of possibility, familiarity and opportunity introduced via the long-standing tradition of cup-final fancy dress.

In our pilot study crowd photos, the first appearances of replica shirts occur in 1970s cup finals and the end-of-season England vs Scotland match. We argue that at these big national occasions, replica shirt wearing was acceptable due to a differing perception of the practice, in the minds of the wearer and other fans. As historian Stacey Pope notes, cup finals offered a rare opportunity 'for ostentatious public display', demanding more expressive forms of local support: 'Outfits were original – individualized and designed by fans'.⁵⁴ Photos of cup finals from the early 1900s show a variety of unusual, homespun fancy dress outfits, and this tradition continues today.⁵⁵ As replica shirts were popularised amongst children in the mid 1970s, adults donning a team-replica shirt for a cup final would have viewed it as cup-final fancy dress, legitimising what would otherwise be considered childish or odd.

Furthermore, cup finals encouraged football clubs to produce souvenirs to generate income and celebrate the occasion. In the late 1970s, manufacturers and clubs began to collaborate in producing adult-sized commemorative cup-final editions of their shirt, with date and match details embroidered under the badge. This created an excuse for adults to purchase them, and a new legitimacy for adults to wear the replica shirt by positioning it not as an item of sportswear or just as cup-final fancy dress but as an official cup-final souvenir. Tony Marks, Watford FC's club shop manager at the time of their 1984 FA Cup Final appearance, recalls: 'We did produce a specific cup-final shirt, and it was probably more adults than children [buying it] ... prior to the cup final, it was just kids'.⁵⁶ Eddie Phillips' sports shop served as the unofficial Manchester City FC club shop until the early 1990s. 'People started to buy [replica shirts] after the '74 and '76 League Cup finals, but it wasn't a big business', he stated. 'That really took off in 1981 ... City's FA Cup run [to the final] saw many adult fans wear the shirt for the first time. It was so popular that I asked the shirt manufacturer to do a special run of twenty dozen'.⁵⁷

Phase 2: from fancy dress to fan subculture

Having been purchased as a cup-final fancy dress outfit or souvenir, the replica football shirt would have ended up in the wardrobe, creating the

potential for it to be brought out again for a big game or a sunny day. Left-overs from the previous season would also be sold by the club, further increasing the replica's visibility. A few adult fans who had worn the shirt, or seen it worn at a previous season's cup final, might feel that it was now acceptable match-day clothing. For example, a Queens Park Rangers FC programme photo from early in the 1982/1983 season features a crowd scene with several supporters dressed in the red shirt worn at their cup final appearance the previous May.⁵⁸

This big-game effect extended to the England national team, who were supplied by Admiral in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Bert Patrick recalls that he proposed 'an FA Mail Order company offering not just replica kits for boys, but for adults'.⁵⁹ Though this plan didn't come to fruition, a new design, the first England national kit to be mass-produced in adult sizes, was unveiled prior to the 1980 UEFA European Nations Cup Finals. This kit was retained for England's participation in the FIFA World Cup Finals, held in Spain in the summer of 1982. The visibility of replica England shirts, and hence their embedding into public consciousness as acceptable adult male dress, was enhanced by the climate (shirts were unlikely to be hidden under warm coats); by television coverage of fans abroad; and, according to Bert Patrick, by their availability in national men's fashion chain Burton Menswear, who experimented with sportswear lines in the early 1980s.⁶⁰ This distribution deal explicitly placed football shirts as an item of general-purpose adult male leisurewear in a popular high-street retail outlet. It is likely that a further boost to the popularity of these shirts as a patriotic statement came from Britain's engagement in the Falklands War between April and June 1982 immediately prior to the tournament: the shirt offered an opportunity to display national allegiance.

Comparing the temporal variation in our purchasing and parading data suggests that a second process driving the adoption of replica shirts was what we term 'wardrobe inertia' – an individual's lack of motivation to change their dress codes as they age. Our purchasing survey indicated that early adopters of replica shirts were younger than later converts, and typically bought their first adult sizes in their late teens and early twenties. The boys who began wearing replica shirts when their popularity exploded in the mid-to-late 1970s would have reached their late teens and early twenties by the early 1980s – the point at which the adult male parading of replica shirts becomes consistently noticeable in our parading data.

In previous generations, adolescent males had progressed from school uniform to workplace uniform, but sartorial procrastination had increasingly combined with the acceptance of casual leisurewear amongst young adults. Furthermore, a growing number of young people were staying in education, and hence abstaining from formal work dress codes.⁶¹ Other signifiers of adulthood, such as marriage and parenthood, began to be delayed.⁶² This

effective lengthening of childhood, which had provided space for the development of distinct youth cultures and fashions since the 1960s, can also be seen as the start of the 'kidulthood' or 'adulthood' phenomenon, in which adults, men in particular, retain many of their childhood interests and behaviours as they age.⁶³ These boys of the 1970s, who grew up wearing child-sized replicas, would have felt less pressure from their life situation and contemporaneous culture to stop wearing them than previous generations had. When their largest youth size grew too tight, some would have purchased an adult size. Of course, this effect left a gendered legacy in terms of replica shirt consumption: the child-size replica kits of the 1970s had been exclusively marketed to boys, and hence wardrobe inertia would only have engendered replica shirt wearing in the 1980s amongst men.

However, our parading data shows that although match-day replica shirt wearing could be regularly observed by the early 1980s, rapid increases did not occur until 1988. Likewise, the results from our promotion and production analyses show that, for much of the 1980s, replica shirts were still perceived by manufacturers as children's sportswear. Notably, replica kit adverts of the mid 1980s still featured child fans/models, albeit often showing slightly older children (including teenagers) than previously. Martin Prothero, who began a lengthy career at Umbro in the early 1980s as a sales rep, recalls that his stock consisted 'primarily of children's products, the big seller was primarily what I call replica *kit* – shirts, shorts and socks as a unit ... It was sold as a football kit'.⁶⁴ For larger adults, the sizes required were simply not produced, nor were women's cuts considered. As Tony Marks, discussing his club-shop stock of the mid 1980s stated, 'there was no option to order bigger shirts ... in those days that [small, medium, large] was the size scale'.⁶⁵ So what slowed or delayed the promotion of shirts to adults and the adult adoption of replica shirts at this point? We argue that it was the football environment of the mid 1980s, rather than wider social norms, that suppressed the development of an adult-oriented replica shirt industry. Two specific aspects of 1980s football culture were at play.

First, the football merchandising industry was still in its infancy: in the words of Goldblatt, the 1980s were at best 'a germination period' for the full-on commodification of football that took place in the following decade.⁶⁶ Advertising of replica shirts to an adult market was largely restricted to club programmes. Whereas adverts for child size replicas were placed in the popular national weekly football magazines aimed at a teenage audience, such as *Match* and *Shoot!*, no equivalent publications aimed at adults existed. Distribution options were similarly constrained. Many clubs, including some of the best supported, did not have their own shop. Tony Marks, discussing the primitive nature of football merchandising in this era, recalls how 'for Arsenal it was down a set of steps, round a corner and it had a green door, with 'club shop' chalked above ... West Ham had two falling down

Portacabins'.⁶⁷ Where club shops existed they were small, idiosyncratic outlets with limited shelf space, sometimes run by a local sports retailer. As Marks notes, 'there was one at Chelsea, just outside Fulham Broadway station ... it was completely unofficial'.⁶⁸ As the decade progressed, football merchandising did increase in scale and sophistication.⁶⁹ Tottenham Hotspur FC were amongst those leading the way in this regard. Spurs' chairman Irving Scholar recalls that, when he joined the club in 1982, their shop was 'dark, small, and the merchandise hadn't changed for ten years ... I didn't start expanding the shop until 1986'.⁷⁰ This type of expansion was undoubtedly a factor in the gradual increase in shirt wearing that we see in our data across the 1980s. Likewise, small independent stores, which might have stocked replica shirts from their local club, but only in small numbers, still dominated high-street sports retailing – consolidation into larger chains was still a decade away. Irving Scholar tagged sports retail at this time as one of the last remaining 'cottage industries', and noted the 'colossal task of getting payment from so many small single-unit retailers'.⁷¹ Though Burton Menswear had sold the England shirt in 1982, we could not find any evidence that this nascent collaboration between fashion retail and replica sportswear manufacturers was then extended to club shirts.

The second reason for the very slow growth of the adult fashion for wearing replica shirts seen in the 1980s was a negative public perception of football and its fans. Though frequent small-scale hooliganism within grounds was on the wane due to the installation of fencing and heavier policing, fighting outside stadia between increasingly organised gangs or 'firms' was still common in the mid 1980s.⁷² High profile incidents, and accompanying political rhetoric and tabloid newspaper outrage, raised the issue of football hooliganism to a national moral panic. By 1985, football was portrayed by the mainstream media as a 'slum sport played in slum stadiums increasingly watched by slum people ... [who] deter decent folk from turning up'.⁷³ That spring, a riot at a Luton Town vs Millwall FA Cup tie was followed by another incident, this time leading to a fatality, at an end-of-season match between Birmingham City and Leeds United and, just over a fortnight later, the Heysel tragedy.⁷⁴ Interposed between these events was the Bradford City fire disaster, in which 56 fans perished – unrelated to hooliganism but symptomatic of increasingly decrepit spectator facilities.⁷⁵ In a 1985 MORI poll, 25% of people gave potential violence as a reason for staying away from football matches.⁷⁶

In this climate, advertising yourself as a football fan was an unlikely personal branding choice for all but the most committed. As attendances sank to a post-war low, the remaining supporters would have been deterred from wearing a club-replica shirt to a match, not only by the risk presented by opposition hooligans, but also the attentions of the police, whose treatment of football fans had become increasingly heavy-handed.⁷⁷

Ironically, replica shirts were rarely, if ever, worn by members of the hooligan firms themselves. Club colours would have attracted unwanted police attention.⁷⁸ Many hooligans embraced the aforementioned 'football casual' subculture, where match-day drinking and violence were undertaken dressed in expensive and fashionable apparel.⁷⁹ Although the casual's list of favoured brands was (and still is) in a constant state of flux, their predilection for high-end brands has always ruled out wearing replica football shirts, which carried little cultural cachet. As sociologist Richard Giulianotti noted in his study of Aberdeen's hooligan firms, 'casuals are specious in ... mocking the fandom of those swathed in team colours'.⁸⁰

From the late 1970s to the late 1980s, therefore, multiple obstacles impeded the widespread adult adoption of replica shirts, be it a fan- or industry-led process. In *Fever Pitch*, author Nick Hornby recalled that, by 1985/1986 'whacking great holes' had begun to open up in the crowd as fans deserted the sport.⁸¹ The remaining supporters and football in general became widely stigmatised, and this clearly restrained any commercialisation of the sport and its apparel by clubs or manufacturers. As Martin Prothero, who had begun to rise up the Umbro hierarchy, notes, 'I think the negativity around the sport commercially then was such that nobody really wanted to try and do anything different to be honest. It was almost a question of running to stand still'.⁸²

However, we argue that it was football's very outsider status in this period that eventually translated the early replica shirt adoption, driven by wardrobe inertia and cup-final fancy dress, into a consolidated subcultural motif. By definition, the fans who continued to attend matches in the mid 1980s were those that Giulianotti classifies as 'hot traditional' spectators, exemplified by a 'thick personal solidarity' with their club that encourages 'multifarious forms' of support, and resembles relationships with close family and friends.⁸³ In the eyes of hot traditional fans, subcultural capital is reserved for 'supporters who continued to attend and to live through those periods when their clubs were unsuccessful' – in the context of mid 1980s English football, 'unsuccessful' can be extended to the wider game.⁸⁴ Giulianotti also notes that some hot traditional fans 'seek to display greater volumes of subcultural capital to authenticate their support to the extent of claiming greater status over their fellow supporters', for example, fans who chose not only to attend but also to wear a replica shirt in the mid 1980s.⁸⁵ The replica football shirt was possibly, for some fans, a defiant quasi-political pro-football statement given the right-wing government's prevailing antagonism towards football and its fans, manifest in plans to introduce compulsory supporter ID cards.⁸⁶

Thus there was a motivation to wear a replica shirt in the mid 1980s – specifically, to proclaim your identity as a fan despite football's low esteem. For a small number of supporters, the replica football shirt became not just an authentic item itself – i.e. one having constructive authenticity, and even

a degree of objective authenticity – but also a badge of the wearer’s existential authenticity, enabling fans to declare their loyalty, knowledge, status, and identity.⁸⁷ To quote Jenss, ‘authenticity of appearance is immediately linked with the self, and the body becomes the site of identity and authenticity’.⁸⁸ Allegiance to the shirt and to football as a whole was a badge of honour which wearers wished to flaunt in the face of cultural opposition. Football’s underdog status not only solidified the replica shirt’s subcultural capital, but eventually played a role in expanding the shirt’s commercial and cultural reimagining beyond the hardcore supporter.

Phase 3: from fan subculture to youth culture

Our production, promotion and parading data also point towards the late 1980s as the point at which replica football shirts began to appeal to an audience beyond hardcore fans. Likewise, football attendances had bottomed out in the 1985–1986 season and then begun to creep upwards – a history sidelined by the popular narratives that place football’s revival as a purely 1990s Premier-League-inspired phenomenon.⁸⁹ This late 1980s recovery can be traced in part to tighter policing and CCTV cameras inside stadia that reduced hooliganism. It also had roots in a surge of fan activism, as beleaguered supporters began to fight back against their stigmatisation by government and media through publishing fanzines and forming independent supporters associations.⁹⁰

With its mix of anti-establishment campaigning and irreverent humour, the fanzine movement gradually mediated a positive change in the perception of football and its fans, particularly amongst a fashion-conscious youth demographic. Essentially the very neglect of football grounds and fans had created what Peter Brook defines as ‘empty spaces’ ripe for young adult fans to campaign, create, and engage in performative behaviours.⁹¹ These green shoots of recovery can, in hindsight, be seen as the first stage of football’s eventual gentrification process, just as what Philip Clay terms the ‘pioneer’ wave of artists and ‘creative types’ create the social capital necessary for urban areas to regenerate.⁹² By 1989, influential music weekly NME was not just referencing football, but declaring: ‘Football is hip again and that’s official. This is reflected on a rock’n’roll level’. Rather than star players, the fans and especially fanzines were lionised:

It is a younger generation who are the cutting edge of this revival. They are the people making up the editorial boards of the hundreds of soccer fanzines that have sprung up. A few years ago they’d have been writing about their favourite rock groups, but now their energies are consumed by football prose...in the same way that the best pop fanzines make you want to go to gigs [the best football fanzines] will have you returning to the terraces.⁹³

Fanzine writers almost always set themselves up as opposed to hooliganism, especially the ‘media stereotype of the inarticulate, macho hooligan imagery

surrounding football fandom'.⁹⁴ So it is ironic that this coalescence of football with wider youth culture, particularly music, was boosted by a contemporaneous change in the casuals' style and focus. Many had drifted away from designer labels by the late 1980s, instead embracing the burgeoning scene developing around a new style of electronic music broadly categorised as rave or acid house: dance-infused guitar bands, warehouse parties, and a dress code characterised by loose-fitting, brightly coloured shirts, and even looser flared jeans.⁹⁵

Advances in fabric technology had been driving shirt design onwards from the blocks of bright colour and branded trim that characterised the late 1970s. The early-to-mid 1980s saw a fashion for a combination of gloss and matt fabric effects known as 'shadow stripes'; by the late 1980s, a full palette of colours including neon shades was available, and printing complex patterned fabrics was also viable.⁹⁶ Shirt design in this era was increasingly guided by a desire to utilise this new technology, particularly on change kits, in which fans would be less concerned about experimentation with traditional colours. Umbro manager Kevin Offer opined that 'we went through a period of trying to make it as whizzbang as possible and we had the equipment and the technology to be able to print those sort of prints onto shirts. So everyone was doing it ... especially the away kit, we had license to do what we wanted'.⁹⁷ With the adult replica shirt market still in its infancy and older adult fans, who might have had more restrained tastes, not yet considered as customers, the shirts of this era tended to vary from bold and bright to lurid, and were increasingly patterned. The vibrant patterning and bright colours fortuitously chimed with many of the rave scene's design aesthetics and fashions.

This scene also heralded a shift in youth soft drug preferences, from lager and speed to cannabis and ecstasy.⁹⁸ Nick Hornby specifically places his first sniff of cannabis smoke on the terraces in 1987 as a 'new football culture'.⁹⁹ Alongside the aforementioned introduction of CCTV inside stadia and intelligence-led anti-hooligan policing, this change in intoxicants decreased match day violence.¹⁰⁰ English football crowds even began to display, on a weekly basis, a touch of the overt carnivalesque behaviour previously associated only with big games, cup finals, or the international fans of certain teams such as Scotland and Holland. Examples include the short-lived fashion for bringing inflatables into stadia that peaked in the 1988/1989 season, and the rise of end-of-season fancy-dress days.¹⁰¹ Both the decrease in violence and a more playful atmosphere made wearing a club shirt a more attractive proposition, and, allied to the general increasing fashionability of football – and the perceived fashionability of the shirt – amongst young adults, offer an obvious explanation for the rise in the rate of replica shirt parading from the 1988/1989 season onwards. This rise did not go unnoticed by shirt manufacturers. As our data illustrates, in the late 1980s adult fans

rather than children were appearing in adverts for replica shirts, and production included a greater range of adult sizes.

The inflatables craze, and much of football's new-found feel-good factor, was briefly punctured by the 1989 Hillsborough tragedy. The survival, or at least rapid revival, of football's positive momentum can be attributed to the attention surrounding the 1990 World Cup in Italy, and England's achievement in reaching the semi-finals. The tournament marked the apotheosis of football's – and particularly the football shirt's – crossover into fashionable, even high-end youth culture. Seminal fashion, music and culture magazine *The Face* produced an *Italia 90* football-themed edition, with a cover shot of model Kate Moss (making her *Face* debut) draped in football merchandise, and photoshoots featuring replica football shirts inside.¹⁰²

However, *Italia 90* was also the starting gun for football's reconciliation with a far wider, older, adult demographic, and the commercialism that was to follow. This bridge between credibility and populism was perfectly exemplified by the England team's chart-topping tournament song, 'World in Motion'. It was recorded with New Order: an influential band beloved of both the indie-guitar and dance cognoscenti, yet one which consistently achieved chart positions that betrayed their radio-friendly pop hooks and wider appeal.¹⁰³ The replica shirt sat atop this metaphorical bridge, with the band appearing in the *World in Motion* video wearing England replica shirts, and a month of TV coverage of the tournament regularly featuring crowd shots of the many replica-clad England fans, ending with the instantly iconic image of Gazza's tears.¹⁰⁴

In summary, the change in the cultural status of both football and the replica football shirt seen in the late 1980s and early 1990s was primarily a fan-led weaving together of disparate strands of English youth culture to raise football's – and, by association, the replica football shirt's – social and cultural capital. By 1991 this phenomenon had peaked, although the replica shirt retained a degree of 'indie credibility' for several years – for example, indie-rock band Oasis wore Manchester City shirts in their first major photo shoot in 1994.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, as our parading data shows, even if the replica shirt's moment in high fashion's fickle spotlight had passed, its adoption as adult match-day dress continued at an increasing rate. The final stage of the replica's journey to ubiquity, specifically purchasing and parading by a new, older and broader demographic, was underway.

Phase 4: from youth culture to monoculture

By the beginning of the 1990s, manufacturers, retailers and clubs had noticed the growth in replica shirt purchasing and parading. In 1991, 18 years after Leeds United received £10,000 from Admiral in the first kit deal, Umbro were willing to pay Manchester United well over 100 times as much to

supply their shirts for the next four years.¹⁰⁶ Martin Prothero, who had risen to a senior management position at Umbro, recalls: 'we were paying a huge sum of money to Manchester United for the rights, and as a consequence the only way to liquidate or ameliorate the cost was to broaden your product range. ... to make sure that every man, women and child had a replica shirt at the very least, if they were a fan of the football club'.¹⁰⁷ Improved promotion, increased availability, and expanding the appeal of shirts beyond children and young adult males was required.

That this was achieved – to the extent that Umbro eventually extended their contract with United for a further 6 years and to a total of £60 million – was due to a combination of the fortuitous and foreseeable, namely the post-Hillsborough legislation that forced clubs to improve their spectator facilities, the gradual detoxification and popularisation of the sport that had occurred in the half-decade up to 1992, and the prevalence of commercial interests seeking to exploit this popularity. These factors continued to impact football over the next two decades, but their effect was best illustrated by the step change in commodification coincident with the Premier League's foundation in 1992, especially the associated TV contract, which dramatically increased clubs' incomes.¹⁰⁸ The construction or redevelopment of stadia, making them all-seater to satisfy post-Hillsborough safety legislation, reduced capacity at a time of rising attendances, causing pent-up demand, and enabling clubs to raise ticket prices season-on-season.¹⁰⁹ Traditional working-class fans were supplemented, then supplanted, by a new, older, wealthier middle-class audience – the second wave of gentrifiers attracted by the now-fashionable sport.¹¹⁰

The increase in larger replica shirt sizes offered after 1992, apparent in our production data, catered for the middle-aged fan with accompanying middle-aged spread and less likelihood of wearing their shirt for any athletic purpose. Our purchasing-survey results reflect the success of this strategy. After 1990, the average age of fans buying their first adult-sized replica rose towards 30, suggesting that many in their 40s had become customers. Umbro's marketing director Peter Draper noted that, in 1993, XL had become their best-selling shirt size – rather than a product for children, replica shirts were mostly being bought by 'Little Johnny's dad'.¹¹¹ Shirt design was also affected. Garish patterning was replaced by traditional stylings that would evoke nostalgia in older fans and appeal to more sober fashion preferences.¹¹² This also increased the likelihood of shirts becoming a non-match-day leisurewear staple too, a possibility opened up by the detoxification of football. Child fans, attracted by 'dress like your hero, play like your hero' motives, were not neglected either – the introduction of squad numbers and players' names on shirts added a further layer of authenticity and player-specificity.

The promotion and sale of replica shirts was also professionalised in the 1990s. The rise of national sports retailers such as JJB Sports saw the

biggest clubs' shirts sold on every high street.¹¹³ Clubs now viewed fans as consumers, not just of tickets but also of merchandise, and saw match day as a retail opportunity.¹¹⁴ Club shops had evolved into stadium superstores. As our survey highlighted, in the 1990s fans were most likely to buy their shirts from such shops, despite the growth in high-street options. Shirts were redesigned more frequently, and many clubs now sold not only a home and change strip, but a third kit too. Newly-established football magazines aimed at adult fans, such as *90 Minutes* and later *FourFourTwo* offered another avenue for advertising and mail-order retailing.

The proliferating media interest in English football was complicit in this marketing process. As well as broadcasting images of replica-clad supporters as a backdrop to the game itself, the media – in particular Sky TV, who dominated the rights to Premier League coverage – used the idea of the 'superfan' to promote their sports channel schedules. Such fans were invariably characterised as face-painted eccentrics, offering overt, carnivalesque support, and wearing the club colours to every home and away match. Essentially, in this fourth phase of adoption, both clubs and media pushed the message that, to be a real, authentic fan, you need to own and wear the shirt.

The stabilisation of parading and production levels from the mid 1990s marks the maturation of the replica kit industry. As the parading figures indicate, replica football shirts are worn by a sizeable minority of the typical crowd at an English league match. Although outside the parameters of this study, football shirts have also become a non-match-day leisurewear option for both high street and holiday, albeit as an occasionally mocked, typically low-end fashion choice – a stigmatisation that doesn't completely support Giulianotti's argument that high versus low culture divisions have collapsed due to the burgeoning middle-class fan base which typifies what he terms football's post-modern period.¹¹⁵

Replica shirts in the new millennium

By 2000, the end of our data-collection period, replica shirts were designed and produced for, and promoted to male fans of all age groups. The twin challenge for clubs and manufacturers then became keeping existing purchasers, and finding new markets. Although a detailed examination of replica shirt consumption beyond the establishment of a stable adult male consumer base is outside the scope of our study, there have been both manufacturer- and fan-led developments and innovations that offer potential avenues for future research.

Existing customers have been targeted by frequent design changes, including a focus on reviving popular past designs, the development of third and fourth shirts to supplement home and change kits (and even one-off outfits for special matches), and increased product differentiation, courtesy of

selling 'player' and 'stadium' versions of the replica shirt.¹¹⁶ New kits no longer just go on sale, but are launched with sophisticated campaigns comprising events, videos and, more recently, interactive online content – the meanings and significance of the shirt engendered through these campaigns, and the fan reactions to them, offer an interesting direction for further investigation.

With collective TV rights sold abroad, the global appeal of the Premier League has opened up a lucrative overseas merchandise market, and shirt retailing has become a global concern. This phenomenon is not just confined to the biggest English teams – Barcelona and Real Madrid replica shirts are a common sight around much of the world. Such 'super-clubs' increasingly undertake pre-season overseas tours, particularly to the USA, China and Malaysia, with the explicit aim of expanding their passive overseas support, and hence merchandise sales.¹¹⁷

Even the focus on the male customer, a limitation of production (in terms of not providing shirts with women's sizes and cut) and promotion that remained unchanged for a further decade from 2000, eventually succumbed. Haynes suggested in 1993 that, though 'replica football shirts are often a required accessory for some women ... women are usually on the periphery of such consumption patterns'.¹¹⁸ The truth of this generalisation at that time, and changes since then, are worthy of far deeper exploration, but as Prothero admits, Umbro's initial attempts to market replica shirts to women were 'pretty lethargic'.¹¹⁹ Our purchasing-survey responses and crowd data support a gender divide, both in the gender balance of respondents themselves, and the lower percentage of women who had worn shirts to matches before 2000. However, the neglect of this potential market for so long cannot be explained by the absence of women from matches. Survey data from Football League clubs, collected between 1983 and 1988, estimates that in this era between 11% and 13% of a typical crowd was female.¹²⁰ By the mid-2000s this figure had risen to over 20%, an increased prominence eventually acknowledged by the development of replica shirts with a female-friendly cut.¹²¹ Paralleling this increase in female fandom has been a rapid growth in girls' football within schools and clubs. As a result, the gendered nature of the replica kit market segment comprising child footballers who wish to play in their team's colours is likely to be gradually broken down, subsequently producing a greater number of women for whom the replica football shirt is an established wardrobe item.

Conversely, it can be argued that the replica shirt's increased commodification and ubiquity has diminished its appeal to those who first popularised it. Giulianotti states that 'for traditional/hot supporters, one cannot acquire subcultural capital in a purely market manner simply by purchasing the latest club commodities'.¹²² It is therefore unsurprising that for some fans the latest, corporatised version of their club's shirt, despoiled by a sponsor's

logo, potentially produced by sweat shop labour, and retailing at upwards of 60 pounds, is anathema.¹²³ In fact, the official current replica shirt, objectively the most authentic product, is conversely seen as the trademark of the mockingly-monikered 'nouveau fan', whose lack of authenticity is despised. Further, it is more generally viewed as symbolising how football has 'sold out' to commercial interests.¹²⁴ With football's position as England's – and the world's – most popular sport becoming ever more entrenched, it would be illogical for the hot traditional fan to project their subcultural capital as the most loyal fans, who lived through football's dark ages and who oppose its hyper-commodification, by wearing a totem of late-modern football's hegemonic cultural status.

However, although the 'latest' shirt may now be out of bounds, rather than abandoning the replica altogether, some longer-serving fans have attempted to reassert their authenticity and status by wearing shirts from previous eras. These 'retro-replicas' were first marketed by independent companies in the early 1990s, before clubs and contemporary manufacturers also began to appreciate the value in their back catalogue.¹²⁵ They allow hot traditional fans to maintain the tension of not fitting in with the crowd – and hence retaining the special status offered in the 1980s simply by attending football – yet still align themselves with their club. For some, they may even represent an overt protest against the prevailing mood around football – just as wearing the contemporary replica shirt did back in the mid 1980s. Indeed, Jense highlights how the consumption and wearing of retro fashions 'may produce a sophisticated feeling of individuality and distinction in the sense of Bourdieu (1992) as a resistance to the consumption of uniform mass products' and may be seen as 'a strategy against homogenizing superbrands'.¹²⁶ Essentially, whilst hot traditional supporters view consumption as inauthentic, as Bauman implies, in a late-modern world, it is impossible not to be a consumer.¹²⁷ The symbolic rivalry that accompanies displaying your true fandom to rival fans and fellow fans is centred around consuming.¹²⁸

A multivalent uniform

The process through which adult males adopted the replica football shirt comprised four stages. Initially, shirt wearing was reserved for a tiny number of eccentrics or as cup-final fancy dress. The vanishing societal barriers to wearing sportswear as leisurewear encouraged adoption by a small subgroup of fans, stimulated by the cup-final fancy dress tradition, and by wardrobe inertia following the child replica kit boom of the mid 1970s. However, this second phase was characterised by very slow growth, with demand suppressed by limited production and distribution, a dearth of promotion, and football's wider unpopularity. These factors unwittingly solidified the replica shirt as

subcultural capital, leading to the third phase: a popularisation of the replica shirt as wider youth fashion that coincided with football's revival within the young adult demographic. This market growth was essentially driven by young adult male fans proactively embracing a child's product rather than resulting from a manufacturer-led initiative. As manufacturers finally grasped the replica shirt's potential, a fourth phase saw it produced and promoted as – and becoming – a uniform for older fans returning to the freshly-sanitised and much-hyped match day, as well as for new fans attracted by the modern football experience. Finally, in the new millennium, the replica shirt has been at the vanguard of football's drive to attract new consumers, be it the long-neglected female fan base, or through global merchandising.

The themes of uniforms, uniformity and gentrification illustrate the wider impact of the replica shirt, and its role as a metaphor for football's transformation. As [Figure 1](#) illustrated, a packed football crowd on a sunny day is granted a uniform appearance by the fashion for replica shirts – a recreation of the relative visual uniformity of the crowd prior to the mid 1960s. Hence, taking a long view, the period of our study is atypical in terms of crowd appearance, and represents the latter two-thirds of a 30-year interregnum in which, as the old sartorial norms of coat-and-hat or jacket-and-tie faded, new styles competed to become the established match-day uniform. The rise and fall of, and meanings carried by, the homespun and subcultural terrace fashions that abounded in this period warrant further detailed investigation.

That the replica shirt emerged victorious despite beginning this period as – at best – a form of fancy dress is perhaps because, as Kendall and Osbaldiston note, it became inextricably 'embedded in narratives of authenticity, sacredness and profaneness'.¹²⁹ In the words of sociologist Kevin Dixon, 'football fans inhabit a culture where authenticity is constantly scrutinised by themselves and others': the replica shirt's flexibility and multivalence with respect to the existential authenticity it is perceived to confer by very different types of supporter links these narratives together.¹³⁰ For the Premier League-era arriviste fan, the shirt forms part of the carnivalesque atmosphere and consumption practices that comprise the modern football experience. For the global fan and football tourist, it offers a chance to visibly identify with a successful overseas sporting brand. Today, ticket demand, pricing and accessibility makes match attendance at the highest level impossible for many fans, yet billions are engaged in a televisually-mediated relationship with football. Brown notes that approximately 0.01% of Manchester United's global fanbase could actually fit into their ground.¹³¹ Wearing a replica shirt is an expression of loyalty and authenticity whilst not attending matches; it perhaps even acts as a partial substitute for attendance in the wearer's eyes. Ironically, the fan type perhaps least in thrall to the replica shirt today is the hot traditional fan, whose endorsement and patronage originally granted it a toehold in terrace fashion. For some,

proclaiming their authentic fandom in a crowd of many thousands involves looking different as well as similar – the retro replica neatly resolves this contradiction and reconciles this tension between uniformity and distinction, maintaining the link with a sacred object, offering an overt display of cultural capital, and also evoking a pleasing nostalgia. Nonetheless, for all fans, just wearing the replica shirt, present or retro, is likely to feed back into their behaviour. By reinforcing their place as a supporter, a replica shirt legitimises and encourages further supportive actions, and for some even creates them. As fashion historian Jennifer Craik notes, understanding the rules about a uniform, including how one should behave in it, ‘is more important than the items of clothing and decoration themselves’.¹³²

Finally, the adoption of replica shirts by adults provides a lens through which to view the accompanying changes in football culture, from the ‘old’ rough and ready, working class football experience to today’s ‘new’ gentrified, sanitised and hypercommodified media frenzy. The simplistic yet established narratives of a ‘pre- and post-Premier League’, or ‘pre- and post 1990 World Cup’ schism ignore the need, in any gentrification process, for the necessary conditions to exist to underpin its early flowering: an unattractive but cheap, easily accessible and largely unregulated environment ripe for colonisation by a first wave consisting of the young and fashion-conscious but relatively impoverished. Their initial revitalisation, through introducing energy, ideas, and cultural capital, creates these necessary conditions (recognition, fashionability, and improved facilities), attracting a wider, wealthier segment of the potential market. This in turn can marginalise the first-wave gentrifiers.¹³³

As such, the first two phases of shirt adoption map neatly onto the decline in English football’s attendances, stadia, and general well-being. In turn, this provided conditions that enabled an alternative football culture to flourish. Football’s emergence and capture of the youthful cultural zeitgeist attracted the attention of, and appealed to, a wider young adult male audience seeking the next big thing: the third phase of our process which, as our parading and production data indicate, began a couple of seasons *before* the 1990 World Cup. This likewise boosted mainstream interest across all age groups and social classes, so that football – and the replica football shirt – was ripe for commercial exploitation. Ultimately both the replica football shirt industry, or at least its focus upon adults – and the revival of football’s fortunes, so often painted as the result of Gazza’s tears, the invention of the Premier League, and satellite television’s investment – were initially fan-inspired phenomena that can be traced to the fan activism and tentative embrace of the carnivalesque found on the terraces in the late 1980s. However, this fan activism, initially directed at least in part at highlighting and resisting what was seen as persecution of supporters and neglect of facilities, is now directed against the commercialism and exploitation of ‘authentic’ followers, and their

marginalisation in favour of more profitable ‘nouveau’ fans – including those who only watch on TV – and sports tourists.

In the late-modern football world, the sport is everywhere. You no longer follow football: it follows you via a multiplicity of media outlets. Even ‘fans’ who rarely attend a match feel the need to identify with a team. Such ubiquity and cultural hegemony ensures that replica football shirts – and their associated spin-offs – are likely to be a mainstream leisure fashion for a long time to come.

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Notes

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9. For instance, see Claudio Benzecry, ‘Azul Y Oro: The Many Social Lives of a Football Jersey’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 1 (2008): 49–76; Gavin Kendall and Nick Osbaldiston, ‘“You’re Not Fit to Wear the Shirt”: Towards a Cultural Sociology of the Football Shirt’ (Proceedings of Social Causes, Private Lives: The Australian Sociological Association Conference, Sydney, 2010), 1–12; John Hughson and Kevin Moore, ‘Hand of God’, *Shirt of the Man: The Materiality of Diego Maradona*, *Costume* 46, no.2 (2012). The burgeoning inventory of nostalgia-tinged football kit histories includes John Devlin, *True Colours: Football Kits from 1980 to the Present Day* (London: A & C Black, 2005); Bob Bickerton, *Club Colours* (London: Hamlyn, 1998); David Moor, *Historical Football Kits*, <http://www.historicalfootballkits.co.uk> (accessed August 12, 2017); Derek Hammond and Gary Silke, *Got, Not Got: The A-Z of Lost Football Culture* (Worthing: Pitch Publishing, 2011); Neal Heard, *A Lover’s Guide to Football Shirts* (London: A Lover’s Guide Publishing, 2016).
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23. Goldblatt, *The Ball Is Round*, 63, 405.
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25. *Ibid.*, 245; Goldblatt, *The Ball Is Round*, 457–8.
26. Crowd images were found via Google, using the keywords 'football', 'soccer', 'crowd', 'fans'. Catalogue scans were likewise found using the keywords 'football', 'soccer', 'kit catalogue' and 'kit advert' in conjunction with the names of manufacturers.
27. The sampling frame was stratified by the typical level at which clubs played during the study period ('top tier' or 'outside of the top tier'). The 50 club short-list was as follows: Arsenal, Birmingham City, Blackburn Rovers, Bradford City, Brighton, Bristol Rovers, Burnley, Cambridge United, Charlton Athletic, Chelsea, Chesterfield, Colchester United, Coventry City, Derby County, England, Everton, Exeter City, Fulham, Ipswich Town, Leeds United, Leicester City, Liverpool, Luton Town, Manchester City, Manchester United, Middlesbrough, Millwall, Newcastle United, Norwich City, Nottingham Forest, Oldham Athletic, Oxford United, Port Vale, Portsmouth, Queens Park Rangers, Reading, Rochdale, Rotherham United, Sheffield United, Sheffield Wednesday, Southampton, Stoke City, Sunderland, Swansea City, Torquay United, Tottenham Hotspur, Watford, West Bromwich Albion, West Ham United, and Wolverhampton Wanderers.

28. The 18 clubs/teams for whom we gathered complete sets of 18 adverts were: Arsenal, Aston Villa, Brighton & Hove Albion, Cambridge United, Chelsea, England, Everton, Fulham, Leeds United, Leicester City, Liverpool, Manchester United, Nottingham Forest, Queens Park Rangers, Sheffield Wednesday, Tottenham Hotspur, Watford, and Wolverhampton Wanderers.
29. Images were sourced online via image and content searches of blogs and social media written or peopled by football-kit collectors and enthusiasts, such as: *Got Not Got: the Lost World Of Football*, <https://gotnotgot.wordpress.com> (accessed September 30, 2017); *True Colours: The Football Kit History Site*, <http://www.truecoloursfootballkits.com> (accessed September 30, 2017); *Football Kits The World Over*, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/648646568570487> (accessed September 30, 2017); *@TheSkyStrikers*, <https://twitter.com/TheSkyStrikers>.
30. The final set of images featured adverts from 98 different English league clubs and the national team (including some from clubs outside of our sample, whose kits appeared in football-magazine adverts and catalogues). Where sizes were given as acronyms rather than chest measurements we used the following frequently-applied convention: S = 36–38 inches; M = 38–40; L = 40–42; XL = 42–44, XXL = 44–46; XXXL = 46–48; 4XL = 48–50; 5XL = 50–52; 6XL = 52–56.
31. Patrick, interview with first and second author, July 27, 2016; Peter Hockenull, owner, Admiral Sportswear 1982–1986, interview with second author, August 22, 2016; Mike Williams, Umbro Marketing Director, 1979–1989, interview with second author, August 5, 2016; Martin Prothero, Umbro manager 1984–2009, interview with first author, July 10, 2016; Kevin Offer, Umbro manager 1988–2013, interview with first author, August 21, 2016.
32. A handful of clubs now have official or approved ‘digital museums’, e.g. <http://www.evertoncollection.org.uk> (Everton FC). The English National Football Museum’s image archive of over 1000 match-day photos taken by photographer Stuart Roy Clarke: see <https://www.homesoffootball.co.uk/>.
33. The 20 clubs/teams for which we gathered the complete set of 22 seasons of crowd images were: Brighton & Hove Albion, Cambridge United, Chelsea, Coventry City, England, Everton, Fulham, Leicester City, Liverpool, Manchester United, Newcastle United, Norwich City, Nottingham Forest, Oxford United, Queens Park Rangers, Rotherham United, Torquay United, Tottenham Hotspur, Watford, and Wolverhampton Wanderers.
34. For instance, Admiral’s 1978 catalogue states: “JERSEYS. Exciting co-ordinated soccer kit from Admiral, suppliers to national sides and major teams throughout the world. Sizes: available from stock: Small Boys’ (28" 70cm), Boys’ (32" 80cm), Youths’ (34" 86cm), Small Men’s (36" 91 cm), Men’s (40" 102cm). Men’s sizes do not carry club badges.” Admiral Sportswear, ‘1978 Catalogue’, *Admiral Sportswear*. The use of replica kit as playing kit by amateur clubs in this era is also inferred by: Patrick, *Admiral: Kit Man*, 148.
35. Admiral Sportswear, ‘Our kit is just up your street’, *Shoot! Magazine*, June 17, 1978. The image can be viewed at: John Devlin, ‘Modern Life Is Rubbish’, *True Colours: The Football Kit History Site*, <http://www.truecoloursfootballkits.com/articles/modern-life-is-rubbish> (accessed 6 August, 2017).
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39. Bert Patrick, owner, Cook & Hurst, Admiral Sportswear 1963-1982, interview with first and second author, July 27, 2016.
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41. De Marly, *Fashion for Men*, 113, 121, 125.
42. Goldblatt, *The Ball Is Round*, 457-8; Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1989), 335; Giulianotti, *Football*, 49.
43. Goldblatt, *The Ball Is Round*, 458.
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45. Holt, *Sport and the British*, 335.
46. Goldblatt, *The Ball Is Round*, 457-8; Brown, *Savage Enthusiasm*, 178-99; Taylor, *The Association Game*, 310.
47. Morris, *The Soccer Tribe*, 251; Holt, *Sport and the British*, 337.
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51. De Marly, *Fashion for Men*, 145.
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