

## Football and Misogyny

Jayne Caudwell, University of Brighton

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If you're looking for real evidence of football's sneering, misogynistic attitude to women then there have been many more revealing places to look over the past few years than the email account of the Premier League's chief executive Richard Scudamore. You could have been present at Cardiff's Celtic Manor hotel when a Welsh woman journalist asked Sepp Blatter how one might secure a professional role with Fifa. "Lady, I'm single," Blatter replied, to general male amusement. ... Or when radio reporter Michelle Evans had the temerity to ask Gordon Strachan about a particularly poor defeat when he was Celtic manager. "Explaining it to you is impossible," Strachan told her. "It would be like you explaining childbirth to me." (Herbert, 2014: ¶1)

### Introduction

Rani Abraham's disclosure to the media (May 11, 2014) of Richard Scudamore's ribald sexist e-mail commentary provides further evidence of, and challenge to, the culture of misogyny within UK football. Scudamore, who is arguable one of the most powerful men in contemporary football, exchanged titillating sexist jokes with his longstanding friend Nick West. West, a lawyer, works for DLA Piper and specialises in broadcasting. Scudamore is paid in the region of £1.8 million a year and he receives sums such as £2.8 million in annual bonuses. As a lawyer, West is likely to have a similar financial profile. Both men are white, middle aged, well educated and very rich. It is men like this that hold vast amounts of social and cultural power in British society.

Earlier in the year (February 2014), the networking group Women in Football found—during a survey of 661 women who work in football—that 436 women had witnessed sexism within the football workplace and 382 women had experienced sexism within the football workplace. Despite mounting evidence of discrimination, the Premier League (all-male board) failed to take disciplinary action against Scudamore. Sports Minister Helen Grant and Dame Tessa Jowell stated, publicly, their disappointment with this decision to take no further action. They both argue, strongly, that his behaviour significantly undermines women, women in football and the current policies of anti-discrimination, inclusion and diversity promoted by the Football Association.

For twenty years or so, scholars of football have made valuable contributions to documenting women and girls' struggles against discrimination and exclusion. There are ever-increasing gendered analyses of the histories, politics and socio-cultural aspects of one of the most popular games in the world (cf. Caudwell, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2012; Clark, 2011; Cox and Pringle, 2012; Cox and Thompson, 2000; Dong and Mangan, 2002; Hong and Mangan, 2004; Liston, 2006; Magee et al., 2007; Pelak, 2010; Perets, 2011; Porat, 2009; Scraton et al., 1999 and 2005; Skille, 2008; Stewart, 2012; Williams, 2003 and 2007). And yet, misogyny and sexism continue to thrive in the upper echelons of football in the UK.

Whilst recognising the dire situation in the UK, I seek to expand our critical view by focusing on contemporary incidents involving women and football elsewhere. First, through a consideration of woman's fandom in Muslim-majority countries I explore the treatment of women who watch men play football. Clearly, all Muslim-majority countries do not have homogeneous configurations of gender relations. As Harkness (2012: 722) argues, in his

account of women and soccer in Iraq, there are regional variations, for example: ‘Reflecting the larger Kurdish region, Sulaimani is somewhat progressive and tolerant compared with the more conservative southern and western areas of Iraq’. However, for most women in most Muslim-majority countries women’s rights remain a constant struggle, probably more so than in Western-capitalist countries.

Second, I look at what happened to the South African footballer Eudy Simelane. This turn to the brutality of ‘corrective rape’ of a nationally-recognised player provides an extreme—and very disturbing—view of how women’s footballing bodies continue to be policed, regulated and surveilled. I finish the chapter with a discussion on feminism and football. Throughout the chapter I work from a feminist perspective. However, in summing up the debates and controversies, I question the value of feminism by asking if such an approach is sufficient.

قلابق بن اجلا

### **:Women Watching Men**

The film *Offside* (2006) depicts a young Iranian woman’s endeavours to attend a men’s football match in Tehran. She is not the only woman football fan who successfully enters the Azadi stadium (an all- and only-male public space). Despite the women dressing-as-men, the soldiers spot them and a group of 6 are held in a small-railed enclosure on the periphery of the stadium. During the film the women and soldiers share their frustrations with not being able to get a clear view of the match. A few of the soldiers watch through gaps in the railings and they make some effort to relay events on the pitch to the women captives. Regardless of a shared interest in the men’s game, tensions rise between the women and the male soldiers

when one of the women requires the toilet. After much negotiation a soldier escorts her to the facilities available, which are obviously men's. On the way, he asks her:

Soldier: Why did you come? You'll get us all in trouble.

Woman: To watch the game up close.

Soldier: Is it so important?

Woman: More important than food to me. I play football too.

Soldier: Yeah, sure you do. ... You wanna play here in front of 100,000 men?

Woman: Not here. We play in front of women. They don't let men in.

Soldier: What if a man came, dressed as a woman?

Woman: Men don't dare do such things. It'll never happen.

Women-dressing-as-men (sometimes known as cross-dressing) in order to acquire the rights, privileges and opportunities men take for granted has a long history, especially at times of war and within some popular culture activities (e.g. writing, music and theatre). Joan of Arc, Shakespeare's Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* and Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Dorothy Lawrence (WWI war reporter) and Billy Tipton (jazz musician) are a few examples from a long list. Discovery of these women often leads to public outcry. And yet, the logics of cross-dressing women are easy to follow: it's the only way to gain access to activities they are passionate about, but are denied access to because of their sexed and gendered body.<sup>1</sup> Men are denied access to fewer, if any, activities. This is the case in sport and specifically football.

Later in the film (*Offside*), one of the women asks the soldier in charge of their confinement:

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent example of the celebration of women successfully living as men (in Albania) in order to gain the privileges many men assume see: <http://petapixel.com/2012/12/26/portraits-of-albanian-women-who-have-lived-their-lives-as-men/>

Woman: Why can't women go in there and sit with the men?

Soldier: Why are you so stubborn? Women can't sit with men in the stadium.

Woman: Then why could Japanese women watch the Japan-Iran game here?

Soldier: They were Japanese.

Woman: So my problem is I was born in Iran. If I were born in Japan, I could watch football?

Soldier: They don't speak our language. If the crowd curses and swear, they won't understand.

Woman: So, the swearing is the problem?

Soldier: No, that's not all. A man and a woman can't sit together.

Woman: Why can they in a movie theatre?

Soldier: That's different.

Away from this fictionalised account, women fans of men's football in Iran have experienced severe restrictions since 1979 (Islamic Revolution). In 2006, these restrictions were further enforced by way of official banning. In 2012, there was a glimmer of hope with talk of Iranian women being granted permission to attend the U16 young men's Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Championship. However, very little has changed and women's place in football stadia is heavily policed. For instance, recent media coverage of the Men's FIFA Confederation Cup held in Brazil (2013) caused strong public objection because Iranian state TV showed "indecent" and "un-Islamic" images in the middle of its live sports coverage, including the glimpse of Shakira' (Dehghan, 2013: ¶2). Shakira was a member of the crowd; she was watching her partner (Pique) play for the Spanish men's team.

The situation is only marginally different in Saudi Arabia, a country in which women have very few rights to basic entitlements such as traveling alone and employment. According to journalist Dorsey, author of The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer blog:

Saudi Arabia, under domestic and international pressure to grant women sporting rights, is creating separate stadium sections so that female spectators and journalists can attend soccer matches in a country that has no public physical education or sporting facilities for women. (2013: ¶1)

Plans to allow women in to football stadia - albeit strictly segregated attendance - in Jeddah and Riyadh suggests some attempt to provide for women fans of the men's game. However, this move to allow women access does not necessarily indicate a shift in football-gendered ideologies. Saudi Arabia is under pressure from governing bodies to change the sporting opportunities for girls and women (e.g. International Olympics Committee and West Asian Football Federation). There is also the positive consequence of increased revenue if a further 32,000 [women] spectators attend (Dorsey, 2013).

Currently, and it would seem for some time yet, the only women who can watch men's football in Saudi Arabia are women arriving in the country to support visiting international sides. The situation mirrors that in Iran. In 2006, Sweden protested the right for women fans to watch the men's fixture (Sweden v Saudi Arabia) and more recently (September, 2013), New Zealand women fans were permitted access to watch the men's International Friendly - NZ v Saudi Arabia. Indigenous women and girls continue to wait for their right to enter one of the many football stadia in Saudi Arabia.

In a strange twist of events the Turkish Football Federation (TFF) placed a two-match ban on Fenerbahçe's men fans. This was as a consequence of crowd disorder at previous games and the no-men sanction was enforced for a home game on Tuesday 20th September, 2011.

Instead of the usual male-dominated crowd, approximately 41,000 women and children aged under 12 years (including boys) attended the game at the Sukru Saracoglu Stadium (capacity 50,000), against Manisaspor.

There are various accounts of this fixture and commentators are generally positive about the decision to allow women-and-children-fans-only. Various mediated reports cover the features of this event. For example, how the male players flung flowers into the crowd of women; how the women fans cheered both teams; how some women wore the shirts of their 'own' team and yet remained supportive of both sides on the field of play; how the female fans chanted the same songs as their male counterparts; and how one man made it in to the game dressed as a woman (wearing a headscarf).

These post-event narratives tend to gender and sexualise both female and male fans in ways that are familiar. For instance, related to the female fans, there are no stories of aggressive crowd behaviour and related to male fans, the ritual of throwing flowers into a standard football crowd by men football players would be unthinkable. As an aside, perhaps in contemporary times when war and conflict are omnipresent, such a public gesture (the giving of flowers) between large groups of men would go a long way to symbolically affirm non violence, co-existence and peace.

The positive, mediated, public response to this event relies, fundamentally, on notions of femininity. In other words, women and femininity are viewed as pacifying forces. Generally,

femininity is almost entirely understood as passive. There are important challenges to this universal stereotype, of course, but in the main women-and-children are viewed as less active and more obedient and compliant compared with men. In their move to punish men fans, the TFF rely on this dominant view. In this case, the decision to open up football-spectator spaces (the stadium) to women and girls was not taken for its own sake. Instead, the move aimed to maintain a crowd, and atmosphere, during the period of a no-men ban. Additionally, it offered insights for savvy marketers of the game; it demonstrated potential future 'customers'.

More recently, and as Dorsey (2013) reports, the Turkish authorities have clamped down on forms of protest within football stadia. As the new football seasons gets underway, in an attempt to stamp out so-called militant forces at grounds, the Prime Minister (PM), Deputy PM and Sport Minister released statements as well as a video:

The 55-second video featuring a young woman demonstrator-turned suicide bomber warned the public that “our youth, who are the guarantors of our future, can start with small demonstrations of resistance that appear to be innocent, and after a short period of time, can engage without a blink in actions that may take the lives of dozens of innocent people.” Throughout the video, the words ‘before it is too late’ are displayed. (Dorsey, 2013: ¶5)

What is of interest here, is the positioning of a woman as a [terrorist-]threat. This positioning is in sharp contrast with the previous view of women as non-aggressive and therefore suitable substitutes for unruly male fans. The representation also grates with the realities of conflict; it is plain to see in the abundant globally-mediated images of war and violent conflict that the majority of “terrorists” are men.



Conflicting gendered discourses of women fans of men's football are evident in the Turkish-based examples provided above. In a simple feminist analysis, women are squashed in to the longstanding madonna-whore complex in which women are either subservient to men and are to be protected or they are impure and warrant punishment. These gendered discourses are not peculiar to Muslim-majority countries.

It is much easier for women fans in European countries to attend men's football matches and to attend matches in countries in which indigenous women are refused access (e.g. Iran and Saudi Arabia). For women in the UK, research has established that sexism and misogyny remain persistent features of their fandom (c.f. Jones, 2008) despite women's entitlements to spectator spaces. The point is that basic entitlements such as access are denied women in countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, and that women fans continue to be interpreted in ways that forefront dominant notions of femininity (Turkey). As scholars of soccer it is remiss to ignore these fan-based contexts.

### **Corrective Rape: Regulation of Women's Footballing Bodies**

From prehistoric times to the present, I believe, rape has played a critical function.

It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear. (Brownmiller, 1975: 5)

“All men are rapists, and that's all they are”.

(Val in Marilyn French's novel *The Women's Room*, 2007: 476)

There are times when I have cited the above feminist sentiments to classes of BA Sport Studies undergraduate students. Rape cases within the realms of men's football (including Australian Rules and American), men's rugby, men's ice hockey and men's boxing provide the contexts for these deliberately provocative statements. Usually students fall silent. Rape is a shocking subject to discuss. However, the links between sport, men's bodies, women's bodies, assault, physical force, violence, violation and power cannot be ignored (cf. Nelson, 1995). And, in broader societal contexts, rape threats via social media appear to be on the increase (e.g. Caroline Criado-Perez, July 2013, UK).

April 2008, aged 31 years, Eudy Simelane was raped and murdered by a group of men in KwaThema, Gauteng, South Africa. Simelane was a 'soccer star', playing midfield for South Africa and the national team Banyana Banyana (Deisel, 2011; Msibi, 2009). She had lived openly as a lesbian. She was an activist in this regard and she was a coach and referee as well as player. In other words, she was well-known for her active involvement in football and for her sexuality (Meises, 2009; Msibi, 2009). It is widely acknowledged that she was 'gang-raped, beaten and stabbed to death for her perceived flouting of conservative/traditional gender stereotypes' (Diesel, 2011: xvi).

The way Eudy Simelane was killed has become known as 'corrective rape', a heinous crime perpetrated by men. Kelly (2009: ¶2), in *The Guardian*, cites campaigners when she writes: "'corrective rape' [is] committed by men behind the guise of trying to 'cure' lesbians of their sexual orientation'. Corrective rape is often associated with South Africa; however there is evidence of corrective rape in Russia, Ecuador and other African states. Human Rights organisations such as Amnesty International have warned of a rise in homophobic crimes, such as corrective rape, in countries that have criminalised same-sex acts and relationships

(e.g. Russia). In regard to Africa, Amnesty argue that existing [homophobic] legislation and penal codes can be traced back to a colonial past and the imposition of Christian moral values. That said, there is a recent socio-cultural history that continues to engender brutal homophobic crimes against women, such as corrective rape.

Sexual violence against women is a global phenomenon: ‘Women aged 15-44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, car accidents, war and malaria, according to World Bank data’

([http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/pressmaterials/unite\\_the\\_situation\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/pressmaterials/unite_the_situation_en.pdf)).

So-called developed countries such as the UK and US are not exempt. For England and Wales (2013), the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Home Office’s joint report states: ‘Approximately 85,000 women are raped on average in England and Wales every year; over 400,000 women are sexually assaulted each year; 1 in 5 women (aged 16 - 59) has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 16’

(<http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk/Statistics2.php>). As with most quantitative (statistical) research on sensitive subjects defining and recording cases is complex (c.f. Durkheim’s study of suicide [1897]). Consequently, sexual violence and rape crimes against women go un/der reported and conviction rates remain low (c.f. [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)). For example, in USA: ‘54% of sexual assaults are not reported to the police and 97% of rapists will never spend a day in jail’ (<http://www.rainn.org/statistics>). In stark comparison, violation of the state in the form of espionage can mean a prison sentence of up to 35 years as we witnessed recently (July, 2013) in the case of Chelsea Elizabeth Manning and the [wiki]leaking of “restricted” military documents.

The rape of women by men—the most common form of rape—is an extreme example of how some men abuse, physically dominate and violate women’s bodies. As many feminists and pro-feminists have argued, the act of rape and the threat of rape are violent and aggressive embodied forms of control and power. Male control and power over women and girls within sporting contexts is not usually so extreme, although there are cases that can be cited. Women footballers in countries in Northern Europe and the USA are more likely to receive verbal and ideological forms of intimidation as a result of their participation in football. However, the focus of this intimidation is, in most cases, based on a ‘... perceived flouting of conservative/traditional gender stereotypes’ (Diesel, 2011: xvi).

Girl players, women student players, women players, women referees, women assistant referees, women managers, women coaches, women volunteers and women fans continue to challenge stereotypes of gender in most countries around the world. Their challenges are often met with derision and blatant sexism. There are a string of recent examples including well known incidents involving Sepp Blatter (2004 - “They [women] could have ... tighter shorts.”, 2013 - “Say something ladies! You are always speaking at home.”), Mike Newell (2006 - “She [Amy Rayner] shouldn’t be here.”), Richard Keys and Andy Gray (2011 - “Can you believe that? A female linesman. Women don’t know the offside rule.”). One of the points here is that these very public commentaries stretch over the last decade and this decade; they continue to be made in places, spaces and times in which we think women and girls have equal opportunities. Significantly, the comments have been made during a period of time when more women and girls have become involved in the game. A period of time often referred to as post-feminist.

Misconceptions concerning the footballing abilities of girls and women compared with boys and men abound, perhaps more so within the institutions of the men's professional game and the global governing bodies of the sport. Homophobic attitudes to players' sexualities often work in tandem with these gendered-ability stereotypes. Despite more athletes deciding to be open about their sexuality, being 'out' continues to be unsafe for some women players.

A cursory view of figures for lesbian, gay and bisexual athletes (Burra, 2012; [www.outsports.com](http://www.outsports.com)) reveals four 'out' lesbian footballers from a total of 21 self-declared LGB-'out' athletes at the London 2012 Olympics. Three of the four footballers play for the same country (Sweden). Clearly, there is not a pooling of women who openly self-identified as lesbian and/or bisexual in specific countries. It is the histories, cultures and social dimensions of nations that permits freedoms, such as living openly as a marginalised sexual subject. Athletes from countries where homosexuality is deemed illegal are at risk of abuse, prejudice, denial and invisibility. For instance, at the beginning of 2013, FIFA issued a warning to the Nigerian Football Association after Dilichukwu Onyedima, chair of the Nigeria Women Football League (NWFL), allegedly made the remark: "Any player associated with it [lesbianism] will be disqualified" ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)).

'Disqualification' operates on many levels from physical exclusion through to snide comments and innuendo. It is heteronormative ideologies of gender, femininity and sexuality that frame and fix these practices of disqualification. Usually disqualification is subtle and the regulation of women's and girls' footballing bodies is through language, discourse, ideologies and representations. Occasionally, it is through physical exclusion. The rape and murder of footballer Eudy Simelane is an extreme case. And yet, it should not be ignored and/or silenced within the realms of football studies.

## **On Feminism and Football**

At the end of 2013, Biggs (2013) and Cochrane (2013) highlight a noticeable surge of feminist activity and protest in the UK and within popular culture. Examples are listed as: increases in feminists gatherings, including a Feminist Freshers' Fair in London; successful social media initiatives such as the 'Everyday Sexism Project'; feminist demonstrations outside of the Bank of England (£10) and The Sun headquarters (Page 3); Student Unions banning Robin Thicket's 'Blurred Lines'; Rape Crisis South London campaigning to criminalise the possession of pornography that depicts rape; Million Women Rise and One Billion Rising (both campaigns seek to raise awareness of the United Nations statistic that 1 in 3 women will be beaten or raped in her life time); Ed Milliband wearing 'This-is-what-a-feminist-looks-like' T-shirt; and the winner of a Comedy Award at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival - Bridget Christie and her show 'A Bic for Her'.

In the introduction to this chapter, I questioned the value of feminism by asking if such an approach is sufficient to a critical analysis of women and football. A feminist-informed agenda has been evident in most football cultures, albeit to different degrees. The most common form of feminism that we can identify within football cultures and football studies,—including playing, officiating, mediated, fandom, governance and academia (i.e. football studies)—is liberalism. This football feminism, like other forms of liberal feminism, tends to emulate the concerns of white-western women (and men). Within white-western football studies how much do we really know about women's and girls' experiences of football? For example, if the names below appeared on a team sheet, what do we know about these players and their experiences of the now-global game?

Amneh Al Shater (Syria), Astrid Daniela Lòpez Flores (El Salvador), Baljinder Dhillon (UK), Eudy Simelane (South Africa), Hajra Khan (Pakistan), Jahongir Rahmatzoda (Tajikistan), Jonny Saelua (Samoa), Khalida Popal (Afghanistan), Maribel Dominguez (Mexico), Rawl Abdullah (Saudi Arabia), Zobeda Khatun (Bangladesh).

The point is that within football studies we know about gender and gender relations as they operate for women and girls actively involved in the game. However, we know less about the interrelations between gender, ethnicity and sexuality. Additionally, we have fewer stories from countries where women struggle for equal rights with men and from places where women and girls experience harsh and often brutal physical realities. Are these knowledge-gaps a consequence of liberalism and whiteness? If so, then the current feminist-football agenda is no longer helpful.

What type of feminist-football manifesto might be useful to the future of football studies?

The discussions in this chapter aim to consider gender, ethnicity and sexuality, and the overlapping and multiple prejudices and oppressions women and girls experience in football contexts. In other words, the intersectionality of their lived, everyday injustices and inequalities. A focus on intersectionality goes some way to moving beyond the traditions of liberalism and whiteness and few football scholars have pursued this line of inquiry in relation to women and girls (cf. Harkness, 2012; Perets, Levy and Galily 2011; Ratna, 2011; Scraton, Caudwell and Holland; 2005).

Returning to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (2013) another feminist comedian - Nadia Kamil:

...performed a set including a feminist burlesque, peeling off eight layers of clothing to reveal messages such as ... "equal pay" picked out in sequins. She also explained the theory of intersectionality through a vocoder, and gave out badges with the slogan "Smash the Kyriarchy". (She hoped audience members would look up any words they were unfamiliar with later, such as "kyriarchy" and "cis")(Cochrane, 2013: ¶10)

There's insufficient space here to provide a thorough account of the concept kyriarchy, suffice to say that some feminists prefer it to the familiar concept of patriarchy (Hodgson, 2010). Re-coined by feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in the early 2000s, the now-feminist concept kyriarchy seeks to identify multiple, interlocking structures of domination and diverse agents of control. In this way, kyriarchy works well within an intersectionality feminist framework. Perhaps future feminist research on women and football will continue to explore the political, social and cultural value of intersectionality (cf. Watson and Scraton, 2013) as well as the critical application of the concept kyriarchy.

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