

"I don't care what she is... she's the best player!"

This study is a comparative study aiming to explore the experiences of football for women over 40.

Author
Jeannie Goulding
MSc by research

Affiliation
Canterbury Christ Church University



Introduction

Around the world there have been many bans on women playing football including England, Scotland, Wales, France, Brazil, Germany and Scandinavia. Many of these countries cited the female body as the reason for the ban, for example the German Soccer Association (DFB) said the sight of women playing football was "an unwomanly body motion and that the sight of wobbling women's breasts during the action on the soccer field would be particularly tasteless" (Kaelberer, 2019, p.344). Despite these historical impediments, the trajectory of international women's football has witnessed a remarkable surge in recent years, exemplified by the staggering global viewership of 1 billion during the Women's World Cup in 2019 (Culvin and Bowes, 2023). It is important we continue this growth of the women's game.



Research Aims

The aim of this study is to investigate the experiences women have had with football throughout their life, from childhood right up to the present day. This study aims to critically analyse these experiences and compare them with each other to understand whether the participants gender may impact their experience and if this experience is different depending on where they grew up. This is a comparative study looking at different nationalities

Methodology

The study will take a qualitative approach, using timeline interviews to obtain the participants life history and their connection to the game of football. The participants will have two weeks at home to complete their timeline, once completed face-to-face interviews will be conducted to talk through their experiences. The interviews will take no longer than one hour and will take place at a time and place convenient to both participant and researcher.

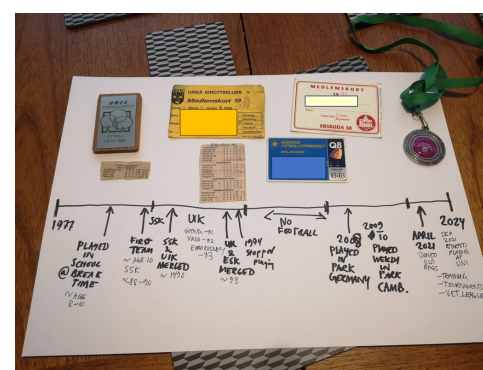
Preliminary findings

I have completed three interviews with participants. The results have not yet been analysed, however, there are some interesting findings already, such as football and all sport in participant two home country (Sweden) was mixed. Participant one (Ireland) said she her negative experiences came from males, e.g. "there was one boy there who I got the ball off and he didn't like the idea of a girl playing and he didn't like the idea of a girl playing being better than him, which I was, and he fouled me and basically put me in crutches for six weeks."

Timelines and interviews

Many studies use timelines as a method to elicit information in during the interview, however, I have selected to allow the participants time at home to complete their timelines, Bremner (2020) suggests that this can improve the quality of the data collected and has shown to provide more or deeper data that may not be able to be collected in face-to-face one time interviews. This methodology grants participants a degree of control in the creation of their timelines and in steering the conversation, thereby adopting a participant-centric approach.

Timelines not only function as a data collection tool but allows the participant to be creative which could add a layer of depth to the narrative process. As you can see from the four examples I have already collected, the creation of each timeline has been constructed differently, some have used memorabilia or photos whereas others have used post-it notes or words to structure their timeline. I deliberately emphasised to the participants that this was up to them how they wanted to present their experiences within the game of football.



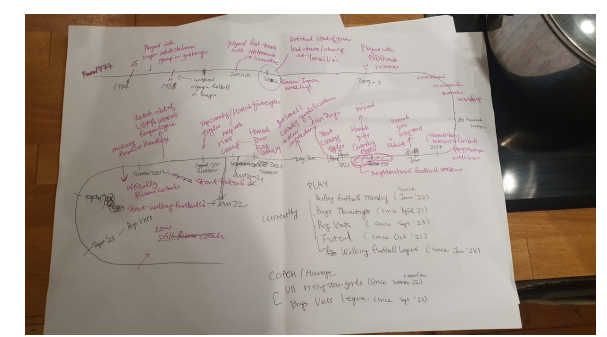
Participant three's timeline creation (above)
Participant two's timeline creation (below)



Participant one's timeline creation (above)
Participant four's timeline creation (below)



1998 - Selected to attend England U18 trials in London.



Conclusion

To conclude, one of my participants said:

"We were born in the wrong decade, wish I had been born now, looking forward to my football future rather than being born when I was, always fighting for your place and being grateful for the opportunities that come our way. I want it to be normal instead of being grateful. All this stuff I have said I still say I'm so lucky it has happened whereas men can just take it for granted and that needs to stop"

Related Literature

Bremner, N. (2020) 'Time for timelines: The take-home timeline as a tool for exploring complex life histories', International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 19, pp. 1609406920948978.
Chen, A.T. (2018) 'Timeline drawing and the online scrapbook: Two visual elicitation techniques for a richer exploration of illness journeys', International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 17(1), pp. 1609406917753207.
Kaelberer, M. (2019) 'Gender trouble on the German soccer field: can the growth of women's soccer challenge hegemonic masculinity?', Journal of Gender Studies, 28(3), pp. 342-352.