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Beyond the Pitch: Investigating Fan Culture, Identity, and Gender Dynamics

Amanda Maria Rind Jensen

31 May 2024

Football is arguably one of the most popular sports in the world. It is an extremely male-dominated sector, however, more clubs are creating women's teams, the leagues are improving, more games are being televised and players are getting better economic compensation.

The fans of football have been globally recognised as a driving force for economic resources in the industry. While many scholars have explored various topics within football, the culture of fans and the interconnected relationship between the fan community and the club they support is a rather unexplored area in research. This study sets out to, explore identity creation through narrative by carrying out a narrative analysis on a number of selected scenes from the 2023 documentary, *Klubben*, featuring members of the fan community as well as players on both the men's team and the women's team. Through a social constructivist perspective, the study research explores the complex relationship between a football club and its fans, while attempting to answer the question of how the top-ranking football club, Brøndby IF, portrays itself and both its men's and women's teams. The findings showed a great appreciation of the fan community and a strong sense of belonging among fans as well as players. While the conveyed message and general narrative are positive, focusing on the strong values and traditions that bind the fans and the club together, the narrative is slightly problematic from the gender equality perspective. Analysis revealed an implicit narrative of a hierarchy of value within the club, reinforcing the existing gender-related challenges within the field of culture, football, and fandom.

The thesis contributes to the fields of communication, culture, fan- and sports culture as well as gender studies. However, due to the limitations in the data collected the study is ungeneralisable. Nevertheless, the findings are profound in the perception of the club and its representation of female athletes and have implications for further research. For example, by expanding the scope to other clubs or diving deeper into Brøndby IF and further developing this research by gathering data from the perspective of the fan groups in terms of how the communication is received as well as gaining a deeper understanding of what the specific sub-culture entails and require from the institution they choose to follow and support.

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1 Introduction

Football is one of the most popular sports in the world, but to some, it is more than just a game; it is a cultural phenomenon that mirrors and shapes societal norms and values. The sport has created an immensely profitable industry with economic impact in many sectors. Football fans are tremendously important for the success of a club, and they are a driving force for resources. However, football is an extremely male-dominated sector and research has had its focus primarily on the stereotypical male fan as well as the men's teams. In recent years, women's football has witnessed a surge in popularity, challenging traditional norms and reshaping the landscape of the sport in Denmark, the attention paid to women's football is limited but, on the rise. More clubs are creating women's teams, the league is getting better with better Television deals, and players are getting better economic compensation (Kvindelig, 2023).

There exists a copious amount of research on football culture and sports fandom, however, with a focus on male fans of men's sports, particularly fan rivalries or hooliganism (Armstrong, 1998 or Murphy et al., 1990), the industry of women's football has been rather neglected. Further, the research on football and fans has yet to examine the interplay between the two entities.

Brøndby IF is one of the most prominent football clubs in Denmark, boasting a passionate fanbase extending across the country. It is ranked highly in both the women's and men's professional leagues and has won several championships through the years making it optimal for a study of fan culture. Therefore, this thesis will focus on one club and its fan group, exploring aspects of culture and communication within an institution. The main objective of the study is to gain insight into the interconnectedness of a club and its fans as well as the general culture of a football community.

The research will contribute to the fields of culture and communication with aspects of gender studies by shedding light on the complex interrelationships between culture, communication, football, and gender. The findings may have practical implications for promoting inclusivity and gender equality within the sport. This thesis will have an intercultural scope as it explores the intersectional and gender studies aspects of football fan culture in Denmark

As there is a noticeable difference in the popularity of women's and men's football and its fans, I set out to explore the differences and similarities between the communication of a club with teams at the top of their leagues. By means of analysis of specific communication from the club as well as an understanding of male and female fans, it is the ambition to gain an understanding of fans from the commercial perspective of a football club.

The following research sets out to explore the complex relationship between a football club and its fans while attempting to answer the question of how the Danish top-ranking club, Brøndby IF, portray itself, its fans and both their men's and women's teams.

2 Literature review

2.1 Definition of a fan

Many scholars have attempted to create an understanding of what it means to be a fan. One main factor has interested many academics and challenged the definition of the concept, namely the aspect of authenticity. However, defining football fanaticism is not a straightforward endeavour, Crabbe, Brown, Mellor, and O'Connor (2006) describes fandom as referring to a subculture made up by fans and characterized by notions of sympathy and camaraderie with others who share a common interest. Football is a space where people can share a sense of collected experience, and inclusion which makes it enticing to participate in (Crabbe et al., 2006) According to Hills (2002) a fan is generally seen as an obsessed individual; someone with an intense interest in a team, celebrity, band or show etc. The term is associated with popular culture, meaning that being a fan often means having an interest in popular music, television, or sport. Moreover, in academia, fans are often profiled as being deviants. They are fanatics, portrayed as dangerous, hysterical or loners, these portrayals are often gendered stereotypes (Crawford, 2004).

The stereotypical stigmatization of fans is also prevalent in sports fans. This tendency can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, when sporting codes were being formalised, introducing restrictions on the number of participants. This caused a rise in mass spectating and supporters were associated with a lack of sportsmanship (Taylor, 1992). These biased portrayals have continued to contemporary times, where the media have labelled football fans as potential hooligans.

Aside from the negative stereotyping of fan culture, it has proved difficult for scholars to define what constitutes a fan. Hills (2002) states that being a fan is more than a label or category, it is an identity and a performance. It is a categorisation that depends on a number of social factors such as social context or time. For example, one may consider themselves a fan, but their supporting patterns such as whether they attend games or not, may cause other supporters to deem them not a real fan. On the other hand, in the eyes of someone who is not interested in sports, they may be seen as a dedicated sports fan. Further, the support patterns will vary across time and culture, meaning that the process of defining the constitution of a fan becomes extremely complex. Therefore, any attempts to provide a framework of fan behaviours would be an oversimplification of behaviour and meanings. However, it is possible to identify common social interaction behaviours and patterns for specific fan groups at specific times. But, to try and give a general description of what constitutes a "fan" is particularly challenging (Crawford, 2004).

In his work to understand the cultural relationships of spectators to football clubs, Critcher (1979) developed on the work of Williams (1961) and Taylor (1971). Williams (1961) identified three kinds of relationships that individuals or social groups have towards an institution: members, customers, and consumers. Critcher (1979) described that the traditional fans saw themselves as club "members", their identity was rooted in the mutual, unbreakable bond between club and fan, structured by a sense of obligation and duty and has a degree of representational status for the club.

Taylor described this as an informal "participatory democracy" within local clubs. However, the understanding of the customer has less definitive loyalties and the support is relatively instrumental and rooted in satisfaction, meaning that if the needs of the customer are not met, he or she will move on and spend money and time elsewhere. Lastly, the consumer has no loyalty and will make rational choices as to which product will provide the greatest benefits. In his description, Critcher is not specific as to how the model of the customer and consumer can be applied to football spectators, however, Giulianotti speculates that the customer will follow his or her local club as long as it meets associative purposes and the players perform well on the field,

otherwise match attendance and interest towards the club may become inconsistent. Moreover, the consumer is likely to follow the clubs that are doing well and switch between clubs to support the winning teams Giulianotti (2002).

Supporters, followers, fans and flâneurs

Another understanding is presented by Giulianotti (2002) as a part of the post-fandom and consumerist understanding. He argues that spectators can be classified into four categories. The classifications are made based on the identification that spectators have toward a specific club. The categories are underpinned by two basic binary oppositions: hot-cool and traditional-consumer. This creates four quadrants representing ideal-type categories to classify consumers in: traditional/hot, traditional/cool, consumer/hot, consumer/cool.

The horizontal axis of traditional/consumer measures an individual's investment in a specific club. The traditional spectator has a longer, more local, and popular cultural identification with the club while the consumer has a market-centred relationship to the club, meaning that he or she is more interested in consuming club products than the cultural identity. The vertical axis of hot-cool dimensions is used to reflect to which degree the club is part of the individual's self-formation and identity. The hot end of the axis signifies loyalty and intense identification as well as solidarity with the club, while the cool denotes the opposite.

Giulianotti (2002) defines the traditional-hot spectators as supporters of the football club. The supporter has a personal and emotional investment in the club on the long term. This support can be supplemented by economic investment such as buying merchandise or shares in the club. However, the reasoning behind monetary support comes from personal solidarity towards the club and is often regarded as compulsory as the individual has a familial relationship towards the club. However, for traditional-hot supporters, subcultural capital cannot be gained solely through market means by purchasing the latest club merchandise. Moreover, while players and staff at the club might change, the ground is "home" to the supporters and changing club and allegiances to another is not an option. The traditional supporter is culturally contracted to their clubs and regularly attend home games, where the ground works as an enhancement of their solidarity with fellow supporters when creating a unique atmosphere.

To the traditional supporter, supporting the club is a part of one's identity and attending games is part of his or her routine. It is a lived experience, rooted in a supporter's identity and the emotional investment in the club is repaid by the team winning games or tournaments or the players following the supporter's and club's traditions. Supporters identify themselves in a subcultural manner and new generations are introduced to the social values by parents or older peers, these the social values are reproduced by creating supporter associations, forums used to discuss club matters and engage in social activities. However, within the group of supporters, there are inevitably different status levels, some supporters aim to demonstrate higher levels of "subcultural capital" to validate their support, thereby asserting greater status over other supporters. Lastly, supporters' dedication to their team does not prevent them from having a keen interest in and understanding of the different qualities and subcultural values of other clubs and their players. They serve as both guardians of football as a sport and active participants in intense rivalries with other clubs, especially those from nearby communities (Giulianotti, 2002).

The traditional/Cool spectators are defined as followers. These spectators can be followers of clubs, players, managers, and other people within football. The follower is defined by staying updated on developments involving the clubs or personalities they find interesting rather than following the journey of the club. The follower understands the unique identities and communities associated with specific clubs and their support groups, however he or she achieves, their identification through engagement via electronic media. The follower can exhibit either thick or thin forms of solidarity. With thin solidarity towards the football institution, the follower might

be interested in a particular club if it hires players or the manager from his or her preferred club. In cases of thick solidarity, the follower may establish relations or friendships with the traditional hot supporters of the clubs. In both thick and thin senses of solidarity there exists symbolic relationships between the follower and his or her favoured club. The follower shows interest or support for the club, which, in turn, offers something that aligns with the follower's habits or established football interests, such as hiring a favoured player or reflecting certain cultural politics. Followers may differentiate themselves from consumer values to validate their traditionalist motives, often by deliberately downplaying or denying the importance of team success or "fashionability" in their allegiance to the club.

Being a follower may be rather complex as there is no straightforward way of ranking or organising her allegiances. It may be difficult to determine where to place one's allegiance when two favoured entities are competing. In order to avoid this the follower will need to have a set of favoured clubs or personalities in different settings to ensure that the football interest is continuous when the true favoured team is not competing. However, the follower understands the cultural politics of football and knows that certain elements cannot be combined, for example, supporting two top teams in the same league.

The follower, unlike the supporter, does not have an emotional relation to the club and surrounding communities or the grounds itself. The ground functions as a practical resource, a place where his favourite players or officials perform. Nevertheless, in instances of thicker solidarity, the follower may have a certain level of respect for the geographic surroundings, but this will be practised from afar.

The hot/consumer spectator is defined as a modern fan of a football club or the players thereof, specifically the star players or celebrities. The fan develops a sense of intimacy or love for specific players; however, it is rather one-sided in attention and affection. Being a fan is a key element of self-identification, however, the relationship is distant compared to that of the supporter. As football has moved in a more commercial direction than previously seen, the fans experience players, club officials and traditions through a market-centred lens. The level of identification of the fan and his relationship with the club is measured through consumption of club-related products such as purchasing merchandise, buying shares, or contributing to initiatives of fundraising. As with the other spectator categories they can show thicker or thinner variations of social solidarity. With a thick manifestation of solidarity, the consumption practices of the fan are motivated by a desire to enhance the collective consciousness and intensify the rituals of support, for example by wearing club colours as a visual display to energize both fans and players during games. The thin forms of solidarity are often from fans further away from the club, who cannot show support by attending games, but rather buy shares or otherwise contribute to the club financially, not for personal profit, but in order to ensure the club's survival or success and enabling the purchase of better players.

According to Giulianotti, football fans are similar to fans of popular musicians, actors, and media personalities as the relationship between fan and player is one-way. Attending live games in a stadium is a temporary break in the distance between player and fan, but as celebrities, the players are often playing a role as a part of their job, working in public. Moreover, the relationship is dependent on specific media presence in order for a continuous relationship between star and fan.

Lastly, the cool/consumer spectator is identified as a football *flâneur*. He or she obtains a rather depersonalised spectator identity through virtual relationships of interactions with the media, in television or online. Giulianotti states that the *flâneur*, tends to be more male than female and is likely to pursue various football experiences by adopting detached relations to football clubs. He belongs mostly to virtual communities of people whose allegiance moves from club to club

depending on success or celebrity status. This form of spectator prefers to experience football through television or on the internet in compressed versions of game- or tournament highlights. The flâneur does not seek forms of social solidarity with other spectators and is likely to switch allegiance to other clubs, players or even to another sport or different entertainment form. He or she finds status and self-identity in a relation to a popular or winning club and may seek to authenticate his identity through an unfavourable representation of spectators with traditional or hot characteristics (Giulianotti, 2002).

Types of audiences

Another understanding of audiences is that of Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) who identify three paradigms in literature used to define what an audience is and what it does. They contrast three types of audience experience, the simple, the mass and the diffused audience. They argue that all types of experiences are present in contemporary societies, and that the mass and diffused audiences develop from the simple audiences. Based on extensive research of audience history and culture, Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) introduce three categories that range along a continuum. These categories are fan, cultist, and enthusiast, who engage in fandoms, cults (or subcultures) and enthusiasms.

Fans are described as people who are particularly attached to a certain show or star, in the setting of mass media use, such as television. They are not organized in the way that they do not engage in contact with other people who share their attachments or interest unless it is through mass-produced fan literature or regular contact with their peers. An example of this definition of fans may be children in their attachment to television shows or personas, which is influenced by peers in day-to-day contact at school.

Further, cultists, are defined as people who have explicit attachment to stars or programmes and is described as close to the recent and general understanding of what a fan is in literature. Moving on the continuum from fan to cultist, one engages in more focused use of media involving a process of refining and defining one's interests and tastes. Media use becomes more specialized but may also increase, entailing that the cultist becomes more involved and immersed in the culture. This group of people are more organized than fans and create networks of informal communication related to the topic of interest.

Lastly, enthusiasts are, according to Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) formed around activities rather than stars or programmes. Media use is specialized and limited to texts produced for and by enthusiasts, as the devotion is time consuming. The enthusiasts are organized but often contested by fans or cultists and is therefore a setting for struggle and change.

2.2 Motivation of fans

Based on a 2022 sole case study, Leslie-Walker and Mulvenna applies thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews. And identify themes from both the perspective of fans and club representatives from Manchester City Women Football Club. They uncover two higher order and four lower order themes from each perspective.

From the perspective of the fans, the two higher order themes were respectively, "its who we watch" and "the people we go with make the game". These themes describe the motivating factors for women to watch women's football. The first theme describes the motivation of watching individual players and supporting women's football, while the second theme identify the social factors in motivating fans to watch the games.

Within the first theme of "its who we watch", the authors defined two lower tier themes. The first is the importance of the individual players. Fans described the importance of the players athletic ability and that they were not motivated by their loyalty towards the club, but rather by the opportunity to watch the best players in the league and/or the world.

The second lower theme identified the desire to show support towards women's football. The interviewees described a feeling of responsibility to support the sport in general in order to help develop the women's game. Further, they describe how this feeling of responsibility and support developed from individual experiences in childhood, where they did not have the opportunity to watch women play and by supporting it now, they are able to give others that opportunity in the future. It is highlighted that there is a community in within women's football, one that goes beyond the individual clubs but overall, supporting to develop the game.

The second higher theme also identify two lower order themes. The first is inspiring others. In line with the above, this theme focuses on the desire to encourage other women and girls to attend games. The motivation focuses on inspiring the younger generation, which speaks to the feeling of collective responsibility, to introduce new fans and to support the sport and to provide experiences and opportunities, the participants lacked in childhood, to the next generation. The second lower theme identified has the focus of social engagement. Participants emphasise the importance of friends and atmosphere that contribute to social experiences. Both in terms of watching the games with established friend groups, but also the importance of the other people attending, the collective group of supporting fans.

From the perspective of the club representatives, the two higher order themes identified were "recruitment of fans" and "the fan experience".

The first lower order theme of "recruitment of fans" concerns membership and the methods used to attract and sustain members. Here the club focuses on membership with regular communications, invitations to events for supporters and priority access. Furthermore, it is described how the club is working with other, competing clubs to share knowledge and learn from each other's approaches. The second lower theme focuses on social media and how the club uses its platforms to sustain and attract members by sharing communication about events and the players promoting the matches.

Likewise, the second higher order theme of "the fan experience" has two lower order themes. The first is events, a theme that describes the key events organised by the supporter's club in order to engage the fan community. Such as competition, supporter's club meetings with competitions and quizzes as well as player of the season nominations. The second lower theme is focused on the community and the importance of the people within it and the atmosphere created by the supporters connecting Leslie-Walker and Mulvenna (2022).

2.3 The sociological functions of sport

Grove and Dodder (1982) argued that sport is a social institution. Social institutions such as families, governments, and religions fulfil needs of protection, sense of purpose and procreation. The effects of social institutions may not be felt by everyone in society, but the institutions perform functions that benefit society on a large scale. As sport contributes to the maintenance of social structures by exemplifying integral social values and norms, it becomes a social institution, benefiting both the individual and society in general. Based on this notion, Grove, and Dodder (1982) developed an item scale to measure a set of five sociological functions of sport: psychophysical well-being, self-expression, pride-in-place, social integration, and clarification of gender roles. These functions were then re-examined by Grove, Dorsch and Hopkins (2012).

The first function of sport is psychophysical well-being, describing the role of sport in a person's psychological and physical well-being. Sport serves as an outlet for emotions and tensions as it provides a space to express affection and emotional attachment to the people around. Moreover, it is a platform that can improve one's physical health if participating. The function encapsulates the positive benefits of sport as it provides diversion from everyday life, health and fitness benefits and emotional stimulation.

In line with the above, the second function of self-expression describes sport as an activity that allows self-sensitivity. Sports allow opportunities for self-definition when developing a relationship with a particular team or athlete as well as the opportunity to express oneself through performance.

Pride-in-place reflects the phenomenon of reflected glory, the sense of pride that occurs when the athlete or team you support succeeds. It describes a sports person's ability to lift communal spirits and evoke patriotism. A sports fan may feel a sense of personal achievement in the success of the team.

Further, social integration is a function that highlights the role sport plays in bringing people together. It has the ability to create bonds of solidarity across a community, regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds. Sport serves a community by providing a common language, fostering group affiliations through common interests and enthusiasm. However, it may also create hostility and separation from other communities who support the opposing teams.

The final function described is the clarification of gender roles, referring to the influence sport has on maintaining stereotypical gender roles. Many sports embody characteristics traditionally associated with the male role. However, this perspective has, over time, been deemed unaccepted and some scholars argue that sport is no longer regarded as the male domain. Nonetheless, there is evidence suggesting that gender is a factor in the likelihood and motives of fandom. In their re-examination of the functions, Grove et. al (2012) argue that this function is no longer noteworthy as women's participation in sports has increased (Grove et al., 2012).

2.4 Sports and gender

According to women's sports advocates, there are two main reasons explaining why there is a relatively small following of women's sports. First, it is argued that the lack of exposure in media inhibits the loyalty and faithful following seen in men's sports. It is argued that this works as a symbolic annihilation suggesting that women are not of importance in the sports scene. Second, and in line with this understanding, the framing of women in sports suggest to the viewer that the product is less important or of lower quality as it is produced as such. Moreover, evidence show that female athletes have been portrayed in ways that emphasise their femininity rather than their athleticism. These strategies trivialise the athletic accomplishments as a woman's appearance is irrelevant to her performance. However, it is suggested that these tactics are declining and becoming less prominent (Whiteside and Hardin, 2011).

It has long been the argument that sports create and maintain gender roles, in spite of the increase in attention towards messages and images of female athletes, sports are still considered masculine (Hardin and Greer, 2009). By watching and playing sports, men are exposed to cultural norms of defining what it means to be masculine, this helps maintain the cultural value placed on sports that embody stereotypical masculine attributes, such as football and basketball. While sports as gymnastics or figure skating, which display traditional feminine attributes, are seen to have less value to male fans and are more popular among women.

Masculinity is often defined as the opposite of femininity which may cause a threat to the male identification with masculinity when watching women play sports that traditionally convey masculinity. This may explain the cultural resistance towards women's sports and athletes. With the increased female participation in sports, the connection between masculinity and sport destabilizes. This connection has been a barrier of difficulty for female athletes in terms balancing their feminine identity with an activity that has been culturally coded as masculine. A study conducted by Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, Kauer (2002), showed that female athletes viewed themselves as a deviant "other" and different to non-athletic girls, causing them to struggle with their female identity in a masculine activity.

Moreover, research indicates that as men maintain their preference for men's sports while showing

reluctance to engage with women's sports, women might tend to align their interests with the men in their lives (Farrell, 2006; Trail, Fink, and Anderson, 2003). Farrell (2006) conducted qualitative interviews with women who regularly attended men's collegiate basketball games and discovered that these women expressed interest in sports that mirrored the preferences of the men in their social circles. Farrell suggests that due to this influence from men, women may adopt a perspective influenced by male preferences when consuming sports, thereby appreciating aspects of sports that embody traditionally masculine characteristics.

3 Methodology

3.1 Scientific theoretical approach

This section serves to explain the scientific paradigm applied throughout this thesis. The following will describe how social constructivism applies to the work as well as account for the critiques and limitations of the paradigm.

This thesis takes a social constructivist approach, which is used as I investigate the cultural and gendered elements of communication between a football club and its fans. The objective of the study is to examine the possible differences in fan culture and communication towards male and female fan groups. Social constructivism is deemed relevant in this case as it is based on the notion that society is invented through a collective process and reality is constructed by the actions of individuals. Moreover, the paradigm investigates how meaning is created through interactions which makes it applicable to qualitative research (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

In social constructivism it is posited that reality, meaning, and knowledge are not discovered objectively but are instead produced by humans within social contexts. This perspective emphasizes the ways in which social interactions, cultural norms, and historical contexts shape our understanding of the world. This includes concepts of gender, race, and sexuality as well as systems of knowledge and power. These concepts are subject to social, historical, and cultural factors and can change throughout time (Amineh and Asl, 2015). Therefore, it is an interesting paradigm to apply in culture studies and in this case, studying socially constructed sub-cultures of football fans.

The term social construction was first used by Berger and Luckmann in their 1966 book “The social construction of reality”. The argument they presented was that social institutions are developed from a range of flexible possibilities at the individual and interactional level. Over time, these possibilities become externalised and eventually they are taken for granted as realities. New generations are socialised into and within these institutions and deviant behaviour is regulated through social control processes. Consequently, individuals internalise and identify with the norms and roles of the institution, which shape their behaviour. Knowledge runs through this circuit from individuals to institutions and back. However, individuals typically do not recognise that the institutions they see as external realities are constructed by humans and, that they under different circumstances could take different form than what they currently have in society. Leading to members of society, taking the institutions for granted and assuming that they are objective and unchangeable (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Social constructivism has received critique for its overemphasis on social determination, Mariyani-Squire (1999) argues that the paradigm places too large an emphasis on social forces in the shaping of knowledge and behaviours as the perspective disregards the autonomy of individuals, and biological factors in shaping identity when stating that people mainly are products of their environment. Moreover, social constructivism may lead to forms of relativism, where objective truth is undermined. It can be difficult to assert a universal or objective truth if all knowledge is believed to be socially constructed. Further, the complexity of power dynamics may be simplified, leading to poor understanding of the operations within society. From the perspective of this paradigm, it might be challenging to explain the occurrence of social change as social norms and knowledge are constructed by society in social settings, making it difficult to understand how the constructs can be changed (Mariyani-Squire, 1999).

3.2 Research design

The following section will cover the choices made in the research. In order to best answer the problem formulated and to keep a clear focus, some limitations are established. The purpose of this section is to acknowledge said limitations, and the specific scientific choices made in order to

maintain a focused and transparent study. The limitations include geographical choices, choice of institution of focus as well as general considerations in terms of the scope of the thesis.

For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to focus solely on league football in Denmark, with emphasis on a single institution and its fans. Brøndby IF has been chosen as the institution as it has a deep cultural history and a unique relationship between club and fans, including a legally binding culture and heritage agreement envisioning a collective future as a community, football club and cultural institution (Brøndby IF, 2023). Furthermore, Brøndby IF has both men and women's team and both are in the top three of the 3F Superliga and Gjensidige Kvindeliga (Superliga, 2023; Kvindeliga, 2023). It is the hope that, by choosing a club that is performing well in both leagues and have a rich cultural history, I will be able to gain a broad understanding of fandom within both women and men's football as well as an insight into the institutional perspective on fans.

As previous research has covered the grounds of club rivalries, violence, and hooliganism I will refrain from studying those aspects of fan culture in this thesis.

Moreover, the focus is on both female and male players and fans in order to facilitate an intercultural perspective to the extensive studies done on football fans. It is acknowledged that there are differing beliefs as to the motivations and behaviours of fans, but it is the aim of this thesis to shed light on this and perhaps gain a deeper understanding, useful from both a cultural and commercial perspective.

Further, the choice was made to focus on both fans and the institution they belong to. This is done in the hopes of understanding the complicated and deep-rooted relationship between the two and as the two entities are dependent on each other, it may be possible to discern how they can benefit one another. Previous research uncovered in relation to this project has been focusing on one of the two entities, however I find the dynamic between them interesting and useful in the academic understanding of fans.

It is acknowledged that I in this study limit my scope from important aspects of fandom and opportunities for comparison by focusing on one type of sport in one club and by setting the geographical limit to Denmark. However, by focusing on fan culture in Denmark alone, it gives the opportunity implementation in local communities and thereby enhances the study's relevance. It is established in the research presented above that the motivations and cultural factors of fan identity can differ depending on the gender one identifies with. Therefore, it is deemed relevant to do research that allows a range of factors to be taken into account. By focusing the research on a specific leisure activity rather than looking at fans of various activities such as sport, music, and art, it is possible to enhance the depth of the study and carry out a thorough and nuanced analysis. Additionally, the focus of Brøndby IF provides a unique opportunity for understanding the nuances of football fan culture and a look into the roles of gender within said culture.

3.3 Data collection

The following section details the factors involved in collecting data from the 2023 documentary "Klubben" for analysis. This includes the process of scene selection, transcription method and general considerations made in terms of data collection.

The data collected for this thesis comes from the 2023 documentary "Klubben", the film is produced by Brøndby IF in collaboration with Sweet Savory Film Company and focuses on the history of the club as well as the emotional tied between fan and club (Brøndby, 2023). From the 1 hour and 28 minutes long documentary I have chosen to focus on interview-style scenes with both male and female fans as well as current or former players from both the men's and the women's team, discussing the culture and mentality of the club and its fans.

In the process of scene selection, I have prioritised scenes that are relevant to the research question presented above and focused on portrayals of club- as well as fan culture. Moreover, in order to facilitate a broader understanding of said culture, a choice was made to include the perspectives of people from “both sides” by selecting scenes with both players and fans. Further to ensure an intercultural aspect of gender set in the problem formulated, the selected scenes include interviews with both female and male fans and players. This will hopefully allow an opportunity to explore possible gendered differences within the culture.

Once the scenes were selected, they were meticulously transcribed word-for-word. Verbatim transcription was used to ensure accuracy in capturing what was being said. As the scenes selected were produced in an interview style, the non-verbal actions were minimal and therefore not included in the transcript. The transcripts were given temporal markers as each scene does not appear after the other in the film, however it is a collection every scene with the chosen fan or player. As the data samples are rather small, transcriptions are done manually rather than using technological tools such as artificial intelligence. In the transcription process it will ensure accuracy as the data is in Danish and the tools available have not yet advanced enough for them to transcribe accurately in Danish. Further, it will ensure that I, as a researcher become more familiar with the data as it will be processed as I listen and transcribe. Moreover, the translation of the transcripts will be focused on accuracy and maintaining the overall tone and message of the narrative provided.

As with all processes of data collection, it is important to maintain ethical standards. Therefore, I strive to show respect for intellectual property by proper citation and acknowledgement of the producers as well as making sure that the data is not altered or somehow misrepresented in the thesis. However, since the film is publicly available, concerns of privacy and confidentiality are minimal. It is important to note that the perspectives presented in the documentary may be rather biased as Brøndby IF are co-producers and assumably decide the narrative of the message. However, it is relevant and interesting for this thesis as it facilitates an insight into the fan culture, from the perspective of the club.

Based on the selected scenes as examples I will conduct a narrative analysis and identify how the fans identify themselves as well as how this in turn identifies and positions Brøndby IF.

3.4 Narrative analysis

The purpose of the following is to account for narrative analysis as a method and explain the choice. In this chapter, I will explore the principles and techniques of narrative analysis, its theoretical foundations, and its application to the research question posed in this study. This chapter outlines the comprehensive process of narrative analysis, demonstrating its application and importance in qualitative research. By examining how individuals construct and convey their stories, researchers can gain deep insights into human experiences and social phenomena of fandom.

Narrative analysis offers means to identify themes and characteristics within a text. Narrative analyses are commonly applied in qualitative research and have roots in literature, philosophy, and social sciences. It is used to understand our experiences and facilitates a process of sense-making of events and actions in our lives. It functions as a tool to view and understand the world in a specific way (Foss, 1989).

The analysis enables a holistic approach that preserves the context of the text while creating a sense collective history and group identity. Practically it examines narratives as units of meaning and identifies how language is processed and learned (Reis and Judd, 2000). There are many different methods in conducting narrative analysis, The primary approaches include thematic analysis, structural analysis, interactional analysis, and performative analysis. However, the

following will focus on interactional analysis and identity creation through narrative.

De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2015) argue that the study of narrative should be used to explain how storytelling shapes and is shaped by ideologies, social relations and the agendas of communities, time, and space. The belief is that narratives are shaped by contexts, but also shape new contexts by providing new understandings, challenging power relations, and creating new practices. It is therefore highly relevant to apply theories of narratives to this study as it can assist in understanding the culture of fans and the interconnectedness between a football fan and his or her club. By carrying out a narrative analysis of the selected interview clips with fans and using the theories of positioning described above, it is possible to interpret the message Brøndby IF is sending with the documentary. Further, it can shed light on the complicated understanding of fan identity and how this is built.

The narrative analysis of this thesis will be carried out by first coding the transcripts of the selected scenes, identifying themes and structures. Followed by an identification of key elements in order to understand the construction of the narrative and what the story conveys. And third, identification of possible patterns across the different scenes.

3.5 Narrative, identity and positioning

The concepts of narrative and identity are often connected. Narratives are viewed as a seminal approach to expressing identity, some scholars argue that the stories we tell mould us into what we are. The field of narratives is vast and interdisciplinary and have many differing traditions and methodologies depending on which research discipline it is applied within.

It is widely acknowledged that narratives are employed to convey and navigate personal as well as collective identities. It is largely agreed among narrative analysts that the core principles suggest that identity emerge through semiotic processes where individuals construct representations of themselves and others rather than being an unchanging set of characteristics attributed to individuals.

Despite the agreement of core principles there are large divisions in the ways identity is studied and theorised among narrative analysts. Broadly, the understanding of narrative can be divided between biographical and interactionally oriented studies. The biographical oriented studies approach the story and the narrator as the data to be analysed. It is based on the premise that the goal of identity forming processes is to create a coherent self and to achieve this by means of narrative impacts one's self-identity in a positive way. Storytelling is seen as a fundamental tool to self-development, enhancing a positive sense of self and to cope with difficult events in life.

In the interactionally oriented studies, the interest is not whether the narrative contributes to positive sense of self, however, the focus is on the process of identity construction itself. It studies the strategies applied by narrators and audiences in creating, maintaining or contesting specific identities. Identity is formed through doing rather than thinking (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2015).

For the purpose of this thesis, the analysis will have an interactionally oriented focus in line with the chosen scientific paradigm of social constructivism.

A second, but equally important distinction in narrative studies is the one between the narrator's identities and the character's identity. When storytellers share a story, especially one in which they are involved, they are simultaneously shaping both their own and others' identities within the narrative world and their identity within the storytelling context (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2015). The interaction between these two versions of self is the focus of positioning theory, an important theory of narrative identity. Originally, positioning was proposed by Davies and Harré (1990) for the study of discourse and described it as "the discursive process whereby

selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines.” (Davies and Harré 1990).

The framework was later developed in connection to storytelling by Bamberg (1997) who presented the notion that a narrator can position themselves at three levels: vis-à-vis other characters in the world of the story, vis-à-vis interlocutors in the storytelling world, and vis-à-vis herself.

At the first level, a narrator will produce images of themselves and other characters, they create and define protagonists and antagonists, detailing their qualities, motivations, and actions. Narrators also convey their judgments about these characters’ behaviours, subtly or overtly expressing approval or disapproval. Thus, shaping how the reader perceives the story by depicting themselves and other characters and assigning accountability for actions and events, clarifying who is responsible for what within the story.

At the second level, the narrator establishes her relationship with the audience by using the story to convey something about her current self. For instance, she might present her past actions as exemplary behaviour or as justified responses to aggression, seeking the audience’s empathy and support. Essentially, this level of positioning is closely tied to the ongoing storytelling event, reflecting the narrator’s intentions and self-representation as the narrative unfolds.

Lastly, the positioning at the third level is a response to the question of “Who am I?” it facilitates an exploration of the narrator’s deeper identity and how they want to be perceived not just in context of the specific storytelling event, but in general (Bamberg, 1997).

Positioning has proven an effective tool for analysing identities, both in terms of story representation, as well as the dynamics between said representation and the actions of participants. However, the analysis has received some criticism as it may be difficult to identify distinctions between the various levels. The line between second- and third-level positioning, for example, can be particularly blurry. This is because part of what makes interactional positioning effective is the narrator’s ability to portray themselves as certain kinds of people beyond the immediate interaction. Therefore, their interactional identities often connect to broader social categories (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2015).

Based on the ideas of storytelling and identity processes as positioning, a new theoretical and methodological approach has developed, enriching the understanding of identity. The approach views storytelling as practice and seeks to capture narratives in various contexts. This view emphasises the importance of interview narratives as interactional encounters and recognises the interviewer’s role in co-construction of meanings and identities. By suggesting identity categories that respondents may adopt, sharing assumptions about the associations related to these categories, the interviewer is actively influencing the process of identity construction (De Fina, 2009).

4 Data analysis

The following analysis is two-fold. First, it will set out to examine what the fans are saying and how their identity is constructed through their story as well as how this portrays the fans, the club, and the relationship between the two entities. Second, it will examine what it says about the club as an institution and a business, how Brøndby IF's identity is constructed through the narrative. Brøndby IF is co-producer on the documentary, therefore, this analysis will investigate what the general narrative is and how the club is positioning themselves through the story. The second part of the analysis will be based on the narrative analysis of selected themes as well as the overall message of the 2023 documentary "Klubben". The analysis will use an inductive approach, allowing the data to speak for itself, not limited by preconceived notions.

4.1 Fans

The first narrative to be analysed is that of Juri, a male fan of Brøndby IF since 1991. The story told by Juri can be divided into three main sections: a reflection on his first encounter with Brøndby IF, a reflection on a specific time, with struggles in the organisation and lastly, a reflection of his relationship with Brøndby IF and being a fan. In the first selected scenes (00.34.16-00.34.42 and 00.36.21-00.36.40), the narrator begins his story with a personal background that gives a glimpse into an unhappy childhood, with no social connections and an unstable home with an alcoholic father. He emphasises the absence of a stable childhood and home environment, describing his need for a sense of belonging and acceptance. He describes the feeling of not having a home, causing him to search for a place to belong and be accepted. Second, he describes how when he first got into Brøndby stadium, he felt a sense of belonging. He explains the immediate sense of relief causing his shoulders to drop from a tense position. Further, an emotional connection to the people around him is instantaneous and is a principal factor in this narrative. Moreover, the stadium becomes more than a place to watch football, it is the setting where his emotional healing begins and it becomes a sanctuary, a place where his identity is validated. The monumental emotional change is a key theme as what is described is someone finding a place to belong and finding healing in a community. This transformation narrates the resilience of the narrator and the healing power of community and acceptance.

In the second section with Juri (00.55.34-00.56.05), the fan describes his point of view and attitude towards issues within the institution in the face of accusations of nepotism (Becker and Rebbe, 2023). This scene is highly relevant as the narrative provides a thoughtful reflection on the dynamics of community and leadership within Brøndby IF, and how impactful the fan community can be in making sure that the institution is run as they see fit. The fan uses his narrative to emphasise the collective identity and values that the club is known for. "Ingen over klubben," no one person is above the community of the club itself. It is a fundamental principle to the environment that is Brøndby IF. The conflict is viewed as an imbalance in between collective unity and individual influence. If one person is to put themselves above the club, issues will arise. The narrator believes that while the communal spirit of Brøndby IF is one of its strengths, it is important to maintain the balance otherwise, one must accept the fact that it may cause trouble. The narrative suggest that this belief is a tool to accountability as the community will recognise if individuals are gaining too much power, threatening the foundational values of the institution.

The last perspective of Juri (01.24.38-01.25.30) narrates a reflection of his loyalty towards Brøndby IF and what the community mean to him. He tells the audience that he has a tattoo resembling Brøndby IF and that it is placed near his heart. This describes a profound sense of loyalty and identity; the club has a permanent and central space in the narrator's life. He explains that Brøndby IF is a permanent fixture in life, regardless of the choices made in life,

while everything around him is subject to change, his loyalty and support for his club is constant. Further, the relationship and importance thereof are described in the narrative as an identity marker, that will outlast him. Once he is gone, people will be able to look at his tattoo and know what or who he was, based on his commitment to the club. Moreover, by referencing the first section of the interview, and the previously told story of inauguration into the fandom, it is described how Brøndby IF and the surrounding community have changed his life and the decision to support the club has brought challenges as well as joyful moments, it is a decision he does not regret making. This narrative encapsulates the powerful relationship between fan and club, it explores the desire for a lasting legacy and the impact of fandom on one's identity.

The above account provides significant examples of how identity is constructed through narration. By telling the story of his lack of welcoming home life affected by alcoholism, the narrator identifies his childhood self as someone on the outside, someone who does not belong anywhere, but finds a secure and affectionate home in the football fan culture, getting to be a part of a community. This positions the narrator as someone who is resilient and was able to overcome the difficulties in his youth. By telling the story of how the community comes together and believes that it no one is above the club, he recounts events where the fans used their collective strength to instil change within the institution as a way of maintaining original values. This positions himself as part of a collective able to keep the institution accountable to its promises. Lastly, by means of his narrative, the fan identifies himself as a loyal and steadfast person. In getting a Brøndby IF tattoo he displays this loyalty and pride. Lastly, the mentioning his passing and the question of who he was, he concludes that at least he was that i.e., a Brøndby IF fan. This narrative also has implications for the identity construction of Brøndby IF. Through Juri's narrative, Brøndby IF is portrayed as a home, or somewhere people can get a sense of belonging. It is a place where the community is rated higher than the individual. Most importantly this sense of belonging and community, it is something that lasts indefinitely.

The second group of scenes selected for analysis is an interview with Maria who has been a Brøndby IF fan for around 25 years. The two selected scenes describe overall themes of belonging, emotional commitment, and the importance of the grounds of the stadium. First (00.34.42-00.35.01), the narrator describes how the stadium has a unique ability to make her feel a sense of security. A place where she can be herself, because of the people surrounding her, but on some level, the actual venue as well. It is described as something that has framed her life for many years. The stadium becomes more than a location as it symbolises stability in the narrator's life. It has provided a scene for significant life experiences, events and phases and has served as the grounds in which the narrator's personal history and identity is created. This narration explores the deep connection a person can have to a place and community that constructs core aspects of one's identity.

The second scene with Maria (00.41.44-00.41.57), is a response to a video clip from 2003, showing her sitting in the stadium, crying. She briefly explains that the opposing team scores two minutes into the overtime, causing Brøndby IF to lose the championship. Her narrative conveys the deep emotional connections fans have to the club, the players and each other. She describes a profound feeling of disappointment, on her own behalf as well as on behalf of the players and the people standing in the stadium around her. A feeling of disappointment that according to her story, could be felt in the air. This notion reinforces the idea of a shared emotional atmosphere. The collective emotions create a sense of community as everyone present is on the same emotional journey. The disappointment is not just personal but is felt on behalf of the entire community, indicating strong empathy and solidarity. This, along with her continuous use of "us" and "we" reflects a deep interconnectedness to the community of the people around her. This narrative

underlines how sports and its accompanying communities and cultures play a key role in shaping personal as well as collective identities.

With this narrative, Maria identifies herself first and foremost, as a Brøndby IF fan. Through her account of events, she is identified as a person with empathy and solidarity towards the people around her, she feels their feelings as well as her own. Her identity is deeply rooted in the community of fans and her long-term commitment to the club. Brøndby IF is central to her sense of self, both emotionally and physically. The narrative highlights the importance of shared passions and communal bonds in shaping and sustaining the narrator's identity. Through Maria's narrative, Brøndby IF is described as a place to belong and to feel at home. The identity of the club is based on the collective emotional experiences that take place inside the stadium.

4.2 Players

The following scenes selected will consist of interviews with current and former players of Brøndby IF, two from the women's team and two from the men's team. While three of the clips are interview-style as the rest in the selection, one is a clip from the locker room before a game.

The first narrative is that of Julie, a player for the Brøndby IF Women (00.46.53-00.47.37). Her narrative opens with a statement about the size of Brøndby IF, and that it is a club that everyone seeks to compete and win against if they are not a part of it. This emphasizes the status, and the club's significant standing in the sporting world. Next (00.47.58-00.48.07), she identifies herself as a "Vestegnspige", a term linking her to the western suburbs of Copenhagen, the area that houses Brøndby IF, she describes growing up in Taastrup and being a fan of the club, watching the games from the stands. This narration establishes a local identity with a strong personal and geographical connection to the region, and thereby the club, it shows a deep-rooted affiliation with the football club. This sentiment is further reinforced by Julie stating that she had no hesitation when she got the opportunity to play for Brøndby IF, playing for Brøndby was a natural and eagerly embraced choice. She concludes this narration by mentioning having played for the club for nearly eight years, indicating commitment and connection to the club. In the second clip, Julie presents the belief that the club has a great reputation around Europe and that the club is known for its traditions and values, on both the men's and women's side.

The narrative reveals several characteristics of the narrator's identity. First, and literally, she identifies herself as a "Vestegnspige," something that, to her has a significant meaning in terms of connection and commitment to the community. Second, the quick decision to join Brøndby IF and the long commitment characterise her as someone who possesses loyalty and passion. A passion that reveals the importance of the club and its traditions to her personal identity.

Moreover, the narrative also contributes to the formulation of Brøndby IF's identity. The long-term commitment of a player suggests that the club is an institution that values its players and provides a good workplace. While emphasis on traditions and communal values strengthens the club's legacy. The opening of the narrative suggesting that everyone wants to compete against Brøndby IF suggests that the club is associated with prestige and high rankings.

The second scene with people from inside the organisation is with Malou, a former player on Brøndby IF Women. The first clip with Malou (00.47.37-00.47.58) revolves around the notion that it is somewhat expected that the team will bring home a championship. This is something she describes as being "in the genes" of the club, and as it has not happened in a long time, she is certain that the fans are expecting that of the club. It is then highlighted that, to many, Brøndby IF is more than merely a football team, it is a big club with a rich history, contributing to the deep-rooted importance in the lives of many people.

Further (00.48.12-00.48.37), it is acknowledged that there may be a perceived division within Brøndby IF, in terms of the professional players, playing in the stadium and the leisure players

in the clubhouse. However, she is adamant that regardless of a disconnect, at the end of the day, they are all playing for Brøndby IF, and that is associated with pride. This highlights the sense of collected commitment and shared experiences, existing not only between the professional players on the field and the fans in the stands, but throughout the entire organisation and adjoining community. Moreover, the narrative describes that playing for Brøndby IF relates to a deep sense of honour and pride and that playing in Brøndby IF is not just about football, it is about much more. This suggests that the club carries symbolic weight and encapsulates the cultural significance of the club. Moreover, when presented by a player, it indicates that the deep, personal, and cultural connection to the club is not limited to the fanbase but is institution wide. “Pride” is presented as the most significant word that can be used to describe Brøndby IF and the final emphasis of this is in the symbolism of wearing the yellow jersey. In the narrative, Malou’s identity is clearly constructed by a deep-seated identification with the club and its legacy. Moreover, similarly to the fans, there is a narrative of collected identity, unifying all of Brøndby if, which underscores the importance of the club in shaping the narrator’s identity. The inclusion of the historical success suggest that winning is deeply ingrained in the club’s identity. Malou’s narrative identifies Brøndby IF as a club, working its way back to former glory and as a united entity where the yellow jersey connects everyone.

The selected scenes with Jesper, a former player for the Brøndby IF Men’s team suggests an unwavering connection to the club. The first clip (00.53.40-00.53.51) describes how playing for Brøndby IF, was his biggest dream and that it was his top priority. Playing for this club is, to him, the right thing and it is where he needs to be, where he belongs. The narrative is full of determination, with football and his family, everything else is unimportant.

In the second clip (01.25.29-01.25.47) he asserts that Brøndby IF is an inseparable part of his identity regardless of which club he plays for. To him, Brøndby IF is not just a place of work, or a team he is fan of, it is where he started out, and the club has had a formative influence on his character, his values, and his game. It is in the experiences and interactions with the club, that his identity is created. This narrative portrays a person with a deep sense of commitment to achieving his goals as well as to his club. Through Jesper’s narrative, Brøndby IF is depicted as something to prioritise, it is worth fighting for, and once the dream is realised, the club is a place to grow, it shapes young people and enable them to reach their goals.

Lastly, the selected scene with former Brøndby IF player, Anis, differs from the rest as it is a clip from the locker room before a derby, a game between Brøndby IF and FC København (FCK). In this narrative (00.39.14-00.39.25), Anis addresses the rivalry between the two clubs by asserting the differences between the two fan groups. While the narrative serves as a criticism of the FCK fanbase, stating that they are supporting the team because it is trendy, it is also a tribute to the fans of Brøndby IF. His understanding of a Brøndby IF fan is that, to them, being a fan of the club is a lifestyle. This suggests that a fan of Brøndby IF, commitment is deep, and it goes beyond attending games and wearing the merchandise. The narrative is strong and emotional, underlining the intensity of the situation as well as the belief in the fans of his club. This suggests a deep connection to Brøndby IF and its fans. He depicts the fans as genuine and denote a sense of authenticity towards the club, that other clubs lack. Further, it describes his identity as someone who is deeply committed to his club, but to the fans as well. The speech shows an admiration of the dedication of the fans.

These identity characteristics can be transferred to the club itself, as Anis, in this setting represents the club. It depicts Brøndby IF as a place of authenticity and worth the dedication it receives.

The above analysis has provided a sense of the overall themes and an idea of what it entails to

be a member of the community that is Brøndby IF, players as well as fans.

The narratives show clear themes of commitment and loyalty. Whether it is player or fan, the bond shared within the community is lasting and cannot be replaced by other clubs. Even among players, where it is the norm to move on to different clubs, the loyalty is visible, with Jesper mentioning that Brøndby IF is a part of him, Malou still referring to the club as “we”, even though she does not play there anymore and Julie, who has played in the club for nearly eight years. It is clear that the club has a significant ability to create an atmosphere that denotes such commitment.

A second relevant theme is that of emotion, both the aspects of it that are literally described but also the implicit notions. In the fandom, football can evoke strong emotions, both good and bad. The stadium provides a collective emotive sense of belonging for both fans and players. Both Juri and Maria describe intense feelings related to Brøndby IF, both in terms of emotional reactions to the game, but also a more general emotional connection to the team, the grounds, and the fans people around them.

This emphasises another theme, that of community and belonging, belonging to the club is a significant factor in the construction of the identities of the people included in this analysis. To them, it is more than a club, it is a united community that is held together by a profound respect for tradition and history. Two themes that are recurring throughout the analysis. Brøndby IF is built on tradition and the fandom cherishes the deep history of the club. The fans and the players have a clear consensus of respecting the history and upholding the traditions.

Furthermore, pride is an important descriptor of people belonging to the Brøndby IF community. The narratives describe a sense of pride to represent the club, defining oneself as a fan of the club and having the club tattooed on your body further conveys this. It is deeply rooted in the identities, and it is something they are immensely proud of. The last important theme to mention is the symbolic significance of the yellow jersey and the physical grounds of Brøndby IF. They have become symbols of the above themes as well as items that unify all members of the community. They represent the community, both to the people who do not take part in this culture, and to the people within, the ground and the jersey becomes a part of the Brøndby IF identity throughout the community.

4.3 Brøndby IF

In narrative studies it is important to distinguish between the narrator’s and the character’s identity. With this documentary, Brøndby IF is shaping their own identity as well as that of the people involved in it. Based on the above analysis, the institution of Brøndby IF is characterised by greatness. It is an entity that is largely supported by its community, and it provides a warm and welcoming space in return. A defining factor of Brøndby IF is its value of traditions and history, it is what encapsulates the entire organisation and its supporters.

The documentary sets out to illustrate the abovementioned deep history of the club, complete with losses and victories. It provides an overview of the ups and downs of the organisation, from their point of view.

Applying the positioning theories developed by Bamberg it can be argued that throughout the documentary’s narrative, Brøndby positions itself at all three levels.

First, vis-à-vis other characters, generally, the production of the documentary detailing the history of the club by the narratives of members of the community is producing images of both Brøndby IF and other characters appearing in the film. Through the narrative, Brøndby IF define both protagonists and antagonists and convey judgements of their behaviours. This is for example evident in the example of the scene above where Anis is speaking to the team before a game. Here, the competing fans, or antagonist, FCK is portrayed as something less than

their own fans, their qualities are belittled and the FCK fans are defined as temporary and fans because of a trend, while the Brøndby IF fans are defined by their loyalty and commitment. Interestingly, despite the portrayal of the opposing team's fans, when it comes to assigning accountability for actions, the general idea presented is that the team or the club themselves are responsible for losing championships or games. Almost exclusively throughout the narrative, the fans of Brøndby IF are portrayed as characters as having qualities of great loyalty, optimism, and unwavering support, shaping the viewer's perception of the story and events and through the above selected examples, the club portrays themselves as a home to people and all in all, a community.

At the second level, vis-à-vis interlocutors, Brøndby IF establishes its relationship with the audience by conveying something about the current identity. The club is presenting their own and the fan's past actions both positively and negatively. The general representation is positive, as seen in the examples above. Nevertheless, the situation that Juri reflects on in the scene 0.55.34-00.56.05, regarding the issues of leadership portrays the fan group in a different light. It portrays events where the fans use their community to oppose a single person in cruel manners and the notion that no single person is above the club is used as a justification for these actions. While the person in question is portrayed telling his version of events, and the emotional toll it caused. This as well as a fan realising the wrong behaviour in retrospect (00.56.20-00.56.30), admitting that it should not have happened and that it was a mistake, can be seen as an attempt to gain the sympathy of the audience, by acknowledging past mistakes and proving that the mindset has changed. The notion that this was how it was previously, and that actions have been taken to prevent similar events in the future is seen in the culmination of the documentary. The club leadership changes, new goals are set, and most importantly, a fan agreement is made with focus on culture and heritage, including fans in the organisation and ensuring that it remains a community.

This leads to the last level of positioning, vis-à-vis themselves. the third level facilitates a deeper exploration of the narrator's identity and how they wish to be perceived. Based on the above analysis, it is likely that Brøndby IF aims to be seen as more than just a football club; they strive to be perceived as a cultural and lifestyle institution deeply embedded in the lives of those who support them. The ongoing emphasis on being a lifestyle for fans suggest that the club values the genuine commitment they receive and by focusing much of the documentary on the fans, and the relationships within the community, it is posited that they hope to be perceived as a club that embodies authenticity and passion. Moreover, by producing this documentary in it of itself as well as seen in the selected examples, there is a persistent focus on the history and traditions of the club leading to belief that Brøndby IF wants to be seen as a great club with a great legacy, a deep rooted community, characterised by commitment, passion and cultural significance.

Interestingly, while the analysis has included equal representation of male and female fans and players, the documentary, does not portray the club in that light. The entire documentary is 1 hour and 28 minutes long and the women's team has exactly two minutes of screen time (00.46.37-00.48.37). Moreover, their championship wins are portrayed by the camera panning across a wall of pictures, while the men's team's wins are portrayed both by clips from the games and commentary from players, fans, and club officials. This shows that Brøndby IF wants the audience to know that there is a women's team, and that they too have won championships. Brøndby IF wants to be perceived as inclusive on the aspect of gender, however, the limited representation questions the level of inclusion.

5 Discussion

The discussion section interprets the findings of the above analysis in relation to the theoretical framework and existing literature presented previously. It explores how the narratives reflect the participants' experiences and the broader social and cultural contexts. As well as the perception of Brøndby IF in relation to gender studies and the promotion of women's football. First, I will present an interpretation of my findings, second a comparison and relation to existing literature, and third, a consideration of the practical implications for Brøndby IF, fan culture and the development of women's football in Denmark.

In the beginning of this thesis, I set out to explore the relationship between football club and its fans and attempt to answer how Brøndby IF, portray itself and both their men's and women's teams. First and foremost, the fan perspective on the club, as it is portrayed in the documentary, is an extremely positive one. This reflects Brøndby IF as an attractive club that has a positive impact on society. Since the documentary is co-produced by the organisation, the representations of characters in the film are subjective and set out to promote the club in a certain way. By means of the documentary, Brøndby IF portrays itself as a social institution of monumental power, with a basis in deep-rooted history, traditions and a set of values focusing on maintaining these. However, as mentioned above there is one distinct example showing a differing perspective, a disconnection between the fan group and the leadership of the club, causing the fans to resort to questionable behaviour resulting in a divide between the club and the organisation itself. It is assumed that the events are included as they are an important part of the club history and influential in forming the future of the club and its relation to the fan group. Consequently, reinforcing the sentiments of interconnectedness. It is evident from the narrative analysis that the club and the fans are dependent on each other, and that perspective is clearly portrayed throughout.

By producing a documentary with an immense focus on the fans of the club and highlighting the importance of the supporters in all aspects of the organisation. Brøndby IF positions themselves as a value-based institution, aware of the dependence on spectators for growth and survival. An approach that reinforces the club's commitment to the community and displays the integral role fans have in shaping the club's identity, culture, and success.

It can be argued that the documentary serves a marketing tool, attracting new fans and strengthening the bond to existing fans by acknowledging their importance to the club and the players. It portrays the club and organisation as inclusive and fan-centred, working to be transparent and in open communication with its supporters. Moreover, by chronologically presenting the history of the club, explaining the values and traditions, it may open to attracting new fans, as the community is portrayed openly and as a space to be yourself. This positioning demonstrates that Brøndby IF has a solid understanding about the modern sports industry, being about more than the game, but also entertainment and the opportunity to create meaningful connections and experiences, reflecting knowledge of the shift mentioned in previous literature. By embracing this shift and the fans and acknowledging their crucial role, Brøndby IF sets an example of how football clubs can thrive by prioritising their supporters and cultivating a community-centred ethos.

In terms of the depictions of the men's and women's teams, the documentary suggests an implicit divide and inequality between the two. By only including two female players and the limited screentime, the organisation is sending mixed signals. On the one side, it is positive that the women's team is included at all, as it is still an aspect of football that has yet to gain popularity in Denmark, and not all clubs have women's teams. On the other side, it suggests that the women's team is not worth more attention, even though it, in the clips exemplified, is evident

that they have been successful and have a similar history to that presented of the men's team throughout the documentary.

The fan depictions of the documentary show clear examples of what Giulianotti (2002) dubbed supporters. It is evident that the fans of the documentary have a deep personal and emotional investment in the club and that said investment is long term. However, the documentary does not reveal whether the fans have supplemented their investment economically, besides the fact that they are seen wearing club merchandise. Another example emphasising the definition of Maria and Juri as supporters is their emotional connection to the physical grounds of the stadium and the described sense of belonging and the establishment of relationships to fellow supporters. Moreover, supporting the club is part of their identity and attending the games is routine, seen for example in Maria's narrative asserting that Brøndby IF has framed her life for many years. Moreover, it is evident that the club repay the emotional investment by following the club traditions. Another example of Giulianotti's classifications is the brief mentioning of the FCK fans, who in that narrative are presented as Flâneurs, following the club as part of a fashionable trend, lacking meaningful connection.

Grove et al (2012)'s sociological functions are also represented in the narratives presented in the documentary. Especially the functions of psychophysical well-being and pride-in-place are highlighted in the narratives of both fans and players. The emotional sense of finally belonging somewhere and having an outlet for one's emotions, contributes to personal emotional health, these feelings are presented by both fans and one of the players exemplified above. Further the pride-in-place is clearly visible, with pride being one of the main themes of the entire narrative and a function that can be detected in all six examples. Contrary to the statements of the literature reviewed previously, there are no obvious reinforcements of traditional gender roles or overtly "masculine" behaviour excluding women portrayed in the documentary. This observation suggests a more nuanced representation of gender within the context of the documentary, challenging the conventional notion that sports media maintains and reinforces gender stereotypes. However, the notion that masculinity and femininity are binary opposites, and that sport inherently reiterates this belief may be questioned, especially considering the fan narratives discussed above.

The main themes identified in the analysis of the documentary were those of emotions, loyalty, commitment, and similar attributes. These characteristics, traditionally associated with femininity, are nevertheless employed by both male and female fans to describe their engagement with the sport of football, which is typically coded as masculine.

Emotions such as passion and loyalty are central to the narratives of both the fans and players, regardless of gender. They all express their devotion to the club with the same emotional depth, even though it is traditionally attributed to feminine characteristics. Similarly, they all demonstrate unwavering commitment and dedication, qualities often associated with the traditional male fan stereotype. This finding reinforces the assessment made by Grober et al. (2012) to disregard the social function of clarification of gender roles.

Furthermore, the depiction of these themes in the documentary highlights that football, as a sport, can foster a sense of community and identity that transcends traditional gender norms. The shared experiences of fans, whether male or female, illustrate that the emotional and social aspects of sports fandom are universal. Sports advocates posit that one of the reasons for the limited following of women's sports is the lack of media exposure and attention as it inhibits the loyal following seen in men's sports. This difference in coverage is a crucial factor that continues the cycle of lower visibility and engagement for women's sports. When media outlets, and in this case, the club itself allocate less resources and attention to women's events and teams in

general, it conveys a message of lower value and importance. The lack of representation may result in a lack of attention from fans and sponsors, leading to less resources, continuing the circle of neglect. This notion constructs an interesting depiction of Brøndby. According to the research, by limiting the women's exposure in the documentary, the club is performing a symbolic annihilation and suggesting that women are of less importance in the club. By not featuring the women's team as prominently as the men's team, the documentary implicitly conveys a message about the hierarchy of value within the club. This kind of media portrayal can have profound implications, not only reinforcing existing gender biases but also influencing the aspirations and self-perceptions of young female athletes who may feel undervalued or ignored.

The limited media exposure also affects the cultural significance of women's sports. As seen in the sociological functions, sports play a crucial role in shaping societal norms and values. The marginalisation of women's sports in the media can perpetuate outdated stereotypes about gender roles. Reinforcing the otherwise disregarded function of gender clarification. By not providing equitable coverage, organizations fail to highlight the talent, dedication, and achievements of female athletes, which can have negative consequences for progress toward gender equality in sports and beyond.

From the study of Leslie-Walker and Mulvenna (2022). Club officials present two overall themes of focus "recruitment of fans" and "the fan experience". The work exemplified in the study is dependent on the associated fan groups and their efforts in recruiting new members and creating an atmosphere inspiring other people to attend games and support the club. From the perception of the documentary, the club itself is doing little to no work in terms of promoting their women's team and the sport in general, relying on the fan associations to make these efforts. Moving forward, to promote change within the popularity of women's football, the club needs to reclaim that responsibility. Moreover, it is important that they change strategy in terms of representation of its female players to not play into the vicious circle of lacking attention.

6 Conclusion

The thesis has explored the relationship between the Danish football club Brøndby IF and its fan community. The findings presented a profound interconnection between the two entities and significant acknowledgement from the club. However, the results are biased and rather limited by the data as Brøndby IF was part of the production. Limiting the study to not focusing on hooliganism and rivalries, enabled a deep focus on the positive, non-violent aspects of the fan community. And as the club aims to present itself and its fans in a positive and inclusive manner, said topics are excluded from the documentary. In retrospect, it would have been interesting to include these and broaden the scope of the study to include more data as well as theory from the club itself, the fan community and elsewhere. Also to provide a more nuanced perspective on the perception of the club.

In relation to the aspect of gender in the study, the analysis and discussion have produced interesting points, relevant for further development. The findings are limited in terms of relevance for the broader study of gender in sports, partly due to the limiting choice of data source and Brøndby IF's coproduction of said source. However, it is profound in the perception of the club and its representation of female athletes.

It would be interesting to further develop this research by gathering data from the perspective of the fan groups in terms of how the communication is received as well as gaining a deeper understanding of what the specific sub-culture entails and require from the institution they follow and support. Moreover, it would be interesting to further explore this phenomenon and investigate whether or not gender plays a role in the fandom of Brøndby.

As the study has had a limited focus on a single club, it is not generalisable, therefore, there are implications to continue the study of the interrelations between fans and organisations, in other clubs or sports.

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