

Women Sport Fans: Identification, Participation, Representation

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Kim Toffoletti, *Women Sport Fans: Identification, Participation, Representation*, Routledge: New York, 2017; 168 pp.; ISBN 9781138189270, £84.00 (hbk)

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Since the 1990s there has been a growing number of female supporters following not only national teams, but also football clubs. The issue of female supporters has received more attention, but even in the UK – which is the cradle of football studies – the number of papers published on this subject is still ‘insignificant’ (McDowell, 2016). Although by far the most significant number of the studies investigating female fandom has been dedicated to football (Dunn, 2014; Pope, 2017), in recent years some other sports have also come to be included in the research. As an example, one can mention an important volume edited by Kim Toffoletti and Peter Mewett (2012), which contains chapters considering female fans in, for example, hockey, rodeo and rugby. Their authors discuss different aspects of fandom, such as the body, commercial narratives, identity construction and female empowerment. The new book by Kim Toffoletti – *Women Sport Fans: Identification, Participation, Representation* (2017) – can be considered a continuation of the previous publication.

In her book, Toffoletti describes and analyses female sports fans from a feminist point of view, more precisely, using transnational feminism. According to the author, this perspective makes it possible to notice the diversity of female fandom and take into account the different socio-cultural contexts in which particular categories of fans function. Toffoletti states that when analysing sports fans, one should consider not only the gender differences but also the differences which result from ethnicity, race, sexuality, etc. She aptly observes that the majority of research that has been conducted so far concerns the Global North (i.e. the USA, the UK and, to a lesser extent, the Scandinavian countries). Therefore, it is necessary to challenge this Western domination as well as Eurocentrism and draw more attention to fans from other parts of the world. Referring to transnational feminism, the book explores experiences and representations of female fans in social and cultural contexts, such as globalisation, neoliberalism, consumerism and the increasing meaning of new media and technologies. The work consists of six chapters which can be read as a whole or separately.

In her book, Toffoletti does not formulate a definition of a fan, because, in her opinion, one definition of fandom can exclude or devalue some expressions of sports fandom or make it impossible to explain changes over the life course of a particular fan. The author points out the advantages of transnational feminism in the analysis of female fans: '[it] provides me with a framework for deeper critical engagement and reflection on various aspects of how women's sport fandom is experienced, represented, shared and understood within and across national borders' (p.25). This perspective, according to the author, makes it possible not only to minimise the perception of 'non-western' women as a homogeneous group, but also to join the local, regional, national and global levels in the analysis of (female) sports fandom. In order to illustrate the limits of generalisations and universal arguments and stress Eurocentrism, Toffoletti uses, for example, the cases of female football fans in Turkey and Zimbabwe (Chapter 2) and offers the analysis of the Iranian movie 'Offside' (Chapter 4).

In the third chapter of her book, Toffoletti critically analyses different dimensions of consumption in sports fan experience as a commodified one (Crawford, 2004) and female fans as consumers. The author notes that consumption can be seen as a factor increasing the number of women sports fans (as a category of 'new fans', see Giulianotti, 2002). On the other hand, she also observes that the perception of women mainly as consumers reproduces the heteronormative order in the stadiums and denies them the status of 'real' fans. A significant part of this chapter is devoted to a case study focused on the advertising poster for the Cricket World Cup held in 2015 in Australia and New Zealand. A detailed analysis of this poster leads Toffoletti to the conclusion that 'the multicultural female fan is limited to the status of consumer citizen, who primarily presents an opportunity to grow the sports through international markets but remains on the periphery of the national and cricketing imaginary' (p.74).

An important contribution made by this book is the analysis of the representation of female fans. Although there is a significant number of publications concerning the representation of female athletes in the media, the analysis of female fans has tended to be marginalised. Referring to different media and genres (film, new media, advertisement), Toffoletti notices that, similarly to sportswomen, they are marginalised, presented according to gender stereotypes and sexualised. However, the author also perceives media, mainly new media, as a chance for female fans to reject, contest or change the way they are presented. In Toffoletti's opinion, new media offers a chance for female fans to create networks, both national and international (using the example of Australian–Iranian women soccer fans), and to express viewpoints alternative to the (male) mainstream. Taking the example of FIFA 16, the author also analyses video games to present their role in the maintenance of gender order in sport. The chapters devoted to these issues (Chapter 4 and 5) can be concluded by the statement that while new media and technologies can contribute to the reproduction of masculine domination in sports fandom, they can also be perceived as a means of changing women's status in this field.

In the final chapter, Toffoletti introduces the concept of postfeminism. To illustrate her statements, the author takes the examples of media representation of fans during the FIFA men's football World Cup (Brazil, 2014) and the FIFA female World Cup

(Canada, 2015). The analysis of female fans of women's sports (in this case, women's football) is especially worth attention because this issue is almost completely overlooked in sports studies. From the postfeminist perspective, the sexualised images of female sports fans are perceived as a women's choice, a form of their social and sexual empowerment. However, in Toffoletti's opinion, postfeminism 'foster[s] myths of sport as an agent of emancipation via a celebration of women's fan participation' (p.143) and makes it possible to reinscribe gender hierarchies in the stadiums. According to the author, this discourse (i.e. the narratives of women's choice and empowerment) masks sports sexism and the exclusion of women as 'authentic' fans.

A great advantage of the book is an attempt to go beyond the Western context. The author draws attention to the diversity of women's situations on different continents and seems to be critical of Western feminism as the dominant frame for the description of all women (after all, the Western discourse is a result of local cultural experience, very often incomparable to women's situation in, for example, Africa). The readers should appreciate the author's awareness of Eurocentrism and the Western perspective, which makes the images of female fans from other parts of the globe more visible. In this sense, Kim Toffoletti's book is an unprecedented invitation to a more global analysis. However, the work does not provide a detailed answer to the question of how this 'going beyond' could look. It also seems that the author could, to a larger extent, refer to the intersectional framework in her analysis, as she made in the case of the Cricket World Cup. Whilst she emphasises that this perspective can be fruitful and should be applied in female fan research, it is only partially used by the author in her own analysis.

More general studies on women's fandom certainly require comparing cases from the global perspective. Meanwhile, the book under review lacks a methodological explanation of how the presented examples help to conduct more global comparative studies. The author states, 'while I cannot claim to systematically document and interrogate all of the images to be found online of women fans in attendance at the tournament, these prevailing accounts are nevertheless important to consider in light of postfeminist tendencies' (p.128). For this reason, it is difficult to perceive this book as an outcome of systematic research designed with particular research questions in mind, using a methodology aiming to find answers to these questions, investigating a research sample, relying on a critical analysis of empirical data, etc. On the one hand, Toffoletti uses many studies by different scholars (the readers have an opportunity to become familiar with other sources); on the other hand, her book would gain more value with a more systematic analysis. Despite the book's methodological weakness, Toffoletti – as one of the first authors in the Western context – really opens up space for female fans from other regions.

The work under review should be appreciated in the context of filling a gap in female fan studies. The book gives a testimony of how unequal relations between men and women function in different countries and in different sports, which may enable, for example, sports and women's organisations to strengthen emancipatory practices in this area. In the scientific world, the book should open a discussion of great importance, as women are becoming more and more significant actors in the world of sport, actors who can no longer be underestimated.

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