


Pernambuco football fan-mothers: investigating women belonging in club spaces

Mães-torcedoras do futebol pernambucano: investigando o pertencimento feminino nos espaços clubísticos

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ABSTRACT: *The article initiates a discussion on the presence of a specific group of women in Pernambuco's football clubs, made up of mothers who are fans of the teams Santa Cruz, Sport Recife, and Náutico. We begin by placing football fan practices in the broader historical context of traditionally male activities. We then describe the evolution of women's participation in the country's football fan clubs and present the results of a quantitative survey held in December 2023. In the discussion, we identify the habits and characteristics of these female fans, who attend stadiums, revealing who they are and how they relate to club spaces. Finally, we conclude that they excel in their role as carers of children and observe changes in their behavior and levels of engagement with their teams after they become mothers.*

Keywords: *football; fans cultures; mothering; sports and gender; consumption.*

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RESUMO: *O artigo inicia um debate sobre a presença de uma parcela específica do público feminino nos espaços clubísticos do futebol pernambucano, composta por mulheres-mães, torcedoras dos times Santa Cruz, Sport Recife e Náutico. De início, contextualizamos as práticas torcedoras do futebol como atividades historicamente masculinas. Em seguida, descrevemos a evolução da participação feminina nas torcidas do país e apresentamos resultados da pesquisa quantitativa, realizada em dezembro de 2023. Na discussão, identificamos hábitos e características dessas mães-torcedoras, frequentadoras dos estádios, revelando quem elas são e como se relacionam com os espaços clubísticos. Por fim, concluímos que se destacam no papel de cuidadoras das crianças, e observamos mudanças nos seus comportamentos e níveis de engajamento com seus times, após se tornarem mães.*

Palavras-chave: futebol; culturas torcedoras; maternagem; esportes e gênero; consumo.

Introduction: communication, consumption, and football

In contemporary studies, consumption has been examined as a social and communicational phenomenon with extensive imaginary, symbolic, and cultural significance. Its relevance in daily life extends beyond material dimensions, given its role in shaping identities and social relationships (ROCHA, 2008; CASTRO, 2014). Gisela Castro (2014) highlights that every act of consumption also constitutes an act of communication, as consumption practices reflect lifestyles, modes of being, behavior, and living. From this standpoint, Ronaldo Helal (2011) identifies football as a communicational phenomenon that mobilizes discourses, practices, and identities. Furthermore, it is viewed as a cultural phenomenon that transcends its sporting nature to serve as a site for the production of meaning.

Historically, the development of football, as well as its spaces of performance and consumption, has been culturally legitimized as masculine domains (GOELLNER, 2005). From an early age, fan practices are encouraged among boys, as sporting values are linked to behavioral traits considered ideal for men, such as strength, virility, and camaraderie. As a result, football has grown and become firmly established as a masculine space, encompassing sporting, fan, and consumer practices.

According to Martine Segalen (2002), fans engage in collective identity phenomena within stadiums through symbolic rituals associated with clubs and football matches. These rituals include wearing team apparel and accessories, as well as chanting club slogans and anthems. Identity bonds are reinforced through language and behaviors marked by dominant warrior symbolism and virile sexuality. Intense bodily and sensory expressions are also observed among fans following team victories, often manifesting in exuberant celebrations such as traffic disruptions, honking, and other public displays (SEGALEN, 2002).

Within this context, football stadiums, or club spaces, are understood as spaces of consumption. Eric Arnould and Craig Thompson (2005) explain that consumer culture comprises a network or system of images, texts, and commercially produced objects utilized by various

consumer groups. Through these practices, consumption contributes to the construction of identities and meanings that shape life experiences, lending significance to collective habits and social environments. However, such meanings frequently overlap or even conflict with one another, leading consumers to both adopt and negotiate roles and relationships across different consumption contexts, including those found in fan practices and football environments.

Throughout history, football stadiums have come to be seen as sites of contestation, where masculine gender values prevail over feminine ones (BANDEIRA; SEFFNER, 2013). Women's role was to support their husbands, brothers, and sons as fans. In these spaces, they began to take on various roles, many linked to maternal figures and functions, such as companions, organizers of parties and social actions of clubs and supporter groups, or even symbolic fans (*torcedoras-símbolo*¹) (MORAES, 2017; ARAÚJO, 2019). With the rise of violence in stadiums in the late 1980s, a new type of audience was encouraged by some institutions, which promoted repositioning these spaces to become family-friendly (POPE, 2017; SVEINSON; TOFFOLETTI, 2022).

Based on this context, the present study examined how women fans who are mothers relate to club spaces. Supporting Garry Crawford's (2004) perspective, sports are understood as cultural products that encompass diverse consumption practices, such as attending football matches in stadiums. To this end, consumption practices and the sense of belonging within the stands were explored through interviews with mothers themselves, investigating their behaviors and habits when attending stadiums. The theoretical framework primarily drew on studies addressing football and women fans (GOELLNER, 2005; COSTA, 2006; POPE, 2017; BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019), gender, motherhood, and mothering (GILLIGAN, 2013; COLLIER DE MENDONÇA, 2014; 2021; O'REILLY, 2023), as well as literature specifically

1 This term is widely used in the media and sports community to refer to supporters who represent and show long-term dedication to their club. They fall into the category of fanatics and "tend to blend their own identity with that of the team" (REIN; KOTLER; SHIELDS, 2008, p. 100).

focusing on mothers who are sports fans (SVEINSON; TOFFOLETTI, 2022). Data were collected through a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions (LAKATOS; MARCONI, 2003), administered between December 13 and 22, 2023, to individuals identifying as women and mothers who support Recife clubs (Santa Cruz, Sport Recife, and Náutico) and reside in Pernambuco, aiming to profile this population. The questionnaire was developed using Google Forms and disseminated online via contact networks and female fan groups associated with these teams. A quantitative approach was employed for data collection and analysis, complemented by qualitative analysis conducted in dialogue with feminist and maternal studies theories.

Mothering practices are understood to involve adults who care for one or more children, regardless of their gender, sexuality, or biological relationship to the child(ren), provided that mother work constitutes a central aspect of their lives (COLLIER DE MENDONÇA, 2014, 2021; O'REILLY, 2023). This study focused specifically on women who are mothers, based on the recognition of the importance of research on women fans, particularly in light of the ongoing gender binarism in the sports domain and the stereotypical representations often assigned to women as sports supporters (COSTA, 2006), which portray them as inauthentic, marginalized, and underserved in terms of stadium infrastructure and safety. Katherine Sveinson and Kim Toffoletti (2022) point out that, although numerous studies address father–child relationships; fan behavior; and either inclusive or exclusionary family policies; as well as women sports fans more broadly, though mothers are frequently overlooked. The objective of profiling fan-mothers and examining their modes of occupying stadium spaces is to initiate a discussion about a more specific subset of the female fan base within supporter communities.

Football: men's stronghold and fan representations

Football emerged among wealthy white families in the 19th century and gradually evolved into a commercial enterprise. Initially practiced by

men from affluent backgrounds, it later became associated with factories and clubs (DAMATTA, 1994). The sport developed as a male-dominated space, both in terms of participation and fandom, with men establishing the norms (GOELLNER, 2005), performance standards, and consumption rituals of the sports market. Within this context, women have been present since the early stages, although their roles and forms of participation have shifted over time.

Beginning in the early 1900s, official football matches in Brazil began to reflect class and racial distinctions. Although other sports also contributed to the formation of fan identities (ARAÚJO, 2019), football in its early stages did not yet foster the kind of fan identity observed today. At the time, spectatorship was characterized by a divided audience, with the upper class occupying separate areas. Women were already present, primarily as companions to their husbands, children, or fathers. These events served as important social occasions for women to be introduced into society and to display their social status through luxury clothing and accessories. As such, their presence was encouraged.

In the following decades, the relationship between fans and teams acquired a strong emotional dimension, and a segment of the urban elite, particularly young women, continued to attend matches (ARAÚJO, 2019). However, as football gained popularity among the working class and evolved into a commercialized spectacle, women participation was increasingly discouraged. The sport became more violent and was deemed inappropriate for ladies, in light of prevailing social expectations tied to femininity and procreation (POPE, 2017; ARAÚJO, 2019). This shift culminated in a government bill that prohibited women from playing football for nearly 40 years, on the grounds that this and similar sports were “incompatible with the conditions of their nature” (BRASIL, 1941). These conditions referred to perceived physical risks, particularly harm to the reproductive system, associated with contact sports. Such justifications were “rooted in biologizing and patriarchal notions of gender” (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019, p. 20), reinforcing dominant social roles assigned to women at the time, especially motherhood.

Beginning in the 1950s, organized fan groups began to gain visibility in stadiums, primarily through the leadership of men. Within this predominantly male environment, one woman managed to break through the barriers of a sport long established as a male stronghold. Dulce Rosalina became the first woman to lead an organized fan group in Brazil, the *Torcida Organizada do Vasco da Gama* (TOV), assuming this role in 1956 while still young, and later being recognized as a symbolic fan (ARAÚJO, 2019). According to Daniela Araújo (2019), during this period, sport ceased to be viewed solely as a space for socialization and securing advantageous marriages for women, and increasingly became a significant arena for devotion and identity formation.

With the emergence and growth of various supporter groups in Brazilian football, particularly those composed of younger fans who opposed the festive and passive values promoted by organized groups up to the 1970s, violence in stadiums began to increase. This escalation contributed to the withdrawal of many female spectators from the stands, as well as some male spectators who no longer perceived football as a safe environment (COSTA, 2006).

In Brazil, during the 1980s and 1990s, women continued to be discouraged from participating as football fans. Within organized supporter groups, they were prohibited from playing instruments or waving flags (MORAES, 2017). In response, some all-female organized fan groups began to emerge, gaining greater visibility and strength in the 2000s. According to Leda Costa (2006), the internet provided these women with spaces for communication and self-expression. The formation of online communities of football fans and club supporters on social networking platforms — such as Orkut and, later, Facebook and Twitter (now X) (VIMIEIRO, 2022) — contributed significantly to the development of fan cultures, particularly in the context of mediatization (FRANDSEN, 2014). On this topic, Amaral *et al.* (2024) note that Brazilian studies on fan cultures began in the 2000s, initially focusing on television fiction, pop culture, and communication technologies. This field is marked by processes of appropriation and resignification,

in which fans actively produce content and participate in engaged communities (AMARAL *et al.*, 2024).

In the context of sports, several researchers highlight fandom as a central component of entertainment, playing a significant role in shaping personal identity and forming social relationships (CRAWFORD, 2004; MEWETT; TOFFOLETTI, 2011; TARVER, 2017). According to Wojoon Lee and George Cunningham (2016), sports fan cultures have historically been structured in a gender-disproportionate manner, operating within a heterosexual and masculine framework, particularly in male-dominated sports. However, in recent decades, shifts have occurred, influenced by social and feminist movements, as well as the growing visibility of athletes, women fans, and LGBTQIAPN+ supporters (VIMIEIRO, 2022). These groups have actively challenged sexism and gender- and sexuality-based prejudices, contributing to the increasing prominence of women's sports on the global stage. Nevertheless, such progress is not always linear or sustained. As characterized by Ludmila Mourão and Márcia Morel (2008), these developments often follow an “accordion effect” — a cyclical pattern of advances and setbacks (POPE, 2017).

In this context, beginning in 2010, several independent women's fan groups emerged online in Brazil. In Pernambuco, notable examples include Coralinas, a feminist supporter movement of Santa Cruz founded in 2016, which aimed to unite women in attending matches without fear of violence (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019) and to promote dialogue on issues affecting women's lives in society. Motivated by similar objectives, the women's movements *Elas e o Sport*, affiliated with Sport Recife, and *Timbuzeiras*, associated with *Náutico*, were also established in the same year (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019).

It is worth noting that although the term “fan” became popular in the late 19th century to describe sports enthusiasts (CHAGAS; FONSECA, 2020), in Brazil, this term was not widely adopted in the sports context. Instead, the terms “torcedor” (supporter) and “torcida” (crowd or cheering section) became established (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019).

This terminology originated as a result of women's participation in the stands of football stadiums and clubs. During matches, they would often twist their handkerchiefs or gloves in moments of heightened emotion during the games.

In Brazil, different groups of fans coexist through both modern and traditional practices (VIMIEIRO, 2022)². Female fans, therefore, represent a diverse group whose characteristics extend beyond fan practices and football consumption to include the specific conditions and constraints still imposed on women. Within this context, the experiences of fan-mothers warrant closer examination.

Women, mothers and fans

Although women have gained greater participation in the sports environment, their presence in the stands remains largely unacknowledged by both the media and society. Silvana Goellner (2005, p. 86) emphasizes that “the conditions of access and participation of women are still not equal.” In the case of mothers, a dual form of oppression persists, reinforcing the culture of patriarchal motherhood (O'REILLY, 2023). Moreover, intersecting forms of oppression further exacerbate gender inequalities and place a disproportionate burden on mothers, particularly those who are women of color, low-income, with limited educational opportunities, single, or part of the LGBTQIAPN+ community. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2021) underscore that intersectional power relations are intrinsic to social life, as they do not operate in isolation.

Stacey Pope (2017) notes the various obstacles faced by women fans who are mothers, highlighting that countries such as Sweden and Finland, which support employability during motherhood, have higher women participation in sports. Meanwhile, Maria Collier de Mendonça

2 Ana Carolina Vimieiro (2022) identifies 5 types of fan formations that still exist in Brazil: the *charangas* (from the 1940s), the *torcidas organizadas* (organized fans from the 1960s), online communities (from the 1990s), new supporting movements (from the 2000s), and *torcidas livres* (free *torcidas* from the 2010s).

(2021, p. 58), in her research with Brazilian and Canadian mothers, points out that even though “they strive to balance different tasks and roles, both inside and outside the home, they face many difficulties managing the time dedicated to their children, spouses, household chores, themselves, or professional matters.”

Maternal studies and matricentric feminism (O'REILLY, 2023) propose that the meaning of the word “mother” extend to any adult person, regardless of gender or biological ties, who performs mothering work as a central part of their life. This would encourage the deconstruction of the patriarchal motherhood culture, which to this day remains the dominant narrative, as argued by Andrea O'Reilly (2023). In this context, it is important to emphasize that the plurality of maternal experiences, which intersect with various intersectionalities, encompass diverse social identities (class, gender, race, geographic location, etc.). With this in mind, Lélia Gonzalez (2020) highlights that oppression occurs — especially due to issues of race — affecting African-descendant and Indigenous women.

Matricentric feminism underscores the importance of focusing on fan-mothers, emphasizing the need to recognize “a distinct feminism for and about mothers and to explore their specific needs, experiences, and desires, which continue to be marginalized compared to non-mothers” (O'REILLY, 2023, p. 172). Additionally, the ethics of care as women's work within a patriarchal system is an essential framework to consider (GILLIGAN, 2013). The role of caregivers is visible in many football spaces, regardless of whether women are mothers. This is particularly significant given that hegemonic representations of women in football remain tied to stereotypes such as *marias-chuteiras* (groupies), *torcedoras-símbolos* (symbolic fans), maternal figures, or masculinized portrayals (VIMIEIRO; SOUZA, 2022).

From this perspective, as noted at the beginning of this article, the symbolic women fans (Figure 1) align with representations of maternal figures, who gain privileges in the stands. To achieve such status, these women are generally more mature. Some tend to dress exclusively in

their team's colors and have free access to clubs (COSTA, 2006) as a way to symbolize a family space, within patriarchal tradition, and unconditional love for the team. It is worth remembering that both masculinities and femininities are complementary constructions, not opposites (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2016). Therefore, greater legitimization of women's participation in football challenges the traditionally male-dominated space in this sport. However, the representations of older women as caregivers and mothers can also resonate with culturally dominant values forged in patriarchy and the female ethics of care (GILLIGAN, 2013).

Figure 1 – Symbolic Women Fans of Corinthians (Dona Elisa), Vasco da Gama (Tia Dulce), and Sport Recife (Dona Maria)



Source: Google Images.

Works such as those by Katherine Sveinson and Kim Toffoletti (2022) support the discussion presented here by addressing mothers who support different sports in the United States and Australia, thus highlighting the importance of expanding the debate on this topic within the academic community. The authors point out that for these women fans, it is important for clubs to invest in family-friendly spaces in stadiums, with facilities that support mothers in their caregiving roles, provided that these spaces do not hinder their ability to simultaneously perform both maternal duties and fan practices.

Where are the fan-mothers? Key findings

To understand the profiles of fan-mothers who attend stadiums, an exploratory quantitative study was conducted to gain familiarity with the subject. A structured questionnaire served as the data collection instrument and was administered to individuals who identify as women — both cisgender and transgender — and as mothers supporting clubs from the capital of Pernambuco (Santa Cruz, Sport Recife, and Náutico). The survey link was disseminated through female club movement groups, such as *Elas e o Sport*, *Timbuzeiras*, and *Coralinas*, as well as via the personal social media accounts of one of the researchers. A snowball convenience sampling technique was employed, primarily for exploratory purposes, relying on referral networks to facilitate the exploration and deeper understanding of the topic (SVEINSON; TOFFOLETTI, 2022). The questionnaire was administered between December 13 and 22, 2023, and consisted of multiple-choice questions, some permitting only one response and others allowing multiple responses.

The questionnaire yielded 86 responses, of which 79 were valid, all from individuals identifying as women — cisgender or transgender — and mothers. As noted, the questionnaire was distributed among women's fan movement groups that actively engage with club spaces, given that these groups were formed with the purpose of attending stadiums collectively. Although the presence of women in these spaces has been increasing, it is believed that many distance themselves from clubs after becoming mothers. This selection allowed for obtaining a qualified sample of fan-mothers who remain involved in club environments. Initially, sociodemographic data were collected to characterize the sample. Regarding age distribution, most respondents reported being between 45 and 54 years old (32.9%), followed by those aged 25 to 34 (29.1%), 35 to 44 (21.5%), 19 to 24 (8.9%), 55 to 64 (5.1%), and over 65 years old (2.5%). In terms of race, the sample reflected the current Brazilian demographic profile recorded in the 2022 Census (DURÃES, 2023), with a majority identifying as brown (45.6%), followed by white (35.4%), black (16.5%), and indigenous and yellow (1.3%).

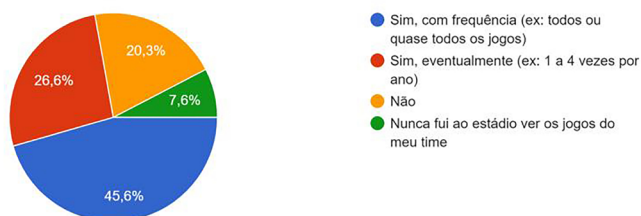
Regarding education level, the majority of mother-respondents reported having completed higher education (51.9%), followed by those with completed secondary education (25.3%), incomplete or ongoing higher education (20.3%), and incomplete secondary education (2.5%). These results indicate that the sample represents a relatively privileged segment of Brazilian society in terms of educational attainment. Additionally, these fans tend to reside geographically close to the clubs, with most living in Recife (64.6%), the city where the stadiums of the respective teams are located, followed by residents of the metropolitan area (32.9%), and smaller percentages in the Zona da Mata and Sertão regions (1.3% each).

Of the total respondents, 57 are fans of Sport Recife, 12 of Náutico, and 10 of Santa Cruz. We then asked if they usually attend the stadiums, and this data (Figure 2) reduced the sample by nearly 30%, as some women answered that they do not usually go to the stadiums. In our interpretation, this reality may reflect reasons such as violence, difficulties in transportation, and harassment experienced by women, as discussed in previously published studies (MELO; LIMA; CASTRO, 2019).

Figure 2 – Screenshot: Survey on fan-mothers

Você costuma ir ao estádio ver os jogos do seu time?

79 respostas



Given the objectives of this research, understanding the motivations that lead these mothers to attend stadiums was essential. The aim was to determine whether their participation is driven by personal motivation related to the construction of a fan identity, the desire to share the sports

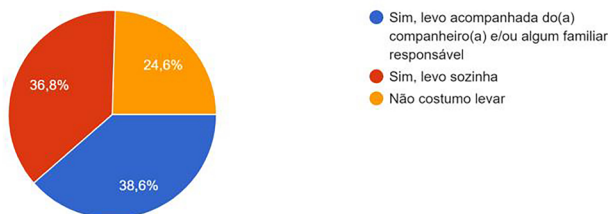
experience with others, or the intent to bring their children to games. Respondents could select multiple answers and had the option to provide other responses. Notably, love for the team was the predominant reason (96.5%). Other reported motivations included attending with friends (19.3%), family (15.8%), and accompanying spouses or partners (8.8%). These findings indicate that women who are mothers also actively construct their fan identities and seek a sense of belonging within football spaces. Soraya Barreto Januário (2019) highlights a historical connection in the *ethos* of Pernambuco's women fans to struggles and resistance for the occupation of previously denied spaces, noting that many young women in the stands were influenced by other women relatives (mothers, aunts, grandmothers) to develop an interest in football.

Focusing on the subset of fan-mothers, we investigated how these women relate to stadiums and football teams after becoming mothers and assuming caregiving responsibilities. Most respondents reported that they take their children to the stadiums, either accompanied by other guardians or on their own (Figure 3). When asked whether this habit was intended to encourage the development of their children's fan identity, a multiple-choice question, the majority (82.2%) indicated that they bring their children so they too can learn to enjoy football and support the team. Other commonly cited reasons included: the children themselves ask to attend (42.2%), it serves as a valuable family activity (44.4%), or they have no one else to leave the children with (6.7%).

Figure 3 – Screenshot: Survey on fan-mothers

Você costuma levar seus filhos(as) para o estádio?

57 respostas



It was equally important to understand the challenges fan-mothers face when bringing their children to stadiums. The majority of respondents highlighted the lack of adequate facilities for young children, such as diaper-changing stations, playgrounds, and child-friendly restrooms, as a key issue (57.9%). Additionally, many pointed to the high costs involved, including expenses for tickets, food, and transportation (45.6%). These findings are consistent with those of Katherine Sveinson and Kim Toffoletti (2022), who observed that one of the main concerns expressed by mother sports fans in the United States and Australia is the insufficient infrastructure in stadiums to accommodate families with young children.

Continuing the list of challenges reported by participants, many noted that the club's communal areas are not appropriate for young children, as these environments often involve alcohol consumption and occurrences of violence (36.8%). Consequently, such spaces are not designed with the needs of parents or guardians in mind, lacking designated family-friendly sections (35.1%). Other difficulties mentioned include the logistical complexity of attending matches with young children who require bottles, toys, or specific foods (22.8%), the late scheduling of games (1.8%), incidents of violence or fights (3.6%), and the lack of priority lines for those with children (1.8%), among other concerns. These findings reflect the normalization of caregiving as a female responsibility (GILLIGAN, 2013). While most men can attend matches alone or with friends without additional concerns, fan-mothers are continually expected to perform care work, whether due to societal norms or structural issues within stadiums — such as diaper-changing stations being located exclusively in women's restrooms.

Corroborating the notion of mothers' awareness of their caregiving roles, we observed that in 2023, certain football matches were held with audiences restricted to women, children, and people with disabilities (PWDs), following sanctions imposed by the sports tribunal in response to previous incidents of violence in the stands. One notable case was Sport Recife, which hosted three Série B matches under these conditions. Although these matches were officially designated for women,

children, and PWDs, both the media and the club emphasized the historic character of the events as festive, peaceful occasions led by women, often portrayed as expressions of “unconditional love” for the team and framed in contrast to traditional, male-dominated fan behavior. However, as previously discussed (BARRETO JANUÁRIO; CASTRO, 2023), much of the infrastructure prepared for this so-called “different” audience was designed primarily with children in mind. This further reinforced the maternal caregiving role (GILLIGAN, 2013), suggesting that women were perceived chiefly as companions responsible for their children’s presence at the matches. Despite this framing, our findings affirm that women possess a deep and autonomous emotional connection to their teams and to football itself, independent of their maternal identity.

Returning to the analysis of the results, we observed notable changes in stadium attendance habits after motherhood. Nearly half of the respondents, 28 fans (49.1%), reported a decrease in their frequency of attending their teams’ games. In contrast, only five (8.8%) indicated an increase in attendance following motherhood, while the remaining (42.1%) maintained the same level of regularity. Regarding their sense of belonging to the clubs, the majority of respondents (57.9%) affirmed that they feel connected to their teams. Nonetheless, almost half (49.1%) of these fan-mothers, whether currently caring for children or pregnant, reported experiencing difficulties or feelings of embarrassment when attending stadiums. These challenges stem from limited accessibility as well as symbolic and physical forms of violence, issues widely documented among women spectators (MORAES, 2017).

When discussing women fans and football, consumer culture plays a significant role in shaping identity and connections with teams and fan groups. Attending the stadium is understood as an act of consumption that includes being present, utilizing the club’s space, services, and products. In this context, we asked fan-mothers whether they typically purchase products from their teams. All 57 respondents answered affirmatively, purchasing official merchandise and/or replicas. However, when

asked if they had ever encountered clothing or accessories specifically designed for mothers, pregnant women, or breastfeeding women, an overwhelming 96.5% responded negatively.

In 2022, Racing Club, an Argentine team, introduced the first nursing-friendly jersey designed to facilitate breastfeeding for nursing individuals by incorporating an opening just below the chest (Figure 4) (FREITAS, 2022). The jersey's launch was accompanied by a viral video campaign on social media, sharing stories from fan-mothers about the stigma that breastfeeding in public places often attracts. Despite the significance of this initiative and the club's acknowledgment of this audience, there has been no evidence of continued production of this style in Racing's official designs. Furthermore, it is unclear whether other teams have adopted this model, although Racing and their sponsor Kappa announced that the design would be available to anyone interested.

Figure 4 – Screenshot: Launch video of the Racing jersey



Source: Racing Club (2022).

Finally, we asked these fan-mothers whether they felt their favorite teams communicated effectively with them (Figure 5). The results revealed that the majority do not feel adequately represented by the clubs, citing a lack of consistent attention to campaigns aimed specifically at

mothers. Official consumer products, such as jerseys, remain limited and insufficient, particularly in addressing the needs of women who are mothers. Even those who perceive some communication from the clubs acknowledge it occurs mainly through occasional, often seasonal campaigns, typically around holidays like Mother's Day. This pattern suggests that clubs prioritize market-driven, calendar-based initiatives rather than fostering genuine, ongoing engagement with their female fanbase.

Figure 5 – Screenshot: Survey on fan-mothers

Você acredita que o seu time se comunica bem com as mães torcedoras? Seja em ações, posts na redes sociais, campanhas, dias de jogo ou estrutura do clube.

57 respostas



Another one-time initiative that gained international attention — and reinforced the idea of mothers as caregivers (GILLIGAN, 2013) and, in this case, as peacemakers (VIMIEIRO; SOUZA, 2022) in the stands — was the “Security Moms” campaign of 2015, organized by Sport Club do Recife. The club recruited approximately 30 mothers of male fans belonging to organized supporter groups, which are often associated with violence, to act as part of the security team during a Pernambuco state championship match against Náutico, a derby with a well-documented history of violence between fan bases. According to the campaign’s video case (SECURITY MOMS - MÃES SEGURANÇAS, 2015), no incidents of violence were recorded in the stands during this game.

After analyzing the data, we can infer that among the respondents, fan-mothers are adult women generally within the typical childbearing age range, according to the medical-biological discourse (20 to 35 years old), and are consumers of team products. Largely, likely due to

the questionnaire's distribution method — online through women's fan networks — these women appear privileged in terms of access to education and, consequently, to discussions surrounding gender issues, motherhood, and parenting. It is important to highlight that groups such as Coralinas, Elas, and Sport uphold discourses aligned with feminist agendas, and their higher educational levels may suggest that the respondents are engaged in politicized and activist debates. These mother fans regularly attend stadiums, with love for the team cited as the most prominent motivation for fandom, regardless of gender (BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019). This passion is also reflected in the values they seek to transmit to their children by bringing them to matches. Nonetheless, these mothers face significant challenges related to inadequate club facilities and insufficient support for attending games with children. Nearly half reported a decrease in stadium attendance after becoming mothers, highlighting how parenting responsibilities disproportionately fall on women and reinforcing the concept of the feminine ethic of care (GILLIGAN, 2013). While these women express a sense of belonging to their clubs as fans, becoming mothers adds complex layers to their experiences, where feelings of embarrassment, physical and symbolic limitations, and difficulties in accessing stadiums become more pronounced. Moreover, they perceive that clubs do not communicate effectively with them, which fosters a sense of invisibility and neglect within the fan community.

Final considerations

In this article, we initiate a discussion on practices of belonging in the stands and the diverse ways in which women who are mothers in Pernambuco engage with spaces associated with football clubs. As Daniela Araújo (2019) emphasizes, football, particularly the stadium stands, functions as a social arena for identity formation and reaffirmation, where women are continually striving to (re)assert their legitimacy as fans. Through an analysis of data collected via the questionnaire, we identify fan-mothers as a distinct and active presence within these

environments. Drawing from both theoretical insights and empirical findings, we intentionally adopt the term “fan-mothers” to highlight the inseparable nature of these identities, underscoring that motherhood and fandom are not mutually exclusive but are deeply interconnected aspects of their lived experiences. We contend that this research offers valuable contributions not only to the fields of sports studies and fan culture but also to broader scholarly conversations on motherhood and maternal subjectivities in contemporary society, as advocated by Andrea O'Reilly (2023).

Moreover, fan-mothers report not feeling represented by clubs or sports brands, revealing a significant gap that must be addressed within the football ecosystem, not only as a matter of social inclusion but also from the perspective of consumer engagement. It is crucial to recognize and account for the diverse audiences that inhabit football spaces so that both clubs and brands can develop more effective communication strategies and implement policies that genuinely support and foster the participation of these groups. As Stacey Pope (2017, p. 34) asserts, “the persistence of gendered inequalities today is likely to continue to restrict some women’s access to leisure and thus may prevent them from entering traditionally male domains such as the sports stadium.”

Women are present on the field, in the stands, and behind the scenes of the football industry (GOELLNER, 2005; COSTA, 2006; BARRETO JANUÁRIO, 2019). Yet, the way these spaces are structured and promoted still tends to exclude or overlook fan-mothers, whose caregiving responsibilities, socially constructed as their primary role, are reinforced within stadiums and club environments. This dynamic contributes to a distancing from their fan practices and limits their full participation. We hope this research, which used the questionnaire as a starting point, can serve as a foundation for future studies that further explore the topic and include the perspectives or actions of key stakeholders, such as football clubs, media companies, sponsor brands, and sports governing bodies, who play a central role in shaping the football landscape.

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