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Argentina – Voices from Women in the Game

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Abstract (English)

Football, a cornerstone of Argentine national identity, remains a deeply gendered institution that embodies and reinforces hegemonic masculinity. While celebrated as a unifying force, the sport continues to perpetuate gender divides, marginalizing women's participation and restricting their access to equal opportunities and representation. This thesis critically examines how gender constructions and patriarchal practices shape women's experiences in Argentine football, analyzing the mechanisms that sustain male dominance and exploring the conditions for change.

Using qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and field observations in Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and La Plata, the research applies Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and Fraser's model of social justice to reveal the overt and subtle forms of exclusion women face – from socialization processes and sports governance to media representation and spatial dynamics. While these structures are historically rooted, they adapt over time to maintain male hegemony, often manifesting in more insidious ways that continue to privilege male authority and participation.

The study identifies emerging conditions for change, as feminist movements challenge traditional norms and create new spaces for women within football. However, tensions exist between reformist approaches that work within institutional frameworks and more radical, independent movements advocating for systemic transformation. The research critiques narratives that place the burden of change on individual women, arguing instead for structural reforms that address economic, cultural, and representational inequalities.

This work calls for a comprehensive reimagining of football in Argentina, emphasizing the need to dismantle oppressive structures and advocate for a sport that is genuinely inclusive and equitable. By exploring gender relations within football, the thesis contributes to broader discussions on social justice, gender equity, and cultural transformation in sports.

Abstract (German)

Fußball, ein zentraler Bestandteil der argentinischen Identität, bleibt eine zutiefst geschlechtergeprägte Institution, die hegemoniale Männlichkeit nicht nur verkörpert, sondern auch verstärkt. Als vermeintlich vereinende Kraft gefeiert, perpetuiert der Sport weiterhin Geschlechterungleichheiten, marginalisiert die Teilhabe von Frauen und schränkt ihren Zugang zu gleichen Chancen und Repräsentation systematisch ein. Diese Arbeit setzt sich kritisch damit auseinander, wie Geschlechterkonstruktionen und patriarchale Strukturen die Erfahrungen von Frauen im argentinischen Fußball prägen, analysiert die Mechanismen, die männliche Dominanz aufrechterhalten, und untersucht die Bedingungen für ihre De- und Rekonstruktion.

Die Studie basiert auf qualitativen Methoden, darunter leitfadengestützte Interviews und Feldbeobachtungen in Buenos Aires, Córdoba und La Plata, und stützt sich auf Connells Theorie der hegemonialen Männlichkeit sowie Frasers Modell sozialer Gerechtigkeit. Damit zeigt die Arbeit die verschiedenen Diskriminierungsmechanismen gegenüber Frauen auf – von Sozialisierungsprozessen und institutionellen Strukturen bis hin zu medialer Darstellung und räumlicher Dynamik. Diese Strukturen haben zwar historische Wurzeln, passen sich jedoch im Laufe der Zeit an, um männliche Vorherrschaft zu legitimieren. Oft treten sie in subtileren Formen auf, die weiterhin männliche Autorität und Teilhabe privilegieren und normalisieren.

Die Studie untersucht aufkommende Bedingungen für Wandel, in denen feministische Bewegungen traditionelle Normen herausfordern und neue Räume für Frauen im Fußball schaffen. Gleichzeitig bestehen Spannungen zwischen reformorientierten Ansätzen, die innerhalb bestehender Institutionen agieren, und radikaleren, unabhängigen Bewegungen, die eine grundlegende Veränderung des Systems anstreben. Die Arbeit hinterfragt dabei (neoliberale) Narrative, die die Verantwortung für Veränderungen allein bei den Frauen sehen, und plädiert stattdessen für strukturelle Reformen, die wirtschaftliche, kulturelle und repräsentative Ungleichheiten abbauen.

Diese Untersuchung ruft zu einer grundlegenden Neuausrichtung des argentinischen Fußballs auf, die auf den Abbau unterdrückender Strukturen abzielt und einen Sport fördert, der wirklich inklusiv und gerecht ist. Durch die Erforschung der Geschlechterverhältnisse im Fußball soll die Arbeit zu breiteren Diskussionen über soziale Gerechtigkeit, Geschlechtergerechtigkeit und kulturellen Wandel im Sport beitragen.

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List Of Abbreviation

Abbreviation	Definition
BIPoC	Black, Indigenous and People of Color
FA	English Football Association
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
FiFPro	International Federation of Professional Footballers
INADI	National Institute Against Discrimination
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex
UEFA	Union of European Football Association
USA	United States of America
WWC	Women World Cup

“Football is a megaphone of society, a microcosm where good and bad come to the surface. The human will and friendship on the one hand, and inequalities and machismo on the other. They are a mirror of what happens in the world”,
– Marion Reimers (Mexican sports journalist)

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Interest And Relevance

Football, the world’s most popular sport, captivates millions and deeply shapes societies. Beyond the roar of stadiums and the spectacle of major tournaments, it wields immense political and economic influence, from fostering national pride to affecting global diplomacy. Yet beneath its unifying façade lies a long-standing tradition of exclusion and stigmatization. Football has become a stage for the performance of hegemonic masculinity, where entrenched patriarchal norms dictate who dominates the pitch and who “*belongs*” within its sphere. These norms systematically marginalize women, LGBTQI+ individuals, and other minority groups, reinforcing a hierarchy that limits participation and recognition.¹

The recent scandal involving Spanish football president Luis Rubiales, who forcibly kissed player Jenni Hermoso after the Women's World Cup 2023, revealed pervasive misogyny within women's football (Horowitz & Chaundler, 2023). Instead of celebrating their World Cup victory, the Spanish team found itself contending with sexual violence and the challenges of confronting a powerful patriarchal system. This incident is just the tip of the iceberg: beyond such high-profile cases, systemic discrimination against women in football is evident in structural barriers to participation, wage disparities, limited media coverage, underrepresentation in decision-making roles, and social stigmatization.

In **Argentina**, a country of over 40 million, football holds profound cultural significance and is woven into the fabric of national identity. The mass celebrations following Argentina’s 2022 men’s World Cup win underscored the country’s passion for the sport, which extends beyond national triumphs to the fervent support for local teams. Football provides a sense of belonging and an emotional outlet amidst the nation's chronic economic instability, marked by high inflation and a deeply polarized political climate, exacerbated by the rise of right-wing President Javier Milei. The game serves not just as entertainment but as a coping mechanism, offering a temporary escape from daily struggles.

However, this fervor for football also reflects deeply rooted patriarchal structures. Violent fan cultures like “*aguante*” and gender inequalities in the sport embody this reality. Women as players, coaches, and

¹ This work follows a queer-feminist-intersectional approach, recognizing the diverse forms of gender discrimination. However, due to limitations in scope and considerations of feasibility, primary focus will center on comparing the situation of cisgender women to cisgender men. Cis-gender relates to an individual whose gender identity corresponds with the sex assigned for them at birth.

fans continue to face barriers: from a lack of funding and media visibility to limited institutional support and social stigma. Historically, football in Argentina has been portrayed from a male perspective, influencing the nation's identity and cultural narratives. While women's participation in football dates back over a century – with the first recorded women's match in 1923 – women's football remained underground and largely unrecognized for decades (Pujol, 2019, pp. 19–20). Although the Argentina Football Association (AFA) officially recognized women's football in 1991 (Janson, 2008, p. 56), progress toward genuine equality has been slow.

Feminist movements like “*Ni Una Menos*” in 2015 began to shift the conversation, drawing attention to gender-based discrimination across various social spheres, including sports. Within the context of Argentina’s broader feminist uprising, exemplified by the legalization of abortion in 2020, women's football players also started advocating for better conditions. Cases like Macarena Sánchez’s fight for professional recognition (Wrack, 2019) and Mara Gómez's battle to play as a transgender woman have brought attention to gender inequalities in football (McShane, 2021). AFA's launch of the Women’s Professional League in 2019 marked a milestone, laying the groundwork for financial stability, improved training conditions, and greater visibility for women players (Knijnik & Garton, 2022, pp. 17–18). Despite this progress, significant challenges remain. Women's football continues to be marginalized, not just in Argentina but globally. Furthermore, the recent election of President Javier Milei raises concerns about potential conservative backlash, threatening feminist achievements in an already tense social climate.

This research will primarily focus on the experiences of women in Argentinian football, examining the sport's intersections with gender, politics, and culture. While the context is specific to Argentina, the findings may provide broader insights applicable to women's football and gender dynamics in other countries. The literature review will explore the global framework, situating the evolving landscape of women's football within a wider research field.

1.2 State Of Art

The state of art relevant for this research can be broken down into three thematic blocks: 1. Football and Gender, 2. Football and Society in Argentina and 3. Football and Gender in Argentina.

1.2.1 Research Field: Football And Gender (Globally)

Over the past two decades, and particularly in the last five years, the field of football studies from a gender perspective has undergone a remarkable expansion, marked by a surge in contributions from social scientists. Historically, football had predominantly been approached as a discipline within sport studies; however, it is only in recent years that social science has taken a growing interest in the field, analyzing the sport from a broader sociocultural perspective and considering a gender-sensitive lens.

The published works analyze football beyond the sport as a mere social phenomenon and giving attention to its gendered oppressive structures, power relationships and opportunities for empowerment - both historically and in contemporary contexts (e.g. Faust, 2019; Hong & Mangan, 2004; Krech & Weiler, 2022; Cleland, 2015). One influential journal in this area is *Soccer & Society*, which plays a prominent role in shaping and disseminating research on football's sociocultural dynamics, gender relations, and global impact.

The interdisciplinary nature of current research in this field is a defining feature, drawing on insights from social sciences, sport sciences, gender studies, law and governance, and management. Methodologically, researchers employ diverse approaches, including qualitative and quantitative analyses, ethnographic studies, and critical theoretical frameworks, to deepen our understanding of the multifaceted dynamics within football and its implications for society. Publications within this field cover a wide spectrum, examining different stakeholders in the football landscape, such as players, coaches, fans, media, and institutions. Researchers address various forms of gender discrimination, including issues related to participation, pay disparities, lack of institutional support, sexism and media coverage. The geographic scope of these studies is expansive, encompassing regions such as Latin America, Europe, Australia, and the United States of America (USA). While there exists a significant overrepresentation of studies from Western Europe, Scandinavia and North America, recent years have witnessed a commendable surge in research with a specific emphasis on Latin America – a trend aligning with the regional interest of the upcoming thesis.

Although the initial works in the field of „*Football and Gender*” were published some decades ago, the research field remained relatively niche for an extended period. Only in recent years has it gained greater prominence and visibility, marking a transformative phase (going hand in hand with the visibility in media). This shift is characterized by heightened visibility, the broadening of perspectives, new regional focuses and increased media coverage. It is crucial to acknowledge that, akin to many academic disciplines, the global landscape of this research field has long been dominated by western perspectives, particularly Western Europe (England, Germany), the USA, and Australia, Scandinavia. While scholars from the Global South remain a minority, there is an observable and encouraging shift toward increased visibility for research originating from and focusing on these regions.

1.2.2 Research Field: Football In Argentina

Football studies in Argentina have been vibrant and multifaceted, reflecting the country's deep-rooted passion for the sport. In recent decades, numerous publications have delved into the social, political, and historical dimensions of football in Argentina, predominantly emphasizing fandom studies. These works explore the intricate links between football and identity, history, political power, and cultural values. Noteworthy examples include Ruffino's (1999) and Orton (2023a) examination of how football

has strategically shaped Argentine identity and national narratives, as well as studies by Huddleston (2022) and Parrish & Nauright (2013) exploring how football chants contribute to the construction and negotiation of masculinity in Argentina. Scholars such as Moores, a distinguished sports journalist and author, have made extensive contributions by delving into the social and cultural aspects of football in Argentina (2023). Moores work intricately explores the intersections of football, politics, and society, offering valuable insights into the complex relationship between the sport and the broader Argentine context. A significant body of literature also addresses the issue of violence in Argentine football, with publications from scholars such as Alabarces (2014), Archetti & Romero (1994), Branz et al. (2020), and García & Diaz Olivero (2020). Additionally, there is a rich exploration of the complex network of links between politics and football, exemplified by works like Moreira (2013) and Paradiso (2024). The historical role of British influence in Argentine football has also been scrutinized, as seen in Duke & Crolley's research (2001) and Raanan Rein in his notable work, *"Fútbol, Jews, and the Making of Argentina"* (2014) delves into the connections between football, nationalism, and identity, providing a nuanced perspective on the historical dynamics at play. While not Argentine, Goldblatt's work, particularly in *"Futebol Nation: The Story of Brazil through Soccer"* (Goldblatt, 2014a) provides valuable insights into South American football culture, offering a comparative lens that enhances our understanding of Argentina's football landscape. In addition to these scholars, works such as Eduardo Galeano's *"Soccer in Sun and Shadow"* (2003) provide a poetic and insightful exploration of football in South America, including Argentina. While these publications contribute significantly to the understanding of the Argentine football context and its social and political interconnections, a noticeable domination of androcentric perspectives can be observed; that football is from and for men has been consistently reproduced within academic discourse. Despite a growing number of feminist approaches addressing women's rights in Argentine football, gender perspectives remain rare in football literature. The following section highlights the few existing publications that have begun to address this crucial aspect.

1.2.3 Research Field: Football And Gender In Argentina (Latin America)

The analysis of sport from a gender perspective appears belatedly in Argentine academia and feminism. However, in recent years there have been notable advances in the feminist critique of sport as a space for sustaining macho culture and gender inequality, as Alvarez Litke observed (2002). Conde & Rodríguez's (2002) paper, *"Mujeres en el fútbol argentino: sobre prácticas y representaciones"* stands as one of the pioneering works in the intersection of Football, Women, and Latin America. It offers a profound analysis of the persistent challenges hindering gender equality in Argentine football and society. Subsequently, there has been a gradual yet steady increase in interest regarding the deeply entrenched gender-based discrimination experienced by Argentinian (Latin American) women in football, a phenomenon intricately linked to national identity and culture (Alvarez Litke, 2018; Álvarez Litke, 2020; Garton, 2020; Garton & Hijós, 2018a; Hijós, 2019). Over the past three years, a notable

cadre of social scientists, including Hang, Hijós, Alvarez Litke, Garton, Moreira, Arambuena and Pujol has significantly advanced the landscape of research at the intersection of football, gender, and Argentina - in the course of the emerging women's rights movements. Their seminal contributions have propelled this field into prominence, increasing its visibility and scholarly significance. These scholars have critically examined the interplay of feminism and football, particularly from a social science perspective. Their works not only deepen the understanding of gender dynamics within football but also shed light on broader sociopolitical implications (Alvarez Litke, 2020; Hang, 2018; Hijós, 2020; Moreira & Garton, 2021). An impactful addition to this discourse is the recently released book *“Women’s Football in Latin America: Social Challenges and Historical Perspectives Vol. 2 Hispanic Countries”* by Knijnik & Garton (2022), which will serve as a cornerstone for my research. The authors leverage cases across Latin America to illustrate the current state of gender inequality and contribute to the demand for *“equality, visibility, recognition, and investment”* (p.ix) for women in football, challenging existing male hegemony. Wood’s (2018) significant work employs the concept of Hegemonic masculinity (2005) to delve into gendered power dynamics in the football worlds of Argentina and Brazil. Emphasizing historical roots and contemporary opportunities for female agency in football, Wood provides a nuanced exploration. Elsey and Nadel (2019) as well as Puyol (2019) broaden the research field with a comprehensive examination of the history of women’s sports in Latin America. They make visible the struggles women faced in gaining recognition and acceptance and explore how women have wielded sports, particularly football, as a vehicle for social change and empowerment both in the past and present.

Building upon the groundwork laid by existing literature, my research aims to contribute to the ongoing academic discourse in Latin American football. Positioning football as more than a mere game, this study views it as an integral part of society that shapes not only the national culture and identity but also the realities of the individuals.

1.3 Research Questions

To gain insights into the dynamics of gender relations within the current football landscape in Argentina, particularly in the aftermath of the raising women's rights movement and its notable advancements, my investigation seeks to grasp the present status quo (2019-2024) for women engaged in football. Additionally, incorporating the historical evolution of women's football in Argentina will provide crucial context to better interpret present challenges and progress. The central focus is to amplify their voices, perspectives, and experiences within an arena historically dominated by men. Building upon the aforementioned state of the art, my research will be directed by the following questions:

RQ 1)In the context of Argentine football, how is hegemonic masculinity constructed and legitimized, and what are the implications for the lived experiences of women participating in or engaging with the sport?

RQ 2) What economic, cultural, and political conditions are necessary to deconstruct the existing gender regime and reconstruct a framework that enable parity of participation in Argentine football?

The research questions are intentionally designed with openness to allow for flexibility, enabling the empirical investigation to be shaped by the lived experiences of participants gathered through interviews and observations. Rather than concentrating on a single case, this study provides a diverse panorama of women involved in football, offering a comprehensive analysis of their unique narratives and experiences. The first research question examines gender (power) relations in football, aligning with existing studies on gender disparities in Argentina and using Raewyn Connell's model of "*Hegemonic Masculinity*". This analysis will consider intersecting factors such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, rather than treating gender as an isolated category. The second question explores potential conditions for dismantling oppressive gender structures and fostering gender parity in football, drawing on Nancy Fraser's theory of "*Social Justice*".

The thesis aims to analyze how hegemonic masculinity is legitimized and its implications for women in Argentine football, while also providing a preliminary exploration of the conditions necessary for change toward equal participation. By identifying gaps and hurdles within the current system, the study seeks to contribute new insights based on lived experiences, enriching ongoing discourse and advancing efforts for greater gender justice. This work positions itself as a piece of the larger puzzle, contributing to the growing body of research that critically examines football through gendered lenses – a field traditionally shaped by male perspectives.

1.4 Methodology

This study employs a combination of secondary and primary sources to address the research questions. Secondary sources include a review of literature on gender and football, both globally and within Argentina, alongside relevant quantitative data to establish a contextual foundation (Chapter 4). The primary focus of the study centers on firsthand accounts (Chapter 5), gathered during a two-month field trip to Argentina in September and October 2023.

Research participants were selected using a combination of theoretical sampling and convenience sampling. Theoretical sampling ensured that a diverse range of women's experiences and roles in Argentine football were represented, focusing on different ages, regions, and involvement in amateur or professional contexts. At the same time, convenience sampling was applied to maintain feasibility, allowing access to participants who were more easily reachable through established networks. This dual approach provided a balance between capturing diverse voices and managing practical constraints.

The final empirical investigation consisted of seven individual and two group semi-structured interviews, as well as informal conversations with women active in various roles within Argentina's football scene. Observations were carried out in Buenos Aires, La Plata, and Córdoba, and were enriched by discussions with local scholars such as Julia Hang, Lorena Arambuena, and Debora Majul. The fieldwork approach followed the principle of popular education which emphasizes a horizontal relationship between researcher and participants (Freire, 1970). This methodology frames interviews and observations as a transformative, participatory learning process, fostering critical, reflective thinking while being mindful of the researcher's positionality within the social context.

Data analysis was conducted through a qualitative content analysis approach, guided by the methodologies of Gläser & Laudel (2010) and Prainsack & Pot (2021). A qualitative approach was chosen to capture these individual experiences and to explore the underlying social structures and practices in football. The study combined deductive and inductive methods: applying Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and Fraser's theory of social justice to interpret findings while remaining open to new insights that challenge or expand existing frameworks.

The research adheres to standard qualitative criteria, emphasizing credibility, transferability, comprehensibility, reflexivity, and objectivity. By focusing on depth over representativeness, the aim is to produce a robust, ethically sound exploration of gender relations within Argentine football, illuminating the dynamics of gendered structures and practices and their implications for women's experiences. A detailed overview of the methodology and its implementation will be presented in Chapter 3.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework has been carefully elaborated guided by the proposed research questions and an in-depth literature review. The selected set of theories introduces into the field of gender studies and lays the foundation to apply the implications of gender within the context of football in Argentina. Thus, these theories will serve as a foundation for interpreting the empirical findings of this study and will be particularly useful in identifying codes for the qualitative content analysis using a deductive approach. The framework is built upon two pillars:

Firstly, this work will draw on Connell's influential theory of [HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY](#). Her theory provides a theoretical explanation for the manifestation of gender regimes, particularly focusing on gendered structures and practices that legitimize male hegemony while marginalizing other genders (Connell, 1987, 1995, 2021). Connell's theory lays theoretical foundation to address the first research question, enabling us to explore and analyze the entrenched structures and practices perpetuating gender relations in Argentina and impacting the lived experiences of women involved in football.

Moving on to the second pillar, our focus shifts towards theories that illuminate potential pathways for deconstructing and transforming the existing gender regime in football. Drawing inspiration from Fraser's theory of [SOCIAL JUSTICE](#), we will explore how redistribution, recognition, and representation are considered as essential conditions for paving the way towards de- and reconstructing the societal spaces towards a more gender-inclusive and equal environment (Fraser, 1998, 2005a, 2007a). By integrating these two pillars, the theoretical framework provides a foundation for better understanding and transforming gender relations in society, specifically within football. This framework allows us to unravel the related power dynamics and implications for women in football while simultaneously analyzing the conditions and constraints for change towards a more inclusive and just future.

Additionally, this study incorporates intersectional and decolonial perspectives to understand the socio-historical factors influencing gender dynamics in contemporary football. Intersectional approaches examine how overlapping dimensions like gender, race, and class create unique experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1991). Decolonial theory helps to understand the lasting impacts of colonialism on current social structures including cultural practices, economic disparities, power dynamics and narratives (Quijano, 2007). While acknowledging and subtly integrating the colonial dimension, a comprehensive exploration of decolonial theories would be beyond the scope of this research. Instead, the study limits its decolonial and intersectional theoretical considerations to contextualize today's gender relations and women's experiences in Argentine football.

1.6 Limitations

This study provides insights into gender dynamics within Argentine football, focusing on patterns of hegemonic masculinity, the experiences of women involved in the sport, and potential conditions for change. While offering an explanation of the social phenomenon, it does not provide concrete policy recommendations and is shaped by certain limitations.

The research centers on women's football in Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and La Plata within a limited timeframe, which restricts the generalizability of its findings across Argentina. While the primary focus is on gender dynamics, intersectional factors like race and class are acknowledged but not deeply explored.

The sample includes women already participating in football, potentially overlooking those excluded due to discrimination. Qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations, offer depth but limit broader applicability. The emphasis is on uncovering dynamics and experiences rather than generalizable conclusions.

As a white, queer, middle-class researcher from Germany, my background influenced interactions and interpretations. While cultural familiarity helped build rapport, it also shaped the framing and analysis. A fuller discussion on these positional influences will be provided in the methodology chapter.

Overall, this research offers a foundation for understanding gender dynamics in Argentine football, with further elaboration on limitations and positionality detailed later in the work.

1.7 Structure

This thesis is organized into two distinct parts, each serving a specific purpose in advancing the research process.

PART I: Introduction, Theory, and Methodology: The “*Introduction*” has set the stage by elucidating the research interest, the state of art and the research questions. It also outlines the chosen methodology and the limitation of the work. Chapter 2 delves into the “*Theoretical Framework*”, drawing on key concepts from Connell's model of hegemonic masculinity and Nancy Fraser's social justice framework. Following this, Chapter 3 outlines the chosen “*Methodology*”. It discusses the sampling strategy and elucidates the use of interviews and on-site observation as the primary data collection methods. Additionally, it explicates the process of qualitative content analysis, defining analytical categories for interpreting the gathered data as well as my own positionality as the researcher.

PART II: Contextualization, Findings, Discussion and Conclusion

Part II transitions to the empirical core of the thesis, providing context, analysis, and reflection on the collected data. Chapter 4, “*Football and Gender*”, contextualizes the research within the broader landscape of gender dynamics in football, both globally and within Argentina. It examines the societal role of football in the country, traces the historical evolution of women's football, and explores how feminist movements intersect with the sport. Chapter 5, “*Results and Analysis*”, presents the empirical findings from the fieldwork, offering a detailed analysis of the interviews and observations. This chapter dissects the lived experiences of women in Argentina's football scene, focusing on how hegemonic masculinity is legitimized and its implications for women's participation, as well as the emerging conditions for change. Chapter 6, “*Key Insights and Reflection*” reflects on the findings in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework, highlighting the study's contributions and identifying conditions for change. Chapter 7, “*Outlook*” concludes the thesis by suggesting possible directions for future research, with the aim of offering a thoughtful conclusion to the study.

2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework – as previewed in the introduction chapter – serves as the “*strategic playbook*”, offering a systematic approach to interpret empirical findings and thus, address the research questions. The selected theories act as dynamic tactics, guiding the research process with their scientific-based perspectives. Unlike covert football strategies, which are hidden from opponents, the transparency of these theories is essential for ensuring reliability and contextual clarity. This framework will be outlined in detail in the following sections, where each theoretical component will be presented as part of an open game plan for understanding and analyzing the data.

2.1 Hegemonic Masculinity (Connell)

This study will leverage the research of Raewyn Connell (1987, 1995, 2005, 2021; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), focusing specifically on her model of *hegemonic masculinity* to establish the theoretical foundation for the first research question.

Connell, an Australian transgender sociologist, has been instrumental in shaping critical men's studies and queer-feminist theories. Throughout her extensive body of work, Connell consistently underlines the centrality of “*gender as a key dimension of personal life, culture, institutions, and economic life*” (2021, Preface, p. X). By advocating for the recognition of gender relations, the sociologist aims to provide theoretical explanation for broader societal issues, rectify power imbalances, and promote social justice on both local and global scales (ibid). Connell's model of *hegemonic masculinity*, as initially detailed in her work “*Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*” (1987), provides insights into the mechanisms through which men maintain positions of social dominance over women and other gender identities within specific historical and societal contexts. These insights deliver a foundational framework for understanding how gender relations unfold within broader society (gender orders) and specific institutions (gender regimes), including their legitimization and relational dynamics.

2.1.1 Contextualization

Before delving into the conceptualization of *hegemonic masculinity*, this work will take a brief look at the academic and socio-historical context that influenced Connell's considerations in the early 1980s. Her conception of *hegemonic masculinity* can be traced back to the theoretical underpinnings of Gramsci's notion of “*hegemony*” (Gramsci et al., 1971, p.12), initially used to explain power dynamics between classes and the stabilization of these relations. Gramsci's understanding of hegemony refers to the cultural processes by which a specific social group asserts and maintains a dominant position within a social hierarchy. Building upon these foundations, Connell extends the concept to the field of gender relations (2018, pp. 9–10). However, her framework does not simply echo Gramsci's ideas; it also

reflects the cultural milieu transitioning from second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s to the emergence of third-wave feminism in the 1990s (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, pp. 830–832). The second wave, prevalent in the Western world, built upon the achievements of its forerunner, tackling issues beyond suffrage and legal impediments (Brunell & Burkett, 2024). It delved into a broader spectrum encompassing sexuality, family dynamics, workplace structures, and reproductive rights. Crucially, second-wave feminism sought to dismantle patriarchal structures and challenge male-dominated cultural norms. This discourse permeated social and academic circles just before Connell introduced her concept of *hegemonic masculinity*. During this period, theories of patriarchy were central to feminist discourse (Acker, 1989). However, their limitations, such as their tendency towards universalism and their failure to encompass the diverse experiences of women, led to a shift from patriarchy to gender as the primary theoretical focus (J. W. Messerschmidt, 2018, p. 23). Connell embraced this new approach, making gender the central analytical category. Concurrently, a lively debate took place regarding the role of men in reshaping patriarchal structures (Goode, 1982; and Snodgrass 1977 in Messerschmidt, 2018). Furthermore, Connell incorporated the critical insights of scholars supporting identities of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), such as Maxine Baca Zinn (1982), Angela Davis (1983) and bell hooks (1984). These scholars challenged simplistic power attributions solely to gender, emphasizing the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. This intersectional perspective is discernible in segments of Connell's earlier works and becomes more pronounced in her later writings.

Connell's framework coincided with the rise of “*third-wave feminism*”, emerging after her conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity. This wave of feminism, gaining momentum in the 1990s and extending into the early 2000s, was influenced by the groundbreaking work of BIPOC feminists (Gillis, 2005). It emphasized intersectionality, transfeminism², bodily autonomy, and offered a critical perspective on white feminism³. Challenging rigid notions of gender, it advocated for embracing the complexity of identities and experiences, showcasing an intersectional and multifaceted version of feminism. Connell's incorporation of intersectional perspectives deeply resonated with the ethos of third-wave feminism, broadening discussions on gender and power dynamics. Connell's concept also draws on earlier discussions in social psychology and sociology, particularly addressing the male sex role, acknowledging the socially constructed nature of masculinity and its potential for change in men's

² *Transfeminism* is both a form of activism and intellectual inquiry that challenges traditional feminist frameworks by expanding them to include genders beyond the cis-heteronormative binary. It critically questions who feminism serves and advocates for, encompassing trans men, nonbinary, genderqueer, and intersex people (Coleman, 2023).

³ *White feminism* refers to a form of feminism that emerges from a white, Western perspective and universalizes its experiences, often failing to consider the intersecting identities of race, class, and other social categories. Rooted in colonialist logic, it disregards the specific struggles of women of color and other marginalized groups, focusing primarily on the concerns of white women (Borah et al., 2023, p. 1).

behaviors (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.831; Messerschmidt, 2018, p.27). Additionally, the gay liberation movement of the 1970s and 1980s significantly influenced Connell's model, introducing the idea of a hierarchy of masculinities, emphasizing the oppression of men and by men (ibid). Finally, the field of psychoanalysis, popularizing the concept of gender identity and mapping variations in boys' development, played a role in shaping Connell's framework (Freud, [1917] 1955 in Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This diverse array of sources served as the foundation for Connell's conceptualization of *hegemonic masculinity*.

In her approach, Connell responded to the prevailing cultural and academic climate, challenging and dismissing the then-dominant gender models: biological essentialism, sex role theory and categorical approaches (1987). According to biological essentialism, sex differences are inherent in nature and bestowed by birth determining individual characteristics, behaviors, and roles in society (Strunk et al., 2022, pp. 55–56). For Connell, role theory serves as a first approximation to emphasize that gender is learned and thus not biologically predetermined. However, according to Connell it has some shortcomings: Despite offering a preliminary insight into the social construction of gender, role theory falters in addressing issues of social inequality, power dynamics, and prejudice. Its limitations become evident when grappling with the complexities of intersectionality, suggesting that reforming social arrangements is just about rewriting the script (Connell, 2021, p. 72). In reality, as Connell argues, gender inequalities, akin to class and race disparities, prove challenging to dismantle. She also troubled categorical approaches like the theory of patriarchy, which depicted women and men as opposing bloc, as such models hindered the understanding of social processes and historical change (J. W. Messerschmidt et al., 2018, p. 2).

2.1.2 Conceptualization

Acknowledging the constraints of existing gender theories, Connell champions a paradigm shift, underscoring the need for more comprehensive concepts capable of capturing the “intractability of social relations, resistances to reform, and the circumstances in which major change becomes possible” (Connell, 2021, p. 72). Central to achieving this shift, as Connell argues, is the recognition of “gender as a social structure” (ibid), implying the historical dynamism of gender.

Gender as a social structure

Drawing upon Giddens' theory of structuration (1984), Connell offers a conceptualization of social structures as large-scale patterns of social interaction that shape individual behavior across time and space (1987, p. 91ff; 2021, pp. 72–74). Connell further refines this notion by mapping gender structures into macro-level gender orders and meso-level gender regimes. Gender orders embody overarching societal norms dictating gender expectations, while gender regimes represent localized arrangements within specific institutions like schools, sporting clubs, offices, or families (2021, pp. 73–74).

Individuals draw upon these social arrangements across various social settings to inform their actions. However, they are not passive bystanders; rather, they are self-aware agents with the capacity to actively engage with and shape their societal environment.

In simpler terms, while social structures exert influence on individuals, individuals also possess the agency to challenge, transform, or reinforce these norms, depending on whether they benefit from the existing system. This reciprocal relationship between structures and human agency is central to Giddens' theory of structuration. However, Connell (1987) also succinctly reminds us that “*practice cannot escape structure, cannot float free from its circumstances. It is always obliged to reckon with the constraints that are the precipitate of history*” (p.95). This underscores the intricate relationship between human agency and the surrounding social structures, implying that change is not solely a matter of individual willpower but is also shaped and limited by entrenched societal norms and institutional frameworks. Social structures, deeply entrenched through historical processes, ultimately dictate the possibilities for change, often presenting insurmountable challenges to practical dismantling efforts.

As mentioned above, Connell's model of hegemonic masculinity draws from Gramsci's examination of class relations. It refers to the cultural process by which a particular group asserts and maintains dominance within society. In the realm of masculinities, it signifies the prominence of one form of masculinity above others, which becomes culturally esteemed or celebrated at a given time (1995, pp. 76–81). In her initial framework, Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as: “*the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women* (emphasis added; 1995, p.77). By using the term *configuration* Connell refers to a socially constructed pattern of behaviors, practices and processes (1987, 1995). This configuration “*legitimizes unequal gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity and among masculinities*” (Messerschmidt, 2018, p. 28). She makes special emphasis on the relational nature of the concept by underlining that hegemonic masculinity is “*always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women*” (emphasis added; 1987, p.183). Both the *relational and legitimization aspects* are key to her concept, aiming to explain the unequal relationship between a specific type of masculinity and a corresponding form of femininity, coined as emphasized femininity. This emphasized femininity is characterized by its accommodating and complementary subordination in relation to hegemonic masculinity as well as certain nonhegemonic forms of masculinity through acts of compliance, nurturance, and empathy, which are perceived as inherent “*womanly virtues*” (Messerschmidt et al., 2018, p.37). She identifies various other forms of femininity, including those characterized by strategies of resistance or compliance, as well as intricate combinations of compliance, resistance, and cooperation (Connell, 1987, pp. 187-188).

Hegemony as a state of ascendancy

While only a minority of men may embody hegemonic masculinity, exemplifying the most esteemed form of masculine expression and exerting a highly normative influence, it compels all other men to orient themselves in relation to it (1987, pp.184-186). Hegemony, in this context, does not necessarily imply physical violence, although it could be reinforced through coercive means. Rather, it refers to a state of ascendancy achieved through cultural norms, institutional structures, and persuasive ideologies (*legitimization process*), encouraging individuals to not only accept but also embrace and embody these imbalances in gender dynamics. Hence, hegemonic masculinity should be understood as forming a *pattern of hegemony* rather than mere domination (p.184).

Forms of nonhegemonic masculinities

Connell differentiates four distinct categories of nonhegemonic masculinities that are intricately linked to the construction of hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2018, p. 29): Firstly, what Connells calls *complicit masculinities*, while not embodying hegemonic masculinity directly, still benefit from the “*patriarchal dividend*” (Connell, 1995, p. 79) through their actions. Secondly, *subordinate masculinities* are portrayed as inferior or deviant in comparison to hegemonic masculinity, as for example homosexual man. Thirdly, *marginalized masculinities* face trivialization and discrimination due to various forms of unequal treatment, such as those based on class, race, ethnicity, and age (ibid). Lastly, *protest masculinities* manifest as hypermasculine responses that compensate for the lack of economic and political power within certain social positions.

Based on the idea of gender as a social structure, Connell highlights the fluid and evolving nature of these masculinities, asserting that they are subject to change within specific social and historical contexts (Messerschmidt, 2018, p. 29). Hegemonic masculinity can adapt by incorporating elements from various masculinities and femininities. Therefore, masculinity and femininity, rather than fixed entities, are dynamic processes and relationships through which individuals, both men and women, experience their gender, an ongoing, negotiated, and relational process, characterized by intricate micro-macro dynamics. The potential for a power struggle in attaining hegemony exists, opening the door for newer forms of masculinity to replace older ones. This suggests that there is a chance for a more compassionate and less oppressive way of embodying masculinity to become widespread, contributing to a process aimed at dismantling gender hierarchies.

Mapping gender: Gender Orders and Regimes

As mentioned before, Connell examines gender relations at both the societal level, termed “*gender order*” (1987, p. 134) and the institutional level, labeled as “*gender regime*” (p. 120): Gender regimes infiltrate various institutions, such as schools, offices, factories, churches, sporting clubs, and government, each exhibiting its unique dynamics in gender relations (2021, pp. 72–73). Institutions, in

this context, denote arrangements (e.g. rules and norms) that mold and limit social life. *Schools* for example manifest gender regimes through various practices shaping femininity and masculinity, such as subject choices, peer group structures, sports and dating patterns (J. W. Messerschmidt, 2018, p. 37). The patterns differ from one school to another, yet they operate within certain boundaries that mirror the prevailing dynamics of sexual politics in society at large (*gender order*). Beyond schools, other institutions like *the family and labor markets* exhibit gender regimes, each characterized by certain dynamics as the sexual division of labor (2021, pp. 72–73). *The state* also deeply influences social gender relations, evident in its involvement in issues like birth control, attempts to regulate sexuality, and support for marriage through taxation (1987, pp. 125–126, 2021, p. 134). By shaping social categories, the state plays a significant role in constituting the gender order.

Geography of masculinities: global, regional and local

In her reformulation of the concept, Connell together with her colleague Messerschmidt advocates to expand the analysis from a society-wide level to recognize hegemonic masculinity on three different geographical levels (Messerschmidt et al., 2018, p.40): local, regional, and global. The local refers to the constructed gender regimes in the context “*face-to-face interaction of families, organizations, and immediate communities*” (p.40), the regional refers to the general gender order society wide, and the global refers to the global gender order including “*transnational world politics, business, and media*” (p.40). There are also interconnections between these levels; global hegemonic masculinities influence regional and local counterparts, and regional hegemonic masculinities contribute cultural elements adopted or modified in global settings and applied in local gender dynamics. A local gender regime is prone to exhibit several characteristics like the broader societal gender order, yet it might deviate from it in specific ways. In certain situations, it might even overturn prevailing patterns.

Four key dimensions of gender structures

After mapping gender into orders and regimes, Connell emphasizes the multifaceted nature of gender relations. She introduces a structural model distinguishing between four dimensions: *power, economic, emotional, and symbolic relations* (2021, pp. 75–86). These dimensions intertwine and mutually influence each other, shaping gender dynamics, sometimes in harmony, but often pursuing divergent aims using distinct means. Connell refrains from asserting the exclusivity of these structures, rather she posits them as valuable tools for interpreting contemporary history, offering a pragmatic approach for describing any organization’s gender regime:

I. Power relations

The first dimension aims to explain the distribution of *power* between genders, highlighting the historically dominant position held by men (2021, p. 77). This dimension focuses on how “*control, authority, and force are exercised along gender lines, including organizational hierarchy, legal power,*

and collective and individual violence” (2006, p. 839). Despite some changes in recent decades, Connell notes that these power dynamics persist globally, manifesting in various forms such as men's authority over women in family settings, sexual violence, and media portrayals (2021, p. 77). Connell takes the example of rape as form of person-to-person violence to illustrate the deeply rooted power imbalances and ideologies of male supremacy (1987, p. 107). This connection between violence and power reinforces and perpetuates societal norms, as evidenced by ongoing gender-based violence statistics, ranging from verbal harassment and intimidation to physical assault, rape, and even murder (Carrington, 2015; DeKeseredy & Hall-Sanchez, 2018 in Connell, 2021, p.77). The systematic alignment of masculinity with power is further evidenced by the fact that tools of organized violence, such as weapons and military expertise, are predominantly controlled by men (1987, p. 107). Furthermore, she emphasizes the importance of looking beyond individual acts of dominance or coercion to recognize a broader framework of power. This power often operates indirectly through the systematic embedding of patriarchal authority within organizational structures. Connell underscores the pervasive influence of men in positions of authority within corporations, government departments, and universities, often creating barriers that impede women's access to respective positions (2021, p. 78). Another key aspect of power, according to Connell, is the ability to shape perceptions and dictate the terms of discourse. This includes defining situations, framing issues, setting moral standards, and asserting hegemony, highlighting the multifaceted nature of social power. It involves not only overt domination but also the subtle manipulation of perceptions and narratives (p.79). Additionally, Connell draws attention to the fact that patriarchal power has historical roots in the establishment of global empires (p.78): Over centuries, imperial powers colonized indigenous lands, exerting economic and military dominance over the today's post-colonial world. This colonization involved the subjugation, exploitation, and displacement of indigenous societies, with gender dynamics playing a central role. The coloniality of gender perpetuated violence and control over women's bodies, using them as tools for reproduction and maintaining racial purity. This system entrenched a patriarchal order that aligned with the colonial economic exploitation, ensuring that gender oppression was intertwined with racial and economic subjugation (Lugones, 2008). These gendered colonial legacies persist today, evident in social hierarchies entwining gender and race, which continue to shape many societies worldwide.

II. Economic relations

The economic dimension of gender relations revolves around how “*production and consumption are arranged along gender lines, including the gendering of occupations and the division between paid work and domestic labor*” (Connell, 2006, p. 839). Thus, gendered economic relations manifests in the stark separation between paid productive labor, often associated with men, and unpaid reproductive labor, primarily shouldered by women. The key issue lies not only in the type of work performed but also in the value society ascribes to each, with unpaid domestic labor remaining largely invisible and

undervalued, despite its foundational role in ensuring the social reproduction necessary for the workforce's maintenance in capitalist societies.

Historical shifts, such as the entry of women into industrial sectors during WWII, provide evidence of the gendered flexibility of labor in response to economic necessity (1987, p.99). However, these changes are often temporary, as societal structures revert to traditional roles post-crisis, underscoring the entrenched nature of gendered labor divisions. Connell (1987) highlights that even when women enter paid labor, they are disproportionately funneled into caregiving roles within sectors like healthcare and education, which perpetuate traditional notions of femininity while reinforcing economic stratification. Moreover, educational systems act as mechanisms that reproduce these labor divisions, with distinct enrollment patterns reinforcing gendered career paths (R. Connell, 1987, p. 100). Men continue to dominate fields like engineering and technology, while women are steered towards professions aligned with caregiving and domestic responsibilities (2021, p.81). These divisions are further reinforced by social and cultural expectations, limiting women's mobility within the economic hierarchy. Drawing on Holter's (2004) insights, Connell (2021) suggests that this divide forms the foundation of the modern gender order in capitalist societies, shaping perceptions of “*masculinity*” and “*femininity*”. According to Connell (2021, p.81), the COVID-19 pandemic revealed and exacerbated existing gender inequalities, as women disproportionately shouldered the increased burden of unpaid care work due to lockdowns and school closures. This situation underscored the vulnerability of women's roles in both paid and unpaid labor markets, making the ongoing double shift – the combination of paid employment and unpaid domestic responsibilities – more visible than ever.

Connell’s exploration of gendered economic relations reveals a system in which the sexual division of labor is not only deeply ingrained but also instrumental in sustaining broader capitalist structures. The undervaluation of women’s reproductive labor serves to support male-dominated economic activities, ensuring that traditional gender roles and inequalities remain firmly entrenched, despite historical shifts or temporary disruptions.

III. Emotional relations

Connell, drawing from Simone de Beauvoir and Sigmund Freud, emphasizes the importance of emotional relations within gender frameworks (1987, p. 111, 2021, pp. 82–84). All social interactions have an emotional dimension, and Freud’s concept of “*cathexis*” explains how people unconsciously assign emotional charges – both positive and negative – to others. These emotional investments can lead to ambivalence, with affectionate and hostile feelings coexisting. Understanding this dynamic is key to grasping negative emotional attachments, such as misogyny and homophobia.

Connell identifies several forms of cathexis (1987, pp. 112–113):

Sexual relations: Dominant gender norms, especially in the Global North, emphasize heterosexuality while marginalizing other sexualities. The social construction of desire is evident in struggles for marriage equality and the regulation of sexuality through laws and taboos. In heterosexual relationships, women are often objectified, particularly in industries like fashion and media.

Household formations: Emotional relations in households are shaped by ideals of romantic love, reinforcing heteronormative roles, with women as caregivers and men as breadwinners. Media perpetuates these roles, contributing to social inequalities.

Parent-child relations: Gendered patterns in domestic labor foster emotional bonds between mothers and children, while fathers, as breadwinners, are often emotionally distant. However, emerging ideals of engaged fatherhood are challenging these norms.

Emotional labor in professions: Jobs involving emotional engagement with clients are often gendered, as seen in roles like flight attendants or debt collectors.

Connell's analysis highlights how emotional relations, structured along gender lines, influence personal relationships, work environments, and societal dynamics.

IV. Symbolic relations (communication and representation)

Social practices are inherently tied to interpreting and assigning meaning to the world. In the context of gender relations, symbolic interactions are pivotal in shaping how gender identities are culturally constructed, including "*the language and symbols of gender difference, and the prevailing beliefs and attitudes about gender*" (Connell, 2006, p. 839). Terms like "*woman*" or "*man*" invoke a dense network of cultural assumptions that extend far beyond biological categories, embedding notions of power, roles, and social expectations (Connell, 2021, pp. 84–86). One significant structure of gender symbolism is phallogentric language, as theorized by Lacan. In this framework, masculinity is positioned as the authoritative and privileged subjectivity, anchoring meaning to a male-centered perspective. This linguistic system limits the fluidity of meaning, consolidating power around patriarchal norms. The dominance of this phallogentric view reinforces traditional gender hierarchies by naturalizing male authority through language.

Connell argues that queer theory, which critiques heteronormativity, provides a counterpoint to phallogentrism by emphasizing fluidity in gender and sexual identities (Connell, 2021, p. 85). It challenges the binary framework of masculine versus feminine and brings attention to diverse forms of self-presentation, resisting the fixed meanings that patriarchal language seeks to impose.

Although language is the most widely examined medium of symbolic gender relations, it is far from the only one (Connell, 2021, p. 85). Gender symbolism permeates various cultural domains such as dress, makeup, gestures, visual media (photography, film), and digital platforms. These cultural forms act as additional sites where gender meanings are constructed, reinforced, and contested. The multiplicity of symbolic forms demonstrates that challenging traditional gender norms requires a broader cultural engagement beyond linguistic critique. It involves a deep interrogation of how gender is communicated and represented across all cultural media.

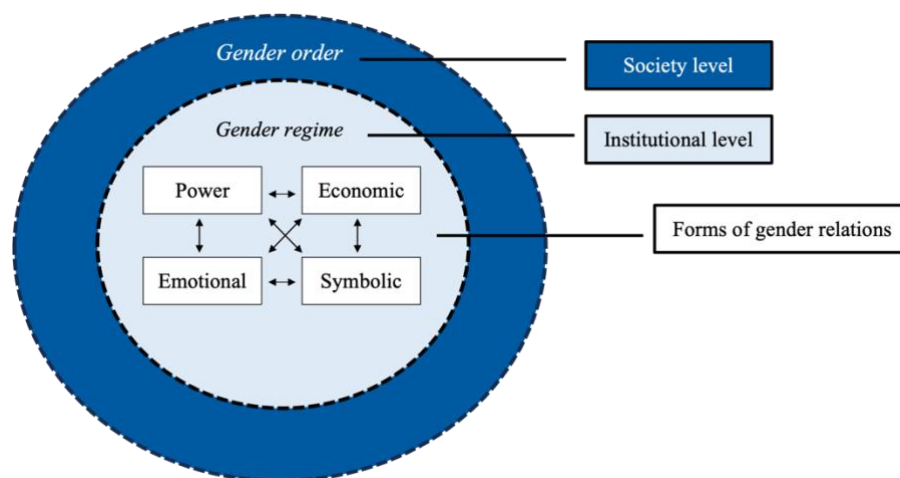


Figure 1: Model of Hegemonic Masculinity (freely adapted from Connell, 2021)

Intersectionality

As frequently underscored by Connell, these four gender dimensions are no static entities, but rather interweave and mutually influence each other in real-life contexts (2021, p. 86): Economic divisions, for instance, rely on symbolic justifications that are deeply entwined with gender constructs. By emphasizing this intricate interplay, Connell also contends that gender relations should not be viewed in isolation rather as an integral part of a complex network of interconnected social structures. In doing so, Connell alludes to a pivotal concept in contemporary gender analysis: *intersectionality*.

The term „*intersectionality*” was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) during her advocacy for the rights of Black women in US courts and highlights the importance of considering multiple dimensions of identity – such as gender, race, class, ability, and age – in understanding individuals' experiences and struggles. Depending on the research context, additional dimensions such as religion may also come into play. Recognizing the limitations of addressing gender in isolation, intersectionality offers a holistic framework for analyzing the intricacies of lived experiences and the intersecting systems of disadvantage which marginalized groups face.

To illustrate, consider a low-income woman of color in the workforce. She may face multiple layers of discrimination and disadvantage based on her gender, race, and socio-economic status. While gender inequality may manifest in the form of lower wages compared to her male counterparts, racial discrimination may further exacerbate her marginalization, leading to limited job opportunities and access to resources. Additionally, her socio-economic status may compound these challenges, affecting her ability to access quality education and healthcare. In this scenario, intersectionality allows us to understand how these various dimensions of identity intersect and mutually reinforce each other, shaping the woman's experiences and opportunities in the workforce. Without considering the interplay of gender, race, and socio-economic status, a simplistic analysis would fail to capture the complexity of her situation and the intersecting systems of disadvantage she faces.

Connell adopts this intersectional approach in her studies to fully capture how various social characteristics intersect to shape individuals' positions within society (2021, p. 86). In doing so she makes special emphasis on the existence of multiple social inequalities and the interconnected nature of social justice struggles, facilitating a nuanced understanding of power dynamics.

Social embodiment

Gender relations and individual experiences are not only influenced by various social characteristics such as sexuality, race, and age, but are also deeply ingrained within individuals' physical selves. The concept of social embodiment, central to Connell's gender analysis, highlights the significant role of human bodies as both agents and objects in shaping gender dynamics (2021, p. 47). Connell underscores the interconnectedness of social structures with individuals' lived experiences and bodily realities. As Connell asserts, "*Gender is a structure of a specific kind, built from the relationships that concern the reproductive distinctions between human bodies. Gender practice is a reflexive process of social embodiment. Gender analyses specify how a society handles sexuality, reproduction, child growth, motherhood, fatherhood, and all that is socially connected with these processes*" (2012, p.1677-1678). Our bodies are influenced by a myriad of factors including diet, sexual norms, work, sports, urbanization, education, and healthcare. These influences are interconnected through social practices organized by larger structures such as class, gender, race, and the global economy (2021, pp. 47–51). To better understand how social structures shape our bodies, it can be illustrated by the domain of attractiveness: social norms and media portrayals often dictate standards of attractiveness for each gender, impacting individuals' perceptions and behaviors, including practices like dieting or cosmetic surgery. Similarly, gender norms influence participation in physical activities and sports, with boys typically encouraged towards aggressive or competitive sports and girls towards more passive or aesthetic-focused activities. In the reproductive arena, societal attitudes towards gender can affect access to reproductive healthcare services and individuals' experiences with reproductive health issues. For example, women may face barriers to contraception or abortion services due to restrictive laws or

social stigma surrounding their reproductive choices. Norms surrounding family planning, childbirth, and parenting are deeply ingrained, impacting individuals' decisions and experiences regarding reproduction, bodily autonomy, and identity. Gender-based violence, exemplified by movements like #MeToo, is a stark example of social embodiment. It manifests in various forms such as domestic violence and sexual assault, rooted in power dynamics stemming from gender inequality. Victims often internalize feelings of shame or guilt, while perpetrators may justify their actions based on societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality.

However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) note in their reformulation that human bodies are not only objects influenced by social structures, but they also recognize bodies as “*actively, intimately, and intricately involved in social processes*” (p.851). This understanding implies that masculinities and femininities are continually contested and not rigidly bound to predetermined attributes. Instead, there is an ongoing interaction between bodily processes and social structures that can evolve over time, demonstrating a reflexive process of social embodiment. In essence, Connell's gender theory emphasizes the pivotal relationship between the body and gender. As Connell (2021) eloquently puts it, “*We can only begin to understand gender if we recognize the close intertwining of social and bodily processes. We are born into both physical pain and social order*” (p. 47). Thus, bodies are not mere objects shaped solely by external structures and practices; they are also active agents capable of influencing and reshaping our reality. This leads us to the last key part of Connell's model: the historical dynamism of gender and its capacity for change.

Historical dynamic and crisis tendencies

Another key component of Connell's understanding of gender refers to its historical dynamism, implying that gender relations (including hegemonic masculinity) are not set in stone but rather subject to change (2021, pp. 88–89). Gender relations showcase a historical instability what Connell terms as “*crisis tendencies*” (p.88). These tendencies, exhibiting uneven impacts on gender relations, continuously challenge the established gender order and regimes, presenting both constraints and opportunities for action (J. W. Messerschmidt et al., 2018, p. 36). Connell suggests that these tendencies may have intensified in recent times, leading to a significant erosion of patriarchy's legitimacy and evoking varied responses among different groups of people (2021, p.89). These crisis tendencies are observable within the four primary structures described above, representing threats to the integrity of the male-dominated system.

Economic relations provide an example of this dynamism. The increased integration of women in the labor market and structural shifts in the global economy have reshaped social divisions of labor, prompting scrutiny of traditional gender norms and reconfiguring power dynamics (Connell, 2021, pp. 89-90). While more women have entered the workforce, changes have disproportionately impacted

young, working-class men reliant on industries like manufacturing. These disruptions in economic relations illustrate the crisis tendencies affecting gender dynamics, eroding the dominance of men in certain sectors yet often maintaining persistent disparities in income, leadership, and economic security (C. L. Williams & Neely, 2018, p. 158). However, these gains have not been equally distributed among all women, with BIPOC individuals and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds still facing substantial barriers (Connell, 2021, p. 90), underlying once again the need for an intersectional analysis.

Changes in other dimensions can also be observed: in power relations, policies around divorce and domestic violence have altered familial dynamics; emotional relations see shifting ideals around romantic partnerships, particularly in the Global North; and in symbolic relations, movements for gender-neutral language and diverse media representation are challenging traditional narratives. However, resistance to these changes underscores the complexity of altering ingrained gender norms.

Connell raises key questions on why and under what circumstances gender relations and their organizing structures change (2021, p.88). While many analyses emphasize external forces – such as technological advancements, urbanization, mass media, secularism, and modernization – as catalysts for change, Connell underscores the inherent tendencies within gender relations themselves. Drawing on Habermas, she posits that internal contradictions within structures of inequality lead to crises that challenge existing patterns, requiring structural reform (Habermas, 1976 in Connell, 2021, p. 88). Consequently, hegemonic masculinities are constantly in flux (Starck & Luyt, 2019, p. 433).

Human agency plays a significant role in these processes, as individuals and groups have the capacity to shape and contest social structures. However, Connell also recognizes the constraints imposed by existing power dynamics and the interests of those who benefit from maintaining these structures (1987, p. 92-95). Efforts to change gender relations are often met with resistance, highlighting that shifts are not solely a matter of willpower or agency but are also shaped by the structural context and conflicting interests. The adaptability of hegemonic masculinity – characterized by dominant beliefs and practices that uphold male dominance – often neutralizes these challenges (C. L. Williams & Neely, 2018, pp. 157-158). Connell emphasizes the resilience of those benefiting from the status quo, cautioning against a linear view of progress toward gender equality. Instead, her theory provides a framework that recognizes both progress and the persistent adaptability of inequalities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2018 in Messerschmidt et al., 2018, p. 257).

Connell's analysis paves the way for this research's next focus: after unpacking how gender relations manifest in society and organizations, we will explore the historical dynamism of these relations, and the conditions needed to transform them. To further this understanding, Fraser's theory of social justice will complement and expand upon Connell's insights.

2.2 Social Justice (Fraser)

After laying the theoretical groundwork to understand how gender relations manifest in society and institutions, along with their inherent power dynamics and thus implications for the lived experiences of women, this study now turns its theoretical focus towards investigating the conditions necessary for transforming and dismantling these existing gendered structures and practices. This aligns with the second research question outlined in section 1.3. To address this second research question, I will use Nancy Fraser's SOCIAL JUSTICE model (1998). Nancy Fraser is a well-known political philosopher and critical theorist within gender studies and related social justice debates. Her theoretical considerations are grounded in a synthesis of (post) Marxism, feminism, and poststructuralism (Downs & Laufer, 2012; The New School, 2023). Presently, she serves as a professor of philosophy at The New School in New York. Her reputation is largely built on her critical analyses and theoretical advancements in political philosophy, with notable contributions to discussions on identity politics, the concept of social justice, and feminist theories.

Fraser's social justice model, with its focus on the interconnected principles of *redistribution* and *recognition*, serves a comprehensive lens through which we can analyze the material and culture-based prerequisites for social transformation, particularly in the dismantling and transformation of (gendered) structures and practices (1995, 1998, 2003, 2007a). Like Connell, she adapts her model over time and adds a political dimension in later works: *representation* (Fraser, 2005a). These theoretical insights will later be applied to the context of football in Argentina, exploring the conditions necessary to deconstruct the existing male-dominated structures and practices. The goal is to better understand how to foster a gender-inclusive environment that provides access and a safe space for everyone, regardless of gender.

2.2.1 Contextualization

Her concept of social justice published in her two papers “*Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, Participation*” (1998) and “*Feminist Politics in the Age of Recognition: A Two-Dimensional Approach to Gender Justice*” (2007a) is grounded in the feminist discussions of recent decades, aligning with the prevailing cultural and intellectual trends of the time. At the end of the 20th century, Fraser identifies a shift in feminist theory from a labor-centered, quasi-Marxist focus to post-Marxist conceptions centered on culture and identity (1998, pp. 1-2, 2007a, p. 24). This shift expands the focus from *material distribution* to issues of *recognition and identity*. Fraser aims to bridge the gap between traditional socialist feminism's emphasis on redistribution and the cultural turn's focus on recognition. She situates her analysis within contemporary trends, noting the rise of struggles for recognition alongside the decline of those for egalitarian redistribution. While recognizing this shift as progress, Fraser cautions that the emphasis on recognition may risk displacing redistributive goals, especially in the context of rising neoliberalism and global capitalism.

In light of this diagnosis, Fraser outlines her approach to gender theory and feminist politics. The four key aims of her model consist of (2007a, p. 25): (1) a two-dimensional understanding of gender that accommodates both recognition and redistribution, (2) a two-dimensional conception of justice grounded in the principle participatory parity, (3) a non-identitarian account of recognition compatible with redistribution, and (4) how to implement this model in practical terms and the problems arising when envisioning institutional reforms. In her later works, she enhances her model by incorporating the dimension of “*representation*” a theme that will be revisited later in this work.

2.2.2 Conceptualization

This work will take her four key features as a roadmap:

(1) Conception of gender: Starting with Fraser’s aim of a two-dimensional framework of gender that simultaneously addresses both *redistribution* and *recognition* concerns (1998, pp. 2–3, 2007a, pp. 25–26): This involves theorizing the gendered elements of the *political economy* and *androcentrism in the cultural realm* without reducing one dimension to the other, recognizing both as distinct yet interdependent dimensions of social justice. The distributive lens views gender as “*a basic organizing principle of the economic structure of society*” (1998, p.2), highlighting the division of labor into paid productive labor and unpaid reproductive labor, with women predominantly tasked with the latter. Additionally, gender shapes the division within paid work, delineating higher-paid, male-dominated roles in manufacturing and the professions from lower-paid, female-dominated pink collar and domestic service positions. This configuration contributes to an economic framework that produces gender-specific forms of distributive injustice. On the other hand, the recognition lens perceives gender as a status differentiation entrenched in cultural patterns, with androcentrism playing a major role: “*The authoritative construction of norms that privilege traits associated with masculinity and the pervasive devaluation and disparagement of things coded as 'feminine,' paradigmatically - but not only - women*” (1998, p.2). This androcentrism, when institutionalized, may result in gender-specific status injuries for women, encompassing sexual assault, domestic violence, objectification in the media, harassment in everyday life, and exclusion from public spheres. These harms represent injustices of misrecognition, largely independent of political economy. As such, remedying them requires additional independent measures of recognition, beyond the scope of redistribution alone. By combining redistribution and recognition, gender emerges as a two-dimensional category that requires attention to both political-economic and cultural-discursive aspects.

(2) Conception of social justice and the principle of parity of participation: Fraser’s conception of social justice mirrors her understanding of gender, addressing both distributive and recognition-based injustices (2007a, pp. 27–30). Rooted in the principle of “*parity of participation*”, Fraser asserts that

“justice requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers” (1998, p. 5). To achieve this, Fraser outlines two essential conditions (2007a, pp. 27-28): The first one, associated with distributive justice, focuses on the economic structure, ensuring material resource distribution for independence and equal opportunity, preventing deprivation and exploitation. The second condition, linked to the status order of society (recognition), requires cultural values to express equal respect, opposing patterns that devalue certain groups and fostering equal opportunities for social esteem. These dimensions adhere to the norm of *parity of participation*, providing a standard to evaluate justice in the gender order.

Fraser's understanding of parity involves four characteristics (2007a, pp. 28–29): First, it is not strictly about numerical equality (e.g. a specific quota) but rather a qualitative condition of being a peer and interacting on equal footing. Secondly, Fraser recognizes that barriers to parity often arise from both maldistribution and misrecognition. For instance, addressing gender disparity in political representation involves dismantling androcentric hierarchies *and* restructuring the division of labor to eliminate women's *“double shift”*. Thirdly, justice, in Fraser's perspective, demands parity of participation across diverse social arenas, including labor markets, sexual relations, family life, public spheres, and voluntary associations in civil society. Recognizing the distinct nature of participation in each arena, Fraser emphasizes that the meaning of parity must be adapted to the specific kind of participation under consideration. Lastly, Fraser's intersectional lens posits that justice requires participatory parity across all major axes of social differentiation. Advocates must consider whether measures designed to address one form of disparity might inadvertently worsen disparities along other axes (e.g. race). In conclusion, Fraser's notion of justice as participatory parity provides a normative standard for evaluating social arrangements across distribution and recognition dimensions and multiple axes of social differentiation.

(iii) Non-identitarian account of recognition: Fraser advocates for a *non-identitarian approach* to feminist politics, particularly in recognition (2007a, p. 30-32). She challenges identity politics that affirm a distinct feminine identity, proposing instead a status-based approach where recognition means equality for women as *“full partners in social interaction”* (2007a, p. 30), based on her principle of participatory parity. According to Fraser, misrecognition happens when cultural norms depict women as inferior or marginalize them from social, political, and public life. Fraser (1998, p. 2) notes: *“Women suffer gender-specific status injuries, including sexual assault and domestic violence; objectifying and demeaning stereotypical depictions in the media; harassment and disparagement in everyday life; and exclusion or marginalization in public spheres and deliberative bodies.* These injustices of misrecognition represent a *“serious violation of justice”* (2007c, p. 31), and the remedy lies in dismantling androcentric norms and fostering inclusivity to promote gender equality.

(iv) Practical implementation (and challenges): Fraser highlights the interconnectedness of redistribution and recognition in feminist politics (2007a, pp. 32–34), but also warns of potential unintended consequences when trying to integrate the two. For example, redistributive policies aimed at reducing women’s poverty – such as those targeting female-headed households – can inadvertently reinforce societal biases that devalue caregiving. This perpetuates misrecognition, reducing the social status of single mothers. To avoid reinforcing sexist stereotypes, Fraser argues that redistribution efforts must also consider their impact on women’s status and be complemented by cultural changes that revalue caregiving and traditionally “*feminine*” qualities

Similarly, recognition-based initiatives, like campaigns against prostitution and pornography, may unintentionally harm the economic position of sex workers (ibid; Fraser, 1998, p. 9). This illustrates how recognition efforts can sometimes lead to negative redistributive outcomes. Fraser points out that addressing sexist misrecognition can, in some cases, worsen economic inequalities, giving rise to criticisms that recognition efforts are “*merely symbolic*”.

To navigate these challenges, Fraser advocates for a more integrated approach. She suggests combining redistributive measures, such as income equality initiatives, with efforts to challenge gender-coded cultural values (e.g. reevaluating low-paying “*women’s work*”) (ibid). She stresses that the revaluation of femininity must go beyond cultural recognition and address the economic structures that perpetuate dependency and powerlessness. Fraser concludes that only by addressing both the cultural and economic devaluation of femininity can feminist politics achieve genuine progress in redistribution and recognition.

In a nutshell, Fraser advocates for an integrative approach through a two-dimensional model, encompassing both distribution and recognition (1998, p. 10; 2007a, p. 32–34). This model, together with Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, enables a profound understanding of women’s subordination, addressing both class- and status-related aspects. It preserves the insights of Marxism while incorporating lessons from the “*post-socialist*” cultural turn. Similar to other feminist scholars of her time, Fraser repeatedly emphasizes the importance of an intersectional lens, recognizing that gender intersects with other axes of subordination, but also complicating the feminist approach in practical terms. She proposes, however, to resolve these complexities by invoking the principle of participatory parity at both the intergroup and intragroup levels.

The dimension of representation: Even after 25 years, Fraser’s social justice model remains highly relevant and continues to be applied across various research fields. It has been utilized in studies on education equity (e.g. Bozalek, 2020), healthcare disparities (e.g. Khan, 2022), and gender in sports (e.g. Knijnik & Garton, 2022). Its continued relevance today is further underscored by Fraser’s ongoing

review and refinement of the model: Following the publication of “*Recognition or Redistribution?*” in 2003, Fraser came to acknowledge the inherent limitations of the prevailing two-dimensional model, and therefore sought to develop a third dimension, which she defined as “*representation*” (2005b, 2005a, 2007b, 2008). Fraser realized that certain forms of injustices, particularly those related to exclusion, had been inadequately addressed due to what she termed the *political constitution of society* (2005b, 238). Previously, the discourse on justice predominantly revolved around the dichotomy of redistribution versus recognition, assuming that justice primarily concerned the national citizenry (ibid, p. 233). However, Fraser contends that this narrow conception is no longer sufficient in today’s globalized world. It fails to grapple with the fundamental question of *who* constitutes the community, and *which individuals* are impacted by injustices (2005b, p. 233). By incorporating the dimension of representation in her model, Fraser turns the focus to the *subjects of justice* and the way political participation is framed.

In Fraser’s refined conceptualization, misrepresentation “*occurs when political boundaries and/or decision rules function to wrongly deny some people the possibility of participating on a par with others in social interaction – including, but not only, in political arenas*” (2005b, p. 239). She distinguishes between two forms of representation-related injustices (2005b, p. 240): The first one, “***ordinary-political misrepresentation***” (p.240) refers to the exclusion or muting of certain voices within a political system, preventing them from fully participating in political processes. This form of injustice involves debates over electoral systems and other mechanisms of political representation. Fraser suggests that these injustices can be addressed through affirmative remedies, which aim to protect the political rights of marginalized groups and ensure equal political voice for everyone (p.244).

The second type, “***misframing***” (Fraser, 2005b, p.240) is a more complex and subtle form of injustice. Here, “*injustices arise when the community’s boundaries are drawn in such a way as to wrongly exclude some people from the chance to participate at all in its authorized contests over justice*” (p.240). Thus, when justice issues are framed in a manner that unjustly excludes certain individuals from consideration, it results in a unique form of meta-injustice, where individuals are denied the opportunity to make primary justice claims within that framework. Fraser argues that this global-scale injustice is rooted in the structure of the international system of supposedly equal sovereign states, where political spaces are often manipulated to favor wealthy states at the expense of global poor (2008, p. 408). She argues that addressing misframing requires transformative remedies. These remedies must go beyond the idea of national citizenry and consider the transnational nature of contemporary politics and integrate redistribution, recognition, and representation to create a balanced and just system (2005a, p. 305). Furthermore, by using the term “*meta-political misrepresentation*” (2005b, p. 250), Fraser follows the argument that it is not only about the what and who of justice, but also not less importantly the *how*. She underscores the issue of states and transnational elites which control the process of setting the

framework, thereby silencing those who may be adversely affected and preventing the establishment of democratic forums to address their claims. This results in the exclusion of many people from participating in the meta-discourses that shape the authoritative division of political space. Without institutional arenas for such participation and subjected to an undemocratic approach, the majority is denied the opportunity to engage on equal terms in decision-making, reflecting a significant democratic deficit.

In response to these challenges, Fraser advocates for a reimagined participation framework that meticulously examines political space, accounting for bundled politics and decision rules and thinking beyond the national state boundaries (Fraser, 2007b, p. 313). Such an approach, as Fraser argues, seeks to determine “*who is included or excluded from the circle of those entitled to a just distribution and reciprocal recognition*” (2005b, p. 9).

In this regard, representation goes beyond ensuring equal political voice within established communities; it involves reframing disputes that transcend political boundaries (ibid).

The combined frameworks of Connell’s hegemonic masculinity and Fraser’s social justice model offer a multidimensional lens to analyze gender dynamics in football. Connell’s concept highlights how male dominance is maintained through relational power dynamics, subordinating both women and non-hegemonic masculinities. Her understanding of gender as a social structure suggests that although gender hierarchies are entrenched, they hold potential for change.

Fraser complements Connell by balancing recognition, redistribution, and representation, Fraser’s three-dimensional politics aims to address a broad range of gender injustices in a global context. Her framework emphasizes context-specific analysis and recognizes that individuals or groups can experience multiple injustices that should be examined beyond the nation-state model.

In contexts like football, where gendered power structures are deeply rooted, Fraser’s three dimensions – redistribution, recognition, and representation – are essential for understanding and addressing inequalities. Together, Connell’s and Fraser’s frameworks provide a comprehensive analysis of how gendered power relations manifest, endure, and can be transformed within the sport.

3 Methodology

This study investigates how hegemonic masculinity is constructed and legitimized in Argentine football and seeks to understand the implications for the experiences of women who participate in or engage with the sport. Additionally, it examines economic, cultural, and political conditions necessary to enable parity of participation in Argentina.

To address these research questions, the study employs a mixed methodology combining secondary and primary data. Chapter 4 provides an in-depth review of **secondary sources**, drawing on both global and Argentina-specific literature on gender and football. This contextual background is complemented by relevant quantitative data to make the reader familiar with the object under study, thus laying the groundwork for the following empirical analysis.

The **primary data collection** is qualitative in nature and is presented in Chapter 5. The main component of this research consists of **seven individual and two group semi-structured interviews** conducted between September 6 and October 18, 2023. These interviews involved women across various ages and regions in Argentina, who are players, coaches, and board members of football clubs. The purpose of these interviews was to gather firsthand accounts and diverse perspectives from women involved in football. In addition to the interviews, supplementary data was collected through **conversations with social science scholars** with expertise in gender and football, including Julia Hang, Lorena Arambuenas, and Debora Majul. Furthermore, **observational data** was gathered from a range of football-related contexts in Buenos Aires, La Plata, and Córdoba – such as training sessions, matches, and stadium visits – to enrich the understanding of the social and cultural environment surrounding women's football in Argentina.

To analyze the collected data, a **qualitative content analysis** was conducted using MAXQDA software. This approach allowed for systematic coding and thematic interpretation of the primary data, helping to identify patterns and insights related to the research questions.

Finally, the findings are synthesized in Chapter 6, where they are critically reflected upon, leading to a comprehensive **response to the research questions**.

3.1 Research Design

I consciously decided to follow a qualitative approach since my study aims to capture and understand in depth the individual experiences of women in Argentina's football and explore its underlying social structures and practices (Prainsack & Pot, 2021, p. 14). Rather than focusing on a single case, my work aims to contribute by offering a rather diverse panorama of women involved in football, exploring their personal narratives and experiences.

Integrating both **deductive and inductive approaches** was considered the most appropriate methodological strategy for this research, serving two purposes (Prainsack & Pot, 2021, pp. 18–21): Firstly, the deductive approach assesses the applicability of gender and social justice theories proposed by Connell and Fraser within the context of football in Argentina. Secondly, the inductive approach maintains an openness to novel insights that may challenge existing theoretical frameworks or offer fresh perspectives specific to Argentina. While this approach seeks to contribute to theoretical advancements, it does not aim to establish a wholly new theory akin to grounded theory. This consideration is particularly relevant given the constraints and expectations of a master's thesis framework. Instead, the goal is to conduct a critical examination of existing theories, augmenting them with context-specific insights that capture the complexities of the subject – namely, experiences of women in Argentine football. These emergent theoretical considerations can then serve as a foundation for developing new conceptual frameworks and avenues of inquiry.

In line with Prainsack and Pot's (2021, p. 217–228) **quality criteria** for qualitative research, this study adheres to principles of credibility, transferability, comprehensibility, reflexivity, and objectivity in examining gender relations within Argentine football.

Credibility was achieved by aligning the theoretical framework, primarily based on Connell's (1987) concept of hegemonic masculinity and Fraser's (2008) principles of social justice, with research questions on gender relations (Prainsack & Pot, 2021, pp. 219–221). Data collection included semi-structured interviews with a diverse range of women players, coaches, and club delegates from different regions (Buenos Aires, Córdoba, La Plata) to ensure varied perspectives. An iterative analysis ensured that findings remained grounded in the participants' narratives, and preliminary interpretations were shared with interviewees for validation.

Transferability was considered by selecting participants across different levels of football and club structures, enabling the findings to have relevance beyond the specific context of Argentina (pp. 221–222). This diversity allows for insights that may inform discussions on gender and sports in other regions with similar power dynamics and structures.

Comprehensibility was ensured through a transparent and systematic research process. Each stage, from designing the interview guide to coding and analysis, was documented, allowing readers to follow the progression of data to conclusions (pp. 222–224).

Reflexivity was integral to the research, especially given my position as an outsider to the Argentine context (p. 225). Maintaining a reflective journal throughout the fieldwork enabled critical engagement with how my presence and perspective might shape the data collection and analysis. This reflexive

practice, influenced by an interpretivist stance (p.23), acknowledged the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants, which I will present in more detail in the course of this chapter.

Objectivity was prioritized by applying consistent methodologies. A structured interview guide ensured comparable questions were posed across interviews, and thematic analysis followed a rigorous coding process to minimize bias (pp. 227–228). While aware of my positionality, efforts were made to base conclusions firmly in participant perspectives.

The primary goal of my research is not to achieve representativeness but rather to capture and portray a diverse array of individual voices. By focusing on depth over representativeness, I aim to illuminate the unique experiences and social realities of individuals, that might otherwise be overlooked in more generalized studies.

3.2 Data Selection Process (Sampling)

This study aims to explore gender dynamics in Argentine football by examining both individual experiences and broader institutional frameworks. The target population includes women involved in football in Argentina, such as players, coaches, officials, and activists. The goal was to define a research sample that was both heterogeneous, capturing the diverse experiences and perspectives within women's football, and comprehensive, while also remaining feasible within the constraints of the study. To achieve this, a combination of theoretical and convenience sampling was employed:

The theoretical sampling strategy served to ensure diversity and depth in perspectives (pp. 77-78). Key criteria included:

- **Age:** Participants from multiple generations, providing both historical and contemporary insights.
- **Role in Football:** A range of roles, including players (professional and amateur), coaches, fans, and club administrators.
- **Amateur vs. Professional Status:** Representation from both amateur and professional participants to explore varying levels of engagement.
- **Geographic Diversity:** Inclusion of individuals from different regions beyond Buenos Aires, especially from the interior, to balance the capital's typical dominance in research.
- **Socioeconomic Background:** Participants from diverse social classes to understand how socioeconomic factors intersect with gender in football.

The theoretical sampling approach allowed for ongoing participant recruitment, ensuring that emerging themes informed the selection process until theoretical saturation was reached (Prainsack & Pot, 2021, p. 160).

In tandem, convenience sampling was used to facilitate participant recruitment within the study's practical constraints (p.80-81). Initial connections were made at the Discover Football Festival in Berlin, providing access to a network of contacts from La Nuestra Fútbol Feminista, professional coaches from Córdoba, and academics from the Universities of Buenos Aires and La Plata. A snowball effect followed, broadening the participant pool to over 70 individuals.

While this combined approach effectively balanced the need for diverse representation with logistical feasibility, the use of snowball sampling also presented certain challenges and limitations, which are critically reflected upon in the positionality and reflexivity section of this thesis.

3.3 Data Collection And Material

To deeply understand social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, I decided to collect data on-site in Argentina. This “*natural setting*” (Prainsack & Pot, 2021, p. 15) allowed me to capture impressions and perspectives integral to the research, particularly in the context of football, where atmosphere and spontaneous interactions play a significant role.

Fieldwork was conducted from September 6 to October 18, 2023, using various qualitative research methods:

The core of the data collection was **semi-structured interviews** (seven individual and two group interviews), guided by a flexible interview guide (see Annex 2). This framework ensured consistency while allowing space for open, genuine dialogue tailored to each participant. Informal preliminary conversations were conducted to build rapport, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed with participant consent. Key topics included participants' biographical backgrounds, experiences in football, cultural values, experiences of discrimination, developments in women's football, and visions for the sport's future. As data collection progressed, the interview guide was refined to incorporate emerging themes and insights, enhancing the depth and authenticity of responses. Additionally, Chapter 5 provides an overview of the interview participants backgrounds and the contexts in which the observations took place (Annex 1: List of Interviews; Annex 2: Interview Guide).

Complementing the interviews, **observation** – both participatory and non-participatory – were conducted. I attended professional and amateur training sessions, matches, stadium visits, and everyday settings in different cities. Participatory observation included active engagement in amateur football training and matches, offering an insider perspective on group dynamics. Non-participatory observation provided a broader lens on social interactions within football spaces. To systematically capture insights, memos documenting observations and reflections were maintained throughout (Annex 3: List of Observations).

Informal discussions with individuals involved in football served as a valuable data source. These spontaneous conversations, recorded as thought logs, provided context to participants' everyday experiences and perspectives, contributing an authentic layer beyond structured interviews (Annex 4: List of Informal Encounters).

Additionally, **informal exchanges with local scholars**, such as Julia Hang, Verónica Moreira, Lorena Arambuena, and Debora Majul from the Universities of Buenos Aires and La Plata and Córdoba, played a significant role in contextualizing findings within broader academic discourse on gender and football in Argentina. These discussions informed participant selection, the development of the interview guide, and the overall analysis.

The combination of interviews, observations, and informal discussions was crucial for data triangulation and validation. Observational data, in particular, enriched the analysis by revealing social dynamics and practices in football environments that might not surface through interviews alone.

3.4 Research Ethics

Particular attention was paid to ensuring that the benefits of the research served the interests of the participants, whose cooperation made the study possible (Prainsack & Pot, 2021, p. 48). Participation was entirely voluntary, and care was taken to ensure that no harm came to the participants. Initially, the research project was briefly presented verbally or in writing, depending on whether the first contact was made in person, by email, or via a messenger service. Before conducting interviews, an information sheet in Spanish was provided, clearly presenting the framework and purpose of the study, including contact details for any queries. Consent forms in Spanish detailed the study's content, objectives, and methods, explaining what participation entailed (formal interviews, observations, informal discussions), how the research data would be used, how it would be stored, and the participants' rights (p. 60).

Participants were asked whether they wanted their interviews to be anonymized by deleting all personally related data. All participants agreed not to anonymize their interviews; in fact, most actively requested that their names be included. However, participants could withdraw from this decision at any time. Throughout the research process, the risks to participants were carefully considered, and their vulnerability was considered, particularly regarding sensitive topics such as experiences of discrimination, violence, or threats (Prainsack & Pot, 2021, p. 56). When unexpected, possibly sensitive topics arose, participants were asked if they felt comfortable discussing them further. This approach ensured that participants felt safe and respected throughout the research process. To further secure data and privacy protection, any sensitive information about them or individuals they mentioned was deleted.

3.5 Data Analysis

Upon completion of data collection, a systematic content analysis was conducted on the interview transcripts, following the qualitative analysis frameworks of Gläser and Laudel (2010) and Prainsack and Pot (2021). While observation protocols and thought logs from informal encounters were not formally analyzed within this systematic framework, they played a crucial role in contextualizing the findings and enriching the interpretive process by offering a deeper understanding of the social context. The content analysis involved breaking down the empirical material into individual components, systematically searching for patterns within these parts, and reassembling the data based on the identified patterns (Prainsack & Pot, 2021, p. 143). The theoretical framework served as a roadmap to frame findings deductively while remaining open to new interpretations through inductive analysis, thereby elevating the data to a higher level of abstraction.

The data analysis followed a systematic coding procedure, guided by the scheme provided by Kuckartz & Rädiker (2024, pp. 25–28) and supported technically by MAXQDA software: Initially, the data were prepared and explored through the transcription of interviews, creation of initial memos, and case summaries to organize the data and get familiarized with its content. Subsequently, a coding framework was established and structured based on the theoretical framework, interview guide, and research questions. The *initial coding system* was developed by defining fact and theoretical categories. Fact including biographical categories pertained to verifiable events or unambiguous facts, providing contextual information about the interviewee and Argentina's football context for further analysis. Theoretical categories were derived deductively from the theoretical framework of the study, including the concepts *hegemonic masculinity* (Connell) and *social justice* (Fraser). These categories helped organizing the research results and test the applicability of theoretical frameworks within the context of football in Argentina (Prainsack & Pot, 2021, p. 13). Following the initial theoretically based analysis, the study proceeded with *focused coding*. In this step, new thematic categories relevant for the study were identified, addressing topics, arguments, or thought patterns and thus develop novel (theoretical) insights (Prainsack, 2021, p. 13, p. 18), which could not be explained with the given theoretical framework. Additionally, natural categories were identified inductively, including terms and phrases directly used by interviewees. These categories serve to capture the authentic language and concepts of the participants, preserving their original voice and context.

After several rounds of analysis, further analytical categories were determined. These categories represent a higher level of abstraction and interpretation, potentially leading to new explanations. They provide deeper insights into the data by synthesizing findings from various categories and arose from both deductive and inductive analysis. This helped to narrow down the data and identify and develop key themes. In the following post-coding stage, key themes were finally determined and translated to from Spanish to English, encapsulating the main findings of the study relevant to answer the research

questions. The final step involved writing the report and meticulously documenting the analysis process to ensure clarity and rigor. By systematically combining deductive and inductive approaches, this method strived for a comprehensive understanding of both pre-existing theoretical frameworks and new, emergent patterns to eventually answer the research questions within the context of gender relations and the experiences of women in Argentine football.

3.6 Possible Limitation

While this research provides valuable insights into gender dynamics within Argentine football, certain limitations in scope, methodology, and analytical focus affect the depth and generalizability of the findings. Throughout the research process, I aimed to address these constraints where possible, ensuring the most comprehensive analysis feasible within the study's parameters.

Scope and Contextual Boundaries: The research focuses on women's football in Argentina, specifically within the regions of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and La Plata, during a limited timeframe (September to October 2023). Although these areas offer rich insights into football culture and gender relations, the geographic concentration limits the ability to generalize the findings to the broader national context. To enrich the study, participants from multiple generations were interviewed, providing perspectives across different time periods and experiences within Argentine football. However, these insights are still context-specific and do not necessarily account for variations in other regions or a longer historical perspective.

Analytical Focus on Gender and Intersectionality: The study primarily explores gender dynamics, particularly the construction of hegemonic masculinity and its impact on cis-women's participation in football. While it briefly touches on intersecting identities such as race, class, sexuality and ethnicity, these aspects are not explored in depth. The research highlights key challenges and experiences faced by cis-women, but a more nuanced intersectional analysis could provide a deeper understanding of how multiple identities interact to shape experiences in the sport.

Methodological Constraints and Sampling Bias: The study's sample is limited to women who are already involved in football – as players, coaches, fans, and board members – thus excluding those who face barriers to participation or are prevented from engaging with the sport due to discrimination. As a result, the research may not fully capture the experiences of those who are marginalized or excluded. Theoretical sampling, complemented by a snowball effect, helped ensure access to a diverse range of voices within the football community, though it also potentially narrowed the variety of perspectives, as participants were often connected through similar networks and potential selection bias.

Qualitative Depth and Generalizability: The use of semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, and observations provided rich, detailed qualitative data, capturing the lived experiences and narratives of the participants. While these methods allowed for an in-depth understanding of the specific context of women in football in Argentina, they inherently limit the generalizability of the findings. The qualitative approach aims to uncover dynamics and individual experiences rather than producing statistically representative results, which should be considered when interpreting the scope of the conclusions.

Focus on Dynamics Over Recommendations: The research primarily aims to uncover dynamics, structures, and implications for gender relations within Argentine football, rather than provide concrete policy recommendations or solutions. The intent was to reveal underlying issues as well as conditions for change, offering a foundation for further analysis rather than prescriptive interventions.

In summary, this research offers a detailed analysis of gender dynamics within specific regions of Argentine football, with a strong focus on the lived experiences of women actively participating in the sport. However, its scope is limited to a certain time-frame, geographic areas, does not fully explore intersectionality, and focuses on dynamics over concrete solutions, outlining clear areas for further research and inquiry. Moreover, my own background has shaped the research, as explained in the following.

3.7 Positionality

This research adopts a constructivist and interpretive approach, recognizing that my background shapes each stage of the process (Prainsack & Pot, 2021, pp. 15–16). As a queer, white, cisgender woman from Western Europe (Germany), with a middle-class academic upbringing and a background in Global Studies with a focus on Latin America, I bring specific perspectives to the study. Although this is my first research project specifically centered on football, my extensive engagement with the sport—as a player, coach, and social worker—deeply informs my understanding of its social dynamics.

Navigating Insider-Outsider Dynamics: Having lived in Buenos Aires and developed familiarity with Argentine culture and language, I hold a nuanced position between insider and outsider. While my cultural knowledge facilitates rapport and understanding, my status as a foreigner introduces complexities that may shape participants' responses. The way I frame questions, my conversational style, and even my perceived expectations might influence how interviewees construct their narratives. To address this, I strived to build open, trust-based conversations, leveraging my fluency in Spanish and football background while remaining critically aware of how my positionality may impact the dialogue.

The Role of Football as a Connector: Football served as a key social connector in my research, fostering rapid access and deeper engagement with participants. My familiarity with the sport created a shared “*language*” and helped break down barriers, allowing genuine exchanges and a welcoming environment for snowball sampling. This shared passion enabled me to navigate the social field of Argentine football more effectively, contributing to the depth of the data collected.

Balancing Privilege and Empathy: Aware of my privilege—whiteness, middle-class status, and academic access—I approached the research with an emphasis on reflexivity, recognizing how my identity influences both the process and interpretation of the study. While my experiences as a queer woman provide some empathetic insight into discrimination, I remained cautious not to project my own experiences onto those of Argentine women in football. This reflexive stance guided me to critically engage with my perspective and its impact on the analysis.

Balancing Theory and Context: Due to my limited research experience and a constrained timeframe, the study's depth is necessarily restricted (Prainsack & Pot, 2021, p. 23). The application of theoretical frameworks—such as Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity and Fraser’s social justice model—provided a structured lens for understanding gender relations in football, though I was mindful of not allowing these frameworks to overshadow the lived experiences of participants. I aimed to balance theoretical constructs with the authentic narratives collected, ensuring that local context remained central.

Research as Advocacy: My queer-feminist perspective informs a commitment to advocate for gender equality and the visibility of marginalized voices. Football, seen as a microcosm of societal dynamics, offers both a reproduction of social inequalities and a site for resistance. This research seeks to critically explore these tensions, highlighting football as both a platform for reinforcing and challenging gender hierarchies in Argentina.

In summary, this research is inherently shaped by my positionality – an intersection of identity, privilege, and experience—and my reflexive engagement with these influences throughout the process (Darwin Holmes, 2020, p. 7; Prainsack & Pot, 2021, pp. 25–26). The aim is to be transparent about how my role informs the knowledge produced, fostering a critical and reflective examination of gender dynamics within Argentine football.

Having outlined the methodology employed in this research, we now turn to situating the study within its broader context. Chapter 4 explores the global and local dimensions of football, focusing particularly on gender dynamics. This contextual exploration will inform and enhance the analysis in later chapters, grounding it in the sport's broader sociocultural and historical background.

Additionally, millions more play informally, in non-organized settings across the globe. Despite the media's focus on professionals, less than 1% of all players reach the elite level, highlighting the fact that football is primarily a popular and grassroots activity (FIFA, 2021a).

The origins of football can be traced back to ancient civilizations around the globe, where rudimentary ball games were common forms of recreation (Blakemore, 2021). However, the version of football as we know it today started to evolve in 19th century England where standardized rules and organized competitions were established. Football's global expansion was closely linked to British imperialism, where the sport, along with others like cricket and rugby, was introduced to colonies as a tool of cultural assimilation and social control. Football's spread, however, was not solely a result of formal state intervention. The game primarily expanded through British commerce, industry, and migration (J. Connell, 2014, pp. 396–398). British workers, sailors, and engineers brought football to distant regions, establishing it in places like Argentina, Brazil, and Russia, an influence still evident today in the names of some football clubs. Interestingly, football did not take hold as strongly in Britain's settler colonies, such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada (*see Figure 2*), where sports like rugby and hockey became dominant due to cultural preferences, climate, and local sports traditions. In contrast, in French, Portuguese, and Spanish colonies, football became the dominant sport, deeply embedded in local cultures.

Importantly, football's global spread was not merely a one-sided imposition; by the time football also became a powerful means for colonized peoples to assert their identities and resist imperial domination (Choto & Ncube, 2024, pp. 70–73). This duality – football as both an instrument of control and a symbol of resistance – captures the sport's complex and multifaceted legacy on the global stage.

Since then, football has grown exponentially, embedding itself deeply into societies around the world. The sport's widespread appeal is evident in the staggering viewership figures across television and social media platforms, where stars like Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi command influence comparable to global celebrities, each boasting over 500 million followers on Instagram (Harms, 2024). This vast audience highlights football's cultural significance and its lucrative market potential. The sport has increasingly aligned with capitalist principles, turning clubs, leagues, and players into commodities, shifting football from a communal sport to a profit-driven industry. The financial impact is immense, with billions flowing through broadcasting rights, sponsorships, merchandising, and transfers. This shift has also seen long-standing clubs fall under foreign ownership, often distancing them from their original communities. Football's influence extends beyond the pitch, particularly in the political arena. Major events like the FIFA World Cup are not just about sport; they are significant political endeavors. Hosting such events allows nations to leverage football's global appeal to bolster their international image, a practice often criticized as “*sportswashing*”. The recent World Cups in Russia and Qatar, both

authoritarian regimes, underscore the intersection of football and global politics, where the sport is used to enhance the soft power of host nations. At the center of global football governance is FIFA, an organization that positions itself as a promoter of “*fair play and mutual respect*” (FIFA, 2021b). However, recurring corruption scandals have cast doubt on this image (Gill et al., 2019). These scandals suggest FIFA's involvement in questionable practices, including ties with political and criminal networks and illicit financial activities. Critics argue that a small, powerful elite within the organization has exploited its influence for personal political and economic gain, profiting from the vast revenues of the football industry.

Summing up, football's reach spans the globe, from the Scottish meadows to the beaches of Copacabana and the streets of Cape Town. Although the sport originated within a male-dominated British expat community, it has since transcended borders, social classes, ages, and genders, becoming a powerful cultural, economic, and political force. However, the rules of the game are not the same for everyone. Access, acceptance, and power within the game are still disproportionately distributed, with individuals facing discrimination based on gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability. On the field, football continues to cater predominantly to heterosexual men, with women and LGBTQI+ individuals systematically marginalized. The game upholds a narrow view of who belongs, leaving those who do not fit within its traditional framework on the fringes. Off the pitch, this male dominance extends to financial and political control, with a small elite exploiting the sport for personal gain, while systemic inequities persist. Efforts by governing bodies to promote inclusivity and diversity often feel superficial in the face of persistent homophobia, sexism, and racism within the sport. Goldblatt's assertion that “*football, as a professional spectacle, as an employer, as a polymorphous popular culture, and as a recreational game, remains overwhelmingly masculine*” (Goldblatt, 2014b, pp. 138–139) speaks to this deeply ingrained reality. This dominance of masculinity not only sustains but also legitimizes exclusion, making it clear that football's global growth has been achieved without significantly challenging the structures of power that exclude women and LGBTQI+ individuals from full participation.

4.2 Global Context: Women In Football

Despite being marginalized for years under the dominant masculine configuration, many women have harbored a desire for playing since the sport's inception. Through an examination of key milestones (see *Figure 3*), this subchapter aims to show the journey of women as they navigate systemic biases, striving for fair material conditions and recognition as equal peers in the game. While progress has been made towards achieving parity with their male counterparts, barriers persist, indicating the ongoing struggle for genuine *parity of participation* in the field (see Chapter 2.2., Fraser). By briefly looking at the global trends in women's football, we can identify systemic issues. The extent of their presence in Argentina will be analyzed in the scope of this thesis. Changes in societal attitudes, acts of resistance, and shifts

in institutional policies in one country often influence developments in others, reflecting the global interconnectedness of *gender regimes* (see Chapter 2.1, Connell).

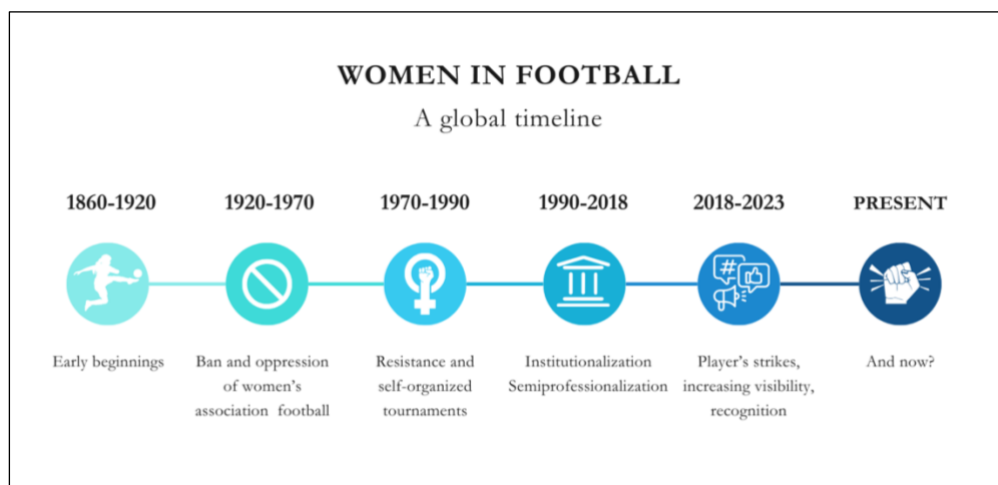


Figure 3: Global evolution of Women's Football (Own illustration)

4.2.1 The Early Beginnings: 1860s-1920s

The global landscape of women in football has been developed by a stark contrast with its male counterpart. While football became organized with the establishment of the English Football Association (FA) in 1863, it took until 1881 for the first official-recorded match between women's teams to be played in Scotland (The FA, 2022). Despite prevailing traditional gender norms, young women in England began forming football teams and participating in matches during the late 19th century, drawing significant crowds of spectators (Brüggemeier, 2006). However, the public and media often fixated more on the appearance of female players than on the game itself, frequently questioning their right to participate (Bohuon et al., 2020, pp. 1–2). Football, constructed as a bastion of virility, has traditionally been seen as incompatible with prevailing gender norms, particularly given its physical demands and the public nature of the sport. The idea that football could alter women's bodies, making them more masculine or even sterile, became widespread. Concerns about potential reproductive harm and accusations of the sport promoting “undesirable” traits such as virility or lesbianism further marginalized women, making it difficult for them to access the sport.

The outbreak of World War I unexpectedly provided a temporary boost to women's football (Goldblatt, 2014b, p. 139). With men deployed on the front lines, women assumed traditionally male-dominated roles in society. Factory owners and entrepreneurs played a significant role in facilitating women's football by providing training facilities and playing grounds. Football became a source of empowerment for working-class women, leading to a proliferation of women's teams across Europe, often referred to as the golden age of women's football (Marinello, 2018). However, socially these teams primarily served as sources of entertainment and distraction during the war (Brüggemeier, 2006).

As the war concluded, the closure of many factories sparked a conservative backlash, pushing women back into domestic roles or encouraging them to pursue alternative professions, thereby reinforcing traditional gender norms.

4.2.2 Bans Of Women's Association Football: 1920-1970s

To suppress the rising popularity of women's football, the FA committee (consisting of only male delegates) released a statement, stating that “*the game of football is quite unsuitable for females and ought not to be encouraged*” (The FA, 2022, p. 1) This belief was far from isolated. Across Europe and beyond, national football associations echoed similar arguments, claiming that football was detrimental to women’s physical health and femininity, with some even suggesting that it could impair their ability to bear children (Pitt-Brooke, 2020) Countries such as Scotland, Spain, Germany, and Brazil were quick to impose bans, justifying their actions with claims that football clashed with the “*natural*” condition of women. In 1955, the German Football Association (DFB) went as far as to declare that “*feminine grace disappears*” when women play, and that their “*soul inevitably suffer damage*” and the display of their body would “*violate propriety and decency*” (DFB Jahrbuch 1955 cited from Hoffmann & Nendza, 2007, p. 47; translated to English).

These bans had far-reaching consequences. The global development of women’s football was significantly stunted, pushing the sport into obscurity and relegating it to a marginalized, stigmatized subculture, often confined to local recreation grounds (Goldblatt, 2014b, p. 139). During this period, women in football were virtually erased from the mainstream narrative. Although they constituted a small portion of the football crowds and continued playing in informal settings, historical football narratives reduced women’s roles in football to stereotypical portrayals, such as secretaries, disapproving wives, or nurturing landladies – while excluding them as active participants in the sport. However, the tide turned in the 1970s as collective resistance and shifting societal values began to challenge this marginalization.

4.2.3 Resistances And Cultural Shifts: 1970s-1980s

In many countries, the bans on women's football gradually loosened during the 1970s, spurred by the rise of an independent women's football movement (Goldblatt, 2014b, pp. 139–140). Two key events, the unofficial WWCs in Italy (1970) and Mexico (1971), drew large crowds and signaled a growing public interest, with 100,000 fans attending at the Azteca Stadium in Mexico City (*see Figure 4*) (Hall, 2023).



Figure 4: Independent WWC in Mexico City in front of 110,000 fans in 1971 organised by the Federation of Independent European Female Football (FIEFF) (Image Source: BBC & Youngs, 2019)

This surge in interest led the European Football Union (UEFA) to urge national associations to lift their bans and reinstate women's football (J. Williams, 2006, pp. 156–157). The growing autonomy of women in organizing their own associations and international tournaments posed a direct challenge to the male-dominated control of football. The governing bodies, long accustomed to ruling over both the sport and women's participation in it, feared a disruption of the established order (J. Williams, 2007, p. 14). This fear was rooted in the potential loss of power and control, as the status of hegemonic masculinity within football governance being threatened by the rising influence and independence of women in the sport. In 1972, the FA lifted the ban on women playing on football fields, and other countries followed suit in the subsequent years (p.129). But even after the restrictions were lifted, the sport often faced reduced levels of investment and precarious training conditions compared to its pre-ban era (Hancock, 2022). The prohibitions hindered the progress of women's football and restricted its growth for several decades. In contrast, the men's game was able to enjoy a long and uninterrupted history of development, leading to increased professionalism, popularity, and global recognition. The disparities between the two gender's football journeys become even more evident when looking at international competitions. While the FIFA Men's World Cup was inaugurated in 1930, it was not until 1991 that the first FIFA WWC was hosted (Jalal et al., 2023). This considerable gap in time between the establishment of their respective World Cups exemplifies the challenges faced by women's football in gaining acceptance and support on a global scale.

4.2.4 Incorporation Into FIFA And Semi-Professionalization: 1990s-2018

The 1990s marked a pivotal period for women's football, as it began to gain formal recognition from national associations and through global events like the inaugural WWC in China in 1991 and its

inclusion in the 1996 Olympic Games (J. Williams, 2007, pp. 66–67). This era signaled the start of the sport’s institutionalization and professionalization. However, the increased visibility and incorporation into the FIFA’s football structures brought to light the still existing stark inequalities between men and women, particularly in areas such as financial compensation, training standards, infrastructure, and media coverage.

During the 1990s and 2000s, several countries in the Global North established so-called “*professional*” women’s football leagues (Cleland, 2015, pp. 74–76; J. Williams, 2011, p. 69). Yet, these leagues often struggled with financial instability and limited visibility, leaving even the most talented players without adequate support. On the international stage, while the WWC saw gradual increases in attendance and viewership, public recognition remained limited, and prize money was only a fraction of what was offered in men’s competitions.

Despite positive trends in participation and some institutional recognition, media coverage and public interest falling far short of that afforded to men’s football. Only a few players, like Marta, Abby Wambach, and Birgit Prinz, gained some public recognition. Leadership roles within the sport were overwhelmingly dominated by men, with few women serving as coaches, referees, or administrators. This male-dominated leadership, particularly in key positions of power, perpetuated the entrenched sexism within the sport. A striking example came from then-FIFA president Joseph Blatter, one of the most powerful figures in football at the time. His infamous comment suggesting that female players should wear tighter clothing to create a “*more feminine aesthetic*” to appeal to male audiences (INADI, 2020, p. 3) exemplifies the dismissive and objectifying attitudes that were not only tolerated but promoted by those at the highest levels of football governance. This attitude was symptomatic of a broader culture of sexism, misogyny, and homophobia that plagued the sport, where many women involved in football faced instances of sexual harassment and discrimination.

Eventually, **in 2018**, FIFA introduced its first *Women’s Football Strategy*, ostensibly to integrate women’s football into the mainstream by focusing on “*participation growth*”, “*commercial value*”, and “*infrastructure development*” (FIFA, 2018, p. 5). While presented as a commitment to gender equality and human rights, critics argue it primarily served FIFA’s broader interests, such as consolidating regulatory power, increasing profits, and enhancing its reputation (Krech, 2020, p. 13). The strategy fails to address deeper structural issues within football governance, such as the lack of representation for women athletes, centralized financial control, and persistent sexism. Rather than driving substantive change, FIFA’s actions have been viewed as symbolic gestures, aligned with a neoliberal narrative that emphasizes individual empowerment over a collective, structural reform (Garton et al., 2021, p. 629).

Overall, the period from the 1990s to 2018 was globally one of both significant progress and ongoing challenges for women’s football. While the sport achieved greater recognition and visibility, it

continued to grapple with deep-seated issues of inequality that required more than just superficial reforms to overcome.

4.2.5 Growing Visibility, Commercialization And Players Strikes: 2019-2024

In the past five years, women's football has seen a significant surge in participation and visibility worldwide. While FIFA's investment in the women's game has contributed to this growth, the primary drivers have been the *women themselves*. For generations, they have been vocal advocates for equal pay, fair treatment, better media coverage, and the elimination of sexism in the sport. Their relentless efforts, fueled by the momentum of transnational women's and LGBTQI+ rights movements, with social media amplifying their visibility, have led to growing acceptance and respect, both on and off the field. This evolving landscape is also reflected in the growing commercial interest and the influx of new sponsors who view women's football as an attractive market. As a result, players are securing contracts with major brands, and the level of broadcasting of matches is on the rise. Many national football associations now mandate that first-division clubs establish professional women's teams and develop youth infrastructure, aiming to address the longstanding systemic discrimination against women in organized football. While these developments are generally viewed as positive signs, they also raise questions about whether women's football will ultimately copy the men's game and become as commodified.

On the international level the **2019 WWC** held in France is viewed by many as a landmark event in women's football history: The tournament set multiple records, including unprecedented viewership, extensive engagement on social media platforms, and new levels of commercial revenue. This WWC drawing an audience of over one billion viewers worldwide, represented a 30% increase compared to the viewership of the 2015 edition held in Canada (FIFA, 2019, p. 2).



Figure 5: Megan Rapinoe of the U.S. and team mates celebrate after winning the WWC (Image source: REUTERS/Bernadett Szabo)

In the lead-up to the 2019 WWC, discussions on gender equality in football intensified, particularly around governance, funding, and resource allocation. High-profile *equal pay* lawsuits, led by women

players, ignited global advocacy for equitable treatment across the sport (Bowes et al., 2023, pp. 191–192). The WWC amplified these issues, placing significant pressure on governing bodies such as FIFA to address systemic disparities and implement more equitable policies.

Megan Rapinoe, a key figure in this movement, used her platform as one of the top professional footballers to advocate for equal pay and LGBTQI+ rights, directly challenging systemic inequalities. Her decision to refuse a visit to the White House in protest of Donald Trump's racist and misogynistic policies highlighted her commitment to standing up to even the most powerful political figures (Roper, 2019). Her activism resonated worldwide, encouraging other athletes to address similar forms of discrimination, not only in sports but in broader societal contexts.

Across the world, women players, officials, and fans have united in strikes and legal battles, demanding equal pay, safer working environments, better facilities, and an end to gender-based discrimination and violence (Wrack, 2022, p. 72): Australia's W-League players successfully fought for a significant wage increase, while Nigeria's team held a sit-in to protest unpaid bonuses. The Ireland's national team also threatened to strike, Denmark even had to forfeit a match due to unresolved pay disputes. By 2020, Brazil and Sierra Leone joined nations like Australia, England, Norway, and New Zealand in pledging equal pay for their men's and women's national teams. Meanwhile, members of Afghanistan's women team courageously exposed the horrific sexual and physical abuse inflicted by the president of the country's football federation, while Iranian women have been persistently fighting for the right to watch games in stadiums.

Additionally, women football players have advocated for the recognition of their specific needs, including paid maternity leave, childcare support, and appropriate sports attire. A significant example is the campaign against wearing white shorts due to concerns about period leaks, which research has shown negatively impacts athletes' well-being and performance (Krumer, 2023). This issue, often overlooked by male decision-makers, affects not only professional players but also discourages teenage girls from participating in sports, contributing to higher dropout rates as recent research indicates.

The **2023 FIFA WWC**, held in Australia and New Zealand, represented a further significant milestone in the global growth of women's football. This event saw record-breaking match attendance, enhanced public visibility, and increased financial investment in the sport. Nearly two million spectators attended the tournament. It attracted a global audience of over two billion viewers, marking another 30% increase in both live attendance and viewership compared to 2019 (FIFA, 2023a). A key factor in this growth has been the role of **social media platforms**, particularly Instagram, in enhancing the visibility of women's football. Social media not only has helped to draw younger audiences but also has provided a space for players to engage with fans directly, increasing their influence beyond the pitch. Brands have

capitalized on this by using popular players as influencers, recognizing the commercial potential of women's football. This commodification of the sport, fuelled by digital platforms, represents a new frontier, where women's football is marketed as a brand and cultural product. A shift that raises questions about the commercialization of women's football, balancing the benefits of visibility and investment with the risk of overshadowing the sport's core values with only a small group benefitting.

Despite the increased airtime dedicated to women's matches during major tournaments like the WWC, regular **media coverage** of women's leagues remains limited. This disparity is evident in the fact that major men's leagues receive consistent, prime-time broadcasting slots across a variety of channels, while women's leagues often struggle to secure similar visibility, with matches frequently relegated to less favorable time slots or secondary channels.

Figure 6 reflects the growing **attendance** at women's football matches in top European leagues, such as the FA Women's Super League (England), Frauen-Bundesliga (Germany), Liga F (Spain), and Division 1 Féminine (France). Notably, the English Women's Super League experienced an almost threefold increase in attendance over two seasons (2021/22 to 2023/24), underscoring the impact of strategic investments in promotion and decisions to host women's matches in the main stadiums (Statista Research Department, 2024). Despite these advances, it is crucial to note that the average match attendance for women's football still significantly trails that of men's football, where figures typically range between 25,000 and 40,000 spectators in Europe's top leagues.

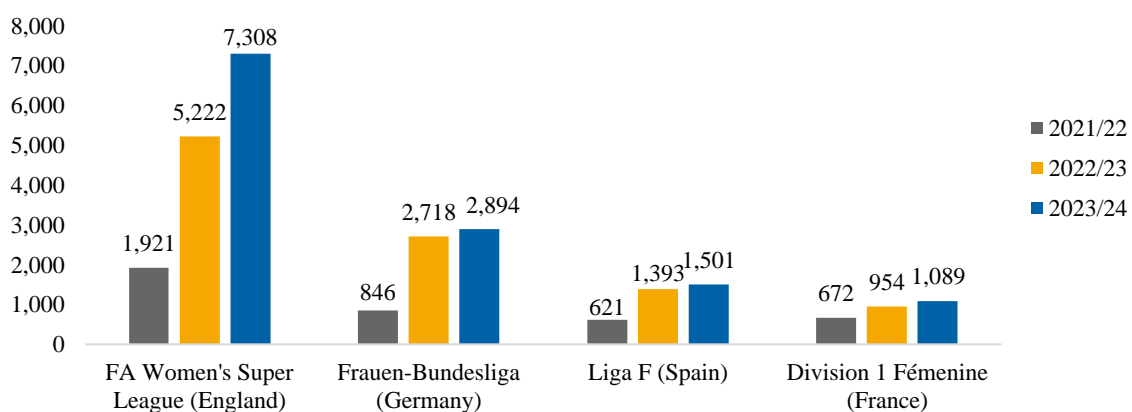


Figure 6: Average Match Attendance from 2021 to 2024 in European Women's Football League (Own illustration adapted from Statista Research Department, 2024)

In recent years, **financial compensation** in women's professional football has seen notable improvements, gradually raising the conditions to a more professional standard (Statista & Waller, 2023, pp. 13–14). Since 2007, FIFA has offered a prize pool for the WWC, although the increases were initially modest as illustrated in Figure 7. A significant breakthrough occurred in 2023 when the total

prize pool surged to \$110 million, nearly four times the amount of the previous tournament. For the first time, each player participating in the WWC was guaranteed a minimum of \$30,000, which, for many, is equivalent to an entire year's salary (p.2). However, despite these significant advances, the disparity between the prize money for men's and women's tournaments remains substantial. As illustrated in Figure 7, the 2022 Men's World Cup in Qatar boasted a staggering prize pool of \$440 million.

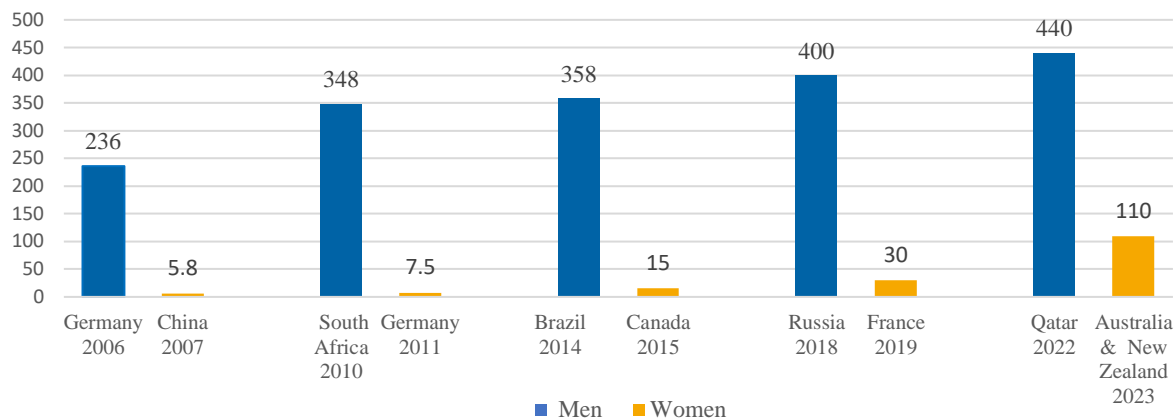


Figure 7: Total prize pool for the FIFA's World Cup from 2002 to 2023 in million U.S. Dollars, Men vs. Women (Own illustration based on *The Sporting News*, 2023)

FIFA showcases impressive figures during the WWC 2023, yet the harsh realities of player compensation before and after the tournaments frequently go unnoticed. According to FIFPro, the global players' union, one-third of female footballers were not compensated for participating in qualifying tournaments. Furthermore, two out of three athletes had to take unpaid leave or use their vacation days to compete (FIFPro, 2023, p. 1). Hardly surprising, the **wage disparity in football is stark**, even in top leagues like England's. In 2023, Sarina Wiegman earned just 8% of Gareth Southgate's salary, while top female players like Mary Earps and Alessia Russo earned less than 1% of their male counterparts (Collins, 2023). While a few women earn well, most struggle to make a living, raising a critical question: why are male footballers multi-millionaires while women doing the same job are systematically underpaid? This not only underscores the massive gender gap but also highlights the absurdly inflated salaries of male players, with these figures continuing to rise.

Beyond issues of limited media coverage and equal pay, women in football continue to face **disproportionate levels of misogyny and sexism**. Since 2014, reports of sexism have increased, which suggests a potential growing awareness (Collins, 2023), but also highlights the failure of governing bodies to address these issues effectively. In the early 2020s, a wave of women began speaking out against the pervasive culture of harassment and violence within football. However, the institutional response has largely been inadequate. The case of Luis Rubiales, the then-president of the Spanish

football association, forcibly kissing player Jenni Hermoso during the 2023 WWC celebration, is emblematic of the pervasive sexual abuse of power within the sport. This incident is merely the tip of the iceberg, underscoring the harsh realities women's players continue to face, particularly the exploitation by men in positions of authority. The persistence of such abuse, despite increasing awareness and calls for reform, raises critical questions about the effectiveness of existing policies and the genuine commitment of football's governing bodies to protecting women players. Sexism is further amplified deeply through online spaces, as highlighted in a FIFA and FIFPRO report on abuse during the 2023 WWC in New Zealand and Australia (FIFA & FIFPRO, 2023): The report found that one in five players were targeted with discriminatory, abusive, or threatening messages during the tournament. Homophobic, sexual, and sexist abuse made up nearly half of all verified incidents, showing how gendered violence is weaponized specifically against female athletes. Women were 29% more likely to face online abuse than men during the 2022 FIFA Men's World Cup in Qatar, revealing stark gender disparities. Further research points to an escalation in online gender-based violence in recent years, including misogynistic comments that objectify women, belittle their skills, and even call for their exclusion from the sport entirely (Fenton et al., 2023, p. 1).

Despite a growing global **participation** on amateur level of over 16 million girls and women in organized football – a 24% increase since 2019 – significant gender disparities persist (FIFA, 2023c, p. 8). While countries like Brazil, Mexico, and England have seen notable growth, opportunities for girls remain vastly limited compared to boys. Most of the investment in girls football and youth development programs remains concentrated in Europe, highlighting regional inequalities.

Women are also severely underrepresented in **leadership and technical roles**. Only 5% of coaches and 9% of referees are women (FIFA, 2023c, p.8), with many facing derogatory comments, being taken less seriously, and frequently targeted by hate speech. In **decision-making positions**, progress has been slow. Women hold just 12% of executive roles within FIFA (FIFA, 2023c, p. 15). The appointment of Fatma Samoura as FIFA's first female Secretary General in 2016 was a step towards inclusion (Gibson, 2016), but it remains largely symbolic. Deep-rooted structural biases continue to limit women's advancement in football leadership, reflecting the sport's persistent male dominance.

4.2.6 The Global Game Or The Last Bastion Of Masculinity

Although formal bans on women's football were lifted decades ago in many countries, the lingering effects of historical discrimination remain deeply ingrained. The challenges faced by women in football extend far beyond the issue of equal pay, despite how it is often portrayed in media coverage. Women's systematic subordination in a sport historically constructed by and for men manifests through a range of discriminatory practices: from limited access for young girls, who must often travel far to find

opportunities, to precarious training conditions, underrepresentation in decision-making roles, and disproportionate levels of stigmatization, sexism, and harassment at both amateur and professional levels. Even today, many female footballers are not recognized as professional workers, denying them the rights and security that male players take for granted.

While generations of men have played without barriers, many of today's female players represent the first or second generation in their families to have the opportunity to formally play. Crucially, the driving force behind change has not come from governing bodies like FIFA but from the players themselves. Female athletes and their advocates have fought to assert their right to be part of the global game, using social media to amplify their voices.

The next time you browse a magazine store, take a look at the sports section: how many women are featured compared to men? When people talk about football, whom are they referring to? How many clubs in your city offer football for girls and women versus boys and men? How many coaches in female divisions are men, and how many in male divisions are women?

As the world's most popular sport, football holds immense cultural and economic power. But how can football truly call itself a global game if half the population still struggles for equal access, recognition, and respect? Is football, in many ways, the last bastion of virility – a space where outdated notions of masculinity still prevail, even as society moves toward greater gender equality?

4.3 Football In Argentina: A Game of Identity, Power Plays, And Masculine Territory

With nine out of ten citizens identifying as fans of a team, football holds a deeply rooted place in Argentina's society (IDAES & Ministerio de Turismo y Deportes, 2021, p. 22). How has football become so popular in the South American Country? Which role has played the mass media? And who is part of the game and more importantly: under which conditions?

4.3.1 Historical Development: British Influence And Local Adoption

Football was introduced to Argentina by British immigrants, profoundly shaping the country's sporting culture and national identity (Duke & Crolley, 2001, pp. 94–98). British schools and the British-controlled railway network were key in spreading football across Greater Buenos Aires, leaving a lasting mark that is still visible today in club names like River Plate and Newell's Old Boys. During this early period, football remained largely an exclusive pastime for the British expatriate elite, with native Argentinians mostly excluded, reflecting the social hierarchies of the time.

As the 20th century progressed, football began to integrate more deeply into Argentine society. The sport underwent a process of “*creolization*”, whereby it gradually shed its elitist, British-centric identity and became more accessible to the broader (urban) Argentine population, which was largely composed of Italian and Spanish immigrants (Archetti, 1999, p. 56ff). This transformation was not a simple process of adoption but rather a kind of hybridization: Football in Argentina evolved into a unique cultural expression that synthesized European influences with local traditions, contributing to the formation of a new Argentine identity that was distinct yet still deeply connected to its immigrant roots (Duke & Crolley, 2001, pp. 96-97). The Argentines took over both on- and off the pitch. New clubs were established. The growing popularity of football was paralleled by increased professionalization and the establishment of formal governing structures (p. 100). The creation of the Argentine Football Association (AFA) in 1893 and the professionalization of men's football in 1931 were pivotal events that transformed the sport from a recreational activity into a highly competitive, organized institution and laid the ground for the structures that shape football in Argentina to this day.

4.3.2 National Identity And Its Political Potential

As football began to resonate with the broader population, particularly among Spanish and Italian immigrants, it transitioned from an elite pastime into a powerful cultural force (particularly among the working class and middle classes) that started to shape Argentina's national identity. Football transcends from the British schools to the streets (Archetti, 1999, p. 72). By the early 20th century, the sport had become a mass phenomenon, especially in Buenos Aires, where many of the country's most influential clubs were established. The increasing popularization of football coincided with the *massive influx of immigrants* into the city, leading to football clubs becoming central to social and political life within their so-called “barrios” (neighbourhoods) (Duke & Crolley, 2001, p. 97). The simplicity of the game enabled widespread participation, fostering a feeling of belonging and community (Orton, 2023b, pp. 196–197). This bond was further strengthened through communal practices such as singing fan chants, displaying club colors, and attending weekly matches, which became integral to Argentine community life. Football matches became a means to defend neighborhood pride, reinforcing a territorial sense of identity (Hijós, 2019, p. 154).

During this period, **mass media** played a crucial role in popularizing football and embedding it into both neighborhood and national identities (Frydenberg, 2014, pp. 36–37; Duke & Crolley, 2001, p. 101). Newspapers, radio, and later television not only covered the matches but also shaped narratives that linked football to local pride and national consciousness. National victories were celebrated as collective triumphs, while defeats were mourned by the nation – patterns still evident today. Football stars, often rising from the popular classes, were elevated to the status of national heroes (Moreira & Garton, 2021, p. 6).

This immense popularity of football in Argentina has made it a **powerful instrument** for promoting national unity, a potential that various **governments** have strategically exploited to advance their political agendas. Leaders have used the sport not just to align themselves with the national spirit but also to influence social identities and reinforce national sentiments, thereby controlling public perception and behavior (Duke & Crolley, 2001, p. 104) like for example under Peron's government in the 1940s and 1950s (p. 103). A tool especially used by Peron government in the 1940s and 1950s by heavily investing in football infrastructure and promoting the sport as a symbol of national pride and social cohesion (p. 103). The 1978 FIFA World Cup, hosted by Argentina under military dictatorship, marks the pinnacle of football's use as a nationalistic instrument. The regime leveraged the tournament as a propaganda vehicle to project an image of national unity and success, despite widespread human rights violations (Alabarces, 2013, p. 28ff; Hijós, 2019, pp. 154–155).

Even today, the national football team continues to serve as a potent symbol of Argentine identity, especially in international competitions. Victories on the global stage, such as the recent World Cup win 2022 in Qatar, are celebrated not merely as sporting achievements but as affirmations of Argentina's place in the world, particularly in the context of the country's severe economic struggles. For many, this triumph offered a temporary distraction, demonstrating football's enduring role as a source of collective identity and emotional relief.

4.3.3 A Space And Activity Of Hegemonic Masculinity

A distinctive feature of football in Argentina is its deep connection to politics, with the power structures within football clubs illustrating how they function as powerful political platforms: Argentine football clubs, structured as civil associations, allow their "*socios*" (*members*) to vote in leadership elections (Moreira, 2013, p. 66). These elections are fiercely contested, as control of a club provides not only the authority of managing the club's affairs but also a platform for political advancement. The leadership within clubs often mirrors societal hierarchies, with wealthy businessmen and male politicians historically dominating these positions (Duke & Crolley, 2001, p. 104). Leading a major football club grants visibility, networking opportunities, and local influence, as seen in the case of Mauricio Macri, who leveraged his presidency of Boca Juniors into a successful political career, eventually becoming the President of Argentina. Since its early beginnings, AFA has also been led by individuals with strong political affiliations, further entrenching the connection between football and politics (p. 102).

Given the close connection between politics and football, as well as the opportunity for fans to participate in club decision-making, influential fan groups like the "barras bravas" play a crucial role not only in club governance but also in broader political movements (Duke & Crolley, 2001, pp. 99–100). Elections are influenced not just by formal democratic processes but also by informal networks of clientelism and alliances (Moreira, 2013, p. 67). Club leaders must navigate the demands of

governance while balancing pressures from these clientels and alliances. The “barras bravas”, with their control over resources such as tickets and transportation, often act as power brokers during elections. Their influence extends into political arenas, where the leaders in the football clubs mobilize support in exchange for material benefits, reinforcing cycles of privilege and tolerated violence (Duke & Crolley, 2001, p. 115).

Over time, football, once an elitist British pastime, evolved into a mass spectacle, a collective ritual, and a highly masculine social space, deeply intertwined with Argentine national identity, as reinforced by the state, media, and education system (Hijós, 2019). Yet, this “*national*” identity has never truly included all citizens, it remains fundamentally *gendered*. While football is often celebrated as a cultural “*free zone*” (Alabarces, 2014, p. 66) that transcends social divides, it has long been dominated by men. Women have been systematically restricted, stigmatized, and excluded, both physically and symbolically, from the footballing pitches and narratives. The sport, while a stage for male identity and power, has consistently denied women the same rights, autonomy, and representation, both on and off the field. Football, therefore, is not only a *gendered space* but also a *gendering practice* – one that perpetuates women’s exclusion and reinforces hegemonic masculinity (Moreira & Garton, 2021, p. 6-7). This is particularly striking in a country where football is seen as a core part of national identity.

Can a national identity truly be “national” if it continues to exclude half its population?

4.4 Argentina: Women In Football

To fully understand this exclusion, this work will now examine the evolution of women's football in Argentina. The development of women's participation in football can be understood through three key phases, each highlighting the challenges and progress in the ongoing struggle for inclusion:

The first period covers the decades before 1991 when women participated informally, without official recognition from the AFA. During this time, a patriarchal social structure and the absence of institutional support created nearly insurmountable barriers for women. Despite these challenges, women, particularly from working-class communities, organized independent football movements, defying societal norms and building spaces for themselves in the sport.

The second period (1991-2019) began when the AFA officially recognized women’s football in 1991, marking a significant milestone. This led to the creation of the first official women’s league and the national women’s team. However, women’s football remained largely amateur and invisible for a long time. Players faced inadequate training facilities, poor working conditions, and minimal public recognition. Yet, in its later stages this situation triggered growing resistance, fueled by the feminist movement and players strikes, demanding better conditions and respect within the sport.

The third period (2019–2024) marks the era of “*professionalization*” in women’s football, initiated when the AFA, responding to public pressure from players and feminist movements, announced the sport’s professional status. This resulted in increased visibility, media attention, and acknowledgement in Argentina. However, many concessions made by those in power were largely motivated to preserve control and the existing social order. As a result, not everyone has benefited equally, with some changes remaining largely symbolic. Critical issues such as fair pay, proper working conditions, and protection against gender-based violence remain inadequately addressed, keeping the playing field far from equal.

4.4.1 Gender Norms, Informal Resistance And Road To Formal Recognition: 1920s-1991

*“El fútbol era el centro de nuestras vidas
pero nosotras para el fútbol, no éramos nadie”.*
(Pujol, 2019, p. 11)

The early 20th century marked a period of rapid growth for football in Argentina, establishing itself as a national obsession deeply integrated into the country’s identity. However, this rise to popularity was predominantly male-centric (Moreira & Garton, 2021, p. 6)

Erasure from the history: The marginalization of women in football is deeply rooted in its historical narrative (Moreira & Garton, 2021; Pujol, 2019, p. 12). While some women have been involved since its inception, their contributions have largely been ignored, leaving only scattered fragments of their presence. This ignorance is now being actively challenged by scholars and activists such as Puyol, Elsey & Nadel, Williams, Garton and Sandoval who are working to recover and document the stories of these pioneering women, highlighting their contributions and experiences of oppression and acts of resistance. By reclaiming their place in the national football narrative, women are not only asserting their rightful role in the history of football, but also offer their stories and perspectives as powerful references for future generations, challenging and reshaping the dominant narrative surrounding the sport.

Early Beginnings and Marginalization: The earliest documented women’s football match in Argentina dates back to October 13, 1923 (Pujol, 2019, pp. 19–20). The game featured two teams, *Argentinas* and *Cosmopolitas*, and drew a crowd of around six thousand spectators at the old Boca Stadium. These early efforts were largely informal, taking place in a cultural climate where women’s participation in such a physically demanding and public sport was seen as transgressive. If taking place at all, women football matches were rather seen as an entertainment than recognizing the athletic performance. *El Gráfico*, a leading sports magazine, published an article in 1921 by Andy Ducat which argued that football was too rough for women who were perceived as too delicate and at risk of

becoming “*machonas*” (*tomboys*), thereby challenging traditional gender norms (Garton & Hijós, 2018b, p. 29). This early stigmatization contributed to the historical exclusion of women from the sport.

Patriarchal gender order: Cultural norms in Argentina during this period were deeply entrenched in patriarchal values which dictated that women should prioritize beauty, grace, and domesticity – traits seen as incompatible with the physicality and competitiveness of football (Elsey & Nadel, 2019, pp. 22–24). When women were allowed to engage in physical activities, these were typically limited to exercises that emphasized maintain beauty and health without developing strength or muscle. Media outlets reinforced these gendered norms, encouraging women to exercise at home rather than in public spaces like sports clubs. This messaging further entrenched the gendered division of spaces, confining women to the private sphere while men dominated the public sporting arena.

Institutionalization: The patriarchal gender order was further institutionalized by key organizations such as schools, the AFA, and local sports clubs. Schools played a crucial role by steering boys toward football, reinforcing the sport as a male domain, while girls were relegated to less competitive, traditionally “*feminine*” activities. The AFA and local clubs compounded this by institutionally neglecting women’s football, actively discouraging its development, and ensuring that football remained a “*naturally*” male-dominated space.

Stigmatization: Women who challenged societal norms by participating in football were often met with scrutiny and stigmatization, particularly concerning their sexuality. Their involvement in what was traditionally considered a “*male*” sport was viewed as a deviation from heteronormative gender expectations, posing a perceived threat to the social order. Consequently, these women were frequently labeled as “*unfeminine*” and subjected to homophobic stereotypes, including being stigmatized as lesbians. This reinforced rigid boundaries around acceptable femininity in the sport, serving to police both gender expression and sexuality in a way that maintained traditional power structures (Elsey & Nadel, 2019; Garton & Hijós, 2018b, p. 30)



Figure 8: Women's Football in Córdoba in the 1960s, Personal collection from Rosa Villagra & Silvia Barrionuevo (Own collection, von der Laden, 2023)

Playing in the “barrios”: Those women that resisted these constraints, played on the streets and founded informal football teams, particularly within working-class neighborhoods, known as “barrios”. While their male counterparts played in more formal settings such as schools and sports clubs, women often had to carve out spaces for themselves in the streets or public pitches of their barrio.

The term “barrio” in Argentina carries significant social connotations (Garton & Hijós, 2018b, p. 30). It does not merely refer to a residential area; rather, it signifies a humble neighborhood often associated with the working class. Being “from a barrio” implies an identity that is closely linked to the struggles and resilience of the popular classes. Thus, the historical marginalization of women’s football is not solely a consequence of gender-based discrimination but is also shaped by class dynamics. The women who played in these environments often did so, playing in conditions far removed from the structured environments available to men. These early efforts by women in the barrios laid the groundwork for the eventual formalization of women’s football in Argentina.

“Las Pioneras”: In the early 1970s, a limited number of institutions in Buenos Aires started to welcome women footballers. Among the few options available were the clubs Piraña, Excursionistas, Universitario, and All Boys (Pujol, 2019, pp. 23–26). At the same time, exhibition matches and tours featuring women's teams were organized in other parts of Argentina by entrepreneurs who charged admission fees. The 1971 Unofficial WWC in Mexico marked a significant milestone in the development of women’s football in Argentina with crowds of over 100,000 people (p. 31).

For the first time, the country’s women’s national football team was formed independently of AFA to compete on an international stage (Else & Nadel, 2019, pp. 55–58). The conditions under which the Argentine team competed were far from ideal. Financial difficulties had previously prevented the team from participating in the first WWC in Turin, and these challenges persisted leading up to the Mexico tournament. Despite facing severe challenges – including the lack of official support, coaching staff, medical care, and adequate equipment – the team managed to achieve a remarkable fourth-place finish.

This achievement, however, was met with indifference by the Argentine mainstream media and AFA sports authorities, highlighting the broader issues of neglect and lack of institutional support that plagued women's football in the country. Today, the members of the 1971 Argentine team are known as "*Las Pioneras*" – The Pioneers (Pujol, 2019, p. 23). They have reconnected through social media and have begun to document and share their history, filling the gaps left by the institutional neglect of their contribution.

It was not until the 1990s, amid growing global recognition of women's football, that the AFA took significant steps to formalize the women's game (Janson, 2008, p. 56). In 1991, nearly a century after its founding, the organization officially recognized women's football and created an official women's league. This move was partly driven by a FIFA mandate requiring its member associations to include women's football in their programs. Additionally, there were concerns that an independent women's association might emerge as a competitor. However, despite this formal acknowledgment, the journey toward genuine equality and professionalization remained fraught within an amateur framework, characterized by a lack of adequate resources, poor and stigmatized media coverage, and minimal institutional support.

4.4.2 Afa - Amateur Era & Players Strike: 1991-2019

The early 1990s marked a pivotal turning point: the era of "*playing for the sake of playing*" gave way to a period of "*playing for real*" (Janson, 2008, p. 84) beginning with the official recognition of the sport by the AFA in 1991. At the same time, the feminist movements gained significant momentum, extending its influence into football – a field long overlooked by feminist activism. As the movement grew, women in football began raising their voices more assertively, gaining visibility as they challenged the oppressive gender structures within the sport. This convergence led to heightened resistance against the entrenched hegemonic masculinity that had long dominated football in Argentina.

Formal Recognition and the Limits of Institutional Support

Despite its formal recognition, the AFA's approach to women's football was characterized by neglect and tokenism. The domestic women's league suffered from poor organization, irregular match schedules, and subpar facilities compared to men's teams (Garton et al., 2021, p. 631). Attempts to broadcast matches often failed, and clubs frequently dropped out mid-season. With little to no funding, players had to cover their own expenses for equipment, travel, and medical care. Many have balanced football with other jobs or education due to the lack of financial compensation, adding significant psychological and financial strain (Janson, 2008, pp. 70–85). The league was officially classified as amateur, but the level of amateurism varied significantly across different clubs and over time (Knijnik & Garton, 2022, p. 17). Notably, there were stark disparities between the capital regions – specifically Buenos Aires and La Plata – and the rest of the country. Football infrastructure was heavily concentrated

in these metropolitan areas, while organized opportunities for women's football were nearly non-existent in other regions.

From 2013 to 2019, the status of some women's football clubs in Buenos Aires, particularly the larger ones like UAI Urquiza, Boca Juniors, San Lorenzo, and River Plate, could be more accurately described as "*marronismo*" (*brownism*) rather than true amateurism (Garton et al., 2021, p. 631). "*Marronismo*", a concept originally used to describe early 20th-century men's football, refers to practices where clubs provided illegal financial incentives and part-time jobs to attract and retain talented players, despite maintaining an official amateur status (Frydenberg, 2011, p. 189). Similarly, these women's teams employed covert methods to support their players before the semi-professionalization of the league in 2019 (Knijnik & Garton, 2022, p. 17-18). These practices blurred the lines between amateurism and professionalism, while many other clubs struggled to meet even the basic requirements necessary for their players to compete at a professional level (Garton et al., 2021, p. 631).

The **national football team** faced severe challenges, including long periods without coaching staff, regular call-ups, and matches, leading to their temporary exclusion from world rankings (Garton et al., 2021, p. 631; Knijnik & Garton, 2022, pp. 18–20). Training was sporadic, and the team only gained access to the AFA's national training center after qualifying for the 2003 WWC. Financial constraints were harsh; players received only a one-way bus ticket to Buenos Aires for training and had to find their own accommodation. They often wore oversized hand-me-down uniforms from the men's teams, leading to embarrassment among many players. Efforts to improve conditions were met with resistance; players who spoke out were excluded from future competitions, including the 2008 Olympics. The team lacked basic resources, with some players even having to repair their boots themselves to keep them intact.

The **media coverage** of women's football remained minimal, reinforcing the sport's marginal status and perpetuating gender stereotypes. When women's football did receive attention, it was often in a trivializing or sexualizing manner, further entrenching societal perceptions that football was a male domain (Garton & Hijós, 2018b, p. 30).

However, in 2017, women's football in Argentina gained an unexpected surge of attention: The spotlight turned to the **women's national team** when they staged their **first-ever strike**, highlighting the deep-rooted sexism within the sporting industry by revealing the inadequate conditions under which they were expected to train for international tournaments (Knijnik & Garton, 2022, pp. 22–23; Lichinizer, 2017). The players demanded basic necessities such as adequate training conditions, properly sized uniforms, and the payment of daily stipends – essentials that their male counterparts had always enjoyed. Although the strike did not immediately lead to an agreement with the AFA, it set the stage for ongoing resistance and future demands for fair treatment.

This strike did not occur in isolation but was part of a broader **wave of feminist movements** sweeping across Argentina and South America. The feminist movements in Argentina had been gaining momentum since the *Ni Una Menos* demonstrations in 2015, which protested against gender-based violence. By 2018, the movement had become even more widespread, fueled by a socio-economic crisis marked by inflation, austerity measures, and pervasive gender violence (Hijós & Hang, 2018). Feminism, during this period, offered hope to many, as it became increasingly intertwined with the fight for bodily autonomy and women's rights, as exemplified by the legislative debate over the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy Bill (Hang, 2020, p. 14).

The intersection of feminist activism and women's football reached a critical juncture during the **2018** Copa América. The Argentine **women's national team's protest**, symbolized by their pre-match pose with hands cupped behind their ears, became a powerful statement demanding that their voices be heard (Alvarez Litke, 2020, p. 86). This act was more than just a plea for better training conditions; it marked a significant turning point, signaling the further politicization of women's football and its integration into the broader feminist movement in Argentina.

The feminist movement's involvement in football did not suddenly emerge in 2018; it was the culmination of years of activism by athletes and feminist groups advocating for gender equality in sports (Ibarra et al., 2023). For several years, these groups been acting in informal spaces for women to train and discuss the deep-rooted gender inequalities in football, setting the stage for the national team's protest to gain widespread support. Consequently, the 2018 protest not only amplified the voices of the players but also marked a turning point in how football was viewed within feminist discourse. The sport became a focal point of feminist activism in Argentina. As a result, feminist networks comprising fans, coaches and players from various clubs were formed, aiming to build tools for organizing themselves. The slogan “*#DejenJugarA*” (*#LetThemPlay*) led to viral campaigns and formal complaints to the National Institute Against Discrimination (INADI), drawing attention to the ongoing discrimination faced by women players in their pursuit of athletic development.

New feminist narratives began to challenge the traditional, male-dominated storytelling that had long defined the sport. Scholars and journalists increasingly documented and celebrated the stories of women who had historically organized opportunities across the country to play, watch, and enjoy football. This shift in narrative further solidified the connection between feminist movements and women's football, transforming the sport into a powerful symbol of the broader struggle for gender equality in Argentina (Hijós & Hang, 2018). The impact of these protests, along with the ongoing feminist movement in the country, was profound, leading to increased awareness and pressure on the AFA to address systemic inequalities in women's football.

A significant moment came in **November 2018** during the **World Cup qualifying playoff against Panama** in Buenos Aires (Garton et al., 2021, p. 635). In front of a record crowd of 11,500 people, with AFA President Tapia and men's coach Scaloni in attendance, Argentina secured a place in the 2019 FIFA WWC with a decisive 4-0 victory. The success in these qualifiers, along with the public protests, intensified demands for the professionalization and better treatment of women's football in Argentina. These events marked a paradigm shift, compelling club administrators and the AFA to confront the urgent need for change and to recognize the value and potential of women's football in the country.

On the **domestic front**, the case of **Macarena Sánchez** significantly advanced the discussions of the conditions of women in football, when her club UAI Urquiza, a team that had dominated the women's league in Argentina, unexpectedly released Sanchez mid-season in January 2019 (Garton et al., 2021, p.632). Without any formal contracts, Sánchez, like many other players, had no job security, benefits, or legal recourse in cases of unfair treatment. Consequently, players were left in a precarious situation, vulnerable to being released by the club at any moment if their services were no longer needed. For many, particularly those hailing from other provinces, this could mean losing not just their place on the team, but also their home in Buenos Aires. Refusing to accept this injustice, Sánchez launched a legal battle against UAI Urquiza and the AFA, demanding recognition of her rights as a professional athlete. Her legal action was unprecedented in Argentina, as it directly challenged the amateur status that had long been imposed on women's players (Pujol, 2019, pp. 219–220). Sánchez argued that the lack of formal contracts violated her rights, and that the AFA had a responsibility to protect and promote the rights of women's footballers. Sánchez's case garnered significant media attention and became a symbol of the broader struggle for gender equality in Argentine football (Wrack, 2019)

The widespread attention and public outcry generated by the exposure of individual players and the collective precariousness they faced prompted significant action (Garton et al., 2021, p. 626; Knijnik & Garton, 2022, p. 24). In March 2019, just two months after Sánchez included AFA in her lawsuit against her former club, president Tapia announced the establishment of the first Women's Professional Football League.

The period from 1991 to 2019 was marked by both struggle and (slow) progress for women's football in Argentina. Although the AFA's formal recognition of women's football in 1991 was an important milestone, it lacked the necessary institutional support to truly advance the sport. The players' strike in 2017 brought to light the deep-rooted inequalities and persistent gender biases that had long stifled women's football. Despite these obstacles, the resilience and determination of players to fight for their rights laid the foundation for the professionalization of the sport in 2019, signaling a new chapter in its history. This progress unfolded within the broader context of feminist activism in Argentina and the region (Arambuena, 2022, p. 2). Empowered by the first #NiUnaMenos movement, activists

challenged the traditionally male-dominated world of football, transforming it into a contested space. Women involved in football and feminist collectives, through protests and social media, have drawn attention to the gender inequalities and patriarchal structures embedded in the sport. Their demands extend beyond the right to play and narrate football, calling for equal participation in club management and the governance of the game itself.

4.4.3 The Era Of “*Semi-Professionalization*” : 2019-2023

The announcement of Argentina's first Women's Professional Football League in 2019 – 88 years after the men's league was professionalized in 1931 – was touted as a major advancement. Yet the reality faced by women in football raises serious doubts about whether the AFA's policies are merely symbolic gestures (Arambuena, 2022, p. 2).

In theory, **professionalization** should guarantee that players can earn a living from their sport, allowing them to dedicate the time and energy required to meet the demands of professional training and competition without the burden of maintaining additional employment (M. García, 2022, p. 186). Yet, the implementation of this ideal has been uneven and incomplete in Argentina. The 2019 agreement between the Argentine Footballers' Union (FAA) and the AFA mandated that Women's First Division teams offer a minimum of eight professional contracts which gradually increased to 15 until 2023. These contracts are partially subsidized by the AFA, but clubs must bear the additional costs for any extra contracts or higher salaries, a significant burden given that a typical team consists of around 25 players (Knijnik & Garton, 2022, p. 26).

This arrangement has led to stark disparities among clubs. Wealthier teams like Boca Juniors, River Plate, and San Lorenzo can afford to contract their entire squads, but they are exceptions. Most clubs, with limited financial resources, must choose which players receive contracts, leaving the majority in precarious situations where they still need additional jobs to make a living. By 2022, only 345 out of 577 registered players in the First League had professional contracts, meaning nearly 40% of players remain amateurs (Corti, 2023). Many clubs continue to operate under “*marronismo*” which involves informal and often exploitative practices, rather than embracing genuine professionalization (Garton et al., 2021, p. 631).

The term “*semi-professionalization*” more accurately captures the current state of women's football in Argentina. Even players with official contracts often rely on additional employment, as their salaries fall far short of covering monthly expenses. In 2024, the minimum salary for a contracted female player was \$203,500 pesos (around \$200 USD), significantly below the Minimum Living and Mobile Wage (SMVM), which stood at approximately \$773,385 pesos (around \$800 USD)(De Uriburu, 2024).

Moreover, the professionalization of women's football has introduced new pressures on players, who must now juggle the demands of elite sport with the challenges of low pay and limited job security (Hijós & Hang, 2022). Adapting to television schedules, managing social media presence, and enduring rigorous training sessions are all part of the professional athlete's life, yet for many women players in Argentina, these demands are met with insufficient financial compensation and support.

The 2019 semi-professionalization of women's football in Argentina, while initially celebrated, has been critically evaluated by Gabriela Garton – both a professional player and sociologist – as a rushed, superficial response to mounting public pressure. According to Garton, this move was less a genuine effort to elevate the status of women in the sport and more of a tactical response by the hegemonic male leadership to quell the growing discontent within the players' movement and the broader Argentine feminist movement. Garton views the professionalization of women's football as a tool to stabilize the current power dynamics rather than to address systemic gender inequalities (Garton et al., 2021, p. 636).

A key figure in this move was AFA President Claudio Tapia, who positioned himself as the “*President of Gender Equality*” (Hang & Hijós, 2023). However, Tapia's framing of this initiative was more about retaining control and portraying a progressive image than addressing the deep structural inequalities that women players face. The AFA maintained dominance over the players, offering concessions but without fundamentally altering the male-dominated structure of the sport. The financial support from the AFA, while a step forward, was also a means of controlling the narrative and maintaining social order in a time of increasing feminist activism.

In this context, the semi-professionalization of women's football can be seen as a political maneuver aimed at containing the demands for equality rather than as a genuine attempt to provide equal labour conditions. It temporarily mitigated the growing pressures from both within the sport and the wider feminist movement but did not dismantle the gendered hierarchies that continue to marginalize women in football.

Status quo: The status of women's football in Argentina is marked by a combination of notable advancements and entrenched structural challenges. On one hand, the rise of feminist movements in the country has had a significant impact on football culture. This growing synergy between feminism and sport has prompted several clubs to take action aimed at reducing machismo and increasing the visibility of women. Initiatives such as workshops on masculinities for youth players, gender training for club employees, and campaigns to recognize outstanding female athletes have become increasingly common (Hang, 2020, p. 15). At the political level, legislative measures like the creation of the recreational league “*Nosotras Jugamos*” and the broadcasting of the women's national team's matches during the 2019 World Cup represent significant progress toward normalizing women's football within the broader

national sporting landscape (Garton et al., 2021, p. 630). Another key development has been the inclusion of Mara Gómez, the first transgender woman to play in Argentina's first-division league, a landmark step in challenging longstanding transphobic prejudices within the sport (McShane, 2021).

Increased media exposure has further contributed to the growth of the sport. The broadcasting of Primera División matches and coverage of the 2019 WWC provided unprecedented visibility for women's football in Argentina (Arambuena, 2022, p. 3). This visibility is bolstered by an expanding academic interest in the field and a growing number of women actively participating in the sport – nearly one million across federated and informal leagues (Garton & Hijós, 2018b, p. 32)

However, these positive developments exist alongside persistent structural inequalities that continue to undermine the progress made. The semi-professionalization of women's football in 2019, while improving certain logistical aspects like training conditions, has not provided players with adequate financial security. Many players still rely on supplementary employment as their salaries fall well below the minimum living wage. The inadequacy of funding has been exacerbated by recent budget cuts under the new far-right government of Milei, which has resulted in the loss of free-to-air broadcasting for women's football, making matches accessible only through paid media outlets (Lo que quieren las Wachas, 2024)

Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women in key decision-making roles within Argentine football remains a critical issue. Despite the passage of Law 27.202, which mandates gender quotas in sports organizations (Yañez, 2020), only 4% of executive committee members in Argentine football are women (FIFA, 2023c, p. 37). The law remains unenforced, illustrating the gap between symbolic policies and substantive change. In coaching and refereeing, women represent only 1% and 6%, respectively, of the total workforce (íbid). These figures indicate that leadership and governance in football continue to be strongly dominated by men, despite increasing women's participation in the sport.

The culture of sexism and harassment remains a pressing concern, as demonstrated by the abuse faced by Yamila Rodríguez, a national team striker, during the 2023 WWC (Ibarra et al., 2023). After revealing her admiration for Cristiano Ronaldo through a tattoo, Rodríguez was subjected to a wave of sexist, racist, and homophobic attacks online. This incident reflects the persistent machismo and misogyny that characterize the culture surrounding women's football in Argentina, where women are still held to different and often harsher standards than their male counterparts.

Additionally, the working conditions for the women's national team remain substandard. In May 2024, several players resigned from the national team in protest of poor conditions, citing inadequate food

provisions and a lack of funding for travel to international matches (Sanz del Río, 2024). The AFA's failure to meet the players' basic needs starkly contrasts with the resources allocated to the men's team, underscoring the deep inequalities that persist within the structure of Argentine football.

4.4.4 Questions Which Remain...

While women's football catalyzed by feminist movements has made significant strides in material and symbolic recognition, these gains remain overshadowed by persistent structural and cultural barriers. The “*professionalization*” of the sport has proven insufficient in addressing the economic vulnerabilities faced by players, and the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles continues to undermine the goal of gender equality, leaving the perspectives of women ignored. Moreover, the opportunities for girls to participate remain concentrated in Buenos Aires, while limited in the rest of the country. The advances made, while meaningful, are precarious and require sustained effort to ensure that they are not merely symbolic but transformative.

Despite some progress, we must remember those who came before – the women and LGBTQI+ individuals who faced hegemonic masculinity, playing without institutional support or basic equipment, their contributions largely erased from the national narrative. Their courage laid the groundwork for today's progress, yet their erasure warns us of its fragility. As we celebrate the recent boom in women's football, we must ask ourselves: who is truly benefiting from this change, and how can we ensure that football becomes a space where all bodies are legitimized?

Let us ask the people involved.

5 Unveiling Gender Dynamics In Argentine Football: Analyzing Power, Resistance, And Pathways To Change

This chapter examines gender relations within Argentine football by combining theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to address the research questions. It is structured into two subchapters that explore how hegemonic masculinity is constructed, legitimized, and challenged within the sport, as well as the potential conditions for change.

Subchapter 5.1, “*Legitimation of Hegemonic Masculinity and Its Implications for Women*”, uses Connell’s theory to analyze how gendered practices, institutional structures, and cultural norms reinforce male dominance and the marginalization of women. It also discusses women’s strategies of resistance, while acknowledging the complexities and constraints of transforming entrenched gender norms, offering a realistic perspective on the struggle for gender equality.

Subchapter 5.2, “*Conditions for Change*”, applies Fraser’s framework to explore pathways for socio-political change, emphasizing collective action, policy shifts, and cultural transformations.

Together, these subchapters integrate deductive and inductive insights to offer a nuanced understanding of how gender relations in Argentine football are constructed and contested, and to explore potential pathways for transformation while recognizing the structural barriers to change.

5.1 Legitimation Of Hegemonic Masculinity And Its Implication For Women

5.1.1 Patriarchal Gender Order

Drawing from my empirical research through interviews and observations in Argentina, it becomes clear that the underlying patriarchal gender order in society serves as the primary force that naturalizes and legitimizes male dominance across various social spheres. Deeply woven into the cultural and social fabric, this gender order privileges men with greater access to public spaces, authority, and visibility while systematically marginalizing women (and gender non-conforming individuals), thereby revealing deep-rooted gendered hierarchies (see Chapter 2.1, Connell).

Gender order in the broader society: Argentine society is significantly influenced by this patriarchal gender order, ingrained in longstanding traditions and reinforced by a pervasive (often violent) “*machismo*” culture. While there can be observed a growing resistance to these norms, particularly since the Ni-Una-Menos demonstration in 2015, the deconstruction of such gender dynamics across different social institutions (e.g. schools, families, state) is an ongoing process.

At the core of this gender order is the division of men and women into distinct, hierarchical roles, spaces, and attributes, justified by perceived biological differences (see Chapter 2.1, Connell). Here,

masculinity – as a pattern of social practice – is culturally associated with traits such as strength, assertiveness, leadership, and emotional restraint. These attributes position men predominantly in the public sphere, granting them power and authority across social domains. Conversely, femininity is tied to qualities like nurturing, caregiving, and emotional labor, which often confines women to the private, domestic sphere, contributing to their marginalization and lack of representation in public life.

Mónica Santino, co-founder of the feminist football organization La Nuestra, underscores the deep gender divides in Argentina, stating: “*What we (the women) had reserved for us was the domestic sphere, the inside, and the work of love that sustained the lives of all those men...*” (Group Interview La Nuestra, Santino, Pos. 28). Santino’s words reflect how women are systematically relegated to unpaid reproductive labor – tasks that sustain the daily lives of men but remain invisible and undervalued in the public sphere. This echoes the economic dimension of gender relations, where the division between paid productive (public) and unpaid reproductive (private) labor reinforces the unequal distribution of power and resources along gender lines.



Monica Santino, 58 years old, co-founded “La Nuestra Fútbol Feminista”. With a background as a former football player, Santino currently serves as a football coach and plays a key role in shaping the organization's agenda. Describing herself as a militant feminist activist, Santino also works as a sports journalist and has authored multiple publications on football and gender. She holds degrees as a National Physical Education Teacher and Biological Sciences Teacher.

Figure 9: Monica Santino (on the left) with one of her players at La Nuestra (Own collection, 2023, Buenos Aires)

The machismo culture in Argentina intensifies these power relations by upholding ideals of male superiority and dominance. Traits associated with hegemonic masculinity – such as toughness, control, and emotional restraint – are celebrated, justifying male authority in both public and private spheres (see Chapter 2.1, Connell). These dynamics are deeply tied to symbolic and physical violence, as machismo normalizes aggressive behaviors and legitimizes sexism and homophobia. This cultural climate has concrete effects, contributing to Argentina’s high rates of gender-based violence, including femicide – the murder of women due to their gender. In Argentina recorded 322 femicides, marking a 33% increase from the previous year (Defensoría del Pueblo de la Nación, 2024).

Recent political developments have further exacerbated these issues. The closure of the Ministry of Women and Gender, coupled with President Milei's assertion that “*violence has no gender*” (Fernandez

Villa, 2024) undermines efforts to combat systemic gender violence and reinforces the existing patriarchal order. Such rhetoric legitimizes power imbalances within gender hierarchies, framing gender-based violence as a socially acceptable tool for maintaining male dominance and upholding patriarchal norms.

Gender regime in sports: The patriarchal gender order shaping Argentine society is embedded in its social institutions, including sports, which act as key cultural spheres (see Chapter 2.1, Connell). Sports operate under their own gender regime, reflecting and perpetuating broader gender structures. The norms and practices in sports align with societal ideals of masculinity, reinforcing associations of men with strength and competition while limiting women's participation, as seen in the construction of hegemonic masculinity.

Biological determinism – the belief that physical and emotional traits are inherently tied to one's sex – plays a significant role in shaping gender perceptions of suitable sports. Those emphasizing strength, aggression, and physicality are aligned with masculine ideals and seen as appropriate for men (see Chapter 2.1, Connell). In contrast, women are steered toward sports emphasizing grace, aesthetics, or limited contact, such as gymnastics or volleyball.

Excluding women from “aggressive” sports like football, traditionally viewed as a male domain, reinforces ideas that women’s bodies are unsuited for such activities, perpetuating their marginalization. Lorena Berdula, a sports and social scientist, argues these beliefs are socially constructed to maintain power hierarchies in sports (Interview Berdula, Pos. 86). She posits that motor skills and physical capabilities are shaped by social conditioning, not biology, showing how hegemonic masculinity is upheld within physical arenas.

Lorena Irene Berdula (50 years) is a trailblazer in Argentine women's football as one of the first certified female coach in the country, earning her qualification in 1998. She co-founded the women's football team and school at Club Estudiantes de La Plata, where she began her coaching career. Beyond coaching, she is a professor of Physical Education at the University of La Plata, leading seminars on gender inclusion and equality in sports. She currently teaches and researches women's football, focusing on gender perspectives, and was a key organizer of the first Congress of Argentine Women Coaches in 2019.

Football as a Gendered Institution: Football, as a key social institution in Argentina, reflects the broader gender order through its distinct gender regime. Santino describes football as “a *man’s game*, where you don’t cry, where the brave play, where you have courage, where you have strength” (Group Interview La Nuestra, Santino, Pos. 29), encapsulating the way masculine ideals like emotional restraint, bravery, and physical dominance are celebrated as core qualities for participation.

Observations confirm this gender regime: discussions of football predominantly refer to men's football, with icons like Messi and Maradona shaping the narrative. Media coverage focuses almost exclusively on men's football, and male dominance is evident on the fields. This normalization and visibility of men in football exclude women from the public narrative, reinforcing a gendered hierarchy that privileges men, which will be explored further in subsequent sections.

Implications of the patriarchal gender order for women: The patriarchal gender order defines football's core values – strength, aggression, and emotional restraint – as inherently masculine. This framing delegitimizes the participation of women and non-conforming gender identities, viewing their involvement as disruptive to the established norms (see Chapter 2.1, Connell). As a result, women face systematic exclusion or, when they do participate, encounter stigmatization as they are often not seen as equally valued peers. The interviews and observations highlight the following key implications:

1. Denial of an intrinsic desire and key social activity: A recurring theme in the interviews is a strong intrinsic desire to engage with football – whether through playing, coaching, or being part of the football community. This passion often starts at a young age, described as a source of immense joy and a sense of belonging. This enthusiasm was evident not only in the women's statements but also in their body language, with visible shifts in their tone, facial expressions, and posture.



Figure 10: Young players at La Nuestra (Own collection, von der Laden, 2023)

This passion, however, was frequently met with discouragement and repression, rooted in the patriarchal gender order. In earlier decades, these restrictions were often severe. Rosa Villagra and Silvia Barrionuevo, who played informally in the 1950s and 1960s, recalled intense familial opposition to their participation in football. Villagra stated: *“It was pure joy for me to play. But my mom wouldn’t let me. She even hid my clothes. Sometimes she’d even beat me for playing”* (Group Interview, Villagra, Pos. 44). Her testimony underscores the threat of domestic violence women faced simply for following

their desire to play, revealing how violently gender norms were policed as women's participation in football was seen as socially transgressive.



Figure 11: Rosa Villagra (left) and Silvia Barrionuevo (right) (Own collection, von der Laden, 2023)

Rosa Villagra (71) is a former Argentine footballer who began playing at the age of eight in Córdoba, being the only girl among boys. Known for her resilience, she played basketball and later became a goalkeeper. In 1974, she was selected to play in Buenos Aires alongside notable figures like Marta Soler and Betty García who has participated in the WWC in Mexico 1971. Her passion for the sport persisted despite societal discrimination, and she continued to play until her health required her to stop

Silvia Barrionuevo (74) is a former forward in Argentine women's football, known for her skill and goal-scoring ability. She played for Estrellas de Pueyrredón in Córdoba, often competing against Rosa Villagra, and was part of a pioneering era when women's teams were just forming. Even after stepping back from competitive play, Silvia remained connected to the football scene, fostering the sport among younger generations and continuing to play for fun.

While violent reactions have become less common, football as a taboo persisted well into recent years, especially in more conservative communities. Luciana Martiarena who grew up in Villa 31⁴, a marginalized neighborhood in Buenos Aires, reflected on how her friends had to sneak out to attend football practice, showing how societal resistance still limits women's access to football and the risk of being punished for playing (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 23).



Figure 12: Luciana Martiarena (Image Source/Credits: José María Pigü Gómez, Celeste Rojas Mugica, 2023)

Luciana “Lucy” Martiarena (22) grew up near the football pitch of La Nuestra and joined the team at age 10. Initially the youngest player, Lucy encouraged more young girls to join. Football for her is not just about playing, it is a social experience and collective struggle. Lucy is actively involved in workshops and educational programs, particularly on topics like sexual education (ESI). She currently studies Education Sciences at UBA and works for the Government of the City of Buenos Aires.

⁴ Villa 31, now officially Barrio Padre Carlos Mugica, is a historically informal settlement in Buenos Aires, inhabited primarily by low-income internal migrants from other provinces and international migrants from Paraguay, Bolivia, and Peru. The term *villa* denotes such urban areas and carries connotations of poverty and marginalization. Despite recent recognition, the neighborhood remains stigmatized (Rollenhagen, 2019).

Even when physical barriers to participation were absent, women often faced stigmatization and discrimination, reinforcing their constructed inferiority in football. Interviewees frequently recalled derogatory comments when entering the football pitch rooted in gender stereotypes, such as *“This is not for you, go wash the dishes!”* (Interview Garcia, Pos. 84). This discourse not only delegitimized women’s involvement in football, but also reproduced the patriarchal gendered division of labour in which women are ascribed to take over the reproductive labour in the domestic sphere (see Chapter 2.1, Connell).

Professional players like Romina Gómez (known as *“Pepa”*) and Magalí Molina echoed similar childhood experiences of being excluded from organized games purely based on their gender. Molina shared: *“I felt a lot of discrimination, especially when playing with boys. I could join informal games, but for formal matches, they wouldn’t let me play because I was a girl”* (Interview Molina, Pos. 9). Even as a professional, Gómez emphasizes that masculinity still dominates football culture, pointing to the need for fundamental cultural change (Interview Gómez, Pos. 93).



Figure 13: Magalí Molina at CA Independiente (Own collection, von der Laden, 2023)



Figure 12: Romina “Pepa” Gómez at River Plate (Image source: Romina Gómez/Atlético River Plate, 2023)

Beyond playing, the exclusion extends to *coaching* and *fandom*. Berdula, who aspired to become a football coach in the late 1990s, was directly told by the official coaching school: *“No, this is not for you. Women can’t coach”* (Interview Berdula, Pos. 12), exemplifying the systematic denial of opportunities for women to hold leadership positions in football. This reflects not just a gender bias but an embedded belief that women’s contributions and expertise are secondary, and their capabilities are inherently inferior in football, giving explanations why only 1% of coaching positions are held by women in Argentina (see Chapter 4.4).

Martiarena highlights both the cultural and economic barriers that have historically excluded women from attending live matches, reinforcing their marginalization even as spectators. The fan scene, long seen as a male-dominated space, has been culturally constructed to make football feel like a man's game. This has imposed high cultural barriers for women, who have faced stigmatization and resistance when attempting to enter these spaces. These cultural obstacles are now compounded by economic barriers. The AFA's new ticket system, requiring paid membership, adds an additional hurdle, while rising ticket prices have turned attending national matches into a luxury reserved for the middle and upper classes, further excluding many women, particularly from lower-income backgrounds: *"I've never been to see the national team. It feels out of reach. Football moves us all, and we'd love to experience it live, but it feels more and more distant. It is a privilege for a few to access the sport, especially as spectators"* (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 110).

Santino emphasizes how denying women the right to play football is not just suppressing a passion but stripping away a fundamental right of identity and belonging: *"They robbed us of our right to play; it is fundamental to who we are. They told us 'no,' took the ball away, and gave it to our brothers"* (Group Interview La Nuestra, Santino, Pos. 72). The phrase *"robbed us"* conveys the historical exclusion of women from football, reflecting the loss of time and opportunities to participate, develop skills, and build identity within the sport. The act of taking the ball away and giving it to their brothers symbolizes the relational gender dynamics at play: boys are legitimized in their participation, while girls are systematically denied access. This relational aspect reinforces a gender hierarchy in which men dominate the space of football, while women are relegated to a position of subordination, reinforcing restrictive gender norms and denying them the basic human need for joy, self-expression, and connection with peers.

Football is central to Argentina's culture and daily life, symbolizing national unity. Yet, excluding women from this space perpetuates their marginalization from key socio-cultural experiences. As Martiarena points out: *"Football unites Argentina, but not being able to participate hurts"* (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 112). This contradiction reveals how a supposed symbol of unity becomes a mechanism of division, reinforcing gendered exclusion and inequality.

2. The denial to public spaces: Territorial exclusion is a key feature of the patriarchal gender regime in football, where men dominate the public spaces in which the sport is played and enjoyed (see Chapter 2.1, Connell).



Figure 14: A young boy playing a the Polideportivo Lucía Cullen - Padre Mugica in Buenos Aires (Own collection, von der Laden, 2023)

The need to “*claim the pitch*”, as frequently mentioned by participants (e.g. Aon, Pos. 97), underscores the spatial nature of their marginalization. Football fields and stadiums have long been male-dominated. Women face significant challenges accessing these spaces, from being physically blocked from pitches to a lack of facilities. As Santino notes, “*Public spaces are reserved for men, including raising their voices and making decisions, while women are relegated to domestic spaces and caregiving tasks*” (Group Interview La Nuestra, Santino, Pos. 28). Berdula describes this struggle vividly: “*We started using the field, then the groundskeeper showed up and said, 'You can't use this area'. Then, a couple weeks later, I had to fight, to claim the locker rooms*”.

(Interview Berdula, Pos. 23). Physical control over public

spaces in football reinforces male visibility and authority while confining women to the private sphere, limiting their opportunities and reinforcing societal norms. By dominating territory, men consolidate their power, making it harder to challenge the existing gender order.

Jimena Alejandra Aon (mid-30) has been a key member of La Nuestra since 2013, where she coaches the junior category and serves on the Management Committee, leading group workshops and managing social media content. With a degree in Community Education, she brings extensive experience in community work and women's organizations and has been actively involved in social movements throughout her career.

She spontaneously joined the interview with Mónica Santino.



Figure 15: Jimena Alejandra Aon (Own collection, von der Laden, 2023)

3. Mandato social: A frequently overlooked yet significant implication of the patriarchal gender order in football is the additional burden imposed by the “*mandato social*”, a term used by several interviewees to describe the societal expectation that women are responsible for caregiving and household tasks. This cultural mandate dictates that women are expected to prioritize domestic duties over personal pursuits or professional growth, as exemplified by comments like “*Go wash the dishes*” (e.g. Interview Garcia, Pos. 84). Consequently, women often face a *double* or even *triple shift*,

balancing paid work, unpaid reproductive work, and football training. This leaves them with little time for leisure or advancement in the sport, with some women even reporting the need to juggle football training and caregiving simultaneously. In contrast, men rarely encounter these constraints, as traditional gender roles continue to dominate both within the home and on the football field (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 46).

5.1.2 Institutional Anchoring

The first key finding has illustrated how the patriarchal gender order in Argentine society serves as the foundational mechanism that legitimizes hegemonic masculinity in football. Building on this, the second finding highlights the crucial role of institutionalization in embedding this patriarchal order. Institutions such as the state, schools, and football governing bodies (e.g. AFA and football clubs) actively enforce these norms, ensuring that hegemonic masculinity remains deeply ingrained in the sport through institutionalized structures and practices (see Chapter 2.1, Connell).

In this context the **school** takes a key role in institutionalizing hegemonic masculinity through its gendered division of sports within the education system, shaping societal norms and expectations. By dividing sports along gender lines, they reinforce the perception that activities like football are inherently male. Martiarena, a participant, reflects on her school experience: *“In primary school, everything was very divided. Football was for the boys, and maybe the girls would play volleyball. In the tournaments, it was the same, there were only boys' football tournaments”* (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 16). This early segregation acts as a socialization mechanism, normalizing girls' exclusion from football. Schools systematically reinforce gendered expectations, positioning football as central to masculine identity while limiting girls' access to the sport and leading them to internalize the notion that their participation in football is less legitimate. However, this exclusion in schools is not driven by official policy but by entrenched cultural practices, as Berdula explains: *“Football was never officially prohibited in schools, it was social practices that determined this exclusion”* (Interview Berdula, Pos. 86). This emphasizes the power of implicit norms, though not formally codified, these norms effectively reinforce the belief that football is a “boy's game”. Unwritten norms, while less visible, are often harder to challenge and play a crucial role in maintaining hegemonic masculinity. Schools, as central institutions in society, are instrumental in reproducing these gendered power dynamics, shaping children's expectations from an early age and solidifying gender hierarchies that persist into adulthood.

Beyond the education system, football governing bodies like the Argentine Football Association (AFA) and affiliated clubs have historically played a pivotal role in upholding structural barriers that limit women's opportunities in the sport. The late official recognition of women's football by the AFA in the 1990s underscores a prolonged period of institutional neglect. Prior to this recognition, women's

football operated without formal support, lacking access to resources, infrastructure, and organizational backing that were readily available to men's teams.

This delayed acknowledgment reflects deep-seated gender biases within the institutions governing Argentine football. The AFA's reluctance to officially sanction women's football until the late 20th century meant that generations of female players were excluded from participating in organized leagues, receiving professional training, or gaining visibility in the sport. This historical context is crucial for understanding the systemic challenges that persist today.

Interviews and secondary sources reveal that even after official recognition, these institutions often treat women's football as a "*second brand*", creating a hierarchical system where men's football is prioritized while women's football remains marginalized (Interview Sandoval, Pos. 133). This manifests in various structural challenges:

Lack of Infrastructure and Support: The late official recognition meant that women's teams had to build from scratch, often without adequate facilities or funding. While men's teams benefited from decades of investment, women's teams struggled with limited access to training grounds, equipment, and professional coaching. Martiarena and Gómez described difficulties in finding suitable training environments, often forced to play with older women due to the scarcity of age-appropriate teams (Interview Gómez, Pos. 4-6; Interview Martiarena, Pos. 8). This infrastructural neglect institutionalizes women's exclusion by limiting development pathways from an early age.

Inequitable Policy Implementation: Policies designed for men's football were indiscriminately applied to women's leagues without considering structural barriers women face. For instance, the age limit of 27 imposed by local football associations disproportionately affects women, many of whom started playing later due to the absence of youth programs. Gómez explains how this restriction cuts short their football careers (Interview Gómez, Pos. 99-101). Such policies, though appearing neutral, inadvertently perpetuate gendered inequalities.

Inadequate Training Conditions: Even when opportunities exist, women often face inferior training conditions. Santino describes rudimentary facilities with dirt fields and no amenities at La Villa 31 during initial training sessions (Group Interview La Nuestra, Santino, Pos. 9). Gómez recalls training in public parks or on substandard fields while men's teams had proper facilities (Interview Gómez, Pos. 16-17). Instances of disrupted training and tampered equipment further highlight systemic neglect (Interview Berdula, Pos. 22-23).

Inadequate Training Gear: Women's teams often receive inadequate equipment, typically hand-me-downs from men's teams. Gómez, like many others, recalls training in oversized men's gear (Interview

Gómez, Pos. 15), highlighting not just a lack of resources but also an experience of disempowerment and humiliation. Training in ill-fitting gear or substandard conditions reinforces the secondary status of women in the sport, affecting their access to proper facilities and recognition (see Chapter 2.1, Connell).

Scheduling Disparities: Discriminatory scheduling practices prioritize men's matches in prime time slots while relegating women's matches to inconvenient times with little notice. Enriqueta Tato highlights how this limits visibility and fan engagement for women's football (Group Interview La Nuestra, Pos. 136-138). This practice reflects not just logistical oversight but a systemic devaluation of women's football, reinforcing the perception that women's football is less important and less worthy of attention. This institutionalized disregard has a ripple effect, hindering the growth of women's football by depriving it of the same exposure, resources, and cultural legitimacy afforded to men's games (see Chapter 2.1, Connell).

Promotion and Media Coverage: The lack of investment in promoting women's football perpetuates its marginalization. Clubs focus marketing efforts on men's teams, resulting in fewer sponsorships and limited media exposure for women's teams. Sandoval critiques this institutional failure: *"Clubs are failing to communicate to the fan who says so much: 'I give my life for the shirt'"* (Interview Sandoval, Pos. 130). This neglect reinforces the perception that women's football is less legitimate and less valuable.

Financial inequalities: One of the most prominent manifestations of institutionalized inequality in Argentine football is the multifaceted financial disparity faced by women players. While public discourse often focuses on *"equal pay"*, the issue extends far beyond salary discrepancies. Women contend with non-payment for matches, out-of-pocket transportation costs to training and games, lack of insurance coverage, precarious contracts, absence of maternity protection, and inadequate accommodation support for those relocating from rural areas. These factors collectively entrench gendered disparities in the sport.

Interviewees consistently highlighted how men are positioned as the stars of football while women struggle to survive (Interview Sandoval, Pos. 69). Before the semi-professionalization in 2019, many female players received no financial compensation, forcing them to juggle part-time or full-time jobs alongside their football careers, placing an overwhelming burden on their lives. Sandoval recounts that during economic crises, players resorted to collecting cans or organizing charity events just to afford transportation to training (Pos. 51). Gómez describes balancing work and training: *"It was tough and I was losing money, but I was happy playing football"* (Interview Gómez, Pos. 20). This reflects the broader financial precariousness women face, often sacrificing livelihoods simply to continue playing.

Despite the 2019 semi-professionalization marking a significant milestone, financial inequalities remain pervasive. Gómez points out the health risks of working full-time while training: “After working, you're already tired when you go to train, and that's when injuries and fatigue appear” (Pos. 21). Her move to Buenos Aires and signing with River Plate was transformative: “*Now, I'm just playing football... you feel the difference – you train with 100% energy, and the injuries disappear*” (Pos. 40). However, only a small number of players – mainly in top clubs – receive contracts that barely cover living expenses. Martiarena notes that in smaller clubs, players must hold second or third jobs to make ends meet (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 107). This precarious economic reality extends to coaches as well; Gómez observes that many female coaches juggle multiple jobs due to insufficient coaching income: “*Coaching isn't lucrative. Most do it out of love, but they still need two or three jobs to survive*” (Interview Gómez, Pos. 201).

A stark example of financial disparity is the lack of housing support for women players migrating from rural areas to cities like Buenos Aires. With top clubs concentrated in the capital, many young players must relocate, facing significant financial challenges as clubs provide minimal assistance for accommodation. Sandoval recalls opening her home to nine teammates from rural areas due to the absence of club support: “*The club helped pay half the rent, but I had to pay the other half*” (Interview Sandoval, Pos. 53). This inadequate support forces young women to rely on personal connections to secure basic living arrangements, further limiting access for those without financial means or networks.

As previously discussed, financial disparities are exacerbated by poor promotion and commercialization of women's football. Insufficient funding and media attention lead to a lack of visibility, perpetuating a cycle of underinvestment (Interview Sandoval, Pos. 142). This lack of exposure results in fewer sponsorships and financial opportunities for players, maintaining their precarious economic state.

This historical and institutional neglect serves to maintain male dominance in football. The AFA's late recognition and subsequent inadequate support for women's football failed to address the deeply embedded structures favoring men's football. By systematically denying women equal opportunities, resources, and visibility, governing bodies perpetuate a narrative that football is inherently male, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity within the sport.

Moreover, minimal concessions made by football authorities – often in response to public pressure from players' strikes and feminist movements – were largely aimed at preserving existing power structures rather than effecting meaningful change (Knijnik & Garton, 2022, pp. 22–24). The 2017 players' strike and legal actions taken by players like Macarena Sánchez in 2019 highlighted persistent inequalities and spurred public discourse, yet institutional responses remained insufficient and sometimes tokenistic.

5.1.3 Gendered Design Of Facilities

Building on the previous findings, which highlighted the patriarchal gender order as a foundational mechanism for legitimizing hegemonic masculinity and its institutionalization through the state, schools, and football governing bodies, the third research finding turns to the gendered design of spaces in football .

The gendered design of spaces refers to how physical environments and behaviors within them are structured in ways that reinforce gender hierarchies and exclusions. In football, these spaces, such as locker rooms, training facilities, and VIP boxes, are not gender neutral but are often organized to sustain male dominance. As a result, women are marginalized, both in their access to these spaces and in how they are treated within them.

Berdula's testimony offers an example of this dynamic. Despite being allowed to access facilities as a coach, she describes how she had to “*conquer*” the locker rooms, spaces that were clearly not designed with women in mind (Interview Berdula, Pos. 23). Rather these are spaces in which male dominance is reinforced through homosocial behaviors. Men's use of these spaces often involves displays of masculinity, which makes women feel excluded or unwelcome. The absence of curtains in the locker rooms, as mentioned by Berdula, highlights the lack of consideration for women's privacy, sending a clear message that these facilities were designed for men, not women. This neglect of women's basic needs forces women to adapt, often resulting in discomfort, as reflected in Berdula's comment that “*the girls didn't want to shower*” (Pos. 23).

Similarly, Nuria Escobar's experience, as one of the first women to hold a position on the executive committee of a first-division football club, further illustrates the gendered exclusion within football, particularly in decision-making spaces. She recalls how the women's bathrooms in the “*palco*” (*VIP box*) remained locked, highlighting a historical disregard for women's presence in these environments, especially in spaces of power and decision-

Nuria Escobar, a trained professor for early childhood education, was actively involved in the football club San Lorenzo, where she served as a member of the Board of Directors. During her time on the board, she worked on institutional matters and advocated for gender equality within the club. As part of the fan collective La Soriano, Nuria played a key role in supporting policy development and promoting women's participation in sports, including pushing for structural changes.

making. As Escobar explains, “*The door is locked because there has never been a woman. Why would they open the bathroom if all the officials are men?*” (Interview Escobar, Pos. 2-4). This example demonstrates how the design of football spaces, whether intentional or not, reinforces the idea that

football administration and spectatorship are exclusively male domains, leaving women marginalized and unconsidered.

The gendered design of spaces in football has serious implications for the lived experiences of women. These spaces are not just inconvenient or uncomfortable for women; they reinforce their marginalization by signaling that they do not belong. When physical environments are designed around male needs and behaviors, women are placed in a subordinate position, their presence becomes an exception rather than the norm.

5.1.4 Gender Bias In Expertise And Authority

The research suggests that expertise and authority in football are often assigned to men, reinforcing male dominance within the sport. This dynamic is evident in how coaching roles and leadership positions are predominantly occupied by men, while women's competence is frequently questioned or undervalued.

An illustrative example comes from Martiarena's experience as a player. She recounts how her father would give instructions from the sidelines during her games, despite the presence of her qualified coach, Juliana. Eventually, Juliana had to assert her authority: "*She told my father to stop interfering and let her coach*" (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 21). This incident underlines a tendency to default to male authority figures, even when a competent female professional is present.

Similarly, Berdula faced institutional barriers when pursuing a coaching career. In the 1990s, she was rejected from coaching schools solely because she was a woman: "*They told me, 'You have to be a man and have played football'*" (Interview Berdula, Pos. 12). Despite becoming one of the first female coaches in Argentina, she was only allowed to start coaching at age 32 – the typical retirement age for male players (Pos. 138). This policy reflects how coaching structures are designed around male career trajectories, neglecting the pathways of women in football.

These experiences illustrate how expertise and authority are often assigned to men through institutional practices and cultural perceptions. According to Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, certain masculinities are culturally exalted, establishing norms that legitimize men's dominance over women (see Chapter 2.1, Connell). In football, this translates to an assumption that men are inherently more knowledgeable and capable leaders in the sport.

The scarcity of women in leadership roles perpetuates this male dominance. With few women in positions of authority, male perspectives become the default in decision-making processes, limiting the

inclusion of female viewpoints. This lack of representation also reduces opportunities for mentorship and role modeling for aspiring female leaders.

Cultural associations of football with traditionally masculine traits – such as competitiveness, aggression, and physical prowess – further reinforce the assignment of authority to men. These stereotypes can undermine women's credibility, making it more challenging for them to be recognized as experts or leaders in the sport (see Chapter 2.1, Connell).

5.1.5 Gendered Power Structures In Decision-Making

In line with the preceding discussions, this section delves into how male dominance – through power structures – legitimizes and further cements hegemonic masculinity in football.

The Status Quo: Male Dominance in Decision-Making: A central theme from the testimonies is the overwhelming male dominance in football governance, where women are conspicuously absent from decision-making positions. Despite women's growing participation in the sport, key leadership roles, such as those in club management, national football federations, and executive committees, are almost exclusively occupied by men. Gómez, a professional football player, captures this exclusion poignantly: *“They are all men and they are the ones who decide. I’m telling you, it is terrible. That’s why we don’t progress”* (Interview Gómez, Pos. 128).

Figuerola's description of the individuals in power as *“patriarchal dinosaur dudes with outrageous power”* (Group Interview La Nuestra, Figuerola, Pos. 44) vividly captures both the entrenchment and the resistance to change among the male leaders of Argentine football. By referring to them as *“dinosaurs”*, she critiques their outdated and patriarchal approaches, implying that their views are relics of the past. The term *“dudes”* (original: *“chabones”*) conveys the informality of their male networks, highlighting the exclusionary nature of decision-making spaces, while *“outrageous power”* underscores the excessive and unchecked authority these men wield. Figuerola's statement encapsulates her frustration with a leadership that stubbornly clings to power, reinforcing a system in which a male elite benefits from the patriarchal dividend, marginalizing women and preventing meaningful progress.

María José (Majo) Figuerola (mid-30) is the Head Coach of the Junior-Teens Categories at La Nuestra. She is pursuing a degree in Physical Education and Sports at Universidad Nacional de Avellaneda (UNDAV). She spontaneously joined the interview with Mónica Santino. As a feminist activist, Majo has been involved with La Nuestra since 2014 as the treasurer and a member of the coaching team, bringing her extensive experience in community sports, recreational activities, and work with children and teens.

The intersection of football and politics further reinforces this exclusion. Political figures, often male, maintain close relationships with football executives, creating a web of influence that is inaccessible to

women. Aon commented on this tight-knit connection: “*Here, everything is really mixed together, politicians, football leaders. And there is a really, really strong patriarchal resistance*” (Group Interview La Nuestra, Aon, Pos. 143). The power held by this elite male circle not only legitimizes male dominance in the sport interested in maintaining this social order as they benefit from it through asserting economic and social power but also creates a near-impenetrable barrier for women to access influential positions.

Mechanisms That Exclude Women: The exclusion of women from decision-making roles is not merely a byproduct of tradition but is actively sustained through institutionalized practices and social norms that prioritize men:

Escobar, one of the few women serving on an executive committee of a top-tier football team, sheds light on how these mechanisms operate. Leadership roles demand significant time commitments, financial resources, and flexibility – attributes more accessible to men due to traditional gender roles. She observes, “*None of them are married and living with their children... the family doesn’t put up with it*” (Interview Escobar, Pos. 49). This highlights how leadership expectations are structured around the assumption that leaders are unencumbered by domestic responsibilities, aligning with societal norms that assign caregiving duties primarily to women.

The gendered division of labor means that women often bear the brunt of household and caregiving responsibilities, limiting their availability for roles that require extensive travel, irregular hours, and late-night commitments inherent in football leadership (Chapter 2.1, Connell). This division restricts women's ability to engage fully in leadership positions and participate in the informal settings where critical decisions are made.

Moreover, women frequently lack the financial capital required for leadership roles that demand personal funding for travel, networking, and other expenses. Escobar points out that these roles often assume a level of financial flexibility not accessible to everyone: “*If trips to Colombia are a barrier for me to be able to do politics, then I’m left out of everything*” (Interview Escobar, Pos. 50). This financial barrier disproportionately affects women, who may have less access to personal wealth due to systemic economic inequalities.

Additionally, men have historically dominated football's social and professional networks, creating exclusive circles where relationships and trust are built through shared experiences in male-dominated spaces. Critical decisions are often made in informal settings – car rides, halftime conversations, post-match gatherings – where women are either absent or marginalized (Interview Escobar, Pos. 50). These informal networks act as gatekeepers, maintaining male control over decision-making by limiting women's access to pivotal discussions that shape the sport's direction.

This self-reproducing cycle is evident in the practice of men appointing or electing other men to leadership positions, effectively excluding women from the upper echelons of football governance. The absence of women in leadership roles means that there are fewer advocates to challenge existing norms or mentor other women, perpetuating the status quo. As Escobar's experiences illustrate, even when women attain positions of influence, they often remain on the periphery of power due to these entrenched practices.

Implications: The consequences of this exclusion from leadership roles are profound. Women's limited representation in decision-making directly impacts their opportunities and conditions within the sport as their specific perspectives are not covered. Testimonies from players such as Gómez and Sandoval point to how male-dominated leadership controls everything from playing conditions to contract negotiations, often to the detriment of female players. Berdula's experiences show how men in power serve as gatekeepers to coaching opportunities, highlighting how deeply intertwined decision-making and career progression are in the football hierarchy.

Escobar, in her role as an executive committee member, confirms this immense concentration of power, describing the overwhelming responsibility and constant decision-making in her position: *"It is total madness all the time, you're making big decisions all the time"* (Interview Escobar, Pos. 81). Whether determining player contracts, team selection, or investment in women's teams, the people in power hold the reins of control.

Given the significant power held by authorities, speaking out against these structures carries considerable risks. Sandoval describes how women who challenge male leaders often face repercussions, including exclusion from teams: *"Here in our national team, many players were erased for a long time because they stood up and spoke the truth. The leaders don't like being told the truth"* (Interview Sandoval, Pos. 126). This fear of reprisal fosters a culture of silence and complicity, where women hesitate to confront the status quo to avoid jeopardizing their careers.

The male leaders in football also control the visibility and promotion of women's football, further marginalizing women's participation. Sandoval pointed out that the lack of investment in women's football is not a matter of market forces but of political will: *"It is very simple, because it is not shown! There's no political will to promote women's football at the same level as men's"* (Interview Sandoval, Pos. 142). By controlling the resources and media attention allocated to women's football, male leaders dictate its development and, by extension, its legitimacy. This exclusion from both decision-making and visibility creates a cycle where women's football remains underdeveloped and underfunded, reinforcing the perception of male superiority in the sport and women's football sidelined status.

Consequently, gendered power structures in Argentine football are key to the construction and persistence of hegemonic masculinity. The exclusion of women from leadership roles is not incidental but a product of entrenched institutional biases, male-dominated networks, and political connections that ensure male authority remains unchallenged. These structures not only prevent women from accessing decision-making positions but also reinforce a broader patriarchal system that dictates the “*rules of the game*” on and off the pitch.

5.1.6 (Media) Representation And Narratives

The media reinforces football as a male-dominated space through its representations and narratives. In Argentina, it has been instrumental in constructing football as part of a heavily gendered national identity, as my research confirms. Through selective coverage, framing, and biased commentary, the media perpetuates hegemonic masculinity, reinforcing male dominance in football and shaping women's experiences in the sport.

Presenting Men’s Football as the Norm: The media legitimizes hegemonic masculinity in football by consistently framing men's football as the standard and natural form of the sport, while women's football requires explicit labeling. This practice reinforces the perception that men's football is the default, treating women's football as an anomaly. By positioning women's participation as exceptional, the media normalizes male dominance and marginalizes women's contributions, embedding gender hierarchies into the sport's cultural discourse.

Implications: This “*othering*” not only impacts the visibility of the women athletes in this research but also affects their sense of belonging and recognition within the football community. According to the interviewees, they often feel less valued and find that their experiences are not represented in the broader narrative of the sport, which is primarily centered on and shaped by male experiences. This reinforces the notion that women are not seen as equally worthy participants in football and must constantly struggle for recognition.

Silencing and Erasing Women’s Presence: The media’s selective coverage of football reinforces the notion that it is a men’s game by largely ignoring women’s participation, both past and present. This gendered focus has led to the near-total erasure of women’s contributions from the sport’s history. As Sandoval noted, while men have a well-documented narrative, women are left to “*make their own history*” due to the lack of mainstream recognition (Interview Sandoval, Pos. 98). Thus, the so-called national history of football in Argentina, is a only the “*national*” history of one part of the population, the “*others*”, are an almost invisible.

Although the number of covered women's matches and tournaments is increasing, their visibility is still limited, with profound implications. The lack of media attention effectively erases their presence and achievements from public awareness. Gómez, reflecting on the 2023 WWC, noted the stark contrast between the scarce broadcasting of women's matches and the widespread coverage of men's events: *"They broadcast the Women's World Cup, but hardly any media outlets covered it... It was disheartening because, just like men, women live and breathe the sport, women's football is a sport too"* (Interview Gómez, Pos. 85).

This disparity is especially striking in Argentina, a football-obsessed nation. When the men's national team plays, the streets erupt with fan celebrations, while women's matches remain unnoticed, their achievements overshadowed. In a country so consumed by football, it is paradoxical that the women's game remains relegated to the margins, almost invisible in the public consciousness. This media silencing not only undermines the contributions of women's footballers, but also reinforces gender hierarchies in the sport, suggesting that only men's football merits public attention and celebration.

As previously mentioned, the lack of media visibility exacerbates economic challenges for the women in this research by limiting recognition and thus sponsorship opportunities. This reinforces structural barriers and compels many to take secondary jobs, hindering their athletic focus and perpetuating inequality in women's football.

Furthermore, the limited visibility and over-presence of male figures leads to a significant lack of relatable role models for young people. This absence is not only a matter of representation but also affects how young people perceive their opportunities and aspirations within the sport.

Framing Women's Football as Entertainment: Even when women's football is covered, it is often framed in ways that trivialize their participation. Historically, women's football has been treated as entertainment rather than as a serious sport. Sandoval recalls how in the mid-20th century, women playing football were seen as a spectacle, not athletes: *"It was like a circus... people would say, 'Oh, look how the women play'"* (Interview Sandoval, Pos. 94). This framing continues to persist in contemporary media, where women's matches are often presented as less competitive or less skilled compared to men's football.

Implication: This trivialization, as discussed in interviews, undermines the athletic legitimacy of the women footballers in this research. When framed as novelties or merely entertaining rather than serious competitors, their credibility as athletes is diminished. This portrayal affects how they are perceived not only by the public and peers but also by themselves, leading to a lack of respect and recognition within the sport. Some women may respond to this by feeling pressured to work even harder to prove their

legitimacy, while others may feel discouraged and disempowered, as previously discussed regarding humiliation as a means of undermining authority. This dynamic reinforces their marginalization and adds psychological stress.

Representation of female fans in a male arena: The reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity in football is closely tied to mechanisms that dehumanize and devalue women who adopt traits and behaviors deemed "*masculine*". Female fans who assert their passion in male-dominated spaces, like La Gorda Matosas of River Plate and La Raulito of Boca Juniors, are prime examples. By adopting behaviors aligned with the aggressive "*aguante*" culture – characterized by physical displays of support, toughness, and loyalty – they conform to norms that are typically celebrated in male fans. However,



Figure 17: María Esther Duffau known as La Raulito (Image Source: Grabia, 2024, Original author unknown)



Figure 16: Haydee Lujan Martínez known as La Gorda Matosas (Image Source: Grabia, 2024, Original author unknown)

rather than being granted equal status within the fan community, these women are often dehumanized and reduced to mere caricatures, viewed not as authentic fans but as spectacles or "*mascots*" of the male-dominated football culture.

This reaction stems from their transgression of traditional gender norms; by claiming spaces and behaviors associated with masculinity, they challenge the perceived naturalness of male dominance in football. The hegemonic system reacts by stripping them of full legitimacy, subordinating their presence, and denying them the same recognition granted to male counterparts. In this way, the mechanism works to reinforce hegemonic masculinity by discrediting and devaluing women who threaten its dominance, preserving football as an exclusive arena of male power and control. Thus, the dehumanization of women who embody "*masculine*" traits upholds the gender order, ensuring that such spaces remain firmly anchored in patriarchal values.

While progress toward inclusivity has been made, similar challenges remain today. Female fans often still feel compelled to adopt "*masculine*" expressions of fandom to gain legitimacy, yet face a double

standard: when they embody these traits, they are seen as transgressive and fail to align with societal expectations of femininity. This paradox reinforces hegemonic masculinity by creating a space where women must navigate a narrow and contradictory path to be recognized as "authentic" fans.

Objectification and Focus on Personal Lives: Hegemonic masculinity in football is further reinforced through the media's objectification of women players, often emphasizing their appearance or personal lives rather than their athletic performance. Still today, female athletes are frequently asked about their relationships, families, or plans for motherhood, while men are rarely subjected to such scrutiny. One player expressed frustration: "*It is very common to see interviews done by men who ask you if you have a boyfriend, if you have children, or if you plan to become a mother. I'm tired of hearing interviews that aren't about the game*" (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 73).

As Martiarena points out, even when women are given a platform, their stories are often reshaped by the media to fit a male-centric agenda: "*They come and they want to tell their version, it is very unpleasant for us(...) They already know how they want to write their story*" (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 90-91). This distortion not only silences women's authentic voices but also sustains the exclusionary culture of football, where women – if represented – are represented through the male lens and thus struggle to achieve genuine representation, especially in the mainstream media.

By focusing on personal aspects of their lives, the media diminishes their status as athletes and reinforces the idea that women must fit into certain societal expectations, even while excelling in their sport. This can lead to a sense of frustration and alienation among female footballers, as they struggle to have their sporting achievements recognized on equal footing with men. Moreover, it reinforces a narrative that their worth is tied not only to their skills but also to their adherence to gender norms, which further marginalizes them within the sporting community.

Concluding, through selective coverage, trivialization, objectification, and the normalization of sexist commentary, the media reinforces the structural inequalities that women face in football. These narratives shape public perceptions, limit professional opportunities, and contribute to a culture of exclusion and marginalization, making it difficult for women to achieve equal recognition and legitimacy within the sport.

5.1.7 Bodies As Both Agents And Objects

To better grasp hegemonic masculinity in football, it is essential to recognize the close interplay between social norms and bodily experiences (see Chapter 2.1, Connell). This *centrality of the body* is found across all interviews and particularly emphasized by the coaches and players from La Nuestra

and scholars like Berdula and Hang (*informal talk*). Their testimonies underscore how the gender regime in football shapes and regulates their bodily experiences. On the other side, these individuals also use their bodies as tools for resistance, asserting their presence and reclaiming space within a traditionally male-dominated arena. The body, then, functions both as an *agent* and an *object* – shaping and being shaped by the social structures within the sport.

Bodies as Agents: Anyone who has played football knows how physically demanding the game can be, from long sprints and sudden stops to powerful kicks and occasional physical collisions. In Argentina, this physical intensity even extends beyond the pitch to fan culture. True support for a team, whether in the stadium or at home, requires total mental and physical engagement, with fans cheering as if every match were the last. For the women interviewed in this study, their participation in football transcends tackling the opponent on the field or singing loud chants, their presence on the field becomes a deliberate, physical intervention into spaces traditionally dominated by hegemonic masculine norms.

Sandoval's recounting of women having to clear fields “*with machetes and shovels in order to play football*” illustrates the literal physical labor required to break into these masculine territories (Interview Sandoval, Pos.84). La Nuestra's slogan, “*Pararse en la cancha, como en la vida*” (Stand on the field, like in life), depicts this need to physically place one's body on the pitch. Their presence is an act of defiance, directly challenging the patriarchal system that governs both the football field and society. Their body becomes an agent of resistance, visibly contesting the exclusion of women and actively reclaiming space in a domain where men's bodies have been the default, challenging the social order.



Figure 18: One of the coaches of La Nuestra wearing the organizations sweater and doing the warm up with their players, Buenos Aires (Images source: Own collection, von der Laden, 2023)

Bodies as Objects: However, after conquering their space, women's bodies often become objects of oppressive practices and structures. It starts with the previously described playing conditions: Many women can recount training conditions with fields littered with holes, broken glass, and lacking proper amenities like lighting and drinking water, compounded by inadequate clothing and the absence of medical aid, directly affect their physical well-being and thus their bodies.

Moreover, historically women in football have been denigrated as “*too mannish*”, often subjected to the derogatory slur “*machona*” (tomboy) for playing the sport (Group Interview Villagra & Barrionuevo, Pos. 85). This form of body shaming was particularly pronounced several decades ago, functioning as a tool to instill fear and discourage female masculinities, thus preserving hegemonic masculine dominance. While the intensity of this stigmatization has lessened in today’s more progressive social context, it remains a relevant issue. Women in football still face misogynistic and queerphobic stereotyping. As Santino explains, even now, being a “*woman who plays football*” is frequently equated with being a “*torta*” (lesbian) (Group Interview La Nuestra, Santino, Pos. 64). These perceived gender transgressions continue to activate mechanisms linking women’s bodies to deviant sexuality, further marginalizing them.

Additionally, once on the field, many participants share experiences of being judged more on their appearance, attire, or perceived attractiveness than on their athletic performance. This raises concerns about whether their presence in the sport is being fully recognized for its athletic value, or whether they continue to be viewed through a gendered lens that prioritizes physical appearance. This issue seems to become more pronounced in the current era of commercialization. As women’s football in Argentina and globally gains greater visibility and media attention, the sport is increasingly seen as a new market to explore. Commercialization can provide crucial opportunities – such as financial backing, increased media coverage, and sponsorships – that were historically denied to women’s sports. However, commercialization also comes with risks, particularly when it reinforces the objectification of female athletes. Women’s bodies can be commodified in ways that prioritize their appearance over their athletic ability, reducing them to objects for consumption within a market-driven framework.

One of the most extreme manifestations of women’s bodies being objectified under hegemonic masculinity is through violence, often used as an abusive tool to assert control by men in power. This issue is not confined to the past but remains alarmingly relevant today, as seen in the case of Jenni Hermoso. Hermoso, the Spanish football player, who was sexually assaulted by the president of the Spanish Football Federation during the 2023 World Cup celebrations, highlighting the grim reality faced by women in football – an issue that is not unique to Spain but of global significance.

As Sandoval pointed out, “*What happened with Jenni Hermoso unfortunately helped make visible not only the inappropriate kiss from the president, but the broader injustices women's bodies endure to be recognized as professionals*” (Interview Sandoval, Pos.123).

In Escobar’s view, a key factor enabling such gender-based violence within football spaces is the lack of adequate awareness and regulation in the governing institutions. She problematizes the disconnect between Argentina's national law condemning gender violence and the nearly complete absence of such

protocols in football: *“If the ‘Gender Violence Law’ says that the spheres where women suffer violence are their public and private lives, the club is a space where women exercise their public and private lives! So how can we not have a regulation that regulates and condemns this violence?”* (Interview Escobar, Pos. 15). Despite legal precedents, the culture entrenched in traditionally male-dominated spheres hinders understanding football spaces as environments in which women are vulnerable to abuse and discrimination, thus institutionally failing to address gender-based violence as a systemic issue which requires robust institutional responses and safeguarding mechanisms.

Today, while societal progress has led to increased visibility of women in football, the commercialization of the sport introduces new challenges. Women's bodies are still objectified, now through media narratives that focus on appearance and commodify athletes, perpetuating a *“hyper-feminized”* image of women's football. This modern form of objectification mirrors past patterns, where women are still judged by their looks rather than their abilities. The violence faced by women in football, exemplified by the Jenni Hermoso case, further highlights how women's bodies remain extremely vulnerable to control and abuse under hegemonic masculine structures.

5.1.8 Intersectionality: Additional Layers Of Oppression

While the previous discussion may have presented a relatively homogenous view of women in football, and many do encounter similar forms of gender-based discrimination for being read as women, it is crucial to recognize that analyzing *gender* alone is insufficient. By adopting an intersectional lens, considering other dimensions such as race, class, sexuality, ability status, and age, we can better understand the diverse realities, vulnerabilities, and barriers these women face (see Chapter 2.1, Connell and Crenshaw). This approach helps illuminate how these overlapping systems of marginalization create multiple layers of oppression for certain individuals. The following section will briefly present two examples of intersecting identities. To highlight these diverse realities, through a detailed exploration of the complexity of layers of oppression, is beyond the scope of this work.

Transgender, Class and Gender: *“Sex tests”* are an example of how transgender individuals, particularly transwomen, face exclusionary practices rooted in cis-normative ideas of gender (Informal Talk with Berdula, 2023). Governing bodies like the AFA demand these tests to measure testosterone levels and determine eligibility, based on flawed medical definitions of *“womanhood”*. This relies on the debunked belief that testosterone differences between men and women require regulation (Caudwell, 2003, p. 378). The use of these tests exposes how transwomen's bodies are policed and regulated to maintain cis-heteronormative boundaries. Additionally, transgender players face heightened risk of social exclusion, implying employment discrimination, higher risks of poverty and psychological struggles, all of which exacerbate their precarity. Basic needs like housing and nutrition can become overwhelming challenges. (Interview Berdula, Pos. 43). Moreover, transitioning and

hormone therapy introduce additional physical vulnerabilities that affect their performance and well-being (Pos. 45). The intensity and range of discrimination faced by transgender players is notably more severe than that experienced by cisgender women. In a gender binary system that rigidly categorizes people as either male or female, transgender athletes encounter unique challenges and exclusion that the system is not equipped to address, leaving their needs unrecognized.

Class and Gender: The individual socio-economic background can further significantly shape the experiences of women in football, particularly in the access to leadership and athletic opportunities, as well as their recognition within Argentina's football:

As explored earlier, leadership in Argentine football is dominated by wealthy men, with decision-making roles structured in ways that favor individuals with social and economic capital. Leadership positions demand not only time but also substantial resources – factors that systematically exclude women without economic means, reinforcing the existing power structures that benefit wealthy men. Escobar's account vividly captures the cultural and economic dissonance of entering these elite, male-dominated spaces: "*I'm a girl from La Matanza... going to dinner with Tinelli is another world*" (Interview Escobar, Pos. 53). The class structure in these elite spaces perpetuates social codes and behaviors that exclude those unfamiliar with these norms, making leadership a space where working-class women struggle for both acceptance and influence despite the economic barriers to overcome.

The economic barriers that impact fan participation further highlight how class influences access to football. The AFA's pay-model for national team matches, which Martiarena criticizes as "*another obstacle*" (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 110), reflects broader trends of commercialization that disproportionately affect the working class. Working-class fans, historically integral to football culture, find themselves priced out, thus reinforcing a class divide in who gets to participate in the national football rituals and particularly affecting women as they usually possess fewer financial resources.

For aspiring women athletes, class introduces further challenges. Many working-class women must navigate what García refers to as the “*triple shift*” balancing football, studies, and work without institutional support. This issue particularly affects women outside the football hub of Buenos Aires. Lacking opportunities to play elsewhere in the country, they are often forced to migrate to the capital to pursue their professional aspirations.

Milagros García (21) has been part of La Nuestra since 2015, initially as a player and currently as a coach for the Sub8 category. Passionate about sports, she is pursuing a degree in Physical Activity and Sport at the Universidad Nacional de Avellaneda, balancing her studies with her work as an Administrative Assistant in the Ministry of Public Space of Urban Hygiene, in the recycling logistics area.



Figure 19: Milagros García (Own collection, von der Laden, 2023)

The recognition of women's football in Argentina reveals another class dynamic. Historically, the sport was played primarily by working-class women, often in informal settings such as street matches or local tournaments. These women faced severe social stigmatization, and their participation was often dismissed as mere entertainment. However, as football gains popularity among middle- and upper-class women, it has become more commercialized and socially accepted, emerging as a respectable and feminine alternative to other sports. This shift highlights a stark contrast: While middle-class participation is now embraced, the same sport, when played by working-class women, was denigrated. The shift in class affiliation seems to have led to recognition and acceptance, overshadowing the sport's working-class origins and raising questions about the role of class bias in determining who is worthy of recognition.

In addition to transgender and class-based marginalization, other axes of oppression further hinder access to football for women in Argentina. Racial and ethnic prejudice, particularly affecting BIPOC individuals from marginalized areas like Villa 31, reinforces systemic exclusion (Interview Martiarena and García). These players often face racist stereotypes that associate them with criminality and deviance, adding further barriers to their participation (e.g. Interview Martiarena and García). Geographic inequality worsens these challenges, as those from rural and provincial regions struggle with limited infrastructure, resources, and pathways to professional football (e.g. Interview Gómez & Barrionuevo/Villagra). Age-based discrimination, as highlighted in Gómez's experience, compounds these issues (e.g. Interview Gómez). This is especially true for women in their late 20s and 30s, many

of whom only began playing football later in life due to the lack of opportunities for young girls in underserved regions. The arbitrary age cut-off at 27 in Córdoba cuts short their careers just as they are gaining momentum, effectively excluding them before they can fully develop their potential.

These interconnected examples show how marginalization operates through overlapping systems targeting individuals with multiple intersecting identities and statuses. Achieving true inclusion and equity will remain elusive without addressing these overlapping axes of oppression that shape Argentina's football landscape

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5.1.9 Navigation And Resistance In Football

The women interviewed in this study offer insights in how they navigate (and actively resist) the gendered practices and structures within Argentine football. Their approaches range from adapting to these gendered systems to challenging and even reshaping the structures that seek to marginalize them. The research highlights that their sorority and sense of belonging played a key role in empowering them to confront these male-dominated spaces. This collective solidarity not only helped them gain access but also enabled them to reshape these spaces, asserting their rightful place in football.

What unites the experiences of these women is the fact that, at some point in their lives, they all confronted the barriers imposed by a male-dominated football culture. For many, this meant battling the entrenched gender norms that positioned football as a sport “*for men*”. Access to clubs, training spaces, and resources were limited or outright denied. Yet, despite these barriers, these women managed to persevere. However, it is important to note that the women interviewed here likely represent a minority, those who were able to overcome at least some of these oppressive structures. What remains unseen in this research are the countless others who may have desired to enter football but were silenced, excluded, or discouraged before they even had the chance to step on a pitch.

The women who did manage to participate in football – whether as players, coaches, or fans – were driven by a deep desire to be part of the sport. The research shows that this desire was more than a passion for football, it was a form of resistance, a determination to claim space in a world that repeatedly denied them access.

Adoption: Despite their common desire to be part of the game, the ways in which these women confronted the implications of hegemonic masculinity varied. Some adapted to the structures already in place, adopting behaviors that helped them fit into male-dominated football environments such as the fan figures “*La Raulito*” and “*La Gorda Matosas*”. Many played informally with boys or trained with older women due to the lack of opportunities for girls. While this allowed them to participate, it often came with stigmatization, such as being labeled “*machonas*” (*tomboys*), reflecting society's discomfort

with women adopting traits associated with men. These adaptations were not choices of conformity but strategies for survival and participation in a space that was never designed for them. Despite their efforts, full acceptance as equals was rarely granted.

Constructing their own game: Others, however, took more (*radical*) approaches, creating their own football spaces and clubs. An example of this is shared by Sandoval, who recounts how women in the 1960s and 1970s, excluded from established football fields, took matters into their own hands: “*What did these women do when they were not allowed to use the pitch? They went to the house, took a machete, a hoe, a shovel, a rake and went to the vacant lot next door. They started to weed everything and set up their own arch, court, everything*” (Interview Sandoval, Pos. 84). These women did not stop at constructing their own pitches. Many went on to organize unofficial tournaments across Gran Buenos Aires, eventually forming their own independent associations to participate in the unofficial 1971 Women’s World Cup in Mexico, after being denied recognition by the AFA. This shows a form of resistance, not only in claiming physical spaces, but also in creating alternative football institutions that defied exclusion.

A contemporary example of this resistance can be seen in La Nuestra Fútbol Feminista, founded in 2007. Although women’s football had gained some recognition by the AFA, La Nuestra deliberately created an independent feminist collective to challenge the patriarchal values embedded in mainstream football. Their approach is defined by inclusivity, flat hierarchies, and a conscious effort to make football accessible and safe to women and LGBTQI+ individuals. Based in Villa 31, a historically marginalized and for a long-time informal settlement, La Nuestra aims to offer a space where participants can engage with football free from the sexism and hierarchy prevalent in traditional football environments. They have built a collective identity that not only fosters a sense of belonging but also pushes against the deep social and economic inequalities that define the social order of Argentine football.

Lucila “Luky” Sandoval (53) is a former Argentine football player and pioneer in women’s football advocacy. She began her football journey in 1988 with the All Boys club and later played for River Plate, Independiente, and Boca Juniors, among others. Known for her passion, perseverance, and leadership, Sandoval overcame challenges to become a respected goalkeeper, earning recognition throughout her 27-year playing career. Off the field, Luky has been actively involved in advocating for the recognition and visibility of women’s football history in Argentina. In 2016, she launched the “Pioneras” project to honor the legacies of past female players and promote the sport's development.



Figure 20: Lucila Sandoval (Own collection, von der Laden, 2023)

In addition to creating new spaces and institutions, some women, like Sandoval, challenged the narrative around women’s football by addressing the media’s systematic erasure of women’s contributions. Sandoval’s project of “*Las Pioneras*” focuses on recovering the untold stories of women who have played football over the decades, thus giving visibility to their contributions. By publishing these histories, she has pushed for greater recognition of women’s involvement in football and placed significant pressure on institutions to acknowledge their rightful place in the sport. Today, thanks to her efforts, AFA started to take over responsibility in recognizing the history of women in Argentina’s football.

Sorority, belonging and collective action: While their methods of resistance varied to a certain degree, a key finding of this research is that the solidarity between these women (often referred to as “*sorority*”) accompanied with a strong feeling of belonging, and collective action were central to the women’s experiences. Football serves not only as a shared passion but also as a communal space where women can exchange experiences, support one another, and collectively confront discrimination. This solidarity empowers them to persist despite significant obstacles. For many participants, football transcends being merely a sport; it becomes a source of personal fulfillment and a platform for challenging invisibility. The collective efforts of women footballers, fans, and allies function as a form of resistance against a system that has historically marginalized them.

Organizations like La Nuestra exemplify how this collective identity extends beyond the pitch. Participants seek to create spaces where women can belong without conforming to the pressures and restrictions of male-dominated football culture. As Martiarena reflects on her experience: “*It has been*

such a beautiful feeling to be part of something. I felt very alone before, but then being part of this space made a huge difference” (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 81).

This sense of belonging highlights the importance of self-created spaces in fostering empowerment and providing the support necessary to confront structural inequalities.

Feminist movements in Argentina have played a significant role in fostering solidarity and encouraging collective action among women in football. Activism around issues such as the legalization of abortion has increased youth engagement and motivated young women to challenge societal norms (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 43-44). Gómez emphasizes the impact of these movements: *“The feminist movements let us know that we are not alone” (Interview Gómez, Pos. 97).*

These movements have empowered female players by providing a sense of community and shared purpose. Figueroa, a coach at La Nuestra, notes that feminist activism has put social pressure on football institutions to address gender inequalities within the sport.

Molina, a professional player, attributes the growth of women's football to the collective efforts of those involved: *“The main driving force behind the growth of women's football in this country, I think, was us – the players, the people who followed women's football at the time, journalists, managers. It was the collective fight after so many years of being invisible... It was more of a fight by the players than anything else” (Interview Molina, Pos. 19).*

This underscores the agency of women in initiating change and the significance of collective action in challenging existing structures.

The experiences of these women reveal the complexities of navigating and resisting hegemonic masculinity within Argentina's football culture. They demonstrate that while football remains a deeply gendered space, it is not static.

While acts of adaptation, resistance, and solidarity, have been instrumental in slowly transforming the structures that have historically excluded them, the transformation of football culture is an ongoing process, and structural barriers persist for many women. Factors such as limited resources, societal resistance, and institutional inertia can impact the effectiveness of these efforts.

What is thus needed to promote a deconstructed football accessible and safe for everyone regardless of gender?

5.2 Conditions For Change

The previous subchapter ([5.1](#)) shed light on the practices and structures that legitimize hegemonic masculinity in Argentine football and examined how this gender regime shapes women's experiences and how women navigate (and resist) these dynamics.

Based on the understanding of gender as a *social structure* which is historically dynamic and thus subject to change, the following section addresses the conditions that enable the deconstruction and transformation of these oppressive structures and related practices. Drawing again from interviews and personal observations, this section presents key findings on the systematic conditions that are necessary to allow a more inclusive football environment in Argentina, allowing everyone to participate freely, regardless of gender.

The analysis is structured around the foundational theoretical frameworks of Nancy Fraser's conceptualization of SOCIAL JUSTICE ([Chapter 2.2](#)). As before presented in the theoretical framework chapter, Fraser's perspective elucidates the prerequisites for social change, particularly the dismantling of patriarchal gender regimes. The interconnected dimension of redistribution, recognition, and representation will be applied on the field of football.

By synthesizing this theoretical lens with new insights emerging from the research material, this section aims to give insights into the economic, cultural and political conditions required for Argentine football to undergo a de- and reconstruction of the existing gender regime. The findings elucidate both opportunities ripe for leveraging gender justice, but also barriers hindering transformative progress. Through this analysis, the goal is to forge pathways towards realizing an equitable, democratized, and re-envisioned Argentine football sphere – one that dismantles patriarchal domination and sets the conditions for all individuals to freely embrace their *desire to participate* unbounded by oppressive gender practices and structures.

5.2.1 Redistribution

The first condition emphasizes *redistributive justice*, advocating for fair economic conditions to ensure equal opportunities for all participants in the sport.

Let us begin with the most broadly discussed issue:

Equal Pay: Without any doubt adequate financial remuneration is essential for ensuring professional conditions in football, implying the recognition of first-division female **players** as professional athletes, thus recognizing them as full-time workers.

The case of Gómez illustrates the shift from not being professionally paid to receiving adequate payment. Prior to moving to Buenos Aires to join Club Atlético River Plate in 2023, Gómez was based in Córdoba where she struggled to balance her commitment to football with other work and responsibilities. Her move to Buenos Aires marked a turning point in her career as she finally received both remuneration and housing support from the club. This shift allowed her to focus exclusively on football for the first time. As Gómez reflected: *“To experience what I have today, to only play football and not have to work, is a great feeling. You have a different desire to train, you perform at 100 per cent”* (Interview Gómez, Pos. 40). Her statement underlines the transformative impact of financial stability on both, performance and mental well-being. By being freed from the necessity of juggling multiple jobs, Gómez could channel her energy into training, thus performing at her peak. However it also underlines the huge differences between opportunities at big clubs such as River Plate in the Buenos Aires and smaller clubs, particularly in the Argentina’s country side which are far away from guaranteeing their women players adequate financial compensation. This forces many players from rural areas to leave their homes and move to a megacity like Buenos Aires where they often face the challenges of adjusting to vastly different living conditions. In Gómez case, after spending a year in the City playing for River Plate and struggling to adapt to life in the megacity, she returned to her hometown of Córdoba. Financial compensation in women’s football reflects several important issues: First, it is crucial to offer professional pay not just in Buenos Aires, but across the entire country. Although only 0.05% of female football players are currently playing at the professional level and directly impacted by the equal pay discussion, its significance extends far beyond. Adequate remuneration sends a powerful message, recognizing women as professionals on par with their male counterparts which helps elevate the status of women’s football as a whole. It also shows how economic justice and cultural recognition is deeply intertwined which will be further discussed in the subchapter 5.2.2.

While the discussion about equal pay often centers on professional players who indeed play a key role in setting standards, it is important to expand the focus. Research shows that the equal pay topic also extends to coaches and club officials. Currently, **coaching** licenses are largely accessible only to

individuals from middle and upper socioeconomic backgrounds due to high course fees and the significant time commitment required which is typically only possible for males. Making these licenses more affordable and accessible would allow individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds to pursue coaching careers, making football less male-elite and more democratic while improving the quality and diversity of coaching in the sport. The lack of pay for coaches in women's football forces them to juggle multiple jobs, limiting their focus on training players and reducing the quality of coaching. This perpetuates a cycle of precarity: underpaid coaches lead to weaker training conditions which in turn stunts the growth and recognition of women's football. This cycle is particularly harsh in women's sports where patriarchal and capitalist systems like in Argentina consistently undervalue women's labor. Breaking this cycle requires fair pay and investment for both coaches and players, ensuring that women's football gets the resources it needs to thrive. With less prominent women players and coaches in Argentina and less women having the liberty to engage in football management, there are less women in executive positions in football in Argentina.

Thus, extending financial support and equitable pay to all involved in football, including players, coaches and board members is vital. Ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities could help deconstruct class structures fostering a more inclusive and accessible environment for everyone.

Opportunities of participation: In Argentine football, unequal participation opportunities present a significant barrier to achieving redistributive equality. Despite the sport's cultural significance, structural barriers disproportionately affect women and girls, limiting their access to football despite growing interest and aspirations. Research highlights that overcoming these barriers requires a systematic approach, beginning with grassroots-level infrastructural support. This development must span the entire nation, from Buenos Aires to Santa Fé, and ensure equitable access for all genders.

Crucially, this initiative should not be limited to gender equality and address class disparities. Currently, private football schools which primarily serve middle and upper-class families, dominate the landscape, further entrenching inequality. To combat this, football infrastructure must be made accessible to all socioeconomic groups, ensuring that participation is not confined to those with financial means.

The AFA and its clubs play a key role in driving this change. They are responsible for funding and implementing inclusive football programs that dismantle both gender and class barriers. As noted by those with firsthand experiences in women's football, significant progress has been made, particularly in the development of youth divisions. Professional player Molina reflects on this journey, emphasizing that while progress has been achieved, much of it was built on the perseverance of early pioneers who faced substantial challenges: *"Today they are working from very young ages. That's where the difference*

is made. It was quite a difficult road, and we were the pioneers, we had to put up with everything to get to where the girls are today” (Interview Molina, Pos. 29).

Material and facilities: Ensuring parity in equipment, facilities, and support structures for training is crucial to improve redistributive justice. This includes: (1) Allocating dedicated times and equitable usage of pitches for women's teams to ensure they can train and play without conflict or competition from other groups (e.g. Group Interview La Nuestra, Pos. 136-138). This will also help raise the profile of women's matches and attract more spectators and media coverage. A scheduling system independent of teams' gender should be enforced through policy changes at the institutional level, recognizing men's and women's teams as equal peers. (2) Providing adequate funding and supplies for women's football teams, including training equipment comparable to that of men's teams, such as jerseys, balls, and goalkeeper gear, to enable professional and effective training environments. (3) Guaranteeing fair travel coverage and accommodation for away games and players who come from farther away. Financial backing should be provided to cover these necessary expenses, allowing professional women's players to compete under similar conditions as their male counterparts. (4) Providing comprehensive insurance and health coverage for female footballers, matching at least the standards provided to men, to ensure their well-being and acknowledge their professionalism.

Media coverage and commercialization: Equal investment in media coverage and commercialization is often seen as key to breaking down gendered economic structures in football. Many participants argue that media networks and clubs should ensure equal airtime, branding, and resources for both men's and women's football, including equitable access to main stadiums. Some suggest that attracting corporate sponsors can help reduce financial disparities. However, this approach raises deeper concerns about the profit-driven nature of football's commercialization.

While events like the 2019 Women's World Cup in France demonstrate how investment can increase visibility for women's football, they also expose the growing influence of corporate interests (Interview Berdula, Pos. 122). The spectacle of commercialization often prioritizes profit over genuine gender equity, commodifying women's sports as the latest market to exploit. Rather than fostering true equality, this model risks replicating the same capitalist hierarchies that dominate men's football, where financial powerhouses control the narrative and benefit disproportionately from investments, leaving grassroots and marginalized players behind.

Some participants actively argue against corporate sponsorships, fearing that such investments could reinforce capitalist structures that profit from women's labor without addressing the deeper inequalities within the system. By prioritizing profit, commercialization risks co-opting women's football into the same neoliberal framework that perpetuates exploitation and inequality across sports. To truly challenge

these structures, the focus must shift from corporate-driven solutions to systemic redistributive justice that prioritizes the needs and interests of all players, not just the profitability of the sport.

5.2.2 Recognition

While material injustices like unequal pay are frequently highlighted in the public discourse, addressing economic inequalities alone is insufficient. It is equally important to recognize and value women's presence as equal peers on the football pitch. This dual approach – combining economic (redistributive) justice with symbolic recognition – targets both material and cultural injustices, which are often intertwined (Fraser, 1998, 2007a).

What does recognition mean in football? In football, recognition involves an understanding of women as *subjects of rights*. In other words: the validation of women's desire to participate, play, and belong within the football community. Empirical evidence from interviews and observations shows that this recognition plays an even more important role for women who experience additional forms of oppression, such as racism, classism and transphobia, as their rights are more frequently questioned and denied.

For many of the women interviewed, being granted the same rights is not merely about playing football but about affirming their *dignity* and their worth as human beings. This recognition is deeply tied to a *sense of belonging* and *acknowledgment* within the social fabric of football. In essence, recognition here means not only being allowed to play but also being seen as worthy of belonging in a space that has historically excluded them.

In Argentina, where football and especially the local clubs hold profound cultural significance, the concept of dignity carries particular weight. For many women, participating in football is not merely a physical activity but an assertion of their right to belong to a broader social and cultural space. Football provides a vital arena for building connections, forming relationships, and fostering a *sense of community*. As illustrated by the testimonies of Martiarena and Garcia, being part of La Nuestra offered them the opportunity to establish meaningful friendships and create a sense of communal solidarity with others who faced similar life circumstances (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 10; Interview Garcia, Pos. 21). Their experiences highlight football's role, functioning as a social space, where women can cultivate belonging and shared identity. Similarly, Gómez highlights how football has been a key avenue for both personal and social validation, teaching her valuable life lessons and strengthening her sense of identity (Interview Gómez, Pos. 210).



Figure 21: Graffiti in Honor of Romina “Pepa” Gómez: “La rebeldía de la gambeta abre la cancha para que entre el sueño de todas” (*The Defiance of the Dribble Opens the Field, Making Way for the Dreams of All Girl*) (Own collection, von der Laden, 2023)

This growth has extended beyond the pitch, shaping her role in the community. Today, she is celebrated in her hometown as a football icon, with murals in her honor and young girls aspiring to follow in her footsteps as professional players.

A closely related outcome of this recognition is the development of *pride* and *identity*, particularly among women from marginalized communities. Football offers a space where women can reclaim their dignity and assert their identity in the face of social adversity. Aon’s reflections on the players from Villa 31, exemplify this. She describes how football enables these women not only to embrace their identity but also to take pride in it, invoking concepts like “*orgullo villero*” (*villa pride*) and “*feminismo villero*” (*feminism of the villas*) (Group Interview La Nuestra, Aon, Pos. 81). This transformation –from the stigma and shame often associated with living in a villa (*shantytown*) to a strong sense of pride – demonstrates football’s potential to (re-)construct identities through recognition. However, as one Santino notes, “*It is not about ending poverty or fixing everything that hurts us... But through football, we’ve regained dignity, held our heads high, and taken pride in the neighborhood*” (Group Interview La Nuestra, Santino, Pos. 95). While football offers empowering potential, it does not address all systemic challenges as sometimes framed.

How can these concepts of recognition be fostered in practical terms? A potential way to foster recognition in football is by trying to create inclusive, low-threshold spaces where everyone feels welcome and heard. La Nuestra, which seeks to develop a feminist alternative to conventional football clubs, serves as an example of this attempt. By incorporating practices like gathering in a circle at the beginning and end of each session to encourage the players’ voices, they aim to create a more inclusive environment. As Santino shares: “*For us, it is essential to create a space where anyone can feel at home on the field. We welcome all kinds of bodies and all ways of expressing themselves through the game*” (Group Interview La Nuestra, Santino, Pos. 69). This reflects an ongoing effort to allow girls and women to inhabit football spaces without fear of stigmatization.

However, it is important to critically assess this approach. While creating inclusive spaces is vital, it does not automatically dismantle entrenched power dynamics. La Nuestra's model, while progressive, remains an attempt – rather than a complete solution – at challenging deeply ingrained societal structures. Even in feminist spaces, internalized power hierarchies and socialization can persist, and the idea of a fully “*safe space*” can be idealistic. Instead, these spaces should be understood as ongoing experiments in disrupting dominant gender norms rather than as fully formed solutions to social inequalities.

Another crucial step in fostering recognition is providing proper equipment that meets the needs of the players. As Aon emphasizes: “*What does dignity in football mean? Well, it means providing uniforms that actually fit the girls properly. Why should an eight-year-old have to play in a jersey that hangs down past her knees and has the name 'Ramón' on it?*” (Group Interview La Nuestra, 2023, Pos. 79).

Recognition also involves acknowledging the often-overlooked contributions of women to football's history. Sandoval's project of researching and sharing the stories of figures like Barrioneuvo and Villagra is a critical step in this direction, making visible the contributions of women that have been erased from the national narrative. Gómez adds that passing down these stories to younger generations helps them appreciate the struggles that made their opportunities possible (Pos. 213), while Martiarena recognizes the debt she owes to the women who came before her (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 132). However, Martiarena's sense of owing a “*debt*” to the women before her, while rooted in solidarity, shifts the focus away from the real issue: the patriarchal system that forced these struggles. Rather than women being indebted to one another, the emphasis should be on dismantling the structures that created these injustices in the first place

Gómez's experience of playing in Belgrano's main stadium, in front of 28,000 spectators, exemplifies how institutional support can amplify recognition and acceptance of women's football (Interview Gómez, Pos. 60).

Sustainable recognition of women in football requires deconstructing the broader societal gender order, starting with key social institutions like schools and families. These institutions play a critical role in shaping children's gender identities and influencing their engagement with sports. Girls (in Argentina) are often socialized into caregiving roles and discouraged from participating in “*masculine*” activities like football (Group Interview La Nuestra, Figueroa, Pos. 79). To challenge this, it is essential to address the gendered division of physical education in schools and dismantle patriarchal norms in family dynamics. Parents and caregivers, as primary agents of socialization, must be made aware of their role in either reinforcing or challenging outdated gender norms.

While recognition of women's football should not rely on male validation, male allies can contribute to dismantling the association of football with masculinity. Several interviewees emphasized the importance of male family members or colleagues, with Martiarena recalling how her father actively supported her involvement in the sport (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 5). Though women's recognition must stand independently, male support can help challenge patriarchal structures and broaden inclusion in the sport.

Additionally, community acknowledgment, particularly in areas like Villa 31 where social life is closely tied to local spaces, is equally crucial. The labeling of one of the main public pitches as "*the women's pitch*" signifies the community's recognition of women's growing presence in football (Group Interview La Nuestra, Santino, Pos. 93). Together, male allies and community support help foster this recognition, though true progress must ultimately depend on affirming women's abilities in their own right.



Figure 22: Public football pitch in la Villa 31 where La Nuestra holds its training sessions (Own collection, von der Laden, 2023)

5.2.3 Representation

Based on Fraser's framework of social justice, this study underlines that analyzing redistribution and recognition alone is insufficient. The key issue of representation – *who* is entitled to make claims for redistribution and recognition – remains unanswered. Thus, representation, as a third dimension, determines who has a voice in shaping and participating in sports, ensuring that everyone is heard, particularly those historically marginalized.

In the context of Argentine women's football, representation thus *sets the political and social stage* for enabling recognition and redistribution policies which take into account the voices of all actors involved

in the field of football. The theme of representation recurred throughout all interviews, albeit with varying emphases, revealing two key areas of misrepresentation: the governing bodies and the media. The research highlights that traditional top-down, male-dominated approaches, historically practiced by the football governing bodies like AFA and local clubs, often *misrepresent* and *misframe* marginalized groups in football.

Area I: Representation in football governance

As discussed earlier, leadership and authority positions in Argentine football are characterized by top-down, male-centric structures. This has led to the systematic exclusion of women in key roles that significantly influence the sport's dynamics. The current figures – 4% of executive committee positions, 1% of licensed coaching roles, and 6% of referee positions held by women – underpins this severe misrepresentation.

Without women in positions of authority, critical gender specific issues (discussed in 5.1) such as the lack of infrastructure, media stigmatization, cases of sexual abuse, and precarious training conditions are often overlooked or not given the priority they need. Genuine representation can ensure that these concerns are addressed with the same urgency and importance as those affecting men's football.

Escobar's experience as a member of an executive committee in a first-division club sheds light on some conditions needed for change. She emphasizes the importance of creating structures and practices that make it easier for women, LGBTQI+ individuals, and those from lower socio-economic classes to access leadership positions. This implies that the broader structures and male elite culture in these positions need to be dismantled. However, the reality is harsh. The self-sustaining system which has historically misrepresent women is difficult to break, as Figueroa emphasizes: "*There are very strong structures of resistance and this will take more than ten years to break through*" (Group Interview La Nuestra, Figueroa, Pos.124). Gómez adds to this by sharing the challenges of advocating for change within established institutions: "*We made claims, but it is difficult when the people in power says, 'this is how it is'*" (Interview Gómez, Pos. 123-125). Individuals without substantial economic and social capital and the time required, facing very high barriers to enter these spaces of power. Furthermore, Escobar advocates for fostering structures which foster women to move beyond traditional volunteer roles, and actively pursue decision-making positions, such as those on the board, where real power lies (Interview Escobar, Pos. 42).

The psychological and financial burdens placed on women in these roles remain significant barriers. Escobar also calls for greater empathy towards women who navigate these highly male-dominated spaces, recognizing the immense challenges they face as they seek to transform these institutions. However, Escobar also acknowledges that gender parity in decision-making roles is not realistic without

structural changes to football clubs' regulations. She explains that many women are not eligible for candidacy due to factors like lack of seniority or living in rural areas: *"It is nice to ask for gender parity, but the regulations have to represent us. We aren't 50% of the membership... we won't have enough women to fill the lists"* (Pos. 44). For her deep structural changes are necessary to prevent tokenism where one woman alone is expected to change the system (Interview Escobar, Pos. 58). Offering financial compensation for leadership roles and implementing gender quotas are potential yet controversial solutions to address this imbalance.

Increasing the presence of women in these roles requires not only financial measures (redistribution), such as subsidies and expanded opportunities, but also cultural shifts (recognition) that challenge the notion that these positions are inherently male-dominated. Role models could be crucial here, offering inspiration for young girls and women to see themselves in positions of authority, beyond fulfilling symbolic or tokenistic roles.

Furthermore, the presence of female coaches, who understand and relate to the realities faced by players, can significantly improve player well-being and development. As Gómez, both a player and a coach, points out: *"You know how to support them in different moments, how to advise them. The girls rely on that a lot"* (Interview Gómez, Pos. 133-135). This highlights the importance of representation in leadership roles, not only for visibility but also for the direct impact on mentoring and fostering an inclusive, empowering environment for women in football.

Despite these gains, we must avoid romanticizing the idea that simply increasing the number of women in leadership will dismantle the systemic issues within football. Representation alone does not guarantee that the underlying patriarchal structures will be challenged or transformed. For instance, Berdula critiques the tendency for some women in decision-making roles to adopt the same masculine norms and hierarchical structures they were meant to dismantle. She calls for a deeper examination of the ingrained patriarchal values that continue to shape behaviors and attitudes in these spaces, noting that the absence of solidarity among women in leadership is a significant barrier to progress.

Thus, while increased representation is a necessary step, it is not sufficient on its own. The conditions for women in football will only improve when this representation is coupled with a critical rethinking of the power structures that govern the sport. Women in leadership positions must not only occupy these spaces but also work collectively to challenge and transform the gendered norms that underpin football governance.

Representation in Argentine football governance can take various forms, and two contrasting approaches are evident: (i) dialogue and sensitization within the system, and (ii) the creation of

independent structures outside of it. These approaches are seen in the perspectives of Berdula and the feminist collective La Nuestra:

(i) Berdula approach can be understood as an advocacy of *working within the established system*, specifically the male-dominated structures of football governance, like the AFA. She emphasizes that deconstructing these power structures requires not just the inclusion of women but the active participation of men, especially those in decision-making roles. For Berdula, the key to achieving real progress lies in engaging men through dialogue, education, and sensitization, giving them the tools to dismantle the patriarchal systems they benefit from. She argues that excluding men from the conversation would be counterproductive:

“We are giving patriarchy the tools to deconstruct itself with the methods we’ve empowered ourselves with. Yes, on the one hand, we’ve made progress, but on the other, we need to help these men deconstruct themselves. They must take responsibility, but we also need to give them some tools” (Interview Berdula, Pos. 97-98).

Berdula is critical of La Nuestra’s more militant, separatist approach, contending that real transformation requires working within the structures that govern football. She points out that without men’s involvement, the systems will remain resistant to change. However, she also acknowledges that this approach faces challenges. The resistance within the AFA and other institutions is strong, and men in power often resist implementing the changes necessary for true gender equity.

(ii) La Nuestra represents a different strategy, one that focuses on creating independent, feminist spaces outside the male-dominated institutions. Instead of working within the existing system, they challenge it by constructing alternative football environments where women and non-binary individuals can lead without the constraints of patriarchal governance. They reject participation in the AFA until it adopts feminist policies, reflecting their commitment to building a football culture free from the biases and exclusions of traditional governance (Group Interview La Nuestra, Santino, Pos. 118-119).

Their approach, rooted in community-based education and participation, allows women to take on leadership roles that reflect the diversity and needs of their community. For example, García’s journey from player to coach at La Nuestra exemplifies how their model empowers women from marginalized backgrounds. Her transformation is more than just a personal achievement, it aims to represent a reimagining of leadership and authority, grounded in lived experiences and collective empowerment (Interview Garcia, Pos. 31).

However, La Nuestra's approach has its limitations. While they aim to create safe, inclusive spaces, their influence on the broader football landscape remains restricted. Operating independently from the AFA risks marginalizing their efforts and limiting their long-term impact on mainstream football governance. Furthermore, La Nuestra is financially vulnerable, relying on donations and external funding, which can be unpredictable, as demonstrated by the shutdown of the Ministry of Women under the new far-right president Milei.

Both approaches face significant obstacles. Berdula's call for dialogue and integration are constrained by the reluctance of men in power to engage in meaningful change. La Nuestra's independent model, while empowering for participants, risks isolation from the broader football system, potentially limiting its broader societal impact. Moreover, representation itself should not be romanticized. Simply increasing the number of women in decision-making roles does not guarantee a dismantling of patriarchal power structures. Berdula's critique highlights this concern: even women in leadership positions can reproduce masculine norms and hierarchical behaviors if broader cultural shifts are not made. Representation alone cannot address the deeply ingrained systemic inequalities in football governance without a concurrent transformation in attitudes, values, and power dynamics.

Area II: Representation in the media

The media emerges as the second key player in shaping the representation of women in football. The media significantly influence the public discourse, by shaping *which stories are told, who tells them how they are narrated*. In the male-centric storytelling of football, women's football is often subject to both misrepresentation (unequal visibility) and misframing (distorted portrayals of women's involvement). These issues must be addressed to enhance authentic representation in the sport.

First, countering misrepresentation in the media involves ensuring equal coverage of women's football. Increased media attention can drastically impact how women's teams and players are perceived. Gómez highlights the positive effect media coverage had on her team playing at Atlético Belgrano in Córdoba: “Belgrano gave us a lot of visibility, in their networks, they talked a lot about the women's team, they made us play in their stadium... with 28,000 people it was incredible! I think the club had a big part in making us visible and that's why people started to know us and went to the stadium” (Interview Gómez, Pos. 60). This increased visibility not only highlights women's achievements in football but also shifts public perception, normalizing their presence in the sport. This, in turn, attracts more spectators and creates greater opportunities for investment, which helps improve the redistributive conditions within the sport by providing more resources and funding for women's teams.

Additionally, the increasing media coverage plays an important role in promoting relatable *role models*. As more women's football is covered, girls are increasingly looking up to female players as their icons.

Sandoval notes this shift in role models: “*Today, the girls don’t want to be Messi or Maradona, they want to be Banini, Bonsegundo, Correa. That’s amazing*” (Interview Sandoval, Pos. 111-112). This shift underscores the significance of having visible, relatable role models who reflect the backgrounds and experiences of young girls. Representation through relatable figures not only inspires participation but also helps normalize women’s presence in football. Such role models create a sense of belonging and show younger generations that football is not only for men but also for women like them.

However, representation is not just about visibility and role models – it also concerns how women’s football is portrayed (*framing*).

Addressing Misframing

Martiarena points out that while media attention on women’s football has increased, the real issue lies in how the stories are told. Correcting this misframing is just as important as increasing coverage. She criticizes that mainstream narratives often distort their experiences, with storytelling filled with gender stereotypes and racist comments, underscoring the need of being able to tell their own stories to counteract this oppressive misframing. Additionally, Aon emphasizes that the ability to tell one’s own story is key to developing individual identity (Group Interview La Nuestra, Aon, Pos. 106).

This also calls attention to the material dimension of narrative control: access to resources like cameras and media platforms is crucial for women to reclaim their stories and resist external misframing (Group Interview La Nuestra, Santino, Pos. 106). By developing their own media channels, such as La Nuestra’s YouTube platform, they not only challenge the traditional gatekeepers of the narrative but also empower young women to participate in media production. Martiarena emphasizes the transformative potential of this initiative, noting that “*many young girls were eager to film*”, signaling a shift from being an object of the male lens to active creation (Interview Martiarena, Pos. 54). Previously, the lack of access to professional tools, such as cameras, served as a barrier to self-representation. Now, through initiatives like this, girls and women are positioned to reshape how they and their communities are portrayed.

The framing of women’s football in Argentina as a “*new trend*” by the media distorts the sport’s history and oversimplifies the reality of its growth. This narrative fails to acknowledge two critical factors: first, women have been playing football since its early days, but their contributions have been systematically erased or ignored. Second, the idea of a “*new trend*” overlooks the fact that the increasing visibility of women’s football primarily reflects the involvement of middle-class women from urban areas, particularly Buenos Aires, where private football schools have made the sport more accessible. This framing marginalizes the pivotal role working-class women from neighborhoods like Villa 31 have

played for decades in resisting male-dominated football structures. Their contributions, central to the sport's development, are often neglected by mainstream media.

By portraying women's football as a recent phenomenon, the media erases the long-standing history of struggle and participation, particularly by women from marginalized backgrounds. Sandoval's "*Las Pioneras*" project challenges this dominant narrative by recovering and highlighting the stories of early female pioneers in Argentine football. As Sandoval explains, her project seeks to "*rewrite the national narrative*", demanding official recognition of these women's contributions and pushing football institutions to reframe the history of the sport to include them.

In this context, Berdula emphasizes the need for a more thoughtful and accurate portrayal of women's football. She advocates for a scientific, data-driven approach to ensure that the realities of players are fully understood and represented, rather than relying on preconceived, prejudiced images. A leadership approach grounded in empathy and research is crucial, she argues, which involves engaging with players directly, gathering data on their experiences, and addressing their challenges: "*We need to be more empathetic, more representative. But you also have to interview the leaders and survey the players to understand what makes them uncomfortable. That's where you get the data*" (Interview Berdula, Pos. 114). This research-driven strategy offers a more informed framework for supporting players and reshaping the media narrative. Ultimately, this also includes the adoption of gender-inclusive language. As Berdula notes, addressing gender bias in language is essential: "*I decided to challenge communication because when we say 'profe,' the default image is a male professor. So, you can find me as 'la profa Berdula'*" (Interview Berdula, Pos. 8). By reframing the language and narratives around women in football, there is potential for a more inclusive and accurate representation of their role in the sport.

The media plays a pivotal role in shaping representation and framing within women's football, holding a dual responsibility that extends beyond mere visibility. On one hand, media outlets and clubs must work toward equitable coverage that places women's football on an equal footing with men's. However, this is not simply about increasing airtime; it requires a deliberate effort to avoid misrepresentation and accurately reflect the historical, social, and economic realities of women in the sport. Providing women, particularly those from working-class backgrounds, with platforms to share their own narratives is vital in resisting external framing that often distorts or diminishes their contributions. By fostering authentic storytelling and amplifying diverse voices, the media has the potential to cultivate a more inclusive football culture – one that not only acknowledges but actively empowers women, offering role models who resonate with broader audiences and inspire future generations to claim their space within the game. However, this necessitates a critical shift away from commodification and tokenism towards a genuine commitment to challenging the structures of exclusion and inequality embedded in football.

6 Key Insights and Final Reflection

6.1 A Nation's Pride, A Gendered Divide.

*“The Argentine Nation does not recognize privileges based on birth (...).
All inhabitants are equal before the law.”*

This constitutional promise, enshrined in *Article 16*, speaks to an ideal of equality that the nation prides itself on. Yet, in the world of Argentine football, arguably the most powerful expression of national identity, this principle is far from reality. Football, hailed as the unifying force that embodies Argentina's spirit, remains a deeply gendered arena where hegemonic masculinity reigns. Despite legal guarantees, women have been historically marginalized, denied equal access, recognition, and power in a sport that claims to belong to all.

This research has critically explored the mechanisms that sustain male dominance and marginalize women in Argentine football, revealing both overt and subtle structures upholding hegemonic masculinity. Football, as a key cultural and social institution, not only embodies but actively reinforces the broader patriarchal gender order. It aligns with traditional constructs of masculinity, positioning the sport as inherently male and systematically excluding women and gender-diverse individuals. While these mechanisms – embedded in education systems, family dynamics, labor divisions, sports governance, and media narratives – are historically constructed, they are not immutable. While gender relations and practices within football have evolved over time, the underlying interest of those in power to maintain male hegemony remains unchanged. In the past, this was often achieved through explicit exclusion and discrimination, whereas today, it may operate more subtly through institutional policies, representation, and cultural norms. Yet, the effect remains consistent: upholding a gendered hierarchy that privileges male authority and participation, shaping the experiences, access, and opportunities of women in the sport.

One of the central revelations is the role of **institutional mechanisms**, particularly the **education system** and **football governing bodies**, in embedding gendered norms within football. Schools, through the gendered division of physical education, socialize boys and girls into different physical activities, thus marking football as a space for boys early on. In recent years, there has been a gradual shift towards encouraging football participation among genders in schools. However, this change is often celebrated by institutions like AFA and educational bodies as a new trend and significant achievement, thereby overshadowing the longstanding systemic denial and resistance that women have historically faced in accessing and legitimizing their involvement in football. The delayed institutional recognition of women's football by the governing body AFA, which took over a century to acknowledge women's

involvement, speaks volume to this deeply entrenched gender hierarchy. Even today, women's football continues to be structurally marginalized, receiving fewer resources, less media coverage, and inadequate training facilities. These institutions play a key role in sustaining male superiority in football by not only underfunding women's teams but also creating a feedback loop that normalizes and internalizes male dominance from young ages.

The exclusion of women from football is both social and **spatial**, deeply ingrained in the very architecture of the sport. The research has shown how football facilities, from locker rooms to VIP boxes, are designed by and for men, serving as physical embodiments of male dominance and control. These spaces are not neutral; they reinforce male ownership over the sport, signaling who belongs and who does not. Men occupy these arenas without question, their presence normalized and legitimized, while women must often justify and negotiate their right to be there. This exclusion starts early: young boys enter public football pitches with ease and confidence, while girls frequently face discomfort, struggle for entry, and feel a need to prove their right to be there – a reality to which many girls around the globe can likely relate. The design and use of these spaces not only mirror but actively maintain the gender order, solidifying women's marginalization and reinforcing the patriarchal norms that permeate the most revered cultural institution in the country.

This spatial exclusion extends to **leadership roles**, where decision-making power is overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of men – those most resistant to change. Positions of authority within football clubs and governing bodies, responsible for shaping the experiences of millions involved in the sport, are structured to favor men who possess the necessary social and economic capital to thrive within these networks. Free from caregiving responsibilities that disproportionately fall on women, men are able to dominate leadership spaces, reinforcing a male-centric model of control. Informal male networks and gatekeeping practices further entrench this power dynamic, making it difficult for women to penetrate these circles. This system is designed to sustain male hegemony, with little incentive to redistribute authority or challenge the deeply rooted norms that uphold it.

Beyond the pitch, **media narratives** act as a powerful force in upholding hegemonic masculinity in football. In Argentina, as explored in this work, mass media plays a pivotal role in constructing football as part of the national identity, paradoxically framing it as a unifying force while simultaneously excluding women. This exclusion is not simply a matter of oversight, it is an active construction of reality. Historically, the media has largely erased women from football's narrative, offering minimal coverage and, when present, framing their participation as either deviant or a form of entertainment, reinforcing the idea that the sport inherently belongs to men. Even with the recent rise in women's football coverage, it remains depicted as less commercially valuable than its male counterpart, a framing that obscures the lack of political will to support and promote the women's game, ignoring the systemic

oppression underpinning this disparity. At the same time, a growing trend of hyper-feminization for marketing purposes exploits female athletes' bodies, diverting attention from their sporting achievements to their appearance, personal lives, and sexuality. This commodification attempts to “sell” women’s football by appealing to broader, often male, audiences through sexualized imagery rather than athletic merit. This dual dynamic – simultaneously framing women's football as less valuable while commodifying female footballing bodies – reveals a subtler yet persistent form of hegemonic masculinity. It continues to shape perceptions of gender in football, perpetuating a gender order that restricts women’s access, recognition, and legitimacy within the sport.

Therefore, the exclusion of women from football is not only structural but deeply **embodied**. Women's bodies are at the center of this exclusion, stigmatization, and marginalization. Historically, women had to physically fight for space on the pitch, literally clearing fields with machetes to create room for themselves. Today, while their presence on the pitch is more accepted, the oppression they face has evolved into more insidious forms. Women’s bodies are still policed, whether through precarious training conditions, derogatory comments about their appearance, or the expectations to conform to traditional feminine body ideals. This embodiment is especially pronounced when women diverge from societal norms of femininity. Figures like *La Raulito* and *La Gorda Matosas*, who did not conform to traditional standards of beauty or femininity, became targets of dehumanization. In contemporary cases, such as the treatment of Jenni Hermoso and Yamila Rodríguez, women's bodies continue to be sites of violence, whether commercialized, objectified, or directly assaulted. The physical and emotional toll of this marginalization cannot be understated, it reveals how deeply gendered power structures remain tied to the control and regulation of women’s bodies in football.

6.2 Bodies As Agents and The Power Of Sisterhood

However, women's footballing bodies are not solely passive objects, they are also active agents in social processes. Football represents a contested space where entrenched gender norms are not only upheld but actively challenged. Though historically governed by hegemonic masculinity, the sport becomes a site of resistance and negotiation of gendered power. Drawing on Connell’s understanding of gender relations as fluid and changeable, these dynamics are not set in stone but can be reshaped. Women's participation in football, therefore, demonstrates their capacity to navigate, resist, and redefine established gender norms.

For many women, the journey of resistance in football begins with their intrinsic desire for joy, fulfillment, and a sense of belonging within the sport. This desire drives them to assert their right to participate in a space that has historically marginalized them. However, the resistance goes far beyond

simply stepping onto the pitch, it involves continually reasserting their right to be part of the game and reclaiming the public sphere from which they have long been excluded.

A critical element in this resistance is the power of sisterhood and solidarity, which operates on multiple levels. Among teammates, it fosters mutual support and shared resilience; within broader society, feminist movements increasingly recognize football as a feminist issue; across generations, it honors pioneering women who broke barriers; and internationally, it connects Argentine women to a global struggle for gender justice in sports. In Argentina, where football is deeply rooted in social life and identity, this collective sense of belonging is especially powerful. The simplicity and accessibility of the sport – requiring just a ball, a space, and some people – make it uniquely capable of forging social connections and identities. Unlike sports that require expensive equipment or structured settings, football can be played anywhere, by anyone, transforming it into a tool for social cohesion and identity-building. Much like it once unified early 20th-century immigrant communities in their neighborhoods, today it provides a venue for women to carve out space, form connections, and build solidarity.

The feminist movement's shift in perspective – viewing football not as an inherently “*macho*” domain but as an arena for challenging gender norms – has been transformative. Since the rise of Ni-Una-Menos in 2015 and the campaign for abortion rights, football has become a space for feminist resistance, turning the pitch into a site where slogans like “*my body, my choice*” take on a new resonance as women actively contest their historical exclusion. Feminist ideals increasingly challenge the patriarchal structures embedded in the sport, with the presence of women on the field visibly disrupting long-held norms.

Figures like Macarena Sánchez have played pivotal roles in driving change, challenging institutional barriers and sparking public debates on equity and justice in football. These acts of defiance are significant because, although football has not traditionally been a platform for political activism, the agency of individual women has proven capable of reshaping its structures. Yet, the progress in women's football has largely come from grassroots activism and the determination of female players and allies, rather than from governing institutions like the AFA or FIFA, which often engage in symbolic gestures without enacting meaningful change.

While women's participation in football demonstrates resistance and potential for transformation, it is essential to acknowledge that change is constrained by broader social and historical structures. Women's ability to challenge hegemonic masculinity in football is not merely about individual willpower but also about collective action that navigates and negotiates entrenched norms. Women's footballing bodies thus become both objects and agents of social processes – resisting, transforming, and redefining the

spaces they inhabit within the limits of the structures they seek to change.

6.3 Leveling The Field: Conditions For Parity

Addressing Fraser's social justice model in the context of Argentine women's football reveals that true parity of participation demands more than surface-level reforms. The conditions for achieving equality expose just how deeply entrenched hegemonic masculinity is within the sport. Fraser's dimensions of redistribution, recognition, and representation make clear that these oppressive structures must be dismantled at their very roots. Only through a holistic, transformative approach can we create a truly inclusive football culture, one that embraces everyone's realities and voices, ensuring that all who wish to participate can do so on equal terms.

Redistribution – More than Equal Pay: Achieving true parity in Argentine football requires a deeper structural overhaul that goes beyond equal pay. While economic justice is often framed around salaries for professional players, the real issue lies in the unequal distribution of resources, infrastructure, and opportunities across the entire system. Football is played by women across all social classes in Argentina, but the conditions under which they play and the opportunities available to them differ greatly. Recently, the growing participation of middle-class women, particularly through private football schools, has been framed as a new trend in public discourse. However, this overlooks the long-standing history of working-class women playing football since its early days, often without adequate resources or recognition.

Furthermore, the narrative that "*women's football is not attractive*" exposes a critical lack of political will. The limited investment and promotion are not simply market-driven outcomes but reflect a deliberate failure to prioritize and support women's sports. This absence of political will reinforces a cycle where the sport is denied the necessary resources and infrastructure to grow, leading to poorer visibility and development. This, in turn, is used to justify ongoing neglect and underfunding. This lack of political will must be understood as an active choice that sustains the self-fulfilling prophecy of women's football as less valuable, ultimately maintaining the gender hierarchy within the sport.

The infrastructure, from youth leagues to coaching programs, must be democratized, making football accessible to those from rural areas and lower economic strata. Representation in football cannot be limited to a few visible players, it must include women in coaching, administrative, and leadership roles, ensuring they have the same financial and educational opportunities as men. Without addressing the economic barriers that keep women from these roles, football will continue to be dominated by men with financial and social capital, maintaining a system of exclusion. Ultimately, redistributive justice in football is not just about leveling the playing field for professional athletes, it is about reshaping the

entire ecosystem so that every girl and woman, regardless of class, has the opportunity to participate, compete, and lead.

Recognition – Beyond Visibility: While the increased visibility of women in Argentine football marks a significant step forward, recognition must extend beyond simply being seen. Redistributive justice has started to address material barriers, but recognition must tackle the deeper cultural norms that still marginalize women. Feminist movements have played a crucial role in challenging the male-centric narrative of football, pushing for greater inclusion, especially in urban areas. Yet, despite the normalization of women's football in some regions, media narratives continue to frame men's football as the gold standard, relegating women's achievements to secondary status. The visibility of women's football, while growing, is often accompanied by a gendered framing that trivializes their accomplishments or focuses excessively on their personal lives, appearance, or femininity rather than their athletic abilities. Recognition must go beyond this superficial visibility, demanding that women are valued as legitimate athletes whose contributions to the sport are celebrated not just for their presence, but for their participation as equal peers. This recognition needs to permeate all levels of society, from schools to communities and media, challenging the deeply ingrained belief that football is inherently male.

Achieving parity in women's football demands critical self-reflection from governing bodies like the AFA. However, this introspection must cut deeper than surface-level gestures of support. Figures like AFA President Tapia celebrate the rise of women's football as a new achievement under their leadership, conveniently glossing over the patriarchal structures that have historically privileged men and marginalized women. These structures – built on exclusionary policies, unequal funding, and cultural narratives of male dominance – persist. While self-reflection is essential, it has its limits. Those in power rarely dismantle systems that uphold their privilege, making internal dialogue an often slow and ineffective means of change. This raises the question: Is a more radical approach necessary? The transformative power may lie in independent feminist movements that challenge the system from the outside, driven by the marginalized voices that have been historically excluded. The real progress in women's football has always come from the grassroots; to break the cycle of male dominance, perhaps a deeper reimagining of power is needed, one that goes beyond self-reflection and tackles the structures that sustain inequality head-on.

While feminist ideals are gaining traction in the mainstream, they risk being co-opted by capitalist interests. The media's portrayal of women's football as a marketable trend often emphasizes hyper-feminization over athletic skill, diluting the transformative power of feminist ideals. This commodification risks turning the feminist struggle into a product, rather than a genuine movement for

systemic change. For women's football to truly be recognized, their participation must be valued for its inherent contribution to the sport, not for its marketability.

Genuine recognition, therefore, involves not just increasing visibility but also de- and reconstructing the cultural and institutional values that continue to marginalize women. It requires both the football establishment and society to confront the deep-rooted biases that have shaped the sport and to acknowledge the real drivers of change – women themselves, who have put their bodies to claim a social space and activity that has been co-opted and dominated by a patriarchal logic.

Representation - A critical endeavor: This research highlights that representation in Argentine women's football goes beyond numbers – it is about who has the power to shape the sport's future. Current efforts often fall into tokenism, placing women in leadership roles without challenging the underlying patriarchal structures. Genuine representation means changing not just who is included but how decisions are made and whose voices are heard.

The male-dominated structures within football governance, like the AFA, systematically exclude women from meaningful positions. A small presence in leadership or coaching does not equate to real influence, and representation becomes hollow when it does not empower women to drive change. Cultural and structural barriers – psychological, social, and financial – prevent women from fully participating. True change requires dismantling the elite male culture, ensuring that representation is not just symbolic but transformative, and that women can lead with authority.

Media coverage of women's football often reinforces stereotypes or erases its long history. Positive visibility, such as Gómez's experience, can shift public perception, but framing the sport as a “*new trend*” overlooks the struggles of women who have long been part of football, especially from marginalized communities. Control over their own narratives allows women to challenge misframing and redefine their roles within the sport.

True representation requires tackling redistribution, recognition, and representation together. It is not just about visibility – it is about reshaping who has the power to make decisions and tell stories and how these processes are shaped. This means ensuring equitable access to leadership, media platforms, and opportunities for all in football. Only through deep structural and cultural change can representation move beyond tokenism, empowering women to lead and reshape the sport authentically.

7 Outlook

“So many have played a part to help grow the game to where it is today. but remember, we’re not finished yet.”

Elise Kellond-Knight, Australia, Twitter (November 2019)

7.1 Reality Check - Kicking Down The Dino?

As the final whistle blows on this research, I find myself reflecting on my choice of topic – a strong drive for football, feminism, and social justice, all intersecting within the context of Argentina, a country that has accompanied me through different stages of life.

What emerges is a struggle between two powerful, opposing forces: the “*football dinosaurs*” and a rising tide of feminist resistance, driven by a profound sense of injustice. The “*dinosaurs*” represented by figures like Tapia, Infantino, and Rubiales, embody entrenched patriarchal power structures that resist sharing space, visibility and control, leveraging the business of football in their interests.

In contrast, there is a growing collective resistance, embodied by women in football across the globe and fueled by feminist movements. From the streets of Buenos Aires to pitches worldwide, women are actively carving out spaces, asserting their right to existence and visibility, and claiming football as their own.

In Argentina, women have historically played key roles in social rights movements, from the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo to today's Ni Una Menos. The power of sisterhood, when combined with the nature of football – a sport that inherently fosters team spirit and a sense of belonging – creates a unique and profound potential for solidarity and identity-building. This has been further catalyzed in recent years by the rise of social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, which challenge hegemonic narratives and amplify historically marginalized voices. Control over narratives is now more democratized, with users themselves contesting the discourse that was once dominated by media tycoons.

The influence and reach of Argentina’s feminist movements have extended far beyond national borders, underscoring their transnational power. Having spread across Latin America and strengthened by the activism of “*sisters*” in other countries, this wave has even reached places like Vienna, where a “*Ni-Una-Menos*” chants are a key part of today’s demonstrations. Such global connections demonstrate the far-reaching social power of feminist movements, today playing a key part in fighting for social justice in football.

However, the battle between these forces raises a central question: what will the future of football look like? Can the “*dinosaurs*” be kicked out of the game? A new vision of football would be one of true inclusivity – where anyone who desires to play can do so on equal terms, without fear of dehumanization, stigma, or exclusion. A genuine national pride would embrace all bodies, free from gendered divides, allowing space for individual desire, dreams, and achievements. As one interviewee powerfully stated, it is about conquering a space that was nearly inaccessible to women and doing so with a language and a body that imagines more possibilities. However, is it enough to envision a pluralistic national identity, or do we need to dismantle the very idea of nationalism as inherently exclusionary? Many questions arise about what it truly means to create an inclusive football space.

This research has revealed a central dilemma in addressing gender injustice in football: while there is consensus on the need to dismantle patriarchal practices and structures, the path forward is hotly debated. Much like real dinosaurs that only faced extinction through radical shifts, the entrenched “*football dinosaurs*” that maintain power in the sport will not disappear without significant disruption. The debate centers on two approaches: *reform from within* or *radical action from outside* – and both have their strengths, limitations, and potential conflicts.

The reformative approach emphasizes dialogue and sensitization, working within the system to engage current leaders, foster male allies, and gradually transform gendered norms in football institutions, family settings and broader society. This strategy has the potential to create long-term change by shifting policies and attitudes from the inside. However, its gradual nature risks slow progress and superficial victories. Without substantial structural changes, it can end up merely reproducing the status quo, with token female representation or media campaigns that celebrate “*gender equality*” without tackling the structural inequalities that persist.

On the other side, independent feminist movements focus on deconstructing the system through radical approaches that challenge male dominance head-on. Collectives like La Nuestra claim to build inclusive, decolonial environments that allow marginalized bodies to reconquer football on their terms, rejecting the framework imposed by hegemonic governance. These alternative spaces provide vital counter-narratives, fostering safe environments and potentially empowering those historically excluded. However, their impact can be limited without engagement with mainstream structures, and they are often financially vulnerable, relying on unpaid, voluntary work. Moreover, there is a tendency to romanticize feminist spaces as inherently just, overlooking the internal power dynamics present within these collectives.

The tension between these approaches reflects the nature of sisterhood itself: allies in the fight against patriarchy but not without disagreement – mirroring Argentina’s deeply polarized political landscape,

where intense discussions, sharp opinions, and diverging political beliefs are part of the daily life. Like close sisters who argue but share a fundamental bond, the feminist movement is fragmented in its strategies, each approach offering crucial contributions but at times contradicting or clashing with the other. Reformers may be seen as too slow or compromised, while independent movements risk isolation and further polarization in an already heated societal climate.

In reflecting on these dynamics, the research suggests that a combined strategy – a delicate balance between working within institutions and building pressure from independent movements – is the most comprehensive path to truly dismantling patriarchal structures in football. Reform from within is crucial to reshape policies and open spaces, but it must be complemented by the radical energies of grassroots feminist movements that create new possibilities and apply pressure from the outside. Like a team on the pitch, unity is key; “sisters” in this struggle may differ in their strategies, but acting together is essential to overcome fragmentation and drive real change.

However, it is important not to over-romanticize this sisterhood or place the burden of change solely on their shoulders. We must be critical of the neoliberal narrative that says, “It is up to you, just do it.” While women’s agency and resilience are undeniable, their efforts are constrained by the social structures that surround them. Real transformation is not just a matter of individual willpower or collective resistance – it requires addressing the systemic barriers and inequalities that limit progress. Change must come from both within and outside the structures of power, but ultimately, the responsibility should not rest on those most marginalized by the system. Achieving genuine gender justice requires a collective struggle – one grounded in solidarity and a relentless critique of the structures that perpetuate gender oppression in football and beyond. This demands an unflinching examination of the privileges and power that those benefiting from the status quo are reluctant to relinquish.

The urgency of this collective effort is even more critical in the face of a growing right-wing backlash against gender justice, embodied by figures like Javier Milei in Argentina. Such opposition not only seeks to stall progress but demands a stronger, united resistance across all fronts to keep the fight alive. Football is never isolated from broader societal struggles, and in an era marked by global crises and resurgent conservatism, there is a genuine risk of deprioritizing women's rights in the sport.

Looking ahead, the next Women's World Cup, set to take place in Brazil in 2027, offers both a chance and a challenge: Will it serve as a catalyst to amplify Latin American voices and inspire new movements, or merely reproduce FIFA’s entrenched power structures?

7.2 On A Personal Note

Conducting this research felt like opening a box of layered stories, diverse experiences, and deep-seated struggles – each hinting at the complexities of Argentine women’s football. Throughout, my identity as a researcher and (queer) woman in football has inevitably shaped my lens.

Driven by a sense of justice, the inequalities I encountered personally and through research fueled my ambition to bring these stories to light. However, the depth and breadth of interconnected issues – gender, class, history, power – often felt overwhelming. With limited time, I aimed to explore every angle, feeling the responsibility to do justice to the women's voices I was amplifying. More than just an observer, I share an intimate connection with the sport as a player, coach, and fan. My own experiences with discrimination have fueled empathy and understanding, helping me quickly connect with interviewees through both language and shared passion.

Yet, I recognize the limitations of my positionality. As a white European with the privileges of financial security and societal stability, my perspective on Argentina’s realities remains that of an outsider. While my time in Argentina has allowed me to share in its culture and rhythms, I am aware of my external lens. This duality – of being both insider and outsider – has deepened my understanding of Argentine football but also frames the limits of my perspective. This research, therefore, remains an snapshot within the larger, nuanced landscape of gender and football.

7.3 Future Directions for Research

Future research can further explore the mechanisms discussed in this study, offering deeper insights into each. Examining the experiences of referees, coaches, fans, and grassroots players will be crucial to understanding how gendered dynamics play out at different levels of the game, moving beyond professional players. Similarly, the inclusion of transgender athletes, alongside the systematic issue of transphobia, remains a vital and emerging area for a more comprehensive view of intersectionality football. New directions should also consider the role of men as both allies and potential agents of change in women’s football, moving beyond viewing them solely as opponents. Understanding how men can either reproduce or actively deconstruct gender hierarchies and relations within the sport is crucial. Events like the recent U20 WWC in Colombia and the 2027 WWC in Brazil present unique opportunities to assess how international tournaments shape women's football across Latin America, influencing visibility, participation, and societal attitudes. Furthermore, reflecting on the research landscape itself, there is value in critically assessing how current studies address – or overlook – these key dimensions of gender and social justice in football, to ensure future work is not just broadening but also deepening the conversation on transforming the sport.

Let us raise our voices, unafraid and united, as we step onto the pitch – not just to play, but to claim what is ours. We step forward for the sheer joy of the game, for the desire to do what we love. Let's confront the machos – the ones who took the ball away, who said we couldn't, who dismissed us with, "*Go wash the dishes.*" To those who watched us play with disbelief – "Wow, you can play football?" – yes, *boludo*, we can. And to the ones who said we were too weak, too masculine, not attractive – who silenced us – our voices are louder, stronger, and now, united, we rise again.

This fight isn't just about the game. It is about reclaiming our place in this national, cultural institution. It is about taking our space, our joy, and our identity back from a world that told us "*no*" at every turn. Once, *aguante* chants were filled with violence, homophobia, and toxic masculinity. Today, we claim them, turning them into songs of resistance:

*"What happened barra brava,
That the fans are free of machos.
What happened barra brava, fachos.
The years go by, the players and leaders,
What happened to the girls? It is the question the people have.
As the girls, we take your place:
Oh oh!
In the streets, in the stadiums, and in the beds.
Oh oh!
While the police look after your football,
Our football is joy,
It is dissident, and it is feminist."*
(Hang & Hawkins, 2022, p. 48)

This isn't just an Argentine revolution – it is a global one. The courage and defiance of women in Argentina inspire movements from Buenos Aires to Vienna. We, too, reclaim our voices, we reclaim our legacy. We sing for ourselves and for all the women who came before us – those who were banned from playing, those who were told football wasn't for them, and those who played in secret or under substandard conditions. We sing for Jenni, for Macarena and for Mara. We sing for our sisters, for those who are feared to play, who have been silenced. We sing for our sister in the Middle East, in India and Spain.

We sing for the next generation, so they can step onto the field freely, without fear or shame, just pure love for the game.

We are reclaiming more than just a field; we are reclaiming a legacy. Football belongs to us too – it is woven into our personal and collective lives. It is a heritage of joy, resilience, and defiance, and it is ours to pass on, to inherit, and to reshape. For the generations to come, we build a future where discrimination and exclusion have no place, where every girl, every woman, every non-conforming body can play without fear, without apology.

Let us sing together – against patriarchy, against violence, against the limitations that others tried to impose on us. Let's rewrite not just the rules of the game but its very soul.

Aguante el feminismo - aguante the resistance of every woman reclaiming her* place – on the pitch, in the stands, and in life.*

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Annex

Annex 1: List Of Interview Partners (Seven Individual And Two In Group)

Nº	Name (age) ⁵	Role and Organization	Location	Date
1	Lucila “Luky” Sandoval (53)	Former professional player and founder of “Las Pioneras”	Buenos Aires/Salta	21.09.2023
2	Monica Santino (58)	Co-Founder and coach at La Nuestra Fútbol Feminista	Buenos Aires, Villa 31	26.09.2023
	María José Figueroa (mid 30)	Coach and treasurer at La Nuestra Fútbol Feminista		
	Jimena Alejandra Aon (mid 30)	Coach, educational workshop and content creation at La Nuestra Fútbol Feminista		
3	Luciana Martiarena (22)	Player at La Nuestra Fútbol Feminista	Buenos Aires, Villa 31	26.09.2023
4	Romina “Pepa” Gómez (33)	Professional player at Club Atlético Belgrano River Plate (2023)	Córdoba, Buenos Aires	27.09.2023
5	Magalí Molina (30)	Professional player at Club Atlético Independiente	Gran Buenos Aires	02.10.2023
6	Nuria Escobar (27)	Fan and former board member at Club Atlético San Lorenzo de Almagro	Buenos Aires	03.10.2023
7	Lorena Berdula (50)	Sport scientist at Universidad de la Plata and Football Coach	La Plata	04.10.2023
8	Rosa Villagra (71)	Former players, members of Las Pioneras	Córdoba	09.10.2023
	Silvia Barrionuevo (74)			
10	Milagros García (21)	Player and Coach at La Nuestra Fútbol Feminista	Buenos Aires, Villa 31	16.10.2023

⁵ Age at the time of the interview (September/October 2023)

Annex 2: Interview Guide

Guía de entrevista (versión general)*

Pre-Entrevista („Vorspann“):

Step 1: Presentarme a mí y explicar el objetivo de la entrevista dentro del marco de mi investigación.
(„Prinzip der informierten Einwilligung“)

Step 2: Avisar la grabación de la entrevista, recibir el acuerdo („Genehmigung für Aufzeichnung“).

Step 3: Si lo prefieres, esta entrevista puede ser anónima . Si no es así, estás cómoda con que se mencione tu nombre completo? Preparar un documento para confirmar participación
(“Aufklärung über Schutz persönlicher Daten und ggf. Anonymität”).

Step 4: Cualquier duda o pregunta mientras la entrevista no dudes en preguntarme. También si hay algo que no preferís contestar no hay problema tampoco, me avisas.

*El enfoque de las preguntas durante la entrevista será flexible y se adaptará según la dirección y profundidad que tome la conversación (según Gläser/Laudel).

1. Trayectoria Personal y Relación con el Fútbol (adaptada al rol de la participante):

- *Si es jugadora:* Cómo fue que empezaste a jugar al fútbol? Ya jugaste de chiquita? Qué te motivó a seguir jugando?
- *Si es entrenadora/DT:* Cómo surgió tu interés por dirigir o entrenar? Cómo fue tu experiencia de transición de jugadora (si aplica) a entrenadora?
- *Si es miembro de una directiva u organización:* Qué te motivó a involucrarte en la parte organizativa del fútbol? Cómo llegaste a tu rol actual?
- *Si es fanática/seguidora:* Cuándo nació tu pasión por el fútbol femenino? Cómo ha sido tu experiencia apoyando el deporte?
- En general: Qué significa el fútbol para vos en tu vida cotidiana?

2. Fútbol y Sociedad:

- A lo largo de los años, enfrentaste algún tipo de desafíos o discriminación en tu camino dentro del fútbol, considerando tu rol (jugadora, entrenadora, dirigente, etc.)?
- Enfrentaste algún tipo de discriminación por ser mujer participando en el fútbol?

Experiencias Cotidianas y Participación en el Fútbol

3. Acceso y Participación en Espacios de Fútbol (según la experiencia de la participante):

- *Si es jugadora:* Cómo fue para vos encontrar espacios para jugar o entrenar? Te sentiste alguna vez excluida o limitada en esos espacios?
- *Si es entrenadora/DT:* Cómo encontraste tu espacio para dirigir o entrenar equipos? Hubo barreras o desafíos particulares por ser mujer?
- *Si es miembro de una directiva u organización:* Cómo te has sentido en los espacios de poder? Enfrentaste algunos desafíos?
- *Si es fanática/seguidora:* Cómo fue tu experiencia asistiendo a partidos o apoyando el fútbol femenino? Notaste cambios en los espacios de aficionados?

4. Apoyo y Percepción Social:

- Cómo perciben tu participación en el fútbol tu familia, tus amistades, y la comunidad en general? Cambió su apoyo a lo largo del tiempo?
- Sentiste alguna transformación en la percepción o apoyo hacia el fútbol femenino en Argentina en los últimos años?

Cambios y Movimientos en el Fútbol Femenino

5. Movimientos Sociales y Feminismo:

- Qué papel creés que tienen los movimientos sociales, como el feminismo, en impulsar el cambio y el desarrollo del fútbol femenino?
- Cómo impactaron estos movimientos en tu experiencia personal o en el entorno futbolístico en el que estás involucrada?
- Dirías que los movimientos globales en el fútbol femenino tienen un impacto en lo que está ocurriendo aquí?

6. Transformaciones y Desafíos para el Cambio:

- Desde tu perspectiva, cuáles son los principales cambios que se necesitan para que haya más equidad y oportunidades para mujeres en el fútbol, ya sea como jugadoras, entrenadoras, dirigentes, o seguidoras?
- Qué papel deberían cumplir los clubes (las instituciones deportivas y el gobierno) para promover el desarrollo del fútbol femenino?

Cultura y Futuro del Fútbol Femenino

7. Creando una Nueva Cultura de Fútbol:

- Cómo describirías la cultura del fútbol femenino desde tu perspectiva (como jugadora, entrenadora, dirigente, o fanática)? En qué se diferencia de la cultura de fútbol tradicional dominada por hombres? (Si hay diferencias)
- Si pensás en el futuro, qué tipo de ambiente o cultura te gustaría ver en el fútbol?

8. Impacto Más Allá de la Cancha:

- Qué impacto tiene el fútbol en tu vida más allá de lo deportivo? Influye de alguna manera?
- Desde tu punto de vista, creés que el fútbol puede ser una herramienta para cambiar la forma en que se ve a las mujeres (y a las identidades de género diversas) en Argentina?

Mirando Hacia Adelante

9. Visión para el Futuro del Fútbol Femenino:

- Cómo ves el futuro del fútbol femenino en Argentina y qué cambios esperás para el deporte, considerando tu rol (jugadora, entrenadora, dirigente, o fanática)?
- Qué consejo o mensaje le darías a las chicas jóvenes que quieren empezar a jugar, entrenar, liderar, o simplemente disfrutar del fútbol?

Annex 3: List Of Research Observation During Research Trip: September 6 And October 18, 2023

N°	Object	Category	Location	Kind of observation
1	La Pampa Fútbol (Private Football School)	Amateur Training	Buenos Aires	Active player
2	Daily Life	Streets, Stadiums	Buenos Aires, La Plata, Córdoba	Observer
3	“Clásico femenino” en La Plata Estudiantes vs. Gimnasia	Professional Match	La Plata	Spectator
4	Home/Family of Romina Gómez	Professional Player (Life)	Córdoba	Observer, informal discussions
5	CA Independiente Trainings site	Professional team	Buenos Aires	Observer, informal discussions
6	La Nuestra Fútbol Feminista	Social grassroots organization	Buenos Aires, La Villa 31	(i) Outside observation (ii) Taking part as an active player
7	Abriendo la Cancha Fútbol Feminista	Social grassroots organization	Córdoba	(i) Outside observation (ii) Taking part as an active coach
8	Barrio Parque Fútbol Femenino	Amateur Football Match	Córdoba	Observer

Annex 4: List Of Informal Encounters/Not Transcribed Interviews

N°	Name	Organization/Institution	Role	Location/Origin
1	Julia Hang	Universidad de la Plata	Scholar	La Plata
2	Lorena Arambueno	Universidad de la Plata	Scholar	La Plata/Salta
3	Debora Majul	Universidad de Córdoba, CONICET	Scholar	Córdoba
4	Emma Alias	Club Atlético Belgrano	Professional Youth Player	Neuquén and Córdoba
6	Luciana	La Pampa Fútbol	Amateur Player	Buenos Aires
7	María Esther Ponce	Pioneras	Former player, Copa 71	Córdoba
8	Ayelen Bruno Kunath	Barrio Parque Fútbol Femenino	Coach, professional and grassroots level	Córdoba
9	Verónica Moreira	Universidad de Buenos Aires	Scholar	Buenos Aires
10	Malén	La Pampa Fútbol	Amateur Player	Buenos Aires