



The power of storytelling in women's football: inspiring equality and enhancing fan engagement

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Dissertation written under the supervision of professor Catarina
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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the MSc in
Management with specialization in Strategic Marketing, at the
Universidade Católica Portuguesa, 06/01/2025.

ABSTRACT

Title: The power of storytelling in women's football: inspiring equality and enhancing fan engagement.

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Women's football has experienced remarkable growth recently, however, it still faces visible challenges in gender equality and reduced visibility. Thus, storytelling occupies an important space in the rise of this sport, as it is a powerful tool capable of reducing differences by promoting gender equality and allowing closer connections. This study aims to understand whether storytelling truly can challenge gender stereotypes, increase fan engagement, and promote gender equality in women's football. To obtain results that can answer the questions raised in the realization of this thesis, a mixed methodology was employed, involving five interviews with specialists in the field and an online questionnaire to understand the opinion of the respondents more generally. This methodology allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of the study in question.

The results obtained demonstrate that storytelling can influence the promotion of gender equality, proving to be an effective tool in challenging existing gender stereotypes and having a quite positive impact on retaining fans in women's football. This powerful tool does indeed change perceptions through narratives that can be of various types. According to the respondents and interviewees, personal stories, documentaries, and social media and advertising campaigns have proven to be the most influential elements.

Keywords: Storytelling, Gender equality, Gender stereotypes, Fan engagement

SUMÁRIO

Título: O poder do *storytelling* no futebol feminino: inspirando igualdade e aumentando o envolvimento dos fãs.

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O futebol feminino tem sentido um crescimento notável recentemente, porém ainda encontra desafios notáveis relativamente à igualdade de género e à reduzida visibilidade. O *storytelling* ocupa um espaço importante na ascensão deste desporto, na medida em que é uma ferramenta poderosa com capacidade de reduzir as diferenças ao promover a igualdade de género. Esta tese tem como principal objetivo perceber o papel do *storytelling* no que toca ao futebol feminino, e entender em que medida esta ferramenta poderosa poderá influenciar a promoção da igualdade de género e a retenção de fãs. Com o objetivo de obter resultados que possam responder às questões levantadas na realização desta tese, foi realizada uma metodologia mista, recorrendo a cinco entrevistas com especialistas na área, e a um questionário online, de forma a perceber a opinião dos inquiridos de forma geral. Esta metodologia permitiu uma análise mais completa do estudo em causa.

Os resultados obtidos demonstram que o *storytelling* é capaz de influenciar a promoção da igualdade de género, mostrando-se uma ferramenta eficaz no que toca a desafiar os estereótipos de género existentes e tendo um impacto positivo na retenção de fãs. Esta ferramenta muda perceções através de narrativas que podem ser de vários tipos. As histórias pessoais, os documentários e as redes sociais e campanhas de marketing demonstraram ser os elementos mais influenciadores.

Palavras-chave: *Storytelling*, Igualdade de género, Estereótipos de género, *Fan engagement*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The realization of my master's thesis was part of one of the most challenging phases of my life. All the pressure I put on myself made these three months indispensable for my personal growth. First, I would like to thank my advisor, Catarina Pestana, who had the greatest patience throughout the journey so far, with the best advice that calmed me down and allowed me to keep fighting.

To my parents, two completely necessary pillars in my life, and as it could not be otherwise, they helped me believe in myself these past few months, always being by my side, regardless of the adversities. Without them, it wouldn't have been possible. A special thank you to my brother Gonçalo, who is also my best friend, and who has always been there for me no matter what, I love him above all else in this world. Siblings are the best thing in life, and I can prove it.

A special thanks to my grandparents: Avó São, Avô Tino, Avô João, and Avó Ade, who, even without understanding the topic, were essential psychological elements. Without them, my life would not have the same magic.

I also thank my cousin Sofia Portela for all the help she gave me, for all the endless calls where nothing calmed me and only her word was able to do so. I will never have words to describe all the support and I will never have the means to thank you for all the help you gave me.

Finally, to my friends, especially to Salomé who every day had the patience to listen to me and wanted to know everything about how it was going, who always wanted to help me even though she wasn't familiar with the topic, and who always did everything for me, and to Margarida who helped me countless times and listened to me just as many, being an indispensable element in the development of my thesis. May we continue the adventures, trips, and laughter with the end of this phase, and may we always be able to solve all problems together. Also, a special thanks to the best people that Católica gave me, Mafalda, Matilde, and Teresa, I hope this relationship lasts many years.

With this, I conclude my academic journey, without regretting anything that has been done so far. They were years of dedication that end now, and that I will always carry in my heart. Thank you, Católica.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Topic Presentation

Women's football has seen a growing trend in recent years in terms of visibility and recognition. In the past, football was largely associated with the male gender, which limited women's access to the sport (Pfister, 2010). Edinburgh recorded the first women's international match in 1881, marking the beginning of a growing interest in women's football. Although, over the years, some countries have even banned women from playing football, a notable example being Brazil, which restricted the sport to men until 1979 (Votre & Mourão, 2003). As far as gender differences are concerned, this sport is a strong pillar to prove that they exist, and to prove this, looking back a few years, we can realize that the first FIFA Men's World Cup took place in 1930 and the first FIFA Women's World Cup followed 30 years later in 1961 (Nassis et al., 2022). Despite the many challenges it has faced in recent years, the sport continues to grow thanks to marketing and the narratives created to promote it, attracting countless audiences worldwide (Kryger et al., 2023).

Storytelling is one of the most powerful communication elements (Kaufman, 2003). It is an essential marketing strategy that allows brands, organizations and people to connect emotionally with the audience (McKee, 2018; Pope et al., 2024). This concept can be defined as “the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights” by Serrat (2008). Through the creation of continuous and powerful narratives, storytelling can connect with the public, resulting in greater fan retention and a loyal relationship with them (Laurell & Söderman, 2018). In the context of women's football, storytelling can help promote social values currently important to integrate into the sport, such as gender equality and inclusion, resulting in subsequent fan engagement to grow the female gender in this sport.

This thesis will focus on the role of storytelling as one of the most influential strategies for communicating with fans (Ben Youssef et al., 2019), exploring the impact of this tool in promoting gender equality and increasing fan engagement, particularly in women's football.

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Questions

Despite the importance of this topic, there is still a lack of research on the influence of storytelling in women's football. Although several previous studies have already analyzed the

concept of storytelling as a powerful tool in marketing (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Laurell & Söderman, 2018), few studies evaluate the application of storytelling in women's football and what kind of impact it could have. Furthermore, Matsiola et al. (2022) focused their study on digital storytelling in sports, leaving open how storytelling in women's football may or may not help to promote gender equality and change public perception. This dissertation seeks to address this gap by exploring the actual influence of storytelling in promoting gender equality and increasing fan engagement in women's football. To address and attempt to fill the existing gap in this area, the problem statement of this dissertation can be summarized as follows: *Understand the role of storytelling in promoting gender equality and increasing fan engagement in women's football.*

To analyze the problem identified, a **main research question** was established:

How can storytelling promote gender equality and enhance fan engagement in women's football?

To streamline this study, some sub-research questions will be analyzed.

RQ 1: How does storytelling influence gender stereotypes in women's football?

RQ2: How does storytelling in women's football influence fan engagement with the sport?

RQ3: What are the most influential narrative elements for increasing fan engagement in women's football?

RQ4: How does the use of storytelling influence the promotion of gender equality in women's football?

RQ5: What are the most influential narrative elements in promotion of gender equality in women's football?

1.3 Academic and managerial relevance

Women's football has experienced growth in recent years (Pfister, 2010) closely aligning with the growing concern about gender equality in sports (Pettersson et al., 2017), but this does not affect the fact that women's football has received less importance and visibility compared to the size and high profile of men's football (Williams & Hess, 2015).

An analysis of key themes in this dissertation revealed that while storytelling in sports has been researched, gaps remain regarding its role in football, especially women's football. Additionally, despite the relevance of gender equality, the role of storytelling in promoting it and enhancing fan engagement in women's football remains underexplored. The need for major sporting organizations to find effective ways to promote gender equality and inclusion to increase fan engagement makes this dissertation relevant, as the adoption of these practices can effectively reduce the gender difference. In this context, storytelling emerges as a critical element that can promote gender equality and the inclusion of the female gender, combat the most diverse differences, and lead to greater fan engagement, thereby elevating this sport to a higher level.

With this study, the author intends to increase knowledge and understand whether the use of storytelling in women's football is influential in promoting gender equality and subsequently increasing fan engagement. In doing so, the author hopes to fill a gap in the field and contribute to achieving full gender equality and inclusion of women in one of the world's greatest sports, football.

1.4 Research methods

Both primary and secondary data were used to answer the research questions. Firstly, in the literature review, some secondary data was used to gain an understanding of the concepts relevant to the study, as well as previous studies. Secondly, in terms of primary data, a mixed methodology was used, using both qualitative and quantitative research. The choice of this methodology, called triangulation, was because it allows for a more comprehensive approach to the topic, making it possible to find in this dissertation a comparison between the results obtained in each of the approaches. Firstly, interviews were conducted with five individuals specialized in the topic of this dissertation, and then a survey was carried out to examine a wider section of the population. The questionnaire was constructed on the Qualtrics platform and statistically analyzed using the SPSS data analysis platform, provided by the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, to answer the research questions and corresponding hypotheses. Descriptive and inferential statistics, Mann-Whitney tests, Spearman Correlation, Friedman paired-samples tests, and post hoc Wilcoxon tests were used to study the topic. The explained and interpreted results can be found in the last two chapters of this dissertation.

1.5 Dissertation outline

This chapter offers a concise overview of the subject, elucidating the chosen topic for this dissertation and outlining the research questions that will steer this study. The second chapter deals with the literature review, presenting a theoretical basis that led to the creation of the various hypotheses listed later. This is followed by the methodology chapter, where we can understand more about the research design and the procedures that were used to investigate the listed hypotheses. The fourth chapter provides a comprehensive account of the outcomes derived from the selected methodology and then initiates a discussion with the primary goal of interpreting these results and objectively connecting them to the established research questions. Finally, the author draws some conclusions, answering to all research questions, acknowledge the limitations of this study, and provide management recommendations. In the appendix, it will also be possible to find the questionnaire designed for the conduct of this study, as well as the transcripts of the interviews conducted.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the relevant literature to the analysis of the main research question and the aim of the study.

2.1 Storytelling

2.1.1 Definition of storytelling

When we consider the concept of storytelling, it is common for the term “story” to be associated with it. This can lead to confusion with the related term “narrative”, often considered a synonym for “story”. However, the term “narrative” has a much broader range of meanings and is used in different contexts and disciplines (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). A narrative, according to Shankar et al. (2001), can be a story, a description or an account. However, several authors disagree with this approach, arguing that the terms “narrative” and “story” are different concepts that should be distinguished (B. Smith & Sparkes, 2009).

The term “story”, is open to several interpretations, making it difficult to define. However, McKee (2018) proposed that a story is “a dynamic escalation of conflict-driven events that cause meaningful change in a character's life”. This author also suggests that all stories are narratives, but not all narratives can be considered stories. Furthermore, Vaara et al. (2016) suggest that stories can be compared to narratives that are told in different ways.

The need to tell stories, whether fictional or true, is part of human nature, and how people communicate, and their styles have evolved (Shishko, 2022). Storytelling, frequently used as a synonym of narrative, although it depends on the context (Laurell & Söderman, 2018), can be defined as the lived description of ideas, beliefs, and experiences that evoke emotions and insights (Serrat, 2008), and is one of the oldest and most powerful ways to communicate (Kaufman, 2003). This concept is considered an art of communication, which seeks to generate emotional connections between the audience and the story being told to modify or obtain some kind of required behavior (Radovic-Markovic, 2020). Denning (2006) agrees and defends that it is an important process of using compelling stories to persuade people to act in certain ways. In everyday life, storytelling is used as a way of giving meaning to the narratives of human life and is present in all situations, whether personal or not (Pereira, 2019), being an important part of what distinguishes us as human beings (Fog et al., 2005). Finally, according to Laurell &

Söderman (2018), storytelling and its continued use can be a very useful and powerful tool in organizational communication.

2.1.2 The role of Brand Storytelling

One of the main functions and capabilities of storytelling is to make a brand powerful internally and externally, with the ability to bring people closer to the brand's vision and mission (Fog et al., 2005). Capable of driving brand growth, storytelling is a strategic asset that drives differentiation, increasing brand longevity and consumer loyalty (Aaker & Aaker, 2016).

Laurell & Söderman (2018) identified the four main roles of storytelling as a combination of content, relational, communication, and finally marketing. First, according to these authors, storytelling represents a combination of content for consumers, where the audience can relate new stories to existing ones (Escalas, 2004; Pulizzi, 2012). Laurell & Söderman (2018) defend that this combination of content for consumers can make people relate different stories, enhancing the second role of storytelling: Relational. With these two characteristics, the strong role of storytelling in marketing is justified, leading consumers to activate more parts of the brain through this method of communication compared to traditional methods that have been known for many years (Laurell & Söderman, 2018). Finally, in the opinion of Escalas (2004), the association of Storytelling with marketing allows the consumer to relate and connect emotionally with a brand, which can lead to an increase in purchase intentions (Gilliam & Rockwell, 2018), or even "an increase in acting on the information given" according to Hauff et al. (2014).

2.2 Storytelling and Sports

By harnessing the power of visual and audio-visual elements, it is possible to foster direct connections between followers and fans, potentially leading to increased engagement and loyalty (Zlotán et al., 2023). According to Smith & Stewart (2010), sports are more than just a business. It is an experience for the audience that can be reflected in fan loyalty, so, naturally, the biggest professional sports organizations try their best to maintain their tradition and make their success story known to the entire interested community (Hill & Vincent, 2006). The concept of storytelling in sports is broader than one might think, as it involves interactions between different types of actors. It is important to remember that fans, clubs, and even athletes

are part of the development of stories in sport (Laurell & Söderman, 2018). Finally, Laurell & Söderman (2018), found that the complexity that is linked with the concept of storytelling in sports comes from the “fluid boundaries between professional sports organizations, fans and other stakeholders”.

2.2.1 Women in Sports

When talking about female gender and sport, it is important to know that in the past this link was completely unreasonable, as even in Ancient Greece women were only given domestic tasks, making them completely subservient to the male gender, which was considered superior at the time. As a result, the practice of sports by women was very limited, with a few exceptions in some Greek cities (Spears, 1984). These exceptions can be found in the women and girls who grew up in Sparta, where they were encouraged to practice sport because it was believed in that region that sport brought strength benefits to the female gender (Ivana et al., 2012).

In the nineteenth century, there was a medical belief that women's bodies were too fragile for competitive sports, which meant that the practice of sports by women at the time was highly restricted and criticized (Smith-Rosenberg & Rosenberg, 1973). The strongest critics of women's sports also argued that excessive physical activity turned women into individuals with masculine behaviors, leading to various problems for this gender (Gregg & Gregg, 2017). To combat this regressive thinking, some demonstrations were made over time, and upper-class women began to practice some sports, albeit still with many restrictions and always following certain rules. Later, in 1920, with the approval of women's right to vote, this tended to change, as their participation in sports increased exponentially to what we see in the present (Carol DuBois, 1987).

The development of women's sports has also been helped by various manifestations and government approvals, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the use of the 14th Amendment in court cases in 1973, and, one of the most important, Title IX in 1972, which played a critical role in promoting gender equality in sport and significantly increasing sporting opportunities for women (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). As thinking about sport for women has evolved, the various benefits of sport for women have also been studied, contrary to what was previously argued. It has been shown that young women who play sports tend to get better grades and have lower rates of depression. In addition, women who exercise feel more confident and can maintain a healthier lifestyle (Gregg & Gregg, 2017).

Despite the fierce fight for women's rights and increased opportunities for women in sports, it wasn't until 2012 that all national teams competing in the London Olympics included women in their squads. Women's sport is still very much focused on physical appearance rather than the ability and skill of the athlete (Fink, 2015). Despite the difficult journey that the female gender has taken to get to where we are today, it can be said that sport now belongs to everyone, and women are well placed to progress in the sector and conquer new opportunities and records.

This historical analysis of existing gender stereotypes demonstrates the limited opportunities available to women in sports, being important to examine the role of storytelling in this context. With this, the following hypotheses will be analyzed:

H1.a: Storytelling in women's football helps combat gender stereotypes.

H1.b: Perceptions about the influence of storytelling in gender stereotypes differ significantly between male and female individuals.

2.2.2 Storytelling in Women's Football

In the past, the male gender was much more closely associated with the practice of sports, particularly football (Kimmel et al., 2005). Years ago, it was believed and defended that football was a man's sport and was not generally associated with women, as it was a symbol of masculinity in more traditional eyes (Pfister, 2010). However, in Europe, about 70 years ago, women began to gain strength and greater access to sports, including football (Pfister, 2010). Women's football used to be completely forgotten and ignored due to the size and importance of men's football (Williams & Hess, 2015), but this is increasingly being overcome with the help of storytelling in the field. Since the 19th century, women's football has become increasingly popular around the world, attracting more and more spectators and taking its place in the world of football (Kryger et al., 2023).

Storytelling in football goes beyond advertising that, in some way, create an emotional relationship with the audience. Megan Rapinoe is one of the best examples of how storytelling can also be associated with careers and individual players. Rapinoe, known for her excellent football career, is also an important pillar in fighting for inclusion and gender equality in football (Schmidt et al., 2019). Her fight for equal pay and inclusion created a strong emotional connection with fans who identified with her cause, being considered an important narrator in the context of women's football (Rachael & Rory, 2023)

Storytelling in football goes beyond what is initially associated with it. Personal narratives, such as the example given about player Megan Rabinoe, play an important role when it comes to an emotional connection with fans (Rachael & Rory, 2023; Schmidt et al., 2019).

2.2.3 The Commercial Impact of storytelling in Women's Football

Women's football has seen significant growth in recent years, although it is still largely ignored by the media's fixation on men's football (Williams & Hess, 2015). This growth and increase in the visibility and popularity of women's football is largely due to the storytelling now associated with it (Williams & Hess, 2015). Valenti et al. (2018) found that the use of storytelling increases the connection with fans, making the sport more commercially relevant and potentially increasing the number of viewers. Through social media, female athletes can convey their values and tell their own stories, creating an emotional relationship with fans, according to Pope et al. (2024), which will result in increased engagement and a positive commercial impact.

Furthermore, the storytelling used in women's football can also attract an increasing number of sponsorships from brands that want to reflect their values when it comes to promoting gender equality (Morgan, 2019). Digital storytelling can create a strong emotional relationship with audiences (De Jager et al., 2017), which will result in positive benefits for sponsors and for the women's football teams, which will grow with the increased investment. More specifically, according to a study by Deloitte (2024), women's football has seen a sharp increase in revenue in 2023, with a growth of around 50% compared to 2021. Furthermore, the report argues that most of this revenue comes from commercial partners and sponsors who have shown an increasing interest in women's football. According to Pfister (2015), this sport has become “a symbol of and a driving force for gender equality in sport”.

According to Hagen & Cunha (2019), 43% of the sports market in terms of ticket, media, and sponsorship revenue belongs to football, which shows how relevant this sport is worldwide. In the last 10 years, there has been a 77% increase in revenue from the football industry. Moreover, the revenue from top-level European clubs rising from 11.4 billion to 20.1 billion euros between 2008 and 2017, largely due to the investments made in transfers and player salaries (Hagen & Cunha, 2019). Revenues from UEFA Women's EURO 2017 amounted to 12.7 million euros, and five years later, the UEFA Women's EURO 2022 saw a significant increase in revenue, which reached €63.3 million, with a 400% increase in revenue from this competition. In terms

of investment, UEFA has invested around €57 million, demonstrating that this organization is fully focused on increasing the visibility and returns of this sport (UEFA, 2022).

2.3 Fan Engagement in Women's Football

Fan engagement is a crucial element for the success of any sport in the world, depending on how a club or association communicates with its fans across multiple platforms (Dvergedal, 2021) and creates a loyal relationship with them. Social media play a crucial role in connecting the two parties, in this case, the club/player and the audience, making them a key element of fan engagement, according to Hussain et al. (2021). This connection between fans and sport makes the spectator experience much more intense and memorable and makes football much more than just a game, but an essential part of fans' everyday lives. Furthermore, regarding Women's Football, Pope et al. (2024) suggest that through social media, female athletes can express their voices and change the way women's football, and indeed women's sport in general, is represented.

Relatively to Digital Storytelling, it is important to note that, according to Turner et al. (2024), Women's football brings with it a search for authenticity and equality with men's football, being critical to use digital storytelling to reflect the experiences and stories of the players and the football clubs. In addition, Laurell & Söderman (2018) found that digital storytelling can increase fan engagement by creating a continuous and emotionally powerful narrative, establishing a relationship of fan loyalty to the sport and its players. Fans are one of the most important elements in the creation of storytelling in sports, and a great example was Manchester City's initiative in 2013, where through the hashtag #citystories, the club invited the entire supporter community to share and collaborate in writing the club's story on social media. This is an example of co-creation, where the main creator and person responsible for the storytelling is the audience (McLaren, 2013).

One of the biggest problems with fan engagement in women's football is that only the biggest and most important events are properly promoted, and with that, Pope et al. (2024) suggest that “coverage of women's football should be sustainable, beyond the life cycle of mega-events”, to retain a bigger number of fans. Valenti et al. (2018) argue that storytelling is critical in retaining fans, especially when using narratives and campaigns focused on gender equality, which increases fan engagement with the sport.

Finally, storytelling can play a central and significant role in fan engagement in this sport, as it is through it that individuals create emotional relationships and connections with the sport and other athletes, increasingly enhancing and enriching the fan experience and fan engagement (Snelson & Sheffield, 2009). With this, the following hypotheses were developed to be tested:

H2.a: Storytelling in women's football increases emotional engagement among fans.

H2.b: Perceptions about the influence of storytelling in fan engagement in women's football differ significantly between male and female individuals.

H3.a: Journalistic coverage and news are the most influential storytelling element in increasing fan engagement with women's football.

H3.b: Social media and digital content are the most influential storytelling element in increasing fan engagement with women's football.

H3.c: Documentaries are the most influential storytelling element in increasing fan engagement with women's football.

H3.d: Advertising campaigns are the most influential storytelling element in increasing fan engagement with women's football.

H3.e: Personal stories are the most influential storytelling element in increasing fan engagement with women's football.

2.4 Inclusion and Gender Equality

Gender can be understood as a social construction and, in this sense, the differences between one gender and another are not natural but acquired by individuals due to the context and culture with which they are associated (Pfister, 2010), with that, gender equality is a contested concept with a wide range of dimensions, including various phenomena that are considered to be in women's interest, and is considered to be a "women-friendly" concept (Ertan, 2016). Previous research by Hoerber (2007, 2008a) found that the defense of gender equality varied widely among sports administrators, with some administrators still arguing that there is no point in equality because a female athlete is different from a male athlete. In addition, Hardin & Whiteside (2009) found that the population's view of gender equality can be interpreted in three ways: firstly, it was found that a large part of the sample associates the idea of gender equality

with equal opportunities for women and men, which seems to be a rather limited idea; secondly, in some cases it was found that there are opinions defending the fact that gender equality should only be achieved under certain conditions, such as the equal visibility of sport; finally, some respondents in this study still consider it to be an issue that exclusively benefits the female gender and not a general value for the whole population.

While a few years ago, it was considered a topic not worth discussing, the idea is now increasingly relevant in developed countries (Pettersson et al., 2017). According to Coron (2023), gender equality is a very broad topic that is being discussed globally to continue to develop, and it can be divided into various dimensions, such as gender diversity, equal pay, or equal access to responsibility. Studies such as those by Bredtmann et al. (2016) and Jacobs (2014) have found that good sporting performance is directly linked to respect for gender equality and, in this sense, countries that defend gender equality are also the most likely to invest in women's sport, according to Valenti et al. (2018).

It is often natural to associate the concept of inclusion with equality. Still, according to Hodkinson (2011), these two concepts should be treated separately, as inclusion is seen as a “complex ideological construct that legitimizes the process of subordination and domination of vulnerable groups in our society”. The concept of equity in this field should be also distinguished from the concept of equality in that equity, as defended in an article by Burton (2014), refers to the practice of providing opportunities to individuals to the extent that they need them or according to their circumstances. This concept differs from the concept of equality, which defends equal opportunities for all genders.

With this in mind, it is easy to understand that the world has not always been tolerant when it comes to these two issues, as evidenced by the fact that sport, in general, has historically been much more associated with the male gender than with the female (Kimmel et al., 2005), which resulted in inequalities in this field both in the way they are publicized and in the salaries associated with women's sports, men's sports are at a higher level than women's sports (Kossakowski & Besta, 2023). Hardin & Whiteside (2009) found that the male gender is placed on a higher level because of the past gender equality narratives. In this sense, the authors argue that to combat this idea, it is necessary to introduce counter-narratives that aim to destroy this formed idea.

Despite the countless advances that have been made over the years, professional sportswomen still face several challenges. Professional sport is characterized by traditional discriminatory

attitudes and is surrounded by countless social stereotypes and gender roles (Fink, 2015). Regarding women's football, there is a big difference between the salaries offered to male athletes and the low demand for women in key positions in the sport. In addition, women's football is still very much associated with sexual harassment, which makes the development of the sport more difficult (María Pérez Gázquez & Barquero-Ruiz, 2024). Moreover, motherhood is also a challenge for female athletes, leading to significant physical and psychological fatigue (Hinojosa-Alcalde et al., 2023). In the past, contracts did not include any form of compensation or guarantee that would allow them to return to their careers, resulting in a difficult choice between motherhood and a professional career (Colmenero, 2018).

Thanks to the growing visibility of these inequalities, women's football is finally trying to address the issues of gender equality and inclusion as much as possible as defended by María Pérez Gázquez & Barquero-Ruiz (2024). In this sense, the use of storytelling can be important to combat the disparities. With this, the following hypotheses were developed:

***H4.a:** Gender equality is substantially influenced by storytelling in women's football, creating a positive public perception of women in football.*

***H4.b:** Perceptions about promotion of gender equality differ significantly between male and female individuals.*

***H5.a:** Journalistic coverage and news are the most influential storytelling element in promotion of gender equality in women's football.*

***H5.b:** Social media and digital content are the most influential storytelling element in promotion of gender equality in women's football.*

***H5.c:** Documentaries are the most influential storytelling element in promotion of gender equality in women's football.*

***H5.d:** Advertising campaigns are the most influential storytelling element in promotion of gender equality in women's football.*

***H5.e:** Personal stories are the most influential storytelling element in promotion of gender equality in women's football.*

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims to provide a detailed and clear description of the methodology chosen to approach this study. It begins with a presentation of the used research approach, followed by a detailed description of the primary data and a description of the data collection and analysis.

3.1 Research Approach

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand if storytelling influences the promotion of gender equality and if it can enhance fan engagement in women's football. Therefore, to provide a complete analysis of this thesis's subject and understand the research questions and hypotheses that should be tested, secondary data was sourced from the literature review chapter, which served as the foundation for all the research. It was found some author contradictions and a lack of studies in some areas, which shows the importance of this research. Furthermore, this study also collects primary data to analyze the hypotheses presented in the second chapter. It was used a mixed methodology, which enables data comparison and measurement through an online survey and five in-depth interviews. All the detailed descriptions of data collection and data analysis follow in the next sections.

3.2 Data collection

Based on the secondary data collected in the second chapter, it is possible to formulate the hypotheses to be tested. The methodology used in this dissertation encompasses an online survey and five in-depth interviews. This process of using two or more sources of data for analysis is known as triangulation and, according to Heale & Forbes (2013), is a method that helps to ensure better insights into the research problem and would be more complete than using a single methodology (Plano, 2017).

3.2.1 Survey

3.2.1.1 Population and sample

The target population of this study is Portuguese people aged 18 or more. Given the time constraints involved in completing this work and since it was impossible to guarantee that all individuals would have the opportunity to complete this questionnaire, a non-probabilistic

approach was adopted, meaning that the individuals were not randomly selected from the total population. The questionnaire was distributed among family, friends, and followers of author's networks, being inevitable to say that the "convenience sampling" and "snowball sampling" methods were used to obtain as many responses as possible (Sharma, 2017).

3.2.1.2 Pilot Test

Since the questionnaire designed for this study could be considered complex, a pilot test was conducted on seven people to determine whether all the questions were correctly understood by the participants. With this pilot test, it was possible to draw an important conclusion that directly affects this study. With the feedback from the seven people who took this questionnaire, some linguistic comprehension problems were noticed. This questionnaire was constructed using the word "storytelling" in its questions, which caused discomfort to the participants, who had difficulties understanding this concept. With this result, it is concluded that there are frequent challenges and obstacles in linguistic comprehension in studies that often use technical concepts that do not have a specific translation, negatively influencing the study's results, as well as the effectiveness of communication and the quality of the data collected. The understanding of concepts and technical terms often depends on the context in which the audience is situated (Daroczy et al., 2015).

With this, based on the results of the pilot test, the questionnaire was modified, avoiding future problems with the quality of the collected data, and it was decided to present, at the beginning of the section that contains questions directly related to the concept of storytelling, a simple definition so that participants are aware of the concept in the study, without influencing the questions by replacing the term with more familiar ones.

3.2.1.3 Survey design

The survey begins with an introductory section explaining the objective of the study and the approximate time required to complete it. This is followed by a section analyzing the relationship with football, with a series of multiple-choice questions to better understand how the target population of this questionnaire relate with this sport. This section also includes questions about the frequency people watch men's and women's football matches and in which media.

The second section of the questionnaire includes a set of questions to analyze the research questions proposed earlier. This section begins with a simple and brief definition of storytelling, in order that all respondents may be aware of the concept. The first question presents a series of four sentences that are in line with the research questions, which aims to understand the extent to which respondents agree with some ideas about storytelling in women's football, with a focus on promoting gender equality and fan engagement, using a Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The second question in this section also aims to answer one of the proposed research questions by asking the participant how much the narrative elements (personal stories, documentaries, social media and digital content, journalistic coverage and news and advertising campaigns) influence the engagement with this sport, to understand which narrative elements are most influential. The last question in this section intends to evaluate how much the narrative elements influence the promotion of gender equality. These last two questions use a Likert scale ranging from (1) does not influence to (5) totally influence.

The third section of the survey includes demographic data, such as age, gender, and education.

A Likert scale of five points was used in the majority of the questions. This scale allows the participant to express a neutral opinion if they are not very familiar with the subject matter or the question, or if they do not have a well-formed opinion regarding the subject matter (Irwing et al., 2018).

The questionnaire is presented in [Appendix 1](#).

3.2.1.4 Data collection

The survey was designed in the Qualtrics platform (online survey software) provided by Católica. Qualtrics is a software for creating online questionnaires in an efficient and cost-effective way, both for the creator of the questionnaire and for the participant, who simply needs to open the link on their mobile device or computer and complete the questionnaire.

The fact that this questionnaire is published online via various social networks means that many people and responses can be reached. This method has many advantages, such as having a wider reach than other methods and making it easier to collect data. Finally, the low cost of administration and the ease with which responses can be collected and stored in databases such as SPSS makes it an attractive method for investigating the proposed hypotheses (Evans &

Mathur, 2005). This questionnaire has been published in Portuguese to obtain as many responses as possible, as the target audience for this questionnaire is Portuguese adults aged 18 and above. Data collection occurs between 4th November and 17th November. In the middle of that two weeks, the questionnaire was re-published to increase the number of responses and to remind the public to respond to the survey. 201 valid responses were collected.

3.2.1.5 Data analysis

The data collected was analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) data analysis tool. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Mann-Whitney tests, Spearman correlation, Friedman paired-samples tests and post-hoc Wilcoxon tests (with Bonferroni correction) were used. The interpretation of the statistical tests performed was based on a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

3.2.2 Interviews

Regarding the qualitative method used to collect primary data, five in-depth interviews were conducted to understand the opinions of some people who are directly involved to the topic under investigation. The five people selected represented diverse profiles, allowing to obtain a complete analysis of the issue from multiple perspectives. Specifically, this study includes interviews with a fan of women's football, a human rights activist specializing in gender equality, a director of a Portuguese women's football team, a women's football player and an assistant coach of a women's football team. These interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the role of storytelling in promoting gender equality and enhancing fan engagement and are therefore provide valuable insights for a rich and complementary analysis.

These interviews were conducted both via Zoom and in person, with durations ranging from 17 minutes to 27 minutes. All the interviews were recorded after obtaining the interviewee's consent to facilitate the process of data collection. Additionally, the interviews were conducted in Portuguese not only to facilitate communication between the interviewee and the interviewer, but also to allow participants to express themselves naturally. The transcripts were translated and can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

To understand the characteristics of the interviews, the following table provides some information such as the profile of the interviewee, the duration and the date of the interview.

Table 3.1: Specific profiles of the interviewees

Profile	Name of the Interviewer	Date	Length
Women's football fan	Margarida Santos	05/11/2024	23 min
Professor at Nova SBE and activist	Paulo Côte Real	06/11/2024	27 min
Assistant Coach of Torreense	Márcio Santos	07/11/2024	17 min
Football player at Torreense	Samara Lino	07/11/2024	19 min
Head of Sporting Clube de Portugal	Margarida Batlle Y Font	15/11/2024	21 min

The scripts for the five interviews were adapted according to the profile of the interviewee and the specific objectives of the study. Each interview consisted of five to six open-ended questions that vary according to the interviewee's profile, allowing participants to articulate thought and share opinions. The selection of individuals was adapted from Hoerber (2008b) framework, which aimed to investigate gender equity in female athletes. The interviews began with a brief introduction about the interviewer and study objectives. In this qualitative method, the role of the interviewer is to guide the interviewee to achieve the intended objectives (Ben Youssef et al., 2019).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

In this chapter, the results of the mixed methodology adopted for the study of the research questions and established hypotheses will be presented. Regarding the questionnaire, a total of 201 complete responses were obtained. Regarding the interviews, as previously mentioned, five interviews were conducted with individuals who have different but complementary profiles related to the studied topic.

4.1.1 Survey

4.1.1.1 Characterization of the Sample

Most respondents are female (75.12%) and the average age of the participants' responses is about 32 years, with the oldest participant being 67 years old. The majority of the respondents are 25 years old or younger (54.50%), with the age group with the lowest frequency being individuals over 55 years old (6%). The age group between 46 and 55 years represents 21.50% of the sample, which means it is the second group with the highest participation in this questionnaire. Finally, it is relevant to highlight that individuals aged between 26 and 35 years represent 8% of the sample, and individuals aged between 36 and 45 years represent 10% of the sample (Figure 4.1).

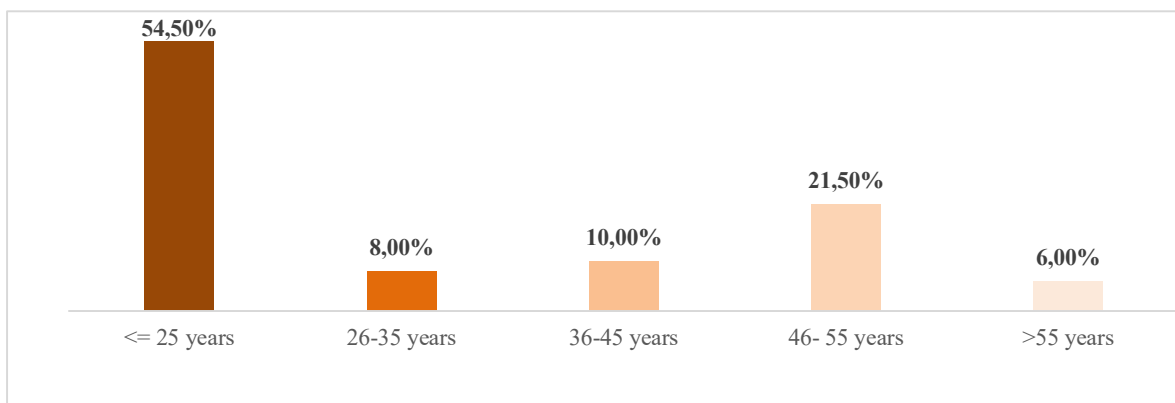


Figure 4.1: Age group of participants.

Regarding the participants' level of education, it is observed that the sample of the present study is generally qualified, as approximately 61% of the individuals have completed or are in higher education. Only 0.50% of the individuals have only completed the first cycle, approximately

3% of the individuals have only completed the second cycle, and finally, about 29% have only completed secondary education (Figure 4.2).

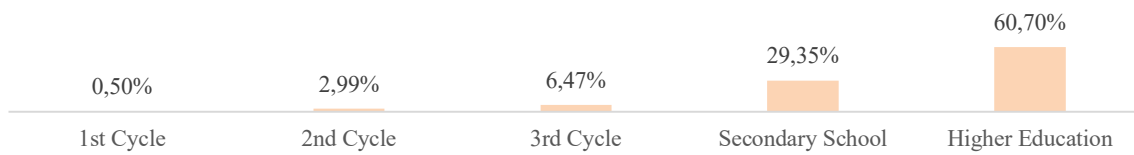


Figure 4.2: Participant's level of education.

4.1.1.2 Analysis of Football Engagement and Consumption

Regarding the practice of sports, 49% of the respondents stated that they engage in some type of sport, which means that almost half of the sample in this study are athletes. More than 10% of the participants engage in weightlifting and gym workouts (11.44%), followed by football, which represents 6.97% of the sample. In addition to these sports, the most mentioned sports were athletics/running (3.98%), pilates (3.48%), gymnastics (2.99%), padel (2.49%), swimming (2.49%), yoga (1.99%), volleyball (1.99%), tennis (1.99%), and crossfit (1.99%) (Figure 4.2). Other sports were also mentioned, but given their low percentage relevance, they were included in the "Others" section, as seen in the Figure 4.3.

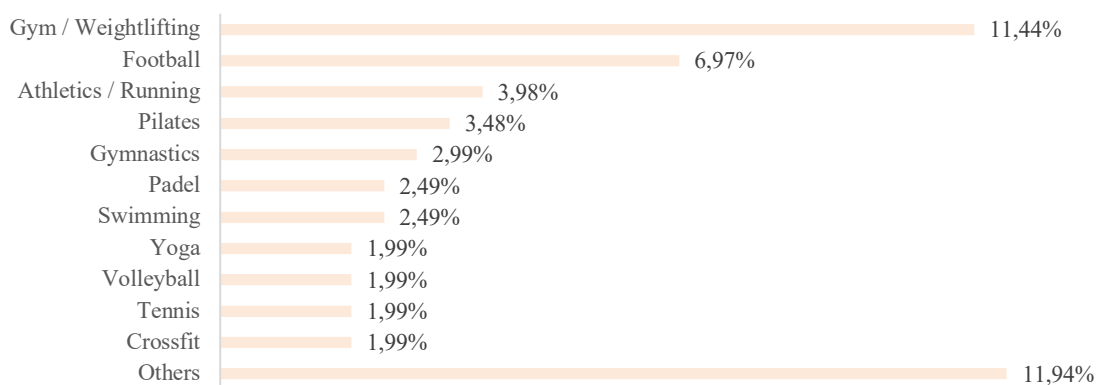


Figure 4.3: Sports most practiced by the participants.

Only 36.82% of the participants in this questionnaire stated that they play, or have played, amateur or professional football. Regarding the frequency in which they watch men's football games, it was found that more than one third of respondents claim to watch this sport occasionally (37%), while 28% claim to watch it frequently. Only 5% of individuals indicated that they never watch men's football matches, representing the minority of our sample.

Regarding women's football, differences are observed in terms of attendance frequency, with more than one third of respondents (37%) stating that they rarely watch women's football matches, while 32% say they watch occasionally and only 7% say they watch frequently. In this sport, 22% of the respondents say they never watch women's football matches, which represents a significant difference compared to the opposite gender (Figure 4.4). To compare more objectively, regarding men's football, 40% of the survey participants claim to watch it always or frequently, while only 22% claim to never or rarely watch it. As regards to the women's football, we can observe that only about 8% claim to watch this sport frequently or always, while 59% claim to never watch or rarely watch. Here, the difference between the audiences of the two sports is quite visible.

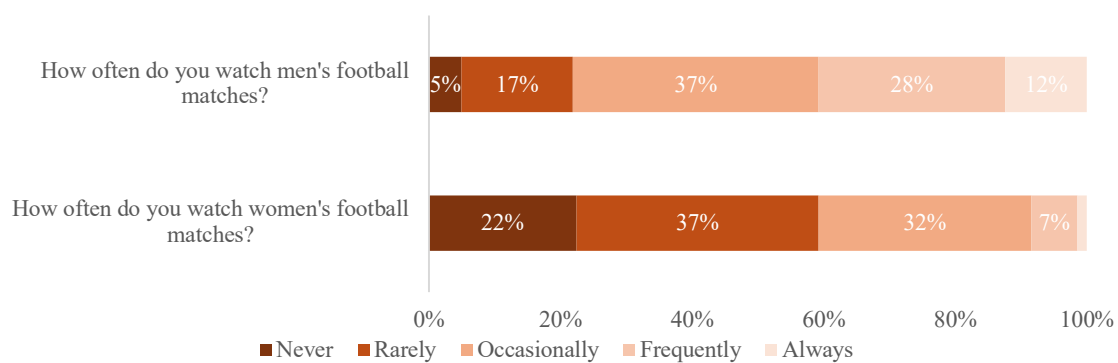


Figure 4.4: Frequency of viewing men's and women's football matches.

The frequency with which participants watch men's and women's football matches through attending the stadium, platforms such as television and radio, and online platforms, such as websites and social media, is presented below (Figure 4.5). To begin with, 35% of the participants claims to rarely go to the stadium and 23% of participants claim to frequently or always go to football stadiums to watch men's football. Moving to other platforms such as television and radio, it can be concluded that there is a greater use of these means to watch the games, with 48% of the sample stating they watch frequently or always through this medium and only about 20% stating they never or rarely watch. Lastly, regarding online platforms, the participants were more divided, as 19% stated they never watch through online platforms, 23% stated they watch rarely, 24% stated they watch occasionally and frequently, and only 11% stated they always watch.

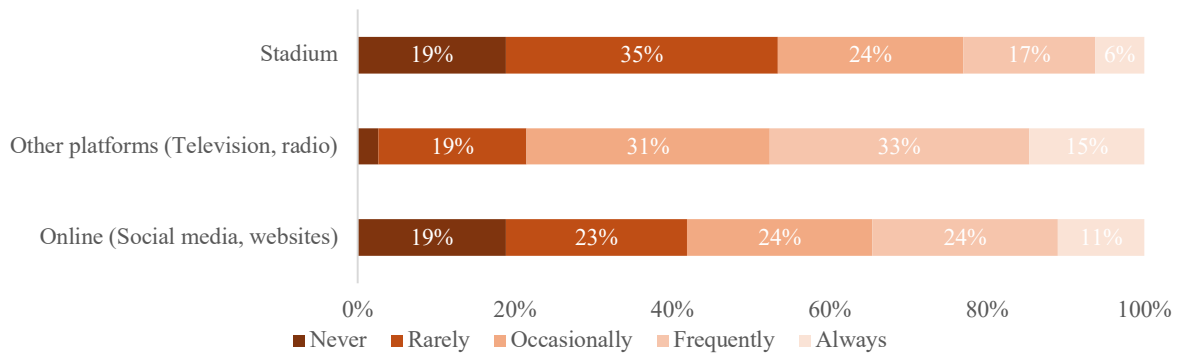


Figure 4.5: Frequency of watching men's football matches across different media platforms.

On the other hand, regarding women's football, only about 4% claim to go to the stadium to watch women's football matches frequently or always, and 84% say they never or rarely go, which clearly shows the difference compared to men's football (Figure 4.6). Regarding other platforms such as Television and Radio, 38% of respondents claim to watch occasionally, and only 4% say they never watch through these media. Lastly, regarding online platforms, there is a noticeable tendency towards the two lowest points on the scale (58%), never and rarely, which shows that participants do not habitually watch games through online platforms.

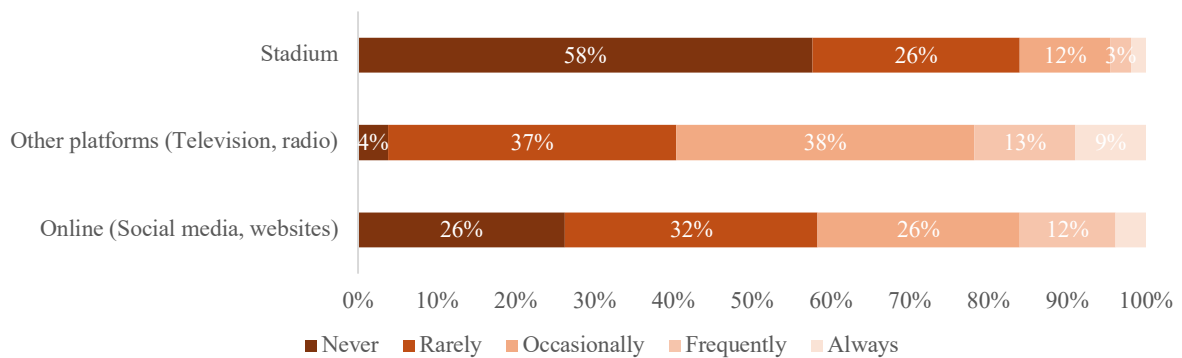


Figure 4.6: Frequency of watching women's football matches across different media platforms.

To complement the previously conducted analysis, it was decided to present the Spearman correlations between the media used to watch women's and men's football matches. Regarding the viewership of women's football, a correlation coefficient of 0.345 is obtained, with a significant p-value (<0.001), between the media "Online (Social media and websites)" and "Other platforms". In this way, it is possible to conclude that there is a positive and significant correlation, leading to the conclusion that individuals who watch women's football matches

online also tend to use television and radio as forms of viewing. On the other hand, analyzing the correlation between "Other platforms" and "In stadium," a correlation coefficient of 0.451 and a significant p-value (<0.001) are obtained, demonstrating the positive relationship between these two media. Lastly, also with a significant p-value and a correlation coefficient of 0.393, the media "Online" and "In stadium" show a positive relationship with each other. In this way, individuals who watch women's football games online are more likely to watch them in the stadium as well. The following table objectively summarizes these results.

Table 4.1: Correlation between the different media used to watch women's football.

			Online (Social media, Websites)	Other platforms (Television, radio)	In stadium
Spearman's rho	Online (Social media, Websites)	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.345	0.393
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	<0.001	<0.001
		N	156	156	156
	Other platforms (Television, radio)	Correlation Coefficient		1.000	0.451
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.	<0.001
		N		156	156
	In stadium	Correlation Coefficient			1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)			.
		N			156

On the other hand, regarding the media to watch men's football, between the media "Online (Social media and websites)" and "Other platforms," a correlation coefficient of 0.502 with a significant p-value (<0.001) was observed, making it possible to conclude that individuals who follow men's football through online platforms are more likely to also use other platforms (Table 4.2). Regarding the means "Other platforms" and "In stadium," a correlation coefficient of 0.549 and a significant p-value (<0.001) were observed, suggesting that the audience who consumes men's football through other platforms such as television or radio is strongly linked to attending stadiums. Lastly, with a correlation coefficient of 0.422 and a significant p-value (<0.001), we have the analysis of the correlation between the consumption of men's football online and in the stadium, thus demonstrating a positive relationship between the two. This analysis is relevant in that it allows us to conclude that, both in women's and men's football, the more frequently people watch and follow football matches on a given medium (in stadiums, other platforms, and online platforms), the more frequently they follow them on other media as well.

Table 4.2: Correlation between the different media used to watch men's football.

			Online (Social media, Websites)	Other platforms (Television, radio)	In stadium
Spearman's rho	Online (Social media, Websites)	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.502	0.422
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	<0.001	<0.001
		N	191	191	191
	Other platforms (Television, radio)	Correlation Coefficient		1.000	0.549
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.	<0.001
		N		156	156
	In stadium	Correlation Coefficient			1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)			.
		N			191

4.1.1.3 Hypothesis test

H1a: Storytelling in women's football helps combat gender stereotypes

To analyze the hypothesis, we will need to verify the degree of agreement among the participants, and thus establish possible trends. The results obtained demonstrated an agreement regarding the influence of storytelling on the combat of gender stereotypes, as 58.71% of the respondents partially or fully agree that storytelling in women's football helps combat existing gender stereotypes (Figure 4.7). It is also relevant to add that 14.93% of our sample showed uncertainty on this matter, indicating room for greater awareness about the role of storytelling (Figure 4.7). *As such, based on participant's opinion, it is possible to conclude that the hypothesis is accepted.*

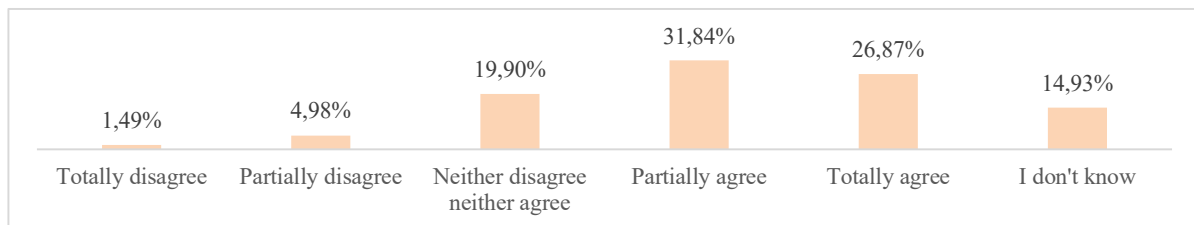


Figure 4.7: Distribution of responses to the statement "Storytelling in women's football helps combat gender stereotypes".

H1b: Perceptions about the influence of storytelling in combating gender stereotypes significantly differ between male and female individuals.

Based on the results of the Mann-Whitney test, it can be concluded that the perceptions regarding the influence of storytelling on gender stereotypes significantly differ between female and male individuals ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$), leading to accept the hypothesis. Furthermore, the results show that females consider that storytelling in women’s football has a greater influence combating gender stereotypes compared to male’s group (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Mann-Whitney test results for gender differences in perceptions of storytelling's role in combating gender stereotypes.

	Gender	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Storytelling in women's football helps combat gender stereotypes	Male	42	71.43	3000	2097	3000	(-)2.52	0.040
	Female	125	88.22	11028				

H2.a: Storytelling in women’s football increases emotional engagement among fans

To study this hypothesis, a question was included in the questionnaire to understand the respondents' opinions, which referred to the fact that the participant would feel more involved with women's football if they saw more storytelling associated with this sport. In this way, to analyze this hypothesis, an analysis of the distribution of the respondents' answers allows to conclude that 63% of participants partially or fully agree that they would feel more engaged with women's football if they saw more storytelling about the sport, reinforcing the idea that storytelling plays an important role in fan engagement and their involvement with this sport. The degree of uncertainty regarding this issue remains high, with 11.44% of individuals responding, "I don't know." Only 8.46% of the respondents claims to totally or partially disagree with this idea, which support of the established hypothesis (Figure 4.8).

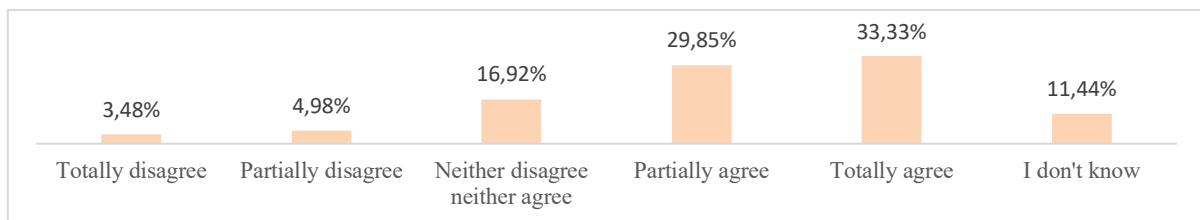


Figure 4.8: Distribution of responses to the statement "I would feel more involved with women's football if I saw more storytelling about this sport".

H2.b: *Perceptions about the influence of storytelling in fan engagement in women’s football significantly differ between male and female individuals.*

Taking into consideration the results of the Mann-Whitney test, it can be concluded that there are no significant differences between genders regarding perceptions of the influence of storytelling on fan engagement as p-value is 0.085 (Table 4.4). *Thus, this hypothesis is rejected, according to the opinion of the respondents.*

Table 4.4: Mann-Whitney test results for gender differences in perceptions of increased involvement with women's football through storytelling.

	Gender	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
I would feel more involved with women's football if i saw more storytelling about this sport	Male	42	76.43	3210	2307	3210	(-)1.722	0.085
	Female	132	91.02	12015				

The following hypotheses, given their nature, will be analyzed together:

H3.a: *Journalistic coverage and news are the most influential storytelling element in increasing fan engagement with women’s football.*

H3.b: *Social media and digital content are the most influential storytelling element in increasing fan engagement with women’s football.*

H3.c: *Documentaries are the most influential storytelling element in increasing fan engagement with women’s football.*

H3.d: *Advertising campaigns are the most influential storytelling element in increasing fan engagement with women’s football.*

H3.e: *Personal stories are the most influential storytelling element in increasing fan engagement with women’s football.*

Before analyzing the hypotheses more objectively, it is important to describe the data obtained on the degree of influence of the selected narrative elements on fan engagement. This will be done by describing the distributions, to later conclude which of the narrative elements is the most influential in terms of fan engagement. In addition to the distributions, the "Top 2 Box"

and “Bottom 2 Box” will be considered, which correspond to the two highest values of the degree of influence (partial influence and total influence) and the two lowest values of the degree of influence (no influence and partial influence) (Table 4.5). With regards to journalistic coverage and news, the majority of respondents (31%) consider that this narrative element totally influences fan engagement with the sport, with a T2B of 59% and a B2B of 20%. In terms of social media and digital content, respondents were most likely to say that it “occasionally influences”, with 33%, and T2B and B2B of 58% and 16% respectively. For documentaries, as with the previous narrative element, respondents tended to “occasionally influence”, with T2B and B2B figures of 57% and 22% respectively. On the other hand, advertising campaigns received a T2B score of 49% and a B2B score of 25%, indicating a greater tendency among respondents to consider this element as influential. Finally, personal stories have a percentage of 44% for T2B and 25% for B2B, with a majority of 31% of respondents choosing the neutral option on the influence scale (Figure 4.9). Table 4.5 shows that the narrative element with the highest average on the 1-5 influence scale was news coverage, with a value of 3.64.

Table 4.5: Analysis of T2B, B2B and average of narrative element's level of influence on fan engagement.

	T2B	B2B	Average
Journalistic coverage and news	59%	20%	3,64
Social media and digital content	58%	16%	3,59
Documentaries	57%	22%	3,42
Advertising campaigns	49%	25%	3,29
Personal Stories	44%	25%	3,20

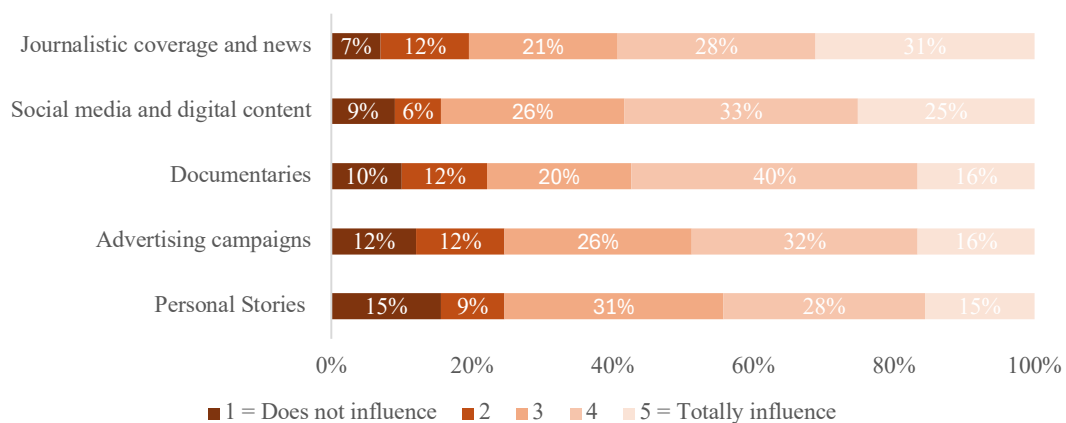


Figure 4.9: Distribution of the influence of narrative elements in increasing fan engagement.

Friedman paired-samples test was performed to analyze if the influence level is equal between all the five types of narratives or if there is any significant statistical difference. Based on the results of this test, it can be concluded that the perception of Portuguese people about the influence level of each type of narrative is not the same ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$). As such, to identify the differences between the types of narratives, Wilcoxon tests were used as post-hoc tests (with Bonferroni correction). The results of these tests allow to conclude that Portuguese people consider that both social media and digital content and journalistic coverage and news have more influence in increasing fan engagement with women's football than both personal stories of female players and advertising campaigns (Bonferroni corrected $p\text{-value} < 0.01$). Besides, documentaries about sports have more influence in increasing fan engagement with women's football than journalistic coverage and news (Bonferroni corrected $p\text{-value} < 0.01$) (Table 4.6).

In this way, it is possible to accept the hypothesis H3.a, H3.b and H3.c.

Table 4.6: Wilcoxon test to analyze the level of influence between all the five types of narratives elements on fan engagement.

	Advertising Campaigns - Personal stories	Documentaries - Personal stories	Social media and digital content - Personal stories	Journalistic coverage and news - Personal stories	Documentaries - Advertising campaigns	Social media and digital content - Advertising campaigns	Journalistic coverage and news - Advertising campaigns	Social media and digital content - Documentaries	Journalistic coverage and news - Documentaries	Journalistic coverage and news - Social media and digital content
Z	(-)1.112	(-)2.477	(-)4.281	(-)3.961	(-)1.817	(-)4.077	(-)4.012	(-)2.418	(-)2.642	(-)0.588
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.266	0.013	<0.001	<0.001	0.069	<0.001	<0.001	0.016	0.008	0.556

H4.a: Gender equality is substantially influenced by storytelling in women's football, creating a positive public perception of women in football.

To study this hypothesis, the distribution of responses to the question "Storytelling can change the way the public sees and perceives gender equality in women's football" was analyzed. In this way, it is concluded that about 65% of the participants demonstrated partial or total agreement with the statement, indicating a positive perception of the ability of storytelling to promote gender equality. On the other hand, almost 12% of the sample indicates not knowing how to answer the question, which suggests the need for greater awareness on the topic. Only 8.95% of the participants disagree with the statement, indicating that the majority of people see storytelling as a powerful tool for changing perceptions about gender equality in women's football (Figure 4.10). *As such, this research hypothesis is accepted.*

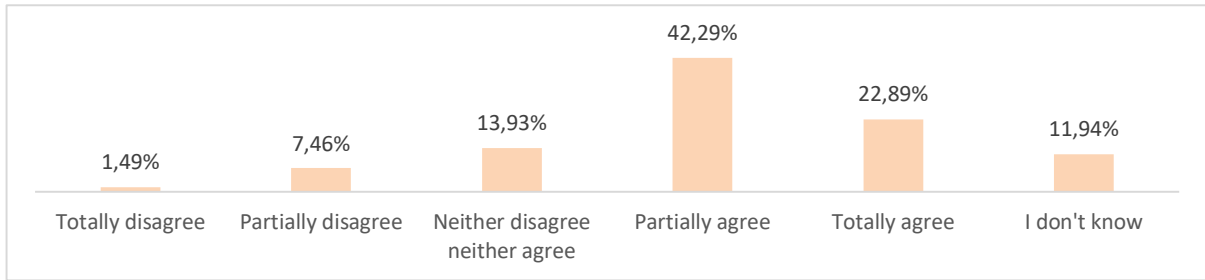


Figure 4.10: Distribution of responses to the statement "storytelling can change the way public sees and perceives gender equality in women's football".

H4.b: Perceptions about promotion of gender equality differ significantly between male and female individuals

Taking into consideration the results of the Mann-Whitney test, it can be concluded that there are significant differences between genders regarding perceptions about promotion of gender equality (Table 4.7). In this case, the p-value resulting from the analysis conducted was 0.045, demonstrating that it is below the established significance level of 0.05. Thus, this hypothesis is accepted, according to the opinion of the respondents.

Table 4.7: Mann-Whitney test results for gender differences in perceptions of storytelling's role in promotion of gender equality.

	Gender	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Storytelling can change the way the public sees and perceives gender equality in women's football	Male	42	74.86	3144	2241	3144	(-)2.008	0.045
	Female	132	91.52	12081				

Similar to hypotheses 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, and 3e, the following hypotheses will be studied together.

H5.a: Journalistic coverage and news are the most influential storytelling element in promotion of gender equality in women's football.

H5.b: Social media and digital content are the most influential storytelling element in promotion of gender equality in women's football

H5.c: Documentaries are the most influential storytelling element in promotion of gender equality in women's football.

H5.d: Advertising campaigns are the most influential storytelling element in promotion of gender equality in women's football.

H5.e: Personal stories are the most influential storytelling element in promotion of gender equality in women's football.

Similar to the analysis conducted for hypothesis 3, the objective for this hypothesis 5 is to analyze the respondents' opinions regarding the degree of influence of the selected narrative elements in promoting gender equality. To this end, the T2B and B2B will be analyzed in order to facilitate the analysis in question. Firstly, with regard to journalistic coverage and news, the majority of respondents (31%) say that this element of narrative is totally influential when it comes to promoting gender equality, with a T2B of 65% and a B2B of 18%. The majority of respondents consider that social media and digital content occasionally influence the variable studied (33%), with a T2B of 65% and a B2B of 13%. For documentaries, there is an increase in T2B at 66% and B2B at 13%, with 40% of respondents saying that this narrative element is occasionally influential. Advertising campaigns (T2B of 58% and B2B of 18%) also have a majority of respondents who say they are occasionally influential (32%). Finally, personal stories received a T2B of 56% compared to a B2B of 21%, with 31% of respondents being in the middle of the scale.

Table 4.8: Analysis of T2B, B2B and average of narrative element's level of influence on promotion of gender equality.

	T2B	B2B	Average
Journalistic coverage and news	65%	18%	3,71
Social media and digital content	65%	13%	3,75
Documentaries	66%	13%	3,75
Advertising campaigns	58%	18%	3,58
Personal Stories	56%	21%	3,41

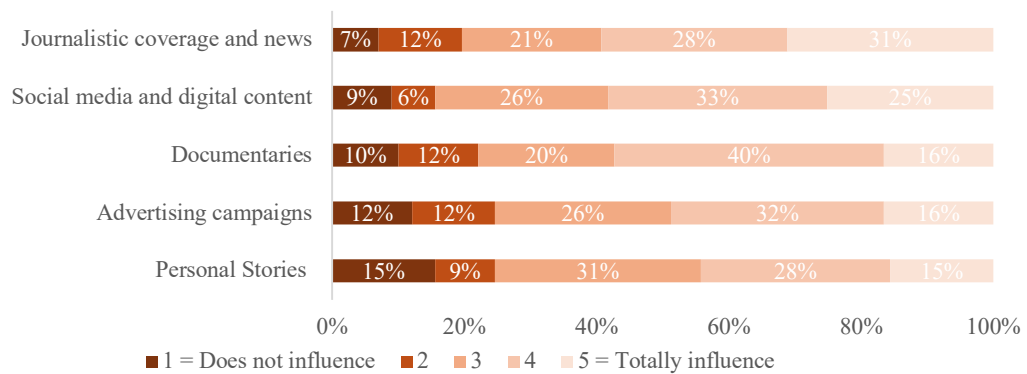


Figure 4.11: Distribution of the influence of narrative elements in promotions gender equality.

Friedman paired-samples test was performed to analyze if the influence level is equal between all the five types of narratives or if there is any significant statistical difference. Based on the results of this test, it can be concluded that the perception of Portuguese people about the influence level of each type of narrative is not the same ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$). As such, to identify the differences between the types of narratives, Wilcoxon tests were used as post-hoc tests (with Bonferroni correction) (Table 4.9). The results of these tests allow to conclude that Portuguese people consider that there is no difference between the influence of documentaries about sports, social media and digital content, and journalistic coverage and news, and these three types of narratives have more influence than personal stories of female players (Bonferroni corrected $p\text{-value} < 0.01$).

Besides, social media and digital content have more influence in promotion of gender equality in women's football than documentaries about sports (Bonferroni corrected $p\text{-value} < 0.01$).

In this way, it is possible to accept the hypothesis H5.a and H5.b.

Table 4.9: Wilcoxon test to analyze the level of influence between all the five types of narratives elements on promotion of gender equality.

	Advertising Campaigns - Personal stories	Documentaries - Personal stories	Social media and digital content - Personal stories	Journalistic coverage and news - Personal stories	Documentaries - Advertising campaigns	Social media and digital content - Advertising campaigns	Journalistic coverage and news - Advertising campaigns	Social media and digital content - Documentaries	Journalistic coverage and news - Documentaries	Journalistic coverage and news - Social media and digital content
Z	(-)2.215	(-)4.501	(-)3.884	(-)3.027	(-)2.455	(-)2.568	(-)1.686	(-)0.270	(-)0.289	(-)0.777
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.027	<0.001	<0.001	0.002	0.014	0.010	0.092	0.787	0.772	0.437

4.1.2 Interviews

This section aims to present the results of the five interviews that aim to better understand the influential of storytelling in challenging gender stereotypes, promoting gender equality, and retaining fans in women's football. To better organize the results, four central themes were created through keywords.

4.1.2.1 Storytelling and gender stereotypes

There was a consensus among the interviewees about the importance of storytelling in challenging gender stereotypes. Although it is still a very present issue in society, it is increasingly being diluted, thanks to the use of storytelling. Margarida Santos emphasized the importance of advertising campaigns, which can effectively plant the seeds of change in the minds of the public. On the other hand, Paulo Côte Real, professor at Nova SBE, argues that *“communication is crucial in changing not only ways of thinking but more importantly, ways of feeling”*, pointing out that there is still real fear of letting women occupy positions traditionally reserved for men. Moreover, in Paulo Côte Real’s opinion, the idea that women must always be inferior to men persists, which has, in a way, been countered with the help of storytelling. This interviewee also argues that storytelling can be even more effective when it seeks to create an emotional connection with the audience, capable of changing points of view.

However, Margarida Batlle Y Font, head of Sporting Clube de Portugal, takes a different view. In this sense, the interviewee argues that storytelling is an effective communication tool for challenging gender stereotypes, but the main element that changes these perspectives is the increase in the quality of the game and the visibility of European competitions, which subsequently allows individual players and the sport itself to stand out, and it is from there that storytelling plays a very important role. In addition, Samara Lino, football player, was interviewed to get a more intrinsic view on the issue, and she argues that the influence of storytelling in challenging gender stereotypes lies in showing players as capable and complete athletes, demonstrating that the sport does not have a masculine label.

4.1.2.2 Storytelling and promotion of gender equality

When it comes to promoting gender equality in this sport, respondents were almost unanimous in their opinion of the effectiveness of this communication tool. Although there are many

challenges, storytelling is seen as a powerful tool by most of the respondents. Firstly, Margarida Santos highlighted the issue of equal pay and argued that storytelling had indeed been influential, citing the example of the Danish men's team refusing a pay rise in order not to further emphasize the difference with the Danish women's team. Márcio Santos agrees, adding that storytelling can be influential and powerful in bringing the two sports (Women's football and Men's Football) closer together, neutralizing the idea that football is more associated with the male gender and that therefore they should have better conditions compared to the female gender. Furthermore, Margarida Batlle Y Font highlights storytelling as an important tool to expose inequalities between men and women in football, citing some examples where this is very visible, such as the "Equal Pay" documentary in the United States or the case of Megan Rapinoe. However, the interviewee argues that the main way to achieve greater gender equality in the sport is to look for results on the pitch. The interviewee defends the principle of equality, pointing out that men's and women's football are not the same and should not be treated the same, as defended by Hoerber (2007, 2008b). In this sense, it is also argued that the differences between these two modalities should not be ignored, but rather that fair conditions should be provided for the specificities of each, with storytelling being a tool capable of helping in this aspect. In this sense, according to Samara, *"storytelling ends up touching on sensitive topics"*, changing perceptions and opinions that could later change the way women's football is perceived. This interviewee also argues that *"the key is to create a social impact that goes beyond football, and storytelling has managed to do that"*.

"Storytelling is a tool to promote gender awareness of the reality of sports and, indirectly, the issue of gender equality" (Margarida Batlle Y Font, Head of SCP)

Still on this subject, Paulo Côte Real believes that *"there are still significant silences that will not disappear so quickly"*. The professor also argues that *"the public space in relation to women continues to be very limited, contrary to what it might seem"*. In this sense, he considers storytelling to be an important communication tool if it is built around a moment of shock, pointing out that this is the feeling most conducive to changing the audience's perceptions.

"People need to have a moment of emotional shock (...) to create a space where some transformation can happen (...) this emotional shock is what leads to transformation and opens eyes." (Paulo Côte Real)

4.1.2.3 Storytelling and fan engagement

The next theme to emerge from the various interviews was the influence of storytelling on fan engagement. Storytelling is seen by all interviewees as a powerful tool to attract and retain fans. Margarida Santos also cites an example of a campaign run by Sporting Clube de Portugal called “Goleadoras”, whose main objective was to offer sports opportunities to women from disadvantaged backgrounds. In this way, as a form of storytelling, this interviewee believes that fans feel more empathetic towards this type of initiative and identify with the club. On the other hand, Márcio Santos, with a similar opinion to the one above, also argues that *“through storytelling, it is possible to create emotional connection by getting to know people and listening to them talk about things, and that is where storytelling becomes quite important in this perspective”*.

According to Samara Lino, it is this kind of fan involvement that makes the sport grow and become what it is today. It is through the fans that the sport gains visibility and manages to sustain growth over the years. As these narratives help to capture the attention of fans and keep them as an audience for football, they are ultimately directly linked and have an influence on the growth of the sport. In addition, the interviewee also emphasizes the importance of the public being exposed to the stories of the athletes or any other type of storytelling, so that they can *“feel more connected with them and their achievements, then feeling a greater connection with the sport itself”*.

Finally, according to Margarida Batlle Y Font fans today are interested in much more than just football, they are increasingly aware of daily routines, hobbies and achievements, and storytelling that focuses on these aspects can humanize this sport and make it more attractive in the eyes of the audience. Also, the Sporting Clube de Portugal head argues that *“giving a perspective beyond the player helps a lot in getting closer to the fans”*. The interviewee also gives a successful example of visible storytelling at Sporting Clube de Portugal, where videos are frequently posted on Instagram with the aim of showcasing the daily life of a specific player. This type of initiative, called “Vem passar um dia com...”, has been increasing fan interest and making them more active and engaged in the sport. Furthermore, this is important because it brings football fans closer together and makes them want to know more about this sport, which is often undervalued. The interviewee also argues that the key to retaining fans is sporting success, but that storytelling plays an important role in maintaining this relationship.

4.1.2.4 Most influential narrative elements in fan engagement

The final issue raised in the interviews was the most influential narrative element in retaining fans, and there was a convergence of opinion on this question, leading to the conclusion that the most influential narrative elements are documentaries and personal stories. According to Margarida Batlle Y Font, documentaries can provide a more intimate view of the reality of sport, which has a direct impact on its visibility. In her opinion, these documentaries create a sense of compassion and empathy in the audience. Samara Lino agrees with this approach, explaining that it is through documentaries that the audience can access the history and reality of this sport. As for personal stories, Márcio Santos and Margarida Santos say that fans feel much more emotionally connected when they realize that their journey has not been so easy.

With these interviews, the author was able to get to some important points that would not have been able to explore with the questionnaire alone. In this way, the results show that storytelling is a powerful communication tool, capable of changing perceptions, promoting gender equality and working on fan engagement.

4.2 Discussion

Evidently, the results obtained support the previous findings of the study by Hardin & Whiteside (2009), which are based on the idea that gender inequality stems from old narratives that have been internalized in people's minds, and that it is therefore important and necessary to introduce new narratives that counter this idea, to the extent that both in the survey and in the interviews there was general agreement on the importance of the role of storytelling in combating gender stereotypes. In this respect, the interview with Margarida Batlle Y Font also emphasized the need to continue to demonstrate the quality of the sport on the pitch to weaken existing stereotypes. Storytelling is a very important communication tool that can change people's perceptions, especially on sensitive topics such as gender equality (Valenti et al., 2018). In this sense, the author highlights the importance of using storytelling as a means to promote gender equality, and through the methodology adopted in this Master's thesis, the results found converge with this idea. Both the quantitative and qualitative methodologies point to the importance of storytelling and its great influence in promoting gender equality. Samara Lino emphasizes the need to create a social impact that transcends what football is, and storytelling is seen as a tool capable of achieving this. Paulo Côte-Real also emphasizes the

importance of creating a moment of shock within society, which is what can lead to transformation.

Through the power of visual and communicative elements, the connection between the two parties can be strengthened, which is the most important aspect to achieve greater buy-in from the audience, leading to stronger relationships and greater loyalty (Zlotán et al., 2023). The use of storytelling increases the connection with the fans and creates a continuous and emotional narrative that empowers women's football and makes this sport more attractive to the public (Laurell & Söderman, 2018; Snelson & Sheffield, 2009; Valenti et al., 2018). In this way, the results obtained in this dissertation defend and relate to subsequent studies, as the participants in the questionnaire showed their opinion on the increased emotional involvement related to the presence of storytelling. On the other hand, Margarida Santos, one of the interviewees, also emphasizes that narratives can create deep connections with the audience, which is directly related to the aforementioned studies. Schmidt et al. (2019) highlight the power of narrative around the personal stories of female footballers as a key pillar in the fight against gender inequality. It is argued that personal stories are an essential narrative element to create a strong emotional connection with fans (Bullingham & Magrath, 2023). This idea is supported by Paulo Côte-Real, who stresses the importance of personal stories to increase fan engagement. In this sense, given the results obtained, there are some contradictions in that, this was one of the narrative elements considered to be the least influential in terms of fan engagement and the promotion of gender equality in relation to the survey results, with other narrative elements such as journalistic coverage and news, social media and digital content or even documentaries considered to be more relevant.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The final chapter of this dissertation is dedicated to presenting the main conclusions and limitations encountered throughout its development. In this way, some conclusions are found, due to the adopted methodology, that allows the author to answer the research questions created in the first chapter. Furthermore, the implications and possible approaches for future research will be presented.

5.1 Main Findings & Conclusions

5.1.1 How does storytelling influence gender stereotypes in women's football?

With this dissertation, it was concluded that storytelling plays an important and influential role regarding gender stereotypes in women's football. The need for narratives that can deconstruct preconceived ideas about this topic is intrinsic (Hardin & Whiteside, 2009), and was confirmed by the results of this study. Communication is an important tool, capable of changing perceptions and ways of thinking, and is essential for deconstructing existing gender stereotypes that have been present in society for many years. The ability to create storytelling narratives around female players and their personal stories helps to deconstruct the idea that football is a men's sport, as it brings the audience closer to the participants in this topic, establishing an emotional connection that can change ways of thinking. Furthermore, storytelling based on female players as capable and complete athletes demonstrates the ability that is often not believed to exist in individuals of the female gender, and this helps to reposition public thinking, erasing or reformulating any existing trends from the past. The analysis and the qualitative and quantitative methodology used in this thesis allowed answering this question, confirming previously established theories.

5.1.2 How does storytelling in women's football influence fan engagement with the sport?

Through storytelling as a communicative element, it is possible to strengthen connections and lead to an increase in fan retention (Valenti et al., 2018; Zlotán et al., 2023). With the creation of a powerful narrative, storytelling can enter the audience's mind and make them empathetic and emotionally interconnected with the sport itself (Laurell & Söderman, 2018). These results are supported by the findings obtained through the mixed methodology used, where it is

concluded that storytelling is capable of influencing fan engagement in this sport. This tool allows the audience and the fans of this sport to create an emotional connection with the players, clubs, or organizations, making them feel closer to the sport and contributing to the growth of the supporter base. Moreover, storytelling as a communication tool can humanize the sport, making it possible for fans to feel closer and become part of the family. By presenting inspiring and authentic stories, women's football transcends the idea that "football is just a game," entering a more emotional and profound dimension that goes beyond the game itself. It is through this sentiment that fans begin to show a different kind of interest and get closer to this sport. By integrating storytelling into the strategy of sports organizations and clubs, women's football can grow and have more influence in the world, increasing the range of fans and admirers in the long term.

5.1.3 What are the most influential narrative elements for increasing fan engagement in women's football?

According to the results obtained through the mixed methodology conducted, this was a topic that had some divergence of opinions. Regarding the analysis of the interviews, the highlighted narrative elements were documentaries and personal stories as the most influential elements of fan engagement in women's football. On the other hand, when a more comprehensive opinion was sought through the survey, journalistic coverage and news, social media and digital content, and documentaries were highlighted. In this sense, it was not possible to highlight just one narrative element that has the greatest influence on increasing fan engagement. These results partially support the case study of the footballer Megan Rabinoe, known for her personal story and for being constantly linked to gender equality initiatives (Bullingham & Magrath, 2023; Schmidt et al., 2019). Moreover, these results support the study conducted by Pope et al. (2024), which argues that social media is a crucial element for athletes to share their stories, thus creating a personal space in one of the most practiced sports in the world.

5.1.4 How does the use of storytelling influence the promotion of gender equality in women's football?

Women's football is still heavily marked by the opinion that there is a lack of quality and strength (Fink, 2015), and storytelling, as discovered through this study, can draw attention to the existing inequalities in this sector. The use of storytelling as a communicative tool opens

horizons for the population, which ends up being extremely influential in demystifying inequalities, such as salary disparities, or even access to resources. Through narratives, this women's sport is positioned as a symbol of inclusion and equality, making women's football the stage for social change. By sharing the stories of players or the realities existing in this football world, the audience feels more relatable to the causes being advocated here, and a whole movement begins to emerge that can bring more investment to this sport and consequently bringing more visibility to it. Lastly, the role of storytelling goes far beyond merely promoting gender equality, as it also plays a crucial role in the decision-making process of stakeholders, who may invest in this sport after the narratives are created. With this, women's football will increasingly be able to be an active voice and come closer, within the limits of natural differences, to men's football, reducing the existing gender inequality. With this, storytelling is an extremely important tool, especially if it results in a moment of shock from the audience, as it is this shock that paves the way for societal transformation. By creating a social impact that goes beyond football, storytelling can promote gender equality in football.

5.1.5 What are the most influential narrative elements in promotion of gender equality in women's football

This research question was only studied using the questionnaire conducted, since out of the five interviewees, only one was an expert on the topic of promoting gender equality. The author analyzed an overall opinion from the 201 respondents, and concluded that journalistic coverage and news, along with social media and digital content, are the most influential narrative elements in promoting gender equality. In this context, journalistic coverage and news can significantly impact the audience's perception by highlighting a persistent issue today, while social media and digital content serve as crucial components. This is because, in the current digital era, individuals heavily rely on the internet for their experiences. This element can be essential and completely necessary to promote gender equality and make this an increasingly well-known and worthy issue of attention.

5.2 Managerial / Academic Implications

Regarding the managerial implications of the thesis developed, it is worth highlighting the possible contribution to sports organizations and marketing professionals who, through this study, can recognize the importance of using storytelling as a tool to promote gender equality

and increase fan engagement. In this way, according to the results obtained, the marketing teams of sports organizations can develop more inclusive campaigns that cover the issue in question, using narrative elements that are more influential, as identified in Chapter 4. In this way, by focusing on specific narrative elements that can capture the audience's attention, sports organizations will build a much stronger and more loyal emotional connection with the audience, strengthening the relationship with fans. In terms of academic implications, this thesis directly contributes to filling an existing gap in the literature related to this topic, in that the role of storytelling in promoting gender equality and increasing fan engagement in women's football has not yet been deeply explored or explored at all and can thus serve as a future basis for further research.

5.3 Limitations and Further Research

With the completion of this dissertation, some limitations were found, such as the limited sample size, given that non-probabilistic sampling methods were used, such as convenience sampling and the snowball effect, not allowing the sample to be fully representative of the target population. On the other hand, the fact that this study was conducted in Portugal and with Portuguese individuals limited the perceptions and realities of other countries that could have been interesting given the magnitude of the topic in question. Lastly, the triangulation used in the methodology also brings with it some challenges such as the greater difficulty in data analysis and comparison, which was another limitation of the study in question. On the other hand, since this is a topic not extensively studied in previous research, it was difficult to base the methodology on the methodologies of other authors and studies. In this sense, this thesis may serve as a basis for other individuals who aim to study topics that were analyzed in this dissertation.

Would be interesting in future research to conduct studies with more representative samples, encompassing a wider range of individuals and profiles. Moreover, it would also be interesting to broaden the focus of the topic to other sports, such as tennis, investigating the role of storytelling in contexts different from the football context. Lastly, in future research, it would be advantageous to create more suitable research instruments to measure the impact of storytelling on various variables.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Collaboration for a master's thesis on Storytelling and women's football:

Impact of Storytelling on Promoting Gender Equality and Retaining Fans

We invite you to participate in a research study conducted by Carina Filipe, with the aim of exploring the impact of storytelling on promoting gender equality and retaining fans in women's football. Participation in this questionnaire is anonymous and the responses will be used exclusively for academic purposes.

The questionnaire has a duration of approximately 3 minutes.

Section 1:

Q1 Do you currently practice any kind of sport?

- Yes
- No

Q2 What sport do you practice?

Q3 Have you ever played, or do you play, amateur/professional football?

- I play or I have already played
- I never played

Q4 How often do you watch games of... ? (Never – Always)

- Women's football
- Men's football

Q5 What type of women's football do you usually watch ?

- National
- International
- National e international

Q6 Indicate how frequently you follow **women's football matches** through the following media.

- Online (Social media, websites)
- Other platforms (Television, radio)
- In stadium

Q7 Indicate how frequently you follow **men's football matches** through the following media.

- Online (Social media, websites)
- Other platforms (Television, radio)
- In stadium

Section 2:

In the next set of questions, please consider the following definition:

Storytelling: it is the art of telling stories to convey ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life lessons in a way that evokes emotions and reflections in people. In the context of football, it focuses on the idea of telling stories about athletes, teams, or games, so that spectators feel more connected and involved in the sport.

Q1 Indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

- Storytelling in women's football helps combat gender stereotypes.
- Storytelling can change the way the public sees and perceives gender equality in women's football.
- The emotional connection with women's football is important to follow the sport regularly
- I would feel more involved with women's football if I saw more storytelling about this sport.

Q2 Indicate to what extent the following aspects influence or can influence your involvement and connection with women's football. (does not influence – totally influence)

- Personal stories of female players
- Advertising campaigns
- Documentaries about sports
- Social media and digital content
- Journalistic coverage and news

Q3 Indicate to what extent the following aspects influence or can influence your perception of the promotion of gender equality in women's football.

- Personal stories of female players
- Advertising Campaigns
- Documentaries about sports
- Social media and digital content
- Journalistic coverage and news

Section 3: Demographics

Q1 Age:

Q2 Gender:

- Female
- Male
- Third gender
- Prefer not to say

Q3 Education

- 1st Cycle
- 2nd Cycle
- 3rd Cycle
- Secondary
- Higher Education

Appendix 2: Interviews

Appendix 2.1: Interview with Margarida Santos (Women's football fan)

Carina: Good morning, Margarida, first of all I'd like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I'm writing my Master's thesis on the impact of storytelling in women's football, with a focus on promoting gender equality and fan loyalty. So, the aim of this interview is to understand how storytelling can be used as a powerful tool to promote gender equality in sport, particularly football. Can I ask you a few questions?

Margarida: Good morning, of course!

C: First of all, can you tell me a little bit about your experience as a fan of women's football and what made you choose this sport over others?

M: Of course! My experience as a fan of women's football started about five years ago. Ever since I was little, I used to play football with the boys at school during breaks, until my interest in the sport grew so much that I asked my parents to sign me up for a 'real' team outside of school. I played with the boys for a few more seasons until I reached the age where mixed football wasn't allowed. At that time I was the only girl in the boys' team, which shows that it wasn't very common for girls to play football at that time. I stopped playing for a while because there were no women's teams in my area. Later, when I was 17, I had the opportunity to return to the world of football, so I talked to my parents and decided to join a team again, but this time a women's team. I spent three seasons with that club until it became increasingly difficult to combine my studies with training and Sunday games, and that's when I gave up. I think it was from the moment I joined a women's team that I became interested in women's football, which until then had only been based on men's football. I started watching more matches, watching documentaries about the sport, following the professional players from the big clubs on social media and whenever I get the chance, I never say no to going to the stadium.

C: Do you think that narratives, campaigns or stories about female players have helped to challenge gender stereotypes in football?

M: Um, yeah, in the last few years we've seen a lot of investment in campaigns in particular, which I think has been reflected in a greater number of fans of the sport. I think even if you don't want to, these campaigns and narratives around women's football end up getting into people's heads.

C: So how do you feel about this change as a fan?

M: Like I said, I feel like there's more and more fans of the sport and you can even see it on the players' social networks where they have more and more followers. For example, I remember following Kika Nazareth four or five years ago and she didn't have half the followers she has now. What's more, when I go to the stadium I feel that the crowds are getting bigger and bigger, so much so that the big clubs are promoting matches in the main stadiums. For example, a few years ago Sporting and Benfica played their games in secondary stadiums such as the Seixal, and now we see derbies at the Alvalade or the Luz that have broken attendance records. I think people are becoming more and more aware that women's football is on the rise, and I say this from personal experience because I consider myself to be an ardent supporter of women's football, but you can often feel much more of the commitment and passion with which the players play, given how difficult it has been to grow this sport to this day. Hmm, I even remember a recent ad that went viral on social media, which was basically an ad that showed different sequences of the game, ending with great plays or goals by famous faces from the French national team, like Mbappé or Griezmann. In the end it was all just a great use of AI where they replaced the faces and bodies of the female players with the faces and bodies of the male players, so all I saw in that advert was women's football and I think that this kind of campaign and storytelling is very effective in proving that football is not just a man's sport and that women are also capable of scoring great goals and making great plays. I really think that this ad is a perfect example of how storytelling can at least plant the seed in people's heads, because even I thought it was impressive that we were talking about women's football at the end, because I really thought it was the best players in the world doing those moves.

C: In your opinion as a fan, how can stories about women's football contribute to gender equality?

M: Hmm, what immediately comes to mind with this question is a news story I read recently, about 4 or 5 months ago, about the men's and women's national teams in Denmark. The recent campaigns and stories have been so powerful that the men's team players themselves have refused a pay rise in order to equalize the salaries of the women's team, I don't know if you've seen this campaign hmm but I think it's one of the biggest proofs that women's football is getting closer to what we see in tennis for example, where tournament prizes are always the same regardless of gender. Okay, it's not a great comparison because women's football still has a long way to go, but if you look at how it's developed over the last 10 years, I think we're on the right

track. And that's basically it, I think the whole narrative ends up getting into people's heads and then people start talking about it and it's as if a 'new' issue is born out of it, which becomes more and more important and in the end nobody is indifferent to it.

C: And do you think that these narratives have an impact on the fans' perception of the sport?

M: Yeah, I think so, I think people are more and more social media savvy these days, it's rare to find someone who doesn't have Instagram, honestly. And I think the players and the clubs themselves are taking advantage of that and promoting women's football. Players are sharing even more on social media now, and that makes fans feel more connected to them and more empathetic to their stories and experiences. That, of course, has an impact on people and it's very noticeable in the network of sports fans, which is growing more and more. I think it was last week, if I'm not mistaken, when Sporting played Nacional and the players even walked onto the pitch holding hands with girls and not boys, as is usual, and I think it was part of a new project by Sporting because even on the shirts they had a logo of this new partnership with the "Goleadoras" project. I didn't know about it, but like me, 40,000 other fans found out about it, or at least found out about this project to promote women's football in underprivileged areas. I think that can have an impact on fans' perceptions and is another way in which storytelling in this industry can be powerful in promoting gender equality. Because if you think about it, better than having a press conference that hardly anyone sees and ends up being boring, is getting 40,000 people in a stadium and telling them about this new initiative, that ends up influencing perceptions, I say.

C: What narrative elements do you think are most influential in keeping fans interested and involved in women's football?

M: Ahhh calm down, that's a difficult question, when you say narrative elements, what do you mean?

C: I'm sorry, I'm already so involved in the subject that I think people are too ahah, by narrative elements I mean like the achievements in women's football, documentaries, campaigns, narratives of overcoming personal stories, those kinds of elements that are capable of increasing fan interest in women's football.

M: Ah ok I see, I don't think I can choose just one. For example, I think documentaries, campaigns or even the personal stories of the players are something that is very appealing or even attractive to a fan. Of course, no matter how intensely I live a sport, if I come across a

player's story or post on Instagram every day, it's normal for me to feel more connected to them and to feel part of the 'family' that is their followers. On the other hand, when I watch documentaries, with all the editing and dramatic music they put in, it always ends up stirring my psyche and making me value this sport much more, if only because I've become more sensitive to the subject and more emotional about what's been achieved so far. Then, of course, the overcoming stories are a very important point, because that's where the fan can see that this sport is really moving forward with all the difficulties that have been experienced. I don't know, I think it's all of these things that make storytelling an essential tool to connect with the fans.

C: Do you think that these narratives are able to influence the connection between fans like you and the sport?

M: Hmm, of course, as we've already talked about today, I think the different narratives manage to capture the attention of the fans and convey the desired idea. Different strategies have been used to attract more fans to the sport and what is effective in capturing your attention is not necessarily what is most effective in capturing mine, which is why I think this investment is increasingly necessary because it really does convey ideas and change perceptions of course. From what I can see, I can see two ways, if I can call it that, of influencing the connection of the fans. On the one hand, I can see that the stories appeal very much to the sentimental or emotional side of people, trying to get fans to empathise with the players and their story of overcoming, and on the other hand, I think they even try to attract fans of men's football by showing the high quality that also exists in women's football. In other words, instead of focusing on people's emotions, they focus on the passion for the sport itself, showing that football can be seen in both genders and it's not because it's more famous in one gender that it doesn't exist in the other.

C: Is there a story or a moment that defined you as a fan?

M: Hmm, let me think, hmm, I don't think there's any particular story or moment that has defined me as a fan, honestly? For me, the thing that always connects me the most to this sport is going to the stadium, that's when I really realise that I like this sport. Of course it's important to be exposed to narratives and stories or even campaigns, but I think what really keeps that relationship close is going to the stadium, where the whole atmosphere brings an energy that can't be explained.

C: What kind of emotions do you feel after watching content about women's football?

M: Hmm, let me see. I think after watching this kind of content and storytelling, it's always a mixture of emotions. On the one hand, it's an inspiration and a source of pride, especially as I used to be a footballer, so it's always good to see the struggle and perseverance of the players who are constantly overcoming obstacles and prejudices. On the other hand, it's still a little disappointing that there are still so many inequalities between men and women in this sport, and I think we're still a long way from the day when women's football will have the same coverage and attention as men's football.

C: Okay, Margarida, I have no more questions for you unless you have something to add.

M: I think I've said everything I wanted to ahahah thank you for choosing me to represent the fans of this very special sport.

C: Thanks for your time!

M: You're welcome! Good luck to you!

Appendix 2.2: Interview with Margarida Batlle Y Font (Head of Sporting Clube de Portugal)

Carina: Good morning, first of all, I would like to thank you for your availability to participate in this interview. I believe that your contribution will be extremely valuable for my master's thesis, which focuses on storytelling in women's football and its impact on promoting gender equality and retaining fans. In this way, the objective of this interview is to understand how storytelling has been used in women's football, particularly in clubs like Sporting Clube de Portugal, and how these narratives and stories can impact public perception and promote gender equality. Can you talk a little about your experience at Sporting CP, especially regarding women's football?

Margarida BF: I am the director of Women's Football, or rather, the position itself is General Coordinator of the Women's Football Team at Sporting since May 2023. Before that, I spent 6 years as a lawyer in the legal department of Sporting where I interacted with the sports management of various modalities, including professional men's and women's football, youth football, and therefore, the lawyer, or legal consultant or legal adviser in sports law, greatly assists with contractual issues, clarifies questions that may arise during the signing of contracts with agents, and so I was very accustomed to that role. It was partly for this reason that the invitation to take on this role came about because I was already doing it with women's football

and had some recognition. Regarding my experience in women's football, I played when I was younger, I was registered with two clubs, in the second division and then in the first division. I stopped playing in 2017 because I got seriously injured and because I wanted to fully focus on my professional career, and I felt that one situation was not aligned with the other, especially after I got hurt and was unable to pursue the master's degree I wanted abroad. So I dedicated myself entirely to law. I completed two postgraduate degrees in sports law, one of which also had a component in finance and management. Then I ended up joining Sporting as a trainee lawyer and I made my way there, which then starts with what I explained a little while ago. I spent 6 years as a lawyer in the Legal Department, so I dealt with various areas of law, whether labor law, commercial, contractual, but above all, and this was my specialization and the area I worked in the most, sports law, where a greater connection to sports management emerged and where a path began to be drawn to also assume the role I have today in women's football, which is general coordination of the department. Therefore, under my purview is the entire strategy of women's football, the budget management, both for the professional team and the youth teams, the definition of the squad, the setting of objectives, the selection or approval of the human resources allocated to the youth teams, the hiring of players, contact with agents, and daily management of the first team's life, especially regarding participation in the competitions in which the team is involved, and thus, overseeing everything that involves women's football, especially the first team. Then we have a coordinator for the training who reports to me and keeps me updated on everything that is happening.

C: Do you think that campaigns or stories about female football players have somehow helped to challenge gender stereotypes? If so, in what way?

MBF: I think that more than the campaigns or stories about female football players, it is mainly the quality of the football and the greater visibility of women's football competitions that have, in a way, ended up blurring issues of gender stereotypes. I think it is a phase in which not only women's football but also women's sports in general are clearly in a moment of upgrade and clearly in a moment of great visibility. The stakeholders in football are paying attention to women's football because it was a major investment by FIFA, especially after the 2019 World Cup, which was a great success and a great achievement. It was followed, despite the pandemic, by the European Championship and then also the World Cup, and therefore, these 3 international competitions had a lot of visibility, gave visibility to female football players, therefore, to football players (I don't really like to say female football, haha), and with that, everything that surrounds the player, therefore sponsorships, life, there is an interest, that's

normal, right? The football fan doesn't just want to know about football. In fact, it has been studied that football fans are increasingly less interested in the technical aspects of football and the entirety of the game; they like to know the backstage, they like to know what the player does, what the player does, how they take care of themselves, what the player's day is like, what their hobbies are, what books they like to read, their favorite movies and music. We ended up having, for example, if we look at the case of Barcelona, which is sponsored by Spotify, they have game day playlists, right? It's a way to focus on the lives of the male and female players, to get to know a bit more about them, and with this visibility, other platforms also ended up realizing that there was interest, that there was, in a way, a following from football consumers, not just in the typical documentaries that accompany men's sports, for example, not just to talk about football, but we had the one about Michael Jordan, we recently had the documentary about Figo, the one about Ronaldo is older, and on the other hand, we have the documentary about Alexia Putellas, who is, in my opinion, the great icon of women's football and who makes a big difference and attracts many people, giving a lot of visibility to women's football, because she talked about everything that happened to her, talked about the Ballon d'Or, talked about her injury, and that ends up creating empathy with the audience. We also have the documentary about Hope Solo, Serena Williams, and her sister from tennis, which discusses how their father managed to make them world champions, coming from a very unfavorable background. And very recently, the documentary "It's Over," which explains the entire process regarding the president of the Spanish National Team, and this is obviously content that consumers increasingly want to know about, want to understand, and that draws them to women's football and sports. I think the campaigns and stories about female football players help attract more people to the sport. Above all, football has had a quality upgrade, and that attracted the audience. Then comes the next step, which is, "Okay, I already know this player, she's a star, but I want to know more." It was after the visibility of the competitions that the individual visibility of the player emerged, with a significant paradigm shift when Alexia Putellas won the Ballon d'Or, I believe.

C: Do you believe that storytelling can be a tool to promote gender equality in women's football and impact public perception on the topic? If yes, in what way?

MBF: I think storytelling is a tool to promote greater awareness about the reality of what is happening in sports in general, not so much about the issue of gender equality. Obviously, the campaigns that are made, the interviews that the players give, like we had the case of Megan Rapinoe and the issue of Equal Pay in the United States, of course, that was important for the

movement, but it all started with the greater quality that women's soccer was increasingly presenting, in contrast with men's soccer and the titles they were winning. And, therefore, everything starts where it should start, which is on the field, in the quality that is presented, in the pursuit of better working conditions, and I believe that the best way to demand and ask for more conditions is to present quality in the work that is already being done with what is available, and results, and indeed it is after that that we can and should ask for more. Obviously, the issue of gender equality is increasingly present in FIFA's policy, and steps must be taken. Just now, FIFA has committed to making a significant investment in women's football, millions and millions of euros, which comes from solidarity distribution mechanisms from men's football, because the truth is that women's football does not produce like men's football, and therefore, the principle of equality is precisely to treat equally what is equal and differently what is different. And the football played by women is different from the football played by men. The business of women's football is at a different level than that of men's football, and therefore what needs to be done is to present more than just awareness campaigns and demonstrations, which are valid of course, but in my opinion, what we should do and the path that women's football should take is to provide dignified working conditions for the goals set within the club, for the results each team aims to achieve, protection for the female football player, her rights as a sports professional, access to medical care, access to a work schedule, access to planning, support, and therefore everything that is granted to a male football worker, in broad terms, should also be granted to a female football worker to the extent of the difference that exists and has been diminishing, with better game quality, more audience attraction, more professionals involved in women's football, with the beginning of transfers with associated values that generate expenses on one side and profits on the other, but that increasingly bring women's football closer to the reality of men's football. The development of actions and awareness campaigns for the sport that attract people to the stadiums, because that's the way, isn't it? Everything that has interest is consumed, and that's where I believe the key lies, the true tool to promote gender equality in women's football. We should not try to compare what is not comparable, knowing that our path must be traced in a unique way, that is, not falling into the temptation of wanting to do what others have done, sustainably defining the path, knowing that there is a process to get there, not taking steps larger than the leg, not being utopian in what is planned. Basically, it is about defining a strategy and adhering to that strategy, and then if that strategy is already resolved and falls short of what the club can achieve, defining another strategy. But always like this, gradually with what is the specific vision for women's football, and transversal to the club's ideology.

C: In your opinion, which narrative elements have been most influential in maintaining fans' interest in women's football? Some examples could be the players' stories, advertising campaigns, documentaries, etc. Do you see any of these examples in SCP?

MBF: I think I accidentally touched on topics earlier that I should have only touched on now. But I think that above all, giving a perspective beyond the player helps a lot in getting closer to the fans, so fans are interested in knowing what the players study, what their day is like, Sporting has that kind of content, right? "a day with..." and creates this type of content that is then shared on their social media, and obviously, this attracts fans and makes people interested in watching more women's football, in consuming this sport, perhaps even sometimes respecting them more, and I think these are always relevant tools to attract women's football. I won't say effective because we believe that what brings the most success to women's football is sporting success. Obviously, the greater the sporting success, the presence in higher-profile competitions, winning trophies, the more fans it brings to the next competition. Therefore, I clearly reiterate that the essential tool is sporting performance and everything around it, whether in terms of the equipment they wear, digital content, interaction with fans on social media, all of this with a well-defined communication strategy, can be very beneficial and can attract many fans to women's football as well as to the players themselves, who can attract sponsorships and gain greater visibility, being able to use their social media as brand influencers and much more.

C: Lastly, how do you think the narratives and stories surrounding women's football affect fans' emotional connection with the sport?

MBF: I think it's very interesting, I think not all fans can be close to their clubs. There are clubs that have fans all over the world, like Sporting, and there are certainly supporters who have never seen the stadium, who only watch Sporting through television. There are football fans who really like a particular foreign club and have never seen a live game, so how do they have that connection to the values of that club and the ideology of that club, to those players? It is through Storytelling, through documentaries, for example, there was a series of documentaries in various clubs called "All or Nothing," which includes Manchester City, Tottenham, Arsenal, Juventus... and these documentaries provided a new perspective and opened doors to the football locker rooms. Chelsea also has a documentary, specifically about the women's team, which covers their campaign up to the Champions League final, called "One Dream," I think it's even on YouTube; "The Matildas" from the Australian National Team, and therefore this type of documentary, especially nowadays, in the way they are filmed, can bring fans much

closer, making them feel almost part of the team, allowing them to understand what the players go through, what the coach says to the team before going to the conference, so football is much more humanized. Even for a good observer and for someone more insane and sensible, they can help fans understand why sometimes players don't perform or what influences positive and negative moments for a player, what high-performance athletes go through as sportspeople, and there you go, I think it's a very important tool that really helps football fans to have a closer perception. Before, there was even a game called Football Manager, and jokingly, this kind of element ends up bringing the sports fan much closer. And well, these documentaries also allow the football fan and also the fan of the management and leadership aspect of coaches and everything else to get closer, and especially in women's football, this is quite possible. There are female players in women's football who can dream, they already have references, something they didn't have before. Before, they had to look up to the boys. I remember well in my time, I had to refer to Zidane, Figo, Rivaldo, or whoever. And today, they can talk about Aitana, Alexia, Alex Morgan, and when they talk, especially when they are women, they are talking about much more than just football. They talk about the figure, the values that person stands for, that person's posture, what they believe in, their ideals. Therefore, the storytelling, the documentaries, and that more in-depth vision of the player/person is very important content even for those who don't manage and who are interested in sponsoring, associating, or hiring. They have a very real vision of what that resource is.

C: Thank you very much for your availability, Margarida. I believe this interview will play a fundamental role in enriching my analysis.

Appendix 2.3: Interview with Paulo Côte Real (Nova SBE professor)

Carina: Good morning, first of all I'd like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I'm writing my Master's thesis on the impact of storytelling in women's football, with a focus on promoting gender equality and fan engagement. Therefore, the aim of this interview is to understand, based on your experience in the field of human rights and equality, how storytelling can be used as a powerful tool to promote gender equality in sport, particularly in football.

C: Based on your experience and knowledge of gender equality, how do you think storytelling can impact the fight against gender stereotypes and promote a more inclusive vision of football?

Paulo Côrte Real: Hmm, let me try to organise my thoughts here. First of all, I think it's important to explain a little bit about my experience with communication choices in the field of activism, which has been mainly in the area of LGBT rights and now in the area of intersexuality, so multiple and intersectional discrimination. What I have realised is that communication is crucial in changing not only ways of thinking, but more importantly ways of feeling. For there to be change, there needs to be debate from an ethical point of view, but there also needs to be emotional buy-in. Emotional buy-in is usually the most complicated and fundamental component. We saw that today with the outcome of the US election, didn't we? There is no doubt that women's stories have yet to be told on many levels. There is ignorance and fear of dealing with women in traditionally masculine spaces, spaces that are not primarily designed for women, including sport and, of course, football, political power and business. These are spaces with major socio-economic implications and throughout history women have been marginalized both in terms of income and wealth accumulation. Both in terms of wealth accumulation, as I said, not least because family rules in the different social classes have always been established in such a way as to ensure that there is inequality in the distribution of wealth between women and men, but also, as we know, in the remuneration of work, so this clearly extends to football as well. This inequality is naturalized and seems normal. I think we have an economic system that is full of distortions that are not obvious, in other words, people don't immediately perceive them as such because they realize that it's always been this way, right? So these differences become naturalized, that is, they seem natural. And so there are a lot of experiences that don't just come from socio-economic inequality, but also from all the symbolic violence that happens to women in many different ways, apart from the physical violence, of course, and the psychological violence, but the symbolic violence dimension is often ignored, which basically includes the idea, which is passed on in many different ways, that women must always be 'a little less' than men. And it's this 'a little less' that counts in the end. To come back to the focus of the question, because I think I'm rambling a bit, I think that in terms of storytelling, emotional attachment can be worked on in conjunction with the communication of important information from a rational point of view, in other words, the issues that people can more easily attach themselves to, in terms of socio-economic inequality and violence, for example, so that there are issues that people can really more easily attach themselves to, in order to also open up a space that allows them to attach themselves emotionally. That seems to me to be a possible contribution. We have a system that is very well oiled and very well established, don't we? It's very present and permanent, from the moment someone is born, through verbal and non-verbal language, we're going to explain to them how they should be, and so if they're

a person who needs to be trained for affection, for care, if they're a person who needs to be nurtured and brought up to wear a tie and a suit, it's not ahah. And so this comes across with very strong messages because it's almost universal, so it's very difficult to overcome this wall and that's one of the challenges that certainly requires more than just communication campaigns, doesn't it, it also requires more structural measures that have a simultaneous impact from a socio-economic point of view. Right? But also, of course, communication to raise awareness of the problems and try to generate a bit more sharing. Even so, empathy is very limited. Even so, it doesn't seem to be a fundamental problem that needs to be taken seriously.

C: In your opinion, what are the main challenges for storytelling in women's football in order to effectively change perceptions about the role of women in sport?

P: Sports is a particularly complex field because, on a competitive and even professional level, it was once again created for men, wasn't it? Therefore, what happened was a desire on the part of women to have a space for affirmation and the creation of categories, but these were categories created secondarily. In fact, at this moment, the very definition of what it means to be a woman and what it means to be a man in the context of sports is always being questioned, right? And here the question is always, what is the purpose of women's sports? And the goal, in principle, is to find a space of affirmation that is physical, when women are not supposed to stand out for their physical appearance, because they do indeed have systematic differences from a hormonal development perspective, right? Anyway, I'm speaking here in general terms, but we can indeed find differences in the aggregates. And, therefore, football is just another sport, moreover, being a particularly central sport in several countries that is a hub of an economic system. Therefore, women wanting to access this center seems like an almost impossible task, doesn't it? It's the same as having a woman president of the United States, that is, accessing the center of power is indeed challenging. I think it is still difficult to define what it means to be feminine, because basically it is a space for the affirmation of women and even today this space is thought of as the "non-masculine" space and not the "feminine" space, you know? In other words, it's as if it were a space created by consequence and counterpoint, right? It is indeed a position of inequality from the outset, the thinking is unequal, the way it is created is unequal. The interest we give to sports and the value we, as a society, place on sports also has to do with the appreciation of physicality and the fact that men benefit from this appreciation. In other words, I don't know to what extent the centrality of competitive professional sports is not something that, by itself, somehow reinforces the power of men in society. I think the appreciation of women's football can be a way to show that there are other

abilities beyond purely physical ones that are important, and this is changing the rules of the game, and I think this can be a very interesting perspective that sports, and football in particular, can bring. In fact, I think that women have the ability to unite, empathize, and communicate, which could eventually be advantageous for this gender, right? These end up being fundamental characteristics that can manage to reflect a different kind of success, one that men do not know, essentially trying to find within the system of inequality something that allows for upward movement, right? But for that, it implies going in a different direction than the usual promotion of sports, that is, it can be related to sisterhood, it can be related to the fact that eventually, greater cohesion can be achieved in a women's team as opposed to the usual prejudice. Therefore, trying to understand to what extent there may indeed be technical specificities that make this sport practiced by women more interesting than when practiced by men. But deep down, trying to find the appreciation, right? The space of superiority. And I think that would be very interesting to turn the tables on the rules of the game without a doubt.

C: Do you consider that storytelling is capable of influencing public perception and promoting gender equality?

P: That may depend on the content in my view, but right off the bat, there are still significant silences that I honestly don't believe will disappear so quickly. The public space in relation to women continues to be very limited, contrary to what it might seem. Hmm, actually, women's stories still lack centrality in space, and therefore this contribution of storytelling is important at all levels. I think another important contribution is to understand a bit more deeply what is experienced in football, for example, I know that there are many lesbians in women's football, right? But now thinking about men's football, I can't even tell you if there's space for gay people, and therefore, we have many stories to tell and even stories that are poorly told, and stories of silences, and the idea here is to break the silence and bring out the need for freedom. I think storytelling in this aspect has a very important contribution indeed.

C: How can gender equality campaigns in football be more effective? Are there specific points that you consider fundamental?

P: Hm, I think people need to have a moment of emotional shock, they need to be able to experience rejection in order to be able to embrace, that is, there has to be something that shakes them emotionally and creates a space where some transformation can happen. But in fact, in my view, the message cannot be too soft; if it is, it will obviously not have much impact. Look, I can even give you examples of training experiences I had, I remember the shocked reactions

I had in several of them when I questioned things as simple as the use of the word "maricas." People are used to this term, it's a cultural thing, it's not very aggressive, and it's used in various contexts, but basically when you tell a man not to be a sissy, and since this word comes from the name Maria, you're basically telling a man not to be a woman, right? Because being a woman is bad, right? Haha? Therefore, when I question the use of these words in formations, people initially reject this criticism because the word is so ingrained and feels so natural, but over time they realize the discriminatory impact of the words. This emotional shock is what leads to transformation and opens eyes. Because if we don't choose something emotionally strong, it won't stay in memory, right?

C: How do you think the public reacts and responds to campaigns that promote gender equality in women's football? why?

P: Hey, I'm feeling very pessimistic today. I think we have a very serious problem from a diagnostic point of view, which is the belief that the work is done and the campaigns are mostly mild and therefore generate, I would say, mainly indifference. And people are actually convinced that the work is done, which is completely absurd, and just think from a socioeconomic point of view, the income inequality and the fact that we have had unpaid work done by women corresponding to a huge percentage of the GDP. In the 70s, when the USA started hiring domestic care work, the GDP rose, meaning it began to be accounted for, but the work was already being done, it just started being paid, you see? Therefore, we have a huge devaluation of women's work just from this perspective, right? From the perspective of violence, the experience was completely different, wasn't it? I think it has a lot to do with the experience and knowledge of fear, which men already don't have, and which women have always learned. We still don't have role models of women in power, do we? Therefore, there is a systematic distrust towards female candidates for positions of power, because the Messiah is always a man; the Messiah can be an Obama but cannot be a Kamala Harris, that is, she can be nice, competent, or responsible, but she does not inspire like a man inspires. And I think the problem is that society looks at men as inspirations and not women. In other words, we have a huge deficit of images from the past, which then becomes a huge difficulty in constructing images for the future because women are systematically spending hours and hours trying to convey the right image, and it's impossible. We have a huge delay from a gender perspective, and we always think it's done. Therefore, this absurd difference between reality and perception makes people not care about the issue, and there you go, maybe more shocks are needed, and it is necessary to realize that there is still everything to be done and that they should not continue

to live under the illusion that the work is done and to normalize inequality and think that what exists as inequality is because it is so.

C: Thank you very much, professor, I also appreciate the time you spent.

P: You're welcome and good luck with continuing your thesis, keep it up!

Appendix 2.4: Interview with Samara Lino (Torreense Football Club player)

Carina: Good morning, first of all, I would like to thank you for your availability to participate in this interview. I believe that your contribution will be extremely valuable for my master's thesis, which focuses on storytelling in women's football and its impact on promoting gender equality and retaining fans. In this way, the objective of this interview is to understand how storytelling has been used in women's football, particularly in clubs like Torreense, and how these narratives and stories can impact public perception and promote gender equality. Can I ask you a few questions?

Samara Lino: Yes of course.

C: Can you tell me a bit about your journey in women's football?

S: Well, it all started in primary school. I started playing with the boys at school, and all I loved to do was playing football. My interest kept growing and growing until I realized that it was really what I loved to do, and when I got a little older and more responsible, I decided to go to the United States of America, where I was allowed to finish college while doing what I love the most, which is football. After that, I even went to Iceland to play a season but ended up coming to Portugal, where I've been for 4 years and where I am very happy, continuing to do what I love most. Here in Portugal, I started at a less well-known club, I was there for about two years, that is, two seasons, but it has nothing to do with what I experienced in the past and what I am living now. The conditions weren't the best, and I didn't see a very promising future there, to be honest. Then the opportunity arose to come to Torreense, a club that, of course, has much better conditions, nothing at all like before, and this is where I've been for two years, and I'm very happy. Especially because it was never easy before to have to play at night and not have the minimum support from the club, nor did you see half the investment that you see, for example, in Torreense. And well, I think that in summary, this has been my journey so far in women's football.

C: Do you think that campaigns or stories about women's football have somehow helped to challenge gender stereotypes? In what way?

S: Yes, I think so. Even more so after making a comparison with recent years, we can see a very pronounced change, especially in the minds of older people, both men and women. Not many years ago, it was still not accepted that women could also play football because, you see, it was a boys' sport and not a girls' sport. Women should focus on other things rather than things of men, according to old-fashioned thoughts, and that personally confuses me a lot. Women's football is still seen as much less competitive than men's football, and the players are often unjustly undervalued, I think. And there you go, storytelling here is quite important because I think it can focus on important points and maybe, who knows, change people's mindset. As far as I remember, the campaigns and storytelling in general always try to portray female players as capable and complete athletes, with the same dedication and passion for football as men, and that, of course, gives people at least the perception that football is a sport for all genders; it doesn't have to be a labeled sport, I think. Then there are countless narratives that clearly challenge the idea that women's football is not even half of men's football, for example when you see the stories of players like Martha, who were born with nothing and today have achieved everything in football. And there you go, this growing investment in storytelling might even show people that this could be a profitable and worthy of respect and admiration endeavor as well. I think all of this allowed women's football to come out of its "shell" and show itself more. Now, with the growth of social media and television, I truly believe that storytelling has managed to normalize something that could never have been normalized before. This makes even the younger generations start to change their thinking and maybe even have female players as inspiration instead of just Cristiano Ronaldo, right? Haha, because it's lucky that Cristiano Ronaldo was born a man because if he had been born a woman, he might have been much better, but he wouldn't be what he is today, and that's the truth. But things are changing. Now Futebol Clube do Porto has created a women's team and managed to get thirty thousand people into the main stadium, I mean, this is incredible given the visibility of this sport. I think storytelling is undoubtedly capable of breaking some stereotypes, of course.

C: In your opinion, how do the stories and narratives of women's football affect the emotional involvement of fans and the connection with the team?

S: I think fan involvement is one of the most important things to make this sport grow, and of course, these stories and narratives help a lot. When fans get to know the stories of the players

and start to feel more connected with them and their achievements, of course, they will then feel a greater connection with the sport itself. And I think it's important to create that emotional connection with the fans because if they see this sport as inspiring, they will even spread the word and bring other people to the sport, and this all starts to grow. For example, when I was a girl, few girls played professional football, I remember Martha but she's the only one. And with the growth of the sport and with more and more talk, more investment, people end up feeling more involved in it, and then things end up happening, and we end up having good surprises. I'm not really into social media, but I can tell you that for this sport, it was the best thing that appeared, it made it grow a lot. The players even have the opportunity to get to know each other a little more off the field, which ends up making the fans feel more motivated to follow the player, and of course, that creates a bridge to the sport itself. At least I am very connected to football, and a lot of it is due to knowing the entire story of Martha, who to this day continues to be one of my greatest inspirations. I am a player, meaning the connection was so strong that it made me want to be part of this family for real, more than just being a fan. I think it's basically a snowball effect, there's more storytelling, there are more figures in women's football, and then fans relate to them a lot, and everything grows. Even on television, now many more games and broadcasts are seen, which at least gives people the opportunity to learn about this sport, and that's great. Overall, I think these narratives make football much more accessible to the world, and this even broadens horizons and ultimately strengthens the relationship with the fans.

C: What narrative elements do you consider have the greatest impact on fan engagement with women's football?

S: I think whatever the narrative element is, it has enormous importance in the development of the sport. In my opinion, social media makes a huge difference because from a very young age, people only use their phones and whether we like it or not, Instagram, TikTok, or other social networks allow discussions about the topic and publicize it, reaching people. This ends up making new people want to get to know the sport and those who already know it, at least want to learn a little more. On the other hand, documentaries for me are perhaps the most important narrative element because it is where one can somehow alert and make known the history of this sport and its reality. I can even give you an example, there was recently a documentary about the Spanish national team where they shared exactly their experience within the team and even focused on the topic of gender equality. Basically, the documentary addressed the issue of a very large difference in the way they were treated compared to men's football, and they basically came together to protest and try to change the conditions. Soon, it didn't happen as

perfectly as they had planned, but in the end, they achieved a change for Spanish women's football. And I think that's important, just the fact that there's a documentary about it makes younger people able to see the reality, and of course, this then makes people have compassion and empathy for this sport, I think.

C: Do you think that the narratives and campaigns related to women's football have contributed to promoting gender equality in sports?

S: Yes, without a doubt. I think the campaigns and all the storytelling involved in this sport help, in a way, to capture people's attention even if they are not the biggest fans of this sport. Because they end up touching on sensitive topics and I think that's important, it's better to tackle subjects that can somehow affect the psyche than to take on topics that no one cares about. All this openness that now exists about women's football, all the attention given to the inequalities that still exist, the lesser online coverage that this sport has, and the enormous lack of investment make people who are at least minimally sensitive to the topic reflect on the importance of treating women's football with the same seriousness as men's football. And with this, I'm not saying they should be treated the same way, but I think no sport should be undervalued. I truly believe that men's football is nothing like women's football and that they shouldn't be treated the same because they are indeed different sports. However, I think people always try to make these two sports equal and make comparisons that, in my opinion, shouldn't be made. This is where the discrimination against women's football comes from; it's precisely because people think they should be played the same way. For example, when there is some error that is not accepted, like a defender's back pass to the goalkeeper, that then results in a penalty. That happens, it's normal, people are not perfect, but if it's in women's football, they talk about it for a day and then it's done, on the other hand, if it's with men's football, my god, the players immediately have to hear and read comments that make no sense, you know? I think it ends up being about that. But thank God, I think it's changing. I think the key is to create a social impact that goes beyond football, I think storytelling has managed to do that because it shows people that we are not just talking about football, we are talking about human rights and justice for all, about recognition, about visibility, and there may even be differences in terms of sports, but women cannot continue to be undervalued in football, as they have been before. And of course, if people associate themselves with these causes and start to have a greater openness to women's football, sports entities will also start to invest more and more in this sport, you see, it's a snowball effect.

C: Do you believe this strategy can influence public perception?

S: Yes, clearly, when the audience sees these stories of the players' overcoming challenges and even highlights that these players actually have talent, it ends up slightly changing the way they are judged, broadening the audience's perspective as well. I think these narratives, if well done, are capable of bringing female football players out of the secondary plan they are unfortunately in, and that is very important. It's for people to realize that female players are also capable of playing with passion, that they can also have an excellent game, despite the differences that exist compared to a men's football game, of course. Moreover, these narratives greatly undermine the idea, or at least try to influence the idea, that women's football is weaker than men's. That is completely wrong, it is not inferior, it is simply different. And if this message gets through, and if we manage to get women's football the attention it deserves, fans will connect with this sport, and all of this is absolutely crucial for promoting gender equality, because I believe that the more fans value and support this sport, the more investment there will be and the better conditions there will be. Then recognition and visibility start to grow, and all of this can transform women's football because fans are the most important element of this sport.

C: Lastly, in your case, have you noticed a change in the way the public views women's football over the years?

S: Yes, without a doubt, the change has been enormous, especially in prejudice; it has decreased a lot. Sometimes it's even a surprise to see people who didn't accept this women's sport now accepting and even supporting it. There is even greater motivation for people to let their daughters play football because they are finally realizing that this sport is not just for men. It's funny that now I even feel like people know who I am, know that I play for Torreense, know when I score a goal, and all that kind of support is excellent for the involvement in this sport, of course. People are increasingly interested, you can already tell they are asking when the next game is and where, and there is no greater reason for pride than that. And if I go back to my past, a few years ago I was the only girl at school who played soccer with the boys, and now that difference is much more diluted, at least that's what I think. If I go back to my old school, I'm sure I would have a nice surprise and that I wouldn't just see a girl playing football.

C: Thank you very much

S: Thank you and good luck!

Appendix 2.5: Interview with Márcio Santos (Torreense Football Club Assistant Coach)

Carina: Good morning, first of all, I would like to thank you for your availability to participate in this interview. I believe that your contribution will be extremely valuable for my master's thesis, which focuses on storytelling in women's football and its impact on promoting gender equality and retaining fans. In this way, the objective of this interview is to understand how storytelling has been used in women's football, particularly in clubs like Torreense, and how these narratives and stories can impact public perception and promote gender equality. Can I ask you a few questions?

Márcio Santos: Of course! Let's do this.

C: Can you tell me a bit about your journey in women's football?

M: Look, I can tell you that I entered this world very early on. I started at 18 as an intern coach at Estoril Praia, which is a club with a good history in women's football, a club that has gone through numerous promotions and relegations and that over the years has had some difficulty staying in this top tier of women's football because it couldn't keep up with the evolution of this sport at the moment. I started in that way, as an intern coach, then I became an assistant coach, and after that, after working with some of the coaches I had the privilege to work with at the time, I received an offer to go to Braga, one of the strongest, most recognized, and most titled teams in Portugal in women's football, and in Europe as well with some achievements. It went super well, I was happy, and it was a great experience. I was in the world of national competitions, and after that, Torreense emerged as one of the clubs with a more lasting and future-oriented vision regarding their women's football project, which presented me with a proposal and good support both in the present and with an eye on the future. And that has been my adventure in the world of women's football in a very condensed way.

C: Do you think that campaigns or stories about women's football have somehow helped to challenge gender stereotypes? If so, in what way?

M: I'll be honest with you, I think so, but I don't know if it's just because I'm involved in the sport. I don't know to what extent people who are outside the sport and who don't follow it the way it should be followed share the same opinion since I am aware of what it was and what it is, and that these gender stereotypes are somewhat more diluted, of course, thanks to storytelling. There it is because I think that the issue of gender stereotypes still exists even within people. Mainly at the level of fans for undervaluing the game because it is not as fast as

men's, not as strong, not as aggressive, of course in a good way, and so I think these campaigns are indeed important to raise awareness, especially for people who don't know that not everything is as they think, but I feel it impacts much more those who are within women's football than those who are outside, there you go, we end up living this every day and feel that these campaigns and types of narratives really try to change people's minds and alert them in a good way that women's football is also a sport in its own right.

C: In your opinion, how do the stories and narratives of women's football affect fans' emotional involvement and connection with the team?

M: I think that's a significant point, and there it is even for the people who are inside and outside, and why? There is still much to learn, and this type of narrative allows fans to understand what they do not know, whether due to a lack of communication or even ignorance. In women's football, I think this problem still exists a lot. That is, everyone knows and understands how the Real Madrid men's team operates, what conditions they have, what they do and don't do, the access they have and don't have. But if I were to ask about Real Madrid's women's football, it would be more complicated, wouldn't it? And that's what I think, if there is this kind of projection and this kind of more pronounced sharing, I believe it allows the fan, in this case, using Real Madrid as an example, to understand that, indeed, there is a path being taken so that one day women's football gets a bit closer to men's football. Of course, it's not quite there yet, but that's the direction we're heading in, and I think it's possible to create that emotional connection by getting to know people and listening to them talk about things, and that's where storytelling becomes quite important in this perspective. If I step out of the role of a team member and put myself in the shoes of a fan, I think I would feel more connected to this sport if I heard stories, if I watched documentaries, if I heard people talking about it, you know? It always ends up sparking a greater interest, I think. Also because these narratives that exist and have, in my view, helped the growth of women's football, do not always share only the good things and the positive side, but also the frustrations and difficulties. The storytelling around this sport ends up pulling people from outside, who are the fans, into the sport, and this ends up impacting people to the extent that they start to feel like they are part of the project, and then they will at least have the curiosity to follow women's football more frequently.

C: What narrative elements do you consider have the greatest impact on fan engagement with women's football?

M: I think that in women's football, it is undoubtedly stories of overcoming challenges, because what it was and what it is now are very different, and for those who don't follow women's football, they might not have that awareness. I think people feel much more emotionally connected with someone after realizing what that person went through to be where they are, and in women's football, the discrepancy is enormous. What the players in Portugal have today was completely unthinkable 3 or 4 years ago, and the gap of 3 or 4 years is very small. In other words, the leap is so significant that I think creating that connection with a fan can be much easier if that connection is built on the difference between what it was in the past and what it is now. And there is no shortage of testimonies from players who have gone through these different generations, and who will undoubtedly benefit some generations in 10 years, 15 years from now, who will not have what the men's game already has, because it will take many years for that to happen, especially in terms of the ease of achieving what they can achieve in terms of resources, structure, and everything else. But I think what is being done now, and this is clearly the best time for women's football, and I think this can be used a lot as a way to bring together people from outside and people from inside, is being done very well. Because I think it has to stop being a bit that those interested in women's football are those within women's football, and I think it's easy to start from there to change that.

C: Do you consider that the narratives and campaigns related to women's football have contributed to promoting gender equality in sports?

M: I think so, and I think not. In other words, I think the ones that are mostly done go a bit like that. I don't think all of them go through that. I think it's still a topic that people try to camouflage a bit. In other words, this type of initiative does happen, but on the topic of gender equality, it is still somewhat camouflaged. This is like the next step in the intention of this type of situations and narratives. I think it's increasingly a topic that's being talked about, right? This promotion of gender equality is very much on people's lips and it ends up being a topic that's even in vogue. And of course, we increasingly see more campaigns and narratives that promote this and that can indeed manage to promote it, but I think the road is still long, and that's why I find storytelling so important. People end up listening even if it's just to win by exhaustion, and then there are things that actually change and can even evolve, I think.

C: Do you believe this strategy can influence public perception?

M: I think so, but there you go, it's a difficult barrier to overcome, and with time and if done in a concrete way, I think it can be overcome. Now it is clearly the hardest point to change,

because, going back to the stereotypes from the first question, it is something that is still very intrinsic in women's sports, especially in football, which is seen as the sport created by men and for men, and I think changing people's minds is the right way to go, and clearly these narratives will be quite useful for that, but it will undoubtedly be the hardest part.

C: Lastly, in your case, have you noticed a change in how the public views women's football over the years?

M: Without a doubt, without a doubt, comparing my first year in women's football with this my fifth year in women's football is completely different in terms of everything, from fans, social media, to the teams themselves, the players who come, because if the club has the interest and the capacity to bring players who already have a significant profile on social media, in other types of competitions, it will also attract the interest of those who are not within women's football or women's football. An example of this is a player that Braga just brought in, who is the second player in the world with the most followers on Instagram. This has clearly brought people to Braga's women's football and to the women's football of the BPI League, which didn't exist before bringing this player, and this wasn't even a topic five years ago. In other words, I think the way women's football and the BPI League are now, with countless initiatives, even with the broadcasts of the games, at this moment there isn't a single women's football game from the BPI League that isn't broadcasted, and if we went back five years, having two games broadcasted per month was already a victory, to be honest. I think the difference is enormous, as I have already said, this is undoubtedly the best moment for women's football so far, even in terms of projection, we have never heard so much about women's football as we do now, and this is evident in various examples. Just recently, Futebol Clube do Porto created a women's football team, Guimarães has a great project in hand, in other words, teams with a good name in men's football are increasingly involved in women's football, and that, of course, brings a fan base. For me, it is one of the most important points since, as I said, it is the fans who make a club, it is the fans who suffer and continue to come watch the games and show love for this, and if these big clubs can bring 25% of the fan base, this is already excellent because if each club brings that 25% of the fan base, in 3 or 4 years this will triple. That's what ends up being beneficial, and that's it, I think that's basically it. If in these 5 years there has been this change and the plans involved from the Federation and the entities regarding these same changes continue to be promising, I think it is on the right track for this to continue happening exactly.

C: Thank you for your time!

M: You're welcome! Good luck with your thesis!