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THE SPONSORSHIP COLLABORATION – A GAME ON EQUAL TERMS?

A qualitative study of gender-influence in football sponsorship collaborations

ABSTRACT

Corporate interest in sponsorship is continuously increasing globally and sport is receiving the largest portion. In Sweden, a country ranked as one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, 46 % of elite athletes are women but only 20 % of sport sponsorship resources are allocated to this group. While previous research on women in sport found women to be restricted in the sport arena, adjusting to the prevailing male norm, sponsorship literature has illuminated how a corporation can benefit from, and use sponsorship. The few studies that have connected the two research areas have studied single aspects of sponsorship collaborations influenced by gender. Lacking in research is still a holistic perspective of the sponsorship collaboration in relation to gender to further understand which aspects and why they influence the possibilities of women's clubs in obtaining and maintaining sponsorship collaborations. In order to isolate aspects influenced by gender in sponsorship collaboration and set a direction for future research in the field a qualitative multiple-case study on elite level in Swedish football was undertaken. Interviews with nine football clubs; four women-only, three men-only, and two with men and women's teams, and nine football sponsors, were undertaken in relation to sponsorship collaborations. These showed that gender is foremost influential in the pre-phase and the start-up phase of a collaboration. Furthermore, aspects such as *personal influence, continuous collaborations,* and *untargeted measurements* that previously were favouring men to obtain and maintain sponsorship are still related to gender but either one can experience the benefits. Gender per se was however not found to influence the management of the collaboration or evaluations, foremost related to the possibilities of maintaining sponsorship.

Keywords: Sponsorship, Sponsorship Collaboration, Women in Sport, Women's Football, Gender

Authors: Amanda Sochon (22718), Anna Zdolsek (22692)
Supervisor: Karin Svedberg Helgesson

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LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Concept	Definition
Elite football club	A club with a team playing in one of the top leagues ("Damallsvenskan"/"Elitettan" or "Herrallsvenskan"/"Superettan").
Gender	Refers to socially constructed characteristics of women and men, used to emphasise the relational and changeable in masculinity and femininity (Dahl, 2016).
General sponsor	Below title sponsor level. Often a sponsor in the bigger group of club sponsors where invested amount and type of contract varies.
Sponsee	A club that receives financial support from a company (sponsor) (Meenaghan, 1983).
Sponsor	A company that invests in a club (Meenaghan, 1983).
Sponsorship	Exchange between a sponsor and a sponsee, whereby the sponsor invests in a sponsee in order to secure the rights to exploit the commercial potential derived from its club with that sponsee (Meenaghan, 1983).
Sponsorship collaboration	All activities related to a sponsorship engagement from the first thought of engaging to the end of a contract. Involves the management of exchange between a sponsor and sponsee in four stages of involvement: pre-phase, start-up phase, management of collaboration and finally the evaluation (adapted from Cousens et al., 2006).
Title sponsor	The highest status of sponsorship in a sport club, which is signified by the highest level of monetary contribution. Usually one of the most exposed spots on the game gear and arena of the club and includes a close relationship. The price for a title partner is decided upon in each specific club.
Traditional sponsorship	A transactional view of sponsorship where a company buys the right for exposure in relation to a sport entity, for example by having advertisement in arenas (Wright, 1988; Abratt et al. 1987).

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Thesis Background

Corporate interest in sponsorship has increased rapidly during the last decade. Global sponsorship spending amounted to $51 billion in 2012 and was forecasted to exceed $60 billion in 2016, with a projected annual growth rate of almost 5% (IEG & ESP Properties, 2016). As of today, the sport industry is receiving the largest share of the spending, approximately 70%, with the remaining funds being invested in arts, charity or other events (Sá & De Almeida, 2016). With sponsorship growing, so is the amount of research undertaken in this area. Today sponsorship is often used for creating awareness, to enhance brand image, or as a strategic resource with a final goal of being beneficial to the sponsor (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). Although sponsorship spending has increased, inequality and a gender gap as regards to income earned through sponsorship and endorsement can be observed (Withers, 2016).

Looking specifically at how women have been considered in sport research, Osborne and Skillen (2015) highlight that they historically have been "peculiarly neglected". Women have, in this context, to a large extent not been written about and it has taken long for research regarding women's sport participation to appear. Sport history has been structured around the institutionalisation of sport as a male-dominated discipline where male interests and norms have been focused on and codified, although women have been active. Theberge (1985) found men's presence in sport to have been longer and larger than women's, something which can be said to have influenced how the setting and structure of sport is perceived. Research dedicated to women in sport however appeared simultaneously as the women's movement in the sixties, when also the number of female athletes increased. This had a disciplinary focus on the female athlete as a subject (Bandy et al., 2012). Still today, however, gender, achievement and outer appearance are pinpointed as factors coming into play in regards to salary or sponsoring (Branded, 2013).

When focusing on Sweden, a country currently ranked fourth on the Global Gender Gap Index (WEF, 2014), a recent study shows that women in Swedish sports merely earn 10-15% of incomes in elite sport (IEC, 2013). To illustrate this with an example, average salary for a football player in the men's top league "Herrallsvenskan" is 63 700 SEK/month, compared to 11 000 in the corresponding women's top league "Damallsvenskan" (Fairpay, 2017). It is also revealed that women's sport receives 20% of the Swedish sponsorship at elite level even though 46% of Sweden's active athletes are in fact women (Fairpay, 2017).

The salary difference is one reason why football is an interesting sport to investigate. Furthermore, in regards to players, football is with 501 371 players the most popular sport in Sweden (RF, 2016). In 2015 approximately 33% of the total number of football players were women in (Ibid). Considering that Germany with its 82 million inhabitants has 190 000 active women players, Sweden has a comparably large amount of women players. In terms of audience level in the top leagues, average visitors per game (2016) were 729 in "Damallsvenskan" and 9127 in "Herrallsvenskan" (Svensk fotboll, 2016).

Sweden has furthermore experienced great international success in football, with the women for example recently seizing the silver medal in the 2016 Olympic Games. Consequently, Swedish football's high number of female players, international successes, increasing game audience level (SVT, 2016) and large sums of skewly distributed sponsorship and resources, calls for further investigation. These reasons make it interesting to examine the sponsorship processes and opportunities within women's football.

1.2 The Identified Research Gap

Previous research has shown the sport arena to be an institutionally male-dominated practice where sporting practices are socially constructed and where needs and interests of certain societal groups seek to be fulfilled (Osborne & Skillen, 2015, Osborne 2005). Despite increased presence of women in the sport community over time, women are portrayed as "the other" and are placed in a peripheral category (Kane & Lenskyj, 1998; Mean Patterson, 2003). It has further been said that there is an incompleteness of research in relation to women in sport and that new studies will contribute to this limited research field (Osborne & Skillen, 2015; Williams & Hess, 2015)

Looking at sponsorship theory, research at international level has studied different aspects of the sport sponsorship process and development (Athanasopoulou & Sarli, 2015). Reasons why companies sponsor, and how they use sponsorship as a tool has been studied, but mostly from the corporate perspective (Meenaghan, 1983; Ryan & Fahy, 2012). Also studies on a holistic level, drawn on previous marketing and management literature, exist in order to understand the mechanisms of sponsorship and the relation between a sponsor and sponsee when collaborating (Cousens et al., 2006). Previous research however needs more studies on the role of sport clubs, their thoughts and considerations when entering a collaboration; information that is necessary for further understanding sponsorship structures (Olkkonen et al. 2000).

Few researchers have combined the fields of gender and sponsorship in order to understand how gender affects sponsor and sponsee in the collaboration, in relation to the sponsee's possibilities of obtaining and maintaining a sponsor. Existing studies in the combined field studied single aspects of a collaboration, such as motivations for sponsoring specific women's sport events, how corporations can gain value from short term engagements, or factors shaping a company's decision to enter a sponsorship collaboration with female athletes (Pegoraro et al., 2009; Sack & Fried, 2001; Amis & Shaw, 2001). In addition, these studies have mainly been performed from the sponsor's perspective. The studies do not include the broad view of which aspects in a collaboration that are related to gender and why they affect a sponsee's possibilities of obtaining and maintaining sponsorship collaborations. One can thus observe a gap in the combined research-field of gender and sponsorship in regard to having a holistic view of the sponsorship collaboration in relation to gender.

1.3 Purpose of Study

The study aims to fill both a theoretical and a managerial purpose. Theoretically, the purpose is to address the identified research gap by studying sponsorship collaborations at a holistic level in Swedish elite football in particular, due to the existing differences between genders in the sport. The collaboration is studied as a whole since gender could influence more stages than just the

initiation of a collaboration and therefore affect how to obtain and maintain sponsorship for sport entities. By including the perceptions of both sponsors and sponsees a broader view of which aspects and why these aspects are affected by athletes' gender in the collaboration are identified. By identifying such aspects the theoretical contribution is two-fold. First a holistic approach including two perspectives of the collaboration contribute with an isolation of aspects that are deemed gender-influenced. Secondly the study intends to expand the theoretical field in the combined area of gender and sponsorship and set a direction of where future research can go deeper to increase the understanding of how gender affects sponsorship collaborations within Swedish elite football.

Managerially, the study aims to show how football clubs work with sponsorship today and to highlight which of these practices that might be gender influenced so that the clubs can expand work practices. The study also aims to increase knowledge among sponsors on how sponsorship can be used in order to adapt their collaborations to seek and reach targets and purposes to a higher degree.

1.4 Research Question

In order to address the need for a broader understanding of how gender affects sponsorship collaborations and the possibility to obtain and maintain sponsorship, the following research question will be examined:

Which aspects in the sponsorship collaboration are affected by athletes' gender and why, when obtaining and maintaining sponsorship in Swedish elite football?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section begins by reviewing literature relating to *women in sport* and thereafter moves on to *sponsorship* theory. The section ends by presenting the, by the authors, *developed theoretical framework* which will be used in the upcoming analysis section.

2.1 Women in Sport

In order to understand women's position in the sport arena internationally, one needs to understand the construction and perception of the sport arena in society as a whole since this is also the foundation of structures in football. This is presented by reviewing literature of *sport as a male-dominated arena*, *previous research of women as athletes*, and *the view of women in sport*.

2.1.1 Sport As a Male-dominated Arena

Osborne & Skillen (2015) argue that sporting practices are socially constructed, culturally defined, and in addition seek to fulfil the needs and interests of certain societal powerful groups. Furthermore, Osborne (2005) views sport history as an institutionalised male-dominated practice, meaning that specific sports are codified by male norms and that governing bodies to a large extent have considered male experiences, even though women have been present.

Sport has been found to be an area where formation and maintenance of masculine and feminine identities is reproduced (Bryson, 1987). The sport community is a place where gendered practices and hegemonic forms of knowledge are prominent, favouring the male norm (Dunning, 1999). Increased women athleticism in the later part of the twentieth century has, however, been acknowledged to challenge the ideological basis of male superiority (Messner, 1988). That being said, it challenges socially constructed meanings surrounding physiological differences between the sexes (Ibid).

The increased presence of women in the sporting community has however not affected the current structure of sports as a male site. Women's sport is still lower in the societal hierarchy (Mean & Kassing, 2008). In this regard, sport can be seen as a foundational discourse, and as such, can be hard to question since foundational discourses are naturalised (Ibid). In addition, showing resistance to a foundational discourse can be problematic (Mean, 2001). Although identities and categories of groups in society are related to as truth of nature, they are constructed and endorsed in everyday talk and discursive practices (Potter, 1996). Membership of specific categories in society with various entitlements can thus be reached or undermined and are not absolute (Ibid).

2.1.1.1 Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic forms of knowledge, *hegemonic masculinity*, defined and understood as *"the pattern of practice"*, has allowed men's dominance over women to continue due to the masculine norm being seen as the most desirable in society (Connell, 2005). Having had prominent influence in the thought process about men, gender and social hierarchy, the framework is increasingly being applied in various fields of research. For example serving as a link between sociological models of gender, masculinity studies and feminist studies of patriarchy (Ibid). The hegemony framework thus includes multiple forms of masculinities and existing hierarchies with the dominant structured form

embodying normative male attributes (Ibid). Although only a minority can reach this, it is what femininities and subordinated masculinities position themselves in relation to and the norm is therefore upheld (Ibid).

2.1.1.2 Peripheral Category Membership

Legal changes, such as Title IX in the US in 1972, banning discrimination from sport participation on college level on the basis of sex, has enabled women to strengthen their position in the sport arena (Mean & Kassing, 2008). Although women's development in sport has moved forward, athletic compensation and access for women still remains debated (Ibid). Even though regular appearance of women in the sport community suggests that the traditional hegemony in sport participation has been overcome, women are at the boundaries (Ibid). This can be seen as *peripheral category membership*, described as where substantial effort to become included and reach membership is visible, and thus where traditional boundary markers are most likely to be produced (Mean Patterson, 2003). It can thus be seen as something that reduces the threat of women participating in sport (Mean & Kassing, 2008). The authors conclude that actual empowerment of women is illusive and that traditional gendered power status intact.

2.1.1.3 Otherness

Increased involvement of women in sport has not changed the male norm of sport and as Kane and Lenskyj (1998) claim, the maintenance of sport as a masculine status quo requires an exclusion or "otherness" of the ones that do not fit into the category, which for example is apparent in media's framing of female athleticism. Researchers thus urge to look closer into communicative practices of sport participators, regulators, organisers etc. and to not only look at simple criteria such as increased participation (Mean & Kassing, 2008).

2.1.2 Previous Research of Women as Athletes

Setbacks for women due to societal changes has been observed over time and the restricted entry of women's sport participation is not an exception (Mean & Kassing, 2008). Not having been prioritised in research related to sport (Osborne & Skillen, 2010). An incompleteness and inadequacy of researched material, although women have been active sport-wise, but "informally" is apparent (Osborne & Skillen, 2015). In research, focus was for a long time instead mainly related to the physical "unsuitability" for women to participate in sport (Macrae, 2015). Also other forms of unsuitability have been presented, as exemplified by Cox and Pringle (2015). They conclude that up until 1921 medical discourses and knowledge disqualified the legitimacy of female football-players. In the seventies women were instead seen as non-threatening to the gender order since they were discursively positioned as subjugated, heterosexual, family members, supportive of male football and were therefore allowed to play (Ibid). This means that women have been accepted, while the foundational discourse of the sport has been maintained.

2.1.3 The View of Women in Sport

The studies in relation to the view of women in sport which started to appear in the sixties were based on the assumption that the female athlete was different than the male athlete (Bandy et al., 2012; Messner, 1988). Tensions between traditional feminine prescriptions and the image of being presented as an active, strong and muscular woman existed (ibid). The view of a difference between female and male athletes has been maintained due to a reproduction of female athletes as women

who play sport, instead of as athletes foremost (Mean & Kassing, 2008). This *social construction* of gender and contradictory messages of women's role in society and sport is a phenomenon that for example was observed during the 1999 Women's World Cup Soccer Championships (Christopherson et al., 2002). At the time, US media framed the event as a new era for women and women's empowerment, yet still constructed and portrayed female athletes as traditionally feminine, thus implying that the primary categorisation of athletes was gender (Ibid).

2.1.3.1 Media's Reproduction of The Male Norm in Sport

As described by Fink & Kensicki (2002) media has over time marginalised women in sport with little coverage and feminine ways of portrayal, leading to the belief and message that the value of female athletes is low. It has been found that the portrayal of male and female athletes in media, is, both quantitatively and qualitatively, differentiated. The portrayal is particularly affected by gender marking, focus on femininity and heterosexuality, and impact of differential coverage (Fink, 2015). Gender marking further explained as, and referred to male athletes and men's sport being presented as norm, with women's competitions gaining secondary status (Messner et al., 1993; Elsey & Nadal, 2014).

What has further been seen in regards to differential coverage in media is that women in sport are trivialised and their performance ignored, which then leaves women's sport less attractive to viewers (Greer et al. 2009). One possible explanation for the disparate coverage is hegemonic masculinity. Another aspect brought up by Angelini (2008) is the biased perceptions regarding women's sport, which is partly created by media's historical presentation. The common argument that women's sport is less exciting to watch and therefore would be a reason for it being less popular has also been contested. Studies have shown that when watching televised sport, no differences in physiological arousal between women's and men's sport was observed by respondents, but differences in self-reported arousal was (Ibid).

2.1.3.2 Female Athletes' View of Themselves

In addition, athletes themselves are affected by the role they are prescribed. This is for example shown in the way that female athletes talk about themselves. Female football players did, in a study by Mean and Kassing (2008), reveal that gender is an issue, but at the same time they tried to avoid to use it as an excuse or reason for problems faced, for example differential treatment. The example describes the fine balance experienced between trying to adjust to the male norm within the sport without being seen as a radical group while still experiencing struggles due to gender. Simultaneously these women assigned themselves to the role as female athletes and not as athletes in general, in that way reinforcing the structure of women being adapting to the male norm (ibid).

2.2 Sponsorship

In the second section of the literature review, sponsorship literature is examined due to its importance for enabling elite practice of sport and since it has be found to be skewly distributed in relation to gender. This part will elaborate on what the *purpose of sponsoring* is, what *the purpose of using sponsorship for a company* is, how a *decision of who receives sponsorship* is created, *the relationship between sponsor and sponsee,* and gender-related implications of this.

2.2.1 Purpose of Sponsoring

Sponsorship emerged from philanthropic actions where financial support from companies to sport entities was seen as donations, to becoming actions with mainly commercial intentions for corporations (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). For sport entities, sponsorship resources are one of the main sources of funding and has an important influence on the possibility of maintaining a standard of the entity's activity. Sponsorship has thus moved from solely the athlete's benefit from, to today's expectancy of bringing returns also to the sponsor (Meenaghan, 1983), including financial returns (Cornwell et al. 2005, 2009).

Over time sponsorship involvement has foremost gained attention in the research field of marketing with a corporate perspective in mind (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). Scholars have explored in what way sponsorship activities were used as alternative marketing channels for companies, as to gain more understanding of how sponsorship benefits companies (Ibid). They have however, neglected how the choices that companies make in regards to sponsorship affect structures in society. By seeing women as outsiders in the sport arena also sponsorship resources reinforce the male domination in sport and money is directed to sport that are most popular in society (Amis & Shaw, 2001).

2.2.2 Companies' Purpose with Sponsorship

The motivation for companies to engage in sponsorship activities has developed over time and three main purposes have been found: to increase *awareness*, to affect *brand image* and to get an additional *resource* to build a strategic competitive advantage.

2.2.2.1 Awareness and Exposure

Maximum exposure of a brand is a common argument to sponsor a sports club with a large audience. Exposure can in itself be used to create awareness of an unknown brand to a larger audience, but does not transition any essence of a brand (Crimmins & Horn, 1996; Crowely, 1991; Parker 1991). In the commercialisation of sponsorship, exposure was the main sponsorship tool used by companies, for example through advertising in arenas, and known as traditional sponsoring (Wright, 1988; Abratt et al., 1987).

Even though sponsorship collaborations put less emphasis on traditional sponsorship today, the most common measures when evaluating collaborations are still related to external exposure, for example in media (Cousens et al. 2006; Crompton, 2004). These measures can lead to hardships for women's sport due to their smaller audience and less media exposure. The construction of media measures can therefore contribute to maintaining the structure of the male norm.

2.2.2.2 Image

As sponsorship grew, so did the interest of what to attain with the investment (Meenaghan, 1999, 2001). It was not only how many who were aware of one's brand that was interesting, but also how the brand was perceived (Ibid). The realisation of using sponsorship for brand building purposes occurred and with an increased expectation on financial returns, companies wanted to understand in depth, how and in what way their efforts were perceived by consumers (McDonald, 1991; Burridge, 1989; Wragg, 1994; d'Astous & Bitz, 1995).

It has been found that the brand image transferred through sponsorship engagements results is foremost affected by the choice of sponsee and types of engagements (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Lee et al. 1997; Walliser, 2003). The higher congruence between the sponsor and the sponsored organisation, the higher chance that the sponsorship improves the consumers' perceptions of the sponsor's brand (Koo et. al, 2006; Speed & Thompson, 2000). Brand fit has also been found to be the most important attribute for sponsors in their sponsoring strategies (Johnston & Paulsen, 2014). Also sponsees increase the benefits from the collaboration by presenting itself as a brand (Renard & Sitz, 2011).

2.2.2.3 As Strategic Resource

Sponsorship has as a third role been identified as a resource, and in addition taken an organisational perspective compared to the previous marketing view (McDonald, 1991; Meenaghan, 1991). The sponsee can be used to create a competitive advantage by including new competence, for example knowledge in how to lead teams, as well as in activities where customers can be entertained (Amis et al., 1997, 1999; Dolphin, 2003; Fahy et al., 2004). The view considers more of an exchange where both sponsor and sponsee are dependent on each other to gain from the collaboration. This also requires each party to have the internal capabilities to engage in the collaboration (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). The view differentiates from the transactional view in traditional sponsorship and shows that sponsorship is more complex than the initial approach might imply.

In relation to the resource view of sponsorship and the need for a sponsee's internal organisation matching requirements of the collaboration, it can be questioned whether women in sport have the internal capabilities needed. As women have been allowed in a peripheral category, also the internal organisation of their sport might be limiting.

2.2.3 Decision-making

Since the sponsor invests money in a sponsorship collaboration, it is also the sponsor's way of deciding with whom to collaborate with which is important in relation to gender's role in sponsorship decisions. Previous literature on the topic highlights the *rationality of decisions*, *traditions*, and *the individual's influence* as affecting choice of collaboration to enter which will be further developed in this section.

2.2.3.1 Rational Decisions

The decision to enter a sponsorship collaboration is expected to be based on rational decisions with the possibility of quantitative evaluations (Thwaites, 1995; Walliser, 2003). Many companies therefore set criteria lists for what to sponsor and what to measure. These lists can however differentiate, some being more focused on characteristics of the sport entities (Aguilar-Manjarrez et al., 1997), while others rather focus on what can be achieved through an engagement (Meenaghan, 1983). The geographical reach for sponsorship is also mentioned to affect the sponsor's choice (Johnston & Paulsen, 2014).

Even though the lists in themselves enable rational decisions, the creation of the lists is interestingly not seen to be fully rational. This means that choices can be indirectly subjective even if the attempt is intended to be rational. Company culture has for example been shown to affect which criteria that are set (Vance et al., 2016). Therefore, if the criteria are framed according to the male norm, for

example largest audience and media coverage, women sport clubs risk being excluded already before the assessment is initiated.

From the sponsor perspective a return on the investment is expected and is therefore often related to criteria (Copeland et al., 1994, 1996). However, companies simultaneously struggle with evaluating in relation to these criteria. In Norway, several studies found that companies that had set measurable objectives for their engagements did either not follow up on the results or ignored negative outcomes in order to be able to stay with their current sponsorship engagements (Thjörmöe et al., 2002, Olson, 2010). If it "felt" like a good collaboration the company was willing to continue the engagement, which suggests the choice to be more subjective.

One can also question if a sponsorship investment can be a rational decision. In a recent study by Anthanasopoulou and Sarli (2015) the sales process from the sport entity's side was compared to a sales process within professional services, which were found to resemble each other to a large extent. Overall it can therefore be seen that companies, which are supposed to be rational entities, still consist of people that are influenced by norms and subjective opinions.

The rationality in sponsorship decisions is thus a two-edged sword. While purely objective criteria imply the opportunities to obtain and maintain sponsorship decreasing the influence of gender, criteria can simultaneously be framed to benefit one group over the other.

2.2.3.3 Tradition

In line with limited action in relation to evaluations of sponsorship, tradition is seen to influence choice of sponsorship engagements. Even though evaluations can show that an investment did not meet expectations, a company can continue sponsoring engagements and thus choose to continue their commitment (Thjörmöe et al., 2002). This would imply decisions to be most irrational. Even though contracts are usually signed on a basis of one to three years, sponsors have expressed a preference of one-year contracts (Johnston & Paulsen, 2014) in order to be able to change or leave easier. This means that there is a structure for the expected rational decisions, but also implies that the tradition of how one used to sponsor often weighs stronger. For a sport club that already receives sponsoring, this means that long-term relations can be expected. It however also becomes challenging for someone on the outside.

2.2.3.4 The Individual's Influence

A final influencer on companies' sponsoring decision is the individual. In the early ages of sponsoring, before a financial return was expected, personal interest was the main influencer of the decision (Javalgi et al., 1994). However, as investments increased in importance, also competence level among companies was required to increase (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). As an example, consumer behaviour changed in the beginning of the nineties in relation to media consumption, which made it harder to reach the customers (Evans et al., 2004; Meenaghan 1991). Specific knowledge of media and communication among managers with decisional power was thus required (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). Two kinds of individual influence can therefore be seen, the subjective individual where one "thinks" a choice is the best, and the professional individual who affects the decision by the professional competence one possesses.

Individuals' influence can thus become both an obstacle and a possibility in relation to the recipient of the sponsorship. If a person with decisional power has an interest in a specific sport, the sport can be prioritised (Amis et al., 1999). On the other hand, if the same company would have a person in the decision-making position who takes a decision based on strategic choices identified through professional expertise, another sport or sport entity might be prioritised (ibid).

2.2.4 Relational Aspects

Today sponsorship has become a close relation between sponsor and sponsee which has led to mutual dependence between the parties (Fahy et al. 2004). This relationship is highly valued among companies (Johnston & Paulsen, 2014). Sponsorship collaborations characterised by such close relationships often result in joint development of sponsorship activities and competence-building (Farrelly, 2006; Amis et al. 1997).

By being more involved with a sponsored organisation, sponsors also get to know the audience better and increase the possibility to match their expectations on the brand (Gwinner & Eaton 1999). To invest more in a close relationship can be seen as natural. Firstly, because efforts are seen as more likely to reach the target. Secondly, due to the increased amount of money being spent on sponsorship, the importance of successful investments also increases (Farelly et al., 2003).

2.3. Framework for the Study

In order to gain further understanding of what aspects of a sponsorship collaboration are affected by gender and why, in order to obtain and maintain sponsorship resources, this study focuses on the sponsorship collaboration stages. These have been found to be the *pre-phase, start-up phase*, *management of collaboration,* and *evaluation*, adapted from the framework of Cousens et al. (2006).

Figure 1: Identified phases in the sponsorship collaboration (adapted from Cousens et al., 2006).

As described in the literature concerning women in sport, women's role and participation has developed and improved over time (Osborne & Skillen, 2015). Male-domination in sport can

however still be seen and can also influence the view of female athletes in society, as well as by athletes' view of themselves. This in turn implies that both sponsors and sponsees might be influenced by gender in the process. Conducting a study on gender's role in sponsorship activities should thus include both the perspective from the sponsor as well as from the sponsee.

2.3.1 The Sponsee Perspective

According to Cousens et al. (2006) the sport entity performs a need assessment to understand what a sponsor needs before it starts a process of acquiring desired resources. Previous literature on women in sport has, furthermore, shown that female athletes are part of maintaining the male norm of sport (Mean & Kassing, 2008), which make sponsees' approach to the pre-phase important to include.

When reaching the start-up phase, the parties act jointly (Cousens et al., 2006), and the terms for the collaboration are set. Simultaneously this is where a sport entity experiences the societal views of different sports and athletes. Treatment of, and how the sponsees are met and responded to when meeting with sponsors, is therefore explored.

To continue, the third step includes the management and handling of the collaboration. In a similar way as in the start-up phase, this part includes joint efforts such as the creation of events, as well as individual actions for example managing the assets of delivery (Cousens et al., 2006). In this part of the collaboration each party becomes further engaged in the relationship and receives a broadened picture of the other. The kind of sponsorship activities and how they are executed in the collaborations, is thus included in the study. As tradition has previously been stated as common in sponsorship collaborations, also the sponsees' perspective of evaluation is included in the study to see whether gender affects.

Figure 2: Framework for study from a sponsee perspective.

2.3.2 The Sponsor Perspective

To mirror the work and experiences by sponsees, the sponsor perspective is evaluated in each of the phases. The pre-phase includes a more holistic view of what the sponsor considers to be the main purpose of engaging in sponsorship activities (Cousens et al., 2006). It is studied in relation to the purposes presented in literature: awareness, brand building and image, and sponsorship as a resource.

In the start-up phase, it is not foremost the terms set and explicitly stated in the sponsorship contract that will be studied, but rather what motivates a sponsor to go into a collaboration with a specifically chosen sponsee. This can be seen as relating to the decision-making that literature has described as rational, while subjective influencers have been seen to affect the decisions that are undertaken.

Moving on to the third step, when a sponsor has entered a collaboration, a sponsor's reaction to the management and maintenance of the collaboration will be studied. This is related to what expectations a sponsor has on the collaboration. In the end of the term for collaboration sponsorship literature has shown that structures are usually set up for evaluation; but it also reveals that evaluation is not properly performed (Thjörmöe et al. 2002). The influence of the evaluation, or perhaps lack of, is therefore also included in the study.

Figure 3: Framework for study from a sponsor perspective.

2.3.3 Summary of Adapted Framework

The framework below is developed by the authors and builds on the steps of sponsorship collaborations, as identified by Cousens et al. (2006). The literature review identified various points which affect women in sport, such as for example peripheral category membership, hegemonic masculinity, otherness etc. which will be explored in regards to the sponsorship collaborations.

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	1. PRE-PHASE	2. START-UP PHASE	3. MANAGEMENT OF COLLABORATION	4. EVALUATION
SPONSEE	What to sell?	Treatment by companies/ society	Activities and execution	What to evaluate?
SPONSORSHIP COLLABORATION				
SPONSOR	Purpose of sponsorship	Motivation for collaborating	Expectations and exchange	What to evaluate?

Figure 4: Summary of framework.

3. METHODOLOGY

The following section presents the methodology chosen for this multiple-case study. Starting with *research design* and *research approach* this is followed by descriptions of the *data selection* and *collection* and leads into the *data analysis*. Trustworthiness of the *data quality* of the study is later discussed and the methodology section ends with a brief discussion of *limitations*.

3.1 Research Design

From an epistemological standpoint, which concerns the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired, two philosophies (positivism and interpretivism) exist (Ritchie et al, 2014). Positivism holds that reality is objective, facts and values are separated, and that methods used in natural sciences are appropriate when studying the social world (Bryman & Bell, 2011, Ritchie et. al, 2014). According to the interpretivist paradigm approach, reality however cannot be separated from our perception of it (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Since this thesis studies the role of gender, experienced through subjective perspectives and realities perceived as true, an interpretivist approach was chosen for this study. The approach thus makes it possible to capture different individuals' interpretation of reality and allows for an understanding and comparison of the meaning and significance of gender in sponsorship collaborations. Interpretivist research is usually performed through qualitative studies since it allows for a dialogue between the researcher and interviewee (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

In order to investigate the research question: *Which aspects in the sponsorship collaboration are affected by athletes' gender and why, when obtaining and maintaining sponsorship in Swedish elite football?* This study takes a qualitative multiple-case approach within elite football in Sweden. A qualitative study was found suitable since it focuses more on words rather than numbers as in a quantitative approach, and thus contributes to understandings of social structures, behaviours and cultures (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Ritchie et al, 2014). Case studies are also preferred when questions of "how" or "why" are posed and when there is focus on contemporary phenomenon in real life contexts (Yin, 2003). One could argue that a single case study would provide more of an in-depth knowledge about the topic, a multiple-case study is however said to give better possibilities to see larger patterns within a context and increases generalisability (Ibid). Evidence from multiple cases is also seen as more robust and to give analytical benefits (Herriott & Firestone, 1983; Yin, 2003).

3.2 Research Approach

Combining existing theory and empirical data in a study can be done in two main, but also contrasting approaches, namely the inductive or deductive approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The inductive approach being when theory is developed through empirical findings, whereas the deductive approach develops a theoretical framework from existing theory which then steers the analysis of empirical data (Ibid). Dubois and Gadde (2002) have however argued for an alternative approach to these studies, commonly known as the abductive approach. Theory and empirics then influence each other along the study in an iterative process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008).

In this study the abductive approach was used through an iterative process by going back and forth between exploring theoretical research in relation to empirical findings. This approach has been

widely used in case studies and was deemed suiting this study well due to the study's aim to understand why a phenomenon occurs in a specific context (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2008; Flick, 2007). Limited research from sport entities' perspective on sponsorship also provided small possibilities to create initial hypotheses on where collected empirics would steer us beforehand. There was thus a need to gradually explore which theory was most suitable for the purpose. The abductive method has however been criticised for its potential risk to increase subjective bias (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order to avoid this, interviewees from different nearby fields were consulted in a pre-study to understand how football clubs work with sponsorship, as well as best practice among sponsors arrowing down the purpose of the thesis, which will be elaborated upon in section 3.3.1.

Methodological Overview	
Epistemological Standpoint	Interpretivism
Research Strategy	Qualitative
Research Approach	Abductive
Research Design	Multiple-case study

Table 1: Methodological overview.

3.3 Data Selection

3.3.1 Preparatory Work

The study's six background interviews were held in the beginning of the study in order to explore the field and to gain insight to sponsorship collaborations within elite sport organisations in Sweden. Furthermore, it aided us in defining the research question. The interviews and reason for each specific interview are all presented in table 2. The interviews lasted approximately 20-120 minutes each. Half of them were conducted in-person and half by phone.

#	Interviewee	Reason for background interview
1	Representative for the female football elite leagues	To gain insight into women's football in Sweden.
2	Expert within sponsorship and events	To gain insight into best practice in sponsorship from a corporate perspective.
3	Former director of female football club in "Damallsvenskan"	To get a first impression of a female club's operational work.
4	Sponsorship agent	To gain an external perspective of what an investor in sport seeks when entering a sponsorship agreement.
5	Former elite player in "Damallsvenskan"	To get an impression of how players experience and notice sponsorship collaborations.
6	Representative from an organisation working for sponsorship equality	To gain insight into the sponsorship distribution situation in Sweden as well as into potential challenges for clubs.

Table 2: Interviews-Preparatory work.

3.3.2 Data Selection

In order for the study to be successful, the choice of cases was important due to its influence the outcome of the study (Yin, 2003). Unlike a quantitative study where a representative sample affects the results, the cases themselves in a qualitative study are expected to be of relevance for the studied topic (Ibid). The selection of cases in the study was thus done sequentially. The cases of sport organisations were chosen first following the steps presented in figure 5.

3.3.2.1 Selecting Sport Organisations

SELECTING SPORT ORGANISATIONS

1. Focusing on one sport → 2. Choosing performance level → 3. Choosing type of performer → 4. Deciding on distribution level

Figure 5: Selection-process for sport organisation.

As a first step we decided to focus on football, the main reason being that it is the largest sport in Sweden with a high number of female and male players. The study required possibilities for comparison since we wanted to identify what aspects of gender and why these play a role in sponsorship collaborations. The decision to base the study on one sport only meant that other factors of difference for example type of arena, outdoor or indoor sport, which could affect sponsorship, were excluded.

As a second step the level of performance, amateur or elite, was decided upon. Since sponsorship amounts are the greatest at elite level and decisions of whom to sponsor were assumed to be of greater importance for the sponsors, the decision for elite level was made. The alternative lower level would have either been younger players or semi-professionals. At the elite level sponsorship is one of the main sources of income needed to finance the higher salaries.

In the third step, the level of club and team was chosen. Sponsorship of national teams or of individual players was excluded. The study of clubs at team level was decided due to a large sample and the possibility to study sponsorship collaborations through the clubs' operations. Had we focused on individual players, the dynamics within sponsorship and football in Sweden were expected harder to isolate in relation to gender. Furthermore, the choice to not explore sponsoring at a national level was related to the benefits of conducting a multiple-case study. Since we were based in Sweden, geographic proximity, access and convenience prevented us from comparing different countries' national sponsorship endorsements.

As a fourth and final step, the decision of which football clubs to study, was made. In the elite leagues in Sweden the football clubs either manage a women's team, a male team, or both in the same club. These will be referred to as women's club, men's club and mixed club from here on. The ambition was to have an even distribution between the three types of clubs to allow for contrasting comparisons of the experiences and methods of work to see if this actually played a role in sponsorship collaborations.

3.3.2.1.1 The Studied Clubs
The study came to include nine football clubs. Four were women's clubs, two from "Damallsvenskan", one from "Elitettan" and one club with a women's team in "Damallsvenskan" and men's team below elite level. Also three men's clubs in "Herrallsvenskan" and two mixed clubs with teams in "Damallsvenskan" and "Herrallsvenskan" participated.

When contacting clubs the request was to speak with a person with close insight to the club's sponsorship collaborations. In terms of access and selection of cases, nine out of twelve clubs in "Damallsvenskan" were contacted initially. Two were excluded beforehand due to travel distance and one due to a non-comparable sponsorship income structure. Six of the contacted clubs were on referral from the pre-study, two via players in the clubs, and one via the former director of the club. Three agreed to participate without reminder. A fourth was willing but cancelled last minute which is why one club in "Elitettan" was contacted on referral and included in the study.

In "Herrallsvenskan" two clubs had already agreed to participate through the contact for the women's club. Another four clubs were thereafter contacted via e-mail chosen for performance level and geographical proximity. Out of these, three clubs agreed to participate. Although a shortage of mixed clubs, due to lack of their existence at elite level, the three additional men's clubs deemed the case selection satisfying.
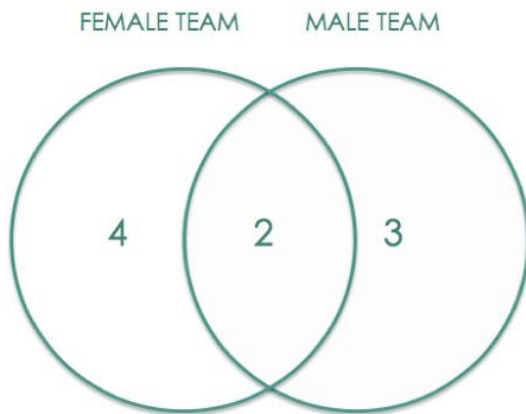
FEMALE TEAM   MALE TEAM

4   2   3

Figure 6: Distribution of studied football clubs.

3.3.2.2 Selecting Sponsors

SELECTING SPONSORS

1. Focusing on sponsors of one sport

2. Choosing level of sponsoring

3. Choosing the way to contact

Figure 7: Selection-process for sponsors.

Also the choice of which sponsors to include was done sequentially. A first criterion was that all sponsors had to sponsor at least one of the studied football clubs and secondly that they were title sponsors. By including sponsors linked to football, the perspective of the football clubs would contribute with further perspectives in the analysis as well as increase relevant findings of managerial implications.

Title sponsor was the chosen level of sponsorship due to the importance and extent of the investment for the sponsor. Although a study with many different levels of sponsorship may have given us an even wider understanding of sponsoring and gender, time duration of the study required a limitation for a satisfying analysis.

3.3.2.2.1 The Studied Sponsors

To balance the perspective of the studied football clubs, nine sponsors were interviewed. Six of the sponsors had sponsor engagements with clubs with both a women's and a men's club, two with women's clubs and one with a men's club (See appendix 3). Out of the interviewed sponsors seven were title sponsors and two were general sponsors. General sponsors were requested in the cases where there was no access to title sponsors.

All sponsors were contacted via referral from interviewed football clubs, which provided a sample of sponsors from companies in different industries, with different size and ownership structure. Some operated locally, others nationally and internationally. Our sponsor sample was consequently rather varied and heterogeneous, and as underlined by Maxwell, 2005 *"sampling should be oriented*

towards collecting heterogeneity in the field", allowing for comparison and implying that if cases are too similar, difficulties in meaningful comparisons can occur (Flick, 2007). In total fourteen sponsors were contacted either via e-mail or phone and nine agreed to participate. By using referral contacts, the risk for bias among sponsors existed with sponsors for example being more concerned of what they reveal. However, the interviews were focused on a more general level of sponsorship strategies to avoid bias (see appendix 4). Also, by contacting sponsors through the clubs, access was improved and we were assured to speak with the right person of involvement, a position that can vary depending on sponsor.

As can be observed in the sample (see appendix 3), the interviewed sponsors were to a higher extent linked to women's clubs than men's or mixed clubs. Even though none of the interviewed sponsors sponsored a mixed club, six of the participating sponsors sponsored both a women's and a men's club respectively. In this way the sponsors can be seen as replacing a sponsor of a mixed club.

3.4 Data Collection Process

3.4.1 Primary Data - Main Study
The primary data in the main study includes 18 interviews, nine with respondents in the football clubs and nine from the sponsor side.

3.4.1.1 Football Clubs
The interviews lasted between 35 and 90 minutes and took place March - April 2017. Interviews with the sport club were prioritised to be face-to-face. One person who had good insight into how the sponsorship activities were undertaken, was interviewed in each club. However, due to the interview period taking place in relation to the busy period of the start of this year's football season, two interviews with men's clubs were conducted over telephone on request from the interviewees. Some of the interviews with women's clubs were also booked with short notice. This in combination with large geographical distance precluded in person interviews and were thus conducted over phone. The other five interviews were conducted in person (details in appendix 2). There is a possibility that the quality of the interviews would have increased if all these interviews had been done in person, but to compensate, we asked for an extra ten minutes for the phone interviews in order to ask clarifying questions and allowed the interviewee an opportunity to come back to and reflect on topics that had been previously mentioned in the interview.

Theoretical saturation was seen as experienced after speaking with a majority of the interviewed football clubs (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011). Something that made some of the final interviews slightly shorter and where focus instead centred on areas emerging as more interesting for the analysis.

3.4.2 Interview Style Clubs
Unstructured interviews were preferred since it allowed each interview to become more of a conversation, which can result in a deeper talk where room for personal reflection can occur (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The lack of structure created a conversation where interviewees were able to freely reflect in relation to the topic. To create a direction for the conversation the phases of a

sponsorship collaboration were used as a frame. The thesis was introduced as a study of sponsorship activities within elite football in Sweden, without emphasising the gender aspect in order to not create an initial bias. The topic about different circumstances and conditions for football clubs did occur in all interviews, but to varying degrees.

Both authors were present during all interviews in the main study, one responsible for leading the interview and the other one for documentation, which by Bechhofer et al., (1984) can be seen as favourable (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Throughout the interview, on occasion, the more passive author joined in in the discussion and asked follow-up questions; something that contributed to the situation being more relaxed and conversational. All interviews in the main study were also recorded and transcribed in order to secure that no issues were overlooked when conducting the analysis.

3.4.3 Sponsors
The interviews with sponsors were also held in March and April 2017 and lasted approximately 20 to 40 minutes. In all cases except one, they were conducted over telephone. The main reason for conducting telephone interviews was the combination of the geographical spread of the sponsors and that some of the interviews were held on the same day. The interviewees were contact-persons to the interviewed football clubs and can therefore be seen as central persons within their organisation in relation to sponsorship activities (see appendix 3).

3.4.4 Interview Style Sponsors
The shorter interview time and the fact that most interviews were conducted over telephone affected the interview guide in two ways. First in order to avoid, or limit the bias effect of being engaged with clubs in the study, the interview guide was set on a general level, asking the interviewee of general strategies and policies in relation to sponsorship. In comparison to the interviews with the clubs, the interviews with sponsors were semi-structured since a certain number of questions were asked to all interviewees and did leave less room for reflection than an unstructured interview (see appendix 4). Also in these interviews the gender factor was brought up more as a question in relation to why or why not a women's, men's or mixed club were sponsored.

3.4.5 Secondary Data
In addition to interviews, secondary data sources such as sponsorship industry reports, the clubs' websites and various shared sales material from clubs, have been used to add understanding of the researched field. On the sponsor side, cases of formal policy documents were consolidated if possible. This was mainly done in the study's early phase, during the time of the pre-study, with the intent to understand and formulate relevant questions in the interview guide. On the sponsee side sales brochures and respective websites were studied to complement the understanding of clubs sales propositions to sponsors.

3.5 Data Analysis
In relation to the abductive approach the analysis and data collection was done simultaneously, especially in relation to the pre-study. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and read in parallel to the process to be able to adjust interviews in relation to new fields that arose in interviews. In

addition, we spent about 15 minutes directly after each interview to summarise the main topics of interests for the analysis and also to give each other feedback to improve the interviews along the way.

When analysing, the empirical findings in the transcribed material was grouped and categorised (Bryman & Bell, 2011) in accordance to the theoretical framework. The use of Excel facilitated the process of mapping according to themes. In this process, quotes which could provide and exemplify experiences well in relation to themes, were also selected. Information deemed irrelevant was excluded to secure that data in the main analysis was focused and related to the purpose and research question. Patterns for the groups could later be identified and comparisons and conclusions drawn.

3.6 Research Quality

Seeing the qualitative nature of this study, the risk for subjectivity in the authors' interpretations exists although precautionary measures were taken (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order to avoid and minimise bias in the interpretation of data in our explorative study, we have chosen to discuss and evaluate the quality aspects of reliability and validity, which concern the credibility in the undertaken research (Ritchie et. al. 2014).

3.6.1 Reliability

Reliability includes internal and external reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2011, Yin, 2003). The former meaning the extent of replicability of the study, whereas the latter implies the extent to which the authors agree upon what they see and hear (Ibid). A concern in regard to reliability, is the difficulty and almost impossibility in fulfilling this when doing a qualitative study, the reasons being that it is undertaken in social and dynamic context at a certain point in time (Bryman & Bell, 2011; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Nevertheless, in order to increase internal reliability both authors were present during the interviews. After each interview a discussion was held among the authors so that interpretations of experiences could be agreed upon. Furthermore, shorter repetitions of what the respondents said and questions of whether we had understood correctly was a method used to ensure clarity and increase reliability. Other attempts to increase reliability include thorough descriptions and documentation of methods and data collection, which is presented in the sections above (Yin, 2003). Having transcribed interviews, a scrutiny of the collected empirics is also enabled and in addition, the interview guide for the semi-structured interviews (see appendix) can ease in replication of the study.

3.6.2 Validity

Also validity can be divided into two parts in regard to qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011) internal validity concerning the extent to which causal statements are supported by the study, whereas the external validity goes into the extent that the findings in the study can be generalised into a wider setting (Ritchie et. al, 2014). In regard to internal validity, various measures were undertaken. Respondent validation for example served to increase the internal validity as to confirm the meanings by participants (Ritchie, 2014). Additionally, a broad sample of clubs (men's,

women's or mixed) were interviewed along with main sponsors from various industries and disciplines (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

External validity can be seen as reached as we identified patterns and themes across cases that were compared against each other, analytical generalisations can thus be assumed (Yin, 2003). Our multiple-case study allowed for the use of the replication logic where both similar cases had been selected, *literal replication*, as well as contrasting cases, *theoretical replication (Ibid)*. Differences for example included contextual factors and differences in gender of the teams.

3.7. Methodological Limitations

Although a qualitative study was done for the reasons mentioned above, limitations with the approach do exist. To gather valid and true data, we relied on the respondents' willingness to share information. Something described as the Hawthorne-effect which means that respondents exaggerate positive and negative experiences as a result of the sensation of being noticed can however cause bias (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Certain aspects, that respondents might also take for granted, and thus do not mention in the interviews is also something that can occur. Furthermore, the topic could perhaps be perceived as sensitive to some interviewees, meaning that it was important to establish a sense of trust. Some interviews unfortunately had to be conducted by phone, and the time we spent with the interviewees was limited.

Our ways of overcoming these matters and raising the level of trust were to try to meet in person in a location chosen by the interviewee, often at their office. Something that was done with the intention of making the interviewee feel safe in an environment they knew. In addition, the face-to-face meetings often started with small talk, with a description of the study, of us as investigators and assurance of anonymity to the extent it was possible. At the end of every interview we also asked the interviewees whether there was anything else we should know about which gave them a chance to tell anything else of importance.

4. EMPIRICS

The following chapter gives an account of the empirical findings of the study. The main takeaways from the interviews form the basis for the analysis in the upcoming analysis section. The case organisations are briefly *introduced* and thereafter their experiences are presented, starting with *the football clubs* followed by *the sponsors*.

4.1 Football Clubs

4.1.1 Introducing the Football Clubs

4.1.1.1 Women's Clubs
Women's football clubs have two to six full-time employees responsible for work related to the clubs' administration and sponsorship collaborations. Remaining work is done on a voluntary basis. The size of the clubs is experienced as limiting possibilities of finding and approaching new sponsors, as well as taking care of existing ones:

"All work ends up on very few people. Then you don't find the time to [do everything you want]. I'm one person and I only have 24 hours a day."

-WC4

In WC1 and WC2 one person is responsible for marketing activities and in one of them the director of the club is also closely involved in sponsorship activities. WC3 has a group for sponsorship in the board, while WC4 has chosen to use an external sales company to acquire parts of the sponsorship revenues.

4.1.1.2 Men's Clubs
In all men's clubs a dedicated role for sponsorship, or a marketing department working with sponsorship activities exist. MC1 which is the smallest organisation of the three interviewed clubs on the male side, only has one person working with sales and sponsorship full time, but expresses a wish to increase the number of people:

"I do everything, it's such a small club. We should be more [people], but in all clubs the finances always decide [what you can do]"

-MC1

MC2 has three sales representatives in the marketing department working with business to business relations, while MC3 has chosen to use an external sales organisation from which they have three sales representatives working full time for them:

"They are fully concentrated on [MC3], they sit in our offices, they are a part of our organisation so when we have staff meetings or conferences they are always there. They have [MC 3] business cards and work as representatives for us one could say."

-MC3

4.1.1.3 Mixed Clubs

The two mixed clubs have marketing departments for sponsorship activities. MIX1 has chosen to use an external sales organisation with three salespeople in addition to the internal organisation of four people doing sponsorship-related work.

Both clubs have one person as head of the marketing department, which includes sponsorship activities. This person has an overall role of coordinating sponsorship activities and to set the sponsorship strategy. While MIX1 has a combination of sales by an external company and management of existing relations within the club, MIX2 has actively chosen to manage all parts of sponsorship activities internally.

4.1.2 What are football clubs' perception of what they offer sponsors?

4.1.2.1 Women's Clubs

All women's clubs offer traditional sponsorship possibilities, such as banners in the arena, tickets to games and exposure on sport gear. Exposure is used as an argument, but then in a local context due to low media coverage at a national level and that games are not broadcasted on TV.

When the clubs approach sponsors, they have often researched companies in advance. In sales-meetings they also listen attentively to what companies look for in a potential collaboration in order to give them a return on their investment:

"An insurance company could think that [engagements in the local community to prevent crimes] seems interesting, and then we focus on that. If they are interested in that we are playing in "Damallsvenskan" and want to participate in our corporate network to get business, well then we focus on that. We need to have a background information of what makes them tick. The presentation of the club is usually very short. These are our values, we think this would interest you."

-WC1

The clubs also have corporate networks, mainly with the ambition for companies to network and do business:

"It's not rocket science, [...] but [a] pretty classic network with everything from speed dating to lectures about different topics, to kick-offs and beer- and wine tastings. Everything to create relations and contact and from there business."
-WC1

They also mention that they increasingly use CSR-activities in their sponsorship collaborations. The form differs depending on geographical region and regional challenges, but usually involves football or the players in some way. The players in one club for example mentor and lead practice sessions for youth teams:

"The goal for us [with this engagement] is that they [girls] shall feel that we are the team representing them. [...] When I started I heard this was what we did best [...] so then we just explored "how can we do this even better?" This part is related to youth development and is something that a lot of companies recognise."

-WC2

4.1.2.2 Men's Clubs

Men's clubs all offer similar alternatives to sponsors and agree with each other that sponsoring today includes elements of giving something back to the sponsor - the time for donations is gone. They also have a focus on the possibilities of exposure whenever the team is playing a game in "Herrallsvenskan". This means exposure to the audience in the arena as well as to TV-audience, and potential media coverage depending on how the game and the sport is covered in media:

"It's both the games, it's on the sport gear, in other contexts, it's in social media, it's digitally, all kinds of exposure one could say."

-MC2

The clubs very much use the "game experience" as an argument and express how it is to watch a game live with thousands of others:

"[The game] is our main product you could say. That we have a team in [Herr]allsvenskan that plays games in [Herr]allsvenskan. That one can come here and eat, one can rent a terrace, provide tickets to one's customers or employees, or whatever it could be."

-MC2

Furthermore, men's clubs have corporate networks into which they put much effort:

"We have a culture [...] to have a strong network and organise many activities for the companies that are a part of the network."

-MC3

All men's clubs also point out the importance of being responsive to the needs of the companies and to do research on what their needs might be:

"I would say that the first thing one does is to actually understand what needs the potential sponsor has from using us as a platform."

-MC3

Furthermore, the solutions many times become tailored to the sponsors' needs. Tailored solutions are often combinations of pre-set options, for example a terrace at the game plus a membership in the corporate network. Different sponsor levels, classical bronze, silver, gold menus do exist, though MC2 expresses that they abandoned this strategy since they found it outdated. CSR is furthermore acknowledged by all clubs as a potential of which they have not exploited fully yet in their sponsorship strategies:

"Two years ago when I started, then [MC 2] might have worked with CSR without knowing it. What we did then was to package it [...]. We have to be better at the marketing and communication of it."

<div align="right">

-MC2

</div>

4.1.2.3 Mixed Clubs

Both mixed teams have strong brands in the Swedish football arena and present a large range of opportunities for sponsors. MIX1 focuses on the possibility for companies to gain exposure and associational value by sponsoring the club and sell the brand as a whole:

"Women's [football] is in itself, I mean, it's hard to put a price on them, it's hard to get a value out of it. So it gives a higher value if we combine it in the rest."

<div align="right">

-MIX1

</div>

MIX2's main message in its sales folder is the community of the team, engagement, and social responsibility. When presenting the club for sponsors, the potential sponsor is given the opportunity to choose which team one wants to sponsor or if one wants to sponsor various teams. The selling process and main arguments when promoting sponsor opportunities with both teams are however the same:

"It [to have the women's team in the club] feels great, foremost for us at the marketing department when we meet with partners. It becomes really hard to say "no, well we only represent men and boys in society of today". I mean, it's just not possible. So it's something we have fought for [...] to be able to use the whole force."

<div align="right">

-MIX2

</div>

Both clubs offer traditional sponsorship opportunities, as well as active corporate networks. MIX1 has over time pursued a strategy of tightening the network by increasing the price and having more exclusive events for the members:

"We try to end each year with a trip for the network where we go abroad with our biggest partners to watch football."

<div align="right">

- MIX1

</div>

The corporate network is connected to the club as a whole and its brand. Both clubs also have CSR-projects and foremost MIX2 identifies itself as a channel for these projects:

"We have an upcoming engagement in relation to social responsibility where [a sponsor] we, female and male players go out to schools to lecture about taking the step from high school to adulthood and work life, what one might have to think about."

<div align="right">

-MIX2

</div>

With a large span of opportunities for companies to sponsor, both clubs also recognise the need to be flexible in sales meetings, to be able to provide a solution that fits the company.

4.1.3 What demands do clubs experience from sponsors?

4.1.3.1 Women's Clubs

In general, women's clubs meet positive reactions from companies and can see an increasing interest in both CSR-engagements and willingness to sponsor more gender equally. There is a feeling that such attitudes are spreading now that some companies have taken the lead and also made official statements:

"[The debate on gender equal sponsoring] has existed for quite a while, and pretty large companies have entered. [...] and then things start happening with their surroundings, their suppliers, customers, and everything. So I think that if a few start it gets the ball rolling."

-WC4

All interviewees do however mention that they still meet companies that do not have the same perception of women and men in football. That puts the clubs in the position of having to educate companies that female and male elite players perform the same sport, to the same extent and compete at the same levels:

"The culture among companies is maybe not that one, I mean we are an elite club and we have professional players [...] But [the companies] are almost surprised. [...]. The companies probably don't have an understanding of that we have to compete with teams from the European leagues that have much more money. [...] The players spend as much time as male players do. But since we are a women's club I think we have a harder time."

-WC2

This attitude is partly expected to be affected by whom you meet in a company you talk to:

"What kind of person am I talking to? Is it a 60-years old business "oldster", then you don't have to use the softer values, they are usually not very interested in that."

-WC4

In addition, some companies are seen to not be as knowledgeable of sponsoring, to not understand the gains from sponsorship investments and activities. It is seen as that the complexity of sponsorship and the change in society should bring opportunities for sponsoring women, but neither companies, nor football clubs have grasped this fully:

"I don't think that we have understood how we can measure the future in a way, how we can go outside the box if we use new methods. If I look a few years back [...] with all blogs that appeared. Young girls and boys get tremendous exposure and they have made a lot of money, it was genius. But we don't react - the older generation."

-WC1

The combination of underestimating women's football and not understanding the possibilities of sponsorship properly is perplexing to the clubs. They believe that companies, with small efforts, could improve the image of their own brand and invest in society at the same time:

"Both centrally, regionally and locally, it's about increasing the awareness of what companies actually can get in return by investing in women's sport at elite level versus investing in men's sport. Sure, they say "well, all games are broadcasted on TV". Yes, but what do you get out of the broadcast? How much publicity can you relate to yourself? [...] If you invest one million in a team in "Herrallsvenskan", you get the same return but for two hundred thousand in "Damallsvenskan".

-WC4

Furthermore, media is questioned for ignoring women's sport, mainly focusing on male sport, especially newspapers at a national level:

"When we qualified for "Damallsvenskan" a lot of journalists, also [from national newspapers] contacted us. They didn't ask a single question related to sports [...] they had only one question: "will your arena be approved for "Damallsvenskan"? [...] they have not been interested in how we have performed in a single game."

-WC1

As a reaction to media's ignorance the clubs use social media to create interest about the sport and to promote their clubs.

4.1.3.2 Men's Clubs

Reasons for sponsoring football clubs are expressed as varied and many. Most sponsors have also been around for a long time. What is stated as most important for the companies the clubs meet is if the companies get a return on their investment.

From the clubs' viewpoints, competition for sponsorship resources is mainly related to the brand of other men's football clubs in Sweden. Furthermore, they experience an increased demand for CSR-projects from companies, as well as to include women in their sponsorship activities:

"I would say that a challenge for us is to look at how we should treat [the demand for gender-equal sponsoring] since we don't have any [female players in our club]."

-MC3

4.1.3.3 Mixed Clubs

Both clubs have a strong fan-base and point out that this affects sponsorship opportunities, both in positive terms of attracting sponsors, but also that it can make companies hesitant to sponsor. Being associated with one club can mean losing customers supporting another team. This is something that in a way has been addressed by the clubs through sponsorship collaborations together with other clubs.

Also due to strong club-brands the mixed clubs experience that many sponsors are more attracted to the brand itself, rather than the gender of one team or the other. MIX2, who merged with ta women's club, experience current sponsors to be positive about the merger. However, in this first year after the merger not all sponsors which expressed a positive attitude have chosen to invest in the female team:

"If there is money, then they support the women so to say. But then you never know what their [real] reasons are to say no to us."

<div align="right">

-MIX2

</div>

In MIX1, few sponsors are specifically sponsoring the female team. The ones that are, often have personal relations to the team or want to make statement that they support women's sport and gender equality.

4.1.4 How is the collaboration executed?

4.1.4.1 Women's Clubs
The execution of the collaboration, involves two types of activities: to activate the sponsor in activities and to activate the own club. The type of sponsor-activity varies, it can for example be to participate at corporate network events, be the host of a game, nominate player of the game, hold a marketing event, or perform other sponsor requested activities.

The network events activate sponsors continuously and has required the most effort from women's clubs over time, since the events generally reoccur monthly. Each occasion gives the club the possibility to represent itself and build on the sponsor-relationship, as well as for the sponsors to do business:

"It is not really connected to football, more than that our players are there and that we talk a bit about football."

<div align="right">

-WC2

</div>

When activating the own club, women's clubs activate their players to a large extent, partly due to the lack of resources in relation to sponsorship activities. Examples of this activity is to co-create a strategy with a sponsor or to be active through social media.

The clubs experience that satisfied sponsors stay and therefore deem the management of the sponsorship collaboration and relation to be the most important factor for success. It takes considerably more time to find a new sponsor than to increase the sum from an existing sponsor, which is another argument for prioritising care in the relationship.

"...therefore it's very relevant to spend a lot of time on the existing ones. And that one is good at taking care of them."

<div align="right">

-WC4

</div>

4.1.4.2 Men's Clubs
Also the execution for men's clubs involves the two activities where one above all activates the sponsor, or the club. When activating sponsors many activities are related to the actual matches. Title sponsors in one club are invited to the team's preparation right before the game and for example listen to the tactics. Other examples are watching the game with a business partner, inviting employees to watch, as well as participating in the corporate network.

"The greatest return that we see for many of our companies [in the corporate network] is [...] the possibility to do business within the network."

-MC3

Activation from the clubs' side is also emphasised on the corporate network where the people responsible for sponsor relationships work actively to create business for the companies involved. Something that can start even before the official relationship has started:

"I always fight for generating business [for companies] even before [they] have become sponsors. If we take an example, [one of our title sponsors] is [expanding], they need clothes to the staff, [printed material], they need everything from scratch. Then I have another sponsor [that is in the printing industry]. Then I call that sponsor and say "you have to meet me tomorrow I have a customer for you." At the same time I tell the title sponsor that "now you will get special prices since you are sponsoring me"."

-MC1

Also the players can be activated, especially in engagements related to CSR where they go to schools and recreation centres in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods and act as role models. No matter what the activity is, professionalism in the relation is emphasised as the most important aspect.

4.1.4.3 Mixed Clubs

Also the mixed clubs have activities related to either activating the sponsor or the club, in addition to the traditional sponsoring. Activating sponsors is related to games for the men's team foremost and to the arena. Sponsors can bring business partners or employees to watch the games, or for example have a football tournament in the arena in relation to the game. Otherwise it is foremost the corporate network where sponsors are most active and where they are described as friends:

"It has become a pretty close group now, so it almost feels as if they betray their friends if they leave."

-MIX1

Activation of players and people related to the team is done to some extent. For example, MIX2 had an on-going campaign in 2016 together with one of the title sponsors where the team assisting the players was featured in different videos for the sponsor. Players also for example get together with a partner to meet teenagers and to talk about life after school. In addition, the clubs work hard to create business for their sponsors in the corporate network in order to have satisfied sponsors that want to stay on:

"As long as we deliver [...] it becomes harder for [sponsors] to drop off, when they gain from [an engagement]. So that puts higher pressure on us. To just put up logos everywhere and not do anything else is super simple."

-MIX1

4.1.5 How is the outcome of the collaboration evaluated?

4.1.5.1 Women's Clubs

Evaluation of a collaboration is seen as a continuous activity during the collaboration. It is common for a sponsorship contract to be extended when the contract reaches its end. Most contracts run for one year, but they can be up to three. If the contract included specific goals to attain, the evaluation is related to these. However, many outcomes of a collaboration are deemed hard to measure due to qualitative outcomes. All evaluations are related to sponsor gains.

Except for meeting the terms of a contract, the players' behaviour during the collaboration indirectly affects the evaluation:

"It [also] depends on how we behave and how we succeed both on and off the field [...] both parts have to work."

-WC3

This was stressed as important to all clubs, and as important to all clubs, regardless of gender according to WC3.

4.1.5.2 Men's Club

Also men's clubs see the evaluation as continuous during the collaboration and try to ensure sponsor satisfaction along the way:

"The worst thing I know is… I have talked with some who "well I would have liked to be a partner to you, but you never got in touch", then you just want to go back in time."

-MC2

The level of evaluation they experience that companies undertake however differs. Some do not evaluate whereas others measure specific parameters. Contracts are most often on yearly basis, but can be up to five. To extend a contract is however commonly occurring.

The clubs also make sure to keep track of their collaboration by follow-up on specific events. One club also mentions that they yearly survey how the collaboration is perceived:

"[They] enter what values they think it has given them to currently be sponsoring us, how they experience the contact with our sales representatives, how they experience that we represent our core values and what we can improve there, and so on."

-MC3

4.1.5.3 Mixed Clubs

In regards to length of contracts, existing contacts last between one to three years. The mixed clubs emphasise that they have a strong focus on showing what value a sponsor receives from sponsoring their club. The clubs gather large amounts of data, both on the characteristics of their audience, which can help when meeting new sponsors, as well as on the performance of sponsorship engagements, foremost related to exposure. Sometimes contracts include targets for number of

viewers of a message, or increased sales for a product that affects entitlement to bonuses from sponsors. Data from sponsors is also collected:

"We have an app in our network where we for example register all business deal generated from the network [...] in order to show exactly how much business it generates."

-MIX1

To properly evaluate and use chosen measures is something that the clubs claim to encourage. This is partly because they want to outperform whatever expectations that were initially set from the sponsor's side. MIX2 also points out the importance of working professionally in order to keep the level of increased investment.

"It's marketing departments, professionals who in return are measured on the investment they do, so we have to deliver KPIs back to them."

-MIX2

4.2 Sponsors

4.2.1 What is the purpose for sponsoring?

Purposes for sponsoring varied but more commonly stated were to receive more brand exposure, increase brand awareness and image and to make use of the sport club's business network. The sponsors who hoped to generate new business found it to be a good sales channel:

"It is really because [sponsoring] is such darn fun, plus it's a good network you know. And the network there, doesn't happen by itself, one really has to work and be active in these networks you know."

-Sponsor WC1

Some were engaged for the fun and the possibility of supporting a football club. Although some shared an appreciation for the networks, others meant that these networks were of little use to them business-wise, the reason being that their clients for example did not operate in the area or because their products were so specific that their clients would not be part of the club's corporate networks. One company claimed that they rarely went to the events, sponsoring was mainly done with the purpose of internal employer branding, where the main objective was to receive tickets:

"[Sponsoring of sport] is included in the internal employer branding you can say. So we often sponsor teams because we want tickets or something so that our employees can go and do a nice activity together."

-Sponsor MIX1

To receive national exposure and increase brand-awareness through traditional sponsoring was especially important for two respondents who had both invested in men's football clubs, one of them also sponsored a women's club. This sponsor stated the importance of local community-tied sponsoring. The appraisal of local sponsoring was repeated by a large number of the respondents who, in contrast, stated that national exposure would not be as beneficial to them. These organisations were often regionally present, customer or municipality owned, but not exclusively

so. It was then more important to build the brand and increase awareness in the geographical area of operation.

For some of the organisations it was important that sponsorship investments *aligned with the organisational strategy*. One sponsor emphasised the importance of giving back to the inhabitants in the local community and had sponsorship engagements tied and connected to vision and strategy based on three pillars, social responsibility, environmental responsibility and economic responsibility.

"First of all, we must be profitable in order to take responsibility in our local society [...] We are customer-owned, and part of the profit goes back to the customers, or the society in which we live, in one way or another."

-Sponsor MIX2

4.2.2 What drives the engagement to a specific sponsorship collaboration?

In regard to how companies decide why they sponsor specific football clubs, their purposes often aligned with choices they made. Apart from drivers elaborated upon further below, the sponsors expressed an expectation of getting something in return from their engagement. The possibility of doing business through corporate networks was attractive. One sponsor said that a decisive factor for the specific collaboration was that the sponsor had met a club representative who talked about their desirable network with companies which the sponsor found attractive. In contrast, a men's club sponsor had chosen its collaboration due to the team's large audience and the popularity of the sport:

"What's most interesting from a PR-perspective? Herrfotbollsallsvenskan. There aren't so many other sports in Sweden which are watched more than football, so Herrallsvenskan became a pretty obvious choice you know."

-Sponsor MC1

4.2.2.1 External and Internal Image
One sponsor, sponsoring both a men's and a women's club, emphasised the appreciation for the women's club's mentorship and youth programme and also explained that they wanted to attract more women to their industry, as well as finding new business partners through the network and build brand image.

Another sponsor used sponsorship for internal employer branding and could, through the collaboration, offer employees possibilities of watching games. In order to give a varied choice, the sponsor sponsored a range of sports and had decided to sponsor equally gender-wise (on athletic level). The choices of clubs to sponsor was put to vote in the employer-branding group responsible for sponsorship decisions. The policy for gender equal sponsorship was furthermore expressed as in line with the values of the company and something stated publically.

Another sponsor for both women's and men's clubs had a broader policy for sponsorship, also including sponsorship of culture as well as social engagements in order to give back to the community and position itself as caring for the community:

"It is stated in our guidelines that we should try to get the best balance [men and women] as possible. So [...] we try to look at what it looks like. [...] The reason why we are with [the club] [...] is because football is a sport we prioritise. It's not because we think it's extra fun in any way, but because we see that there is a great demand from the customers."

-Sponsor MIX3

A fourth sponsor stated that it was part of their strategy to sponsor and become partner sponsor in so-called strategic social projects in their local area. Through communication they would thereafter be able to strengthen the feeling of being local and doing good in the local community, and thus align sponsoring with their corporate strategy:

"We have a clear mission to be a voice in the local community in regards to gender equality. This is an important part of sustainability."

-Sponsor MIX2

4.2.2.2 CSR-engagement

Some of the examples mentioned above overlap into this CSR-engagement section. Sponsors remarked that they saw a collaboration with a club more as an exchange where there should be time for both parties to find activities that favour both of them. Another sponsor than the one mentioned earlier, also found the same women's club's mentorship youth program as an exemplary project to get involved in. They could reach much more youth clubs than the company would have been able to do by sponsoring each youth club individually, and also save time.

4.2.3.3 Decision-making

Some sponsors had one person with mandate to decide all or certain sponsorship sums on a case-to-case basis. In the case of larger sums, decisions were made by higher levels, such as the board or the CEO.

In some cases the sponsoring strategy needed to be approved by higher levels, but the executive choices of whom to sponsor was then made by a single person or groups responsible for sponsorship in the organisation. When authority approval was needed, it was also up to the sponsorship responsible person to present the case for the chosen strategy:

"I prepare the information that decisions are based on very carefully"

-Sponsor MIX2

In one case, the respondent had pushed for a change in the current sponsorship strategy in relation to getting a policy for gender equal sponsorship investments. To convince the organisation internally, the use of data on the current sponsorship engagements as well as a connection to the foundations of the company were deemed as deal-breakers. People noticed that male sport had been prioritised earlier but had not challenged it, and the fact that they had sponsored in this way was earlier not really considered strange:

"How many times should companies be able to hide behind: "Yes, but we have always sponsored this way. Yes, but it's because some want free tickets to games" […] No, this is in some way about challenging old structures and values."

-Sponsor MIX2

A sponsor of both a women's and men's club said that sponsorship was more relational earlier, as when being convinced by a salesperson or choosing by gut feeling; to have become more professional lately. The sponsor exemplified this by recently formulating criteria of how to deal with sponsorship. Examples of criteria was that the sponsee needed to be locally based and perform sport at elite levels, but preferably also provide possibilities of national exposure in order for the investment to give a return.

4.2.3 What is the exchange and return from a sponsorship engagement?

4.2.3.1 What do the exchange and expectations look like?

All sponsors expect something in return from their sponsee. For example to be game-hosts, the possibility of receiving tickets, the opportunity to meet players, to have specific events with the club, the VIP-terraces or to be displayed on various communication channels:

"Both because there are benefits for the customers. We get tickets, we invite people to games, we get exposure. But I also think that [the club] is a good role model for many of the local clubs and youths."

-Sponsor MIX3

The exchange in terms of business through the network is again an important priority, judged on how active and strong the corporate network is. So is the fact that the sport club has a brand which can represent well and place the sponsor in a good light. One sponsor of a women's club mentioned for example that they would not tolerate any scandals within the team. Some sponsors also mentioned a willingness to give something back to the sponsee:

"We want to join and help, because it is a club we are close to and we know and feel for this club. Then you want to help them and sponsor them with what we can you know. But of course, you want the club to give something back."

-Sponsor WC1

In addition to what can be described as closer relations, many of the sponsors mention that they are very active in their collaborations for example by organising events together, coming up with ideas jointly, developing web shops, having social media campaigns etc. Many found the cooperation between the sponsor and sponsee as crucial, and valued when genuine efforts are invested in the collaboration from both sides:

"Something that might make us slightly different from others is that we are not a sponsor who just enters in the beginning of the year and gives a sum of money and then says goodbye [...] we are quite active."

-Sponsor MC1

In addition, some sponsors particularly mentioned the significance of a sponsored team reaching and succeeding in final playoffs since it increased possibilities for more exposure. This was however mostly brought up in regards to the men's clubs.

4.2.3.2 How is the outcome evaluated?

Sponsors evaluate their sponsorship collaborations to different degrees. One sponsor revealed that the company does not evaluate the sponsoring but *"follows the heart"*. Some sponsors on the other hand said that they attempt to look at how much sales that were generated through the business network, however, difficulties in measuring and estimating this were expressed.

Lengthwise, the majority of the sponsorship contracts last one year. Some have two-year contracts though the longest one mentioned was three years. Most contracts are renegotiated before they end. As an example, one sponsor usually comes together with the sponsee when their contract is about to end and discuss how the year and the cooperation has been. An aspect also brought up by other sponsors was that they discuss not only for their own sake but also for the sake of the sponsee.

Furthermore, some of the sponsors make yearly comparisons of how sponsorship resources are distributed. They then see if resources go to pure men's or pure women's clubs. One respondent said that they had considered equality aspects out of an audience level, although this is not actually included in the evaluation. Furthermore, they aim at using the sponsorship resources based on presented guidelines.

"I'm looking at "what does it look like now with sponsorship? Just for men, just for ladies?" "

-Sponsor MIX3

To buy reports on media exposure is only done by one sponsor. Another sponsor on the other hand measures factors relating to more strategic goals with the sponsorship. For example by measuring locals' opinions in regards to sustainability issues, and thus receiving data on number of people mentioning their company.

Seeing that one of the sponsors just recently entered into one of the collaboration, they have not had the opportunity to evaluate their specific collaboration just yet. On the other hand, in terms of other sponsorship engagements, representatives from different departments reviewed whether the engagement was meaningful:

"Okey, what do we think this brings us? And really, reason on our own. What was good? What was bad? If we think it's meaningful to join in, if it gives us a lot in return. And it's built a lot on feeling."

-Sponsor MIX4

5. ANALYSIS

In this chapter, empirical findings are merged with the theoretical framework in order to address and investigate the research question of *which aspects in the sponsorship collaboration are affected by athletes' gender and why, when obtaining and maintaining sponsorship in Swedish elite football?* Each phase of the sponsorship collaboration is firstly presented from the perspective of the football clubs and thereafter from the sponsor perspective. In a combined manner each phase is then tied together and more specifically tries to analyse and answer the research question.

Figure 8: Overview of analytical framework.

5.1 Pre-phase

5.1.1 Football Clubs

5.1.1.1 Emphasised Values

Although the transactional view of sponsorship belongs to the past as mentioned by Ryan and Fahy (2012), all clubs in the study offer traditional sponsorship to sponsors. The clubs do however acknowledge that they seek to bring value to the sponsors, which also corresponds with the development of sponsorship, it is seen more as an investment (Meenaghan, 1983). What the value is differs between clubs with and without women's teams. While clubs with men's teams emphasised more on how sponsors could benefit from experiences and activities in relation to a men's club's game event and the arena, women's clubs focused more on how they, could become a valuable resource for sponsors, often in relation to CSR-projects.

5.1.1.2 Responsiveness to Needs

Rather than focusing on the team and its players when describing what to sell to sponsors, the clubs talked about themselves as a brand. This is something that sponsors could associate themselves with, an aspect identified as a success-factor when seeking sponsorship (Renard & Sitz,

2011). That congruence between sponsor and sponsee is expressed to enhance the brand image of the sponsor (Koo et. al, 2006; Speed & Thompson, 2000) implies that the sponsor's needs are to be prioritised when matching a collaboration. This can be seen as an explanation for the responsiveness which the clubs emphasise when they meet sponsors. Furthermore, this implies that it is not foremost gender that plays a role, but rather how the clubs can present the highest level of congruence in relation to a company's brand image.

5.1.1.3 Disconnected Activities

The corporate network can be seen as an example of clubs matching companies' needs. It contains networking activities and gives sponsors the opportunity to connect and do business with each other, thus allowing for direct return on investment. This can be seen as a way for the clubs to also have engagements disconnected from the athletic results in their respective league. The example is however also disconnected from football per se, which implies that gender could play a minor role.

Figure 9: Take-away from pre-phase, sponsee perspective.

5.1.2 Sponsors

5.1.2.1 Expected Returns

The expectation of financial returns from sponsorship investments as an outcome of an engagement (Cornwell et. al., 2005, 2009) is a point brought up by many of the respondents. For some, a major reason for collaborating was indeed to partake in the sport club's corporate network. One sponsor revealed that they would not be in the collaboration had it not been the business generated through it. On the other hand, the donation part still exists to some extent and the willingness and wish to genuinely help the sponsees was conveyed by some, which goes against the view scholars have on sponsorship today (Ryan & Fahy, 2012).

5.1.2.2 Exposure and Brand Image

Awareness was commonly stated as a reason for engaging in sponsorship activities, most often reached through exposure. Few sponsors however expressed an explicit need for national exposure

via for example television, which can indicate that the purpose for entering sponsorship collaborations relates to more than just raising awareness to the brand itself. Interest in how brand image, consumers' perception and view of a how company image can change through a collaboration, resonates with previous research (Crimmis & Horn, 1996; Crowley, 1991; Parker, 1991). That the sponsors who were interested in national exposure also sponsored men's clubs can be expected since these games gather larger audiences than women's games do, which is attractive when seeking exposure (Ryan & Fahy, 2012).

5.1.2.3 Strategic Resource

The preference for local sponsorship found by Johnston & Paulsen (2014) could also be seen in this study. These sponsors were also the ones seeking sponsorship related to their organisational strategies and thus seen to use the sponsee as a strategic resource to a larger extent, for example by using the engagement for public statements on gender equal sponsoring or legitimising a company's CSR engagements by having the sponsee organising activities in socio-economically deprived areas.

Figure 10: Take-away from pre-phase, sponsor perspective.

5.1.3 The Role of Gender in the Pre-phase

5.1.3.1 Traditional Sponsorship

In the first step of a sponsorship collaboration, when each party assesses its own strategy, it becomes apparent that traditional sponsorship still exists but also that clubs prioritise to adapt to sponsor demands. Since traditional sponsorship is demanded by some sponsors, it remains in their offer. The maintenance of old sponsorship practices could affect the possibilities for women's clubs to obtain sponsorship since this reinforces sponsorship activities related to exposure which are adapted to games with large audiences which typically are games with male teams.

5.1.3.2 Awareness and Image Locally

Companies interest to foremost gain exposure and improve brand image in relation to the local community speaks to women's clubs' advantage. Both sponsors in the study and women's clubs

have recognised this opportunity and taken advantage of it, foremost through different CSR-engagements. It was also found that companies who tie their sponsorship strategy to its organisational strategy to larger extent used the club as a strategic resource; which could be an advantage for women's clubs since it for example is disconnected from size of the audience.

5.1.3.3 Disconnected Activities

Finally, offering activities disconnected from the athletic performance should diminish the gender aspect of sponsorship choice. Nevertheless, it requires an appreciated management of the activity since the relationship is highly valued by companies (Johnston & Paulsen, 2014). This is further elaborated in section 5.3.
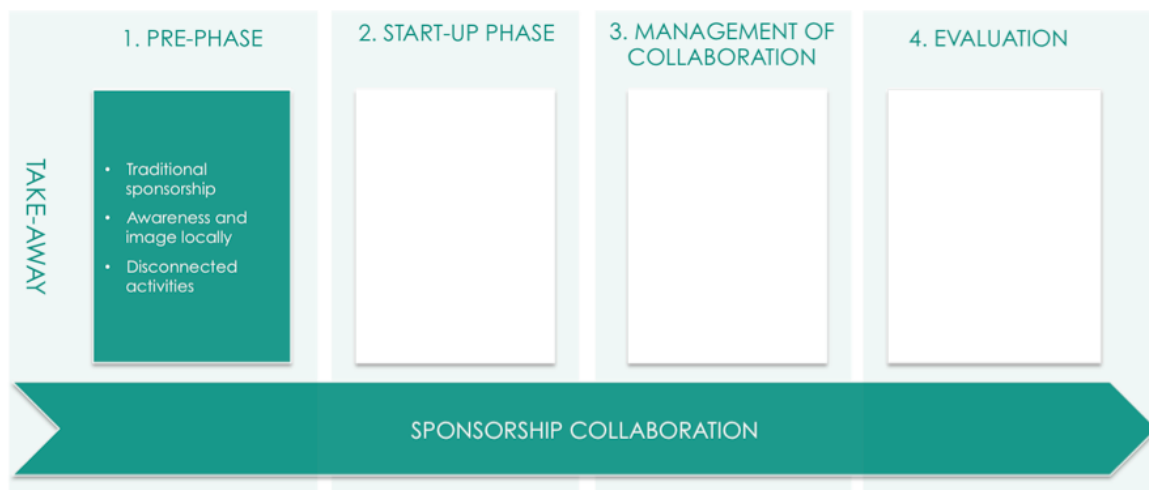

Figure 11: Combined take-away, the role of gender in pre-phase.

5.2 Start-up Phase

5.2.1 Football Clubs

5.2.1.1 Gender-related Misconceptions

As mentioned by Thjörmöe et al. (2002), companies have a tendency to keep sponsoring the same entities, although the evaluation of the collaboration might not meet expectations, something that shows the traditions facing sport sponsorship. Also the interviewed clubs mentioned tradition as something still influencing them when meeting potential sponsors. Women's clubs meet the traditional perception from companies not understanding that female and male players perform the same sport, something that also is a sign of companies seeing women as a peripheral category (Mean Patterson, 2003) within football. Women's clubs experienced this to be stronger expressed when they met older company representatives with a more conservative mind-set.

5.2.1.2 Uninformed Companies

Furthermore, women clubs emphasised that many of the companies they meet do not seem to fully grasp the potential of a sponsorship engagement. Rather than focusing on how they can benefit from the engagement as Meenaghan (1983) claim they can, some companies prioritised traditional sponsorship since it was what they knew. Women's clubs expressed this as limiting since they stress other benefits than exposure as more important in a sponsorship collaboration.

5.2.1.3 Peripheral Category Membership

The views from mixed clubs that female players are either harder to price, or need to exist in a club in order to gain more sponsorship, shows that also clubs with men's teams place women in the peripheral category of the sport as a reaction to the market (Mean Patterson, 2003). It can also be seen as a sign of acceptance as long as they contribute to the men's team and are seen as non-threatening to the existing norm (Cox & Pringle, 2015).

5.2.1.4 Challenged Norms

All clubs have acknowledged that they experience a trend among companies to request a focus on CSR in sponsorship activities. Some men's clubs also mention that they meet companies who are hesitant to sponsor them due to the absence of female players in the club. This shows that at least some companies do not align with the view of women as an "other" group in football (Kane & Lenskyj, 1998). Hegemony, the idea of the masculine norm as the top in the societal hierarchy (Connell, 2005) can therefore be seen as challenged by companies that stress these demands on football clubs and is additionally seen when public announcements of gender equal sponsorship policies are announced.

5.2.1.5 Media Ignorance

Women's clubs confirm that media still ignores women in sport (Williams & Hess, 2015), which can indicate that in the media-sector hegemony is still present. This also affects women's football since exposure is a common point of measure in collaborations (Cousens et al., 2006). Since exposure measurements are easier to quantify, media do not only promote male sports by writing more about it, but also reinforce the arguments of why male sport should be preferable to sponsor. However, with the changing media landscape, where social media compete with traditional media, women's clubs have also found a tool to somewhat challenge media's ignorance.

Figure 12: Take-away from start-up phase, sponsee perspective.

5.2.2 Sponsors

5.2.2.1 Strive For Rationality

In relation to theory it could appear as if sponsors are rational when choosing clubs to collaborate with (Thwaites, 1995; Walliser, 2003). In the study some sponsors expressed that the decision to first enter a collaboration was somewhat coincidental, for example through meeting a specific person. That others express that they have become more professional in their decision-making would however imply that decisions are becoming more rational, as stated by theory.

The consideration of geographical reach ties into (Aguilar-Manjarrez et al., 1997) theory about sponsor's creation of criteria when choosing collaboration partner. Criteria can be elaborated further to include characteristics of the club or on what can be achieved through an engagement (Meenaghan, 1983). Although some sponsors in the study had criteria or a policy when choosing collaboration, many did not. The ones that had were also the ones with sponsorship strategies that merged with the corporate strategy. The lack of criteria and policies can indicate a lack of objectivity in the decision-process among sponsors.

5.2.2.2 Influence of Criteria

The lack of decision-criteria in some cases, questions whether decisions to enter collaborations are rational. Since the sales process has been shown to resemble the one in professional services (Anthanasopoulou & Sarli, 2015) subjectivity can still be expected in relation to the decisions. Vance et al. (2016) in addition point out that the corporate culture can affect potential criteria, which might limit the possibilities for women's clubs to obtain sponsorship. This was however not found in the study since sponsors with criteria often had gender equal sponsorship as a criterion. Thereby hegemonic masculinity was challenged and the opportunity for women's clubs to obtain sponsorship increased.

5.2.2.3 Influential Individuals

Looking closer at sponsorship decision-makers, this varied among the sponsors. Some could decide individually, whereas some for example sought approval from higher authority and argued for one's opinion of choice. This means that few individuals are still in charge of the decisions and individual opinions (Javalgi et al., 1994) as well as competence can still influence the decision (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). Both personal interests and individuals' competence were found to influence sponsorship choices. While one sponsor was persuaded by the salesperson, another changed the board's mind on company sponsorship strategy. When this occurred the earlier male-prioritisation of sport was noted, but not challenged. So, in our study, the influence of individual's benefited women's clubs.

Figure 13: Take-away from start-up phase, sponsor perspective.

5.2.3 The Role of Gender in the Start-Up Phase

5.2.3.1 Tradition

In the start-up phase various signs imply that traditions still influence companies' sponsorship decisions. One being that women's clubs experience an attitude among companies where women are placed in a peripheral category. Furthermore, traditional sponsorship commonly occurs. Another is that clubs express that they have a more advanced approach than companies in the way of working with sponsorship. This is for example shown when women's clubs need to explain how a company can use sponsorship and have to address the misconception that football for men and women is different. Old sponsorship structures are maintained and indicates limitations for women's clubs in obtaining sponsorship. As exemplified by one sponsor, that large amounts of sponsorship went to male sport though it was not challenged, shows that sport is a male arena and can still be seen as a foundational discourse, highly naturalised and thus not questioned (Mean & Kassing, 2008).

5.2.3.2 Striving For Rationality

The suggestion of rational sponsorship decisions in relation to literature (Thwaites, 1995; Walliser, 2003) was found in a few cases in the study where sponsors had criteria relating to their choices. These sponsors often addressed gender equal sponsorship, which evens the possibilities between the genders. On the other hand, since also companies without criteria in the study sponsored both genders, the decision-making practice cannot be deemed a major influencer for possibilities of obtaining sponsorship.

5.2.3.2 Personal Influence

Just as Ryan & Fahy (2012) expressed, personal influence cannot be underestimated. As seen among sponsors, personal influence is not only related to personal preference, but also to personal competence. While football clubs tend to see more of a tendency of goodwill sponsoring in relation to women's clubs and teams, the sponsors with the most elaborate sponsorship strategies have most actively chosen to sponsor women's clubs. Nevertheless, since personal influence can be seen

to influence the choice to a large extent, the "oldsters" attitude of football as a male arena will influence the possibilities of obtaining sponsorship to some extent.

5.2.3.3 Hegemonic Masculinity Challenged

Media's continuous ignorance of women's sport could be expected to influence sponsors to a larger extent, since media is a measurement for exposure. Nevertheless, sponsors' active choices to be public about their gender equal sponsorship strategies shows a tendency of a change whereby women move away from being in a peripheral category in football (Mean Patterson, 2003). This study has seen signs of a trend change which can come to affect the possibility for women's clubs to obtain and maintain sponsorship even more in the future.
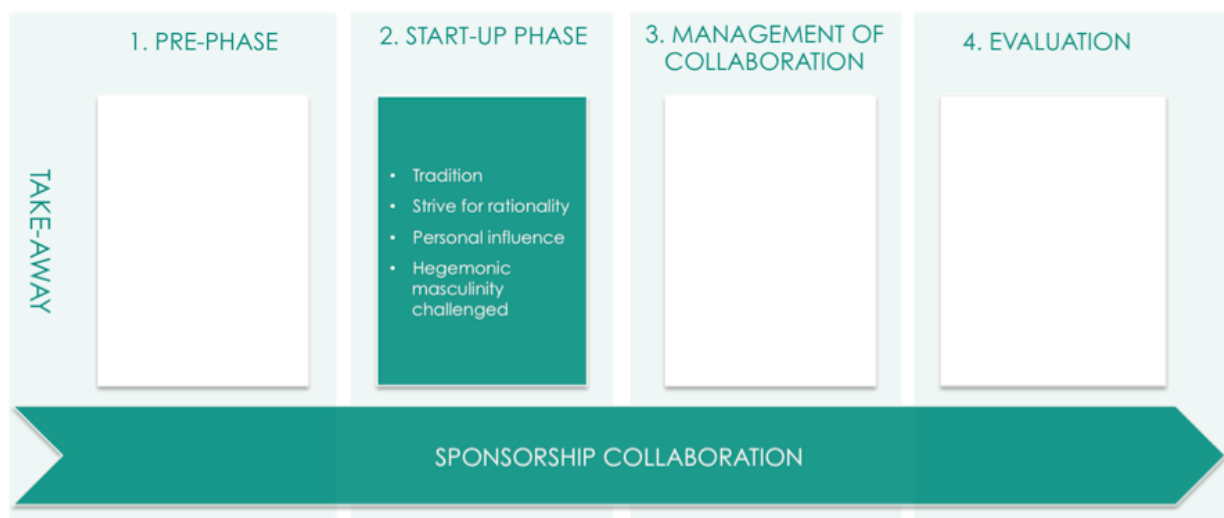

Figure 14: Combined take-away, the role of gender in start-up phase.

5.3 Management of Collaboration

5.3.1 Football Clubs

5.3.1.1 Professional Relationship

As mentioned in part 5.1.1. Swedish football clubs are slowly moving away from the transactional view of sponsoring (Ryan & Fahy, 2012), which is also shown in the management of the collaborations. A majority of the clubs saw a professional collaboration as crucial in order to maintain a collaboration, which resonates with the importance sponsors' see in the relationship (Johnston & Paulsen, 2014).

5.3.1.2 Internal Capabilities

Close relationships also require clubs to have internal capabilities to be able to engage in every collaboration (Ryan & Fahy, 2014), which challenges women's clubs further. Reason being that they do not have a department handling sponsorship activities to the same extent as male clubs do.

Women's clubs tend to foremost focus on activities disconnected from their games, such as corporate networks and CSR-related activities and then involve everyone in the club to co-create the activities. Men's clubs on the other hand focus their activities more in relation to games and the corporate network, which are managed by separate departments. Although women's clubs have smaller organisations, there is still an advantage for the sponsor who receives access to more varied resources in the club since everyone contributes to the collaboration. This can be seen as a competitive advantage (Amis et al., 1997, 1999; Dolphin, 2003; Fahy et al., 2004).

5.3.1.3 External Resources

That male clubs have a marketing department suggests that they have the opportunity to give their sponsors more attention, something that is shown by the active work the clubs do to create business for their sponsors. That some clubs with men's teams also have external organisations for sales assisting in the sales process liberates more time for these club to focus on the execution of current collaborations. In addition, that clubs work persistently with tightening the network, to create a group where it "almost would feel like a betrayal" to leave, is a sign of increased dependency by the sponsors in relation to the club (Fahy et al., 2004).

Figure 15: Take-away from management of collaboration, sponsee perspective.

5.3.2 Sponsors

5.3.2.1 Professional Relationship

That sponsorship collaborations lead to a development of close relationships, activities, and build competence (Farrelly et al., 2006; Amis et al. 1997) was also experienced by the sponsors, but on different levels. Some respondents still had more of a transactional relationship, for example the ticket-exchange. Others developed and shared new ideas together, for example about new events. Just as stated by Johnston & Paulsen (2014) the sponsors value the good relations and contact they have with their sponsees, something proved by the majority of collaborations which had existed for numerous years.

Figure 16: Take-away from management of collaboration, sponsor perspective.

5.3.3 The Role of Gender in the Management of the Collaboration

5.3.3.1 Professional Management

That the collaboration needs to be executed professionally is agreed upon, both by the sponsee and sponsor. This implies that sponsorship collaborations are becoming more relational (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). From both perspectives of the collaboration, signs of close relationships where the parties developed and built on each other's competences could be seen. While women's clubs are used as a resource in CSR-engagements to a larger extent, men's clubs were to a higher degree seen to create dependency specifically through the business network.

5.3.3.2 Disconnected Activities

Additionally, the business network, CSR-sponsorship activities, other business-related events can be seen as disconnected from elite level football itself. They can also be seen as disconnected from gender per se since they are not dependent on the gender of the athletes. This could increase possibilities for women's clubs to obtain and maintain sponsorship since neither gender nor the sport influences the management of mentioned activities. Though in a way it still does influence, reason being women's club have smaller organisations and less resources to manage their collaborations.
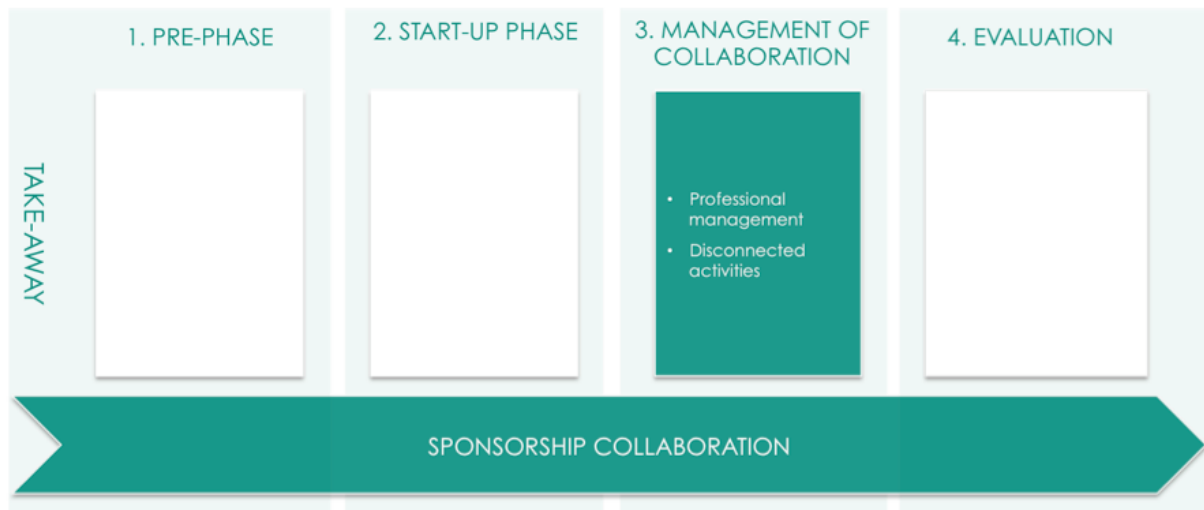
Figure 17: Combined take-away, the role of gender in management of collaboration.

5.4 Evaluation

5.4.1 Football Clubs

5.4.1.1 Short-term Contracts
Just as found by Johnston & Paulen (2014), also in Swedish football the majority of sponsorship contracts are one year long, for all clubs.

5.4.1.2 Measurements
While previous research has found that sponsors use measurements for evaluations to some extent (Thjörmöe et al., 2002), this study has shown that football clubs measure more aspects than requested. The main argument for that is to have valuable data when re-negotiating contracts. The larger the football club, the more measurements were used. Women's clubs however emphasise that it is hard to measure impact of engagements related to qualitative results, which is how many of their engagements can be evaluated.

5.4.1.3 Continuous Dialogue
The close sponsorship collaboration also requires continuous contact and evaluation. This could be an explanation of why companies do not decide in relation to what (if they have) measurements show (ibid), since the relationship weighs more than the quantifiable results (Johnston & Paulsen, 2014). Since quantifiable measures speak against possibilities for women's clubs to acquire sponsorship, the importance of the relationships improves them. The relationship on the other hand can be influenced by the view of women's football by the sponsors as mentioned in 5.2.1.

Figure 18: Take-away evaluation, sponsee perspective.

5.4.2 Sponsors

5.4.2.1 Untargeted Measurements

That most measurements in evaluations are related to exposure, for example media (Cousens et al., 2006) aligns with the sponsor in the study which uses media exposure reports for evaluation. Evaluation of brand image was however also found to exist, one sponsor for example measured change in locals' perception of the brand in relation to sponsorship activities. Therefore, indications of changes in measurements imply a development of the measures used earlier, such as only measuring consumers' remembrance of a brand, but not their perception of a brand (Meenaghan, 1999). Some sponsors had specific points of evaluation, as also Thjörmöe et al. (2002) have seen. Very few, however had targets for these points which decrease the importance of the results. Possibilities to maintain a collaboration can then be seen as gender neutral.

5.4.2.2 Continuous Dialogue

Many sponsors nevertheless expressed that good relationships and continuous dialogue was important in order to call the collaboration successful. This strengthens the argument for subjectivity in the decision to maintain a sponsorship collaboration. That some sponsors stated that they would continue sponsoring as long as the terms of the contract were fulfilled shows no extraordinary expectations on a collaboration. In addition, this was not seen to be gender-influenced, making the evaluation phase gender neutral.

5.4.2.3 Long-term Collaboration

Just as for the clubs, and as found in previous research (Johnston & Paulsen, 2014) many sponsors in this study expressed the preference for one year contracts. This gave the possibility to change or end contracts for either party if circumstances changed. This implies that terms for re-negotiations and evaluations are set to be rational. However, that many sponsorship collaborations in the study had been on-going for a long time and that a contentment between the two parties had settled, implies that sponsors keep to their traditions. Only misbehaviour by the sponsee on or off the field

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was mentioned as a reason to end a collaboration, or if what was stated in the contract was not fulfilled, which also is a gender-neutral aspect and should affect clubs of different gender equally.

Figure 19: Take-away from evaluation, sponsor perspective.

5.4.3 The Role of Gender in the Evaluation Phase

5.4.3.1 Continuous Collaboration
The preference for one year contracts does not mean that engagements are not long-term, quite the opposite. As both parties describe, it is not foremost results of quantitative measurements that decide whether the collaboration will continue, but the management of the collaboration and the behaviour of clubs.

5.4.3.2 Untargeted Measurements
Even though few sponsors requested quantitative measurements, some clubs provided a large amount of such matters. Nevertheless, women's clubs still emphasised qualitative values to a larger extent, which are deemed harder to measure. Altogether, gender could have a larger impact in the phase of evaluation if more sponsors based their decision of continuous engagement based on quantitative measurements. This since they are often related to media exposure (Cousens et al. 2006). Since this study, however, has seen few indications of such tendencies, it implies that the evaluation phase can be influenced by gender, but in relation to the purpose of sponsoring and not solely in the evaluation phase.

Figure 20: Combined take-away, the role of gender in evaluation.

6. DISCUSSION

In this section the outcome of the analysis is further discussed in relation to the research question. Aspects in a sponsorship collaboration affecting women's clubs, men's clubs, being gender neutral in the possibilities of obtaining and maintaining sponsorship in relation to gender will be illustrated. Furthermore, aspects that affect possibilities of obtaining and maintaining sponsorship which were gender-related, but without favouring merely one gender were found.

The purpose of the study was to address the identified research gap in the combined research-field of gender and sponsorship in regards to having a holistic view of the sponsorship collaboration. This culminated into the research question: *Which aspects in the sponsorship collaboration are affected by athletes' gender and why, when obtaining and maintaining sponsorship in Swedish elite football?*

6.1 Aspects Affecting Women's Clubs

In the sponsorship collaboration, three aspects were seen to favour women's clubs in obtaining and maintaining sponsorship, namely sponsors interested in gaining *awareness and image locally*, *hegemonic masculinity challenged*, and sponsors *striving for rationality*. By using women's clubs in the local area, companies can both statute an example of promoting gender equality as well as using sponsorship as a resource, which implies a more advanced use of sponsorship (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). Simultaneously, this shows that companies are challenging the hegemonic masculinity in sport (Connell, 2005) and question sport as a male-dominated arena, not categorising female athletes in "otherness" (Kane & Lenskyj, 1998).

6.2 Aspects Affecting Men's Clubs

Two aspects in the collaboration in relation to gender were also found beneficial for men's clubs when obtaining and maintaining sponsorship; *traditional sponsorship* and *traditions*. That traditional sponsorship still exists, even though research claims collaborations to be more complex today (Ryan & Fahy, 2012) is a sign of the male norm as dominant and still present in the football arena. Traditions also play in, sport can still be seen as a foundational discourse that is naturalised and non-questioned (Mean & Kassing, 2008).

6.3 Gender Neutral Aspects

The two aspects of *disconnected activities*, and *professional management* of the collaboration were also found to influence the possibilities of obtaining and maintaining sponsorship, but were however seen as gender neutral. These activities were not only in line with what sponsorship literature has found common in sponsorship collaborations, that the collaboration is expected to be beneficial for the sponsor (Meenaghan, 1983), and a close relationship (Fahy et al., 2004). They were also a way for football clubs to disconnect themselves from the performance on the field to create more stable connections for their collaborations. Even if the intention is not to disconnect themselves from athletic performance, they have by doing so decreased genders' influence in the activity. That women have been in a peripheral category in sport over time (Mean Patterson, 2003) could be a reason why they today have much smaller internal organisations to manage the sponsorship

collaborations today. This was seen to limit the possibilities of obtaining sponsorship. The history of gender in sport is therefore still seen to influence, but it is not gender per se.

6.4 Neither Advantageous Nor Disadvantageous

Finally, the three additional aspects found to influence the sponsorship collaboration in relation to gender were *personal influence*, *continuous collaboration,* and *untargeted measurements*. Both personal influence in relation to taste and competence, as well as the length of collaborations have been acknowledged by previous literature (Javialgi et al., 1994; Ryan & Fahy, 2012; Johnston & Paulsen, 2014) and previously expected to favour men's clubs due to traditions in sponsorship collaborations (Thjörmöe et al., 2002). This study however found that these aspects can be seen as both an advantage and a disadvantage in relation to both gender. Depending on what the personal preference and competence is, as well as what type of club has been sponsored over time, either men or women can be prioritised. That quantitative measurements favour men has been stated, but since a majority of the sponsors in the study did not have fixed targets for their collaborations the measurements do not necessarily have to favour men. The lack of targets gives clubs the possibility to set expectations on outcomes. This can either lead to possibilities for clubs to exceed low expectations or mismatch expectations. Unlike previous theory expressing these factors as beneficial for male athletes, this study found that either gender could benefit from these aspects.
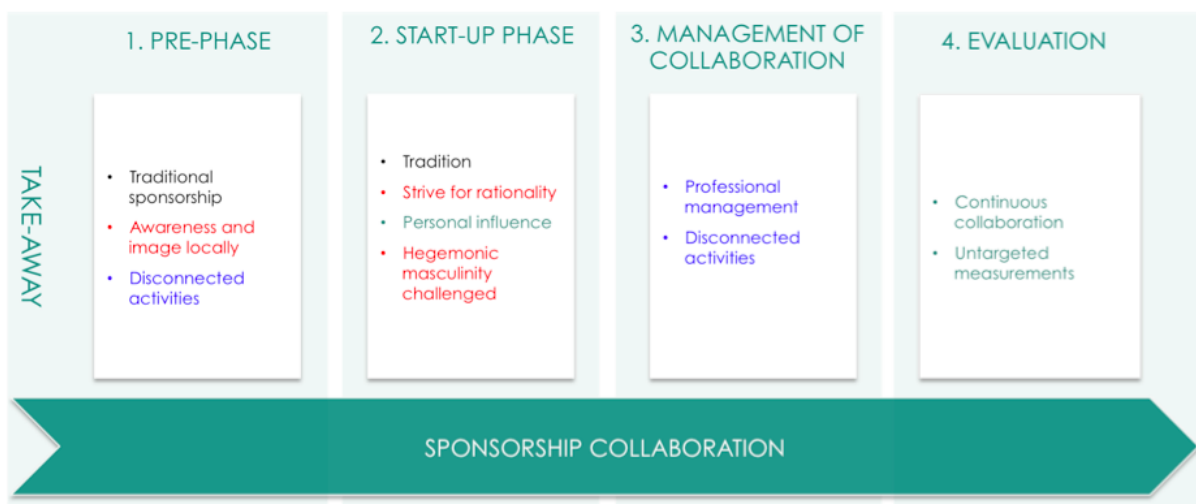

Figure 21: Colour-coded overview of findings from sponsorship collaboration (black=male, red=female, blue=gender-neutral, green=either gender benefits).

6.5 All In All

As illustrated in the figure 21 above, athletes' gender influences sponsorship collaborations most in the pre-phase and the start-up phase which are also the phases relating most to obtaining. The management and evaluation are either gender neutral or affected by choices in previous phases and are thus the phases relating more to maintaining of sponsorship. They could therefore be indirectly be affected by gender instead.

Even though the current structure of football and use of sponsorship described in previous literature is beneficial to men, this study has shown that gender equality in sponsorship is becoming more important for companies in Sweden and that therefore aspects previously benefitting male teams, can today come to be of an advantage for women's clubs instead.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

7.1 Theoretical Contribution

While the research field combining gender and sponsorship literature previously has studied specific events or decisions in relation to sponsorship collaboration from the corporate side, this study has by its holistic approach to the collaboration, contributed to the research field with three main contributions.

Firstly, the study has found the pre-phase and the start-up phase as most influenced by the athletes' gender in collaborations. These parts relate to obtaining sponsorship. The phase of managing the collaboration and evaluation, more related to the maintenance of sponsors, have however not been found to be affected by athletes' gender directly. These phases could instead indirectly be affected by gender if affected by gender in a previous phase of the collaboration.

Secondly, within the phases the five aspects of *awareness and image locally*, *challenged hegemonic masculinity*, sponsors *striving for rationality, traditional sponsorship,* and *traditions* were, in this study, found to be the aspects where the gender of the athlete affected the sponsorship collaboration at a holistic level.

The third contribution, and development of the research field was the finding of the three aspects *personal influence*, *continuous collaborations,* and *untargeted measurements* to play a role in relation to gender. Unlike previous theory expressing these factors as beneficial for male athletes, this study found that either gender could benefit from these aspects.

7.2 Managerial Contribution

The study has provided managerial implications for both clubs and sponsors. In relation to football clubs, the study has shown that women's, men's and mixed clubs to a large extent provide the same types of activities in a sponsorship collaboration. While women's clubs have found different CSR-engagement as attractive among sponsors, men's clubs are not taking advantage from CSR opportunities to the same extent yet. By disconnecting activities in the collaborations from the athletic performance, clubs have decreased the influence of gender in their sponsorship collaborations. Adjusting to companies' demands however, maintains the gender structures in football since companies still tend to demand traditional sponsorship.

In relation to sponsors there are signs of lacking knowledge, both in relation to how companies are sponsoring in relation to gender, as well as how sponsorship can be used. The study also recognised a tendency of increased interest in gender-equal sponsorship. This was to a larger extent seen in companies integrating sponsorship strategies with corporate strategies.

7.3 Future Research

The holistic approach of the study has given direction for more in-depth studies in relation to the aspects that are affected by gender in the sponsorship collaboration. By looking further into how each of *awareness and image locally*, *challenged hegemonic masculinity*, *striving for rationality, traditional sponsorship*, and *traditions* are formed and affected by athletes' gender; a deeper understanding of how gender affects the possibility of obtaining and maintaining sponsorship is given. Furthermore, since a majority of the sponsors in the study sponsored women's clubs, future studies including more sponsors of men's clubs is desired to strengthen the relevance of the found influential aspects.

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9. APPENDICES

Appendix 1

#	Interviewee	Reason for background interview	Date	Communication medium
1	Representative for the women's football elite leagues	To gain insight into women's football in Sweden.	8-feb	Face-to-face
2	Expert within sponsorship and events	To gain insight into best practice in sponsorship from a corporate perspective.	13-feb	Face-to-face
3	Former director of women's football club in "Damallsvenskan"	To get a first impression of a Swedish women's club's operational work.	23-feb	Telephone
4	Sponsorship agent	To gain an external perspective of what an investor in sport seeks when entering a sponsorship agreement.	7-mar	Telephone
5	Former elite player in "Damallsvenskan"	To get an impression of how players experience and notice sponsorship collaborations	9-mar	Telephone
6	Representative from an organisation working for sponsorship equality	To gain insight into the sponsorship distribution situation in Sweden as well as into potential challenges for clubs.	9-mar	Face-to-face

Table 2 (extended): Interviews-Preparatory work.

Appendix 2

Club	Interviewee	Type of team and league	Date	Communication medium
WC1	Club director	Women's team in top league, men's team in lower division.	16-mar	Telephone
WC2	Club director	Women's team in "Damallsvenskan"	23-mar	Face-to-face
WC3	Club director	Women's team in "Elitettan".	21-mar	Face-to-face
WC4	Club director	Women's team in "Damallsvenskan".	22-mar	Telephone
MC1	Marketing director	Men's team in "Herrallsvenskan".	21-mar	Face-to-face
MC2	Marketing department	Men's team in "Herrallsvenskan".	11-apr	Telephone
MC3	CEO	Men's team in "Herrallsvenskan".	04-apr	Telephone
Mix1	Sponsorship responsible	Men's and Women's, both teams "Damallsvenskan" and "Herrallsvenskan".	15-mar	Face-to-face
Mix2	Marketing director and sales representative	Men's and women's, both teams in "Damallsvenskan" and "Herrallsvenskan"	04-apr	Face-to-face

Interviews Sport Clubs

Appendix 3

Sponsor	Interviewee	Industry	Sponsorship engagement	Date	Communication medium
WC1	Sales representative	Printing	Women's club	22-mar	Telephone
WC2	CEO	Environmental friendly cleaning	Women's club	24-mar	Face-to-face
WC3	Marketing and communication representative /responsible sponsoring	Parking	Women's club	25-mar	Telephone
MC1	CEO	Printing	Men's club	29-mar	Telephone
MIX1	HR-representative	Industrial technique	Women's and men's clubs	12-apr	Telephone
MIX2	Sustainability responsible	Insurances	Women's and men's clubs	27-mar	Telephone
MIX3	Marketing and communication	Housing	Women's and men's clubs	28-mar	Telephone
MIX4	Hub manager	IT and technology services	Women's and men's clubs	30-mar	Telephone
MIX5	Marketing director	Home appliances	Women's and men's clubs	28-mar	Telephone

Interviews Sponsors

Appendix 4
Interview Guide Sponsors

1. Background and role of interviewee
2. Sponsorship strategy – what does the company want to achieve when engaging in sponsoring?
3. How is the decision taken of who to sponsor?
   (Are there any criteria? Which ones?)
4. How has the company sponsored historically?
5. What are the expectations the sponsee(s)?
6. What does the exchange look like?
7. Why have you chosen to sponsor [the club]?