In the Outer - Not on the Outer:

Women and Australian Rules Football

By

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy – Communication Studies
Murdoch University
2006
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

___________________________________
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Abstract

This thesis identifies, examines and probes the nature of women’s involvement in Australian Rules Football. Rather than have a single theoretical underpinning, an interdisciplinary approach, albeit with a feminist perspective, was applied because of the broad scope of the study. Australian Rules Football is an institution that can transcend class, race, and gender. It is also a multi-billion dollar industry. The game traces its origins back to 1858 and claims influences from rugby and an Aboriginal game called marn-grook. While it is played mainly by men, exclusively at league level, interest and involvement is not limited by gender.

Academics and administrators have frequently written off women’s involvement with football. Even though scholarly interest in both sport and feminism has grown since the 1970s, little significant work has been undertaken to examine women’s interaction with Australian Rules Football. Leading Australian feminist Anne Summers rejected the notion that women could find anything of value in football apart from following players as devoted wives, mothers, girlfriends or ‘groupies.’ Through investigation of monographs and edited collections, I reveal that myriad scholars, feminists and historians have missed the point of sporting scholarship: many women enjoy involvement with football, they understand the game and its strategies and value being part of the football community in diverse and evolving capacities.

The original contribution to knowledge in this doctorate is to demonstrate that while women have had a central role in the development and maintenance of Australian Rules
Football since the game was founded in colonial times, their contribution has gone unacknowledged by historians and administrators. My thesis places on record those omissions. Particularly, I highlight the lack of acknowledgement and respect for the work of a woman who authored a comprehensive and seminal social history written on the game. This is the archetypal example of how women, in many roles – both professional and personal – have been marginalized, despite playing pivotal roles with Australian Rules Football. The original contribution contained in these pages tracks Australian gender relations through the social institution of Australian Rules Football. To create both space and strategies for the revaluation of women in football history, a new model of female fandom is offered. The testimony of the women included is weighty in numbers and pithy in content. The scale of interviews represents diversity in age, class, ethnicity, regionality and role or function with football. Superficially it may appear that women can be placed in taxonomy. Women’s involvement with Australian Rules Football is complex and their involvement enmeshes in the many facets and spheres of the game.

The completion of this thesis follows the long overdue appointment of the A.F.L.’s first female commissioner, Samantha Mostyn, in June 2005. Without disrespecting Mostyn, this was a tokenistic cultural shift by adding a commissioner to the existing eight males with the goal of adding further business expertise, not a new insight or strategic cultural intervention. It also comes at a time when the Australian Football League’s has a new challenge to address, with the growing interest and participation in Association Football in Australia after the qualification for the 2006 World Cup. At this moment of change and contestation, Women’s Australian Rules competitions are impoverished through lack of structural and financial support while women’s Association Football, both in Australia and internationally, is flourishing.
Acknowledgements

I thank Associate Professor Tara Brabazon for supervising my thesis; for her confidence; the constant encouragement during the duration of the project; and for being an inspiration to her students.

I also wish to thank my husband Gordon, our children Sean and Renee Hindley and my parents Priscilla and Keith Burrell for their support. I thank my bookclub friends who unknowingly started me on this journey and encouraged me – cheers Sandi, Cheryl, Denise, Margaret, Christine, Pat, Amanda, Nalini, Lee, and Ann! Thank you also Joanne, Julie, Tony, Ingrid and Ray. My thanks are also extended to my postgraduate colleagues, especially Dr Leanne McRae, Dr Mike Kent and Rachel Shave, who have accompanied me on this challenge.

Finally, I am extremely grateful to all those women who contacted and helped me during my research. I dedicate this thesis to them and to all women, past, present and in the future, who are involved with Australian Rules Football.
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<td>A.B.C.</td>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>A.F.L.</td>
<td>Australian Football League</td>
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<td>A.R.C.</td>
<td>Australian Research Council</td>
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<td>I.A.F.C.</td>
<td>International Australian Football Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>M.C.G.</td>
<td>Melbourne Cricket Ground</td>
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<td>N.A.F.C.</td>
<td>National Australian Football Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>N.B.A.</td>
<td>National Basketball Association</td>
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<td>N.R.L.</td>
<td>National Rugby League</td>
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<tr>
<td>S.A.N.F.L.</td>
<td>South Australian National Football League</td>
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<td>S.B.S.</td>
<td>Special Broadcasting Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>V.F.L.</td>
<td>Victorian Football League</td>
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<td>V.W.F.L.</td>
<td>Victorian Women’s Football League</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.A.F.C.</td>
<td>Western Australian Football Commission</td>
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<td>W.A.F.L.</td>
<td>Western Australian Football League</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.A.W.F.L.</td>
<td>Western Australian Women’s Football League</td>
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<tr>
<td>W.U.S.A.</td>
<td>Women’s United Soccer Association</td>
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Introduction

BOUNCEDOWN

In Australia, if a person is “on the outer,” then they are out of favour or shunned. It is a colloquialism defined by G.A. Wilkes as “not favoured to win, not given a chance; disliked, ostracized.” It is the English equivalent of being sent to Coventry. “The Outer” was the area of the football ground not covered, before advent of enclosed arenas or multiple grandstands that had full stadium seating. It was characteristically the area where enthusiastic and die-hard supporters of Australian Rules Football stood to watch the game where they screamed for their team, hurled abuse at the umpires and openly displayed a passion for football. It was used as the setting for a publication in 1984 by prolific football writer, Garrie Hutchinson, entitled From the Outer: Watching Football in the 1980s. It recorded fans’ experience of suburban Melbourne football before the transformation of the Victorian Football League into the Australian Football League (by a faltering league competition, big business and the media). “The Outer” existed before the game came under the control of corporate entities and identities whose view of women’s involvement in football is one of tokenism. This thesis traces the involvement of women with Australian Rules Football from its birth in Melbourne in 1856 through to the present and will position them in the outer, not on the outer.

The scope of this research is wide-ranging in source material, but precise in focus. It has examined women’s involvement from the professional level to volunteers, to women

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supporting partners and sons, women as fans and women who play Australian Rules Football. Owing to the breadth of this study, a single theoretical framework has not been applied throughout the entire thesis. Instead an interdisciplinary approach has been used, where a discipline or disciplines focus on a specific problem or question. In Chapter One history is the prominent discipline. The Literature Review provides a background of women in Australian history since colonization and concomitantly the invention of Australian Rules. Illustrations from the past are analysed through a combination of cultural studies, media studies and semiotics. In many respects the study has been an ethnographic project. It relies more upon the flexibility of anthropological methods than the confines of sociological structure. Certainly, I have an insider’s emic understanding of the game, as will be revealed throughout the thesis. As a result ethnographic research methods have primarily been used to carry out the research. In addition to my emic appreciation, the study has been carried out with a feminist perspective, leaning towards a Marxist-feminist perspective when discussing the capitalistic enterprise of football.

In discussing Australian Rules Football, I am referring to the overarching structure of Australian Rules Football governed by the Australian Football League, the keepers of the code. The A.F.L. influences all levels, from junior Auskick leagues to the national A.F.L. competition. I also use Australian Rules Football rather than Australian Football, departing from the parochial use by the A.F.L. and Australian academics to differentiate between it and the global game of football commonly referred to as soccer in Australia.  

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3 “Australian Rules Football” is used by Leonie Sandercock in *Up Where Cazaly*, Rob Hess and Bob Stewart in *More Than a Game*. “Australian Football” is used by Geoffrey Blainey, Robert Pascoe, Stephen Alomes and Anthony Barker. The A.F.L.’s official centenary publication is entitled *100 Years of Australian Football*, and *Australian Football*, a quarterly journal of essays, ideas, commentary and illustrations is edited by Geoff Slattery, also the Managing Director of A.F.L. Publishing.
This thesis expands the research carried out on the history of Australian Rules Football. It fills a space left by scholars who have studied the history of the game. Geoffrey Blainey, Australia’s pre-eminent historian, published *A Game of Our Own: the origins of Australian Football* in 1991 and republished it in 2003 as a revised edition in paperback.4 The *Winter Game: Over 100 years of Australian Football* by Robert Pascoe followed in 1995.5 The year 1998 offered *More Than a Game: An authorized history of Australian Rules Football* by Robert Hess and Bob Stewart.6 Within a patriarchal framework, their perspective concentrated upon the development and maintenance of the game by men. Indeed, the scholarly examination of women’s roles in Australian society had been largely overlooked by academics afflicted by a myopic view until the 1970s when the feminists of the Second Wave began to scrutinize and publish on the subject. Two Australian classics on women’s history and position in Australian society are Anne Summers’ *Damned Whores and God’s Police*7 first published in 1975 and revised in 1994, and Miriam Dixson’s *The Real Matilda*.8 As a result, women’s studies brought a new depth and clarity to how Australian society should be considered. This thesis is yet another story to be added, an account that reclaims women’s position in the Australian sporting institution of Australian Rules Football. In the past, patriarchal football administrators would have preferred to have kept women “on the outer” to take possession of the game in order to maintain traditional and hegemonic relationships between genders. This thesis goes to the heartland of masculinity in Australia. It challenges the gender norms of Australian Rules Football and traditional roles played by women in Australian society.

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This thesis raises the question of whether women are truly regarded as equal players in this particular Australian institution. In *Damned Whores and God’s Police* Summers stated:

> Women who watch football are seemingly motivated by less complex notions. They are there as sidelines supporters for husbands, sons or boyfriends, or as companions to devoted fans, or perhaps because they entertain secret sexual fantasies about one or more of the players.\(^9\)

The evidence and arguments that follow disagree with this assertion and paints a more complex and intricate picture of women’s motivation in Australian Rules Football. It also tests the validation of this involvement in the varying domains of the game which is intensively masculine. In her recent publication, *The End of Equality: work, babies and women’s choices in 21st Century Australia*, Summers points out that:

> After decades of political action, feminist rhetoric and state and federal legislation promising, equality, women were entitled to think things would be a little easier in the early 21\(^{st}\) century than they had been a generation ago. Yet although the language of equality is still used, and despite the successes of so many individual women, the actual experience of far too many women in Australia today suggests that the promise of equality has not been met. Sadly, we are actually going in the opposite direction. If we look at the economic, physical and social markers of women’s well-being, the picture that is revealed is grim in contrast to the rhetoric of equality and accomplishment.\(^10\)

The Australian Football League claims to be embracing women’s involvement in football, yet on their website only a meagre outline of the five hundred words captures the diversified roles that women maintain in the A.F.L.

Support and spectatorship are investigated here. Spectatorship is the one of the most prevailing forms of support for the A.F.L. through club memberships, attendances and as a portion of the television audience. As a result, spectatorship is the most significant

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category of women investigated here. Women’s support through spectatorship should be valued by the A.F.L. greater than has been. In raising historical prejudices does the A.F.L. intend to critique itself, for they have maintained their own historical prejudice as evidenced by their lack of recognition of women in their centenary publication 100 Years of Australian Football: 1897-1996? Essendon coach Kevin Sheedy recognized their omission and together with Carolyn Brown published Football’s Women: the forgotten heroes in 1998 to rectify the A.F.L.’s exclusion. Sheedy and Brown also recognized the array of women’s support. In the A.F.L. Info Sheet, Sheedy and Brown’s work is cited:

In 1998, Essendon coach Kevin Sheedy and writer Carolyn Brown released the book, Football’s Women: The Forgotten Heroes, detailing the lives of women involved in football as mothers, reporters, administrators and umpires. Marginalizing the significance of the book, the A.F.L.’s doggedly sticks to its stance and I test the sincerity of the A.F.L. I examined the extent to which women support the game and gauge whether this support is matched by a genuine share of participation in the game. If the photograph of the A.F.L. Tribunal with its eight male members and one woman (Elaine Canty) is studied, the question is whether it is an achievement to have one woman appointed to the tribunal, as an individual’s success, or ponder why more women are not on the tribunal. Australian Rules Football is a sporting institution and a billion dollar industry. As such, it cannot be ignored as a site of hegemony, compliance and conformity in respect to gender relations.

The result of this research will not weaken the game but rather strengthen the position of women in Australia involved with Australian Rules Football. Australian Rules Football will also gain insights into football from a female perspective and critique. This is important for the future as Australian Rules Football is likely to come under threat from other sports, including other football codes and in particular the world game of football, through the increasing influences of commercialism and commodification. This critique provides a deeper understanding of women’s involvement with Australian Rules Football and help to preserve the native game rather than denigrate it.

Scholarly interest with the many facets of Australian Rules Football is certainly increasing, including women and football. In 2003, The Australian newspaper published an article in its Higher Education section by Jim Bucknell “Fresh legs on the sacred turf” which reported that Associate Professor Rob Hess of Victoria University had identified sixteen theses underway or completed in the disciplines of history, management and sociology-psychology in 2003. The article reports that Associate Professor Hess, an historian, has also studied women as supporters of the game and recognized the importance to the game and to clubs. The article states:

Hess’s own research on the historical importance of women as supporters of the game also has implications for the future. Clubs are learning that the needs of women, who make up about 44 percent of all members – the largest proportion of women members of any football code in the world – are best addressed rather than ignored. The lobbying of women has always added to the pressure for a cleaner, less violent game and for facilities catering to women such as the modern-day move for crèches in clubrooms.

This thesis moves beyond the boundaries of empirical historical methods of study by examining the relationship of Australian Rules Football and women using

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interdisciplinary methods. It critiques other studies on Australian Rules Football from a feminist perspective, positioning women’s historical involvement through omission or marginalization. The issues investigated are football as a community builder and a method of inclusion and exclusion. There are many contexts in which to explore the significance of women’s contribution to Australian Rules Football including volunteers, spectators, professionals, partners, mothers and players. As a result, this study takes a broad approach to the topic of women and Australian Rules Football to highlight the width and breadth of women’s involvement with the game. Women and football is a burgeoning and important topic that is imperative to the future of Australian Rules Football. It should not to be dismissed or treated lightly, as has occurred on the A.F.L.’s website.

Adding a further dimension to the context of Australian Rules Football is the location where most work on the thesis has taken place: Perth, Western Australia and not Melbourne, Victoria. In addition to decentralizing masculinity from Australian Rules Football, this thesis also decentralizes the geography of Australian Rules Football from Melbourne to Perth. Despite Australian Rules Football having spread to other states since the 1890s, and the Australian Football League expanding into a national competition in the 1980s, Melbournians still maintain the ideology that they are the only possessors, authorities and custodians on and of the game. While attending the Australian Society for Sports History Conference Sporting Traditions XIV “Mislaid or Marginalized,” I was informed by another delegate that I should be enrolled at one of the universities in Melbourne. In my reply to him, I should have pointed out that since the competition went national in the late 1980s, Australian Rules Football has flourished. The four clubs in

\[16\] Ibid. 31.
South Australia and Western Australia boast the largest number of members, with almost equal, if not more than equal, numbers of women members. Those clubs paid expensive licence fees to join the competition and are now among the most economically viable, while some Melbourne clubs exist only due to the expansion and transformation of the Victorian Football League into the A.F.L. In *Football Ltd: the inside story of the A.F.L.* Garry Linnell traces this transformation, stating that in the 1980s, football in Victoria was “staring at disaster”17 and “The national league had been born out of desperation for cash more than a willingness among the Victorians to expand.”18 Linnell also described the begrudging attitude of Victorians towards the expansion of the competition to go national, at first northwards to Sydney and Brisbane. However the hesitant approach towards the inclusion in the competition of the rugby cities of Sydney and Brisbane did not quite contain the haughtiness, open hostility, and horror of including the two other Australian states where Australian Rules Football was already firmly established, Western Australia and South Australia. Linnell describes their attitude: “After 90 years, few [Victorians] savoured the possibility of a Western Australian, or even worse, a South Australian team joining the competition and winning The Flag”19; and “Who knew what sort of a monster the V.F.L. would be creating if it allowed a team of West Australians to play in the competition. Cook feared a Perth presence more than anything.”20 At that time, Victorians regarded those beyond their borders as “foreigners.”21 Many still do. In 2004 A.F.L. Grand Final, two interstate teams played for the first time: In an article titled “Our misery is interstate joy – Invaders on the M.C.G.” Kelvin Healey wrote “Victorian footy fans’ worst nightmare finally came true last night – two interstate teams will contest the

18 Ibid, 353.
19 Ibid, 142.
20 Ibid, 158.
21 Ibid, 256.
A.F.L. Grand Final.”22 The nightmare continued for the Victorians in 2005, with the West Coast Eagles playing the Sydney Swans. However, Victorian administrators and fans clung to their parochialism by aligning with Sydney Swans, formerly South Melbourne. According to Caroline Wilson, Chief Football Writer for The Age:

But while it was in many respects Sydney’s day, it was South Melbourne’s as well. This was not so much the Sydney Swans playing on the last day in September but the team formerly referred to as The Bloods, the former V.F.L. team that reincarnated itself in Sydney in 1982.23

This thesis therefore aligns the importance of studying marginality of gender and geography. It plays on the periphery, to mark out new territory for Australian Rules Football.

Melbourne-based administrators have fiercely guarded the custody of the game. Even in its former entity the V.F.L. “regarded itself as the official governing body of the game, even though countless other organizations were spread throughout the country.”24 The origins of Australian Rules Football began in Victoria. Dialogue on most aspects of Australian Rules Football is still closely controlled from Melbourne by the A.F.L. over 150 years on. In a further example of the A.F.L.’s protection of the game under its control is its relationship with Brian Clarke, President of the International Australian Football Council, who promotes Australian Rules Football internationally to thirty countries. In a feature article written by Norman Aisbett for The West Australian Weekend Extra of Saturday January 17, 2004, Clarke explained how the A.F.L.,

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22 Kelvin Healey. “Our misery is interstate joy Invaders on the M.C.G.” In Sunday Herald Sun. 19 September 2004, 3.
began to see the I.A.F.C. as a threat, over which it had no control, and became determined to wind it up. The A.F.L. saw itself as “the keeper of the code” and would not countenance an interloper, no matter how well meaning. Clarke the “interloper” had once been the A.F.L.’s development officer in Queensland and worked on the A.F.L. website in Melbourne. The “interloper” was born in Amsterdam and lived in New Zealand before moving to Darwin where he developed his passion for Australian Rules, playing with Michael Long and Nathan Buckley who later became successful players in the A.F.L. Despite Clarke’s efforts to promote the game internationally, particularly in India, the A.F.L. still maintains total control over any development of the game, both within Australia and beyond its shores.

On 18 February 2004, the new Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Demetriou, and Chairman Ron Evans released the A.F.L.’s new strategic plan for the following three years. An extract from the Mission Statement reported that, “To manage the national football competition for the benefit of all A.F.L. stakeholders – players, members, supporters, clubs, sponsors and the community.” The first two of the values linked to the Mission Statement were “equality” and “fairness.” The third value was “tradition and opportunity.” This ideology contradicts the first two values. By adhering to “tradition,” the A.F.L. is keeping the status quo where the Victorian clubs are more favourably treated. The competition cannot move forward to create opportunities by adhering to customs that anchor it in the past. Nor should the A.F.L. consider Melbourne as the foundation for all football traditions and trajectories. In 1898, William Magarey founded The Magarey Medal for the fairest and best player in the South Australian National Football League. Subsequently, twenty three years later the Sandover Medal League was

26 Ibid, 16.
inaugurated and awarded to the fairest and best player in Western Australia three years prior to the V.F.L.’s Brownlow Medal inception in Melbourne. The last medal to be inaugurated is now awarded at A.F.L. level. Two of four objectives were to “Connect to Fans and Community” and “Manage Responsibly, Strive For Financial Growth And Stability.” At the same time the A.F.L. Chairman gave an assurance to maintain the existing 16 clubs of the competition, tacitly meaning the 10 Victorian clubs. In response the Editorial from *The West Australian* on Friday 20 February 25, 2004, was scathing of the A.F.L.’s commitment calling it “unsporting and manifestly unfair.”

The editorial pointed out the inequities of the competition from a financial position where Melbourne based clubs are “on artificial life support” because those clubs “do not have the drawing power, supporter base or perhaps efficiency and drive to survive unaided” and stating that “the requirements of a national competition are different from those of what was previously a suburban competition in Melbourne.” Additionally, the editorial pointed to the inequity of the current League composition where the majority of Melbourne-based clubs meant that they were required to travel far less than the other State clubs: – “the preponderance of Victorian sides means that they do not need to travel outside their comfort zones.” The editorial concluded with:

> The A.F.L. hierarchy still seems to think that this is essentially a Victorian competition with some teams from other States attached. That sort of thinking retards the national development of the game and should be changed.

The A.F.L. therefore is at odds with their Strategic Plan. It is incongruous to talk of “stakeholders of all the A.F.L. community”, “equality and fairness” at the same time as “tradition and opportunity”. The editorial acknowledged that, “Certainly, history and tradition are important in football” but the competition cannot flourish while Melbourne

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28 “Melbourne should have fewer teams” *The West Australian*, Friday, 20 February, 2004, 18.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
males monopolize the competition and act in a manner that contradicts their own strategic plan.

Parochial and patriarchal are synonymous with the A.F.L. discourse despite sixteen years of a national competition. The revitalization of the game through the national competition may not make up the loss of seven Flags to the “foreigners”\(^{31}\). The Melbourne Cricket Ground is the traditional “home” of Australian Rules Football, hosting the grand finals of the premier competition. However it is also home to another “A.F.L.”, formed twenty years earlier. Melbourne is also the home of the “Anti-Football League” inaugurated by the Melbourne, journalist and author, Keith Dunstan in 1967.

When planning this research, as a woman from West Australia, I was not surprised that my attempt to enlist support from the A.F.L. was unsuccessful. In 2002, I submitted an application for an A.F.L. Research and Development Grant to the A.F.L. Research Board.\(^{32}\) The application was submitted in the full knowledge that the A.F.L. was more interested in ankles, knees and groins, physiological aspects of player performance rather than a significant area of tangible support for the game from grass roots to the highest levels. My proposal was an ambitious one for an early researcher, however the research would have been carried out under a principal researcher who had great expertise in social research and media theory. The proposal’s outcomes and benefits were to:

1. To identify trends in demographics that may impact upon future support of the A.F.L. from women.

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\(^{31}\) Eight, if 2005’s win by the Sydney Swans is counted but as previously stated Melbourne claimed this victory also.

\(^{32}\) Correspondence to A.F.L. Research Board dated 13 June 2002.
2. To highlight aspects of the A.F.L. that appeal to women that may provide a basis on which to sustain and build upon the existing ratio of support.

3. To determine any areas of concern that may negatively affect women’s interest in A.F.L.

4. To ensure the viability of continued support from women fans to the A.F.L. competition.

5. Provide an informed base for marketing strategies for club membership and marketing activities.

6. Provide an informed base for the A.F.L. to attract diverse sponsorships and diversify its marketing with the media.

The application was also supported by a Western Australian A.F.L. club as required by the A.F.L.’s Research Programme regulations. The project proposed undertaking research that would enable the A.F.L. to gain information on women supporters and would signal that the A.F.L. valued women supporters. The application sought a grant of $23,000 but the real purpose of the application was to formally alert the A.F.L. that research leading towards a doctorate in philosophy was being undertaken in the area of Australian Rules Football and women. The result would contribute to the body of knowledge on Australian society, gender relations, and Australian Rules Football.

Upon receiving the A.F.L.’s correspondence - dated 21 November 2002 - that my application had been unsuccessful, I responded to the Chairman of the A.F.L. Research Board, David Hatt on 29 November 2002, seeking feedback on the research proposal, asking what their future research priorities might be and whether there was “any other assistance that the A.F.L. could offer, ie letter of support, access to records or a link to the website.”33 A reply from Roger Berryman, Secretary to the A.F.L. Research Board dated 9 December 2002, stated “As yet the Board has not finalized its priority topics for the

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2004 round of funding, and we will be seeking assistance from A.F.L. Clubs, State bodies and medical groups in determining what topics may be of most importance to A.F.L. football.”34 These words contained an acknowledgement of “it might provide some useful outcomes, particularly the relationship between women and football”, however no offer of assistance in any tangible way was forthcoming. Indeed, there was no indication of any intangible support. Their correspondence contained no glimmer of interest, no “stay in touch”, or “we’d be interested in the findings of your thesis.”

The purpose of the inclusion of this information is not to display personal disappointment in the grant process. Rather, it is to demonstrate how lacking in understanding the A.F.L. has been toward areas of research not associated with male-centric activities. It lacks foresight not to seek an understanding of an important section of the football community. It is a mistake not to ask how women want to be perceived in the overall context of the game. It is an omission not to ask why the proportion of women who hold A.F.L. club memberships is significantly higher than other football codes, particularly in comparison with soccer in the United Kingdom. Do A.F.L. clubs in financial difficulty have low numbers of women supporters? What social and cultural conditions have created the high interest and involvement of women with Australian Rules Football? Could global trends affect this national commitment and specificity?

This thesis focuses upon gender relations within the locus of Australian Rules Football. It is about inclusion and exclusion. It discusses the inclusion of women who provide the sport support through nurturing, volunteering and economic buying power and on the

34 Correspondence received from Roger Berryman, Secretary, A.F.L. Research Board, dated 9 December
other hand discusses patriarchal attitudes that lead to tokenism, marginalization and exclusion. My interest includes women who help at junior levels, and I have been one albeit briefly, to the tens of thousands of women supporters who have boosted membership, and I remain one of those. I also incorporate the women who are employed in the billion dollar Australian Rules Football industry. As a result the range of source material is vast. Material collected ranges from mothers in the Northern Territory who are the engines of their local competitions to career women in capital cities. The depth and breadth of the data is a further original contribution to knowledge. Within the site of Australian Rules Football and the A.F.L., the roles women play are multiple, often converging or overlapping in time and place. When an A.F.L. player is listed, he has a singular identity while women may have many identities within this context.

In Australia, sport is ubiquitous, inescapable and part of the social fabric of the country. It is almost unpatriotic not to enjoy sport in Australia. The public importance of sport in the contemporary nation is confirmed by the 2004 Australian of the Year award being made to Steve Waugh. He was the fourth sportsperson to become a recipient since 1998. In a country where the climate ranges from tropical in the North to temperate in the South, the change of season is more associated with the comings and goings of the different sports than by weather conditions. Bound up with sport are the ideologies of nationalism, religion, hero worship and community.

The Australian Football League is the most dominant sport in Australia. No other code of football or sport in Australia has the supporter base of the A.F.L. Nor does any sport
dominate the Australian media as much as the A.F.L. competition. Myriad factors contribute to A.F.L.’s popularity. There is a parochialism connected to Australian Rules Football because it is an authentic invention of this country with its roots extending to colonial times. From its origins in Melbourne, it spread to the Southern states quickly in the mid to late 1900s due to the Goldrushes and population movements. Outside of Melbourne, the Port Adelaide Football Club in South Australia, formed in 1870, is one of the oldest Australian Rules clubs. After playing in the South Australian National Football League (S.A.N.F.L.) competition for over one hundred years, Port Adelaide was admitted to the A.F.L. in 1997 and boasts that it is “arguably the most successful senior football club, not only in South Australia but Australia-wide.” As nationalism grew in Australia since federation in 1901, popular culture - and particularly sport – was pivotal to proliferating an ideology of Australia.

Rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne was the main reason why the game was prevented from being the dominant football code in New South Wales. According to Robert Pascoe in The Winter Game: 100 years of Australian Football:

The styles of economic development and political culture which typify Australia’s two major cities are as divergent as those separating New York from Boston, Glasgow from Edinburgh, and St Petersburg from Moscow. The Sydney-Melbourne rivalry is equally intense as a result.

This “deep cultural” divide was dubbed “The Barassi Line” by Ian Turner in his Ron Barassi Memorial Lecture in 1978 because rugby was the main football played in N.S.W.

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35 The Roy Morgan AFL Football Monitor carried research out on supporters of AFL Clubs. Their press release 315 published in The Australian March 26, 2004 indicated the diversity by age, gender and socio-economic indicators for each club.
37 Pascoe, 1996, xii.
and Queensland. The divide melted when the first of the interstate clubs was spawned through the transformation of a Victorian team, South Melbourne, into the Sydney Swans on March 28, 1982. Further expansion of the V.F.L. occurred in 1987 when the West Coast Eagles and the Brisbane Bears joined. While Australia Rules dominated the football codes in Western Australia with its own Western Australian Football League and a Commission overseeing football in that state, Brisbane was North of the Barassi Line in a predominantly rugby state. Subsequently in 1990, the V.F.L. became the A.F.L. to embody the national competition because the suburban Melbourne clubs had falling memberships, were in decline financially and the state competition was shrinking rather than expanding. Three more interstate clubs were then admitted: Adelaide in 1991, Fremantle in 1995 and Port Adelaide in 1997. Financial problems resulted in Fitzroy, one of the eldest clubs, merging with the Brisbane Bears to become Brisbane Lions at the conclusion of the 1996 season.

It is ironic that in 2004 the two most popular teams in the A.F.L. were the Brisbane Lions (the former Bears) and the Sydney Swans, according to the Roy Morgan A.F.L. Football Monitor, bearing in mind that they are the only teams in their respective states and that Victoria still retains ten teams in the competition. The growth in Queensland can be attributed to the on-field success of the Brisbane Lions who won three back-to-back premierships from 2001 to 2003. Additionally the A.F.L. Strategic Plan 2001-2003 had specifically planned growth in New South Wales and Queensland to increase A.F.L. attendances, television ratings, corporate expansion and foster participation in football.

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upwards from junior competitions. These one-team towns create strong parochial followings that harness loyalty to region and capitalise upon already existing rivalries between states, particularly Victoria which has managed to create a small degree of enmity between itself and most states beyond its borders in matters on and off the field.

It was important for the long term viability of the A.F.L. competition to expand into New South Wales, Queensland, and also the Australian Capital Territory, to counter the effects of competition from other challengers seeking to gain a share of the Australian audience and the A.F.L. Strategic Plan 2001-2003 recognised this. “Issues for Next Decade” addressed possible threats to the long term future of A.F.L. These challengers included other football codes, rugby league and rugby union but mainly soccer. In the past, soccer in Australia has suffered from poor organisation and has been seen as a vestige of migrant homelands that invokes fear of hooliganism, ethnic hostilities together with fragile masculinity or strong femininity. In the international sphere, soccer’s existence is omnipotent. It is, football. Concomitantly, while the Australian Socceroos are now part of the 2006 World Cup in Germany, competition to the A.F.L. also flows from other areas, particularly international events including the Olympics and Commonwealth Games that not only engages the audience but also fosters future athletes. These and

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41 Michael Cockerill, Australian Soccer’s Long Road to the Top states that “If Australian soccer is remarkable for one thing, it is its resilience. For decades it has been buffeted by one setback after another: endless squabbling among its own officials; a chronic shortage of funds; spectator violence, much of it caused by ethnic tensions; an under-achieving team; the shameful neglect by the mainstream media. One step forward, two steps back. Yet through all this, the game has inched towards the ultimate goal—acceptance. And it will come...The proverbial sleeping giant of Australian sport will finally awaken. And then everything else will have to move out of the way.” (Port Melbourne: Lothian Publishers Pty Ltd, 1998), 158.
other forms of entertainment together with emerging social and demographic trends are also identified in the *A.F.L. Strategic Plan 2001-2003* factors that could determine the future of the A.F.L. and Australian Rules Football.

The A.F.L. has also consolidated Australian Rules in other states and territories where the game is popular but could not in all likelihood sustain a home-based team. Since 2003, matches have been played in Canberra where the host team is the Kangaroos and Launceston whose host team is Hawthorn. Collingwood, Essendon and Fremantle have also travelled to Darwin with the pre-season and Wizard Cup matches. The A.F.L. continues to strengthen its national spread not only in capital cities but also in regional areas with the pre-season matches held country towns.

A.F.L. is a spectator-oriented game. The attractiveness is due to the nature of the game’s pace, it is a physical spectacle and a feast of footy. It is a fast, high scoring game that combines many elements including athleticism, skill, and strategy. It differs markedly from each of the other football codes of soccer, rugby league and union, American Gridiron, although it is similar to Gaelic football. International matches are held between Ireland and a composite team drawn from the A.F.L. Australian Rules Football owes most of its distinctive nature to the great movement and speed arising out of the major skills of the game. These skills include kicking the oddly shaped oval ball by foot, mainly a drop punt; marking the ball after it has been kicked by another player and handballing, where the ball is balanced in the palm of one hand and punched with the other. Kicking the ball is the main skill of the game whether it is a short chip shot, a “worm burner”

Johnny Warren with Andy Harper and Josh Whittington. *Shielas, Wogs and Poofers: an incomplete*
along the ground, an aerial “long bomb”, or in the case of an ugly kick it may be called a “mongrel punt”. It is a vigorous game that within the rules permits some hard physical contact including bumping or tackling the opposition. It is marking the ball which has become the skill that probably causes Australian Rules Football to be distinct from other codes. Players leap to propel themselves towards the flying ball that has travelled at least 10 metres, often using their opposition player’s back to climb skywards. Furthermore, the ball itself contributes to the uniqueness of the game. The oval ball causes a degree of unpredictability for players and umpires who are required to control or bounce down the ball to commence or recommence play. In wet weather, this unpredictability increases when the ball gets slippery and the grounds soggy making it even more difficult to control.

Players of all shapes and sizes are found in the A.F.L. because the game requires speed, agility and strength. The combination of the large playing field, the odd shape of the ball, the pace and the range of skills contribute to the games overall intricacy. This permits the selection of players for positions and for purpose adding to the tactics vital for success. For example, the Fremantle Football Club, had the largest and the smallest players in the competition between 2003 and 2005: Captain Peter Bell, is 174cm tall and weighs 84kg and is one of the smallest players in the competition. Adam Sandilands is 211cm tall and weighs 115kg. He is not only the tallest player currently but also in the game’s history. Since many players have specialist positions their exclusion from the team due to injury or a penalty suspension can be a blow to the team or a bonus to the opposition. The A.F.L. has no send-off rules, however, minor infringements are dealt with during the game and players can give away free kicks or an advantage of an extra 50 metres and a free kick. More serious violations usually of an overly rough or deliberately violent nature are reported to the A.F.L. Review Panel either by the umpire taking down a

player’s number during the match or later after viewing video footage and can result in a fine and/or suspension for a number of matches. Once found guilty of an offence, players are no longer eligible for that season’s Best and Fairest Award, the Brownlow Medal.

An important additional factor that makes the A.F.L. the most popular sport in Australia is that it has a substantial female following. This factor differentiates the A.F.L. from other codes both in Australia and with soccer in the United Kingdom and Gridiron in the United States of America who have a far smaller proportion of women followers. Between 1993 and 2003, the A.F.L. club membership more than doubled from 207,640 to 463,171. The total female membership in 2003 was 34% or 158,799 members. Adelaide had the largest membership of 47,097 with 18,812 female members or 39.9% followed by Collingwood with 40,455 with female membership of 11,766 or 29.1%. The Western Bulldogs had the greatest percentage of female members with 43.1% or 9,171, out of a total membership of 21,260 the second lowest membership overall. However, with the exception of the Western Bulldogs, clubs outside of Victoria drew the highest percentage of female memberships.

I also examine the nature of women’s spectatorship and fandom. I investigate the motivations behind their interest, the passion of their fandom and demonstrate the diversity of female fans by age, ethnicity and background. Most importantly, I put female fandom into context. To draw an international comparison and to underline this significance I probe why A.F.L.’s has a greater percentage of female followers than the

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U.K.’s F.A. Premier League. The economic benefits to the A.F.L. and the allied industry
derived from the female patrons are therefore substantial.

Men in Tight Shorts - Myths, Legends and The Unsung Heroes

It is this kind of devotion, this mixture of intellectual appreciation of an intricate and
skillful game and the sheer cathartic pleasure gained from watching others indulge in
purposeful violence, which few women are able either to share or to understand.
Women who watch football are seemingly motivated by less complex notions. They
are there as sidelines supporters for husbands, sons or boyfriends, or as companions to
devoted fans, or perhaps because they entertain secret sexual fantasies about one or
more of the players. Rarely can women engaged in the detailed technical discussions
of rules, precedents and decisions which are an important part of following the game.
And any woman who thinks that by acquiring such knowledge she will be admitted to
the fraternity is likely to be disappointed, for men cherish and wish to retain as a
retreat this avenue of self-expression. It is part of the pub-talk, the work-break chats
and other conversations men have in which they establish their clan credentials and
strike up friendships with members of their sex. The woman who takes up this
interlocution is likely to be resented for transgressing a sexual boundary, for intruding
into the private and precious province of mateship, a precarious state of communality
whose fragility is underlined by its antipathy to a female presence.

Anne Summers44

It is tempting to disregard or refute the claims made by Summers. While I disagree with
most of the statements and the inferences she draws, these propositions do facilitate
discussion on gender relations within the context of Australian Rules Football. In fact
this paragraph from “The Sporting Wife” chapter in Damned Whores and God’s Police
needs to be dismantled entirely, and will be throughout this thesis. Women’s motivations
for following football are many, and they are complex. Most alarmingly, as a feminist
Summers articulates that women do not understand the intricacies of the game. It is a
statement worthy of the most misogynist of men and it strikes to the core of this thesis:
women can and do understand the game. I wonder whether the substantial numbers of

women who make up the football audience now pose a post-feminist conundrum for Summers?

In an age where the relevance of feminism is being questioned by younger generations of women, I commence this argument by discussing the impetus that women follow football “because they entertain secret sexual fantasies about one or more of the players.” The question to be considered is - should sexual fantasising be regarded as the least important and the most ignoble of impulses or is it a manifestation of the complexity of gender relations, sport and society and therefore just as suitable as any other stimulus for fandom.

If new paradigms are to be established and modes of patriarchal authority broken down, then the bureaucracy of the A.F.L. must be examined as a masculine culture of governance and social auditing. Examining the A.F.L.’s corporate structure, culture, and governance reveals how its patriarchal hegemony has strengthened over the last two decades. Certainly the transformation of the V.F.L. into the A.F.L. and its increased corporative function over its traditional cultural role in the Australian community has been examined by scholars since Sandercock and Turner warned in 1981 that “The V.F.L. is being taken over by men with entrepreneurial skills and public relations flair.” Nearly twenty years later Nadel wrote how Fitzroy’s football fate was determined by accountants

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45 The Feminist Movement has been stimulated by the Third Wave Feminists: Julie Burchill, Katie Roiphe and Naomi Wolf. These Third Wavers are critical of their predecessors but this serves to rejuvenate the movement making it more relevant to younger generations of women. Julie Burchill, has written on the sporting hero, masculinity, femininity and the celebrity with Burchill on Beckham. (London: Yellow Jersey Press, 2001).

in the wake of the game going national, football had become business.\textsuperscript{47} Capling and Marjoribanks studied the A.F.L. in terms of “culture versus commerce”, “community versus market.”\textsuperscript{48} Previously Andrews discussed football’s transition from “club to corporate game” and the contradiction and tensions in the social institution’s economic and cultural roles.\textsuperscript{49} Their studies examined the League’s organisation, structurally, culturally, historically and economically. Other work concentrated upon the impact of television upon the corporatisation and nationalisation of the League.\textsuperscript{50} Women infrequently are mentioned in the A.F.L.’s corporatisation and governance documents. The main players are usually men.

The Australian Business Register records the Australian Football League as an “Other Unincorporated Entity” which is described as “An other unincorporated entity is a number of people grouped together by a common purpose with club-like characteristics, for example, a sporting club, social club or trade union.”\textsuperscript{51} The A.F.L. operates with a Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association as a Company Limited by Guarantee under the Corporations Law.\textsuperscript{52} It is a unique organisation in Australia. As a non-profit organisation it earns hundreds of millions of dollars from broadcasting rights and sponsorships. Vast revenue is also accumulated from the licensing of the A.F.L. logo

on a wide range of products and services marketed. The A.F.L. can invest or divest itself of property, again worth millions of dollars. Subscriptions raised through club and individual memberships are a minor funding source. The difference between the stakes and the stakeholders reflects the A.F.L.’s raison d’être for its operation. Football is not only a game. It is a product and correspondingly the A.F.L. has put business ahead of any social responsibilities with the result that the A.F.L. is little more than a hawker in a marketplace.53

The evolution of Australian Rules Football from a competition into a football corporation was executed by a group of men maintaining dominant ideologies of masculinity. In Football Ltd: The Inside Story of the A.F.L. Garry Linnell recorded the football action of the 1980s when most football action was carried out by Australia’s high profile businessmen in their boardrooms. This was consistent with its past. Linnell stated that:

   Since 1896, when the Victorian Football League was formed, the men in charge of each of its clubs had jealously guarded their fiefdoms. Each week they met at the boardroom table and argued well into the night over the smallest and most obscure points of order.54

The game of Australian Rules Football is secondary to story of Football Ltd. Business is also secondary to Football Ltd. The exercising of male power is, and has been, the motivation for the alpha males of Australian Rules Football and winning “The Flag … would guarantee immortality” according to Linnell.55 As an example of the male culture in Australia Linnell’s text is an archetype. In particular, his chapter on “The Beer Wars”

53 In November 2005 the A.F.L. published a social responsibility policy “Respect and Responsibility: Creating a safe and inclusive environment for women at all levels of Australian Football.” This was a reactive rather than pro-active initiative. Two weeks later two A.F.L. players were accused of sexual assault. Michael Davis. “AFL Club stands by accused players.” In The Australian. Wednesday December 7, 20005, 3.
55 Ibid, 25.
could be a parody on Australian masculinity with its main characters of John Elliott and Alan Bond, the “big men liked to drink beer.”

Football is a barometer of gender in/equality in Australia. In the testosterone-fuelled *Football Ltd*, Linnell could have omitted women completely and although they are on the periphery of his discussion this sharpens the point that their roles have been principally of mothers, wives and secretaries assigned to them by the alpha males. These women provide an important contrast to the men because their interest is not about the individual but about the collective.

The A.F.L. must broaden research priorities beyond performance enhancing aspects of ankles, knees and groins and enlist researchers that can analyse trends and impact that flow between the sport and society. The institution lacks an understanding that it has been biased toward areas of research associated with male-centric activities. There is no foresight to seek an understanding of an important section of the football community. It is a mistake not to ask how women want to be perceived in the overall context of the game. The gendered roles within Australian society have been long established and need to be overhauled. To include women in this arena is not to emasculate football – just to remove the overarching relations of power between men and women around the ground and beyond the ground. Here is an empowering account of women’s involvement with football that intervenes in the taken for granted – grand - narratives of sport in Australia.

56 Ibid, 130.
Following this introduction, a comprehensive historiography is presented. It focuses on Australian Rules Football and where women are present or absent. It also discusses sport and women Australian society from a playing perspective and also through their contribution to the maintenance of another sport that Australians have a penchant for, tennis. The scope of the works examined for the historiography is vast, but this is a prerequisite as the scope of the thesis is concomitantly broad. There are many points in researching this thesis where I have been overjoyed at how individual women have made significant contributions to Australian Rules Football but at the same time also angered over the lack of acknowledgement they have received. In particular, the contribution made to the history of Australian Rules Football and Australian society written by Professor Leonie Sandercock stands out and underpins, not only Chapter One but indeed the thesis itself.

The methodology for this research project is presented in Chapter Two. The rationale behind presenting the research methods at this point in the thesis is two-fold. To highlight a specific problem encountered in the research. Certain women involved with players or coaches were unwilling to participate in the research. They were mainly wives. This required evidence for the corresponding chapters to be gathered from alternative sources. The significance of their reluctance was correlated to the subject of the ensuing chapter, a chapter which was unforeseen when the research was designed, yet the topic could not be disregarded.

Midway through researching this thesis, a number of sexual assaults and alleged sexual abuse by Australian Rules Footballers came to the public’s attention. Such an important
issue could not be ignored, even though this was an unintended outcome of the research. Chapter Three – Out of Bounds: Footballers and Sexual Assault, details and discusses a number of cases of sexual assault and alleged sexual assaults connected with players from the A.F.L. While the focus of the thesis returns to the males in this chapter, it is a sad, brutal and pertinent investigation into the milieu of professional footballers, hero worship and the women who fall victim to the damaging side of a national passion. The chapter offers reasons and also questions why this issue had not been seriously addressed by the game’s administrators before these latest incidents.

One of the answers and a possible solution for the unhealthy worship of players by young women is provided in the chapter on female fandom that follows Out of Bounds. Chapter Four – Every Club has a Rosa - presents a number of case studies of fans. The case studies are presented as evidence of innovative a model of female fandom and connect to one woman’s fandom through examining her biography. Once again, this chapter demonstrates and replicates the broad scope of the thesis through the fans who are drawn from a wide range of ages, ethnicities and backgrounds. Similarly, motivation for their fandom is as diverse as the fans.

Logically the ensuing chapter is The Home Team which features mothers and wives. Again case studies are used with the mothers of male players from the little league to league levels of the overarching competition of the A.F.L. Mothers support is wide ranging from simple domestic tasks or arranging the oranges at little league to participating in club and state organizations. Mothers and wives are placed in one chapter although the methodology for research is very different. In contrast to mothers whose
voice and participation was given willingly, data for the section on wives was mostly drawn from sources other than interviews with them. Their story, equally valuable, shows the trials and tribulations of being a footballer’s wife and while the irksome television on the subject comes into play, the reality is fairly remote to the fiction. Employment of women in Australian Rules Football also is examined. Again the roles are diversified. Several case studies reveal the experiences of women and these are supported by additional media and historical sources. This chapter discusses the challenges and success of women who chose careers in a male stronghold. It also examines what occurs when women work in a highly charged male environment.

The thesis’s final chapter investigates women who play Australian Rules Football. It is a lone chapter that almost contradicts the position of the thesis in respect to gender, where one of the aims of the thesis is to normalize women in a football context. This chapter also discusses a few of the falsehoods of why women play the physical game of Australian Rules Football and why they should not. This chapter demonstrates the greatest disparity of Australian Rules Football and gender relations, that the support given to male football by females is not reciprocated by the billion dollar industry largely administered by males.

My original contribution to knowledge is to confirm how and why women have had a central role in the development and maintenance of Australian Rules Football since the game was founded in colonial times but have had their contribution unacknowledged by historians and administrators. My thesis places on record those omissions. Of particular significance is highlighting the lack of acknowledgement and respect for the work of a
woman who authored a comprehensive and seminal social history written on the game. This is the prime example of how women, in many roles – both professional and personal – have been marginalized, despite playing solid roles with Australian Rules Football. This original contribution to knowledge measures gender relations in Australia through the social institution of Australian Rules Football and each chapter contains at least one original contribution to knowledge, no matter how large or small. A further notable original contribution to knowledge proposes an alignment between the hero status of elite players and women through proposing a new model of female fandom and also contains a proposal, from a fan, for a healthier player-female fan relationship.

With an eagle eye, I have surveyed the landscape of women and Australian Rules Football. The timing of this thesis is significant because it is overdue. The topic has not been taken up before, especially from Victoria where fans, academics and administrators are possessive of Australian Rules Football. Australian women are increasing their participation in the workforce yet there are two significant areas where women have equal stake but where their numbers remain low, in elected government at a State and Federal level and in positions of authority with the Australian Football League. In respect to football, there was a change of wind direction in 2004 following the period of sexual assaults and scandal. In response to the call for increased women’s authority with the game in 2005 the A.F.L. finally appointed one female commissioner. They have also engaged with research on female fandom [in Victoria] and they have called for expressions of interest for a new history of Australian Rules Football. In late 2005 they also released a social responsibility policy to address the issue of sexual abuse by footballers. Belatedly, the significance of women’s involvement with Australian Rules
Football has come to the attention of the games administrators. Despite the disinterest in this project, this thesis provides a trajectory and stimulus to enact change.

57 This is a declaration. I have followed the West Coast Eagles from their first season in 1986 and been a season ticket holder since 1997.
Chapter One

WHERE IS LEONIE SANDERCOCK? HOW HISTORIANS HAVE WRITTEN OFF WOMEN IN/AND FOOTBALL

Scholarly interest in both women and sport in Australian society has risen since the 1970s. During this time, there were two significant books on women in Australian society published: *Damned Whores and Gods Police*¹ and *The Real Matilda*.² These two important publications followed trends begun in the United States in the 1950s, with the publishing of *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir³ and the rise of left-injected feminism in the United Kingdom in the 1960s lead by Germaine Greer and Ann Oakley. Concurrently, but derived from a distinct origin, scholarly interest was also turning to studying sport from a historical, sociology and cultural perspective. Those studies have grown into disciplines which occasionally conflate. In this chapter, an examination of the histories of Australian Rules Football is aligned with women’s involvement and participation. In considering major books in the field, what has been taken for granted – women, what has been missed out – women; what has been overlooked – women; and what has been misconstrued - about women, will be established. I discuss an example of these absences, where two reputable Australian male historians and authors of books on Australia football have disregarded another primary female author in the same field. This chapter also ponders specific works on women in Australian society, as well as the intersections made between women and sport in Australia.

Apart from the print media, there are traditionally three main sources of literature relating to football. Club histories feature material of variable quality and applicability. These are often researched and published by lay-historians. Club histories celebrate both team and individual achievements and are important to a club’s identity. These accounts of clubs past are useful for academics wanting to study indicators of social trends and values. The second source is biography, frequently written by journalists. It is a characteristic of sport research that many are in auto/biographical form because of the relationship between masculine hero-worship, and sports journalism and journalists. Sports stars, especially football players, are accorded celebrity, even hero-like status by the media and sports fans. The celebration or denigration of sports figures can best be studied using interdisciplinarity. A third category of literature consists of anthologies, works like *The Greatest Game*, which contains poetry, literature and plays on interdisciplinary analysis or omnibuses such as Garrie Hutchison’s *From the Outer*. Interdisciplinarity allows scholars to establish meanings in and around history, feminism, cultural studies, media and other paradigms to facilitate more intricate research using a wide variety of sources. The utility of interdisciplinary allows a base or foundation to construct a position or argument and is a framework of reference, which can support the evidence widely gathered. It is probably a bold beginning to tackle the work and words of Professor Geoffrey Blainey. *A Game of Our Own*, is not only a starting point as far as history is concerned, it also reveals a non-history, an overt gap in the study of Australian society and the flaws of a singular historical approach to sport.

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In *A Game of Our Own,* 7 E.W. Biggs, then General Manager of the National Australian Football Council, concludes his Foreword by stating “Professor Blainey’s book therefore, must be recognized as being of considerable importance to the overall history of this nation.” 8 Blainey, the eminent Australian historian, had been commissioned by the N.A.F.C. to record the origins of Australian Rules Football. In tracing the development of Australia’s “own game” Blainey incorporated the many factors that characterize Australian history and the development of the nation. There is reference to a unique landscape, the wide open spaces, the hard ground, and the “ghost-like gum trees.” 9 The original inhabitants, the Aboriginals, are mentioned in the book, first with their traditional practices, discussion on their possible influence upon Australian Rules Football and also their participation with the game as both spectators in the early days as well as players. Customary tropes of the land and origins are drawn. Women are the focus of this thesis. Rather than précis Blainey’s history overall, I look at where women are present, the context in which they are placed, as well as where they are absent from the history. This reading against the historical grain allows new priorities, endpoints and narratives to be revealed.

Why did E.W. Biggs and the N.A.F.C. commission *A Game of Our Own?*” and why did they ask Professor Geoffrey Blainey to write it? The answer to the first question seems that E.W. Biggs and the N.A.F.C. wanted to establish whether Australian Rules Football was an offshoot of Gaelic football (it was not). This imperative had consequences: they implicitly wanted to reject the influence that *marn-grook* (the Koori, Aboriginal game of Victoria). Professor Geoffrey Blainey’s reputation as a historian would make it a

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7 Blainey, 1990, 8.
definitive work. Yet what was produced was a historical, chronological narrative. The work paid homage to individuals, laying out dates, places and events. There is little contemplation upon social and cultural conditions of the period. Women and Aboriginals are placed well on the periphery. *Marn-grook’s* influence is also refuted. It almost was a half-hearted version of the origins of Australian Rules Football by a pre-eminent historian and not the “serious work” that was missing from Australian social and cultural history that Sandercock and Turner had asked for and produced nine years earlier. Again, I ask why did E.W. Biggs and the N.A.F.C. commission *A Game of Our Own*? Perhaps one answer is that prior prejudices would be confirmed.

Through reference to the “earliest hero of Australian football”, Tom Wills, Blainey\(^ {10} \) reminds us that Australia was colonized as a penal settlement. Sport in the new colony existed for a variety of reasons, including leisure, social advancement, fitness and mental prowess. Aristocratic sports imported from England were not only for leisure but also to build “character and thereby a nation.”\(^ {11} \) It lessened the stigma associated with a convict settlement. Sporting competitions organised against England were not mere competitions but were meant to demonstrate that the inhabitants were still “civilized”, able-bodied and mentally alert. In England, sport had grown increasingly popular from the 1800s and became more organized.\(^ {12} \) The dichotomy established between upper class sports and working class sport reflected the class system. From the 1800s to the late 1900s, sport continued to develop and was negotiated by varying sections of the English society.\(^ {13} \) Sport also became a strategy of control. The working class was diverted by sport from

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\(^ {10} \) Ibid, 10.
\(^ {11} \) Ibid, 19.
\(^ {13} \) Vamplew, 1988, 7-20.
less desirable activities of drinking and gambling. Goldlust\textsuperscript{14} states that football was used by boy’s schools to bring about control and discipline. He also argues that in the mid-1900s, “There were fears of a declining physical prowess and fighting character of British manhood” and sport became regarded as “positive benefit of the respectable middle class, and therefore, of course, for the nation.”\textsuperscript{15} The Australian colonies developed in a parallel way to England in the 1900s and formed a “close relationship between community construction [and] social need.”\textsuperscript{16} Colonisation, patriarchy and class are reaffirmed through sport.

The early football hero, Wills’ grandfather, had been transported to Sydney in 1799 after his death sentence for highway robbery was commuted.\textsuperscript{17} The first mention by Blainey of women in the new settlement is of Wills paternal grandmother, a free woman, who married Edward Wills and they embarked upon making the family fortune.\textsuperscript{18} Although he provides the name of Edward, Blainey does not give the same respect to Mrs Wills. Indeed, Blainey also names Tom Wills’ father, Horatio Spencer Wills, details his early employment and the subsequent move to the Port Phillip District, yet Horatio’s wife is not accounted for except for alluding to “his parents”, “the family” and “they”. Then Blainey gives Wills’ aunt “the widow of a famous Australian convict, Dr Redfern” a voice in her declaration of Wills to be “a fine youth – sensible, well-looking and gentlemanly”. Again she is denied a name although we learn she was widowed, lived in London and visited

\textsuperscript{14} Goldlust, 1987, 18.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 18.
\textsuperscript{16} Stoddart, 1986, 19.
\textsuperscript{17} Blainey, 1990, 10.
\textsuperscript{18} Blainey, 1990, 10.
This demonstrates that women were only important in sport when attached to a man and that they had no autonomy or independent role.

Tom Wills is presented as one of Australia’s first sports fanatics, both on and off the field. According to Blainey:

He was attracted to virtually every sport except horse racing. …games appear to have pleased him more than work. His worry was that Melbourne did not yet provide him and his friends with sufficient sport every available Saturday. The cricket season ended in May: what game could he play next? He decided to arouse public interest in football – another of the games he had played at Rugby School. Wills was an early advocate of devising a game to suit local conditions. The first acknowledged game of Australian Rules Football took place on 7 August 1858 between Scotch College and Melbourne Grammar School on the site of the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Like their counterparts in England, the Australian boys’ schools believed sport to be part of the development of character, body and mind. It was included in their curriculum as a pathway for boys to become men. Australian Rules Football had been played previously to that event, however, it was subsequent to that Wills wrote a public letter proposing a new code of laws. The new game began to develop new rules leading to distinctive characteristics of the game. Its popularity grew with new clubs being formed. Players came from diverse backgrounds, from white-collar workers to warehousmen. With the Goldrushes, new teams were organised on the Goldfields of Victoria. The game then spread further to South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia. Blainey outlines this expansion to South Australia, Tasmania, Western Australia and also an attempt to introduce it to New Zealand. Why it did not become as popular in New South Wales and Queensland is glossed over. The well-known rivalry

19 Ibid, 11.
20 Ibid, 12.
between New South Wales and Victoria, where Australian Rules Football originated, was given as the main reason why football did not become popular at that time. New South Wales imported rugby. Victoria created Australia’s own game and it spread to the other colonies to the South and West.

The level of spectatorship also increased. Blainey’s first Australian Rules Football crowd estimates were the 300-400 spectators who watched Ballarat play Geelong on 18 July 1862.22 In the 1870s, Blainey states that the number of spectators at football matches were between 2,000 and 10,000 depending upon which teams were playing.23 Crowds were made up of “boys,” “young men” or gender neutral “adults.” Descriptions are given of their mode of transport to matches, their attire, including top hats. Chapter Six “The Rise of Barrackers and Hissers” discusses early crowd behaviour and football language. There are two illustrations of spectators included, which display women. The caption on page fifty three notes “Women wearing the latest winter fashions”. Blainey does not mention women as spectators until page seventy seven where the first reference to women spectators is made to South Australian Governor and his wife who “sometimes attended”, another woman attached to a man. Prominent identities like Henry Ayres the politician and Uluru (Ayres Rock) one-time namesake are named while women are subsumed into the background through statements “And of course the ladies came” or “especially the women standing along the boundary.”24 Twice Blainey states that the football was supported by “women as well as men, rich as well as poor, Catholics as well as

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21 Ibid, 18.
22 Ibid, 28.
23 Ibid, 63.
24 Ibid, 77.
Protestants.” In Blainey’s eyes, women were only useful within the role of companionship.

A Game of Our Own presents the origins of the Australian institution of football as a simple story, a description of how the game started, where, when, by whom, the local conditions, how the rules were developed, together with the growth of the colonies. Blainey relied mainly on newspaper reports, Bells Life in Victoria, The Argus, an early magazine The Footballer and the state and club histories. These are the traditional source materials for conservative historians. As a result, it is a one dimensional account of the birth of a new sport in an emerging nation, without analyzing questions of deeper social significance. It is not surprising therefore that little, if anything meaningful can be found of women’s association with the origins of Australian Rules Football. Granted, football was initiated as a male pursuit, and it is to be expected that individual players feature. However women are rendered nameless and featureless, and almost worthless. Yet surely even in those times women, must have had some kind of role in association with football, especially when the numbers of crowds was in the thousands. Even Tom Wills’ wife is reduced to a single sentence on the last page: “His wife saw his intention but did not have the strength to prevent him from stabbing himself three times in the breast.” Women have always been part of football. Put simply, alternative sources must be found.

Blainey Revised

In 2003, Professor Geoffrey Blainey published a revised edition of A Game of Our Own: The Origins of Australian Football with some “lost pieces of the jigsaw [that] have come

25 Blainey, 1990, 87, 94.
to light.”27 The revised edition is a paperback with the result that the illustrations are smaller and reproduced with less clarity. In this revised edition there is no Foreword by E.W. Biggs28 of the N.A.F.C.29 Instead Blainey explains the original mandate which was to investigate whether Australian Rules Football was an offshoot of Gaelic football. There are minor changes to the original text, additions to paragraphs “for the sake of accuracy, clarity or pithiness.” 30 Blainey has included two new chapters to extend the story for a further twenty years resulting in Chapter 9 “The Hidden Money” and Chapter 10 “The Tribulations of the Man in White”. Additionally, he expanded and revised the original Chapter 9 “The Gaelic Myth” with Chapter 11 of the revised edition “Myths: Gaelic and Aboriginal”.

Blainey still distances the influence of Aboriginal football from Australian Rules Football. By fleet of foot, he concedes that the most distinctive feature of Australian Rules Football (from all football codes), marking the ball, may be have been “imitated” and the only action or attribute early settlers learnt from the Aboriginal people of Australia.31 His position is a concern. He wants to acknowledge this influence but falls short. It may be a singular factor, but it is a distinctive feature of a very distinctive game and by his own admission: “In essence, the modern game is the result of a chain of invention, nearly all made since 1858, that game would bear virtually no resemblance to the present game.” Blainey states “that the case rests on the idea that the game played now is akin to the old Aboriginal game: ‘Today’s game still retains the essential character

of the original”32 and I assume this is cited from the Australian Football League’s 1999 Aboriginal-sponsored booklet he references on page two hundred and three.

While Blainey wants to explicate himself from his usual treatment of Aboriginal people he ignores women and football. There is no expansion of women’s involvement in the game. No further serious investigation of the role of women and Australian Rules Football in Blainey’s revised edition is found. Nor had he sought the primary author of *Up Where Cazaly* Professor Leonie Sandercock’s input, her acknowledgement remained the same. Joanne Scott had previous chided Blainey for his brief appearance of women:

> While sporting history offers considerably more scope to reflect on women’s experiences than does the story of Australia mining, the origins of Australian Rules Football, the subject of Blainey’s primary work in the genre, *A Game of Our Own*, does not. Women make brief appearances in Blainey’s histories, but the central figures are always men.33

In producing a revised edition of *A Game of Our Own*, Blainey had the opportunity to redress this error and absence, but did not, could not or would not. The omissions made are fairly consistent with Blainey’s other writings on Australian history. *The Fuss That Never Ended* is a chronicle of this and other aspects of Blainey’s work. Blainey alone is not responsible for the absence of women in Australian Rules Football history. This thesis provides a statement and stand on the contribution women make to Australia and Australian Rules Football.

31 Ibid, 203.
32 Ibid, 204.
In his ‘Acknowledgements and Sources’ of *A Game of Our Own* Geoffrey Blainey credits A. Mancini and G.M. Hibbins, the editors of *Running with the Ball: Football’s Foster Father* with having “a valuable preface of 50 pages on early steps in the growth of the game” together with “new material from the 1850s.” I concur with Blainey that *Running with the Ball* is a valuable addition to the body of knowledge pertaining to Australian Rules Football. *Running with the Ball* in this historiography incites also some interesting points relating to the two other notable histories on Australian Rules Football.

The sequence of major publications on Australian Rules Football is important to track. In 1981 *Up Where Cazaly* published by Sandercock and Turner, followed by *Running with the Ball* in 1987 by Mancini and Hibbins and followed in 1991 with *A Game of Our Own* by Blainey. In considering this sequence, ponder the following: Blainey does not mention the names of Thomas Wentworth Wills’ grandmother (Sarah Harding), mother (Elizabeth McGuire) or aunt (Sarah Wills) although he has this knowledge from *Running with the Ball* of “H.C.A. Harrison’s Family Tree.” With the information at the ready it is lamentable, that a leading Australian historian not to include the names of these wives and mothers, although a trait of his writing is to ignore women.

Secondly, on page seventeen Mancini and Hibbins mention the “pioneering work” of Ian Turner on the history of Australian Rules Football, Leonie Sandercock is again relegated

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34 A. Mancini and G.M. Hibbins, eds. *Running with the Ball: Football’s Foster Father*, (Melbourne: Lynedoch Publications, 1987). It is a reprint of *The Story of an Athlete* by H.C.A. Harrison, 1923, with an extensive preface, photographs and illustrations of men and women of the story and end notes. H.C.A. Harrison was Mancini’s great great grandfather’s brother., 101.

35 The title *A Game of Our Own* comes from Thomas Wentworth Wills who advocated working out “a game of our own” rather than taking up Rugby. From *The Story of an Athlete* by H.C.A. Harrison 1923 and reprinted in *Running with the Ball*.
to the footnotes (this is six years after the publication of *Up Where Cazaly*). At least Blainey had the courtesy in his ‘Acknowledgements and Sources’ of saying that Leonie had completed *Up Where Cazaly*, in a brief fashion. Thirdly, Mancini and Hibbins were indeed fortunate that “the V.F.L. has generously seen fit to make a substantial contribution to Australian sporting history and Victorian society history by the support of this book.” While the book is valuable to Australian and Victorian sporting history and society, it should be borne in mind that the pivots upon H.C.A. Harrison’s autobiography *The Story of an Athlete: A Picture of the Past* published in 1923, the preface and Chapter 7 concentrate on football. Support from the A.F.L. for social, cultural or historical projects is hard to gain. In 2002 and 2003, the A.F.L.’s Research and Development Committee’s focus has been on clinical research, a performance based criteria of ankles, knees and groins. H.C.A Harrison would have approved their narrow focus, as he is revealed as both an elitist and a sexist in *Running with the Ball*.

One of the aims of Mancini and Hibbins’ preface is to “redress omissions” of Harrison’s family background. In his autobiography, Harrison includes details of successful family members, of strategic marriages, heroic explorers and prominent cricketing friends and omits his convict relatives even though they had varying degrees of success out of their penal existence. Mancini and Hibbins also contextualise the Christian masculine ethos prescribed by the colonial powers for its own and colonized subjects at that time, revealing how masculinity in Australia was constrained through vigorous sporting

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36 Mancini and Hibbins, (ab) (vi). Thomas Wentworth Wills and Henry Colden Antill Harrison were cousins and subsequently brothers-in-law, Emily Thomas’s sister having married Harrison.

37 Ibid, vii

38 The V.F.L. is not included in Leonie Sandercock’s Acknowledgements and refer correspondence between Hindley and AFL 2002.
pursuits. It is Harrison who is instructional here, for he “never ducked the physical clashes, declaring football was ‘not suitable for menpoodles and milksops’”.39

The principle aim of the preface was to elaborate upon Harrison’s role in nurturing Australian Rules Football in its infancy. Mancini and Hibbins’ history of the early era discusses class, colonialists, cricket and how the codification of Australian Rules Football came into being, together with the influences of the other codes, rugby (in its variations) and soccer. Early rules distinguishing codes: running with the ball, no offside and marking the ball are discussed. These early intricacies of the game are discussed without any debate, for example no reference is made to the Aboriginal game, marn grook. According to Mancini and Hibbins cricket clubs were responsible for fostering many of the football clubs. While Harrison was hailed as “Football’s Father” by the public in a caption under his portrait, Mancini and Gibbins believe that “foster father” is more accurate because he played a follow up role to his cousin and brother-in-law Thomas Wentworth Wills.

There is an aspect of this book that requires comment. Despite the family tree, the inclusion of “strategic” marriages, conditions of the colony for men and women and the photographs of Jane Harrison, Elizabeth Wills and Emily Harrison nee Wills, there is no mention of the women who watched football or who contributed towards the game. Mancini and Hibbins state that Colden Harrison was “what used to be called ‘a man’s man’ and his references to women tend to be of the patronising ‘fair sex’ variety.”40 This Harrison ‘legacy’ links to the ideological view of femininity and spectatorship that men

39 Mancini and Hibbins, 48.

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play, women watch, discrediting women’s role, because it is assumed that spectatorship is passive.

In contrast to A Game of our Own and Running with the Ball, the most significant work on Australian Rules Football makes its introduction with “The queue – men, women, children – begins to form on Friday afternoon.” This is the opening of Up Where, Cazaly?: The Great Australian Game.\(^{41}\) The ‘Introduction’ sets the scene of the pinnacle of the football year – the Grand Final. Sandercock and Turner acknowledge the presence of women at the football as an integrated, empowered and present force. They were not an “add on” but were described as spectators, waiting in anticipation for the commencement of the game, in inclusive and fairly gender neutral terms while stating that the game is played by “thirty-six men”. They continue to acknowledge women’s presence in their introduction:

> Every inch of standing space is crammed with 120,000 men, women and children who have come to the Melbourne Cricket Ground on this, the great day of Melbourne’s sporting and ceremonial year.\(^{42}\)

and

> The boys and girls of the fan clubs have raised, in front of the races from which the players will emerge, screens of intricately woven in club colours and carrying the messages of the day.\(^{43}\)

The acknowledgement and validation of women as football spectators is an immediate contrast with Blainey’s work and it is worth noting again that Sandercock and Turner’s book was published nine years earlier. Blainey cites Up Where Cazaly in Appendix One

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\(^{40}\) Mancini and Hibbins, 16.
\(^{42}\) Ibid, 3.
\(^{43}\) Ibid, 3.
‘Acknowledgement and Sources’ 44 pointing out that Leonie Sandercock had completed “the outstanding historian” Ian Turner’s work following his death. By stating that the book had been “published in their joint names” he suggests her role was one of editor or, perhaps, even less. However Turner had completed seven of the seventeen chapters and one assumes was not associated with the preface, introduction, two appendices, sources, bibliography and index. Without diminishing the work of Ian Turner, the majority of the credit must go to Leonie Sandercock. Her perspective as a woman is important to this thesis as is her knowledge of the theories of space, cities and cultural geography.

In the ‘Preface,’ Leonie Sandercock explains why, and how, she enacted this process. Ian Turner, a social historian, was one of the first scholars to investigate Australian Rules Football in Australian society. She moved from her usual discipline of Urban Planning to finish one of the most important works on Australian Rules Football. It became a significant work for a number of reasons. It documented the origins and history of Australian Rules Football to the 1960s, with its transition from a fledgling pastime to an industry and institution. Secondly, it was also one of the first discussions on the impact the media would have upon the game, particularly significant because it preceded the Victorian Football League going national with its transformation into the Australian Football League and the commensurate expansion of the media coverage. Thirdly, the study of Australian Rules Football as an aspect of “popular entertainment in the culture of modern industrial societies” 45 occurred as interest in popular culture began to be taken seriously by scholars.

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Although Sandercock and Turner also did not provide the names of the two Mrs Wills, they did include women in their social history consistently throughout their work, noting that men and women went to the Goldfields of Victoria. They make the point that early in the history of Australian Rules Football women were consistently spectators of the game. From their work, we learn those early female fans were from different classes: “barmaids (very strongly represented), working girls”46, “respectable ladies” and “callow girls.”47 According to the Australasian which Sandercock and Turner quote, in the 1920s football’s popularity not only had “broad class appeal” it also had no age limit, “‘from the grey-haired old lady’ to the ‘carefree flapper’”.48 It is also revealed that women were not always passive spectators; they were frequently described as “excited”, so excitable that some assaulted the umpires.49 From Sandercock and Turner’s work, it appears that one woman would have made an early trainer when she “climbed the fence and made her way across the playing area to … to offer sympathy or first aid or both” to an injured player.50 They state that this was an unusual incident however officials did not stop her from her ministering. Women were also attracted to football celebrities and heroes in the 1920s. One notable, personality was Haydn Bunton, who appealed to the spectators with his on field skill and his off field glamour, had a great following of women.51

The main emphasis Sandercock and Turner place upon female fans is their enjoyment of the game as spectators. They state:

Although the game itself was an all-male exhibition, women were welcomed as spectators and for social reasons. Both the amount and the intensity of female

46 Ibid, 36.
48 Ibid, 97.
49 Ibid, 85.
50 Ibid, 96.
51 Ibid, 113.
involvement were commented upon from the earliest days. Aussie Rules was in many instances a family involvement.52

It is acknowledged that those early women fans accompanied their partners as spectators, however, the emphasis seems to be of a mutual enjoyment. The “family involvement” could have also extended to those women who followed their husbands, brothers or sons. It was a way of sharing a leisure activity and demonstrated interest in their pursuits, in this case, football. This interest could have been extended to other family members and different forms of social life that comprised of a range of sports and other activities including art and music.

Little is revealed about the tangible roles women played in support of the early footballers. Undoubtedly they must have contributed in myriad ways to the existence and maintenance of Australian Rules Football, whether it was support given at home or at the club. Volunteer work remains pivotal to clubs. However, in the past, women’s work probably meant patching and mending, making the teas and similar domestic tasks. These under-rated tasks must be recognised as part of the early maintenance of football competitions, clubs and players.

Sandercock and Turner’s work raise intriguing questions about the relationship between the divide between player, partner and performer and also the bridge between them. When discussing the future of the game with increasing media promotion of football, the Brownlow Medal Count night hoopla is regaled with “a big hug from the coach, wife and V.F.L. President.”53 Gender-neutral or a pecking order – are the women here appendages

52 Ibid, 200.
53 Ibid, 163.
or ornaments? Secondly, in Sandercock’s discussion of the “promotional hype and razzamatazz never before associated with the game”, she states that the “Carlton Bluebirds” were more “jeered than cheered.”54 Cheer leaders, young women in short skirts or skimpy costumes, waving pom-poms and performing dance routines unconnected with the actual game has continued. Cheer leaders perpetrate the notion that women entertain and men play sport. While a few A.F.L. clubs have female cheer leaders, most clubs have cheer squads made up of women and men dressed in similar club attire whose function is to wave club banners and initiate cheering from the audience.

On *Up Where, Cazaly*’s dust jacket, the question is posed: “Is it an all-male orgy that excludes women from any place in it bar that of appendage?” This is a fair question, and relates to Appendix II “Women: Appendages to the Game” and of course is pivotal to the thesis. Sandercock reproduced the assertion of William Broderick, columnist of the *The Age* that “Women are mere appendages to the game, extras in an all-male saga, tolerated but not taken serious.”55 She also drew attention to the late Graham Perkin, Editor of *The Age* that women going to the football were “Women’s Lib gone mad”. The publication date is the first of April 1972, a most appropriate date for the author to be writing. The right of reply (and the last word on the topic) in *Up Where Cazaly* went to Mary Brady who was married to a league footballer and who could be regarded as being an expert witness. In “Miss and Mrs Football, but no Ms Football” Brady states:

> The world of Aussie Rules has a definite place for women – in the background. Women must play their parts but always these are supporting roles to the real stars – the players, the coach, the committee, the men of football. Yet, woman’s role in the world of Aussie Rules has been, and remains, quite substantial.56

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54 Ibid, 167.
56 Mary Brady. “Miss and Mrs Football, but no Ms Football” in Sandercock and Turner. 249.
Brady discusses the different faces of these women, the passionate supporter, the doting fans, the volunteer workers in the kitchen and office, the fund raisers, the mothers, wives, girlfriends, handmaidens and trophies, cheer leaders and would be players. Brady was right, women have had a substantial role in football and in the past it has been in the background. However Brady claimed that:

Aussie Rules has no place for uppity women who want to play the game so many of them love, who try to meddle in club politics, who want to be football journalists or commentators.57

Brady’s view of those roles was too limited she failed to realize that women can play a wider part in football in occupations that do not have to be exclusive to males. She could not have anticipated that by 1998 women, while still not playing on the A.F.L. arena, were no longer in the background. Women had become more visible and had greater participation in the game. They were now both journalists and commentators, goal umpires, trainers, medical and para-medical staff, club presidents, and have taken their place on the A.F.L. Tribunal. As Australian Rules Football faces the challenge of globalisation, it is vital for the game, that women who are stakeholders in the game are considered seriously. My contribution to the discourse of women and football is to fill the gap and correct myths in the understandings that surround the relationship.

What Did Lola Montez and a Nun Have, That Leonie Sandercock did not?

Both Lola and the nun were recognized in The Winter Game by Robert Pascoe.58 Lola is mentioned for her entertainment in Ballarat pubs and the “no name nun” was Peter ‘Crackers’ Keenan’s first coach. The primary author of one of the most significant books

57 Brady, 256.
(perhaps the most significant book to date) on Australian Rules Football does not rate a mention in Robert Pascoe’s book. In correct academic fashion, the name “Sandercock, Leonie” does appear in the Bibliography with “Turner, Ian” and frequently in the “Notes.” In *The Winter Game*, she appears persona non grata in its discussion. In an early chapter, Pascoe states that Australian Rules Football has rarely been the subject of serious academic scrutiny. He notes the other co-author, Ian Turner’s contribution to football, in academic, media and public settings throughout the book, and in his conclusion states “One of the interesting ironies in the late Turner’s life was that he did more than any other academic to promote a debate about football.” The irony is on the same page, Pascoe calls for “More women to be drafted onto the club boards of management”, while discussing issues of demographics, spectatorships and politics, he fails to mention that Ian Turner’s work would not have been completed and published without Leonie Sandercock. Her role was not that of mere editor. Only half the research had been completed: only the first seven of the seventeen chapters had been written by Turner. In view of the similar treatment by Blainey, is this a male historian conspiracy to airbrush Sandercock out of football historiography?

On the book’s back cover it is stated that a broad readership is the main audience intended for *The Winter Game* “die-hard fan …. newly converted” rather than a contribution to academic debate. An important issue in sports theory is that the divide in reading audiences is never clean. Cultural studies is a confluence between academia and its subject, in this case the fans. Pascoe discusses class struggles, social conflicts and social histories and presents to the reader an accessible account of Australian Rules Football.

59 Ibid, 300.
60 Ibid, 281-292.
61 Ibid, 59.
He employs an interdisciplinary approach with geography, masculinity studies, cultural studies, media analysis, folklore and a dash of anthropology in the book.

Pascoe also raises the possible influence of *marn-grook* on Australian Rules Football. He is slightly more receptive to the notion than his fellow historian Blainey, and provides more detail on the game *marn-grook*, and its role in promoting social cohesiveness amongst Aboriginal people. Additionally, Pascoe stresses the multicultural dimension of Australian Rules Football, past and present. Including the multicultural policy and the diversity within Australia’s population has been included in histories since the adoption of Australia’s multicultural policy in the 1970s.

The sources that Pascoe used for *The Winter Game* are very varied and include academic journals, unpublished manuscripts and theses. He studied film from the National Film and Sound Archives for data on both playing styles and crowd composition and behaviour. He analysed sports journalism, both past and present and the print media. As expected, local club histories and biographies are also sources. Pascoe included anecdotal evidence and carried out a number of interviews with past players and fans. In addition he has referred to the work of professional football writers – Martin Flanagan, Garrie Hutchison and Geoff Christian, journalists but also authors of anthologies, omnibuses and club histories.

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62 Ibid, 244.
In the introduction, a cultural analysis explains why rugby was played in Sydney and Australian Rules Football in Melbourne. This analysis continues in “Part One Preliminaries,” which overviews the rules of the game and issues of social conflicts, class struggle, and social mobility are continued throughout the main body of the book. The chronological narrative of the history of Australian Rules Football over the century follows and while the main focus is on Melbourne, there is substantial discussion of football, names, places and events, in Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania. Accompanying the history of the competition are details on football language, humour, cultural practices and descriptions of social activities carried out by the fans, placing sport and culture in everyday life, giving it texture and depth.

Pascoe shares much with Blainey with the perfunctory manner in which he acknowledged women’s presence at the football from its origins, then frequently mentions women but without any substantial discussion of their involvement with the game. Predictably, there are brief references to girlfriends and wives (as a category), mothers and daughters individually. Then there are other more generalized references: “First flush of family building”64; “Children and women”65; and the “family picnic.”66 Pascoe does discuss masculinity throughout the book - Ron Barassi “helped to shape modern Australian notions of masculinity himself.”67 Yet he does not acknowledge that there may be a feminist perspective until the penultimate moment “Add to this mixture the new politics of the women’s movement.”68 Opportunity for acknowledging women’s contribution to football was present throughout The Winter Game. In outlining the hierarchial system of

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63 Elza Barassi and Merv McIntosh’s daughters (well respected netballers).
64 Ibid, 51.
65 Ibid, 83.
66 Ibid, 110.
67 Ibid,141. Pascoe and Barassi’s “notion” of Australian masculinity is raised later in this thesis.
Australian Rules Football from the junior leagues to the A.F.L., Pascoe overlooked women’s vital contribution to the juniors. Again, when he discusses Kevin Sheedy’s beliefs for football he states “Sheedy believes football must be studied and nurtured from the toddler’s first kick to the bounce of the ball in the Grand Final.”69 While child-rearing has become an increasing shared experience with mother and father, the reality is that most nurturing is still carried out by the mother. There is more to the development of a footballer than just kick to kick at the park. Transportation to training, orange and washing rosters, fundraising, first aid are just as important to the maintenance of the junior team as coaching and officials. There are also many instances of mothers taking on coaching roles for junior teams and often if there is a male coach, he is often assisted by the mothers. Indeed, I have assisted at junior training. Not all youngsters will play at the elite level. Their appreciation and interest in the game can be “nurtured” through their experience in junior football. Pascoe failed to examine what “nurturing” meant to Australian Rules Football at any level.

Finally Pascoe asks “When will women join A.F.L. ranks?”70 It is a strange question to pose in the third last paragraph. Perhaps it is more of a frivolous question while attempting to suggest that there will be a time when a woman is included on an A.F.L. team. He then continues (in the same paragraph) to acknowledge women’s role as supporters, the women on the Boards and women as senior and junior umpires. Another fleeting reference to women is made. The answer to his question is that women have always been in the A.F.L. ranks, but not in the capacity of players. Their role in the game is nonetheless important. It has been a neglected area of study requiring redress.

69 Ibid, 203.
70 Ibid, 246.
Football is now receiving more attention from academics. This thesis ensures that those who have been forgotten in Australian Rules Football are acknowledged. My task is to add to the body of knowledge relating to the institution of Australian Rules Football through scholarly research on women’s involvement and contribution to it and investigate why women have not been accorded with a significant status of their own in the realm of Australian Rules Football.

**Up Here— Leonie Rules!**

“Thanks for asking. It was cathartic.”

Leonie Sandercock

This was how Professor Leonie Sandercock described the experience after answering my questions regarding *Up Where Cazaly?: The Greatest Game*. It was important that Sandercock’s experience of writing the book be sought and as well as her opinions on Blainey and Pascoe’s treatment of her authorship. After locating her in Canada, I emailed and asked if she would agree to answer questions. I am grateful to her for agreeing to this request and responding with frank answers.

Professor Leonie Sandercock is now Professor in Urban Planning and Social Policy, School of Community and Regional Planning at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. As a teenager, she was an “Aussie Rules fanatic, something of a sports star” and she “really wanted to play the game!” In Adelaide, she attended games

72 Ibid.
with her father and at fourteen years of age she won the Channel Seven World of Sport footy tipping competition (Adelaide). Having developed a deep understanding of the game and an appreciation for its physicality in Adelaide, her passion for the game took on an extra dimension in Melbourne, where she lived with Professor Ian Turner, social historian. They followed Richmond, lived within walking distance of the M.C.G. where Tigers fans would meet before and after the game to socialize.

Professor Ian Turner was contracted by the publisher Granada to write the book and had been working intermittently for a number of years before he died. Sandercock states, and is supported by other academics and Pascoe, that Turner was the “real pioneer in the field”, ‘Professor Footy’. However, when and if, Turner would have completed and published the book in view that he had research and written up to 1900 is doubtful according to Sandercock who states “he was not focused on the book, ever”. Sandercock stated, “He only signed the contract with Granada because he was short of cash, and then he felt guilty that he was never really working on the book.” His waxing and waning research for his book could be explained by the seriousness that his colleagues viewed sport and society at that time. Very little on sport had been researched or published in Australia. Fortunately the publisher recognized Sandercock’s football knowledge and writing expertise and approached her to finish the book.

Sandercock states that she readily accepted the publisher’s proposal. She understood the subject matter and was concerned about the future of the game which was facing

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73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
nationalization and increased financial imperatives. Her greatest challenge was overcoming her grief, not the task of research or writing. Secondary to this was “as a woman, getting access to players and coaches to interview them.”\textsuperscript{76} However some were “very cooperative, great informants, and also good friends.”\textsuperscript{77}

Professor Sandercock’s response to my questions about Blainey and Pascoe’s dismissive attitude towards her authorship of \textit{Up Where Cazaly} was succinct. Blainey had stated:

Ian Turner did more than anybody in Melbourne in the 1970s to quicken interest in the history of football but he died before he could do full justice to his knowledge. His article ‘Work and Play in Victorian Victoria’ is in the \textit{Victorian Historical Journal} of February 1978. His book was completed after his death by Leonie Sandercock and published in their joint names as \textit{Up Where Cazaly?}: \textit{The Greatest Game} (Granada).\textsuperscript{78}

Sandercock states Blainey never consulted her, or anyone close to Turner, about her role, to the detriment to \textit{A Game of Our Own}. “What a lousy piece of history he has written in this case!” she admonished.\textsuperscript{79}

Pascoe also followed in Blainey’s footsteps with his omission. In \textit{The Winter Game}, he discusses Ian Turner’s contribution to the study of Australian Rules Football and includes references to Turner and \textit{Up Where Cazaly} in his discussion. Yet Leonie Sandercock’s name is only mentioned in the bibliography. Sandercock’s rebuke for Pascoe: “Same as above. These blokes are so full of stereotypes about women, it wouldn’t occur to them that I might actually know something.”\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{78} Blainey, 1990, 101.  
\textsuperscript{79} Sandercock, 2002.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
Recognition for *Up Where Cazaly* is due to Sandercock, her perseverance and expertise both as a scholar, a football fan and a grieving partner. Her historical account has not only the greater historical span but it is the depth of her book, acknowledging that there is not one gender who makes an audience, that makes it significant. According to Sandercock, Turner had not recognized that “women were enthusiastic spectators, and that it wasn’t an entirely male audience for the game.”

‘Professor Footy’ Ian Turner who initiated scholarship on Australian Rules Football had not made the connection of the popularity of Australian Rules Football with women and the contrast with other football audiences. Both Sandercock and Turner were, however, interested in its latent sexuality. Astutely, Sandercock engaged Mary Brady, then a student and wife of an ex-League star, as research assistant, who wrote Appendix II Women: Appendages to the Game “Miss and Mrs Football, but no Ms Football”. They claimed a hitherto ignored dimension to the audience of Australian Rules Football audience, women.

Additionally, Sandercock was teaching Australian Political Economy so she was critical of financial changes and the influence of the media. The media subsequently shunned her and lost the opportunity of a new and insightful ‘Professor Football’. In foreshadowing the national competition, her prophesy of a destruction of the national game has not come to pass, (to date) which she readily admits. However, the Professor of Urban Planning and Social Policy reflects that “socio-spatial demographics of the city were changing the game anyway.”

At the time of publication she was dismissed by the media, but Professor Sandercock states she has never heeded barriers. Professor Sandercock is now

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81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
a distinguished scholar in her own discipline, Urban Planning. Additionally, she has also contributed significantly to Australian social history through her publication *Up Where Cazaly*. Her version of the social history of Australian Rules Football is the “screamer.” She flew above stolid historians.

**More than Just the Men**

A scene of the spectators at the St Kilda versus Fitzroy from 1907 on the cover of *More Than A Game: An Unauthorized History Of Australian Rules Football*[^83] with its good representation of women in the crowd and who are strategically placed just below the title hints that this book will offer a different nuance on women and football. In their introduction, Rob Hess and Bob Stewart call for increased research into Australian Rules Football. They admit that their “account is incomplete”, recognizing that there much scholarly work to be done in the field, and appeal for scholars to continue the research.[^84] From page one where they acknowledge Professor Ian Turner and Leonie Sandercock, there is a different tone to the book, a more inclusive enquiry of Australian Rules Football. Indeed, “The Preface” by Martin Flanagan also indicates this, with his reference to his mother listening to the radio for the football scores.[^85]

Published in 1998, it is probably one of the last comprehensive works published on Australian Rules Football. It is an “unauthorized” history because no direct assistance was provided by the A.F.L. The editors Robert Hess and Bob Stewart are both academics from the Victoria University who have researched and published widely on sport and


[^84]: Ibid, 3.
Australian Rules Football. Their contributors are also academics and writers on Australian Rules Football and whose eight chapters span nearly 150 years. It is, as it claims to be, a history, a chronological account of people, places and events that focus mainly upon football in Victoria.

Running through *More than a Game* are the usual references to women and football, accompanying males, fashions and hero worshipping. These references do not have the same emphasis placed upon them as with other historical accounts where it is more tokenized and feminized. Discussion on women’s positive involvement with football takes place in this book, as well as those times when women behaved badly. During the 1880s, “larrikins”, gangs of men and women were drunken, violent and organized gangs, similar to soccer hooligans who terrorized the opposition at matches. Similar to the social conditions of soccer hooliganism in the United Kingdom of the past few decades, youth unemployment was high in an atmosphere of economic and social hard times. In the 1890s, crowd behaviour generally became unruly. According to Hess, the incidences of women swearing, threatening to hit or kill the umpire were “remarkable” and their behaviour came under “special scrutiny” from the newspapers. He cites the *Argus*:

The woman ‘barracker’, has indeed, has become one of the most objectionable of football surroundings. On some grounds they actually spit in the faces of players as they come to the dressing-rooms, or wreak their spite much more maliciously with long hat pins. In the heights of this melee some of the women screamed with fear. Others screamed ‘Kill him’. One of these gentle maidens at the close of the struggle remarked regrettfully that it was a pity they ‘let off’ the umpire in the Geelong match,

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85 Martin Flanagan “The Preface” In Hess and Stewart, (v).
as they should have killed him. Yet these women consider themselves respectable, and they ‘support’ football, which is consequently in serious decline.88

In contrast with the earlier description of the “remarkable” behaviour of the women, Hess’s analysis of the Argus is circumspect, stating:

In some quarters, then, female spectators were seen as having a deleterious effect on the tone of football matches. They were seen as taking their barracking too seriously, and as a consequence were blamed for at least some of the social ills surrounding the game in Melbourne.89

According to Hess nearly twenty years later, newspapers were again focusing their attention upon women and football.90 This time they were lamenting that women were not attending the football. After outlining the reasons for this Hess follows with the first discussion on women and football published in a history on Australian Rules Football, stating, “The presence of women at football games, although often ignored by football historians, deserves some exploration” and examines their presence over the next three pages. It is a brief discussion that acknowledges women as spectators, from different backgrounds, and who provided valuable support to the players and clubs. He notes the role of the male press in writing on women and football as trivializing their presence at matches. Profound negativity tracks women’s playing of football. According to Hess, at that time women influenced crowd behaviour and also “development of the game itself”. Importantly, in response to the suggestion by Anne Summers that women only go to the football to accompany partners, peruse the players and have no real appreciation of the game, Hess states this “underplays the role that women have had in seemingly masculine sports.”91 This is reiterated in the ‘Conclusion’ by Rob Hess and Bob Stewart who again acknowledge that women have played an important part in the development and maintenance of the game. They ponder the reasons for its popularity among women and

89 Ibid, 89.
91 Ibid, 105.
suggest that women will be playing an even greater role in future and the discussion moves towards naturalizing this role.

This thesis answers their call for more research on Australian Rules Football and women. It is not only a scholarly tribute to women but provides an expansive explanation on why women enjoy Australian Rules Football, adding to feminist theory that has been blinkered towards the multi-faceted involvement of women and sport. Additionally, there was a goal to reveal the complexity of roles and functions of women in the sport. While many male historians have ignored women, numerous feminists have regarded sport only as a site of inequality. Feminists traditionally studied tangible aspects of inequality: workload inequality, family responsibilities and economic inequality. The injustices in leisure are too often collapsed into questions of lifestyle. Many women gain from their participation with football. They enjoy being a part of a football community, engage with the strategic levels of the game and seek career opportunities within the industry. The thesis challenges historians and feminists to establishes a new ground for women.

Welcome to the Testosterone Zone

100 Years of Australian Football: 1897-1996 claims to be “The complete story of the A.F.L.” It was commissioned by the A.F.L. to celebrate the A.F.L.’s centenary in 1996.92 Below the title on the cover it states ‘ALL THE BIG STORIES, ALL THE GREAT PICTURES, ALL THE CHAMPIONS, EVERY A.F.L. SEASON REPORTED.’ Be wary of book covers. They are often misleading. It is indeed a very comprehensive record of the history of the A.F.L. from its origins up to 1996. It was produced for fans of
the A.F.L. with contributions from prominent academics including Geoffrey Blainey, Stuart Macintyre and Robert Pascoe.

This book has a number of functions in the thesis. It provides a fairly comprehensive chronological narrative of the Australian Football League, the origins of the game, its early history, narratives of clubs, details of significant events and important players through the centenary. It also contains a number of essays on different aspects of the game from the 19th century and 20th centuries. Mention of women’s early involvement in football is made in the essay “Football takes to the sky” by Garrie Hutchison.93 In this essay, Hutchison provides a historical account of how the mark became an important and distinguishing feature of the game. He cites the Argus (circa 1885) “Ladies in the pavilion screamed for fear Mr Pearson would cause some serious injury to himself when he caught the ball high above himself but toppled down head first among the bunch.”94 Again Robert Pascoe notes that “women were present in good numbers, and no doubt passed on the sense of team loyalty to sons and daughters” in “Local Heroes – How they played.”95 Pascoe also outlines the early appeal of “pin-up heroes”96 from the 1920s indicating that the relationship between the media, sport and the fans were inextricably linked before academics began studying popular culture. This suggests that women’s spectatorship was linked to sexualization rather than appreciated the technicality, physicality and strategy associated with sport as sport.

93 Garrie Hutchinson “Football takes to the sky.” In Ross and Hutchinson, 28.
94 Ibid.
95 Robert Pascoe “Local Heroes – How they played.” In Ross and Hutchinson, 102-103.
96 Ibid.
Football in Australia is a dichotomy. Men play, men watch, men work in the industry – it is considered as granted. Women watch and women work in the industry – is still regarded as somewhat quirky. The binary divides requires challenging. Reflecting that men are the “norm” in the text when it means football, there is no specific listing for men in the twelve page index. Conversely there are fifteen references under “women.”

Some references are for the frivolous: “football and fashion 1899” and “debut of Swanettes (cheer leaders).” Significant moments relating to women’s involvement with football, for example Rowena Allsop taking the V.F.L. to the Equal Opportunity Board because she wanted to be an umpire. Beverley Knight’s appointment to the Board of Essendon while listed in the index is not treated with any degree of serious consideration, but included with the references in the chronology of the year. The narrative is embedded with male privilege. While the book focuses on footballers and lauds their playing achievements, declines, retirements, it also includes information on males involved with football not in a playing or coaching capacity. Ranald Macdonald departing as the President of Collingwood and several vignettes on John Elliot are presented in the book. In their centenary year, an essay on women and their involvement in football surely would have signaled that the A.F.L. valued the contribution of woman, in their various capacities. Again Leonie Sandercock’s role in the publication of *Up Where Cazaly*, was downgraded as they state that “It was written by the late Professor Ian Turner and completed by Leonie Sandercock”. This is an account of Australian Rules Football that relegates women and their relationship with the sport. The immediate response was initiated by Kevin Sheedy and Carolyn Brown who published their book

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97 Ross and Hutchinson, 383.  
98 Ibid. 43.  
99 Ibid, 349.  
100 Ibid, 294.  
101 Ibid, 349.  
102 Ibid, 318.  
103 Ibid, 295.
Football’s Women: the Forgotten Heroes two years later. The A.F.L. Centenary is considered as a Testosterone Zone full of clichés and stereotypes.

The Collingwood women members were valued in 1900, because a new grandstand was built especially for them. One-third of Collingwood’s 2000 membership in 1900 were women and it had been apparent that they might “require separate accommodation on match days.”

The caption for this short article is “Collingwood feather new nest for lady Magpies” above the reproduction of the painting of the new grandstand. Consideration of the ladies comfort was supposedly the main intention of building the new grandstand, however, it was also suggested that other more “delicate” members may be protected from the “umbrellas or worse of the women”. Indeed women frequently used umbrellas and hat pins as weapons on umpires. What this paradox demonstrates is a contrast in expectations, roles and actions.

Similarly to most historical narratives, the majority of sources are from newspapers, club histories, football biographies, and the photographic collections of State and National Libraries. In addition, there are a number of photographs presented that were from private collections and individuals. It is the illustrations of the 100 Years of Australian Football that will contribute to the thesis. The illustrations are varied with reproductions of important paintings, lithographs, cartoons, sketches and photographs. They represent changes in technology over the 100 years but also reveal other changes relating to aspects of social life in Australia. It should be stressed that interpretations of these illustrations

104 Ibid, 48.
were not studied adequately and require an examination which probes beyond previous standards.

The illustrations revealed women in a number of roles. Women’s fashions were featured. Apparently in 1899:

Some ladies like to go to the football, and football is starting to have its influence on winter fashion. The horizontal striped jumper is combined with pantaloons, stockings and boots, jaunty caps complete the charming ensembles.\(^{105}\)

That is the story. If the point is to trivialize women’s involvement in early football, it is well made. Through fashion, the trivial becomes political.\(^{107}\) Further investigation is
warranted, and more evidence of these bizarre fashions or the lack of evidence may throw light on past and contemporaneous intentions.

Another image taken at the 1937 preliminary final, “boys barrack, ladies are on tiptoe with enthusiasm”, the accompanying photo is of four women in hats and furs, the caption reads “Football finery for the ladies.”¹⁰⁸ The women are spectators and seem engrossed in the match. This image reveals the class of those women spectators, but not whether they were Melbourne or Collingwood supporters, or there for the occasion. Perhaps they were the ‘Chardonnay Set’ or the trophy wives of the 1930s, reliant upon famous or wealthy men because their access to economic independence was denied or at the very least limited.

¹⁰⁵ Ross and Hutchinson, 43. Photo Credit Index 43, BM State Library of Victoria. 370
¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
P. Sparke. As Long As It’s Pink. (London: Pandora, 1995), 222-223.
¹⁰⁸ Ross and Hutchinson, 156. Photo Credit Index 156 - ML State Library of Victoria.
In contrast, or perhaps very similarly, there is a photograph taken towards the end of the 20th century of “Leanne: the good doctor’s wife.” Leanne Edelsten was the wife of the first (and last) private owner of a V.F.L. club. Dr Geoffrey Edelsten was the “high flying doctor” who offered $6.5 million to assume control of the Sydney Swans. Leanne is wearing white boots, very short skirt with splits up the sides. On trust it has to be accepted that the photograph was indeed taken at a football event or related event because it reveals a grassy surface, with trees in the background, however, the occasion seems to be a grand one, one of the background figures is wearing a tuxedo. The grand occasion was the 1985 Melbourne Cup, the biggest day in the Australian sporting calendar. The only connection between Leanne and football seems to be her affiliation to “the good doctor”, who later found himself in dire financial troubles, notwithstanding investigations.

109 Ibid.
110 Ross and Hutchinson, 315. Photo Credit Index No. 315 - TM The Age, 371.
into Medibank fraud and subsequently the connection with the Sydney Swans was severed. The relationship between these three images is in the exotic (bizarre), wealth and the undermining of any worth that a woman may had made to football.

In two reproductions of the football fixture (sheets) from 1952\textsuperscript{112} and 1976\textsuperscript{113}, women, not the footballers, feature. The first image is of a woman’s head. It is attractive, as most images of women associated with football are, but it bears no connection with football. Pelaco, the sponsor of the fixture card, is making the link between glamour to football and women. The second, depicts a young woman in a football costume. The linkage with football is made through the costume, with a football in hand and the sponsor, A.G.C.,\textsuperscript{114} again associates glamour, women and football. Clearly, this woman has been “dressed up” as a footballer. There are no captions with these illustrations. They are present in the book as a record and reflection of football’s history. Rather than presenting women as enthusiastic followers of football, there passive and unrealistic images of women, reveal how women were tokenized and patronized through these images.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} Ross and Hutchinson, 194. Photo Credit Index No. 194 – BM Tom Mahony, 371.
\textsuperscript{113} Ross and Hutchinson, 273. Photo Credit Index No. 273 – BM Tom Mahony, 371.
\textsuperscript{114} Australian Guarantee Corporation was a financial institution.
The third category of images relates to footballers females: Female fans and footballers, footballers and their appendages. Surprisingly this group did not occur with great frequency. Two images from the 1950s and 1970s are of Brownlow winners with female partner, contrast markedly with images from the 1990s, where the accompaniment receives more attention than the potential/winner. In addition there are images of wives as nurses, and supporters, in traditional female roles.

The images of crowd scenes with women spectators were predominate. Most of these appear early in the book, as if to signify women were present in significant numbers. Again, these spectators are well dressed with hats and furs. Where are the working class women? Were they working? The wealthier women probably had more leisure time than their working class sisters. Some of these women appear to be with male partners.

115 Ross and Hutchinson, 194. Photo Credit Index No. 194 - BM Tom Mahony, 371.
116 Ross and Hutchinson, 273. Photo Credit Index No. 273 - BM Tom Mahony, 371.
117 Ross and Hutchinson, 214, 278. Photo Credit Index No. 214 - TL The Age, No. 278 – BM The Age, 371.
However there are photographs with groupings of three or more women without obvious male partners. There is a photograph taken in 1900 of the grandstand at Geelong with the majority of the spectators being women. The image accompanies a short article on the dispute that arose when South Melbourne refused the Geelong “Lady” members free entrance. The dispute took several months to resolve, but not before Geelong refused all South members free entrance, received a fine from the V.F.L. and their President was forced to resign. The caption underneath the photograph is “the civilizing side of football: ladies in the grandstand at Geelong.” They perhaps were the “God’s police” of football.

![Figure 6: The civilizing side of football: ladies in the grandstand at Geelong.](image)

The most ‘precious’ of photographs feature women playing football and one the “Queen of Football.” The table of events for 1921 includes the women’s football match between the Fleetwoods and the Chorleys before an “enthusiastic crowd.” The photograph on page 107 is an action shot of the teams playing and a number of players going for the

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118 Ross and Hutchinson, 46. Photo Credit Index No. 46 – BR The State Library of Victoria, 370.
120 Ross and Hutchinson, 46. Photo Credit Index No. 46 – BR State Library of Victoria, 370.
It appeared to be serious, until reading that the umpire, a man, wore a dress. In 1954, the charity match was not presented in the table of events for that year, although we learn that there was indeed a match through the caption under the photograph of “Jack Collins trains one of his ‘cuties’ for a charity match.” Jack is taking a chest mark and getting a good “hip and shoulders” from an intent woman in football attire.

No further details of the charity match or ‘the cutie’ are given. Whatever happened to the “Queen of Football”? Miss Kate Harrison was the 1929 Queen of Football. How did she become to be crowned, through birthright? Not as a consort, for she was a Miss. Alas again we have no further details, other than she “tosses the coin” and the only other Queen appearing in the book is H.R.H. Queen Elizabeth II, in 1970.

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121 Ross and Hutchison, 107.
123 Ross and Hutchinson, 199.
125 Ross and Hutchinson, 130.
126 Ross and Hutchinson, 253.
The testosterone zone focuses on the masculine side of football and closer to 1996 the hormone saturated prose screams “Men Only.” Women are marginalized, trivialized and overlooked, yet there were a significant number of supporters from the beginning. While the book is beautifully presented, full of statistics, wonderful illustrations, it paid no regard for women’s involvement and does not provide any semblance of alternative views and the changing conditions in Australian society, remaining in traditional mould of the male historian. The A.F.L. could have called for a new interpretation of studies of the game. It failed to do so, to the detriment of the book and the A.F.L.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{127} Ross and Hutchison, 130. Photo Credit Index 130 – BL State Library of Victoria. 370.

\textsuperscript{128} In 2005, less than 10 years after the centenary, the A.F.L. called for tenders to research and publish a new history of Australian Rules Football.
Remembered Heroes

It is significant that Kevin Sheedy, the long serving coach of Essendon and probably one of the most astute personalities in the A.F.L., recognized the need for women to be included in literature on the Australian Football League, and that he teamed up with Carolyn Brown to write *Football’s Women: the Forgotten*.\(^{129}\) The authors, one involved with the league at the highest level and the other with a nursing and social work background, were not historians or academics working in feminism, women’s studies or popular culture. Sheedy sought to redress and to balance knowledge that surrounds one of Australia’s most prominent institutions. Carolyn Brown left her career to pursue her writing and coming from a sporting family, Brown would have experience and insights into the various roles women play in sport, particularly football.

It is an important book on the A.F.L. and the women involved with it in their varying capacities. While it is written for a popular audience, it should not be underestimated or overlooked by those the academic arena. In Sheedy’s ‘Acknowledgements’ he states that:

> The motivation to write this book was largely due my interest in history and, in particular, the fascinating accomplishments and contribution women have made to Australian Rules Football for over 100 years. To date, these women have not been acknowledged or officially thanked by having their stories recorded. This book is my way of thanking all women who have contributed generously to the success of football.\(^{130}\)

The acknowledgements are placed following the main body of the book and Sheedy’s final words echo his first words:

> IN THE CENTENARY year, the Australian Football League (A.F.L.) did not say thank you to the women of football. This book is part of a long overdue acknowledgement of the roles women plays as mothers, partners, sisters and


\(^{130}\) Ibid. 301.
daughters, and introduces readers to the high-pressure worlds of women sports journalists, women working in administration and sports medicine, and in committees and the Tribunal. 

Not only did the A.F.L. fail to acknowledge women in their centenary year, they also appear to have not to have assisted in the publication of *Football’s Women*. Neither Sheedy nor Brown acknowledge any assistance from the A.F.L. and it seems that the book was researched, written and published, completely independently from them. This is also significant because the A.F.L. have in the past negated a vital section of their audience and the infrastructure that is required to make the competition, not only successful but viable. Was the A.F.L. slow to realize the substantial contribution women have made continue to make to the game? It would appear that this is the case. In 2002, the A.F.L. official website published a succinct acknowledgement of women as supporters and also of their other capacities associated with football and they prelude a brief discussion on “Prominent women in football” as follows:

**Historical role of women in football**

Since Australian Football first became an organized sport, women have supported the game as spectators. It has, however, taken social change on a broad level to give women the opportunity to become more involved. A.F.L. football, like many sports, has largely remained a male bastion in areas beyond the playing field. These historical prejudices however, are being gradually [my emphasis] eroded and women are able to apply themselves [my emphasis] in many meaningful football roles. 

Gradually indeed. The floodlights are on but no one’s at home at Colonial Stadium. At least the A.F.L.’s website now acknowledges *Football’s Women* by Sheedy and Brown.

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132 A.F.L. Info Sheets “Women in football:
133 Colonial Stadium is where the A.F.L.’s administration is housed.
134 A.F.L. Info Sheets “Women in football”
In addition to the A.F.L. overlooking women in the year of its centenary, Sheedy also notes other important points in the Preface. It is a “myth that Australian Rules Football is an exclusively male domain.” Secondly, Football’s Women gives “voice” to the “other team.” Prior to the main discussion, Sheedy outlines the importance of women in his life and football career: Sister Rupert, his teacher; supporters; mother; sister and wife; and the women administrators at Essendon Football Club. Women of many ages, backgrounds, ethnicities and occupations have been interviewed and their contributions to football were put on record. Not only are they given “voice” but also “face” for the book contains many photographs. I am grateful that Football’s Women did not have a theoretical trajectory or precise method. If it did, then I would not have a thesis with an original contribution to knowledge and opportunity for to publish as a book as a further outcome. Instead I contribute to Sheedy and Brown’s agenda.

### On and Off the Field – Illustrating Women

In interdisciplinary studies, particularly cultural studies, visual sources are able to be read as texts. When cultural theorists “read” visual sources, they look for the present active ideologies, but also the absences. They look at expression, body language and for clues to the time, place and motive. In addition to Figures One to Eight already analysed further visual texts, still and motion are examined here. Two of the visual texts are World War Two films held by the National Screen and Sound Archivie, ScreenSound Australia.136

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135 Sheedy and Brown, vii, 1.
136 “Australian Rules? Women Workers Take to Football.” ScreenSound Australia, National Screen and Sound Archive.
The third is *Year of the Dogs*,\(^\text{137}\) a documentary on the Western Bulldogs, formerly, the Footscray Football Club.

Blainey recognizes Rob Hess for locating the illustrations for *A Game of Our Own* in Appendix One ‘Acknowledgement and Sources’.\(^\text{138}\) There are a number, some lithographs, and early photos of individual men and teams. There are also three lithographs that illustrate the social side of football that include women. Page twelve has a lithograph of the Melbourne Cricket Ground on New Year’s Day 1864. The figures around the arena are of men and women. They are well dressed, if not overdressed for the Australian climate at the height of summer, the women are wearing hats and many carry parasols. Similar illustrations also appear on pages fifty seven and ninety seven but rather than the oval being the focus, it is the Grandstand in construction and then completed. The first illustration looks like a social occasion, not unlike occasions twenty years ago, where social cricket would be played and families would have picnics. Perhaps this change demonstrates how sport has evolved over the years, from purely a leisure and social occasion to an industry and social institution. Men played the cricket, while the women sat on the perimeter, organized the lunch and watched the children.

The above illustration cited from *Australasian Sketcher* 7 July 1877 has two well-dressed young women resplendent in hats, coats and muffins in the centre of the picture, around them are other couples, some with children. The caption states, “Women wearing the latest winter fashions would steam into the Yarra Park if their favourite team was playing.” This suggests that the women were going to the football wearing their new clothes – and that the football was an important social occasion. From their dress and their body language, arms to the side, muff to the mouth - it looks like a cold winter’s day for the football. They appear affluent and they look young but seem neither happy nor excited to be going to the football. In the foreground is an older couple, the woman looks slightly disapproving. Behind the woman are a family, father, mother and two children of opposite sexes. In the background is the new Parliament House. On the same page reference is made to an “admiring woman” of player Ensign Crosby. It is a busy picture,

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lots of people, hurriedly moving to the football. They all look wealthy, the poor seem absent, perhaps they are in the background. Younger men are also scarce, possibly they were playing football, working or engaged in some other pursuit.

Over the page is another sketch from *Town and Country Journal* from Sydney in June 1885 with several crowd scenes, some depicting rugby action, the football, male spectators and two illustrating women. In one scene a passive looking young woman who is looking straight ahead, is the focus of attention by two males sitting either side of her. Different interpretations of the signifiers could be applied. It is possible she was more intent on watching the football, while they studied her. Or it may have been half-time and they were both vying for her attention. Some explanations may be that men had to compete with one another for women. Alternatively the young woman may have been particularly attractive. This illustration is an evocative example of the linkage between heterosexuality, and sport discussed by Toby Miller and the varying discourses of masculinity.141 Another scene shows two young women ducking a ball that went towards them, and the crowd behind also dodging the ball. These two illustrations might represent that the football was indeed a social occasion for men and women. The male figures to the side of the illustration appear to be in some sort of confrontation, perhaps fans of the opposing sides. Their clothing is modest, suggesting they were working class, no top hats for them, but caps. Below is the upper class gentleman with top hat, cane and monocle, behind him, the barrackers. While the person with the top hat is expressionless, perhaps his team was doing badly; those in the background are animated and full of expression. They look like they are heckling – but are they heckling the opposing team or the upper

140 Blainey, 54.
class person at the front indicating class prejudice and social conflict. The only clues that this relates to football is the ball in the foreground and the ball the women are dodging. The illustrations capture a number of other possibilities, although there appears to be a team in front of the flag pole. This is an analogy to the illustration of Parliament House’s symbols of class and authority.

*Up Where Cazaly* contains the mandatory early photographs of individual players, teams, and sketches of the Melbourne Cricket Ground.\(^{142}\) From 1900, onwards the illustrations are more of a social history, followers off to the football on the tram, masses fans in the outer. There are also examples of advertisements placed in *The Football Record* in 1914, one of local hotels and one of a mens tailor “defenders of your pocket and peace of mind by supply all that is choicest in Men’s wear at the most Moderate Prices” indicating the default assumptions of a male audience.

![Figure 10: Advertising for Men’s Fashions in *The Football Record* circa 1914](image)
There is a fascinating photo from *Table Talk* 28 July 1921 with the title “Should Women Play Football”. Unfortunately I could find no further details in *Up Where Cazaly* pertaining to who these women were and indeed the intention behind their inclusion. The illustration is a collage of women in individual and group pictures, static and playing shots, of one male with his hands on his hips and a serious look on his face. There is a look of disapproval: these women were out of their customary domain and playing football. These women look serious and determined about football. They are attired in traditional male football fashion which long bloomers, long sleeve jumpers, long socks and boots. They also wore caps. In the very early years of football, men also wore caps. There are at least two teams in the photograph, although there may be more. The 1920s may well have been the time when women could have gained greater gender equality and even established their own football league. Yet for women, the game did not gain strength. These photographs pose questions about intention and ideology. A precise interpretation is unlikely because it is difficult to piece together woman’s history; to do so one must read across sources, or against the grain. The photographs provide evidence and incite questions. When words are prioritized and illustrations are without captions, conjecture must prevail.

142 Sandercock and Turner, 1981.
143 *The Football Record*, circa 1914 In Sandercock and Turner, unnumbered.
Figure 11: Should Women Play Football? *Table Talk* 28 July 1921.\(^{144}\)

\(^{144}\) *Table Talk* 28 July 1921 In Sandercoc and Turner, unnumbered.
If still images confirm an author’s assumptions about the triviality of women’s football, then two examples of early video exemplify it: *Girls Break Aussie Rules* and *Australian Rules? Women War Workers Take To Football* held by ScreenSound Australia, the National Screen and Sound Archive." Both films were made during World War Two when football was curtailed owing to many men being away at the war and the austerity measures that existed providing further examples of the uncommon activities women undertook during the war. *Girls Break Aussie Rules* by Cinesound manages to trivialize women and football through image and commentary. The Contents Sheet is the first clue:

**ANIMALODDITY!**

4. **MELBOURNE GIRLS PLAY AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL:**

Newport (Vic.) Aircraft Girls play Railway Girls a code of football which they believe is Australian Rules. The game, arranged in aid of the Beaufort Christmas Parcels Fund, may not have been good football, but boy, oh boy! It created lots of interest!  

The bone fide “Animaloddity” continues through the commentary and transcript:

*Victoria gets a kick out of an Australian Rules Football match that will make strong men weak and weak men wonder…….*

*Aw – they’re the backs, of course. But who cares about the silly old RULES!* 

*And Grace forgot her lipstick!*  

Teams have the same jumpers, black shorts or white shorts symbolising a single side in pseudo competition. Women’s bloomers meant to juxtapose male’s wide shorts. The ball is touched to the ground, not bounced, seemingly, a weakness yet a common occurrence when a heavy rainfall occurs, but focused upon in this film. The two teams swarm the play. It is now called “flooding”. At first glance it would appear there is male applying lipstick to a female player – ‘let’s make sure our lipstick is in place.’ Or - perhaps it is a

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145 “Australian Rules? Women Workers Take to Football.” ScreenSound Australia, National Screen and Sound Archive.  
first-aid attendant attending to a blood nose, not unusual in football. Similarly, *Women War Workers Take to Football* would now be considered politically incorrect. Its inappropriate language commences with “A scratch team but biting” team: “Goody-goody” to signify winning the toss. According to the commentary, “This game is to prove that a women’s place is in the home.” To challenge the credibility of the commentary it should be judged by its reference to “the referee has been disqualified for joining the scrum.” Australian Rules Football does not have referees or scrums. Take a 50 metre penalty — Commentator Jack Davey.

In 1996, a documentary *Year of the Dogs* followed the fortune, or misfortunes, of the Footscray Football Club. It was the year that preceded the change of name to the Western Bulldogs. The documentary illustrates the male-female binary of the club and Australian Rules Football, where consumption and fandom is feminized. The players, coaches and the club’s politicians are juxtaposed to “The Fans” Pat and Jenny Hodgson. The film illustrates the players in their football domain, the field, the clubrooms and the locker room. Pat and Jenny are shown in their football domain, in the audience at both training and matches and in their lounge room as they watch interstate matches on the television. In fair and foul weather, on and off the field, Pat and Jenny passionately support the hapless “Dogs.” “Poor darling boys,” Pat soothes after a drubbing by North Melbourne. Pat admits that when she went to her first football match with her husband that she did not enjoy the experience. However Jenny, Pat’s daughter took an interest with the result her mother became equally as ardent. Excitement and a sense of belonging to a community,

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148 “The toss” is carried out by the umpire throwing a coin in the air and calling ‘heads or tails’ in front of competing captains. The successful captain chooses the goals in accordance with strategic plans and weather conditions for the game.
150 Cordell. 1997.
151 Ibid.
Footscray, the locality and club, are the motivation for Pat and Jenny. While keen to watch the players train on a dark, wet and windy night, Pat declares the fundraising Players Revue “not my cup of tea. I just love them as players on the field.” If they had any voyeuristic ambitions, then they would certainly be satisfied attending the revue. Rather than gaining respect for their consistent encouragement for the players at training sessions, they are heckled by older male club members who still find women barrackers the oddity.

Year of the Dogs documents the transitions made by a traditionally-based Melbourne club, Footscray, in the changing conditions of the Australian Football League. For my purpose it also demonstrates different facets of women support and spectatorship. Their support has been, and will be, vital to the game’s future. Furthermore it illustrates that while women like Pat and Jenny symbolize ‘the fans’ they struggle for recognition and respect. Yet in Year of the Dogs they are almost pitied and ridiculed. I protest that as ‘fans’ women’s roles are limited, they have marginal representation in Australia Rules Football and face a political fight to overcome the barriers to be truly regarded as fellow supporters within Australia’s own game.

Heroes of the Outer

At last, an historian considered women and their involvement with Australian Rules Football. Robert Hess’s chapter ‘Ladies are Specially Invited: Women in the Culture of

152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
Australian Rules Football is a welcome, if not overdue, addition to the body of knowledge on Australian Rules Football. Note the title: ‘Ladies are Specially Invited: Women in the Culture of Australian Rules Football’. This is an historical examination that outlines women’s early involvement with football, before the days of political correctness and the successive waves of feminism, when the word “ladies” was the appropriate term for women and on one hand held a measure of respect, on the other it is a binding term because it expects women to behave in a determined manner of decorum. It refers to the invitation for ladies to join in the annual meeting of the Collingwood Football Club in 1895. However, what I consider more significant in the title is Hess’s placement of women in the culture of Australian Rules Football. In this brief account of thirty pages, Hess outlines the positive contributions women have made to Australian Rules Football since 1858, asserting that Australian Rules Football is the most inclusive out of all football codes. Yet aspects of Hess’s chapter need critique.

Hess’s historiography is brief, citing Appendix II “Women: Appendages To the Game” by William Brockerick and Mary Brady’s response “Miss and Mrs Football, but no Ms Football in Sandercock and Turner’s in Up where Cazaly and Pascoe’s all-but-omission in The Winter Game. His sources for the chapter are the customary historical materials: club records, newspaper accounts and the analysis of photographs of past crowds. A typology of women fans is used to organize Hess’s argument. The seven categories of fans have been built around traditional social and historical focuses: “Passive onlookers”; “Women Voyeurs”; “Women as Socialites”; “Women as Barrackers”; “Women as Civilizers”; “Women as Auxiliaries” and “Women as Players”. The taxonomy built is in effect a

cluster of silos. These silos still stress the separateness of women’s involvement in the game. By organizing women into a taxonomy, even if it is for “an artificial organizing tool”, it serves to reinforce the notion of two very different kinds of supporters. In most cases the taxonomy could also be compared to male fans. Not all men are aggressive fans or barrackers. Many men enhance their social status (and economic) status through football. These aspects of women’s involvement should not be overlooked but considered as part of the audience as a whole and not in relation to male counterparts if their real role and influence is to be taken seriously, even though in the past women’s “role and influence” has been negated or neglected.

In “Women as Auxiliaries”, women’s role and involvement in the functioning of their clubs is discussed. Their contribution as a section of the membership base, their fundraising activities and donations are outlined. However, Hess overlooked another dimension of women’s roles and that is of supporters to players, as evident in Year of the Dogs with Pat and Jenny Hodgson. Footballers, especially in past times, relied on the domestic support of their mothers, wives and sisters. This care is not to be dismissed, yet most domestic support went unrewarded, and in this case, unacknowledged.

Hess’s chapter focused upon the late 18th and early 19th century. My work updates and elaborates on women’s role in football. It highlights the multitude of ways in which they support football, at many levels. I also stress that women who follow football do so for many of the same reasons as men. Such a realization breaks down a silo mentality of assumed gendered differences that punctuate and demarcate the football audience.
Claiming Our Identity

Before I commence reading a book, I peruse the index to find references to football. It also gives me an overall picture of the books contents. Unlikely as it seemed that any mention would be made to football, *The Real Matilda* was no exception to my process.\(^{158}\)

As suspected, there were no indexed references to the game. However between the Preface and the end of Chapter Two the word “football” appears five times.\(^{159}\) In positioning women’s identity, or the lack of it in Australian history and society, Miriam Dixson overviews those dominant characteristics attributed to the stereotypical Australian male who is mainly projected as a beer drinking, football loving, betting, insensitive bore. Dixson is discussing the identity of a group of Australian males who do exist but alongside many other males with different identities. She is effectively slotting all men into this category overlooking those men whose masculinity does not depend upon drinking, gambling and sport. If men have claimed all the identity belonging to football, then it is time to claim some space and language. Dixson’s positioning of Australian males and football will enable me to claim a new aspect of identity for women and football that provides balance to identity, men’s also. It has been argued that one of the blind spots of feminism has been sport. Dixson also ignored women and football.

In addition to dominating areas of identity, men have also dominated most other spheres of life in Australia in the past. In Chapter One Dixson traced how and why women have been traditionally undervalued. This lack of worth extends from the domestic domain to the workforce where women have been under represented in the professions, denied

\(^{157}\) Ibid, 116.
promotion in other occupations especially in education and through to their severe lack of numbers in politics. Dixson also states that in comparison with women in similar countries, Australian women had a lower status and therefore a lower confidence. According to Dixson, the low status attached to the domestic role of women can be explained as “perhaps the value placed on the home as an emotional arena is lower because it is shared with more demanding rivals than in cousin communities, namely pub, football, workplace and mates.”160 Since 1976, women have gained greater status and are being more fairly represented in the workplace. With greater economic autonomy, many women enjoy more social interaction with their female “mates.” Girls night’s out are common place and they can also go to the pub or club if they wish.161 However, women have had a long involvement with football and with their almost equal presence around the arena now, this is the opportunity to add to the research on football in Australian society and place on record women’s involvement and connection to it.

Recording women’s contribution to the building of Australia since the white invasion had not been carried out in any meaningful way until The Real Matilda was published. Dixson examined historians treatment of women and took to task the prominent historians, including Geoffrey Blainey, Ken Inglis, Russel Ward and, Ian Turner co-author of Up Where Cazaly.162 Dixson cites the contradiction of the empathetic Geoffrey Bolton who wrote six lines on women and followed by a reference to Australian Rules Football in one of his works.163 The celebration and exploration of national identity by male academics lead to “the single most striking feature of our national identity is a

158 Dixson.
159 Ibid, 30, 31, 49.
160 Ibid, 49.
162 Dixson, 58.
womanlessness that amounts in some senses to her obliteration.” Theories of national identity claimed ideologies and assumptions that are coded in the masculine. Dixson states that men have divided characteristics into those of feminine and masculine which leads to both females and males being constrained to binary roles:

As part of the same long evolutionary process, males have defined another group of human qualities – initiative, adventurousness, endurance, courage, aggression, knowledge-as-domination, the capacity for sustained abstract knowledge – as ‘masculine’.\textsuperscript{164} It has suited males to claim, and continually reclaim, these characteristics, particularly in connection to football, yet they are not characteristics that are exclusive or even dominant to males. According to Dixson it is “bodily differences” that have led to the defining of polarized characteristics.\textsuperscript{165} Being a very physical game this has allowed men to assume all identity when it comes to football. Yet many aspects of masculinity are subsumed on the football field, players embrace on field in a way unlikely to take place off field. Miller describes this as a “privileged space of the legitimate gaze of male upon male” with the gaze extending to physical contact that includes hugging or kissing.\textsuperscript{166}

Women are not innately virtuous. They must be researched with complexity, subtlety and analytical care. Dixson confirms, “Their darker sides deserve more attention, if women are to be considered serious historical subjects.”\textsuperscript{167} Dixson later reinforces this where she states that women have been credited with a “civilizing influence” and not been “granted flawed humanity that goes with real respect” by historians.\textsuperscript{168} Umbrella bashing of an umpire by a woman needs to be considered not as eccentric behaviour but in comparison

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid, 57.  
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid, 66.  
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid, 70.  
\textsuperscript{130} Miller, 1990, 82.  
\textsuperscript{167} Dixson, 73.  
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid, 198.
with similar attacks by males. Women behaving badly at the football needs to be analyzed, contextualized and critiqued along with men’s behaviour. Rationales, should they differ, need exploration and articulation.

*The Real Matilda* takes possession of women’s history in Australia from 1788. Dixson questions why our leading historians overlooked women when they wrote their histories about the colonial beginnings, nation building and national identity. But she did more than that: she generated a new history for Australia and the opportunity for women to claim identity. This work establishes an earnest identity for women who follow football, not as voyeurs, nor as oddities, or appendages but serious followers of a physical and strategic game. It is an overdue contribution to the body of knowledge relating to women and football. As a self-professed nation of sport lovers, there have been very significant works relating to women and sport previously that rewrote the records. Since the literature on women and football is sparse, other sports offer models to consider women and football from comparable aspects.

**Wicked and Wicket Women**

*Wicket Women: Cricket and Women in Australia*¹⁶⁹ and *Half the Race: a history of Australian women in sport*¹⁷⁰ are important social histories relating to women and sport in Australia, from a players perspective. These are two important texts on women in sport which reveal valuable insights into common attitudes held in Australia towards women and their involvement in sport, both as players and by association. Both histories trace

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developments in sport and society from the 1800s to the late 1900s where a significant social shift takes places and where the playing field, in various forms, becomes more level for women.

*Half the Race* is a chronological account of women in sport in Australia since 1788, which also includes discussion on contemporary issues that affect women in Australia. She demonstrates that Australian women have undertaken a wide variety of sports, from team games to individual pursuits. Stell also discusses the derision and obstacles faced by women in the past stating that:

literature on colonial women’s participation in recreation, leisure and sport is riddled with myth. From ill-informed and patronizing articles to token comments in general sporting histories, writers have hidden and downplayed both the nature and the extent of women’s physical activity.¹⁷¹

Omissions and trivializations are also true of women’s participation in sport off the field. Little wonder then, that women who pursued sports like cricket and football encountered all kinds of ridicule, but that did not stop many from playing. Stell says that in the 1890s, women had their own football teams in Melbourne and in Perth.¹⁷² Women’s football was also popular post World War Two and Stell states that 27,000 attended a match in Melbourne in 1947.¹⁷³ Later in the 1980s the Victorian Women’s Football League was established.¹⁷⁴ Yet women’s football has been sporadic and not built the tradition and longevity of the Australian Football League or the wicket women who played cricket.

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¹⁷¹ Ibid, 1.
¹⁷² Ibid, 13.
¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 255.
*Wicket Woman* by Cashman and Weaver is similar in style to Stell’s *Half the Race* focusing of woman and cricket in Australia. It is a social history of women who played cricket from the late 1880s to the late 1900s. Common themes relating to attitudes once held towards women in sport are traced back to England and particularly to Victorian England where women were considered to frail too play sport whereas in Australia it was a colonial testing ground for men. Australia’s cricketing women have persistently resisted the negativity encountered to establish a strong competition that is not only internationally competitive but has dominated the world in women’s cricket.

One aspect of Cashman and Weaver’s book that is important in relation to football is their discussion on the change in attitude towards women playing cricket that has taken place over the last twenty years on a number of fronts. Cricket and football are dominant sports in Australia with participation from grass roots to professional level, that attract large audiences and therefore we can compare and contrast the experience of both sports. They are critical of the 1970s feminists for not including on their political agendas a reform of sporting culture and for not arguing for women’s sporting rights. These feminists include Anne Summers’ for her chapter in *Damned Whores and Gods Police* “Sporting Wife”175 and Lois Bryson “Sport and the Oppression of Women.”176 Some reform did occur in the 1980s, including the government promotion which increased opportunities for girls to play sport as part of the school curriculum and as extra-curricula activities, increased funding to women’s sports and a enquiry into *Women Sport and the Media*.177 The first of these initiatives lead to new forms of junior cricket. Kanga cricket was aimed at girls and

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175 Summers, 1994, 115-134.
boys. According to them cricket administrators came to realize that the growth in women’s cricket and increased participation by girls playing cricket was good for all cricket. While boys still dominate in little and junior football leagues it is not unusual these days for girls to play. This is important because increased participation could lead to increased interest in junior and league football and increased representation.

*Wicket Women* is a recognition of those women who have contributed to Australia’s sporting endeavour and successes. It is also an acknowledgement that women also enjoy the same sporting activities that Australian men enjoy. Similarly, *Half the Race* provides valuable information on the women’s sporting pursuits in Australia including the women who took pleasure in playing football in the past. The sporting seasons in Australia are marked by cricket in the summer, football in the winter. The study of women and football, compliments and extends the scholarship of *Wicket Women* and *Half the Race*, adding a further dimension to women in social and cultural life in Australia.

**Labourers of Love**

One aim of this thesis is to highlight the substantial work that women have undertaken that serves Australian Rules Football. This is an additional facet of the contribution and involvement of women in football who sustain and maintain the game. This follows an important focus of Sheedy and Brown’s *Football’s Women* where the roles of mothers, wives, partners and volunteers have been discussed but adds the theoretical perspective required for scholarly work and contrasts to *Local Rites* that claims “an exploration of the

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179 In Chapter Four informants Cath and Aurora used the phrase “in summer it was cricket, in winter, it was football.”
people, the places and the ties that bind local football”, ethnography grass football in the Eastern States by journalist Paul Daffey. Daffey’s book contains anecdotes, reminiscences and a smattering of biography that focuses upon the players and coaches. His references to women, essential to grass roots football’s existence, are peppered. Daffey displayed a blindness towards women and their participation in sport and the differing roles.

Mother’s Taxi: Sport and Women’s Labor by Shona Thompson claims credit for the services women provide in the maintenance of a particular sport, tennis but applicable to other leisure activities. Mother’s Taxi was the outcome of a research project that examined the service work carried out by women in more of a social setting, tennis in Perth, Western Australia. Like my work, Thompson utilized an interdisciplinary approach spanning the disciplines of history, politics, economics, social, cultural and feminist theory. In-depth focused interviews were the basis of her research methodology that was analyzed using grounded theory. By using the data from the interviews, Thompson gave voice to her subject, its participants and throughout Mother’s Taxi her own voice is clear. The chapters are well constructed, corresponding to and outlining the three main roles of women associated with tennis: mother of player; wife of player and player. I would have ordered the book differently, presenting Appendices A and B as an introductory chapter providing a background and describing the setting in which the study takes place. The bibliography reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the book with the authors with diverse backgrounds, academics and sports wives. It comprises scholarly

texts, biographies, articles, chapters and popular sources, and has provided, myself and others interested in this field with some valuable references.

*Mother’s Taxi* has informative similarities and differences to those to be discussed in my thesis. Obviously, the setting is different because it focuses on tennis in Perth, Western Australia. Primarily it examines the domestic work that supports a leisure activity, both contrasting with the professionalism of the A.F.L. and comparing with the activities of women involved with football at non professional levels, although those mothers whose children were playing at State level would have similar experiences to women involved with professional footballers.

Thompson’s work, like Sheedy and Brown’s *Forgotten Heroes*,\(^{182}\) recognizes the “invisible” work women do and makes it visible. There are many different facets to the work women conduct, ranging from the tangible, the myriad of operational tasks or equally as valuable yet less recognized emotional support. Support includes domestic work provided to players, including transportation, washing, ironing and preparing meals. Where the player is a partner and parent, this usually includes the role of chief caregiver to children. ‘*Emotional and backup support: Being a “listening post”*’ is another important role these women have.\(^{183}\) There is also the volunteer work involved in running the club. This may include organizing social events, fundraisers or administrative tasks. Then there are the women who coach, in this case tennis, but as Thompson states, “I believe that there are insights and implications that would apply, to a greater or lesser

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\(^{182}\) Sheedy and Brown.  
\(^{183}\) Thompson, 85.
These insights and implications can be applied to football, not only to coaching but other roles as well. Thompson also discusses the expectations placed upon player’s mothers, she states:

The definition of being a ‘Tennis Mum in Western Australia’ is accompanied by a specific set of expected behaviours. It also may be a controlling definition – she can not behave any other way. These behaviours related to traditional notions of motherhood of primary care giving, where their efforts in supporting their children’s participation in tennis were expected rather than appreciated. These expected behaviours can also be applied to women who have family involvement with football.

The problems women confront when fulfilling these roles are also discussed by Thompson. She examines cases of mothers in paid employment and the increased pressures upon their time, their challenges of trying to balance work and family responsibilities. Mothers in the workforce still assumed the role of helper with their children’s tennis activities. Other women were frustrated by the time tennis occupied in relationships that lead to confrontations with partners. Then there were women who were stressed by the demands of their tennis playing partners or children as well as clubs and associations. These are intrinsic factors that bear upon those women’s lives.

The chapter on “Rewards and Rationales” provides the insight into why women carry out their “invisible work.” Most of those women believe in continuing their work and see the benefits associated with maintaining a child or partner’s tennis activities as having

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184 Ibid, 7.
185 Ibid, 59.
186 Ibid, 185-226.
benefits for them also. These rewards include seeing others happy, healthy, social benefits and a sense of pride or reflected glory from sporting achievements which can also be applied to football. They are intrinsic rewards. Even though Thompson compartmentalized mothers, wives and players, tennis mothers and wives experiences they can be compared and contrasted to Australian Rules Football. The playing experience requires a deft approach because tennis is mainly run as a social game with mixed doubles and single sex matches coinciding at clubs on competition day unlike football where competition is segregated, except at junior level where a minority of girls play. Nevertheless, mothers and wives rewards and rationales are a significant facet important to the maintenance and success of the game.

The relationship between the mother and sport as an institution is also outlined by Thompson. “Identity and Gendered Institutions” discusses motherhood, wifehood, material relations and sport and hegemony.187 Thompson states:

There is an overriding theme to the situation in which mothers facilitate and service junior sport, wives similarly facilitate men’s sport.... These women’s lives were defined and constructed by the material and ideological relations by which they participated in the public arena and at home. Gendered relations that mediated their motivations and activities have prescribed divisions of labor in which women are disproportionately responsible for domestic labor and child care. This, along with the economic relations that support it, rendered these women in positions of inequality, co-opting their labor but maintaining their marginality.188

Thompson’s argument can also be applied to football as a further example of where “sport is maintained by women’s labor constituted in predominantly gendered-prescribed roles.”189 The question is “What would be the consequences to sport if women did not conduct this work?” Tennis, football and other sports, from the most junior levels to the

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188 Ibid, 228.
189 Ibid, 229.
premier leagues would suffer. Even the most, seemingly, mundane task works toward sustaining a sports existence and without the nurturing of “little leaguers” league footballers would not be present. An exploration of the significance of the sustenance and maintenance that mothers and wives contribute to football will reveal the tangible and intangible benefits to individuals, clubs, leagues and wider society.

This Sporting Wife

While I have stated that Mary Brady could not have anticipated that women have increased their roles and prominence with Australian Rules Football since she wrote her essay “Miss and Mrs Football, but no Ms Football”, it could be argued that not a great deal has altered. Many ideologies are perpetuated. Primarily, the audience and their submission to hero worship have become more intense. The women’s volunteer brigade steadfastly continues and is intermittently acknowledged through club awards or newspaper articles. At the top of this shadowed hierarchy is the football wife or partner, who is an attractive, adoring appendage. These glamorous and glorifying aspects of footballers and their entourage are a contributing factor to the success of the game. According to Brian Stoddart in Saturday Afternoon Fever the development of sport and education in Australia privileged male sport activities with the result that girls were socialized into becoming “vociferous supporters of Australian male rather than female sporting heroes.” In his chapter, “Playing like a girl: sport and sexual stereotyping,” Stoddart discusses the power relationships between male and female in Australian sporting life that have their origins in early colonial times. Women’s sport still struggles to gain sponsorship. While the range of sports available to women is now

diversified, many sports are still considered “unfeminine” by many in the community. Media coverage of women’s sport is still scant. Perhaps the single greatest contributor to sexual stereotyping is how sport is important to the Australian male image with all the trappings of mateship, toughness and physicality. Even though Stoddart’s book is nearly twenty years old, his argument is still relevant. He shows that sport and society texts include “obligatory chapters” on women and sport, while media coverage is “meagre” and importantly to this thesis that “writing on Australian sport has been silent on women’s affairs.”

This thesis documents and evaluates the contribution women have made to Australian Rules Football and how they are a vital and integral part of the football community.

Juxtaposed to Stoddart’s “obligatory chapter” in sport and society texts is Anne Summers’ chapter “The Sporting Wife” in Damned Whores and God’s Police. Summers’ “the classic study of women in Australian society” is now in its third revision and numerous reprints having first been published in 1975. Her work began as a book and became, after much effort by Professor Henry Mayer of the University of Sydney, her PhD thesis. Her style was truly interdisciplinary. It was neither academically nor journalistically bound, but incorporated several disciplines including history, sociology, literature, psychology and medical science, and utilized various sources historical records and popular sources. There will be many reverberations with Damned Whores and God’s Police in this thesis, but also some discord. Summers work was one of the first texts on women in Australian society pointing out omissions of the male academics who wrote histories of Australia without signifying women’s contribution to the nation. Summers

192 Ibid, 134.
193 Summers, 115-134.
discussion of the binary of sex roles in Australia is relevant particularly in respect to
women being married to famous footballers, stereotypes of virtue “the civilizing
influence” and their roles as nurturers and child raising. I concur with her statement that
there are “two quite different elements in football – playing and watching” up to the
point where she states:

Women are, by reason of their relative physical frailty and their conditioning to avoid
violent encounters, unable to participate in this ferocious fraternity.

Women do not play at A.F.L. level, but there are women’s football competitions - not
widespread but they do exist. My principle dissension lies with the other point of her
argument that spectating is not the “very much male preserve” Summers claims it to be.

I dispute much of the following analysis:

It is this kind of devotion, this mixture of intellectual appreciation of an intricate and
skilful game with the sheer cathartic pleasure gained watching others indulge in
purposeful violence, which few women are able either to share or to understand.
Women who watch football are seemingly motivated by less complex notions. They
are there as sidelines supporters for husbands, sons or boyfriends, or as companions to
devoted fans, or perhaps because they entertain secret sexual fantasies about one or
more of the players. Rarely can women engage in the detailed technical discussions of
rules, precedents and decisions which are an important part of following the game.

Some women are present as sidelines supporters, a few as companions, some might enjoy
a sexual fantasy but many, many women enjoy the strategies of the contest, the skills
employed and the development of players and teams. Nor is it true that they are excluded
from discussions regarding football. Summers has fallen into that binary she seeks to
critique by stating that women do not understand football and cannot participate in
discussions of matches. Many women can and do participate in pre and post match
analysis: at the game; in the home, in social settings; at the workplace and in the media.

\[194\] Ibid, vii.
\[195\] Ibid, 120.
\[196\] Ibid, 122.
\[197\] Ibid, 120.
\[198\] Ibid, 124.
Spectatorship does not have to be passive, as Cultural Studies theories of the audience reveals.

**Into the Locker Room**

David Rowe’s *Sport, Culture and the Media: the unruly trinity*, fulfills a pedagogical function for students of media, sport and society.\(^{199}\) It is acknowledged that women athletes and spectators “have been rendered more or less invisible,” but Rowe has brought up to date women’s involvement with sport.\(^{200}\) His first update is to discuss women sports journalists. While most sport journalists must contend with being considered less important than their other journalist colleagues, they are also paid less, have fewer career prospects and most are also very likely to be male white Anglo-Saxons, not an encouraging scenario for would be women sport journalists. As is the case in other areas of the sporting industry, women are underrepresented in sport journalism, although there has been an increase in their numbers of the last ten years. Rowe states that on average female sport journalists are likely to be younger and have more educational qualifications than their male counterparts.\(^{201}\) It is the operational manner that women sport journalists carry out their work that really sets then apart, particularly those involved in radio or television. Rowe uses the example of “Caroline” a sports editor on radio who had different work methods than her male colleagues and “negotiates differently work related situations”, the male dressing room being the most obvious.\(^{202}\) Women sport journalists also have different ways of working with both male and female sports persons. Rowe cites Teresa, who says that some female journalists “play the softer side” and can get male

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\(^{200}\) Ibid, 24.

\(^{201}\) Ibid, 56.

\(^{202}\) Ibid, 54.
sports stars to tell them things they would tell a man. This “softer side” relates to the institutionalized masculinity involved in sport where a female journalist would broach subjects a male would not indicating a different gender approach.

Rowe has also alluded that male sports stars use their wives (or girlfriends) and children seemingly to bolster their image. This is sycophantic journalism according to Rowe’s informant Philip, who loathes this kind of journalism with the “bloke who loves his wife! Look at him here with his two kids.” Philip says that - in actuality - he would select this bloke for the “deadshit Olympics.” Later in the book, Rowe discusses sexuality and sport and the “outing” of Ian Roberts. He refers to Robert’s pretending to have a “girl” to hide his homosexuality. This raises not whether sports stars cultivate relationships, or at least the appearance of them, for the benefit of the media and readership, but how often it occurs. Sports stars are portrayed, and want to be portrayed, as heterosexual heroes. To underscore this point, Rowe also states that through (related-secondary) sporting images there are demonstrations of dependant relations and emotional attachment to partners and children. Evidence to support this will be presented in a later chapter.

The media’s recent embrace of women as spectators is also investigated by Rowe. The media have realized that it does not bode well to alienate potentially half of the population, especially those who have key economic decision making power in households and notwithstanding their own discretionary income. Evidence of this trend according to Rowe includes explaining “arcane rules”, employing more women in

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203 Ibid, 55-56.
204 Ibid, 60-61.
205 Ibid, 125.
sport and the media and giving sympathy to women in sport rather than acknowledging that they are effective and professional.

From making the point about sport and media embracing women Rowe, moves into the “domain of cultural citizenship.” According to Rowe “media sport has become a major aspect of contemporary cultural heritage and so is deeply implicated in debates about cultural citizenship.” Furthermore, if sporting events are deemed to be of national importance or cultural significance the Australian Federal Government can move to have them broadcast on free to air television. Sports importance according to Rowe has to be recognized “as part of established national cultural heritage.”

A clear example of a perceived cultural ownership is the field day the media had with the Carey scandal, front page, second page, third page, back page – more news on Carey than there was on the war on terrorism and other international and national events. This is because “the political economy of media sport extends far beyond the production, distribution and consumption of sports reports and live television.” The best sports scandals occur off the field, not on the field, and are usually related to matters connected to the heart and groin. The intercourse between heart and groin often leads to transgressions left of field with the result that socially accepted sexual conventions and institutions are seen to be undermined. This does not mean the readership shuns such

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206 Ibid, 87.
207 Miller, 107, 135.
208 Rowe, 87.
209 Ibid, 88.
210 Ibid, 90.
211 Wayne Carey was the captain of the Kangaroos. He had an affair with his vice-captain and best friend’s wife. It was the Australian equivalent of the Beckham-Loos affair.
212 Rowe, 91.
pseudo-disturbing events, quite the reverse. Every snippet is revealed, relished and revised for the hungry consumer of gossip, which the media is happy to root out like a pig looking for truffles. According to Rowe, this is no different from any other form of popular culture, just put out in the name of sport. Little wonder, therefore, that Rowe says that “scandals cannot be contained.”

Ideology, power and media representation should be taken into account when reading sports photography according to Rowe. Rowe’s advice is to study what is visible, what is explicit in comparison, or, contrast to the invisible or implicit. The images of domination or subordination can be found in the text, written or visual. Sports images grounded in his theory, adorn the media. Both male and female athletes may be subjected to what Rowe refers to as sport “pornography”. There are two forms, the “hard” form where there are moments of ecstasy symbolic of ejaculation or “soft” porn, the soft gaze. Both types of sports pornography are connected to power relationships and sexuality. Sexualization, of both male and female sporting bodies means that those bodies also become commercialized. Where once sports male bodies were viewed for technical aspects, the imaging of sporting masculinity now means that male bodies are now viewed as objects of desire, by a section of women and gay men. With the discretionary income available to women in recent years, sports stars’ bodies have become commercialized.

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213 Ibid, 92.
214 Ibid, 123.
215 Ibid, 125-126.
Siren Sounds to End the Quarter

Discussion in this chapter has focused upon existing works that have recorded women’s experience in sport in Australian society, with Australian Rules Football at the centre. It has revealed the gaps in existing football histories that ignored women’s participation in the game and belies the notion that women have had no involvement with the football community. It demonstrates that Australian women have had a history of a non-history in the writing on the development of the nation and the development of football. Eminent historian Blainey does not write off women, he just does not write about them, choosing to take a myopic view of the origins of Australian Rules Football. Robert Pascoe is bewildering in his lack of acknowledgement of Leonie Sandercock and her substantial role with *Up Where Cazaly* and his late call for women to be included in the A.F.L. The A.F.L.’s centenary publication lives up to feminists alacrity for their criticism of football with the marginalizing, trivializing and tokenism of women and fails to signify they contribution to the game. Fortunately, this situation is redressed by Sheedy and Brown in *Football’s Women: the Forgotten Heroes*. *Up Where Cazaly* remains the most balanced, and inclusive, account of the history of Australian Rules Football twenty plus years after its publication. Sandercock’s response to Blainey and Pascoe reveals the weaknesses in their work and while she does not highlight of the strength of her own work, I do so on her behalf, it was and is, a tour de force. She understood, decades ago, that women were participants in the Australian Rules Football. Indeed in many respects Sandercock augured the future of Australian Rules Football. That football should be a technical and strategic mystery to women or that they are too “frail” to play in their own competition undermines feminist argument. Identity, even football identity, is claimed now by women: “I’m an Eagle” and “Maggie’s a Docker”.

I have also drawn on other works to demonstrate the wide ranging modes and roles of women’s involvement in sporting activities in Australia which demonstrate common themes and experiences. In particular *Mother’s Taxi* is a testament to the crucial role women play in supporting their husbands, children’s and their own, tennis activities. Again the motives may differ, but the crux of the argument remains. Rowe updates theories for considering sport and the audience. Women often underpin others sporting activities. It is a role that should be applauded, acknowledged and appreciated through scholarly investigation. An eminent scholar of a different discipline, Leonie Sandercock, the author of still the most significant book on Australian Rules Football, rightfully and respectfully, is acknowledged last in this historiography.
Successful sport coaches achieve results through formulating a game plan. They employ physical skills, stamina and courage, combining these qualities with strategy. Tactics are set before the game and adapted during its course allowing for what the opposition throws up in defence. Performing academic research requires skills of a mental kind for the intellectual challenge, endurance for producing a one-hundred thousand word thesis which may be produced under isolating circumstances and bravery to conquer internal fears and face external challenges that may impede research. The academic’s game plan or stratagem is the methodology of the research project. This chapter details the game plan of my thesis *In the Outer Not On the Outer: Women and Australian Rules Football*. Unlike many theses, this methodology chapter follows the introduction and historiography. The reason for this unconventional order is that some research problems encountered and discussed in the methodology require a specific understanding of the field and articulate with the following chapter which itself was not a trajectory anticipated in the design of this research.

The nature of the research and structure of this project follows the research method detailed by Allan Kellehear in *The Unobtrusive Researcher: A Guide to Methods*. Kellehear’s instruction on the unobtrusive research methods was applied to my research, as the subject lent itself to this mode of scholarship. Having presented the literature review
in the previous chapter, this section demonstrates how the interdisciplinary approach has been deployed through the use of disciplines and then methods employed during the course of research appropriate to those disciplines together with a justification for their choice. In addition, I discuss problems encountered with the research, together with ethical practice.

As stated in the Introduction a single theoretical framework has not been applied to the thesis. One framework would not be sufficient to accommodate the scope of the research. Each role or chapter pertaining to women and Australian Rules Football has the potential to be a lengthy investigation and exposé. This thesis is the first academic investigation into the positioning of women and Australian Rules Football through their long and expansive involvement. Hence, the interdisciplinary approach. The study is very descriptive in accord with an ethnography. Harry Wolcott stated “Anthropology is well suited to serve that integrative function among the social sciences…”\(^2\) Thus the flexibility of anthropology and its ethnographic methods which values description and discussion is evident in subsequent chapters. Sociology is also applied to specific questions of power and ideology here. However, this study is too broad for a silo structure. As a result my thesis also demonstrates the importance of being able to research in an interdisciplinary environment which is paramount to scholars of sport and society in the 21st century.

Commensurate with giving women voice to this project interviews were conducted. However a considerable volume of data was accumulated using diverse sources,


particularly those from popular sources. Newspaper articles magazine features, television and radio broadcasts, and the internet have the benefit of being easily accessible, economical as well as plentiful. These sources are a valid source of data when studying sport in society and have been used by esteemed sport’s anthropologists, sociologists and historians, Jennifer Hargreaves, Jean Williams and Michael Oriard.\(^3\) Added to those sources player biographies, fans and journalists anecdotal accounts of football experience are the pulp fiction of the sporting world. The intellectual and paradigmatic flexibility of cultural studies means that while the source material is prolific it is also prodigious and productive.

In this thesis, cultural studies approaches intersect with sport studies and leisure studies. Interdisciplinarity is important because of the broad scope of the study and that is the rationale for deploying a number of disciplines: history, sociology, anthropology, media and gender studies.\(^4\) Historians have located Australian Rules Football firmly as an emerging pastime in the new colonies and then as an important part of Australian society while utilizing cultural studies to find the gaps and the silences relating to women.\(^5\)


\(^4\) Williams. 2003.


Sociological approaches configure Australian Rules Football as an institution in our society and demonstrate what power is being exercised, to whom and by whom and the outcome. Media studies critiques the relationship between the Australian media, audience and Australian Rules Football because the success of any sport “must have a popular base within communities …. support must be stimulated through high-pressure promotion, sustained (if not saturation) media coverage and spectacle.” Gender studies holds the role of scrutinizing roles of males and females in Australian society. Anthropoligical methods of research at games are employed through participant observation, identifying informants and collecting data and finally determine a common ground that realizes a shared community. Richard Giulianotti and Gary Armstrong state that anthropologists “can no longer ignore games such as football, if a fuller understanding is to be contributed to the social and cultural life in most societies” although they are referring to Association Football. Once disregarded as an area of serious academic enquiry, anthropologists, notably Clifford Geertz, came to recognize that sport contained many important practices and functions in contemporary society comparable to traditional societies they had once intervened with. Sociologists have studied sport for decades and continue their work. Fandom, in particular football fandom in England, has been studied by Steve Redhead. Scholars in the field of masculinity and sport, masculinity, the media and sport

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6 Anne Summers. Damned Whores and God’s Police: (Melbourne: Penguin Australia.)
11 Blanchard, 19.
include Bob Connell,\textsuperscript{15} John Goldlust,\textsuperscript{16} Garry Whannel,\textsuperscript{17} John Sugden\textsuperscript{18} and Gary Crawford.\textsuperscript{19}

A substantial part of research for this thesis has been to survey past and present print and broadcast media to establish women’s involvement - historically, economically and politically - with Australian Rules Football. The media frequently has feature articles on women who are associated with football. For example, articles collected and accessed include the stories of wives of coaches and players; women associated professionally with football, women who do volunteer work for clubs and the diversity of ages of women who follow football and their clubs.\textsuperscript{20} Methodologically, media reports are valuable and in accordance with the interdisciplinary methods employed from an anthropological perspective and media studies, they add complexity and texture to data collection. As outlined by Kendall Blanchard:

> Another legitimate source of anthropological data is the literature, the vast resources of published and unpublished material available in libraries, special collections, agencies, information services, and government offices. Very often newspaper and other community information media provide invaluable data for the anthropologist studying in sport.\textsuperscript{21}

Additionally, because the A.F.L. is tethered to the media for commercialization and a funding stream, often journalists have ready access and greater accessibility to areas of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17} Garry Whannel. \textit{Media Sport Stars: masculinities and moralities}, (London: Routledge, 2002).
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interest, for example wives and partners of footballers.\textsuperscript{22} Gaining access to wives and partners is an example of where I found it difficult to engage this category of women to assist with my research and then turned to other sources of information on them, including newspaper articles, the official football programme of the A.F.L. the \textit{A.F.L. Record}, celebrity magazines and television programmes.\textsuperscript{23} This mode of material is one of the sources for Allan Kellehear’s \textit{The Unobtrusive Researcher}. A further advantage of using these unobtrusive methods is that it is an inexpensive way of carrying out research. I accessed newspapers from other states, particularly Victoria, through the Murdoch University Library in hard copy and journal databases, and through online newspaper services and other Internet sources.

The Internet is also another unobtrusive research method discussed by Raymond M. Lee in \textit{Unobtrusive Methods in Social Research}.\textsuperscript{24} Not only could I collect data disseminated through the World Wide Web, but I could also communicate with informants via e-mail. Again, this had the advantage of being a relatively economical way of carrying out research throughout Australia and internationally. Through email, I was able to contact one subject who indicated some reluctance to meet face-to-face for reasons of time constraints due to childcare responsibility, but I also suspect her (understandable) desire to preserve privacy. I sent a list of questions to be answered when she had the time available. It was not an ideal interview but as Lee points out it was “a trade-off of the efficiency of email and the ability to develop complex shared understanding of particular

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{21} Blanchard, 86.
\bibitem{22} David Rowe. \textit{Sport, Culture and the Media: The Unruly Trinity}. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), 91-93.
\bibitem{23} Crawford, 132-134.
\end{thebibliography}
situations using face-to-face communication.”25 This strategy mobilised the great potential of the web for asynchronous communication. Email was also used to petition participants in my research using the Popular Culture Collective26 where I circulated a document with information on my research, myself, information about confidentiality and researcher responsibility to its members who forwarded the information on to their networks of family and friends. Participants then contacted me to be interviewed face-to-face or responded through an emailed questionnaire. Requests for information from the A.F.L. were also obtained through email and I received statistics on membership for each club in an Excel document. Additionally, at one point I was concerned that I did not have any indigenous informants. Australian Rules Football, particularly the A.F.L., is one area of Australian society where aboriginal men have a high profile.27 In regional and remote communities it is a very popular game with the indigenous population. I contacted a colleague at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University of Technology who put my request out through an email network of Aboriginal women. Informants came forward from around Australia, including Darwin and Alice Springs in the Northern Territory and South Australia. I was also able to conduct a face to face interview in Perth with an indigenous informant.28

25 Lee, 117.
27 In an address to the Breakfast meeting of the ATEM on Friday 2 December at the Matilda Bay Restaurant in Perth, Professor Millicent Poole, retiring Vice-Chancellor of Edith Cowan University, stated that aboriginal men were “over represented” in the A.F.L. This was Professor Poole’s maiden address on the topic of Sport in Contemporary Australia. The argument I present throughout this thesis is that indigenous citizens – and their models of management of regional sport – provide a model for the wider sporting community. ‘Representation’ is not the imperative. Leadership and social justice are the goal.
28 It was important have indigenous women’s voices because Australian Rules football is a locus where aboriginal men have a visibility in Australian society. To omit Aboriginal women would have created a marginalization of their experience and contribution. The Aboriginal women included in this thesis have provided an insight to overcome problems with the problematic relationship with footballers and ‘groupie’ fans. Additionally in remote communities Aboriginal women provide a model of normalizing the role, place and function of women in football.
Ethnographic methods, through participant observation, reclaim the voices of women. *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing* by Harry F. Wolcott was instructive in gathering ethnographic accounts in various settings. Through participant observation at local and interstate matches, I surveyed women’s understanding of the game, their behaviour and responses as part of the football audience. In fact, the seed for this thesis was probably sown by an unknown woman I stood on the hill at the Western Australian Cricket Association ground in Perth in the early 1990s. She was loud, witty, passionate and knowledgeable about the players, the strategies and the rules. She was there with her husband (who was quiet), there to watch football, not to drink beer like the men standing around us, who she cursed when they shoved past to go to the bar to replenish. This process has been one of the most enjoyable parts of carrying out this research, going to the football, watching the action on the field and the responses off the field by the female fans. In this interdisciplinary project the gathering of voices was more important than collecting and classifying numerical facts. These women’s voices contain the valuable detail for the original contribution to knowledge.

While unobtrusive research methods had advantages in the course of this study I considered it important to validate the research through going to my subjects and directly gaining their motivations, actions and understanding of football. Interviews have been conducted with twenty five informants to investigate the nature of women’s involvement and interaction with Australian Rules Football. Most of the fieldwork has been undertaken in Perth where the experience of being part of the expanded competition is meant to be representative of the other states New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. Interviews were also conducted with informants interstate via email and

29 Wolcott, 24.
telephone. In *Interviewing for Social Scientists*, Hilary Arksey and Peter Knight, state that:

Many feminist social scientists claim that for interviews to be successful there need to be a shared culture between the interviewer and the interviewee. By drawing on common experiences and languages, the interviewer is more likely to ‘hear’ what is said and, as important, left unsaid. Over the previous ten years or so, semi-unstructured or unstructured interviews have become the principal data-gathering technique for feminist social scientists. Open-ended interviewing allows researchers to explore diversity, meaning and experiences, and women’s view on reality.

My own involvement with football over the years in a number of capacities, including membership of an A.F.L. club, enabled me to find common ground with the interviewees. When “talking footy”, the interviewer can obtain much valuable data through the interview. When I first began conducting the interviews I would ask the interviewee to read a comprehensive outline of the purpose of my research and then read and sign the consent form as prescribed by Murdoch University’s Ethical Code of Conduct. However, I began to sense that interviewees were framing their responses according to what they thought I wanted to hear, particularly those women who I was interviewing for the chapter on fandom. A number of my informants were tertiary educated and would have knowledge of the differing arguments relating to women and football. This is one of the drawbacks of the interview process. Lee states that:

Interviews and questionnaires create attitudes in part because respondents commonly try to manage impressions of themselves in order to maintain their standing in the eyes of an interviewer.

Subsequently, I asked interviewee to read and sign the consent form only. As contact with them had been made through an intermediary or through existing contacts, I took it as implicit that they had a general awareness of the purpose of research. In accordance

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30 Australian Rules Football is also played in the Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania where grass roots football has supplied notable players into the A.F.L. competition.


32 Lee, 2.
with Murdoch University’s policy on research ethics all the names of informants contained here have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Interviews with a flexible structure were conducted. When I carried out the interviews, I had a list of questions which served as an interview guide on topics as proposed by Arksey and Knight.\(^{33}\) As I was approaching women from different perspectives, such as volunteers, mothers, wives, employees, fans, I had a different set of interview guides with questions to elicit their experiences and views. The questions were both open ended and close ended, allowing me as interviewer to “probe and prompt informants’ responses in order to seek further elaboration, clarification, specific examples and so on.”\(^{34}\) I began by taking the relevant interview guide to the appointment with the targeted interviewee, however soon learnt to take all my interview guides because the semi-structured interview often became unstructured as the conversation extended to the many layers of football. I found myself reaching for other interview guides to maximise the opportunity of the interview. It became increasingly evident throughout the fieldwork that the roles of many of the women I interviewed overlapped with other functions. This overlap again indicates the complexity and plurality of women’s participation with Australian Rules Football.

Interviews were audio-taped, then transcribed and analysed. In contrast to the difficulty of interviewing wives and partners, I was fortunate to have many willing participants in other aspects of my work. Indeed, when I discussed my research to friends and acquaintances, many fans volunteered to be interviewed on the topic or could provide me with others willing to participate in the study. One outcome of this process was that a

\(^{33}\) Arksey and Knight, 96.
diversified fan base was established. This diversity of respondents is spread over age, ethnicity and class.

Research was undertaken on women who play football. Teams were identified through the sports organizations, government departments, internet and through high schools where there is a thriving competition. I undertook participation observation at a number of matches and interviewed the players with the aim of determining their experiences of playing football. I also interviewed parents of players in the schoolgirl competition to gain their perceptions and attitudes of their daughters participating in the vigorous game.

During the course of my research, I followed the methodology outlined by Arksey and Knight’s “ compilation of techniques” for interviewing “elites” as a strategy to understand and contextualize women related to footballers, employed by the A.F.L. or its clubs or who were close to clubs or players in other ways, for example, a volunteer. Arksey and Knight define “elites” as leaders, experts, people of power and influence, there is no doubt that being involved with such a powerful social institution and billion dollar industry in Australia accords them a related and reflected elite status. They state that when interviewing elites interviewees must “negotiate access” because elites are “influential, held in high esteem and used to having others defer to them.” Arksey and Knight recommend that a letter of introduction be provided with information on purpose of study, methodology, credentials of the researcher, assurance of confidentiality and offer to meet

34 Ibid, 98.
35 Arksey and Knight, 122.
36 Ibid, 122.
at a time and place of mutual convenience.\textsuperscript{37} To access elites, they suggest that the researcher draw on pre-existing personal contacts, which may include, friends, relatives and colleagues as a point of entry.\textsuperscript{38} The following discussion reveals what transpired during the course of my research.

A number of friends, acquaintances and other informants offered to contact women linked to areas of research. In all cases, I did not approach women who were informants or who I wanted to interview directly. Rather, I approached intermediaries to make the first contact. A number of people I knew had association with women who would make valuable informants, including my own daughter who went to school with a daughter and sister of a former V.F.L. player and current A.F.L. player, making my daughter’s friend and more particularly her mother very desirable informants. However in this case, I did not feel it ethical to use my daughter (who was under 16 years of age) as an intermediary and did not want to impose upon my daughter’s friendship.

My research did encounter problems. In particular, I found it difficult to interview and carry out research with women who are in relationships with elite footballers, either through marriage, consanguinity or friendship. I found it disturbing that there was a reluctance to converse and what it revealed was that many women close to the footballers chose to keep silent at a time when other women were being raped and abused by some players. The sadness is that one of the project’s aims was to give these women a voice so that they would be ‘more’ than footballers’ wives. They did not want that opportunity. It

\textsuperscript{37} A letter of introduction from the A.F.L. would have been valuable, hence my request as outlined in the Introduction.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, 122.
raises question about carrying out research of this nature. Why did these women keep silent? How can researchers intervene? Ethically – should they? With regret, I decided that instead of pursuing these women I would read and contextualize their silences. This imperative is why unobtrusive methods become valuable tools in carrying out research. As a result, and in many respects, this thesis is more about the silences in the story of women involved with football and their invisibility. This thesis is about football as an institution and discourse and what it does to women’s voices. It is how women become placed into taxonomy and are positioned according to functionality prescribed by those men around them. While rejecting some of Summers’ statements about the sporting wife, I see very clearly that the dichotomy of her “damned whores” and “God’s police” at work in football.\textsuperscript{39} It is a binary and dichotomy that will be explored and extended through this discussion of women and Australian Rules Football.

A sharp example of silence and withdrawal is demonstrated through ‘B.’ When I met ‘B’ two years previously she talked for two solid hours about her involvement with a football club. She had initiated contact with me by email because she had received a copy of a conference paper that I had presented that she was interested in its contents. Subsequently, she invited me to her home to meet her husband and discuss topics of mutual interest contained in my paper. She explained how as a couple they became interested in the football club, what passionate fans they both were and how involved they were with the club.

'B' talked about how much time she spent performing volunteer work with them, what activities and jobs that she carried out for the club which included a variety of clerical tasks. She also spoke of individual footballers and the support she had given them, particularly the younger interstate players who she took a great interest and care with acting as a surrogate mother. Her support included having these players over for dinner, carrying out domestic tasks and providing emotional support. She spoke of how grateful the players, their families and the club were to her for her volunteer work and compassion. At that time, she indicated that she would be prepared to be an informant for my research. Her son had achieved a doctorate of philosophy and she said understood how important informants were to research. However, as I was in the early stages of postgraduate research, preparing my candidacy and ethics application I said I would contact her later regarding arranging an interview on her work as a volunteer.

My early research was carried out as a part-time student because I was in full-time employment. My next contact with ‘B’ did not occur until I became a full-time student twelve months later in 2004. My request to ‘B’ was to interview her for the chapter on women football fans and also for the chapter on the importance of volunteers to the club and the game.\textsuperscript{40} Her reply disappointed and surprised me:

I have given your request 24 hours consideration!!! … I feel privileged to both be able to participate in such an intimate way as volunteers to this great football club. However we know we are \textit{too close} [her emphasis] to the action to ever really be interviewed - and believe we both should remain private in what we do- That is the only way I can answer. It is difficult for me to explain any better than that … I know you do not want me to actually talk about the business of the club-- but difficult for us to draw a line because of the privacy policy for staff.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{40} Private email sent 5 July 2004.
\textsuperscript{41} Private email arrived 6 July 2004.
This was a complete transformation from wanting to help with research because she understood the process from two years previously. Indeed, she had given me lengthy advice previously when I had asked for assistance regarding interviewing wives and partners and stated:

Sadly these days’ people do not like sharing/helping out on things like this. Having had 3 children and then grandchildren as UNI students and doing research for PhD’s and honours etc. I know the difficulty they have experienced.42

‘B’ acknowledged that “I know you do not want me to actually talk about the business of the club—.” This indicated to me that ‘B’ was fearful that I may draw from her a situation that she would not want to expose.

To understand what may have precipitated this change of heart, it is necessary to consider what had taken place in the A.F.L. in the intervening time between ‘B’s’ contacting me, our meeting and later my request for an interview. The request was not what is termed in sales speak as “cold calling’, making contact with a new client, but following up on an offer made previously for an interview. It is my belief that the Carey-Stevens scandal of 2002 and more particularly what followed by the exposure in 2004 of a number of cases of gang-rape, sexual misconduct and misconduct by A.F.L. players led ‘B’ to withdraw her offer of help. During the early part of 2004, very few A.F.L. clubs were not associated with accusations which led me to believe that one possible reason for ‘B’ change of heart could have been that she may have taken the issue personally against “her boys.” ‘B’ had exhibited the pathologization of women in football.

42 Private email received 16 April 2003
This was not the first time that this had happened. Another person I was acquainted with had been the girlfriend of an A.F.L. player. She indicated that she was interested in my research. When we were socialising, she was quite happy to tell me what it was like being in a relationship with an A.F.L. player, of not being the “Brownlow”\(^{43}\) woman amongst the players’ girlfriends and wives and of the deterioration of relationships post football careers. In one instance, she mentioned names. Again, this was in the early stages of research. However, post ethics approval when I arranged an interview with her, her reaction was that she was not sure that she could say anything of interest or value. She had broken up with the boyfriend a couple of years earlier and could not see how she could help. I said that I would appreciate interviewing her and a time was arranged to meet at her home. When I met her, she stalled and delayed reading and signing the consent form to the point that I knew that if I was to urge her any further then I would be contravening the ethical conditions imposed by my University.

Similarly I had been introduced to a coach of the A.F.L. by a senior Australian academic who was well known to the coach. The purpose of my research was explained and that I was very keen to interview his wife. I presented my business card from Murdoch University which confirmed postgraduate status and asked whether she could telephone me so that I could explain the research parameters and the interview process. The coach said that his wife usually liked to keep a low profile and that he did not think she would want to participate but that he would pass my card to her. No contact was ever received from her. All that remains is a husband who spoke on her behalf. No new source

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\(^{43}\) A ‘Brownlow woman’ or ‘girl’ is the glamorous, usually a professional model, taken to the Brownlow Medal Count and Presentation. Characteristically they have long, usually blonde, hair and wear gowns with plunging necklines. This is explored in Chapter Five: The Home Team.
material has been constructed. Women have remained silent. The rationale and context for this ‘choice’ – and the intent for it – remain of interest.

This woman would have been told of my research through other channels. I had formally approached that A.F.L. club who were willing to help with my research, met with staff members, including one male and two female members. I left information packages with the female staff members to pass onto the wives and partners of players who they saw before matches. The information I had prepared included an abstract on my work, a consent form setting out details of confidentiality and ethics and information about myself, my background and previous work, my Murdoch University business card with contact details. The club was also willing to arrange a meeting of the wives and partners at the premises of the club. I was asked by the representative of the club if an issue of concern (the example was domestic violence) arose whether I would inform the club. In reply I confirmed Murdoch University’s Ethical Code of Conduct, stating no information would be divulged as a result of the interview to the club, or anyone else, and the data included in my thesis would not reveal the identity of any informant. It was clear that quid pro quo was expected if they lent assistance with the research. Anonymity in a small group would be impossible to maintain and at that point I felt hesitate to engage the club’s assistance any further. However, as the two female staff members had indicated that they would pass on the information packages when they saw the wives and partners prior to the game I was hoping for a response. The response received was minimal. Similarly the response from wives and partners from another club I contacted and had sent information packages was also negligible. ‘B’ in her previous advice had stated that, “The player’s wives and partners live quite apart from the club. They have a private lifestyle.” In

44 Private email received 16 April 2003.
another instance during the course of my previous employment I had met a former high
profile person of the A.F.L. Again I explained my postgraduate research and asked
whether he would pass on my business card to his wife. His response was so similar to
the coach mentioned above that it almost sounded as if it was a standard answer. Perhaps
it is.

Part of the problem may be that wives and partners now feel under so much scrutiny that
many do not want extra attention no matter what the purpose or aim. The British
television soap *Footballers Wives*\(^4^5\) broadcast on Channel 10 in Australia fantasizes and
sensationalizes their lives through fiction. In Australia Fox Footy Channels’ *Living with
Footballers*\(^4^6\) panel show of wives and girlfriends of players and coaches and utilises all
the clichés of being glamorous while at the same time depicting them as being
intellectually challenged. These women’s partnerships involves a package of promotion
of the partner, the respective club and the entire A.F.L. industry through public,
engagements, team promotions, media interviews plus the public’s interest in them when
seen in public but in a private setting, for example, dinner at a restaurant. With this
backdrop, it is not surprising that my overtures for research were not accepted. In
*Interviewing for Social Scientists*, Arksey and Knight state that getting the interview may
depend upon three things: status, the project and yourself.\(^4^7\) My status as a postgraduate
researcher may not have been senior enough, especially when they have many approaches
from the media. Perhaps they were not sufficiently interested in the project or felt there

\(^{45}\) *Footballers’ Wives*. Written Ann McManus & Maureen Chadwick, Prod. Liz Lake, Dir. Mike Adams,
ITV, UK.

\(^{46}\) *Living with Footballers*. Fox Footy Channel. FOXTEL, Moonee Ponds, Aust.

\(^{47}\) Arksey and Knight, 39.
was nothing in it for them. Perhaps I did not come across as being “personable, trustworthy and interesting.”

A further reason for not participating with the research may have been that they held doubts on how I was going to use the information gained from them. According to Arksey and Knight, suspicion on how the data will be deployed is often a reason why people will not participate in research and they provide the example of an interview situation where employees may be suspicious of motives of the manager and “How the data are going to be used.” This may have been a problem derived from tethering the project to the clubs and husbands.

Since the 1970s and the Second Wave of Feminism, there has developed a rejection of feminists by successive generations of women in Australia. Their grandmothers who preceded the Second Wave also remain suspicious of ‘feminists’ even though their granddaughters have many more opportunities than they had. Those opportunities were fought for by this middle generation of women yet the Second Wave Feminists are perceived as angry if not bitter, lonely and unattractive shrews. Summers admitted this “fear of feminism” in her concluding chapter in her 1994 revised edition of Damned Whores and God’s Police and sought to address this in her “Letter to the Next Generation.” This is problematic. Summers had stamped a brand on the sporting wife

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48 Ibid, 39.
49 Ibid, 68.
and then appealed to the next generation not to judge feminists harshly, or reject their efforts in creating a more equal society. Research is therefore necessary on sport. This is why this current project is important. Younger women may have had a perception of a certain type of academic feminist whose agenda was to not only attack the footballer, his lifestyle but them also. They would not want to be an accessory to research that may damage the image of football, which may have an effect on their family or themselves.

In addition to their fears about the research agenda is how this process would be managed. The wives and partners may not have wanted to participate in research, wondering what sort of questions would be asked and how personal the questions would become. A footballer’s sex life is a subject that hold’s a fascination for the media and public not only from a scandal viewpoint but also from any possible affect upon their performance. The triangular relationship between husband, wife and coach has been discussed in Summers’ “The Sporting Wife” and by Mary Brady in the Appendix “Miss and Mrs Football, but no Ms Football” in *Up Where Cazaly*. Former V.F.L. player Brent Crosswell’s chapter in *The Greatest Game* is succinctly reflected in its title “Sex Before the Game.” Broaching this topic would be unethical as it is a private matter and does not fall within the parameters of the thesis. In fact, question 19 on “Human Research Ethics Committee FORM A -Application for Human Research Ethics Approval” asks “Are there any other aspects of the study that are intrusive in areas ordinarily considered personal and private, or that could create apprehension and anxiety for participants.” My university required a list of questions to be submitted for ethics approval and while the questions were broad

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32 Ibid, 122.
33 Mary Brady, Appendix II “Miss and Mrs Football, but no Ms Football” In *Up Where Cazaly*, (London: Granada, 1981), 252.
enough to elicit data on specific areas of their lives relating to the aims and objectives of this research no intrusive questions were included. The interview would conclude with the open ended question, “If I was to marry an A.F.L. player what would your advice be to me?” which initiated the opportunity for a frank response on broad topics without pressure being applied.

Problems of reluctance to enlist wives to participate were not exclusive to my research. In Football’s Women: The Forgotten Heroes by longstanding A.F.L. coach of Essendon, Kevin Sheedy and Caroline Brown, sister of a former Carlton player they conclude their chapter on “The Playing Wife, the Coaching Wife” by stating:

Some of the wives approached for this book said that no one would be interested in hearing their perspective and declined to be involved. But every football wife has a story to tell.

In contrast to this academic, they would have had easier access to wives and a shared understanding of the culture of football, yet they too drew blanks. Sheedy and Brown’s explicit intention was to acknowledge the contribution made to football by women that had been overlooked by the A.F.L.’s centenary publication 100 Years of Australian Football. By adding the missing piece to this powerful Australian social institution they strengthened its position while not seeking to critique how it operates in terms of gender.

I asked one informant close to a football club and who knew most of the wives and

55 Murdoch University Human Ethics Kit/Application Forms
56 Having to submit a list of questions to be asked is problematic for qualitative research. Arskey and Knight state that questions for qualitative research should “They act as reminders to the interviewer to check out particular sub-topics, and obtain more detailed or thoughtful information.”, 98.
girlfriends what her thoughts were about the lack of response to my research and why I had trouble reaching them:

They are very protective of their own. .... Wives and girlfriends of footballers tend to be under the thumb a bit, you know the pretty wife, they are all attractive, and often they are not that smart, there is that element. If they were brave enough, I think they are media shy, but they shouldn’t be shy of you but perhaps they would be worried about people asking information of them that they don’t want to give. It doesn’t surprise me that you don’t get very much support.

Some of the young ones wouldn’t have much idea what you are doing. They wouldn’t know what a thesis was. It is a bit disappointing. May be they are not just that bright. You can see it when you are at a function. They are just pretty.59

I include this testament not to judge or denigrate these women. My informant also stated that a number of wives have professional careers and their lack of participation may be simply that they did not have the time available to become involved, a factor about which I was also aware. It is also true that footballers have different educational standards, backgrounds and assorted occupations beyond football. However, for the purposes of outlining the methodology for this thesis, I am explaining a problematic area of research, the difficulties encountered and possible reasons for the lack of participation. It was disappointing but not disastrous. I sought to overcome this concern by employing other unobtrusive research methods. As a result, when the detailed discussion of these women’s situation is presented in a later chapter, more of their situation is revealed and a fuller understanding of their position can be appreciated.

Presented here is an analysis of data collected and compiled as a comprehensive body of evidence. The data gathered in forthcoming chapters value-adds to the comprehensive historiography in Chapter One which was not an exclusively a text based document but included illustrations and photographs that examine meaning and codes embedded in

them. In total, the historiography, results of research and discussion support the thesis statement that women have made a substantial contribution to Australian Rules Football. The scale and breadth of testimony – conveying the role of women in the game – is not replicated or confirmed in the ‘official’ websites or policies of the A.F.L.

Determining a location of women in football that is commensurate to their support was original intention of the thesis. However it is often the case with postgraduate research that it takes a different direction from the path originally intended. This has also occurred to this research project. At the commencement of 2004, my research took a significant detour with the revelation and allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct by A.F.L. players exposed by the media. The sexual abuse of women was not a trail I had expected to follow. The following chapter may be the most important outcome of the thesis. The goal is not to highlight the contribution of women as handmaidens or helpmates to the A.F.L., but ensure their participation as equals in an Australian institution of Australian Rules Football. The consequences of not recognizing this plural and complex role of women has a profound impact on cases of the sexual abuse of women.

Arising out of this path, my research has also flagged that the A.F.L. has turned its back on the culture of sexual abuse which has existed. I have searched to understand their corporate structure, their governance and their social responsibility and accountability. The governance of the A.F.L. has been studied by academics in Victoria, however their focus seems to be on a financial responsibility and the overall cultural affect upon Melbourne society rather than a holistic concern for Australian citizens.
Before the presentation of the analysis of the foundational aims and objectives of this thesis, I discuss the impacts of the scandal. These impacts had dire consequences to victims of the sexual abuse and reverberated through Australian society with a constant stream of allegation brought to the public’s attention. The scandals also shook up the methodology of this thesis. After a month of deliberating on whether to continue on the project that I have believed in for nearly a decade, the decision was made to maintain the initiative for the game and its audience, particularly its female audience. This decision is a recognition that it is possible to love a sport but deplore the abusive culture it produces.
Chapter Three

OUT OF BOUNDS – FOOTBALLERS AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

The first rule of Fight Club is you do not talk about Fight Club and the second rule of Fight Club is you do not talk about Fight Club. ¹

Tyler Durden

In Fight Club, Tyler Durden tells his followers these two most important rules. Likewise, there is a well understood mantra amongst sportsmen, including elite footballers: “what happens on tour, stays on tour.” This sloganized truth was confirmed during S.B.S.’s programme Insight “Foul Play.”² Four statements to this effect were made by the participants in the forum, while discussing allegations of gang rape by Australian Football League players. In the previous weeks, news had broken that several members of the Canterbury Bulldogs Rugby League team had allegedly been involved in separate incidents of gang raping two women at Coffs Harbour. Subsequently, several similar cases involving A.F.L. players were also revealed. “Foul Play” interviewed an anonymous victim who told of her experience of being gang raped by a number of A.F.L. footballers. Then the forum discussed the sub-culture of sexual abuse existing in Australian Rules Football codes.

¹ Tyler Durden, played by Brad Pitt in Fight Club, based on the novel by Chuck Pulahnuik, screenplay by Jim Uhls, directed by David Fincher. (Regency: Twentieth Century Fox, 1999.)
This chapter discusses the subculture of sexual abuse existing in Australian Rules Football milieus that is a further manifestation of Susan Faludi’s *Backlash* against feminism. Furthermore, I argue that Faludi’s subsequent work *Stiffed* and the movie *Fight Club*, with their themes of dysfunctional masculinity, are valuable in establishing the underlying motives for the violence perpetrated against women, individually and collectively. Women are the substitute enemy for these footballers, who are emasculated by consumerism, not because they must consume but because they are the consumed. Sport is a marinade for myriad social institutions in Australia, quietly corroding women’s struggles for equality. These political losses were tracked by Anne Summers in *The End of Equality*.

Summers states, “Women are far more likely to be victims of sexual or other forms of violence today than at any time in our recent past, possibly in all of our recorded history.” The celebrity sports culture creates a situation where women are vulnerable to an ideology that is fundamental to the ingrained sexual discrimination embedded in society.

The relationship between men and women is rendered more complex through sport. To argue that sexual abuse upon women carried out by footballers adds an awkward twist to the gender conflict. To frame this debate, I examine existing work carried out by scholars who in the past have discussed sexual abuse, and gang rape in sporting contexts. I also scrutinize media reports of the recent allegations of gang rape to determine patterns existing between cases and make connections with academic literature. Theories of hegemonic masculinity within the patriarchal domain of sport are also utilized. The frame

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6 Ibid, 78.
for this discussion is Stiffed, the work of Faludi and its connection to Fight Club. Stiffed provides explanation of problems for masculinity and it also specifically discusses practices of violence, sexual abuse and male bonding. The underlying themes of masculinity and consumerism of Stiffed and Fight Club relate well to sport and support my argument that the recent cases of gang rape by footballers are political actions which are aimed at championing masculine culture and behaviours. In the second edition of her landmark work Damned Whores and God’s Police Summers stated that: “The patriarchal system derives considerable benefit, then, from the existence of rape and it is able to use this to confine women”7 and “There is a war of sexual violence underway in Australia.”8 Nearly ten years after that publication, Summers revisited the status of women in Australia and produced The End of Equality where she stated: “Rape became a political issue because women thirty years ago made it one.”9

Concurrently, there is much talk inside and outside of the academy that the masculine discourse is in ‘crisis.’10 In sporting contexts it has been claimed that there is, “A defensive backlash” according to David Whitson.11 In keeping with this framework, Murray Drummond states there is “an attack upon feminists.”12 Gang rape by a section of

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8 Ibid, 102.
9 Ibid, 103.
an elite sporting community may be a violent response to the crisis but the enemy is the “project” itself. The “project” is football.

It is highly unlikely that footballers involved in these practices recognize their actions as being political. That level of critique and interpretation is not available within either the organisational culture or sporting discourse in Australia. This absence is demonstrated by footballers’ failing to understand the concept of consent that would render their behaviour as criminal. Nevertheless, the deeds carried out are the result of conditions produced by hegemonic masculinity occurring within the patriarchal domain of sport. In his discussion, “Sport and images of masculinity: the meaning of relationships in the life course of “elite” male athletes,” Drummond says:

The hegemonic masculine environment of many sports can perpetuate unhealthy attitudes and behaviors towards women and towards some men. Similarly, the patriarchal domain in which many sports are grounded can influence men’s perceptions of women thereby creating serious problems for both genders.¹³

Not every footballer is a sexual predator or a misogynist. Yet misogynist influences are present in the A.F.L. and other sports that require change but to institute change it will take a revolution in power relations without precedent in sport. It will occur when women share the authority of a hierarchy hitherto controlled by men.

**Foul Play**

The perpetration of sexual abuse and coupled promiscuity in the culture of sport is not a recent phenomenon. Scholars of sport, gender and society have written previously and extensively on the topic. Scholars I cite focussed upon North American and are relevant

¹³ Drummond, 129.
(with translation) to Australian society. Mariah Burton-Nelson’s *The Stronger Women Get the More Men Love Football: sexism and the culture of sport* examined the culture of sexism that pervades American sports. According to Burton-Nelson it is men’s fear of competition with women over their power that is at the heart of this sexism:

Football is male, masculinity, manliness. So when women demand the right to play, control, judge, report on, or change football – and other manly sports – their struggle is not just about equal access to fitness and fatlessness. It’s about redefining men and women. It’s about power.

In Australia, women are asserting themselves more and more in the many levels of involvement with the A.F.L. including influential positions, employment and spectatorship. This is why Burton-Nelson’s study of sport in North America has resonated with recent cases of sport and sexual abuse in Australia. Following media exposure of the police investigation of the Canterbury Bulldogs (N.R.L.) alleged gang rape case, two players from St Kilda (A.F.L.) also came under investigation over similar allegation of rape of another woman. Subsequently, a number of cases that occurred in the past concerning A.F.L. players were revealed. Burton-Nelson commences her discussion with football, and proceeds to discuss the embedded sexism and abuse, including gang rape, in a number of sports. She points out that,

Sport is a women’s issue because on playing fields, male athletes learn to talk about and think about women and women’s bodies with contempt. It’s a women’s issue because male athletes have disproportionately high rates of sexual assaults on women … the media itself cheers for men’s sports.

To demonstrate the close links with what has occurred in North America, I juxtapose Burton-Nelson’s work with the recently revealed cases concerning A.F.L. footballers that did not proceed to the court. In particular, I highlight the gang rape of the anonymous

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15 Ibid, 11.
16 Ibid, 9.
victim who appeared on the *Insight* programme “Foul Play” and the ensuing forum discussion on the culture of sexual abuse in sport.

The victim in “Foul Play” was one of many cases that continued to come to public attention over the next three months. These cases were not concentrated upon one club or in one state although in two cases the same player was implicated. One alleged assault took place on an after season overseas trip. None of the cases that the public learnt about through media speculation resulted in players being charged although most assaults were reported to police. In 2000, only fifteen percent of victims report sexual assault according to the Australian Institute of Criminology.\(^\text{17}\) This low rate of reporting indicates that women are fearful and reluctant to make complaints, likely because they will endure further harm to their welfare and esteem.

In Chapter Seven of her book, “Sexual Assault as a Spectator Sport”, Burton-Nelson provides many examples of rape and gang rape by athletes. She states:

> A sampling from my thick file on athlete rape reads like a twisted Twelve Days of Christmas. In the past few years, the following groups have been accused of group sex crimes against women: twenty members of the Cincinnati Bengals football team; five University of California at Berkeley football players; five members of the St John’s University lacrosse team; five West Virginia University basketball players; five Kentucky State University football players; four Portland Trail Blazers; four Washington Capitals ice hockey players; four Duquesne University basketball players; four members of Glen Ridge (New Jersey) High School football team; four University of Arkansas basketball players; three New York Mets; three University of Minnesota basketball players; three Hampton University basketball players; two University of Colorado football players; two Oklahoma University football players; and many others.\(^\text{18}\)


\(^{18}\) Burton-Nelson, 130.
Burton-Nelson’s endnotes cite case references, details of the rape and court outcomes. In some cases, baseball bats, wine bottles and broom handles were used to further carry out the rape. Most of the defendants were acquitted and she states that only 2% of rape cases are followed up and result in a verdict. Similarly, Vanessa Swan, Chair of the National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence in Australia stated that the statistics for the report to police of rapes or assault in general range from 15% to 20%. Additionally, Swan stated that the national association had knowledge of numerous cases of gang rapes that involved sporting clubs.

The anonymous victim on “Foul Play” was a credible case according to Swan. She had gone to the association for counselling following the rape which had occurred approximately six months earlier. She told Fanou Filali, the S.B.S. reporter, what had occurred:

WOMAN: A few years ago, I met a man who I became friends with. After a few months, he invited me out for a - just to meet him out at a popular venue, which I agreed to. It was a very crowded area, and he suggested we move into another room so we could talk a bit better... which I did. We were only in the room about a minute or so, and I heard the door open and I turned around and there was four men who walked in. I recognised them immediately.

Filali: Why did you recognise them?

WOMAN: One was a prominent A.F.L. footballer that I'd obviously seen, you know, on the television, and the other three I recognised as friends of his, although I'd never met any of them before.

Filali: So were they also A.F.L. players?

WOMAN: No they play in just the local league. They then proceeded to corner me and then I basically knew what was going to happen. I pleaded with them to let me go. And then they just proceeded one by one to rape me. They held me down. I struggled with them a lot. They threatened to...to bash me, to shut me up. They continuously said that, you know, they sort of spoke amongst themselves, you know, "Should we do it, should we shut her up?" So I was - and then they were just laughing at my
terror. They were sort of sitting and standing around the room watching. They were encouraging each other. They were instructing each other what to do next. They then basically just sort of took it in turns. They made me perform grotesque acts on them. This went on for what seemed like a very long period of time... and just sort of, one by one, as they finished, so to speak, they sort of left one by one until they were finally all gone and left me to get myself together and then I had to walk out back through the crowded area and try and make my way home.

Filali: What happened to the person you knew who organised the meeting? Was he part of the group?

WOMAN: Yes. Yes. I believe that he was almost, say, like a scout who was looking for the next prey so to speak. He befriended me and I just feel lured me in and set it up. Just by their behaviour, and their - the pleasure and enjoyment that they were getting out of this, I think it would be definitely something that they've either done before or that they would definitely do again. 20

The *Herald Sun*21 and *The West Australian*22 newspapers also reported another similar case that happened in August 2000. This case had been reported to police but the charges were “unexpectedly dropped” by the South Australian Director of Public Prosecutions. A 23 year old woman had been gang raped by three A.F.L. players after going to an Adelaide night club with friends, where she was passed a drink she had not asked for and believed had been spiked. One of the footballers involved had offered to take her for a walk outside to clear her head. Then while she was lapsing in and out of consciousness, she was raped by the three players in nearby bush. The *Herald Sun* reported that: “The woman claimed she remembered one of them complaining: “Why do I always have to go last?”23

Individual cases revealed by Burton-Nelson provide “a common modus operandi” for gang rape:

In the case of the twenty pro football players, a ninety-eight pound woman ... was “brutally and sadistically raped over two hours, by twelve members or former

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members of the Cincinnati Bengals while another eight stood by and watched. … She had gone to the hotel for consensual sex with Lynn James. … When James left the room, three other players barged in and began the series of assaults.24

In the Adelaide victim’s case the players had claimed that the sex was consensual. The issue of consent is important in all cases of sexual assault, however, when sport is involved it becomes intensified. Elite sportsmen are regarded as heroes, role models by members of the community. Burton-Nelson states:

This is how gang rape trials usually proceed: one woman says she was raped, and several men say no; she chose to have sex with us. When male athletes are involved, it becomes an issue not only of a woman’s word against men’s but also of athlete privilege.25

This case indicates that these were not random acts; they were premeditated and followed a pattern. If a victim should take action the response is to claim “consent”. Players’ fitness, celebrity, indeed their “manliness” seeds the concept that they are desired by women. In such a context, why would a woman not consent? Since they also are admired by men, then it is almost inconceivable to them that their word should not be accepted. This is an athlete’s privilege, so they believe.

Amongst other scholars who warn of sexual misconduct by athletes is Steven Ortiz of Oregon State University, who undertook an in depth study of the effects of sports careers on sports marriages in professional leagues in North America.26 Ortiz’s study revealed that “there exists a culture of adultery … that managers and coaches usually ignore, that fellow players may often encourage, and with which the wives must contend.”27 The culture of adultery is fuelled by “boredom, peer group pressure, team loyalty, opportunity,

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24 Burton-Nelson, 131.
sense of self-importance, and the availability of women who seem to be irresistibly attracted to professional athletes."28 with more opportunity while on the road.

There are a number of important factors to tease out of Ortiz’s statements that bear similarities to this discussion of Australian Rules Football. “Available women” can be considered a synonym for “groupie”. These women are usually poorly educated, of low socio-economic status, have poor self-esteem, they have little empowerment in their own lives other than to claim that they slept with a celebrity, they are therefore, vulnerable. Groupies are to be found where there are celebrities. Certainly, Greg Baum has stated that “A footballer’s path is strewn with pitfalls … He might – will be seduced by women.”29 Servicing footballers with sexual intercourse is one of the examples of the support with which Connell argues women “routinely” provide footballers.30 However, they may choose to have sex with a player. They may even choose to have sex with more than one but - it is their choice. They must consent to the act and only the act they believe will take place. They may choose to go to a footballer’s room, but that is not an invitation for others to take part in the act according to the rapists’ modus operandi.

A distinct controversy involving sex and sport provides an insight to attitudes on sex and sport. When A.F.L. player Wayne Carey’s affair with his friend and team member’s wife Kelli Stevens became public knowledge the different attitudes of men and women became apparent through media and public discussion. Many men were incredulous not at the peccadillo, but that it had taken place with a mate and team mate’s wife. They ‘forgot’

28 Ibid.
that people do have affairs with the partner of a friend, that many marriages have been broken up by close friends and that workplace affairs are not uncommon. It was not the infidelity but the wearing of a uniform or a team jumper that made it shocking. Women were more philosophical about the affair many using the cliche “it takes two to tango.” In fact, in her letter of March 2002 to the Editor of *The West Australian* Sandra Stevenson of Yangebup said:

> I am so tired of hearing bad things about Wayne Carey. The man made a mistake. We are all human and we have all made mistakes….. Not one bad word has been said against Mrs Stevens. Let’s be honest, it takes two to tango. 31

The women I spoke to did not condone the affair but recognised that it was a consenting relationship between two adults. That is the point. Women understand consent and many men do not. Consent is to agree. To agree there must be a sign, an indication of willingness. Willingness cannot occur if an individual is not able to demonstrate this because they are stupefied by alcohol or drugs, or because they are terrified. In cases of gang rape it is common for the perpetrators to claim consent, but often the victim consents to sex with one player and ends up by being raped by more. In the case of the Carey-Stevens affair, the concern of the men canvassed, was not in the impropriety of the affair but the issue of proprietary, of possession, of ownership. Infidelity was not the problem, according to most men - it was who it was carried out with and thus indicating that masculinity requires loyalty between men above any other loyalty.

My argument does make a leap from a case of infidelity to a case of gang rape, but I want to demonstrate that there is a fundamental flaw in attitudes when women are treated as objects or property, especially when it seems to be so widespread. This paradox leads to

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the second point of concern arising from Ortiz,\textsuperscript{32} that the hierarchy of managers and coaches ignored players’ sexual exploits. Often victims are paid off to prevent any further action being taken. Indeed, Burton-Nelson states that “Paying women to keep quiet has become routine. One pro football player even tried to deduct as a business expense the $25,000 he paid to a former girlfriend” (the U.S. Tax Court disagreed).\textsuperscript{33} Although the three footballers involved in the Adelaide case claimed “consensual sex” the victim was reported to have been paid nearly $200,000 “for her silence”, and “All three contributed … the legal source told the newspapers.”\textsuperscript{34} Administrators and managers who arrange to pay compensation to victims of sexual abuse indicate a tacit sign of approval. Condoning this type of behaviour reinforces the notion that women are to be used and discarded.

Beyond condoning sexual abuse is the organising of prostitutes for group sex as an exercise in male-bonding. Male-bonding and team-bonding were discussed during “Foul Play.” Michael Flood, Research Fellow, of the Australian Institute, an independent public policy research centre, stated:

My research among young heterosexual men found that some men had sex with other women as a way to bond with other men. And so, for example, one of my interviewees talked about the notion of ‘pig on a spit’, which was that he would bond with his mate by the two of them having sex with the one woman. Essentially, she would perform - well, there would be both intercourse and fellatio occurring, and so they would be sort of joined, if you like, these two men would be joined through the body of this woman, and this was a way to bond. Now that kind of, if you like, group sex, very easily slides into non-consenting sex. And certainly my concern is that over the next few months, lots of questions will be asked about the women who choose to participate in sex with more than one player, we will very rarely ask the question, how did those individual men know that that woman was consenting. How did they make absolutely sure that she was happy to have sex with that person? And I think we want to ask that question.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{31} Sandra Stevenson, “Give him a break”. In \textit{The West Australian}, 28 March 2002, 21.
\textsuperscript{32} Ortiz, 2001.
\textsuperscript{33} Burton-Nelson, 131.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{The West Australian}, 19 March, 2004, 1.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Insight}, 16 March, 2004.
When two men bond through a woman the intimacy shared is between them, not the woman, she provides the neutralizing of the homo-erotic space. To the footballers her body is their – the footballer’s - space. It is an extension of Rowe’s “gaze” or “fetish” in sporting contexts where “men can gaze on and devour the male form without homosexuality being either alleged or feared.”36 In private, it is an erotic sport with a performance, a viewing and an experience that enables the players to have a closeness that would otherwise be considered a betrayal of the homophobic culture of football. Here the woman is incidental. She is an object, without brain, without feelings but with orifices for them to penetrate. To the footballers, her consent is also incidental and her initial consent may have been different to the outcome. Their status as footballers and celebrities provides a confidence that once again it is her word against theirs.

Footballers are required to achieve a cohesiveness to enhance and strengthen the team spirit, commonly called bonding, these practices go beyond the field with negatives consequences. According to Burton-Nelson:

In the manly sporting arena, misogyny and homophobia allow team members to feel close. Group rape cements that bond. Men brag about “gang bangs” and joke about “pulling train,” a euphemism for gang rape; the men line up like train cars to take turns having intercourse with (or rather, doing intercourse to) the woman.37 During the “Foul Play” forum Greg Hunter, journalist, spoke of an article in The Herald that provided an example of where a coach, “who was famous, old, and of the old school” organised prostitutes for young players as “an ordinary bonding system … we’ll do this together.”38 In this incidence the players concerned said that they had no interest in

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37 Burton-Nelson, 143.
participating but what was revealed here was that it had been part of an established subculture.

There are commonalities between different sub-cultures, sporting and non-sporting, where an atmosphere of hegemonic masculinity produces incidences of sexual abuse of a predatory nature that is a response to perceived threats to masculine power. In *Stiffed*, Faludi discussed the perceived growth of female power as troubling for males and this is reflected in her title for Chapter Three “Girls Have All the Power: What’s Troubling Troubled Boys.” Faludi examined two non-sporting cases in the USA. The Spur Posse, a group of young men from California who formed a gang where the contest was to have sex with as many girls as possible to gain points and to claim identification with the N.B.A. team San Antonio Spurs amongst their gang. Once the required points were accumulated they would achieve a particular player’s number for their jackets. They boasted privately and publicly of their sexual demeanours. Faludi also examined the Citadel Military Academy, in Charleston, South Carolina, whose fear of women joining the academy resulted in the degradation of a female instructor and then of females wanting to join as cadets, in particular the case of Shannon Faulkner. The Citadel cadets fear was that “[She’s] ruining a 150 year old tradition.” Faludi stated that the media publicised the two groups as an example of “bad boys out of control, fuelled by a high-octane mix of testosterone, aggression, and the insulting slap of feminism.” The media often assists in perpetuating the myth of masculinity as aggressive without analysing the cultural factors behind the actions resulting in making aggressive masculinity appear even

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39 Faludi, 1999, 102-152.
40 Ibid, 121.
41 Faludi, 1999, 114.
more natural. The following statement from Michael Flood from the Australian Institute during “Foul Play” tethers to Faludi’s discussion:

We know from the international research that there are some contexts that are rape-prone, in other words, some contexts where sexual assault is particularly likely. Those contexts, whether a sporting club or a military group or even a young male gang, a context where you have very strong group loyalties among men, where you have strong sexist and rape-supportive attitudes, where you have a culture of sort of sexual boasting and sexual conquest and where you have strong beliefs in male violence and male aggression and particularly the belief that those things are natural.42

Sexual harassment was not only reserved for these women who sought to join the academy but also for some junior male cadets who were sodomised systemically and referred to as “woman” or “female” in a derogatory way. Common to both the Spur Posse and the Citadel was the belief that women were objects to be used and discarded. Michael Lake, former student told Faludi: “According to the Citadel creed of the cadet, … women have no rights. They are objects, they’re things that you can do with whatever you want to.”43 The objectification of women is the most insidious factor that twists power in both private and public domains. It remains so pervasive and is no where near sufficiently challenged in order to redress the consequences upon women, including sexual harassment, sexual abuse, rape and gang rape. It facilitates the notion that any female (there are perhaps many underage girls who have not made reports) can be raped. Circumstance is no mitigation, whether the victim is a virgin who has had too much to drink in a bar with friends and is then trapped, or a groupie who has consented to sex with one player but is confronted with a situation with multiple persons.

42 Insight, 16 March 2004.
43 Faludi, 1999, 117.
**Fight Club for Footballers**

In the film *Fight Club*, the basement of the bar was the site where members could carry out their fights with impunity while being watched by other members of their fraternity. Similarly sport presents a context where violence can be carried out legitimately and the popular codes of football discussed here are regarded as the most rugged and physical contests that exist in Australia. While many women are involved with football from professional to personal roles and as spectators, it remains that those who benefit the most from football are men. Yet there is a problematic relationship between those involved in the production and consumption of elite sports like the A.F.L.

The players themselves are immersed in a closed culture. Their lives are largely run by their club who has a holistic view of the player. They realise that a healthy player involves more than a fit and trained body. Players are advised what to eat and how to cook. Often the club will take care of personal problems and arrangements. Their clothing is supplied for training, matches and public appearances, and includes both casual attire as well as more formal wear, including business suits. Players train, travel, and socialise together. This engenders team loyalty necessary for a cohesive and successful sporting team. It is where socialising and team loyalty intersects with male-bonding and aspects of hegemonic masculinity that practices of gang rape occur. In this context David Whitson’s words are somewhat chilling: “With respect to the bonding that can occur among male team mates, many have written lyrically about the comradeship and intimacy that can develop as men come to depend upon one another in a shared quest.” Gang rape is an extension of the public on-field performance, a furthering of conquest. Burton-Nelson states “When men rape in a group, they are performing sexual
acts on or in a woman … for each other. It’s a male competition with male spectators.”

It is also an inverted homo-eroticism, the shared conquest in these settings is a parade of phallic power performed as a spectacle for the group where the gratification for the players comes not only from their individual performance but as a spectator for the others performance as well.

Footballers are aware that they are a commodity. From the start of their career they are drafted by a club, often not the club they would have preferred. In many cases the young players have to move state to play for their club. Every game they risk injury because it is hard and physical. Poor performance may cause them to be dropped. Since they are a commodity they may be traded during their playing life. This can occur more than once and it is not uncommon for players to play for two or three clubs disrupting not only their career but is likely to affect personal relationships as well. The knowledge that their career can be tenuous can cause underlying stress.

Players are also a commodity because sport is reproduced through performance, celebrity and merchandising. Where once sports male bodies were viewed for technical aspects, the imaging of sporting masculinity now means that male bodies are viewed as objects of desire, by women and gay men. The result is that according to Connell players have little choice about the power and characteristics surrounding masculinity.

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45 Burton-Nelson, 1994, 146.
In addition, players are often the subject of hero worship which has become part of the culture of football. There are many factors, on and off the sports field that may influence and project a footballer to a hero status. Richard Holt and J.A. Mangan state:

Worship of the performance naturally crossed over into worship of the performer. Great players became first local figures, then more public ones, graduating to national celebrity. … Heroes came to be known for their public virtues as well as their public performances. They were given a persona to suit the needs of the public which did not necessarily correspond to the private reality.49

Many, if not most, players are regarded as heroes by those in the football community. Actions on the playing field become imbued with notions connected to history, traditions and legends and are used metaphorically by sports journalists to describe play and players. The audience is persuaded by the media of players’ worth through the associated traits of masculinity of bravery, strength and glamour. Players’ deeds go beyond the field and any challenges in their private sphere may also be used to embellish their playing public character. Hero worship adds to the sense of being a commodity because the media is selling an archetype. When Holt and Mangan state “the contemporary sports hero is the hero of the Consumer Culture: a conscious, hedonistic consumer par excellence” they are adapting Georg Grella’s discussion on James Bond.50 The James Bond image with footballer Ben Cousins dressed, posed and bearing all the markings of James Bond was used in a marketing campaign for a Western Australian hardware company. I am not linking Ben Cousins with any incidents in this discussion, but providing an example of hero worship, James Bond, sexuality and consumerism.

49 Holt and Mangan, 10.
50 Ibid, 6.
The combination of the legitimate space for carrying out violence, the closed culture of football, becoming a commodity, the tenuous nature of their career, being an object of desire, of having hero status conferred upon them together with being part of an industry may well cause some players to feel conflict about what is expected of masculinity like Jack and Tyler in *Fight Club*. J. Michael Clark sees the connection between Faludi and *Fight Club:*

of men enslaved to consumerism we encounter in both Faludi’s (1999) text and the *Fight Club*’s images a problematic version of phallic essentialism – that testosterone-driven men must be “up” against some enemy or other (or even themselves) or else be

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“up” against the wall of emasculating self-doubts, and that those self-doubts in the midst of the post-war plenty of [American] consumerism have ironically let men “down”.

Footballers are the mass consumed. Some have embarked upon their own “Project Mayhem” by committing acts of sexual violence but they are confused about the threat of their masculinity as they perceive it to be. Their conceptualization of masculinity is narrow, as is their understanding of wider social issues and the business of football. Their intelligence does not prepare them for considering that casual sexual encounters can be sexual abuse.

Although the A.F.L. it is the most popular sport in Australia, is in excess of a two billion dollar industry, has the largest media presence in sport, has nearly six thousand employees, including women, it can also be regarded as a closed culture even at the highest level. The A.F.L. and its Commission have no statutory requirement to report to government or shareholders, yet clubs and players are ultimately responsible to it. While the hierarchy of the A.F.L. embraces a few women in its ranks, I consider that they are apprehensive over a loss of authority. They may make public statements to pride themselves on the nearly equal numbers of women in the audience but this is an economic imperative. In advanced societies, women are disposers of greater proportion of discretionary income. Connell states “While few men knowingly practice hegemonic masculinity many men benefit from it” and indeed he calls football a “hegemonic project.”

The revenue through memberships, merchandise and from advertising and

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53 Rowe, 1995, 151.
54 Connell, 1995, 79.
55 Ibid, 80.
sponsorships is the rationale behind this acceptance and yet it remains that the male hierarchy know in whose favour most benefits flow.

At that time there were a number of indicators that the male hierarchy of the A.F.L. was feeling threatened with the possibility of losing its powerful hold on the control of the competition. In 2004 while there were women in senior positions, including Elaine Canty on the A.F.L. Tribunal, there was not one woman on the A.F.L. Commission, the policy making body of the A.F.L. A number of women were on the boards of the clubs but these are individual achievements because not all clubs have representation on their boards. Overall numbers of women in authority are not a proportionate representation of women involved in the many diversified roles that are connected with the maintenance of the A.F.L. In 1998 the hierarchy of the A.F.L. believed that women already wielded power and influence in the A.F.L. as evidenced in response to a question from Scott Palmer, journalist from *Herald Sunday*: “The A.F.L. is not rushing into placing a woman in a position of power.”56 Unlike other football organisations around the world, A.F.L. bosses claim the right female candidate is yet to emerge. Soccer’s world governing body, F.I.F.A., believes the “future is feminine”,57 while Britain’s Sports Minister Tony Banks would like to see a woman in charge of an English Premier League team.58

While those “football identities” interviewed by Palmer suggested an existing club board member, a journalist, and the A.F.L.’s ground operations manager they also listed wives, secretaries and mothers. Again these roles, while valuable to the sustenance of the

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A.F.L., the women quoted in the articles were still in traditional female roles that are subordinate in the existing modes of patriarchy. The A.F.L. ran a poll on its website in April 2004 asking “would you like to see women calling A.F.L. matches on TV?”\textsuperscript{59} It is assumed that the purpose of the poll was to undermine the women journalists commentating on the A.F.L. With the increasing number of women sports journalists involved with the A.F.L. it seems that males that fear that the women will move from the periphery, “the boundary rider,” to the commentary box, and ably demonstrate their knowledge of the game. Rowe points out that, on average, female sport journalists are likely to be younger and have more educational qualifications than their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{60} In 1996, the A.F.L. failed to recognise women’s contribution to football in their centenary publication, \textit{100 Years of Australian Football}. Kevin Sheedy, Essendon coach, subsequently rectified this with the publication \textit{Football’s Women: the Forgotten Heroes}.\textsuperscript{61} In contrast to the F.A. website\textsuperscript{62} where the Women’s League is prominent alongside the (dominant) male competition, there is no visible link to women’s Australian Rules Football competitions. While the English Premier League has suffered many of these ‘sex scandals,’ the Football Association has made strategic female appointments and increased the visibility on their website of women as players, officials, fans and administrators. When viewing the Australian Rules Football website, there is material on women and football, but it takes the commitment of overweight fullback to find it. The A.F.L. website is a misogynist zone.\textsuperscript{63} John Elliott who was President of Carlton Football for twenty years stated that he encountered many sexually related accidents.\textsuperscript{64} If a subculture of sexual abuse by some elite sportsmen has existed, and there seems to be

\textsuperscript{59} The Official AFL website, “Would you like to see women calling AFL matches on TV?”
\textsuperscript{60} David Rowe. \textit{Sport, Culture and the Media: the unruly trinity}, (Buckingham: Open University, 1999), 56.
\textsuperscript{61} Kevin Sheedy, Kevin and Carolyn Brown, Football’s Women the Forgotten Heroes, (Victoria: Penguin Books Australia, 1998)
adequate anecdotal evidence to support this as well as the body of research by scholars of sport, gender and society, why did the A.F.L. fail to pay attention to the signs and take action to extend the A.F.L. Players Code of Conduct?65  Directly relevant to this paper, Beverley Knight attended the *Insight* “Foul Play” forum “primarily as an Essendon Football Club director”. She did speak on behalf of the A.F.L. although she expressed surprise that no other official from the A.F.L. was present. In view of the seriousness of the issue, an executive to represent the A.F.L. should have been essential. Over a month later, when confronted with the handling of two other alleged assaults by A.F.L. players on the *Four Corners* “Fair Game” the chief executive officer of the A.F.L., Andrew Demetriou, either referred the journalists questions back to the respective club (despite the club referring the journalist to the A.F.L.), denied any knowledge or stated that one club acted appropriately.66  In one of these two cases, $200,000 was paid to the victim in compensation by the players accused, including one player who came from the club who “acted appropriately.” The same programme revealed that an advertisement by this victim’s lawyer had been placed in Australian newspapers appealing for another victim to contact them because they had learnt that one of the accused was implicated in both cases. This occurred in 2001 and the A.F.L. took no action to look into these matters. This is not maladroit handling from a new C.E.O. It is a further symptom of the code of silence, a facet of masculine loyalty.  

Calls for women to be represented on the A.F.L. Commission are not new. In 1998 Nadel wrote, “there should have been at least one female member of the A.F.L. Commission,

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since it is the Commission rather than the tribunal that makes policy.” In 2004, the C.E.O. of the A.F.L. Andrew Demetriou stated “I know there will be a time when a woman will be invited to join the A.F.L. commission… there is no valid reason why there should not be a woman or women on the A.F.L. commission” and immediately countermanded with the statement that:

We’ve had women premiers, … chairs of major Australian companies, the president of Indonesia is a woman. None of those people were appointed, or voted in because they were women. They made it because they were the right person for the job they won. And so it will be with the A.F.L. 68

This statement makes it clear that the glass ceiling of the A.F.L., while visible, will be more impenetrable than the roof at the Telstra Dome. The standard for appointing commissioners needs to be assessed to see if there are tacit criteria which prevent women from the A.F.L. Commission.

Patriarchal authority is being retraced over Australian society firstly through the management of the A.F.L. and secondly through the sport itself. Without a change in the management culture of the sport it is doubtful that the closed culture will transform. Many academics including Burton-Nelson69 and Drummond have the same opinion about the role of sports administrators in bringing about change. Drummond states,

These values and behaviours need to be addressed by concerned athletes as well as sports administrators. The patriarchal nature of the culture in which the sportsmen exist must also be deconstructed.”70

69 Burton-Nelson, 129.
70 Drummond, 2002.
This chapter is not about a few “bad boys.” It is aimed at an organisational, sporting culture that requires an institutional and cultural change. My call is for the naturalising of women in power, thereby undermining the ideology that clings to the notion that women are meant to be subordinate and at the disposal of men.

**Beyond Foul Play and Fight Club**

Many players, managers and administrators are unaware of hegemonic masculinity and its negative outcomes, including the sub-culture of gang rape. Yet some are conscious of its ramifications. I repeat - not every footballer is a sexual predator or a misogynist. James Murphy, a former A.F.L. rookie, who participated in the “Foul Play”\(^\text{71}\) forum rejected the whole culture and environment of the A.F.L. Asked why he chose not to pursue a career in the A.F.L., Murphy stated: “It was an environment where I wasn’t willing to actually submit myself to that. So I think I was in a position to say to myself, ‘I’m not willing to actually stick this out and see what person I’ll become.’” On practices of male-bonding through group sex, Greg Hunter had also given the example where the coach had wanted to hire prostitutes to “do this together” but that “The team at the time consisted of some fresh-faced young guys who were saying to this particular coach …. Listen, we just don’t want to watch your bum going up and down. It’s not of any interest to us.”\(^\text{72}\) While this indicates some decency, their problem lies with the coach, not the actual exercise. It still remains that a sub-culture of sexual abuse does exist and it has not been seriously addressed and eradicated by those in authority of the A.F.L. and its clubs. Certainly Phil Cleary, former V.F.L. player and politician, stated on *Online Opinion*:

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\(^\text{71}\) *Insight*, 16 March, 2004.

\(^\text{72}\) Ibid.
I wish Watson [Tim, former A.F.L. player and now columnist] hadn’t omitted what he and I know only too well about the football world. The stories of groups of men on the rampage, the cover-ups and the institutionalised belief that women who have sex are sluts whereas the men are studs – that’s the football sub-culture.\textsuperscript{73}

All lose when this subculture exists. Women lose collectively and individually. The victims are degraded, violated, experience a loss of human rights, may experience ill-health resulting in the loss of employment and may experience damaged personal relationships. Certainly, the anonymous woman on “Foul Play” had resigned from her job, had imprisoned herself in her home and was living on sickness benefits. Partners of players would most likely feel a sense of betrayal. Women in the community are also at risk. Summers cites Karen Willis, of the N.S.W. Rape Crisis Centre, confirming that, “the harsh reality is, young men are congregating after the footy, after the cricket, after a surf, at weekend parties… Women are being gang raped most weekends in Australia”\textsuperscript{74} and it seems they are at high risk of some players who the football community regards as heroes and role models.

Players seem to be unaware that their actions are also detrimental to themselves. They run the risk of going to prison and gaining a criminal record. They jeopardise their status in the community, their earnings and damage Australian Rules Football. In discussing bringing sport into disrepute and the private behaviour of a criminal nature, Martin Kosla states:

professional football players are obliged to attend public promotional events and functions such as player family days, autograph sessions and football clinics. If a footballer risks public ridicule or rejection at such functions and events, his criminal behaviour will have a negative bearing on his capacity to perform his sporting responsibilities and functions.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{74}Summers, 2003, 107.
Then there is the possibility of contracting a sexually transmitted disease. They are also damaging personal relationships with women. This goes beyond emotional hurt and loss of existing relationships but it extends to an inability to experience genuine intimacy with a partner. This occurs when masculinity is viewed as a system of domination of women that men feel bound to conform to and which is harmful to both genders. Certainly, Burton-Nelson states that players who chat in the locker room about established relationships with partners can be subjected to mockery.76

Damage also occurs to the A.F.L. and the clubs involved. Following the recent allegations of gang rape, a number of sponsors were reviewing their future arrangements with the A.F.L. and the players’ club. It was reported that:

Wizard Home Loans, a major sponsor of the A.F.L. and the National Rugby League, is considering dropping its sponsorship of both sports in light of rape allegations. … It is believed Wizard pays about $1.5 million in total for its sponsorship of the pre-season cup.77

In the Canterbury Bulldogs case, it was reported that a number of their sponsors had already withdrawn support for the club.

The A.F.L. was slow to take action on a different social issue, racial vilification, but once confronted with enough evidence and pressure from community organisations they did act. Nadel states that Aboriginal footballer, Syd Jackson who played for Carlton in the 1960s experienced racial abuse both from opponents and from spectators.78 Following continual racial vilification of several Aboriginal players in the 1980s and the 1990s the A.F.L. did institute a code of conduct which has been successful in stopping racial

76 Burton-Nelson, 84.
vilification, certainly on-field.\textsuperscript{79} \textsuperscript{80} An offer of assistance in devising a code of conduct and education programme for the treatment of women has been offered to the A.F.L. by the Centre Against Sexual Assault at the Royal Women’s Hospital and Men Against Sexual Assault.\textsuperscript{81} However, that the A.F.L. continues to react to specific incidences rather than being proactive on social issues. Additionally, the effectiveness of a code of conduct and education programme is also questionable. When cricketer Shane Warne was found to have taken a banned substance, a diuretic, it was revealed that education sessions on drug awareness had been taken too lightly by players.\textsuperscript{82} Rape prevention programmes organised at universities in the USA were poorly attended by males and disrupted by jocularity that undermined the message according to Burton-Nelson.\textsuperscript{83} Education programmes are not the answer. Cultural change in institutions requires strategic policy interventions to summon new realities, rather than perpetuating the patriarchal punctuation.

New paradigms of sport relating to gender need to be established. To break down modes of patriarchal authority there is a great need for women to become involved in the management and hierarchy of sport, especially the A.F.L. Burton-Nelson states, “We can conclude that the men in power – coaches, team owners, athletes, editors – have not made the connection between male sports, training and rape. Or that they do not think it is

\textsuperscript{77} Brammall and Warner, 2004.  
\textsuperscript{78} Nadel, 242.  
\textsuperscript{79} AFL Players Code of Conduct.  
\textsuperscript{80} There are by-laws at Subiaco Oval advising spectators of acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours. Officials can be called upon to remove spectators who are offensive.  
\textsuperscript{81} Melissa Ryan and Emma Quale. “AFL offered help in setting up code of conduct”, The Age, 20 March, 2004.  
\textsuperscript{83} Burton-Nelson, 157.
important."84 Again, I say there should be more women in authority in the A.F.L. to
counterbalance the patriarchal, performance related, and the profit driven goal.

Through the Australian Research Council, the Federal Government contributes
considerable funds towards research on sport. Individual sports also have their own
research funding. However, most funding goes towards health sciences or sciences that
improve performance. In Australia a much smaller proportion is allocated to humanities
and social sciences. A quick search of the A.R.C. website containing “sport” revealed
twenty-seven projects.85 Of those twenty-seven projects only seven were related to
humanities or social science. Four of these had a strong tie to an economic benefit. It is
imperative that funding is provided for research on sport and its effects upon society.
Issues of power, of gender, of celebrity, of ethics and justice need to be studied within the
context of sport. The A.F.L. must also broaden their research priorities beyond
performance enhancing aspects of ankles, knees and groins and enlist researchers that can
analyse trends and impact that flow between the sport and society.

Additionally, more women need to be in positions of authority in all sporting
organisations. Those few women who have been appointed to boards or in executive
positions are not sufficient. Through naturalizing a plurality of feminine roles, it is my
position that more women in higher positions in sport would reduce cases of sexual abuse.
Although some feminists would call this “civilizing”,86 if this is what it takes for women
to be safer, then so be it. It would certainly facilitate to counter the closing of the ranks

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84 Burton-Nelson, 129.
and the code of silence, the first and second rules of *Fight Club*. The binary of roles between genders in Australian society have been long established. They need to be overhauled. To include women in this arena is not to emasculate football but may dislodge the overarching relations of power between men and women around the ground and beyond the ground.

In 2004, the issue of whether there was a crisis in masculinity in Australia was widely debated and placed on the agenda for the election year by the then Opposition Leader, Mark Latham. Faludi’s *Stiffed* and *Fight Club* presented an examination and reflection of American men who reacted to their masculinity crisis in the 1990s. In *Stiffed*, many men turned on women and feminism rather than considering underlying economic and social institutions that affected their identity whereas in *Fight Club* the men punished themselves before embarking on Project Mayhem. At the commencement of the 2004 A.F.L. season, revelations of a significant number of alleged past and recent cases of sexual assault indicated there was indeed a crisis of masculinity and that the crisis was that masculinity was out of control. It was a crisis that should not have happened. It was caused by a patriarchal system that did not want to take action, even though the warnings were present, because it is controlled by men only. The A.F.L. is an organic body that only shifts when jabbed by outside stimulus, in the past mainly motivated by the sharp pain of finance. In November 2005 the A.F.L. released a social responsibility policy “Respect and Responsibility: Creating a safe and inclusive environment for women at all levels of Australian Football.” Their timing was consistent with their tardy action on racial vilification with the result that it could be construed that it was in response to the

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86 Summers, 1994, 50
potential loss of sponsorships. Two weeks after the release of the “Respect and Responsibility” policy it was reported in The Australian newspaper that two A.F.L. players were accused of sexual assault.\textsuperscript{88} It is now the case A.F.L. should not shift, but completely undergo change, by placing women in positions of authority and policy making. Without a dynamic change in culture, at the top, the A.F.L. has been dangerously flaunting its position and flouting its responsibilities to Australian society.

Gang rape, rape and sexual assault are not only just a sporting problem and in isolation to the rest of society. Football presents a context where it is an amplification and acceleration of issues that are embedded in Australian ideologies. Therefore, eradicating a culture of sexual abuse in all parts of society should be important to all its citizens. Politicians, the sports industry, academics, media and individuals should make it a priority in the context of sport because sport is so pervasive and is an appropriate place to start. Sport is also a persuasive element of society. If messages are being relayed to the community that rape is not a serious issue when it involves professional athletes, then sport becomes a perverted and corrupt institution. As theorists and historians of sport, we must question and assess the organisational of culture and create a matrix to activate change.

As stated in Chapter Two, this chapter was an unintended outcome of the research project. The controversies relating to footballers and sexual assault are very serious and very sensitive. I acknowledge that the problem deserves further indepth research with a more

\textsuperscript{88} Michael Davis. “A.F.L. Club stands by accused players.” In The Australian. 7 December, 2005, 3.
detailed discussion on masculinities, power and identities. However, to have failed to address the issue at all, particularly in view of the timing of the research, could lead to a far superior criticism. Within the confines of this research project sexual assaults by footballers was given due attention. Sexual assault is a heinous act. An omission of Chapter Three would be disrespectful to the victims.
Chapter Four

“EVERY CLUB HAS A ROSA” - AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL AND FEMALE FANDOM

“You know every club has a Rosa. That would be a good title for a chapter.”¹

Apollo

To envision a deity in the true female tradition, it is necessary to purge the image of simplistic or unrealistic male interpretations. It may be that a truly powerful female image can be found only in prepatriarchal traditions of the complete trinitarian life cycle: Virgin, Mother, Crone. Especially the Crone.²

Barbara G. Walker

The late Rosa Townsend had a lifetime love of Australian Rules Football and is a legend at her club, West Perth. Despite the belief of the executive of A.F.L. House, Footy Show personalities and staid historians, football legends are not exclusively inscribed in the masculine. Rosa Townsend is a football legend at the West Perth Football Club. She is part of their football folklore. While Rosa was a unique individual, her passion, indeed love, for the West Perth Football Club can be found at most football clubs throughout Australia. The case of Rosa Townsend is that of an archetypal female football fan, capturing the complexities of both her age and class. Rosa is a representation, metaphor and metonymy of a section of female football fans throughout Australia that have existed in local, state and now national clubs but who do not attract commensurate status. In this chapter, I recount Rosa Townsend’s story while putting forward a paradigm for female fandom which is a new method of theorizing women sport spectators.

¹ Interview 23 August 2004.
Maidens, Mothers and Crones: A new model of exploring female fandom in football

Football fans worship the players as heroes. Sports journalists proclaim players as heroes describing physical contests in terms of great deeds and bravery. Historians, sociologists, anthropologists and cultural theorists study the triangular relationship of sport, media and society using comparisons of mythical heroes and legendary figures that are abundantly drawn to footballers using a mine of metaphors while taxonomies of heroic types are compiled that include: the local hero, the unlikely hero, the popular hero, the anti-hero, the fallen hero and forgotten heroes, including Kevin Sheedy and Carolyn Brown’s *Football’s Women: the forgotten heroes*. Muhammad Ali, the champion boxer, has been described by Michael Oriard as “The Hero in the Age of Mass Media.” Oriard stated that critical approaches have studied Ali as a cultural text, in the way Clifford Geertz had:

> taught scholars to approach cultural expressions as “texts” in which we can read the larger culture that produces them. In reading the texts of a complex modern culture as ours, it is essential to acknowledge that no single interpretation is likely to be possible.

One reason why a single interpretation is not possible is that through the passage and progression of time, football heroes often fall into divergent, and often opposing, categories. “God” Gary Ablett and the “King” Wayne Carey became fallen heroes following off-field tragedy and scandal. The anti-hero of West Coast fans, Fraser Gehrig became a hero three years later after winning the Coleman medal for the most goals kicked in the season in 2004 and again in 2005. There is a body of research that tracks sporting and football heroes. Conversely, there is a scarcity of scholarship on women

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6 Oriard, 511-12.
7 Hindley.
football fans. This is not unique to Australia. Ann Coddington states the British experience:

women fans of yesteryear are absent from these flickering pictures and sepia tints is one way in which men can assert that this history belongs to them, even if tomorrow it no longer does. Another process is to treat these great heroes, for that is what they remain for all fans, in masculine isolation.8

Player’s identity is found in football archetypes but the connection of identity to football is often withered when theorizing female fans.

Apart from Sheedy and Brown’s “forgotten heroes,” there has not been a status accorded to women involved with football equivalent to men that draws on a past of mythology and legend. Women’s presence at football has been characterized only in terms of their functional relationship to men and not on their own terms. Here I am proposing a new cultural studies fan model that positions women in sport in a way that also draws on mythology, a feminist mythology. My theory aims to solve and salve the difficulties in researching women’s involvement with football, in particular women fans of football. Importantly my model renders female fandom as plural and complex and crucial to the future of football. At the moment, “female fans” are being dealt with as one homogenous group, particularly in the eyes of the A.F.L. Cultural studies can help to manage the problem of how to structure the theory of a female audience through textual poaching, literacy and pedagogy. Yet it requires a new vocabulary that allows us to assemble and to understand audience behaviour. This model also focusses attention on women as self-standing fans, rather than as pillions to masculine glory.

Women in mythology and literature are often represented by a trilogy. The theme is constant and present in many ancient and prepatriarchal societies, according to the humanist Barbara Walker:

This many-named Goddess was the first Holy Trinity. Her three major aspects have been designated Virgin, Mother, and Crone; or, alternatively, Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. The same Trinitarian pattern can be traced in all the Goddess figures of India, Arabia, Egypt, the Middle East, Aegean and Mediterranean cultures, and among Celtic and Teutonic peoples of northern Europe.9

Making a claim for the eminence of a female football audience is proposed through the existing metaphors of mythology. The myth I utilise is The Fates, the three sisters that represent the past, present and future, who spin and weave the fate of men.

Very important but assigned to no abode whether in heaven or on the earth were THE FATES, Moirae in Greek, Parcae in Latin, who, Hesiod says, give to men at birth evil and good to have. They were three, Clotho, the Spinner, who spun the thread of life: Lachesis, the Disposer of Lots who assigned to each man his destiny; Atropos, she who could not be turned, who carried the “the abhorred shears” and cut the thread at death.10

Each of The Fates serves a purpose, often sitting on the periphery but holding men’s fortune in the balance. The three characteristics of women fans are the maid, the mother and the crone who clasp fateful threads to players. In terms of this theory and structure of female fandom, the maid holds the future of the footballers and also the game through the regeneration of a female audience. The mother represents the present and is invested with delivering footballers their portion of rewards which includes stability. She is also the conduit between generations of females and the hub between her own family and the wider football world. The crone is the most intense of the three. Her advanced age gives her an elevated status through knowledge and experience. She has witnessed many players enter the competition as neophyte and with her accumulated football wisdom has the ability to predict their end in football. While The Fates were mythical sisters, the

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9 Walker, 21.
three generations of maids, mothers and crones exist in the factual football world as evidence by the Steel family of Samson, Fremantle Football Club, “Dockers,” supporters:

In this photograph, age determines the structure the fan model of the maid, mother and crone. There are other factors to be examined in the women’s fandom besides age. Class is one. In all football codes, class has established its roots in clan and region including race. In multi-cultural Australia entry, to community can be accessed through football. Ramona Koval, writer and broadcaster, was born in Poland and stated that barracking for St. Kilda made her just another one of the kids at St. Kilda Park High, it enabled her to lose her new kid status that she felt was accentuated by her ethnicity. In a world-wide mythology, legends, heroes and powerful women figures can be found in most cultures

over time and are a part of the “human psyche” according to Joseph Campbell in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. 

Nor can the relationship of sexualisation between femininity and masculinity be displaced. The question is whether “perving on footballers in tight shorts” is a valid motivation for female fans. The complexity of female fandom has been understated because the exploration of women and sport has been studied from the fringes, largely on the field rather than off. The motivations for being a female fan of football vary in intensity and rationale but they have always been a constant in Australian.

A continuum exists in the development from maid to crone. The continuum acknowledges the diversity and the juxtaposition of the motivation of women’s fandom. It is also possible for women to choose at which point they enter the structure. Some may try to enter at an inappropriate point where age or class conflict with accepted notions in stages of or types of femininity. Therefore, correspondingly to footballers whose heroic status changes, the status of women may also transform. Movement through the continuum is important. At each stage there seems an incremental elevation of status. These women become acknowledged for their knowledge of the game as well as their devotion and enthusiasm for their club and the sport. Players with football longevity enter popular consciousness as legends and can also receive club and league life membership. They may also succeed into being inducted into State and National Halls of Fame. A small number of women’s have received life membership of their clubs but are few in number. As for entering popular cultural consciousness, their passion for football usually

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becomes renown to a milieu of their fellow fans, family and friends. Several informants whose testimony is included were enlisted through contacts recommending that I interview these passionate personalities for this research.

In the next section, I examine women’s football fandom traversing the continuum of maids, mothers and magical women using the oral history gathered. I listened to their stories and provide space for their voices to cement their presence. For every one woman fan included in this section there are tens of thousands more throughout remote, regional and urban Australia. Women have been steadfast in their support of Australian Rules Football since the 1900s. These are the voices reclaiming a history that has been for the most part silent towards them.

Magical Women – Who is Rosa and What is Her Spell?

It is true: “every club has a Rosa.” Irene Chatfield, is the legendary Bulldogs supporter, who was a key member of a campaign to prevent a merger of her beloved club in 1989.14 At Arden Street, home to the Kangaroos, Jude Francis, member, volunteer, and “mother figure” is “part of the [club’s] folklore.”15 In reality, not only does every club have a Rosa but their histories should contain a chronicle of many Rosas. Sadly these women are often absent. The story of the late Rosa Townsend is an archetype, conveying what football means to them. She represents one perspective of women’s presence in football. Rosa is an archetypal story of female fandom. I present her example as a case study

1968), 4.
14 Sheedy and Brown, 237, 242-248;
15 Mark Duffield, “Welcome to Arden Street.” In The West Australian Pre Game Friday July 12, 2002, 10.
because she is revered by players and supporters - both male and female - because she shares many characteristics with her counterparts. She is rare though, because her passion for her football club has been documented in *Rosa: a biography of Rosa Townsend*.  

This text means that she does not require the anonymity necessary to my university’s ethical guidelines although I gained her family’s permission to do so. The story of Rosa’s fandom and her football identity is synopsized from Beryl Hackner’s biography, further weighted with others testimony of Rosa’s fandom and then spliced with anonymous women fans to demonstrate shared meanings and motivations for female fandom of Australian Rules Football. Through Rosa’s story, the cycle of the maid, the mother and the crone is tracked.

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**Rosa the Maiden**

Rosa Townsend was the antithesis of the woman who becomes involved in football through a male influence. Her biographer Beryl Hackner stated that it was while attending a convent school in Busselton, a small south-west country team that she became first became interested in Australian Rules Football:

> Rosa's lifelong interest in football began at the convent, pupils were taken to watch the game for Saturday afternoon outings and Rosa soon chose to barrack for the Pastimes team because she like their colours – red and blue.

As a teenager Rosa went to picnics and the football with a family her mother knew through the Communist party:

> At the football, they would scream for West Perth, Rosa choosing to follow this club because its colours were the same as those of the Busselton Pastimes from her boarding-school days. They would take the train from West Leederville (when they had the money), run to the West Perth oval, and sit on the outer bank area for threepence, having lied about their ages to avoid having to pay the adult price. Rosa’s ambition was to graduate to the inner seats (sixpence) and ultimately to the grandstand (one shilling).

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17 Permission to include the late Rosa Townsend in this thesis has been given by her son Tony Townsend dated 27 September 2004.
19 Ibid, 15.
20 Ibid, 34.
One aspect of female fandom examined in this research is when and how women became interested in football. My study established that fans born in regions where Australian Rules Football is dominant usually became interested at a very early age. One informant recalled becoming interested as young as six years of age.\textsuperscript{21} As young girls, they were introduced to football by other family members and there did not seem to be a dominant male or female influence at work here. Mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters all played a part in their initiation and participation with football, indicating that football was a family affair, particularly for those who had been raised in the country where social life revolved around football in winter and cricket in summer. ‘Cath’ from Victoria stated, “So in summer it was cricket and in winter it was the V.F.L. Sunday afternoon the whole family would get into the car and go down to the oval.”\textsuperscript{22} ‘Cath’s’ experience was similar to other informants. Many first childhood experiences of football that led to a lifelong following, both female and male, occurred on oval’s grassy banks around Australia. Many ovals have now been superseded by stadium seating, necessitating the induction of a fresh form of female fan into Australian Rules Football. The following voices convey new female football fans whose interest in football was generated through a new set of social and cultural forces, including national mobility, immigration, and the increased media coverage with the transformation of the V.F.L. into the national A.F.L., particularly television.

\textsuperscript{21} Interview 19 August 2004.  
\textsuperscript{22} Interview 10 August 2004 (b).
Electra

One of the attributes of the maids, mothers and crones football fans is their diversity, not only in age but also in race and ethnicity. One of my informants was a young indigenous woman who had followed Australian Rules Football since she was six years old when she joined her first football club in the WA.F.L. competition. Electra’s mother was a Nyoongar woman and her father of Anglo-Celtic ancestry. Electra told me that she was still a member of that club and had joined the Fremantle Football Club as an inaugural member and was a member of the Siren’s Coterie, an exclusively woman’s membership group.

Australian Rules Football has a considerable following from Aboriginal people as a spectator sport and through participation at the many levels of competition throughout the country. Despite Geoffrey Blainey’s rejection, debate continues amongst Australian sport historians over the influence of *marn grook*, Aboriginal footballers have had a significant presence in the A.F.L. competition. Electra’s fandom for football demonstrated consistencies with other informants. She had a deep appreciation for the physicality and strategy of the game and she identified with the locality of her club. However, it was her comment on other young women who followed footballers that provided an insight into pathological – and pathologized - female fandom and the culture of celebrity associated with footballers:

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23 Womens coeteries of A.F.L. Clubs have been established by a number of A.F.L. clubs. The coeteries add to the binary of male/female in sport and leisure and do not serve to normalize women in football. The coeteries perpetrate the “Ladies Only Stand” or the “men’s bar.” This is another facet of female fandom and capitalism and sport. Fiona Irvine, Bachelor of Business Studies, Edith Cowan University completed an Honours Thesis *The Call of the Sirens: the women who support the Fremantle Dockers*. Edith Cowan University. 2001. Hons Thesis (B.Bus.).

**Electra:** I think a lot of people are interested in being a part of a club and not just the footballers. I lot of women try to ‘crack’ onto them.  

Do you think the ‘tight shorts’ thing is a myth?

**Electra:** No I don’t, I think some women do want to perve. Only 50% would be interested in the technicality of the sport. A lot of the younger women are regarded as groupies. Not the Sirens members though because they are mostly forty-plus. But the younger ones are seen as groupies.

Through Electra a perspective or problem, of female fandom is articulated. Electra’s evidence supported one of Summer’s assertions that one motivation for women following football was to “entertain sexual fantasies about one or more of the players.” While one of my original stimuli for undertaking this project was to refute this notion of female fandom, it became increasingly clear throughout the research that footballers are treated as sexual objects by a section of female followers. Another informant, also close to the footballers, stated:

Some of them are really nice girls but they develop this hero worship. “X” is just one of the most gorgeous boys, a lovely man, beautiful human being and girls adore him and I have been out with them where he could have taken home half a dozen girls, he will say no to the first five and say yes to the sixth.

Australian Rules Footballer’s tight and short shorts is often a cause for sniggering yet there is potency to it. In studying video of Australian Rules Football, Beverley Poynton stated:

What attracted my interest were the images of male bodies. Here were barely clad, eyeable Aussie male bodies in top anatomical nick. The cameras follow their rough and tumble disport with a relentless precision, in wide-angle, close-up and slow-motion replay. With the commentary turned down and with some music the imagery

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25 Interview 29 November 2004.
26 Interview 29 November 2004.
29 At least three women academics have written on the topic of short shorts:
may be released from its imposed fixity of meaning and the performance enjoyed as choreographed spectacle: lyrical, flagrantly masculine, and erotic.\textsuperscript{30}

The consequences of sexualising and idolising footballers are very serious. An informant close to the footballers also stated that she found that “most A.F.L. players have a low opinion of women … they just don’t respect girls who chase after them.”\textsuperscript{31} Often it can result in serious sexual abuse as demonstrated in Chapter Three. A different example of how idolising footballers can be dangerous is found in the case of Gary “God” Ablett and Alisha Horan who met her tragic death, due to drugs in his company. Garry Linnell traced Ablett’s final fall from grace and its connection to a terminal outcome of female fandom:

In 2001, the coroner, Noreen Toohey, found that 20-year-old Alisha Horan had died as a result of a lethal combination of heroin, ecstasy and amphetamine. Over a five-day period, said Toohey, Horan ‘became enmeshed in a culture of alcoholism and drug-taking with her football hero, a man … with whom she was clearly infatuated.’

Not all victims are women. Chris Lewis, former West Coast Eagle, said of a fellow player:

Turls [Craig Turley] was an interesting character, actually. I felt sorry for him because all the women loved him! There were times when we would go out and women just wouldn’t leave him alone. I think that was alright with Turls at the start, but after a while he couldn’t handle it. He would have 18-year-old girls to 80-year-old grandmothers trying to pinch him on the bum and after a while that got the better of him.\textsuperscript{32}

Craig Turley had a brief brilliant football career, but it was cut short. The circumstances are still unclear which lead Turley to leave a promising A.F.L. career. A further serious case of unwanted attention by besotted fans occurred in 2004 to West Coast Eagle Chris Judd and was reported in \textit{The West Australian}\textsuperscript{33}. Two teenage girls continually drove past his home, went through his rubbish to find his mobile telephone number, and then

\textsuperscript{30} Poynton and Hartley, 150.
\textsuperscript{31} Interview 25 August 2004.
\textsuperscript{32} Gary Stocks and Alan East. \textit{Lewie, Lewie: Chris Lewis, an Aboriginal Champion.} (Perth, Western Australia: Specialist Sport Management, 2000), 154.
bombarded Judd with text messages. Although he was reluctant to involve the police and have charges brought, his club did intervene. Police subsequently interviewed the women. In an interview with the Chief Executive Officer Trevor Nisbett, the importance of the clubs’ responsibility to players, players’ responsibility and responsible behaviour by fans was stressed.

Besides raising the issue of sexualizing and idolizing footballers, Electra’s interview also provided a sound opinion on how women should view footballers in a way that will reciprocate respect.

**Electra:** Older women get a lot more respect in the football world, the sixty pluses, more than the younger women. I see it a lot, we have people’s nights, sausage sizzles and those women are there cooking and organising. They have a lot of respect from the boys and the staff.34

Participating and involvement in the football club’s organized activities is a healthy manner in which to highlight the positive and interdependent relationship of player and fan. The accessibility of footballers to fans in an atmosphere of a family-type social function may develop a close group of people fostering conditions for Electra’s further advice:

**Electra:** People believe at A.F.L. level that players are and are seen as Gods rather than for their athletic ability. They are people as well. Because I am Aboriginal, we are all connected. They are your mob and you don’t put one above another. A lot of Aboriginal people are not interested in sleeping with them. Other women put them on a pedestal – but it is a gift. We see these boys as sons, brothers, cousins and not as objects.35

This is a highly insightful observation. The admiration is for the athletic ability that the player has. Electra considers that this it is a special talent bestowed upon the players. In

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34 Interview 29 November 2004.
35 Ibid.
Marcel Mauss proposed that gifts have obligations between the giver and receiver. He concluded that “mutual respect and reciprocal generosity” lead to worthy citizens. Both players and fans should respect “the gift” and the role of player and fan in an equal way.

**Electra:** The Aboriginal people work in place and belief. We view them in other ways and value them all equally. They are black fellas you know and you would not chase after them, because they are part of the extended family network. I saw the national [Aboriginal] teams play recently. It is a family feeling. A different feeling and different to other games where the girls are hanging over the fence.37

When sport becomes professional sport, like all capitalist ventures, it negates and corrupts the concept of equality. Yet Electra emphasises the importance of the family network and that those within the network are placed on equal footing. Players have value for their athletic ability but within Aboriginal culture and their communities all people have equal worth, including fans. This value should be inculcated amongst the players, fans and all those involved in the football community.

**Daphne**

Daphne was brought up in the heart of one of Australia’s other football codes, Rugby League, and moved into Australian Rules Football territory in her early thirties. She was introduced to Australian Rules Football by a female co-worker and like Rosa Townsend did not come into the football through any masculine framed channels.

**Daphne:** A lady I was working with was involved with [the club] and so was her sister. Her sister was working for [ ] who were the major sponsors back then and they said come along … and gave you a ticket into the ground and what not. So I said ok I’d go because it wouldn’t cost me anything and I would go and check it out and it started from there. I’ve just had the time of my life.38

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37 Interview 29 November 2004.
38 Interview 30 July 2004.
Daphne could be considered a “maiden” because of her relatively recent interest in Australian Rules Football of six years, but also for her single status and her age. However, it is her independence of male influence and her passion for football and her own club that Daphne shares with Rosa. Daphne is not only a member of the football club she now follows but is part of their official cheer squad. Her involvement with the club has deepened through selling merchandise and taking part in promotional activities in the media. Daphne told me, “Myself and another lady got involved with radio interviews before the first final last year. We did a little two minute grab. I got asked a few questions.” Daphne’s club recognises the commercial value of their women members and actively promotes their involvement frequently through the media. During the interview, I asked Daphne what appealed to her most about football. She responded:

**Daphne:** Good question. The atmosphere of the game probably. That is probably what got me hooked in the first place, when I first went I knew nothing about the A.F.L. coming from Sydney. Yeah, just the passion of it. I am somewhat of an emotional person and that is my outlet. I can scream and shout and sing and whatever I need to do. I always leave feeling, I don’t know, feeling relaxed, sometimes excited, sometimes a bit sad but like I have had a good day out.

In respect to my question whether Daphne had any favourite players who she followed and why she followed them she stated that she had three.

**Daphne:** [...] because he is exciting, he is unusual, he is controversial, there is never a dull moment with [him]. [...] because he is the heart and soul and never gives up. [...] because I have met him and he is a beautiful person, there is no other words for him, he is just a beautiful person, very down to earth, quietly committed to what he does. He is not in it for the accolades, he is in it because he just wants to play football.

Thus Daphne’s affection for these players is based upon the qualities that these individuals bring to the game and not any sexual fantasy or designs upon them that are so often falsely associated with female fandom.

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39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
It was Daphne’s concluding remarks about football that had resonance to community that was significant:

*Daphne:* Yeah. There a number of people in the mob that I am close to, not a whole heap but a handful but everybody says hello to everybody there. Even if I can’t remember their names. Yeah just having that football family I guess, being here by myself is a plus, definitely, everybody wants to think that they are connected to humanity in some way and I think this is my way. Yeah.42

Despite being relatively new to the state where she now lives and being away from her consanguine family, Daphne has found a new family through football and established herself in a new community. She has an identity within this community and states “I have a scarf full of badges which a lot of people know me for from that. They might not know my name but they know me as the girl with the scarf full of badges.”43 Sport, particularly, football has an important function in the building of these communities. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*44 examined the “imagined community” through the politics of nationalism. His discussion on imagined community has portability and relates well to football where often members of that community do not know others.45 Yet Daphne is real, and so is her football community. Her example has harmony with Anderson’s argument that these imagined communities should not be regarded as either being “false” or “genuine” but rather “by the style in which they are imagined.”46 The A.F.L., with its clubs, teams, supporters and projection through the media, is resplendent and awash with the style of community. In the football community style Anderson’s “emblems of modern culture” with coloured maps that are “instantly recognizable, everywhere visible, … penetrated deep into the

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
46 Ibid, 6.
popular imagination, forming a powerful emblem.47 Club colours and logos are part of the style of community as well as chants, songs, and language. Daphne with her “scarf full of badges” and “singing” is a clear example of member of a community.

**Kora**

Kora is another football maiden who demonstrates the diversity of the female football audience. Kora is one of two football maidens who were not brought up on Australia’s grassy banked ovals but were introduced to Australian Rules Football after settling in the country. The two fans migrated from South-East Asia. Kora is 29 years of age, migrated to Australia in 1986 from Malaysia, single, a university student and has taken an interest in the A.F.L. for the last four years. Her interest was spawned through a workplace football tipping competition that lead to her taking interest in football through the television broadcasts.

How long have you been following Australian Rules Football?

**Kora:** Probably since about 2000 or so with interest in it. Previous to that I was always aware of A.F.L. but I had a very cynical view of it because all I used to take notice of the news was ‘so and so got rubbed out for two weeks for this’ or melee at such and such a game. I used to think ‘how pathetic, these are grown men and they can’t control themselves and they are getting busted for biffing each other’ but I never really watched matches until around 2000 and then I actually got into it and got interested in the game.48

How did you become interested? Through friends, TV or something else?

**Kora:** Probably a combination of TV as you know in winter the ads are always on telly and I watch a lot of telly so I couldn’t really pretend that the ads weren’t happening in front of my face. Also in my job there were footy tipping competitions. I never really took part in the beginning but people were always talking about it and there was money up for grabs at the end and so that was quite interesting.49

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47 Ibid, 175.
48 Interview 18 August 2004.
49 Interview 18 August 2004.
And in the end did you become involved in footy tipping competitions or was it the trigger for you to become interested?

**Kora:** I got involved in footy tipping for the first time a couple of years after I got interested, mainly because at first I thought I don’t really know enough and I will feel stupid because I will be picking them by the name rather than by who actually might win. So it was sort of through work listening to people talk about it, TV. Most of my friends and family are not into football so they didn’t really play much of a role in getting me interested.50

From her original “cynical view” of football, Kora now follows the A.F.L. competition as a whole and not a particular team. From her interview it became evident that she is a quiet and studious watcher of the game. While she has attended matches, she finds some of the spectator behaviour, the “yobbo element” offensive and prefers to watch the game on television. When asked about what appealed most to her about football, she answered:

**Kora:** It is the competition. I mean I like the physicality of it is really good. Seeing these athletic guys doing the athletic things they are doing, it is an exciting game to watch I think. So that is probably the main thing. The competition, the things that the coaches say before the matches and you know, the drama of injuries and coaches getting sacked. I get into all of it.51

One of the aspects of fandom investigated with my subjects was whether they ever felt disadvantaged by being a female fan of football. None did. Some felt it was an advantage. In Kora’s case she was able to converse with her friends’ partners because football was found to be a shared interest:

**Kora:** I wouldn’t say disadvantaged. I suppose what I do find is that, especially when we go to parties or whatever if the blokes are doing the blokey thing and talking about footy or sport they tend not to expect me to make any contribution and then they are very surprised when I make a contribution.52

While Kora may have had a range of topics to discuss with her friends, the subjects open to conversation with their partners was narrow.

**Kora:** But it has actually been a good thing because some of my friends I never really had anything to talk about with their hubbies but then when we discover we like

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50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
football, every time I see them it is like “how’s your footy tipping going?” and it is something to talk about. It breaks the ice a bit. Footy tipping competitions, like fantasy leagues, have become increasingly popular throughout Australia over the last ten years and the workplace is one common site for them to be found. The value of prizes to be won ranges according to the size of the competition but typically there would be a small pool of cash provided by the participants in the competition. In these instances, it is not so much the cash but prestige that is at stake. Tipsters take pride in their knowledge of the game being demonstrated to the rest of their co-workers. Conversation at work following the weekend frequently commences with a review of results, discussion of outcomes who got “eight out of eight.” It is worth noting here that many competitions held in the workplace or in social settings are organised and run by women. In her case, Kora was introduced to Australian Rules Football through joining a footy tipping competition in her workplace and which resulted in a continuing interest in football that outlasted her employment. Her interest has led to increased communication with other members of the community without losing any of her cultural background, but added to her social repertoire, highlighting that football fandom has many diverse facets and motivations:

_Kora:_ I would not think it is a disadvantage as such but people’s particular perceptions of what they think footy fans should look like and I guess I really don’t fit that look.

By “that look” Kora meant that fans are predominantly of Anglo-Saxon or European descent who presently make up the majority of fans. Kora is a new type of female football fan whose interest in Australian Rules Football will be vital to keep the game viable in an increasingly multicultural Australia, and especially migration from its South-East Asian neighbours continues.

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53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
Cybele

Kora’s experience of finding new common ground in an adopted country is not an isolated case as Cybele demonstrates, although with some differences.

Cybele: I think that I am lucky that I got to like it otherwise weekends would be quite dull for me anyway. Its good to be with friends sometimes, sit around and you are not at a loss when they are talking A.F.L. so I can join the conversation. It is quite a novelty a Chinese lady getting involved with the A.F.L. and I know about play as well, the rules quite well, to abuse the umpires. Ha ha ha. I really enjoy not for anybody’s sake but for my sake, I really enjoy, really.\(^55\)

Cybele was born and educated in Singapore. She is married with a daughter and a retired business woman in her fifties. Like Kora, Cybele was not immediately enamoured with the A.F.L. competition when she arrived in Australia but became an avid follower:

Can you tell me how long you have been following the A.F.L.?

Cybele: I have always been keen on soccer since Singapore days and when I came to Perth I saw the A.F.L. In the beginning it didn’t interest me because I thought football was meant to be the foot, not hands and everything. But after a few years here and because a few of my friends were interested in A.F.L. and we started to watch together and I learnt from them the rules and I learnt that it was something different so when I started to watch that was seven years ago and I got hooked.\(^56\)

Cybele was introduced to the A.F.L. through her friends. Her husband is the reverse of the “assumed” partner of the gendered male/female football fan: “[he] was not really interested in it, but he watched because I watched so he is not as keen as I am but he will watch a game if am watching it.”\(^57\)

Cybele’s experience of attending matches is different to Kora’s because she was invited to games in the elite company boxes, far removed from the loutish element. Unlike Kora,

\(^{55}\) Interview 17 August 2004.
\(^{56}\) Ibid.
\(^{57}\) Ibid.
Cybele is a vocal supporter and prefers “to watch it on television because of the replays and because I can be myself.”\textsuperscript{58} She admitted that as a spectator she is “Active at home I am active. Very active. I am very vocal.”\textsuperscript{59} When asked about what appealed to her about football she replied:

\begin{quote}
It is a very hands on game. It does show the masculinity, the fitness and the braveness of the boys, the physical side yes, every minute of the game; it is not something that is dull, never a dull moment. I really enjoy the physical part of the game, really.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

Kora, Cybele and other case studies in this chapter reveal a side of multiculturalism in Australia that coincides with an important part of its cultural heritage, its own game of football. The diversity of female football fans has been constant. It is reflected and connected to successive stages of immigration to the country. Ramona Koval in seeing the importance of connecting with a local football team said “But Aussie girls barracked” and she realised that while she was excluded from player, spectatorship was not an exclusive male domain.\textsuperscript{61} This is what has differentiated this country’s football code from other parts of the world and other football codes, particularly Association Football in the United Kingdom, where their game has been demarcated by class and above all gender. Australian Rules Football on the other hand has always had women’s presence visible, even if it was on the periphery. Furthermore, ethnicity and race have not been a barrier to players of football, with many finding increased social mobility through their football careers, their presence demonstrates multiculturalism at work both in the game and in the nation.\textsuperscript{62} Since the colonisation of Australia, the country has always had a flow of immigration particularly from the United Kingdom then Europe. Koval was one of many post World War Two immigrants from Europe. During the 1970s, the Australian Government adopted multiculturalism which saw migrants arrive from South-East Asia.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{61} Koval, 90.
and closer regions. Therefore, positive conditions for women of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds to become fans of Australian Rules Football have prevailed and some have adopted Australian Rules Football as a new cultural currency. The problem is that the A.F.L. regards “women” as one audience and one dimensional.

**Lavinia**

Lavinia was born and raised in England and came to Australia in her mid-thirties. While Lavinia is a member of an A.F.L. club and attends matches with her husband, she was initiated into the A.F.L. while living in London before she married her Australian husband. Lavinia’s rationale for fandom is consistent the other maids. It is partly sourced from the notion of community but also in the spectacle, strategy and physicality of the game. The importance of Lavinia’s case lies in the difference in the dominant football codes of her country of origin, Association Football (F.A.) and the A.F.L. of her adopted country and the contrasts between of fandom between the two.

How long have you been following the A.F.L.?

**Lavinia:** Since 1989 (15 years). They used to have it on Channel 4 television on Sunday mornings.63

So it used to be on the TV in the U.K? Did you watch it because your partner [……] watched it?

**Lavinia:**

No I just found it on Channel 4. I did know [……] but we didn’t talk about football and I didn’t even know which team was which at the time so I wasn’t following any particular team. There was a great game when [……] was over there. It was Hawthorn and I can’t remember who they were playing. It was a hoot. The commentary was very funny. It was a fun game and the atmosphere was very good.

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62 The presence of indigenous and ethnic footballers does not mean that racism has not existed in Australian Rules Football. Racism in the A.F.L. has been discussed in Chapter Three.

63 Interview 22 July 2004.
….. As I was saying about the exhibition match at The Oval the crowd participation and their hilarious comments it was generally a fun event. I will never forget there was this guy playing, Buckenara, and the commentator kept calling his name with an “f.”64

In 1991 during her first year in Australia, Lavinia joined an A.F.L. club. She attends every home game with her husband and has become a passionate member of her club and an even more avid fan of the game. Although I did not directly ask about a comparison between the two football codes, Lavinia volunteered her feelings about both, which allowed the opportunity to follow up her statement:

What appeals most to you about footy? What do you like about football, why do you like going? The game itself?

**Lavinia:**
The game itself because it is interesting to watch. Soccer as far as I am concerned is really boring. I really don’t like soccer. The A.F.L. is so much more athletic. You can’t take your eyes of the game because if you do you miss something, which happens when we talk amongst ourselves during the game. It is very athletic. The rules are interesting. …

The game itself is exciting but the thing I particularly enjoy is the crowd participation because you get some really good comments from the people around you. …

It has a different atmosphere to a soccer game where you are almost arch enemies where here you can have a bit of banter with the opposition it is not malicious.

My dad worked at the hospital next to the Vicarage Road ground which is where Watford play. I saw bits of the game because you could see the game from the hospital. The only interesting thing about that was that Elton John was the Chairman of Watford at the time but the game itself had no appeal. Nine times out of ten the game is so slow moving. If someone gets tripped then you would think that they have broken their neck the way they carry on afterwards. Some of the knocks the A.F.L. players take, how they bounce back is amazing. It [soccer] never appealed.

Also living in London I was so near the Arsenal football ground you would see people streaming along the road before and after the game and the police on horseback trying to keep them under control. It wasn’t the kind of experience like here, when you drive to the oval, park the car and walk to [the ground]. There aren’t gangs of youths waiting to pelt you if you are the opposing side. So apart from soccer not having any appeal it was also the crowd stuff that was associated with it as well in London.65

This high level of interest in the A.F.L. contrasts with other codes of football, both within Australia and overseas. Rob Hess has stated that “women make up 44 per cent of all
members – the largest proportion of women members of any football code in the world.\textsuperscript{66}

In 2000, the A.F.L. club with the highest percentage of women members was the Western Bulldogs with 47% and the lowest was Melbourne with 25%. In 2001 highest percentage of women season ticket holders for the F.A. Premier League was Leicester City with 26% and the lowest was Everton with 6%. The following tables give statistics for A.F.L. and F.A. women’s membership/season ticket holders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A.F.L. Memberships</th>
<th>2003 %\textsuperscript{67}</th>
<th>2000 %\textsuperscript{68}</th>
<th>F.A. Premier League</th>
<th>2001 %\textsuperscript{69}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Bulldogs</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Leicester City</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geelong</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Ipswich Town</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collingwood</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Derby County</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorn</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Aston Villa</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Middlesbrough</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kangaroos</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Southampton</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Coventry City</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Adelaide</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Bradford City</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fremantle</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Manchester City</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Coast Eagles</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Manchester United</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlton</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Leeds United</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Kilda</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Charlton Athletic</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Chelsea</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essendon</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>West Ham United</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane Lions</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Sunderland</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Tottenham Hotspur</td>
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<td>Arsenal</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Newcastle United</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Everton</td>
<td>6</td>
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These figures demonstrate that women’s membership of A.F.L. clubs is close to the proportion of men’s membership. Of greater significance is the difference in the ratio with women’s membership of football in the U.K. Statistics indicate that women in

\textsuperscript{65} Interview 22 July 2004.
\textsuperscript{69} John Williams. “A Brief History of Female Football Fans.” Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research. Fact Sheet No. 9. University of Leicester.
\textsuperscript{70} It appears that A.F.L. female membership went down between 2000 and 2003. This could be attributed to different data collection and statistical methods (the sources are different).
Australia are three to four times likely to follow the dominant football code than women in the U.K. While the level of women’s interest in both countries is increasing for a number of reasons, including women’s increased level of income, increased leisure time, better facilities and stadium seating, the reason for Australian women’s strong following can be found through its history and origins.

Blainey states that Australian Rules was the first game of football to be codified, on 1 November 1893 when the Intercolonial Conference adopted the Laws of the Australasian Game of Football. Two A.F.L. clubs are amongst the oldest, if not the oldest, of any football code. According to Blainey, “No famous soccer club is as old as the senior football clubs in Victoria”71 with two Victorian clubs Melbourne [1858] and Geelong [1859] being formed before Notts County [1862] and Stoke City [1863] soccer clubs.

From its beginnings Australian Rules Football has been regarded by passionate, perhaps parochial, Australians as “a superior game to any played elsewhere in the world” and “the Greatest Game.”72 It is a code of football that combined the features of other types of football and then added its own distinctive characteristics, chiefly the “mark” a leap that propels the player upwards to the flying ball. Stephen Alomes regards Australian Rules Football as:

one of the great achievements of Australian popular culture, a fusion of the creative and the physical, of speed and strength, of subtlety and endeavour, of the aesthetic and the practical, of courage and stamina, of the individual and the cooperative.73

There are two further differences to the other football codes, firstly, the irregularity of the shape and size of the ground in contrast to defined size and shape and the omission of the “offside” rule. According to Mancini and Hibberd the offside rule was rejected because the game was to be kept simple and non-violent. The large ground, the number of players in the team (22) and on the ground (18), the combination of skills and tactics makes for a high scoring game with charged emotions. Association Football has contrasting appeal. According to Brabazon, “From the beginning of its formal ‘origin’ in England in 1863, it was recognized that controlling the ball with the feet was extremely difficult and required special skill.”

One aspect of both codes is that they are bound to heavily masculinised traditions. The ‘healthy-mind healthy-body’ philosophy of British public schools was transported to the Australian colonies where the men wanted to prove that the remoteness and “stain” of convictism had not made them inferior. However, masculinity is context specific and therefore manifests differently through sport. This differences existing between the two styles of masculinities can be sharply illustrated between the A.F.L. and Association Football and these contrasts do not confine themselves to just to the pitch.

Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research published “A Brief History of Female Fans.” This succinctly discusses women spectatorship from the 19th century until the end of the 20th century. It states:

Until very recently the existence and importance of female fans in this country has largely been ignored both by researchers and the industry itself. Many commentators seem to think that the female fan is a relatively new phenomenon and one which plays little or no part in the history of the game. However, this is not the case, and while there is little doubt that the numbers of females who attended games in the past were not always large, women seem always to have attended professional football matches.76

This is consistent with Australia where female football fandom has been overlooked until recently in spite of the evidence that demonstrates that women have been attending football matches since the mid 1860s.

Do you ever feel you are disadvantaged as a female fan of football?

*Lavinia:* No. I get away with calling the umpire a wanker77 but [husband] got told off a couple of years ago. Someone in the crowd complained about his language. The guy who came and spoke to him was obviously just doing his job and was embarrassed. [...] pointed out that he wasn’t using any language that was used in Parliament that week. Jim McGinty that week had called someone a “sanctimonious wanker and an arse-licker” so he decided to be topical and that would be appropriate to call the umpire. After [...] had the talking so he decided to call the umpire a “grass-licker” and the guy next to us spelt it out “G R A S S...” No one has come up to me and complained.78

What do you think about the talk of players and tight shorts, perving on players, sex appeal of players?

*Lavinia:* Well some have and some haven’t but really they are young boys. […]Perving on players? Well possibly if I really thought about it. No. No. I hadn’t really thought about it in that way. The thing is most of the players are teenagers or early twenties. Come on. I don’t think so.79

Lavinia overtly denied the sexualization of the players stating that she had not considered them as sexual objects. She then made comments on their youth and denies any the sexualization, contradicting her statement. Through asking Lavinia if there was anything that she did not like about football she demonstrated that she had accumulated acumen for the game. Lavinia stated that what she disliked was, “The inconsistency of the umpires.76

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76 John Williams. “A Brief History of Female Football Fans.” Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research. Fact Sheet No. 9. University of Leicester. (Undated)
77 At a previous stage in the interview Lavinia also said “I am not very imaginative. I usually come up with “You are a wanker.” Interview 22 July 2004.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
They are inconsistent.”

Lavinia’s concern is shared by others and subsequent to this interview in *The West Australian* reported that clubs and coaches were confused over what appeared to be a change in the interpretation of the holding the ball rule. While the A.F.L. had denied that there had been a mid-season change of umpiring decisions they would be questioned as several coaches had had conflicting advice. Lavinia’s comments not only capture her concern over inconsistency and its impact upon the game but also her knowledge which was subsequently supported by a similar concern by coaches, clubs and commentators.

**Enchanting Mothers**

Through that language, encountered at mother’s knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed.

Out of maidens, mothers and crones, mothers play a central role in the continuum of the audience. Mothers are the intermediary of the three Fates and because they are often at the hub of family life. Therefore they are vital to the sustenance and future of the game. I demonstrate here how and why mothers are important to Australian Rules Football as an audience as well as what they gain from their spectatorship and involvement with football. Many of the roles women play in Australian Rules Football overlap, a mother in the audience could also be a mother of a player but that should not devalue their part of the audience. Roles and reasons need not be mutually exclusive because as Rosa will demonstrate fandom does not have to hinge on a personal relationship and the ties to football are more enduring if the fan takes an overall interest in the game and the club, rather than a particular player. Motivations for football fandom go beyond husbands and

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80 Ibid.
81 Mark Duffield and David Reed, *The West Australian*, 56.
82 Anderson, 154.
sons. This discussion demonstrates the debunking that part of the myth that women go to football matches only as companions.

Rosa’s passion for football continued while she was married but she was certainly not the dutiful wife who followed her husband to the football for company, quite the reverse: “Sam also forbade her following football – and footballers, who were, according to him, ‘a dirty, filthy mob.’” Yet on one occasion Rosa, her husband Sam and his family did attend a grand final together because their teams, West Perth and South Fremantle, were playing. Sam and family ended up by not speaking to her because West Perth had won. Thus life with Sam was turbulent because he was a troubled and violent man. Hackner stated that when Rosa left Sam she could “openly follow the football” and attend games where before she read the newspaper and listened to the radio. Rosa’s passion for her football club can be gauged through one terrible incident. She asked Sam if he was going to the end of season trophy night, he refused and threatened to “give you a hiding” if she did. She did attend and was assaulted by Sam as threatened.

Clearly not all women have violent husbands, but this pattern of events punctuates Rosa Townsend’s passion for football. Football was also a part of her identity. When starting a new job at the department store Foy and Gibsons, she was given a quizzing on her personal life by a fellow employee who asked her about her marriage status, religion and

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83 Hackner, 83.
84 Ibid.
85 Hackner states that Rosa left Sam several times during the course of their relationship until it finally broke down irretrievably. Hackner, 87.
86 Ibid, 87.
her football team.\textsuperscript{87} This passion is shared by many women and they shared their stories through my research.

\textit{Diana}

Rosa had something in common with my informant Diana’s maiden football days. Hackner states that after her marriage broke up Rosa refused to go out with a man who barracked for East Perth and that she said “goodbye” to him.\textsuperscript{88} Diana’s parents did not follow the same teams and during the football season, Diana’s mother and father would go to the opposite ends of the house to listen to the broadcast their teams play. She stated that this was not a problem for the family, except when those two teams played each other. Diana ended up following her father’s team, West Perth, because the family lived in the West Perth area, demonstrating the importance of local identification with football.

During our interview, Diana told me what happened when she met her future husband:

\textit{Diana:} When I met him he barracked for East Perth and he told me that he barracked for East Perth and I said “Well we can’t really have a friendship because I am a West Perth supporter and I don’t have anything to do with anybody that doesn’t barrack for West Perth.” So he became a West Perth supporter.\textsuperscript{89}

Diana’s husband informed me that gaining his wife’s affection meant more to him than following the football club that he had chosen because a friend of his had made the team.

Both male and female football fans swap football teams for a number of reasons and while babies may have their allegiance pledged to by their parents who buy the baby’s first beanie while still in-utero, adorn their bassinets in club colours and join them as junior members, as the individual matures other factors may affect their choice of club.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, 102.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid, 111.
\textsuperscript{89} Interview 23 August 2004.
Regional and local loyalties influence fandom. The merchandising and marketing of clubs and players through the ubiquitous media has a powerful influence on fandom. One factor that I thought would have swayed allegiances was the success of teams on the playing field. Within Australian national ideologies, the underdog status produces a powerful sense of loyalty. This was particularly evident with the supporters of the Fremantle Football Club who have doggedly followed their teams fluctuating fortunes, indeed, taking pride that they had stuck with their team.90

Fanatical support often can have tangible outcomes for clubs and football history. When two A.F.L. clubs, Fitzroy and Footscray were about to merge (due to Footscray’s financial problems), one woman was mobilized to raise funds and rally support for her club. After 21 days of action, she saved her beloved club, Footscray (now the Western Bulldogs). The legendary Irene Chatfield was the inaugural Football’s Woman of the Year. The A.F.L. admits:

Irene Chatfield had a significant impact on football in the late 1980s. A long-time Western Bulldogs supporter, Chatfield is credited with leading the club’s antimerger efforts during 1989, when the Bulldogs were able to avert a merger with Fitzroy. 91

The depth of Chatfield’s part in Australian Rules Football folklore can be gauged through her inclusion on the National Museum of Australia online collection.92

Ms, Miss and Mrs Football, but no Mr Football

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I have never been a follower of the West Coast Eagles – and I will never be. With the demise of this team at the hands of Essendon, no longer will I have to listen to my wife and the majority of my family members extol the actions of this team. I look forward to my usual period of tranquillity for the next five to six months. Peace has returned – and thank God.

B.B. ROSAIR, Golden Bay

Brynhild

Different allegiances to clubs between couples may be a source of tension, however, during the course of my research I found women whose husbands who had no interest in football causing some conflict among the couples. Brynhild, a retired teacher, married with one daughter, became interested in football in her childhood through her father’s interest. Brynhild was raised in Victoria and although she had brothers, it was her that went to the football with her father and was the most passionate about football. Before Brynhild moved to Western Australia she followed North Melbourne. She arrived in Western Australia before the inception of the national competition. However, with the entry of the West Coast Eagles into the national competition she began to follow the West Coast Eagles and had season’s tickets for several years. During that time, Brynhild mainly attended matches with friends but has given up her seats due to the couple’s interest in caravanning. Despite not attending matches, she still is an avid fan, admitting that she watches or listens to most matches, reads comprehensively the newspaper reports of the competition and takes part in footy competitions. About the game Brynhild stated, “I love the game. I love keeping track of the ladder. I probably listen to any match that is

93 B.B. Rosair Letter to the Editor. The West Australian, Tuesday September 17, 2002.
on or if I am at home I have the TV on. It is the game I like.”94 Brynhild proudly showed me the club watch presented to her by her colleagues when she was retiring, saying “… does that show that I am a football fan?”95 Interestingly, Brynhild helped her daughter in a footy tipping competition who was in the lead and was asked if her father helped with the tips, she said “no Mum does.”

Although Brynhild did not attend football matches with her daughter, they followed the competition together through involvement with the footy tipping competition. Similarly, my daughter won a footy tipping competition at her primary school with my early collaboration, although towards the latter part of the season, she was confident enough (and good enough) to make her own tips. One of the observations made during this research is that frequently mothers are passing onto their children the passion for football. Indeed, in my family the season’s tickets are held by my daughter and I. While my husband enjoys football, it does not take precedence over other activities for him and if he does chose to watch a game he prefers to watch matches on television. I am the more passionate football fan who attends the games as a priority weekend event during the season. Over the years, I have taken my son and my daughter to matches, but it is my daughter who has gone more frequently and is the more involved football fan. One factor I find curious in this disparity of interest within the gender divide of my family is that my husband and son have played football. My daughter and I have not. It seems that the experience of playing the game does not necessarily engender enthusiasm for following it.

94 Interview 13 August 2004.
95 Ibid.
Leda

My example is not unique. Two of my informants were mother and daughter whose husband and father had no interest in football. Leda and her daughter have held West Coast Eagles seasons tickets for six years and are dedicated supporters of their club and keen followers of football.\textsuperscript{96} Leda has followed football since she was 12 years of age attending matches of the Western Australian Football League with her parents. In \textit{Year of the Dogs}, mother and daughter Pat and Jenny Hodgson follow the Western Bulldogs and go to the football together because their husband and father is not interested.\textsuperscript{97} The phenomenon of women passing an interest in football onto their children, particularly those with daughters, is common as the following case indicate. This further debunks the myth of women following football as an adjunct to husbands and sons and provides further evidence of a continuum in the maid-mother cycle.

A Family Affair

The maids and mothers can be considered as mosaics in the picture of spectatorship with Australian Rules Football. Part of the problem of examining football is that it has always been considered a masculine project. This is because the focus is on the number of players on the field are male together with most of the umpires. Yet there are almost equal numbers of male and female fans and supporters. My research has shown that football is largely a family affair. Its appeal is not delineated along gender lines. Fathers too have influenced daughters. If a father takes his son to the football this may be regarded as a progression in male pursuits, reinforcing patriarchy. Like those mothers who have passed the baton to their daughters, many fathers also sparked their daughter’s

\textsuperscript{96} Interview 19 August 2004. (a)
\textsuperscript{97} Michael Cordell (Prod.), \textit{Year of the Dogs}. Ronin Films, Australia, 1997.

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lifelong interest in football. Many of those women interviewed during research spoke of their father taking them to the football as young children. One woman, Aurora, was 40, mother of seven children and like myself a PhD candidate working in Cultural Studies. In the interview, I established how she became interested in football:

How long have you been following Australian Rules Football?

**Aurora:** Since I was probably five or six years old. I am the eldest of three girls. My father was and is a passionate sports follower. So in summer it was cricket and in winter it was the V.F.L. then and also he played reserves for Swan Districts so we grew up in Bassendean when I was quite young. We followed Collingwood and Swan Districts because they were the same colours. We would watch to go see Swans play. We would watch the V.F.L. on the TV, Match of the Day all the stuff on the ABC. It was always on the radio. Then when I was eight or nine we moved to the country and to annoy my father I started following West Perth and Richmond. I am really not sure why. I have always loved it [football] and when a West Australian team entered the A.F.L. then I became an Eagles girl. I will be an Eagles girl until I die. 98

As Aurora is working in Cultural Studies, she has awareness of issues of masculinity and patriarchy that exist in football’s realm but she still is passionate about football, exercising a free-will to continue to follow football long after leaving her childhood home with a paternal figurehead.

**Football’s Female Folklore**

In Greek mythology Atropos was the third Fate who cut the threads of life with “the abhorred shears.” 99 She was reputed to be unmovable. Atropos is the final stage in the trilogy of female fandom. My proposition is that the final stage of female fandom coincides with the mythology of the crone. Their value is found in their capabilities as sage and as a site of stability for the game within the locus of their respective clubs. This archetypal figure is more common in traditional female lore. The crone is also a physical

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98 Interview 19 August 2004. (b)
99 Hamilton, 43.
stage of many women’s lives. After a lifetime of following football, the crone completes the three stages of maid and mother. She now becomes valued for wisdom rather than youth, her role as a mother/teacher has developed into one of leadership, her presence is prized. Her status becomes revered. By studying Rosa Townsend’s case, we see the pinnacle of the cycle and the final stage of female fandom.

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**Rosa the Crone**

Such dedicated following of the players, season after season, brought her very close to them and she took a keen motherly interest in their lives off the field as well. She watched ‘generation’ after generations of boys develop and graduate from the Colts to the Senior Division.

Beryl Hackner.\(^{100}\)

In 1990 Rosa was made a life member of the West Perth Football Club in recognition of her years of voluntary work. Her work ranged from laundering the players’ gear to helping to cater for their teas and breakfasts whenever required. Rosa would also visit injured players in hospital.\(^{101}\)

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The two brief paragraphs capturing “Rosa the Crone” demonstrates Rosa’s final stage of the progression through the cycles. It also signals that progression through time that is common to players who progress through grades, amateurs, leagues, and ultimately at elite level where they start as rookies and often retire as legends. This becomes significant when consideration is granted to the status of males within Australian Rules Football and how women are regarded after a lifetime of contributing to football in various roles. Embedded in this passage are the roles of fan, volunteer, maternal figure and friend. In exploring the final phase of the fandom model of maid, mother and crone

\(^{100}\) Hackner, 110.

\(^{101}\) Ibid, 110.
discussion takes place on the crone’s role, wisdom and how these women are remembered.

One of the telling gauges about how women are considered by the football’s patriarchy is how they are remembered in the League and Club’s history. Often the only way these women enter into a football club’s folklore is through oral histories. In Rosa Townsend’s case, my research revealed her connection to both. Two of my informants recalled Rosa in their statement to me:

She was the female background of West Perth, Rosa, she referred to them all as “my boys.” See West Perth went through a pretty good period about then when they won the premierships in ’69 and ’71 and ’75 and they were in the grand final in ’74 so there were a lot of real good players in West Perth and they were all “Rosa’s boys.” … She used to fuss around them. She was always at the club and any night of the week she would be down there. When they played their last game at Leederville Oval, they dug up a square foot of turf off the Leederville Oval and she grew it in a tray at the flat.

At her funeral, Trevor Jenkins, the ABC commentator, did the eulogy.102 Rosa may have died but she lives in the memories of others. Through gathering oral history the focus shifts from the male-centric player or ex-player turned club official. The result is that a wider experience of belonging to a football club is established. Club histories can and should list players, their achievements, match wins, premiership wins but in the years ahead histories need to include a variety personalities and what their deeds were on and off the field to capture the social fabric of the club at the time. Otherwise club histories are merely a collection of statistics. In The Voice of the Past, Paul Thompson states that oral history “can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place.”103 The women of the club

102 Interview 23 August 2004.
who make their contribution to the club’s success and continuation would not be excluded from institutional documents.

Thompson also states that, “The very power structured worked as a great recording machine shaping the past in its own image.”104 The patriarchal hold on football can be demonstrated by the 2004 publication of a history of football in Western Australian commissioned by the Western Australian Football Commission and authored by Anthony Barker.105 Women are excluded from this history except for two examples of blatant intellectual sexism in its chronological narrative. When discussing the appointment of the first woman commissioner of the W.A.F.C., Dr Helen Parker, Barker lists her qualifications and then debases them with the comment “with a good football pedigree as the daughter of playing and coaching legend Clive Lewington.”106 Clearly Dr Parker is not a horse, to be judged only by the sire. The inclusion “23 year-old “exotic dancer and see-through barmaid” who streaked across the oval at the football was insulting to thousands of women who rate inclusion in the history for their positive contribution to W.A. football but who were omitted by Barker.107 Daughters and streakers do not capture the complexity of women’s work in this too often framed ‘man’s game.’ Long after the cheering finishes this testimony produces the voice of fans and members that can still be heard through gathering oral histories, producing aural tradition consistent with the model crone. There is no recognition of Rosa or other women included in the history of the West Perth Football Club.108 It is a compilation of male names, dates and statistics. After a lifetime of devotion and volunteer work Rosa’s legacy lives on, not through her beloved

104 Ibid, 3.
106 Ibid, 343.
club’s official record, but through oral histories and in the memories of past players and friends.

A former captain of the West Perth Football Club told me of his memories of Rosa.\textsuperscript{109} He stated that Rosa was like an auntie when he first came to Perth. Although she did not take the place of his mother, his mother was grateful for all the support Rosa gave to her son. ‘William’ stated that, “In those days the “Rosas” were taken for granted.” He recounted how during the period of his captaincy the West Perth Football Club, like many other clubs, had separate sections for men and women, with the men having the more comfortable space. He stated that he was uncomfortable with this segregation, no doubt he understood the feeling of segregation and marginalisation as an Aboriginal person, and that with Rosa’s encouragement he took all of the women into the men’s section. He was told that “You can’t do this.” As he was the captain at the time he said “I just have.” He wanted to have a drink with his partner, Rosa and other women present. ‘Williams’ concluding words to me about Rosa were:

She was a little lady with a big heart. Rosa loved the players and it was reciprocal. It was a beautiful relationship.\textsuperscript{110}

Football is a funny game, off the field as much as on. Personal relationships are made between clubs, players and fans. Yet political separation, whether by gender or race, has wider social consequences, especially when discrimination based upon race, gender or sexuality comes into play.

\textsuperscript{109} Telephone interview 15 September 2004.  
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
Not all women have been written off in club histories. Lay-historians who are members of a club which they research and write histories of include people involved with the club beyond players and administrators because they know the importance of these people in the sustainability of their club. In *East Fremantle Football Club: Celebrating 100 Years*, Jack Lee stated:

“Outskirts” is the appropriate word, because the reports of the 1920s and adjacent decades can be read from start to finish without finding the name of even one lady of the many who pitched in and helped. Sure, they were thanked – but under the all-embracing but anonymous phrase – “Our thanks to the ladies.”

This club history recognized past omissions and included the involvement in women in many facets of the club. In particular it focused upon Elsie Park, a Life Member and at the time of publishing, ninety years of age and one of the oldest members. “Indefatigable” Elsie was one of many women who worked tirelessly over the years for the club. Elsie and her own team cooked, cleaned, catered, raised funds, organized players teas and social functions.

Women like Elsie and Rosa are readily found at most football clubs, they have longstanding connections and quietly work on the “outskirts.” Too infrequently they come to public attention through the media. One exception was a newspaper article by journalist Mark Duffield “Welcome to Arden Street” that focussed upon the women of the North Melbourne Football Club, the Kangaroos rather than on the players. Duffield wrote:

It is 4pm at Arden Street, the temperature is in the process of dropping about six degrees in half an hour to a rather chilly 9°C.

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112 Ibid.

113 Duffield, July 12, 2002, 10.
On the terraces in front of the old condemned grandstand that doubles as a gymnasium, Kay Cubitt, Dot Pain, Val Rou lent and Sally Barfoot, members of the Peninsula Supporters Group, have the sausages on the sizzle as Denis Pagan puts his troops through their paces with typical military urgency.

Inside the change rooms, Jude Francis, mother figure to hundreds of Kangaroo footballers over the past 30 years, has a very tasty soup on the simmer – just part of a menu of pasta, rolls, fruit and lollies she has ready before or after any match or training session.114

In addition to highlighting the involvement of these women with the club and the value their work from feeding and caring for players, Duffield intertwined the history and past traditions of a club based in a working class suburb. He states, “This is a club, not a corporation. And these are just some of the people who have worked like hell to keep it alive.” Increasingly the financial viability of clubs in an age of corporatisation becomes difficult. Cash takes precedence over culture.

When interviewing women who have long standing affiliations with football clubs, the erosion of the culture of clubs was their shared concern. There is a feeling of dislocation and loss. One informant, Gerda, who followed football all her life, told me:

Twenty-six years ago we went to a game at Leederville Oval that was going to decide who was going to get into the finals that day and there was 24,000 people at that oval to watch a West Perth versus East Perth game. It was huge, absolutely huge and we felt robbed, yesterday there was 1600 people. I know deep down it had to come [the national competition] but it still hurt and I was just too hurt to follow them [West Coast Eagles].115

The affect of the national competition upon state competitions was also a concern for Rosa Townsend. Her biographer stated: “This is an issue that raises Rosa’s ire. She feels that the A.F.L. has harmed local football tremendously by draining it of its most

114 Ibid.
115 Interview 26 July 2004.
promising players and of its grass-roots supporters.” Men look to the affairs of the nation state while women look after local affairs.

There is no doubt that Rosa gained enjoyment and pleasure from the West Perth Football Club. She gained many friends, had a good social life and enjoyed the football. However, without the Rosa’s or Jude’s or Elsie’s a football club does become a football corporation. My thesis claims Australian Rules Football as a social institution for women and men. Males claim football as a masculine institution rather than a physical competitive performance that is viewed by men and women. The performance is the pivot for many other activities, including fandom, that do not have to be inscribed in the exclusive masculine. Part of the problem may be that women do not realize their support is a valuable resource that sustains Australian Rules Football and rather than “allowing” women to take up roles or token positions, women should be more assertive in their presence.

The corporatisation of football has lead to the shareholder taking priority over the stakeholder. Women are stakeholders in football, yet stakeholders do not have to be gendered. This thesis is about the accurate positioning of women within football. It is also about bringing all the stakeholders back into football arena. Again Barker’s commissioned history of Australian Rules Football in Western Australia is an example of the shareholder having precedence over the stakeholder. Chronological accounts offer analytical difficulties when constructing a history of sport. The focus is on dates and names, not meanings or interpretation. The relationship between media, business and

116 Hackner, 213.
football is now interlocked, however, if Australian Rules Football is an important aspect of the State’s history, as Premier Gallop states in his “Foreword” then the history should have gone to the grassroots and not the boardroom.117 Similarly, Dr Neale Fong, Chairman of the W.A.F.C., in his “Foreword” and the final chapter stresses the social importance of football but defends those decisions made in the boardroom.118 Yet the significance of football and the social networks in the life of the city and country is dismissed and the consequence of the erosion of social networks built up around the WA.F.L. clubs’ following the establishment of the A.F.L. also disregarded. In Behind the Play, stadia were more important than supporters. Even the players, who are always the main feature of club histories were reduced to sitting on the bench. The main players are those “behind the play” highlighting the professional qualifications and football prowess of men who have played their part in the inclusion of the two Western Australian teams in the national league. It is a top down history imposed by self-imposed kings of the game.

Wisdom of the Crones

The Crone is of value, too, as an indication of the power of women’s nay-saying, hence of their best hope of exerting control in a male-dominated world where they are expected always to say yes. The Crone’s title was related to the word crown, and she represented the power of the ancient tribal matriarch who made the moral and legal decisions for her subjects and descendants. As an embodiment of wisdom, she was supposed to have written the first tablets of the law and punished the first sinners. She also established the cyclic system of perpetual becoming, whereby every temporary living form in the universe blends eventually into every other form, nothing is unrelated, and there can be no hierarchy of better or worse, We and They. It was a philosophical system profoundly opposed to the ones devised by men.119

119 Walker, 14.
There is an enormous gulf between a society like this and earlier prepatriarchal societies where elder women were founts of wisdom, law, healing skills, and moral leadership. Their wrinkles would have been badges of honour, not of shame.120

Barbara G. Walker

Lavinia, my informant from the maid section, told me of an elderly woman who had members seating close to her. After several years of observing the elderly woman who she called “Mrs Onions” it was clear to my informant and her partner that “Mrs Onions” had accumulated a wealth of knowledge about football. So much so that at half time when “Mrs Onions” used her mobile telephone, my informant believed that she would be calling the coaches box with instructions.121 Clearly “Mrs Onions” would not be phoning the coach with advice. What this statement captures is that my informant respected “Mrs Onions” for her in-depth knowledge of the game. This is football wisdom surrounding the technicality of the game and it is at odds with Summers’ statement that women cannot understand the strategies of football.

Not all wisdom is related to the technicality of the sport. There is an understanding of the culture of the game that women have gained because of their peripheral roles in supporting the club through volunteer activities, mothering and through their social interaction with other members and fans. Gerda felt a sense of loss and anger when the national competition was instituted. This is consistent also with Rosa Townsend’s view of the A.F.L. Gerda was closely associated with her state club, but with the expanded competition, found it had negative impacts upon it. Skilled players were drafted to the elite league. This in turn dropped the standard of the local game. The high profile of the state teams together with the drop in standard of the state league meant a significant drop in the numbers of members and fans who attended matches. The roar of the crowd was

120 Ibid. 21.
diminished and the charged atmosphere evaporated. Membership of the clubs dropped, affecting their financial viability. This in turn meant turning to new forms of sponsorship. Often this would mean not only the sponsor’s name appearing on jumpers changing the appearance of the traditional look but also the names of the clubs were changed to the sponsors name. Tradition was sacrificed to ensure that the club could continue to operate.

Another significant and detrimental consequence of the erosion of club bases meant that members felt disconnected from the clubs and other members. Their football community fractured. No longer were their sustained friendships and social occasions throughout the week following training and especially on the weekend. While this dislocation is suffered in the West, it is also felt in Victoria and Irene Chatfield who saved her beloved Footscray has been previously discussed in this chapter. When the A.F.L. was pushing for a merger between Footscray and Fitzroy, Chatfield mobilized supporters, raised funds and was a key person in maintaining Footscray as a club in its own right. The trade-off was that the club was rebadged and renamed into the Western Bulldogs although many of its traditions were kept and the sense of identity with place and club maintained. In 1998, Irene Chatfield was the inaugural recipient of the A.F.L. Woman of the Year.

Subsequent recipients of Woman of the Year include Caroline Wilson, journalist, Jill Lindsay, Grounds Manager for the A.F.L., Katrina Pressley, A.F.L. Umpire, Beverley O’Connor and Beverley Knight, Presidents of Melbourne and Essendon football clubs respectively, Jenny Williams, of Port Adelaide and Edna Daniher, mother of elite players could also be regarded in the wise woman/crone category. While the Woman of the Year

121 Interview 22 July 2004.
is an innovative move for the A.F.L., and I concede it does highlight women’s involvement, it does not serve to normalize women in football. Players are inducted into the A.F.L. Hall of Fame, once a year. Some even have their status elevated to Legends. Senior media people and administrators can also be inducted but as yet not one woman has been inducted into the Hall of Fame. True, Jill Lindsay, longtime employee, has life membership of the A.F.L., but the question remains, should Jill and other women be accepted into the A.F.L. Hall of Fame. This would be a significant shift in the culture of the A.F.L. The proposal would no doubt have its critics and detractors. However, Elsie, Rosa and others all broke ground when they became life members and walked into the men’s area of football clubs. The club’s were not harmed by women entering into those areas, quite the converse. Women are significant stakeholders in the game and culture of Australian Rules Football. Roles and contributions of men and women in a shared culture must be recognized with women being normalized.

Distinctive and separate recognitions for stakeholders and shareholders reflect inherent levels of status. It an extension and reflection of the corporatization of the game that has had adverse affects upon clubs at the lower levels. An examination of the structure of the corporate entity of the A.F.L. reveals a stratification and hierarchy of reward and recognition creating a lopsided elitism. Many ex-players receive status, recognition and economic benefit from football. Few women, if any, receive the commensurate rewards.

**Circle of Life for the Female Football Fan**

When children are born in Victoria
they are wrapped in the club colours, laid in beribboned cots,
having already begun a lifetime’s barracking.
Carn, they cry, Carn…feebly at first
while parents playfully tussle with them
for possession of a rusk: Ah, he’s a little Tiger! (And they are…)  

Hoisted shoulder-high at their first League game
they are like innocent monsters who have been years swimming
towards the daylight’s empyrean

Until, now, hearts shrapnelled with rapture,
they break surface and are forever lost,
their minds rippling out like streamers

In the pure flood of sound, they are scarfed with a light, a voice
like the voice of God booms from the stands
Oohh, you bludger, and the covenant is sealed.

Hot pies and potato-crisps they will eat,
they will forswear the Demons, cling to the Saints
and behold their team going up the ladder into Heaven,

And the tides of life will be the tides of the home-team’s fortunes –
the reckless proposal after the one-point win,
the wedding and honeymoon after the grand-final…

They will not grow old as those from more northern states grow old,
for them it will always be three-quarter time
with the scores level and the wind advantages in the final term,

That passion persisting, like a race-memory, through the welter of seasons,
enabling old-timers by boundary-fences to dream of resurgent lions
and centaur-figures from the past to replenish continually the present,

So that mythology may be perpetually renewed
and Chicken Smallhorn return like the maize-god
in a thousand shapes, the dancers changing

But the dance forever the same – the elderly still
loyally crying Carn…Carn…(if feebly) unto the very end,
having seen in the six-foot recruit from Eaglehawk their hope of salvation.  

*Life-Cycle* by Bruce Dawe

*Life-Cycle* is a passionate poem concerning football fandom from the cradle to the grave.

This chapter proposed a new model of fandom for women. It goes beyond any other
model for female football fandom in Australia. Australian women have been segregated
in “Ladies Only” stands since the 19th century. A leap needs to be made in the psyche of the games administrators to understand that women are standing fairly and squarely “in the outer” and not “on the outer.” A realisation and invoking of the normalising and neutralising of gender bias on the basis of masculine performance, on the field and in the boardroom, taking precedence over all else needs to take place recognising the diversity of fans and the wealth of wisdom that women accumulate over a life-time.

This chapter has constructed a new model for female fandom. It has presented original testimony from a diverse female audience. This diversity demonstrates the appeal of Australian Rules Football through age, class and ethnicity. The model of the maid, mother and crone has been supported through the voices of Electra, Daphne, Kora, Cybele, Lavinia; the mothers Diana, Brynhild, Leda, Aurora and Gerda who traverse the cycle of Rosa Townsend, the archetype of the model. The maid, mother and crone model is a commensurate status of the female fan of football to the archetypical football hero. This new model for female fandom, in the trinity of maid, mother and crone, is an original contribution to knowledge. The Halls of Fame in Australian Rules Football are filled with men, players, administrators and journalists. Absent are the women who helped put them there. Individual players get assigned hero status, or anti-hero status. My model of the maid, mother and crone aligns the mythology and standing to men.
Chapter Five

THE HOME TEAM: MOTHERS AND WIVES

Memories of meals cooked but uneaten, then finally, abandoned; missed school sports and children’s birthday parties: the elation of a Premiership win; the strain of media intrusion; sitting in the grandstand feeling nervous and empty; loneliness; babies crying; a heckle hurtling from the crowd; pride and happiness; football sirens; friendships and love – all of these are experienced by the football wife or partner.

Sheedy and Brown

Within the patriarchal project of Australian Rules Football - at all its levels, leagues and manifestations - there are a range of women whose lives are dominated by football through their consanguineous, conjugal or affectionate relationship with a player. The support these women provide to football and players is both in the public and private spheres. These women are mothers and wives. Clearly other women are close to the players: sisters, girlfriends, grandmothers and the extended family, play a role as well. However, because of the confines of the thesis it was felt that the stories of the mothers and wives should take priority. The support they provide is more than tangible. It is substantial. Similar to the phases of female fandom and the progression from maiden, mother and crone, many women experience a transition from one era of their life to another. This chapter discusses how they view football and its impact upon their lives which varies greatly.

Nurturing the “Paddock”

Women support football at the grassroots level and therefore an examination of mother’s involvement with football at junior ranks is undertaken. These women work on the sidelines of the game, which is where most women in football are placed by its administrators, on the periphery. When the administrators do centre women’s involvement there is another benefit, glamorisation and commodification. Women become adjuncts to the celebrity surrounding the A.F.L. There is also another side of the value of women and football, one just as tangible, and while the A.F.L. raises the status of women it does so in a way that undermines them also. This chapter is devoted to these women. As motherhood is an institution that is revered in Australia and yet constrains women at the same time, mothers take precedence here.

Without mothers, there would not be football. The first and most obvious reason is that mothers bear the children. However what needs to be researched is that young footballers require their mothers to not only nurture them through infancy into school and beyond but also support the extra-curricular activities whether they are music, sport or performance. Despite the rise in the numbers of working mothers in Australia, many women work part-time or arrange their hours of work around their children’s out of school activities. In Mother’s Taxi: Sport and Women’s Labor, Shona Thompson stated that none of mothers of young tennis players she interviewed were in full time employment; most had part-time employment that concluded mid-afternoon to accommodate their children’s squad training and a small number of women in full time employment spoke of the difficulties

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2 The first Australian Rules Football match took place on the M.C.G. which is now the stadium for the Grand Final. It is is often referred to as “The Paddock.” Geoffrey Blainey in A Game of Our Own titled Chapter Two “Football in the Paddock.” (Melbourne: Information Australia, 1990, 13-23.)
associated with getting their children to training. A small proportion of junior footballers succeed to the ranks of the elite A.F.L. Auskick and the junior league come under the A.F.L.’s auspices. In 2004, Auskick had developed into a multi level competition for primary school children from the ages of 5 years to 11 years with 133,363 participants with 15,000 volunteers, many of whom would be mothers of these young players. The grassroots needs development and support. Few footballers develop their talent close to their career debut at elite level without being involved with the game at a very young game. Instrumental in their playing are their mothers. Mothers are also crucial to the maintenance and sustainability of football at all levels. These mothers often carry out these activities without conscious thought of their contribution to the micro and macro levels of the game. Neither do they consider any possible sacrifice to their own interests and leisure. My research interest also has a personal aspect. I have worked with junior football. I have taken my son to games, washed jumpers, cut the oranges for the players to have at half-time, helped coaches at training and carried out small administrative tasks. My involvement was miniscule in comparison with many other women. When my neighbour became the registration officer for her son’s junior league, she remarked to me that volunteers were called to “help” with registration and that she came forward. Her idea of “helping” was that she would be entering data or writing down names, ages, addresses and telephone numbers. She subsequently found out that she had to have correct knowledge of the registration regulations, check birth certificates, ensure that players were entered into the correct age level, accept registration fees and forward to the body organizing the competition. Jokingly and without rancor she said she thought she had volunteered for one hours work; “You should interview me for your thesis” she said, again displaying a willingness to help me and in turn help football.

In addition to the work the mothers do at grassroots, there are other investments they make. Emotional investments are one. Bethany a mother of an A.F.L. rookie saw her son injured at an interstate match on the television broadcast. She was quite fearful of the injury but the club doctor immediately telephoned her immediately to allay her fears that her son although had a painful shoulder injury, was not in life-threatening danger or at risk of permanent disability. Following his return to Western Australia, Bethany’s son required an operation and physiotherapy in follow-up treatment. His mother, not the club, nor his club or team mates cared for him post-operatively, transported him to and from the physiotherapist, taking time out from her million-dollar business, again without rancour.5

**Little League – Big Support**

In this section, I examine mothers who provide support to their sons and in turn the game to sustain the competition and question whether this support should be taken for granted. A further problem was how to quantify their efforts. Here I investigate one mother’s reflection upon her son’s participation in the junior football league. As so frequently happens with football the lines between roles and involvement intersect. Harry Wolcott in the *Ethnography: The Art of Seeing* discusses the value of serendipity in research.6 One informant was contacted and interviewed for research on fandom because she is a passionate supporter of her club. Vickie has followed Australian Rules Football since a childhood in suburban Melbourne and now as a married woman with a grown up son in Western Australia. Soon in the interview she started to tell me about her involvement

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5 Interview 17 September 2004.
6 Harry Wolcott. *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing*. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1999),
with her son’s junior football club. The result has been a testament of both her fandom and her involvement with junior football has been valuable. Association with sport demonstrates how the lines of involvement between community and football are blurred.

I got involved with Terry’s [now 19] football and in fact Bill and I [Vickie’s husband and Terry’s stepfather] we went to every game he played, even though he went to his father’s every second week, we would still go to the game and watch him play. I really really love watching kids play football. You get really involved and you love it, you watch all the kids, you see them develop and their skills developing, from seeing the pack follow the ball around to their positions. When they are older they are allowed to bump and then they are allowed to tackle and then they are allowed to do different things. You become involved through your children as well.7

I asked my informant whether there was any special preparation prior to the match for her son:

Nothing really, just get him up and make him have his breakfast… Make sure the shorts and jumper and socks are there and clean. You would get there and it would be “I’ve left my mouth guard at home” and it was always when we were playing away not when we were at Ernest Johnson [Oval] which was three inches from home. You would be flying off to the nearest pharmacy to buy a cheap mouth guard to protect their teeth. We also tried to get the rule “No mouth guard no play.” It wasn’t a rule and still isn’t but we tried to get as many people as possible to wear them. Once you knock those second teeth out of your head, well we are not like sharks or alligators, we don’t grow new ones, we are without them for the rest of our lives.8

In Mother’s Taxi, Thompson relates one mother’s experience of being “there” for her child.9 This is emotional support and includes being a spectator, giving encouragement and consolation. It is hard to quantify support but it was a common factor to the mothers I interviewed. I asked Vickie what encouragement she gave her son and how important it was to them both.

I think that whatever he wanted in sport, and it wouldn’t have worried me what sport he chose, I would have said that is fine well do that, but I was glad he chose football. Encouragement and consultation, yeah, all the time.

Yes [he liked me being at the game] even though he didn’t always show it. They ignore you and pretend you are not there. But if you are late, I was late, I got there at

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7 Interview 10 August 2004.
8 Ibid.
9 Thompson, 56.
half time one day and he knew I didn’t get there until half time even though he didn’t speak to me or look at me.\textsuperscript{10}

The emotional support, encouragement and consolation provided by mothers also serve to teach the child of fair play, good behaviour in sport and in life. Vickie explained the rationale behind encouragement and consolation:

> There is always something good, even though they have kicked it out of bounds three times, there is always something good, they haven’t had just a bad game and if you look for that then they look for good things too I reckon rather than looking negative, looking positive. You have to teach them to lose as well as win, they have to lose graciously not with their lips dragging.\textsuperscript{11}

In addition to the personal support of her son Vickie also was involved in the activities of the junior football club. These roles and activities are vital to the maintenance and survival of not only individual clubs but junior sport that feeds into the higher levels of competition. I asked Vickie about the support she provided to the club. The roles she played were varied and vital:

> I was on the committee for two or three years. I ran the canteen for three or four years and I was the Safety Officer for two years as well. I did a sports medicine and safety course which was provided to the junior football clubs for that specific purpose. We were very involved with Terry’s junior football. I just about lived football club I think.\textsuperscript{12}

Vickie explained her responsibilities as Safety Officer. Her first priority in this volunteer position was to check the first aid kit:

> Each team had a first aid box and at the beginning of each season I would be responsible to make sure it was well stocked. When I went there I found that the bandaids must have been forty years old, and the dressings and things had grass in them, they were in a pretty tatty state so that was another thing that we made sure that all the boxes were up to date with fresh supplies at the beginning of each season and then if they ran out they would get more. It was general safety around the club, particularly on the ground, that sort of thing.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} Interview 10 August 2004.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
Safety issues were not confined to the injuries on the football field but included the prevention of infectious diseases. During her time as Safety Officer, Vickie instituted a change in the regime of refreshments for the young players:

One of the things we tried to bring in, was the separate drink bottles, instead of the plastic cups at half time. Once you took turns in bringing the cordial and the oranges now with all the different problems of Hep B and C you have to have to be very careful. The club could not afford separate drink bottles for everybody so everybody had to bring their own drink bottle. That was one of the things that we made sure they did.14

However, her major concern for the children’s safety related to the adults watching on the sidelines:

Being junior football everyone brings along their own chair and parents inevitably sit on the boundary line. Now the kids come sliding out and they are sitting there with steaming cups of coffee, one of the kids is going to wear that one day. The actual rule that make you read for junior football is that they have to sit so many metres back from the boundary line. Well to be honest that was one of the hardest things I had to do in football. The away teams were much better than my own people from the home team because I’d be there and ask them to move back but they were very reluctant to do so because they would think someone would come along and sit in front of them. I don’t know what it was about them but it was a safety rule and you really needed to do that.

While Vickie was committed to safety and sought to enforce the rules, other adults sat on the sidelines watching the match, drinking coffee and resisting her efforts to prevent a possible scolding of a player.

The role of Safety Officer for a junior football club is a job not to be taken lightly. There are important health and safety issues relating to young children. The Safety Officer has a responsibility to the children, to their parents and to the club. Additionally, there is the prospect of a burden personal responsibility and liability if a child is injured or becomes sick. In an era of heightened litigation this is a genuine concern for the person who takes

14 Ibid.
on this role. There is also the potential for harassment from other parents and players. It
could be expected that concern over litigation, and harassment would deter people from
taking on these responsibilities. Yet it seems not so. The Western Australian Department
of Sport and Recreation provide information sheets on their website for sport officials and
promote the benefits of becoming involved with sport as an official, the first benefit listed
is “Enjoyment and satisfaction.”\textsuperscript{15}

In \textit{Mother’s Taxi}, Thompson discusses the Rewards and Rationales behind mother’s
support of their children’s sport.\textsuperscript{16} Thompson’s informants saw the rewards in terms of
health and fitness, personal development and mixing in safe social environments for their
children. Similarly, Vickie also considered the health and fitness benefits to her son.
Additionally, in Vickie’s case her son, an only child, benefited from participating in a
team sport and learning to share:

I think it is good exercise and it is good for them to be out doing something. I always
thought that Terry is an only child he didn’t have the same sharing skills I guess that
other kids had because he didn’t have to share any of his things, because they were his
things and there wasn’t anyone else to share them with and learn to be a team player,
you are part of a team. In other words you are not the only person on the planet and
so at home when he thinks he is the only one and is the most important when he is in a
team he is only part of the 18 members of the team so if he does his job well and they
do their job well, the team will win so you have to work with someone else to get the
final result, you don’t get it on your own. That was one of the things that I thought he
would learn from it.\textsuperscript{17}

For Vickie the involvement with her son’s football activities went beyond the focus upon
her own son or her roles in the running of the club. She received pleasure through the
connection to the football club. Even though Vickie gave her time freely, she believed
that she gained pleasure through her son’s footballing activities.

\textsuperscript{15} Department of Sport and Recreation, Western Australia “Officiating in WA”
\textsuperscript{16} Thompson, 194-203.
\textsuperscript{17} Interview 10 August 2004.
Personally I just got enjoyment out of it. I just like to see them get out and you watch them develop from the beginning of the season and they were absolutely hopeless, the ball would go over their heads and they would go to kick and they would do the fresh air thing and by the end of the season and they are playing almost like league players, they are just little kids and they are up and grabbing the ball in the air and just over the season their skills had developed so much and it was gratifying to see and they would know it too and they would be all chuffed up, their chests were out, they knew they were doing a good job so its terribly gratifying. It makes you feel all warm and fuzzy I think inside to know they were doing well. I used to love junior football. I’m almost sorry he had to grow up.18

These last two sentences indicate Vickie’s satisfaction from Australian Rules Football. She was not a passive volunteer. Noel Dyck has stated that the social “consociate relationships constructed through parents participation in children’s athletics” is a further reason why “some parents devote so much of their time and money … to a self-sacrificing pastime.”19 Thus the reasons for mothers supporting sport are multifaceted. While Vickie’s son’s involvement was to gain physical activity and skills connected with teamwork, Vickie recognised that it was a period in their lives to look back upon with fond memories.

On the Wing - Mothers in Colts and Reserves

Between the recreational game of Auskick for school children, including high school competitions and the senior state leagues or the national and elite A.F.L. competition there are the Colts (the under 16 year olds) and Reserves competitions. The emphasis on fun and fitness for the school children has disappeared and is replaced with a higher degree of competition. While these players are not professional the training has becoming more intensive, new regimes involving diet and personal habits are instituted in the hope or expectation that the player will eventually be drafted directly to an A.F.L. team or

18 Interview on 10 August 2004.
progress to the state league. In this section, I present the three case studies of mothers of boys playing in the Colts or Reserves. These women are working in the private and public sector, in professional or upper management positions. They are also single parents. Despite the demands of other family commitments and career pressures they have supported their sons’ football. Two of the boys had progressed from Auskick competitions and had been playing football for over 10 years. The other son had been playing football for over five years.

Peta’s son is now playing Colts for a WA.F.L. club. Alan commenced playing Australian Rules Football in the Auskick competition 10 years ago. Peta estimates that she spends at least four hours of her time each week on Alan’s football pursuit. There are a number of activities in which Peta is involved. Firstly, Peta helps with the fundraising activities for the club, plus she collects the playing fees and each week collects the voluntary fees that subsidize the end of year camp for the players. Then there is transporting to and from training and from matches. This is not a twice weekly occurrence; there are three training sessions a week plus the match day. Peta informed me that while Alan was in the development squad, he would play six or seven games during the school holidays plus there is extra training once the player moves up in the ranks. The home field is approximately 15 kilometres away from their home “so a lot of time is taken hanging around and waiting.”

Emotional support is invaluable at any stage of playing football from Auskick to the elite A.F.L. level. There is no quantifying this aspect of involvement. During the interview, I asked Peta how she saw her role as a mother in the overall context of football. She stated:
I just see it as part of the role of a mother as being supportive and ensuring some degree of organisation in the home, getting them their on time, Alan is training three times a week. Organising transport for him, making five rounds of sandwiches instead of three. A lot of it is meeting his physical needs and showing an interest.\textsuperscript{21}

When I asked Peta if she had any concerns for Alan playing continuing to play football and perhaps succeeding to A.F.L. level she had two concerns:

I think the game itself is very rough. It is pretty hard watching it on the sidelines. I have thought whether he would have to move East.\textsuperscript{22}

Australian Rules Football, particularly, at the elite level is brutally physical game. Besides injuries to knees, ankles, groins and faces, the consistent match after match bruising clashes often cause post-career debility. If spectators wince at players injuries then most mothers would more than metaphorically feel every bump and knock. Peta’s other concern was if her son did succeed to the ranks of the A.F.L. then he may need to move interstate. In 2005, the A.F.L. Players Association awarded their inaugural Mother of the Year to Maree Selwood for her devotion to her four footballing sons.\textsuperscript{23} Twins Adam and Troy played for clubs on opposite sides of Australia, and away from their Victorian home in rural Victoria. Adam was based in Western Australia for the West Coast Eagles and Troy in Queensland for the Brisbane Bears. Adam Selwood spoke of his mother’s selflessness towards their sporting lives, stating “She’s done it pretty tough, especially in the first couple of years when both her sons left at the same time.” Maree Selwood again revealed the self-effacing nature of many mothers by saying she was “humbled by the award” and accepted the award on behalf of all A.F.L. mothers.

Another one of Peta’s concerns was the behaviour of adults at junior football:

\textsuperscript{20} Interview 16 July 2004.
\textsuperscript{21} Interview 16 July 2004.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Steve Butler.“Selwood supermum earns award.” In \textit{The West AustralianPreGame}, Friday May 6, 2005, 3.
I am sometimes staggered by the behaviour of adults at junior football, 16s is [sic] still junior football. Some of the comments that come out of the mouths of women too I find quite abhorrent.24

As part of their Ethics in Sports, the Australian Sports Commission promotes a Code of Behaviour for Parents/Guardians on their website.25 The eleven point code includes never ridiculing or yelling at any child, never verbally abusing anyone associated with the sport and respecting the umpires’ decision and teaching your child to do likewise. Thompson also discusses “ugly parents” in tennis stating that evidence from the files of the Western Australian Lawn Tennis Association and from her informants indicates that most “ugly parents” are fathers.26

During the interview, Peta’s focus was completely on her son. Never was there a hint of complaint of the time or money Peta spent on Alan and football. Her attitude was self-effacing. It was almost that she was embarrassed that the focus was on her rather than on her son’s achievements. To conclude the interview I asked Peta for any final comments about the research on Australian Rules Football. In keeping with the rest of the interview, she replied “I just really love watching my boy. It’s just a great game to watch, it’s highly entertaining. I think they are brilliant athletes.”27

Nicola

Unlike Vickie and Peta who attended Australian Rules Football matches in their childhood with their families, Nicola came from the United Kingdom and was initially reluctant to let her son play Australian Rules. She stated:

24 Ibid.
I didn’t want my son to play football because there are too many injuries which is why he started at 13. I had him playing soccer, swimming, surf club, scouts, basketball – he is tall and I thought that would be good. But he said that he wanted to try out for football when he was 13. So I thought oh well ok I would let him try out for it and he just took to it like a duck to water. He just loved it. The coach loved him. And he loved it and he was at the top at 13 with no training and he just loved it. Yeah he was 12.  

At the time of the interview, Nicola had been involved with her son’s football for six years. Despite her reservations about the game, Nicola became immersed in the administration and management her son’s junior football club. For three years she was manager for the under 13s, under 16s and under 17s and has not confined her involvement to her son’s age group. At the time of the interview, she was secretary. I asked Nicola how she became manager and what the job entailed:

Well number one, no one wanted to do it and I wondered why? I went along to the club. We started at this new community club when we moved to the area in …. when my son was going into the 16s so I put my hand up and what it involved was doing everything that was required so the coach could just concentrate on the coaching. This meant organising social functions, fundraising, making sure the boys got there on time. The biggest part of the job I felt was getting the volunteers each week to do the things that would keep the game going like the goal umpiring, the boundary umpiring, organising people to do the water, bringing the oranges and do the running so it was pretty full on because things changed in the last couple of years when I was a manager for the 13s in that you cannot get people to commit anymore. So I found that when they were 17 last year that I actually on the morning, if we arrived an hour early, as the manager, an hour before game, I was still approaching people to do these jobs that make the game work. I actually filled in the jobs where people couldn’t do it. I would do running and water.

I am part of the executive, there is also a treasurer as well. There is a treasurer, chair person and secretary. They are the executive. I meant the chair person is the president, we don’t have those type of terms. We have a vice-president, but there is mainly us three. It was more than minutes. I was the contact for other football clubs and various layers of the football hierarchy.

I did a lot of liaison. I also looked at a lot of funding applications for our 25th anniversary coming up next year. So I had to look at the submissions for funding. What else? I had to keep the mail going and make sure everybody was informed. Offers would come in with offers for coaches to do training and so it was very much keeping the information flowing, there would be members of the A.F.L. or Eagles appearing somewhere and they were offering special coaching or clinics so I would

26 Thompson, 66-67.
28 Interview 2 December 2004.
have to make sure that they were aware where these meetings were and what was on offer. It was pretty full on in that sense. We didn’t have a registrar to start off with. That is a huge job and usually done by a female. That meant that we had to fill in at the beginning which was really onerous. The registrar does a lot of work and that is usually a female role as well.29

It is apparent that many of the roles in the junior football club are delineated by gender, as they are to the highest levels of Australian Rules Football. Nicola stated that the archaic patriarchal view that one must have played the game to understand the roles had existed before she took up the manager’s role.

I see that they want people on the committee that really know something about football and people who, it’s a bit like the A.F.L. and the WA.F.L. that you have to had played it to know it. I can understand that from that you need to know about the roles that support the individual teams. I can understand it on the committee as well because we had someone who was responsible for the coaching coordinator and then they made the managers coordinator, they made that a male’s position and I could see that I could do that as a female manager. I could see that they needed other qualities there for that job that I could offer. The secretary is usually a female role, the newsletter editor – a female, the registrar is usually a female. That is a hell of a lot of work because they have to take up a whole room in their house for information and some of the easier of the administrative type jobs, like the president and vice-president are male.30

Nicola was in full time employment and was a single parent. When I asked her if she had any idea of how much of her time each week was devoted to the football club she stated that when she accepted the secretary’s position was clear on the tasks and activities she would undertake. Nicola stated that she believed that the secretarial duties would have taken five hours per week. After reviewing her testimony, I believe this to be a conservative estimate.

When they asked me to take on the secretary’s role I had to be very clear that my role was going to be minutes rather than newsletters or doing any of the registrars job and doing that sort of thing. The minutes for example, writing them, running them past the president, posting or emailing them and checking that people are carrying out their actions, that could be five to six pages. I could take five hours and then I had to do the correspondence. Go to the mail box, log all the incoming and outgoing

29 Interview 2 December 2004.
30 Ibid.
correspondence and responded to in a timely fashion. Even though they were monthly meetings we had other meetings in between as things came up.\textsuperscript{31} Nicola also told me of the work of other mothers on the committee. These women are the engine room of junior football which would not survive without their efforts. They drive the game:

There were two other women on the committee. One woman actually organised the photos and the trophies and they were tasks that took a long time and were considered more menial and auxiliary. They also looked after the keys. They left the keys out for people to open the toilets on the days of the game and that sort of thing.\textsuperscript{32} These women accept these tasks and largely go unrecognised. Team photographs and trophies are important mementoes. Opening the toilets on match days may be menial but definitely not auxiliary. It is the way this labour is perceived.

Consistent with Vickie and Peta, I asked Nicola what support she provided to her son with respect to tangible aspects of diet and transportation:

I really knew he wanted to make the A.F.L. so I really encouraged him when we had dietary advice and talks at the … Football Club to the development squad I was able to talk to him again after a dietician had told them about eating all this stuff, like muesli bars and all this sort of thing and I was able to say that to be aware that there is a downside to the football that if you can eat all that rubbish and build up and have the energy for the game but as soon as you stop playing you will go to fat. I was able to talk about how important the holistic approach to his game was so that if he did have a career that when he left he left healthy and without injury. So I supported him every way possible.

In relation to preparation for the matches I made sure that he didn’t have any concerns at home regarding clean your room or anything like that. I gave him a clear space to focus on the game.\textsuperscript{33} Nicola’s emotional support of her son seemed invaluable. This support is provided through encouragement, advice and being ready to listen to his concerns or being a part of

\textsuperscript{31} Interview 2 December 2004.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
the celebrations. It is an intangible quality that sustains the young player in their formative years:

I made sure that he got to training and made sure that I talked to him about that and said that he was looking good and allowed him to build up and psyche himself up for the game. When we were going to the development squad games, they were at a higher level, he had a tape it was like a Rocky tape and it was quite inspiring and he played that. He was psyching himself up and I helped him with that and then if the coach was negative at all, although he wasn’t negative to him, I would talk to him about focussing on the positives and how he was going to approach it, encourage him to do his best and concentrate on his strengths in the game. 34

As part of the interview, I asked Nicola how she saw mothers in the sphere of Australian Rules Football. While Nicola was selfless in her personal actions and substantially supported her son’s footballing activities, her reply contained truth and clarity:

Mothers do the things I have been describing. They are there. I can see that they come having that believe in their kids and we put ourselves out and make sure that they get to training and games. That they are fully supported. Make sacrifices to make sure that they get what is needed. Without that the boys can’t cope. I know as a manager some of the kids that struggled because they couldn’t pay the fees, they could have asked for that to be subsidised or they just couldn’t get themselves to a game because the parents would not give them a lift to training. The ones that seemed to do better were the ones whose parents supported them. We make these footballers, mothers, we make them and the game and the competition. We are there.35

Asked if she had any concerns if her son did succeed into the A.F.L Nicola replied “Absolutely. Absolutely. I see incredibly awful injuries.”36 To prevent the injuries, Nicola stated that she would like changes made to rules to make the game safer. These included having more umpires and bigger penalties:

I want them to have like soccer the cards and I want to see that they are actually going to put policies and rules in practice that if you do something to another player that you are off the ground. I would like to see that they don’t tolerate rough play.37

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34 Interview 2 December 2004.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
Another A.F.L. mother put it succinctly to me when she said “Toughness does not mean roughness.”\textsuperscript{38} It is the belief of these mothers that the behaviour and safety of the players can be regulated without any detrimental consequences to the game.

Nicola’s story was not solicited. She approached me after hearing a conference paper I gave on one topic of this thesis and wanted to be involved in the research project. Her aim was not to receive personal recognition for her work or recognition for the army of mothers who support their son’s football; it was to air her concerns over the roughness of the game and the entrenched patriarchal attitudes that permeate through all levels of Australian Rules Football. Nicola also strongly recommended that I interview one of her counterparts whose involvement with Australian Rules Football extended back to her youth and subsequently arranged for me to meet Gail whose views on the patriarchal project were as strong as her love for her sons and the game.

\textit{Gail}

When I interviewed Nicola’s counterpart Gail, I understood why Nicola was so keen for me to speak with her. Gail did not stand on the sidelines submissively. Where Gail saw inequities or anomalies in the treatment of young players she admitted that she was forthright and ready to challenge the male hierarchy that perpetrated the nepotism. This resulted in not only Gail being unpopular with the established male order but affected her son. She told me “I take them on. They say your son won’t go anywhere in football. Small minded men.”\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{38} Interview 17 September 2004.
\textsuperscript{39} Interview 26 November 2004.
These were Gail’s concluding words in an interview that had traced her association with Australian Rules Football since her childhood. My mission had been to learn of Gail’s considerable and diversified volunteer work with her son’s football club and the personal support she gave her son’s. The two boys started playing in the Auskick competition and at the time of the interview the younger son was playing for a state league club Colts side. Gail had been on different clubs and football associations committees, she had been the media officer, social coordinator, first aid officer and treasurer. She had been ground manager and coordinated the match and events. At the time of the interview, she was the club’s timekeeper. This job was not only a responsibility in respect to the outcome of the game, but any delay in a team not taking to the field results in financial penalties incurred by the club, up to $1,000 per minute. Gail had also been assistant coach at one time and had completed the coaching course to a senior level and had nominated to coach an under 17s side without success:

but they said you can’t do that because all the dads will think if you have a female coach the boys will end up poofs [sic poofter – homosexual]. That’s quite a common thing. That’s why they don’t want us to go further up the ladder. You can stand on the sidelines and depending on what they are like, if they are used to having you around, they will value your comments, but they hate it, absolutely hate it if you say “why don’t you move a to b, b to c” and when they do it and it works they hate it.40

It was Gail’s views on the machinations of football clubs that became of great significance. During the interview, Gail told me of the nepotism that exists in football clubs where some father’s money or former football career overrides the communal good of a club and the younger players. Gail had become aware of this power structure because she, not her husband, had taken an active part in her boys’ football clubs as she stated her husband preferred to pursue his own pastimes rather than take an interest in their son’s life and leisure. Within masculine traditions patriarchy, the dominant political
force can also sideline other males through favouritism and prejudice. It was Gail’s view that a culture of ex-players and businessmen dominating the clubs and code existed down to the grassroots level:

The coaches’ son always gets a game, no matter how good they are. You regularly get that in junior football. Actually lots of junior sports too. It’s actually very cruel on the child but they don’t understand that. … You battle various cultures of if dad’s not there or dad’s not played football or dad has played football or dad’s on the board or dad’s company is supporting the club, then that boy gets a guernsey. That culture is alive and well.

Grand final day culture is another disgusting thing that has emerged because of the A.F.L. Come grand final day X who has played his heart out all season is dropped because Y’s dad is paying all this money to the club and even if Y is no good he plays to get that grand final medal. A lot of grand finals have been won and lost because of that.\textsuperscript{41}

This testament confirms a shift in principles from the spirit of fair play in junior football and ethical behaviour of the player and the parent to culture of nepotism. The evidence suggests that where mothers have a high degree of involvement in the sporting activities of their children and this ensures a level playing field. At the time of the interview with Gail, the A.F.L. was considering the appointment of its first female commissioner. The eight man commission comprised former players and businessmen, it did not need additional business expertise. It needed the appointment of a woman closely associated with football from the grassroots whose understanding of the levels of support to the players and clubs. This would have provided a fresh perspective for the Commission and a dimension of understanding that seems lacking in a culture that is far reaching throughout Australian society.

\textsuperscript{40} Interview 26 November 2004.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
Elite Mother

To demonstrate how important a fresh perspective is to the overarching Australian Rules Football, the elite mother, Elizabeth, in my research responded towards the end of the interview of my question: “Can you tell me how you see your role as a mother in the overall structure of Australian Rules Football?”

How I would like to see our role? That we could be more involved. We are only allowed, at the stage our sons are at, to be a supporter. We are not allowed to be involved. That is what I find. I would like it that we could be more involved and that we may be could make it more family orientated. I know that they say that it is very family orientated but I would like our son’s lives with their football to be more involved like a big family. Because it is kind of divided there is the club, the players and the family, it’s very divided.42

It is evident that this divide occurs between the junior leagues and the elite leagues. In the last eighteen years Australian Rules Football had been dominant in the life of my elite mother. Elizabeth’s sons played in the elite A.F.L. competition started in junior competitions from six and seven years of age. Once again this mother was self-effacing and had not given thought to her role in the maintenance of the A.F.L. competition. When I posed the question to her that she had been an integral part of establishing them in the A.F.L., she paused to think about her answer and hesitantly replied “Well, that was just how they started, hmmm, well maybe I did.”43

Elizabeth’s two sons had reached and played in A.F.L. At the time of the interview, the eldest son had been playing at A.F.L. level for ten years and the younger for three years. The interview traced their progression from junior football to the elite league with the focus on Elizabeth’s involvement through the successive stages. Her story was consistent with my previous informants. In the personal sphere she had provided the domestic

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42 Interview 8 October 2004.
43 Ibid.
labour and emotional support. Her involvement was compounded by her husband’s employment which often meant he was away from home for long periods of time. She also knew little of Australian Rules Football because she came from a State not dominated by the code:

My husband worked away a lot and so I took them down this Aussie Rules that was new to me as well and they used to say “go home and get your dad to help you with your skills” and so it was me that actually had to kick the football with them and I had to learn along with them, the rules and the game with them. From the beginning.44

It is not uncommon for mothers and other women to play the pivotal role initiating Australian Rules Football careers. In *The Forgotten Heroes* Sheedy and Brown state that women, particularly teachers in primary schools “play a crucial role in introducing children to the game of Australian Rules.”45 Sheedy credits Sister Rupert, a Catholic Nun, with first teaching him about Australian Rules and his first coach was a fourteen year old Veronica Nolan whose brothers played football.46 Veronica Nolan, like many other females, took on the coaching role at Sheedy’s school, St Joseph’s, because no other person [read male] would or could. In “Mothers First”, Sheedy and Brown also discuss the support mothers give in the formative years to their sons:

Often it is the mother’s dedication when her son is at an early age, in providing the clothing and boots and finding the closest local club, that gives him the opportunity to play his first organized football matches. She might sit patiently on the sidelines, take her turn in the canteen or dab mercurochrome on grazed kness as the child begins to build his skills, confidence, self-esteem and understanding of teamwork47

Elizabeth told me about her son’s training programme and match commitments. Not only was her son committed but she was also:

They used to have training two nights a week and that used to be for a couple of hours each time and then we would go to the football on the weekends and watch them. Both games. Two, four, and two games. When they were playing Colts and League

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44 Interview 8 October 2004.
45 Sheedy and Brown, 198.
46 Ibid, 198.
we would go in the morning and watch that and then we would stay on for the League, so that would be the whole Saturday.48

In the public realm, Elizabeth took turn with the oranges and water on match days. The managerial duties she undertook included finding coaches, managers, players; working out how many teams the club would have in each division and age group. Additionally, each team would need equipment and jumpers. Then she became part of the club’s administration and was involved on its committee from junior football until her sons reached a W.A.F.L. club. At that stage she said:

I was on the committee for quite a number of years for the junior football. Right up until they moved up into the WA.F.L. clubs, the next level. Then you are not invited.49

This is the institutional level where the white suited males take over, Connell’s “hegemonic project.”50 Here men and their mode of masculinity men are mobilized. To support my claim I again, point to the commissioned history of *Behind the Play: A History of Western Australian Football and 100 Years of Australian Football.*51 These versions of history are an affrontery to women of Elizabeth’s calibre. These women do not undertake the personal and public labour for accolades. Yet they require more sincere and equitable acknowledgement than they have received to date. Women have been barred from the committee room then excluded from history.

The discourse of football is wide. The personal and public spheres become blurred. Elizabeth’s personal emotions took a toll every time her sons went out onto the field. She worried about their health and their safety. When her son’s were at home she would have to take care (and I suggest responsibility) for their diet:

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48 Interview 8 October 2004.
49 Ibid.
While they were playing A.F.L. yes we would have to cook very special food, meals
for them. … Difficult when you have got others in the family. There is a lead up to
the games, they eat special foods, a couple of days before. I have seen lots of
dieticians and they have lots of lectures by the dieticians and I have been to lots of
those.52

When I analyzed Elizabeth’s interview it had many resonances with other informants
through the facets of all their support. Even though her son’s had reached the A.F.L. they
still tacitly valued their mother’s presence and/or observation of their game:

Well what I find is that sometimes people will say to them that they have played a
good game and then they will come and say to me “ummm how do you think I played
mum?” And I say “Ok.” Or sometimes I will say “Oh I don’t think that was your
best game.” And they will say “yes that’s what I thought too but everyone is saying I
played a good game.” So they still want your opinion and your sort view of about it.53

Asked whether her opinion on their performance was important to her sons Elizabeth
replied confidently “Yes”. Having been there at the outset of their playing days as six and
seven year olds Elizabeth’s knowledge has become valuable to her son’s.

Again I took the opportunity to canvas other topics surrounding the culture of elite
football. I was interested in Elizabeth’s perspective on the issue of girlfriends and
groupies, especially as she had a daughter, and asked her whether this was an issue:

Oh yes. It’s a big problem for them. Both my sons won’t answer their phones unless
they know the number that is dialing. They will ring people back but they won’t
answer their phones. And yeah everywhere they go even if we are out here they get
people coming up to them all the time.

One of my sons said to me yesterday that with girls they don’t have a life, as soon as
you start going out with them they burn their friends, and everybody, they don’t want
to keep their own life. Yeah. He said like you can’t have any freedom when you
have a girlfriend because they completely burn their friends and don’t do anything
else than be with you, know what you are doing 24/7. They need to have a life
themselves and be independent ladies.54

52 Interview 8 October 2004.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
The issue of women obsessing over elite sportsmen, particularly footballers prevails in many countries and codes. It is a complex issue and has been discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Anne Coddington, author of *One of the Lads: Women who follow football*, suggests that the obsession stems from women not having role models in the sport, where men fantasize about playing professional football, “women fantasize about being a footballer’s girlfriend.”55 Coddington also states:

> There will be ‘groupies’ for as long as women are taught to value themselves by the status of their men. It’s about wanting to get fame and recognition by waiting for a man to provide it, rather than going and getting it for yourself.56

Young women require role models that play, work, manage, not supermodels, who hang onto players. They need to have the ability and confidence to attain their own status, not the reflected glory of someone else. Within the discourse of football exists a binary of masculinity and femininity that frames and constrains women. The patriarchal project continues to perpetuate the binaries, not break them down. In the words that follow, this binary is interrogated by examining events that purport to “celebrate” women in football.

**Stars Beside not Behind the Team**

A bridge in the discussion of The Home Team from mothers to wives is demonstrated by the A.F.L. Women’s Weekend that occurred during Round 7 May 7-9 of the 2004 A.F.L. season. A.F.L. demonstrated their view of the role and value of women in football in Australia through the A.F.L. Women’s Weekend 2004 and it seemed that the hierarchy of the A.F.L. had discovered for the first time that women were involved with football. Through this “salute”, the A.F.L. would redress any paternalistic attitudes of women over the last 158 years. However, in staging the A.F.L. Women’s Weekend, they revealed that

they intended to keep a patriarchal hold on the A.F.L. There is no “A.F.L. Men’s Week” during the season because the currency of football is always masculine. The A.F.L. also celebrates Grassroots Weekend and Heritage Weekend where the masculine is automatically inscribed in these salutes. Yet those weekends too are as much about women as they are about men. Rather than normalising women’s presence in football the A.F.L. decided to contort their activism into a theme weekend during May 2004. Women were reduced to a sociological variable along with class and race. They were being tethered to the institution of motherhood, offered a glimpse of opportunity for careers and participation throughout the footballing field while being denied equality of influence and engagement. The timing could not have been more perfect, nor ironic, for the A.F.L. to promote the A.F.L. Women’s Week. After the disastrous weeks where a number A.F.L. footballers had been accused of rape, others sacked or reprimanded over drug taking and two incidences of drink driving by footballers on the East and the West coasts, the management of the A.F.L. and its clubs must have grateful for a different kind of profile for the competition. It was high time and much overdue that the A.F.L. took notice of women especially after omitting any serious reference of the support and roles women have in the maintenance in its centenary publication, *100 Years of Australian Football*. Planning for this week had started in August of 2003, the A.F.L. stated, lest any cynics thought that this was repairing any damage done, by the seriously vile and just plain errant players, to the relationship between football and women. A television commercial was broadcasted just prior and during the week. It featured different images of women of varying age, background and teams reciting the lines of Mike Brady’s classic football anthem *Up There Cazaly*.58

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56 Coddington, 86.
In Melbourne, the A.F.L. held a forum in Melbourne, its “aim of this event is to recognise the contribution of women in football and thus exposing opportunities for women to enjoy, play and work in Australian Rules Football.”59 A panel of football identities would discuss “why women make footy great.” Other “special interest” panels covered employment, families, football facts and “your club.” The event was meant to demonstrate how women could “get involved in the football industry – whether to work full-time or as a volunteer.” While the range of occupations for women in the A.F.L. is expanding, the A.F.L. remains a patriarchal project and it is doubtful that the Forum would have pointed out that women are still to reach its most senior of levels, or that of the fifty player agents, only one is a woman.

With patriarchal attitudes firmly entrenched, those goal posts will keep moving. The field will never be level. Yet the A.F.L. knows the value of woman as volunteers are a vital component of the labour force of the A.F.L. comprising “48,000 volunteers who contribute some 5.7 million working hours to the game annually, worth $69 million in labor effort.”60 A cynical view could consider the Forum a recruitment exercise for the unpaid help. While playing football remains a prerequisite for administering and commenting on football – a gendered barrier is in place.

In Western Australia, the celebration of A.F.L. Women’s Week was slightly more pragmatic, if not honest in its approach. Members and the public were invited to “A fun Mother’s Day lunch with some of the West Coast Eagles’ finest Stars behind the team” on

57 John Ross and Garrie Hutchinson, 10-12.
the Wednesday preceding Mothers Day at the Grand Ballroom at the Burswood International Resort. There were no illusions of “jobs or careers for the girls” or pretensions meant to lure the dedicated follower to become an unpaid helper, this was a good honest fundraiser for the club coinciding with Mother’s Day. The star attractions were Stephanie Cousins, mother of Ben, Georgina Worsfold, wife of John, Amber Banfield, wife of Drew, and Annette Fletcher, mother of Chad. At $55 per head, including lunch and drinks, the function was promoted to the audience that they would learn “on and off field secrets. Find out who wears and washes the pants. Hear what mothers, wives and partners think of their heroes.” The promotion steadfastly adhered to all that feminists ruminate about women and football, that men play, profit and provide, women wash, work and wonder at it all. As the flyer said mothers and wives are the “stars behind the team.” More correctly, I rewrite this slogan to confirm that mothers and wives are the “stars beside team” and I maintain this is the position with which they should be credited.

Having had difficulty in accessing the wives and partners during my research, this was an opportunity to glean whatever information I could through the lunch with the added possibility of networking and meeting the mothers and wives who were for me the main attraction. I went, ‘frocked up’, with pen, notebook and micro cassette recorder and learn what I could, while dining at one of Perth’s finest venues overlooking the Swan River, recently proclaimed as the first icon of Western Australia. A friend and West Coast Eagles member was easily persuaded to accompany me. This is the ethnographic tale of that event. The experience once again demonstrated that the tropes wives and mothers must traverse are not really a true measure of their contribution to football. It was another
view on the footballers through the eyes of their mothers and wives but also of the paradoxical nature of female fandom.

Inside the Grand Ballroom, fifty-seven tables of ten people made up the audience, mainly women, although I would estimate that there would have been about sixty men present, including one on our table.61 The age of the audience ranged from women in their early twenties through to women in their eighties, with the majority of them being over fifty, a sign of an elderly fan base of the West Coast Eagles. Fittingly there were many mothers and daughters present, age and resemblance providing obvious clues. Indeed there were three mother and daughter couples on our table, the lunch a Mother’s Day present for one. The Eagles fans are often chided with the myth of being the ‘Chardonnay Set’ because of the perception of coming from the wealthy coastal suburbs, certainly those present could reasonably be considered as not coming from low socio-economic backgrounds although the extent of their affluence would differ markedly I would estimate from their dress and

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61 Fieldnotes dated 5 May, 2004. West Coast Eagles Mother’s Day Luncheon held on Wednesday 5 May 2004.
by the jewellery worn. Only several women took part in the auction for the V.I.P. tickets and lunch for the forthcoming game, with most of the bidders dropping out once the bids went over $200. The successful bidder paid nearly $700 for the package. Different accents and physical appearances belied Australian origins reflecting the appeal of Australian football and the diversity of its followers. The female audience dress ranged from smart casual to corporate suits, another indicator of differing occupations.62

The co-hosts for the lunch were Karl Langdon, media personality and former West Coast Eagles premiership player of 1992 and Alischa Wunsch, Marketing Manager for *The West Australian* newspaper, a partner of the West Coast Eagles and sponsor of the lunch. In welcoming guests Langdon stated that in 2003 the A.F.L. had encouraged clubs to celebrate the A.F.L. Women’s Week and that this was the purpose of the event. He also stated that the Club was very proud that 45% of their membership was women. This was greeted by great applause by the audience, as if they needed the acknowledgement of their presence and support.

Preceding the panel discussion was the mandatory fashion parade held at women’s lunches confirming conservative femininity. The post pubescent pretzel models display not fitting (in many respects) garments to the majority of the audience, it was the hyper-feminine frame for the event, and the comedian of the day performance of the “Demotivational Talk.” During the panel discussion both Langdon and Wunsch asked mothers and wives questions relating to the players. Langdon approached the discussion with the tack most male commentators employ asking trivial and token questions. In

questioning mothers the emphasis was on the players as babies, toddlers and as boys. “Was he active in utero?” “What was he like as a boy?” The wives’ questions focussed on how the couple met each other and what kind of dress sense the husband had. Langdon asked the husbands about wives’ favourite flowers, first jobs, and of sons and husbands, birthdays and mobile phone numbers. They were trivial and hollow questions.63

Deviating from the totally trivial “What is the hardest thing about living with John?” The reply “was being a parent on [my] own.” This honest answer raises an important issue that faces most A.F.L. wives with children. It was an honest answer. The topic of emotional support was also approached. Georgina Worsfold said that she felt her support was “just being there.” This understatement leads me to believe that many wives do not understand the nature and extent of their support to their partners, to the club and to the promotion of the game. Their support to the club and to the game comes in both tangible and intangible terms. Financially, the club draws the benefit of their presence at the fundraising luncheon. Of equal, or perhaps more importance, their presence during a difficult time for the club and game demonstrates solidarity and loyalty.

Langdon roving with the microphone took questions from the audience. These revealed the varying nature of motivation for following football. First, there was the female fandom that surrounds sports celebrity. In a poor attempt at humour, one question directed to Stephanie Cousins was “Can I have your son’s [Ben] hand in marriage?” Stephanie appeared embarrassed or non-plussed by the question posed by a stranger to her

63 Fieldnotes 5 May 2004.
adult son. Her response was “ask him.” The next question outdid the first in its inane-
ness. Georgina Worsfold was offered an indecent proposal of $1 million for a night with
er her husband John. In their coverage of the lunch the local media, television broadcaster
Channel Seven\textsuperscript{64} and \textit{The West Australian} newspaper (in two separate articles\textsuperscript{65}), featured
this question that leant credence to the notion of trivialisation of female fandom that
focuses upon celebrity and sexuality rather than upon technicality, strategy and
community. Nor was the difficulty of sole parenting reported keeping the spotlight on the
tropes of celebrity.

Other questions were focussed upon more pragmatic aspects of a life in football rather
than its culture of celebrity. One woman asked the two panel member mothers whether
they would advise other mothers to place their sons in football. It was a straightforward
and bland question in comparison to those questions above, yet it raised an important
issue, individually and collectively. As documented earlier mothers can play a crucial
role in the development of their children’s sporting pursuits. Mothers may encourage and
nurture the interest in sport. They would be sensitive to the physicality of Australian
Rules Football over Association Football where there is less body contact and likelihood
of injury both at a young age and then as a player and career develops. Collectively it is
important that the game at grassroots develops so that the competition continues
providing a pool from where players can be recruited. Recruiters from clubs know the
importance of mothers support. They often spend time to convince the mothers, more so
than fathers, of the benefits of their sons being drafted into the competition, with

\textsuperscript{64} Channel Seven Perth, \textit{Seven News}, Wednesday May 5, 2004.
\textsuperscript{65} Pamela Magill, “Mum’s the word for Eagles” In \textit{The West Australian}, 6 May, 2004, 14.
assurances of their boys becoming educated and economically stable for a life beyond football. Both mothers were direct in response with an emphatic – “yes”.  

The notion of a life beyond football no doubt affects families in public, private and personal spaces. This was reflected through the question and answer session that included questions regarding support for other children. Both mothers felt that they were able to find a balance of attention and support for all their children. Frequently wives own careers are overshadowed by their husbands’. Amber Banfield said that her attitude after the game was that she also works and that she tells Drew not to bring work home if the match is lost. Georgina Worsfold's outlook was similar.

The audience also demonstrated its interest in the sport and competition, the team’s strengths and weaknesses and its prospects for the remainder of the season. Several women sought John Worsfold’s views on the impact of travelling on the outcome of matches, the possibility of a home final and the reasons for inclusion or exclusion of individual team members. Some did not shy away from recent controversies, showing that women are prepared to depart from the smooth subjects. One person asked why it was necessary to drop from the team for the coming match, Quinten Lynch who had recently been involved in a drink driving incident causing some scandal. The audience seemed to agree with the reply that Lynch, who had already been disciplined and fined by the Club, had not trained well and therefore would not play. One member of the audience raised the issue of whether coaches should be able to query umpiring decisions and standards. It was learnt that umpires are prepared to discuss these matters, that it is the

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66 Fieldnotes 5 May 2005.
A.F.L. that is not happy for dialogue to be made public. This segment of the panel discussion was a reflection that women are able to engage with the subjects relating to the sport and their team.

However a return to the circuit of femininity within the masculine discourse was made by Alischa Wunsch whose question highlights the careers of the sons and husband through the eyes of mothers and wives. The framing of this question places male achievements at the centre with women being placed in the periphery. When women are placed at the centre, the purpose is to add glamour to the game. These women are placed in a hyper-feminine frame.

Throughout the thesis, I have offered analytical detours from the Australian setting to drawn comparisons and contrasts with women of the F.A., particularly in the section on the wives of footballers. Discussion on fandom also brought together the two countries and codes. In One of the Lad’s Ann Coddington stated that footballing authorities could take initiatives and increase interest in the F.A. to a growing female audience. She suggested campaigns that coincided with Mothering Sunday, Valentine’s Day or International Women’s Day. However she admitted,

Some might claim such campaigns smack of tokenism. A more positive way of looking of it is to say that it gives a constituency previously excluded from football a foot in the door.67

Unlike their counterparts in the U.K. there have always been a substantial number of Australian women’s feet in the door. Women have followed and supported soccer in the U.K., however, in the past they have been a significant minority. This is exactly a reason
why the A.F.L. Women’s Week is an example of tokenism, it was a hollow symbolic gesture. The A.F.L. were again playing catch up, recognising what had long been the case and through designating an A.F.L. Women’s Week they were returning women to the “Ladies Only Stand” of 1900 and given men primacy within the context. The event of 2004 was such a success that the West Coast Eagles held another Mother’s Day Lunch in 2005. The audience was not new. Rather what the luncheon achieved was a new opportunity for sponsors in an established setting.

**Australian Rules Footballers’ Wives**

Wives and mothers are not trophies or themes or workers. They are real people who often give up their time, their social life and their professional careers, taking on the majority of parenting responsibilities and household duties. These women should not be reduced to a theme weekend or by giving a false sense of glamour about their lives. The women who took part in the A.F.L. Women’s Week were not wax mannequins, drag queens or exotic wildlife, they were wives, employees, fans who are as individual, complex, hardworking and as abundant as their men. The separation is the concept of football as a discourse. It is the discourse of football that I attack while critiquing the agents and subjectivities within football that are negotiated. The agents include the A.F.L., the print and television media, clubs and business. The subjects are the wives or girlfriends and mothers and the critique does not attack or ridicule these women. On the contrary, my discussion aims to validate their journey and give them voice even when no one spoke. Spivak enacted such a project with her brown woman ascending the pyre. Their actions replaced their voice.68

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67 Coddington, 214.
The way to transform a subaltern is to translate their actions into the empowered discourse.

The binary of masculinity and femininity within the discourse has in the past five years seen the Brownlow Medal night become a dazzling event. The countdown of votes to award the fairest and best of the Australian Football league was once an evening regarded as interesting as watching grass grow. It now provides an example of how feminisation embellishes the hypermasculinity of the A.F.L. through the cultivation of sports celebrity. As the players tread the red carpet the waiting media ask, “How do you think you will poll? The cameras then turn to the player’s partners, and for a moment the focus is on them: the gowns, the hair, and the make-up. Brownlow night is like a massive ball attended by Handsome Princes and their Cinderellas. What follows the fairytale? What is “ever after” really like, and what are some of the challenges life as the wife of an A.F.L. player present? The “Brownlow women” are represented by the electronic and print media for their part in supporting the game in a hyper-feminine frame. Here I interrogate the contribution made to Australian Rules Football by those women to investigate how this public representation intersects with private reality.

In presenting this picture of A.F.L. wives, I have drawn upon several sources. Commencing with the print and television media, I tease out how wives or partners are portrayed by the media from the gala occasions of the Brownlow Medal from 2001 to 2005; an episode of Fox Footy Channel’s Living with Footballers, and popular magazines. Partner involvement with these programmes undergirds the player’s role on

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69 Brownlow Medal Count Broadcast, Channel 10, 8.30pm September 23, 2002.
and off the field, and is a fresh site for investigation by scholars of sport, gender and society. Secondly, I use sources from the United Kingdom and North American where studies of the partners of professional athletes have been carried out, to compare these to the Australian experience. One of the problems I have encountered is that many wives and partners of footballers are not willing to share their testimony or views with me. This ‘gap’ or ‘problem’ is not peculiar to my study. While Sheedy and Brown had a number of football wives in their book they did state that others had “declined to be involved.”\textsuperscript{70}

Similarly, Steven Ortiz, who carried out research in North America on professional athletes wives from football, basketball, baseball and hockey leagues, had only 48 informants in his study.\textsuperscript{71} As stated previously I have been advised by several sources close to the wives that most are intensely private and like to keep to themselves. Possibly they do not want to admit that a life revolving around football is not necessarily glamorous. At the same time they may not wish to interrupt the fascination surrounding their lives by the media and supporters. It could also be a desire to affirm that a woman is more than just her husband’s occupation.

In the introduction to the 2002 \textit{Brownlow Medal Count}, the off screen announcer states that “it is the night for handsome suits and beautiful dresses”, setting the scene for the parade to commence. Sharing the spotlight with the players, some partners are clearly more comfortable with the camera than others. These are the Brownlow women, those who have a certain style to which the cameras are drawn and who are there to make their appearance and be noticed. For example, Brodie Holland’s girlfriend, Sarita Stellar, who wore a red leather dress, to represent the Sherrin football. At the previous year’s

\textit{Living With Footballers}, Fox Footy Channel, May 8, 2003
\textsuperscript{70} Sheedy and Brown, 94.
Brownlow Medal night, Tania Mancini, now wife of Nathan Buckley, had intended to “make an impression” with her diamond studded g-string. Tania later admitted that the “publicity was beyond comprehension” but she clearly accomplished her goal. Brownlow women are being objectified and commodified in an atmosphere of hypermasculinity. The alluring partners are a conduit for the A.F.L., promoting it from the back page to the front page, into the social columns and the celebrity magazines. They have become conjoined to the player’s celebrity status and are a part of “the production of celebrity” as discussed by Turner, Bonner and Marshall where “anyone the public is interested in is a celebrity.” Other partners are not so at ease with the attention, but take their places beside their partner. After the year and season’s work, it is a glamorous night to be enjoyed. However, that is what the cameras focus upon – the glamour and the glitz associated with the A.F.L.

Figure 15: Chris Judd, 2004 Brownlow Medallist and Rebecca Twigley in “That Dress”

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A crescendo over the girls and their gowns was reached in 2004 when West Coast Eagle player, Chris Judd, won the Brownlow Medal. Judd was accompanied by his girlfriend, Rebecca Twigley, a professional model. Twigley’s gown by Perth designer, Ruth Tarvydas, caused a sensation around the country. The red gown had a neckline that plunged to her waist and was backless. The illustration here appeared on page one of *The West Australian* where it was reported in his acceptance speech Judd said “his chief concern had been the double-sided tape holding up … the stunning outfit.”75 In my family there was more interest in Twigley than in the winner. My 18 year old son cut Twigley wearing Judd’s medal out, leaving Judd and a hole in the front cover of the newspaper. He then stuck her photograph to his bedroom wall. *The West Australian*’s page 1 listed “Judd’s Victory. Back Page” and “Brownlow Fashions. P13” “Perth’s version of ‘That Dress’” (comparing it to Liz Hurley’s Versace dress with the safety pins and Marilyn Monroe’s white pleated frock) as it became known was a continue source of attention for the next year.76 In the prelude to the 2005 Brownlow Medal ceremony *The West Australian*’s had a full page dedicated to “It’s a girls game too, Class of 2004.”77 It is a beautiful façade. One informant told me of her perspective having attended a Brownlow Medal ceremony:

I went to one Brownlow function which was great fun. The girls were just so gorgeous. I went with the senior managers and they sat there drooling there all night. One of them said “Oh I wish these girls could afford to buy a whole dress.” They just had so little on. And they had a wonderful time. They were beautiful, all so gorgeous. So clearly there is a benchmark here of who you take out (if you are a footballer).78

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76 These are just a small sample of the newspaper articles and do not include television or radio coverage: Di Bawwens and Nick Miller “Diamonds, sequins outshire the medal” In *The West Australian*, Tuesday September 20, 2005, 7; Rania Chandour “Rebecca upstages footy stars again.” In *The West Australian*, Saturday, October 2, 2004, 1; Daile Pepper “Football’s Lady in Red.” In *The West Australian*, Wednesday, September 22, 2004, 3; *The West Australian*, page 1 “Chris Judd: The captaincy, Brownlow blues and ‘that dress’ Pages 50, 51”; “The hottest dress in town” In *STM The Sunday Times*, October 10, 2004; Melissa Kent “Down and around for that red gown” In *The West Australian*, Saturday, May 15, 2005, 3; Liftout*The West Australian*, Thursday, September 15, 2005, 8.
77 Liftout*The West Australian*, Thursday, September 15, 2005, 8.
78 Interview 24 August 2004.
Midway through the Brownlow broadcast in 2002, an advertisement for the forthcoming premier of a new television programme from the United Kingdom Footballers Wives was shown. The promotional advertisement states the programme is about “Sex”, “Drugs” and “Football”; that “the sport is nothing compared to the games these wives play” and the “betrayal and scandal”. The irony of this programme is that the book upon which the series was based had intended to provide the public with the real experiences of footballers’ wives in the U.K. and break down the stereotypes associated with them. Shelley Webb, wife of former English international soccer player Neil Webb, wrote Footballers’ Wives Tell Their Tales. Webb intended to dispel the myth of the “Malibu-drinking bimbos, who live in mock-Tudor mansions” and demonstrate that the wives have an identity beyond their role as football partners. It would appear that instead, it spun off a soap opera that was degrading and trivial.

In Australia, the Fox Footy Channel produced Living with Footballers for two seasons. It is neither a soap nor a sit-com but a panel show with wives and girlfriends, akin to The Footy Show. With its theme music being like a refrain for Sex and the City, this programme perpetuates the tropes of hypermasculinity, objectification and commodification found at the Brownlow Medal Count’s red carpet and in the celebrity magazines. Garry Crawford states:

Much of the language used to describe sports stars in the mass media draws on the narrative of melodrama. Heroes rise and fall, villains, are defeated, and women play out their roles as supporting cast members to men’s central roles. Sport has literally seen itself portrayed in recent years as melodrama and soap opera.

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79 Footballers Wives.
While *Living with Footballers* was not a melodrama or soap opera the women in the programme’s panel still play supporting roles. The programme commences with a recap of the round with a light-hearted discussion of wins, losses and tribunal appearances, interspersed by vision from the matches. The program’s format includes “Hot Spot” where guest wives ask trivial questions of their husbands, such as “Where was our first holiday?”, “What was the first movie we saw together?” There is also an interview with a high profile player, for example Nathan Buckley who talked about his recent marriage to Tania, of diamond-studded g-string fame. Then the panel and Buckley had a voyeuristic question and answer session where the audience learnt that Tania does not play golf because they do not allow high heels on the course and will not play ten pin bowling in case she breaks a fingernail. Only a minority of the issues that the wives contend with are mentioned. Issues are glossed over and the opportunity to highlight the true depth of support for players is lost by not discussing the disturbing or confronting aspects of their lives. Those issues include wives bearing most of the responsibility for child rearing, ensuring the smooth running of the home so that the husband can concentrate upon football, providing emotional support to their partners, especially during the trials of transfer, injury and losses. Research has also determined that for wives, most social commitments revolve around football and the opportunity to have a life outside of football is very limited with the result that they feel that their lives are constrained and that they are married to the job. Those interviewed agreed that they felt constrained by their partners A.F.L. career.

**Naomi:**

Many people identify me as [….‘s] wife and not [….]. This is obviously not done by people who are close to me but I feel it is used often to describe “who I am”. I also feel that in some instances such as my career, I was given a chance only because of being [….’s] wife or girlfriend at the time. Fortunately, these people learnt that I could do the job either way. Socially people including friends at times, assume that all I want to talk about is footy. It has given me the tendency to distance myself from such people because it can be apparent they are unintentionally befriending me to be near
[...] I hate Monday morning’s at work – people always asking how the team went and what went wrong if they lost.\[82\]

Naomi

Indeed, to underscore how intensively this can be felt, Nanette Malthouse in Sheedy and Brown stated, “football is a lifestyle, it is not job.”\[83\] In adopting the “lifestyle”, a term synonymous with celebrity, many surrender their own career, which should be important to their own sense of self and identity. This dependency and lose is also the case in the United Kingdom, as Richard Giulianotti confirmed:

Until the 1960s, football helped to reproduce the modern sexual division of labour and leisure. Men dominated workplaces and public spaces (such as football grounds); women were relegated to private domains like the home.\[84\]

There is a binary of life and lifestyle, suggesting that the term “lifestyle” equates to a sexual division of labour in the realm of the A.F.L. and that identity for many wives is linked to their footballing husband.

It is true that many women have their own careers and do have choices outside those relating to men, marriage and money. There are wives of A.F.L. footballers who maintain their own professional careers or their own businesses. However the A.F.L. is a site of hypermasculinity that enlists women into its maintenance. Those women chose to support their husband’s career and take on the challenges. It is evident from Ortiz, Sheedy and Brown and Janet Finch that they do make this decision consciously and with pride and are not passive participants. Indeed this is common with other occupations and Finch, who studied the incorporation of women into men’s work, believes that many wives are willing to be married to the job through the rationale of achieving a higher standard of

\[82\] Interview by email 25 May 2005.
\[83\] Sheedy and Brown, 58.
living than otherwise achievable within patriarchal wage standards.\textsuperscript{85} They believe they are making an investment in their husband’s work. The state of affairs in Australia is comparable where men still have a far greater chance at economic success, have more choice of occupation, higher rates of pay, greater opportunity for advancement and are better superannuated. In \textit{Backlash}, Susan Faludi confirmed these disparities:

If women are now so equal, why are they more likely to be poor, especially in retirement? …If women have ‘made it’, then why are 80 per cent of all workers in catering, cleaning, hairdressing and other personal services still women, and 78 per cent of all workers in clerical jobs?,\textsuperscript{86}

In Australia, this inequity also prevails. In \textit{The End of Equality} Anne Summers states what while “\textit{some}” [her italics] women have made significant achievements in their work and careers “Equal pay is a myth.”\textsuperscript{87} Summers claims that equality in Australia has regressed during the last decade. Her claim is supported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics \textit{Year Book Australia 2003} that reveals a 2\% improvement in the intervening thirteen years: “In February 2002, female earnings were at 85\% of male earnings.”\textsuperscript{88} This shows that very often women choose to marry men with high salaries and high profiles but pay a high price for being in the public domain. Finch, whose work concentrated upon various occupations in English villages, provided an eight point recipe for marriage, which actually would knock out most men but especially footballers. Point seven states:

Avoid men doing work which contaminates the whole of their lives, work which is highly socially valued, or has strong moral overtones. You will be contaminated and you will find it virtually impossible to compete with his work.\textsuperscript{89}

High profile occupations pose challenges for the partners. The public has an expectation that players are always available to them regardless of the setting and face intrusions upon

\textsuperscript{86} Susan Faludi. \textit{Backlash: the undeclared war against women}, (London, Chatto & Windus, 1992), 5-6.  
\textsuperscript{87} Anne Summers. \textit{The End of Equality}, (Sydney: Random House Australia Pty Ltd, 2003).  
\textsuperscript{88} Year Book Australia 2003, “Labour Level of Earnings”, Australian Bureau of Statistics, accessed:  
http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/07A4693170A8DA91CA256CAE 26/05/03  
\textsuperscript{89} Finch, 133.
their private time. Their actions are under continual and intense scrutiny and it is common that as public figures they are often exploited and confronted in places outside their career domain.

_Danni:_

Being with someone in the public eye can be a bonus at times but certainly hard at other times. The public view on a professional athlete is that at all times they should be doing PR whether they are interrupted from a family meal or in a shopping centre or park for that matter. People don’t understand that we require personal time too and can be very rude at times. Socially you are being tuned in on at all times so this can be very difficult."90

Footballers are well remunerated while playing, but it is a transitory career and the uncertainty of their continued livelihood is chanced at every bounce. The span of careers was one of the challenges glossed over on _Living with Footballers_. In discussing the milestone of 250 games, the physicality of the game was acknowledged as contributing to short careers. This is an example where two negative aspects of professional life – public interest and job insecurity, combine to intensify the stress. Further, even though the panel of _Footballers Lives_ was participating in a television programme, the issue of “media pressure” was raised. In _Media Sports Stars: Masculinities and Moralities_ Garry Whannel states:

The tabloidisation of the press has fostered an erosion of a clear distinction between public and private domains, leaving celebrities more vulnerable to the exposure of their ‘private’ lives.91

In a momentary lapse the panel members lamented the uneven distribution of attention attracted by the coaches and a few high profile footballers out the League’s pool of hundreds of players. This is the price of becoming a celebrity and being married to one.

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90 Interview 28 April 2003.
An extreme example of objectification and commodification of the girlfriends of players from two football codes is seen in the April 2003 issue of the magazine for males, FHM. Consistent with Whannel’s description of the “New men’s magazines” and the “laddish discourse of ‘beer, birds and football,’” the Australian version of FHM succeeded in “uniting ‘sport’ and ‘men behaving badly.’” The cover of the April 2003 FHM states “Rugby League vs Aussie Rules – Stuff the players! Behold their bikini-clad girlfriends”, the index says “Footy Babes” and the title for the article on page 103 is “Cheer Leaders”.

The scantily-covered girlfriends answer four or five questions about their playing partner. Again these questions are voyeuristic: “Sex before the game, “How do you pamper him

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92 Whannel, 36.
93 Ben Smithhurst, “Cheer leaders”, FHM, April 2003, 102-114.
after a loss” or “Do back injuries put the kibosh on rumpy?” However, one question posed is “What’s the worst thing about dating a footballer?” The response was the “groupies” who follow the players. This reveals a common anxiety for partners of professional athletes. It also establishes a site of competition and hostility between women, rather than unity. Groupies are, according to Shelley Webb, one of the “worst hazards” for players and their wives. It was an issue raised in Football’s Women where Sheedy and Brown state that “It is not uncommon for relationships – and marriages to break down where groupie attention has compounded underlying issues in the relationship.”95 Similarly in North America, Ortiz states that groupies and infidelity contribute to the stress wives have to contend with, being an “underlying tension in many of these marriages.”96 In his study “When Sport Heroes Stumble: Stress and Coping Responses to Extramarital Relationships Among Wives of Professional Athletes”, Ortiz examined the institutionalized adultery occurring in professional sports and its impact upon the wives who develop response strategies varying from the use of humour, new conditions to the relationship, denial and divorce. FHM’s feature on the scantily covered “Footy Babes” uncovered another yet commonly experienced challenge - infidelity.

Scandal, especially where it involves infidelity, is grist for the mill for the media. Wayne Carey’s football career was illustrious but in 2003 his private life overcame his public performance, amplifying the notion arising out of Turner, Bonner and Marshall’s study of celebrity in Australia, that “At the core of all celebrity stories, irrespective of gender, are two lines: the performance and the life.” When the ‘Carey-Stephens Affair’ went into the

95 Sheedy and Brown, 112.
public domain the media were frenetic in their coverage. Carey’s life was catapulted from the back page to the front page. From sports journalists to columnists, editors and the public everyone made pronouncements on the matter. Football’s lifestyle challenges met head on with its concomitant celebrity status, turning a private matter into a public concern. As discussed by Turner it was an example of celebrity dissolving the boundary between public and private lives.97 In particular, the Careys had cemented their celebrity status fourteen months earlier with the media coverage of their wedding, only to have those images presented again in the myriad stories on the affair, in a manner over which they had no control. Similarly, happy photographs of the Stephens with their new baby resurfaced in the media. While the images and stories were circulating, discussion did not focus upon the issues confronting the individuals involved. If infidelity is as widely occurring in the A.F.L. as it suggested by the threat of “groupies” and there is a culture of infidelity similar to the North American and United Kingdom sports leagues, then Carey’s impropriety concerned proprietary limited, his greatest misdemeanour was that he flouted that value of Australian masculinity, mateship. At the same time, Kellie was party to one of the greatest stresses for footballer’s wives. Their celebrity ensured that this would be a very public drama.

97 Turner, et al, 12.
This section captures hypercommercialisation and sport; controversy and sport; gender and sport, sport and sexuality. It demonstrates that questions of gender, masculinity and femininity, let alone feminism and men’s studies cannot be demarcated from other areas of sport studies. Although Sheedy and Brown focused upon the football wife or partner there are many women whose partners are employed by a football club in other capacities. These women also share the joys, and burdens, of being a “football widow.” Advice was offered from Naomi on being a footballer’s wife:

First of all make sure you love him. Build a support group of friends who are not involved with the footy so when you need to you can get away. Make your own life at the same time and ensure you have some goals of your own such as career aims and a sport you enjoy. Be tough, it’s not always hard and the rewards are many. Be involved with your husband’s career, this helps build the relationship.

I believe that the whole experience of being an A.F.L. Player’s wife cannot be judged until you have been one. One of my closest friends has always said to me she would not trade places with me for anything and it is a life she would not want due to the many scrutinizes. We are acknowledged by club support staff on occasion and even though it is a small effort, it makes it feel all worthwhile with a simple thanks.  

Naomi

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98 Collage of the many newspaper and magazine articles. Compiled by author.
99 Interview 25 May 2003.
Many of the trials of being married to the job are not restricted to just the wives of players or coaches. Staff in football department have careers which also affect their families. These women also should be saluted for their sacrifice and contribution to football.

The contribution to the maintenance of Australian Rules Football that mothers, wives, girlfriends make is highly tangible. It is not an area easily quantified in economic terms. Rather it is a qualitative endeavour. Their supporting roles are many and varied from the hands on grass roots support at junior leagues, supporting sons at elite levels, assuming the majority of responsibility for the family and household to free the player or coach to concentrate on the game or providing a sense of glamour continue the cycle of producing footballers often sacrificing their own sense of self or career.
Chapter Six

IN THE ROOMS: WOMEN IN EXECUTIVE, PROFESSIONAL AND ANCILLIARY POSITIONS

It was anything but glamorous—it was bloody hard work! However, the office was filled with lots of young, pretty women who seemed to have a goal in life of dating an A.F.L. player!

I did once go to a meeting at the M.C.G. - it was for all the A.F.L. clubs, and it was quite amazing that, out of a room full of what seemed like hundreds of men, there were only 5 women! Just as well really, as there was only 1 woman’s toilet!!

Gabriel

In the last decade, there have been an increasing number of women employed and involved in the Australian Rules Football industry in professional, executive and ancillary capacities. This widening involvement has occurred for a number of reasons. Firstly, women have increased their participation in the workforce since the 1970s. Secondly, diversified higher education opportunities have led to an increased number of women entering into traditional male professions. The Equal Opportunity Act and Affirmative Action Policies also led to women making inroads into traditionally male held occupations. Elsewhere in the thesis I have cited prominent women in the Australian Rules Football industry. In this chapter I again cite them to explore their positions and success in obtaining positions in the football industry. Additionally I discuss other women’s experiences who were employed or are involved with the Australian Rules Football industry in management and ancilliary positions.

1 Interview by email 30 March 2004.
The previous two chapters have traced the unpaid labour of women through volunteer activities of fans, and mothers and wives. This chapter includes a discussion on women who are employed in the Australian Rules Football industry. The scope of the Australian Rules Football industry is broad. The industry extends from the lower leagues through to the pinnacle and corporate entity of the Australian Football League. There are also the associated businesses television broadcasters, radio broadcasters, newspapers, magazines, and telecommunication companies. There are a diverse range of occupations or professions involved with the leagues and football clubs. A sample includes doctors, physiotherapists, dieticians, educators, clerical, umpires, journalists, commentators, fitness coaches and statisticians. Many of these women are part-time employees. Those women in part time employment may work reduced hours because they have other full time positions and supplement their income and at the same time enjoy the involvement with football with payment for service. Part time work is more attractive because it can fit in with family care responsibilities. This chapter concentrates on three occupations: journalism, management and umpiring. Material used for discussing women sports journalists has been sourced from the print media itself because the data is accessible. It also avoids the possibility of identifying informants. Two case studies of managers who worked for A.F.L. clubs are also investigated. Their areas of responsibility were membership manager and merchandising manager. The third case study explores the experience of a young woman who umpires at a State league level and aspires to reach A.F.L. level. If appointed to umpire at A.F.L. level she would not be the first woman umpire. It is her candid testimony that reveals a number of twists and ambiguities in sexist attitudes. This chapter discusses the closed and fragmented culture of Australian Rules Football that is rarely revealed. A further rationale for this chapter is to confirm

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2 In 1998 Katrina Pressley became the first woman goal umpire in the A.F.L.
that women have made inroads into the journalism profession and management. Yet umpiring rarely attracts former players, particularly players from the elite levels.

Management and journalism are two occupations where many former players have a career trajectory based on their playing days. A study of the executive of the A.F.L. and its commission demonstrates that the Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Demetriou, played with North Melbourne (the Kangaroos) and Hawthorn in the V.F.L. subsequent A.F.L. competition and the Chairman of the A.F.L. Commission, Ron Evans, was a former player in the V.F.L. Of the eight male members of the A.F.L. Commission, only one member was not a former player, Bill Kelty. Dennis Cometti “a champion among commentators” was a former W.A.F.L. and V.F.L. player and W.A.F.L. coach. Robert Walls, commentator and sports writer, was also a former V.F.L. player and A.F.L. coach. The appointment of Sam Mostyn as the first A.F.L. woman commissioner in 2005 is unusual despite the earlier appointment of Elaine Canty to the A.F.L. Tribunal.

In 1996, it seemed that the A.F.L. had made some gender progress when they appointed their first female member, Elaine Canty to the A.F.L. Tribunal. Canty, an academic and lawyer, remained on the tribunal until 2005 when the Match Review Panel replaced the Tribunal. In *Football’s Women* Sheedy and Brown devote a chapter “a woman in the tribunal” to Canty and her appointment. Introducing the chapter Sheedy states:

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I welcomed the news of Elaine Canty’s appointment to the A.F.L. Tribunal. I don’t accept the argument that representatives who haven’t played football lack the credentials to stand in judgement on players. We don’t require our legal judges to have a criminal background! That’s a ludicrous example, but it illustrates the absurd nature of the reasoning behind such arguments.

At the time there was a great deal of criticism over her appointment, including former player and coach, Ron Barassi. In an interview three years later with sports writer for The Age, Linda Pearce Canty said of the controversy:

Since then, very little’s been made of the fact that I sit on the Tribunal. I like to think that while you’re doing a satisfactory job no one hears about you.

I think it’s good having a lay perspective sometimes. It can act as an unconscious prejudice against a player if the person in judgement has actually had a similar experience, because it’s only natural that you would visit on the player your own reactions in a similar set of circumstances and that may not be correct.

It is a concern that Canty said she had a “lay perspective.” This implies that a perspective outside of the direct playing of the game is not ‘professional’ or valuable. At the time, Pearce alluded that Canty may have been a potential candidate for the first female commissioner on the A.F.L. replacing another commissioner. On the appointment of a female commissioner, Canty stated in the interview:

I think it’s time to consider the broader picture and the future of football. It’s an industry, whether we like to think so or not, and it has to be a reflection of women’s place in the general community.

The A.F.L. is a very forward-thinking organisation and I don’t mean that to sound like a suck job. But they are a very successful sporting corporation and I think they’ve made a cold-blooded commercial decision that it is in their interests to involve women in the administrative side of football.

The “forward-thinking organisation” took another six years before it appointed the first female commissioner Sam Mostyn. Significantly, it was an additional, not replacement, appointment. In the meantime, the Tribunal was restructured and replaced by the Match Review Panel and a new Tribunal. The process of decision making to exclude women

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7 Linda Pearce “A Woman’s View: Ready for criticism” In AFL Record, Round 12, June 18-20, 1999, 9.
8 Ibid.
9 The AFL Record is an official publication of the A.F.L. Despite Canty’s claim that she was not a “suck job” it is unlikely that she would have made any criticism of the A.F.L. at the time, especially in the Record.
from senior positions within the industry is pivotal to this argument. It is not acceptable that women support the game at so many levels, sustaining the sport from the grassroots, without a substantial representation in its governance and administration. Yet males continue to dominate the game at all levels. It is a male domination that frames and shapes the state leagues and layers of competition. Women need to have men’s patronage to permeate into all levels of executive, management and occupation.

It is possible to compile a list of former players and their positions within the A.F.L. and its clubs. The roll extends ad infinitum/nauseum. Yet the numbers of women on club boards and in management positions are few. Apart from Mostyn and Canty, the other senior woman with the A.F.L. is Jill Lindsay, the Grounds Operations Manager. In Victoria there are women on the Boards of Clubs including Beverley Knight the first female Board Member of an A.F.L. club, with Essendon Football Club,10 Beverley O’Connor, Vice-President of Melbourne Football Club, Lauraine Diggins, Carlton Football Club and Sally Capp, Collingwood Football Club. There are A.F.L. clubs that do not have any women on their boards. My club The West Coast Eagles is one of these. Additionally there are 60 accredited player agent/managers in the A.F.L. Only one is a woman.11 The question posed is by what standards are these appointments being made? If the essential criteria for a career in the industry is to have played the game then such standards require reassessment. If it were possible to track the careers, find position descriptions, scrutinise curriculum vitas and assess by the standards that are being applied to men and women this would reveal a profound and perhaps disturbing dissonance. However, the scope of this current research does not allow for such an exploration.

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10 Sheedy and Brown stated that 70% of Essendon Football Club’s employees are women, including the fitness coordinator, 149.
Membership Manager

The subject of the first case study in this chapter is Kathleen who was employed by an A.F.L. club as the Membership Manager. Kathleen spoke about the male-dominated workforce in a football club:

Well what happens in A.F.L. clubs is that men take ... the whole of the football department is all male, you are lucky to have a female physio [therapist] so all the senior managers are male, every C.E.O., every finance manager, some marketing managers are female the only category is that they will have a female membership director or whatever. Further down the pecking order you go the more women there are. All the doing jobs are all girls. 12

When asked whether she considered there were more roles for women at a senior level she replied:

No! Football is a very male oriented world. Very. The only positions, well may be you could get a finance director as a female. But football is almost the last bastion of a male dominated world and cricket.13

Kathleen agreed that it is the culture of the industry and not the actual capabilities that inhibits that progression. She pointed out that “up until the last two years every C.E.O. has been a former legend.”14 It was her view that football player credentials were not necessarily a suitable qualification for an effective C.E.O. I questioned Kathleen about the future and whether there were prospects of a career path in the industry for women like herself:

No it would take a brave person. The only place I could go would be C.E.O. and people used to say to me “you run the football club.” I am strong to a point, I have opinions but I am not bold enough to take that on.15

Business expertise, leadership and communication skills apparently are not the only pre-requisites. In addition a woman needs courage to follow through on such an audacious

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid
15 Ibid.
appointment. On the prospect of her or another woman being offered a C.E.O. position, Kathleen stated:

I don’t think that would arise. That’s where if you were a woman you would have to have a really good understanding of football as well business, people would be testing you all the time. It would be like “how dare you as a woman” be involved with it. I would rather be on the Board. That’s an issue. There are hardly any women on A.F.L. boards. Every club should have at least one female board member. I think that we are years away from having a female C.E.O.16

Kathleen pointed out that the appointment of Steve Harris, the former editor-in-chief of The Age, in 2004 as Chief Executive Officer of the Melbourne Football Club had come as a surprise to many in the industry:

That is shocking the football world a bit. Often it is football manager and then C.E.O. Some of the football managers are going “Shit how am I going to be C.E.O. if they are getting them outside that’s not right”. So the wheel is turning a bit. They need more C.E.O.’s from outside of football and then they will start to think may be a woman can do it. If a newspaper person can do it, may be a woman can do it.17

The appointment of Harris, an executive from a different business environment, is the beginning of a cultural shift. It demonstrates that it is not knowledge of the game and its specificities that needs to be tested by others who have played but rather management skills, business acumen and leadership qualities. Kathleen regarded administration, communication and organisation as key skills for a C.E.O. or management positions, stating that many women possessed those skills:

Yes. I would like to see more women in management. There is no doubt that women are better organisers and football is a lot about being well organised. My department had to organise 30,000 seats and you had to be very well organised to do all the jobs that came, functions. You had to be extremely well organised. Women are doing the doing work and they are well organised.18

In the interview my informant’s experience of working in the industry was explored to establish whether any gender bias existed. In particular I wanted to establish whether she was treated any differently to her male peers.

16 Ibid.
No not if you earn their respect I think. In my case I wasn’t because I am a very hard worker. I earnt the respect of the football department because I was always working late. Because I don’t have a family I could commit to that and do a job. The football coach thought that I was the hardest working person in the building.19

Two points from this extract require commentary. Firstly, she felt the need to work extended hours to gain respect. Secondly, she justified this effort to her position because she did not have a family, which infers a partner and children. In Australia the choice women face between career and children has been frequently debated by feminists. According to Summers’ “Kids or job’s – what would it be? The trade-off is a brutal one. And one that is unfairly expected only of women. It is not something asked of fathers.”20

Kathleen had reversed the gender roles when she unknowingly mobilized a masculine narrative, stating that she had no children – therefore – she could work late. Later in the interview she stated “our lives revolved around the football department.”21 Her experience of the workplace was canvassed and I asked whether she had encountered any sexist attitudes there:

Not personally because like I said I gained respect but I did have to be careful and because I was the only female manager I was the police a bit. Like I had clothing issues with some of them. I didn’t like the bare midriffs which were starting to come in just as I was leaving. And I won that battle because the men would let the girls wear nothing. They like busty women and all the young girls want to go down and work there. And some would work quite well. I would say to them that they would have to dress appropriate because 75% of the people you would see during the course of the day would be male. The some of the guys didn’t have very high regard for women and they would laugh at the girls dressed like that. I would say to the girls that you have to recognise that men need to treat women with more respect. I made sure I employed girls who had standards who I thought were appropriate and I never had any trouble with any of them. But you had to be careful. It wasn’t necessarily anyone’s fault some girls would want a job at a football club to get close to the footballers. I didn’t want them down there as a dating service. I wasn’t going to help them get a husband.22

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
21 Interview 24 August 2004.
This statement reveals that Kathleen felt it was her job to police the young women’s clothing in a male-centred environment. She was teaching her female subordinates how to dress ‘appropriately’ in a workplace where the men predominated, many of whom are often portrayed in hyper-masculine frame. In the football club working environment the boundaries of work and leisure easily blur. By policing the young women’s clothing she was marking it as a workplace and not a leisure space and ‘protecting’ them from potential sexual dalliances with footballers.\textsuperscript{23} She was also imposing her definitions of work – and particularly women at work – on other staff.

**Merchandising Manager**

To create a winning club requires sound leadership and business acumen on and off the field. Working in the corporate world presents challenges enough for professional women let alone working in a masculine-centric industry and institution. This was recognised by Kathleen:

> The football department dominated the meetings to a point. We were a business. That’s the thing. Are you a sport and not a very good business or a good business and not a good sport. This is where some C.E.O.’s don’t get it right. I was an important part of making that money therefore they needed me to be doing the right thing. The key issues in meetings were always what was happening in the football department.\textsuperscript{24}

Kathleen’s experience was mostly a positive one. However another informant, Gabriel, had a contrasting account. Gabriel was the merchandising manager for an A.F.L. club. It was another management position responsible for a specific business function that was not related to the core business of winning the premiership. Gabriel’s testimony is oppositional to Kathleen because she was treated differently to her male colleagues:

> As far as being treated differently from my male peers in the club, I guess all I would say is that, as a woman, there were certain expectations of me at the club in terms of

\textsuperscript{23} I would like to thank Angela Thomas-Jones, PhD candidate, Murdoch University, for her expertise on dress in the workplace. (Email 29 November 2005).

\textsuperscript{24} Interview 24 August 2004.
my “looking pretty” and “talking nicely” to sponsors and their wives and families. At
first there was a general feeling of novelty about me being a woman, a manager, and
also not having any prior interest in the A.F.L.25

Gabriel had also encountered sexist language and gender bias when she was expected to
undertake tasks associated with her gender rather than her management position. Again
Gabriel’s experience was contrary to Kathleen’s:

Yes—not so much sexist language that I can think of, but certainly attitudes. As
already mentioned, I was expected to look pretty and talk nicely to sponsor’s wives at
official functions. I was also told on one occasion to prepare a report for the Board of
Directors, but “not to worry my pretty little head about it” as no-one would read it
anyway. I’m not sure if this was because I was a woman, or because they thought the
Board was not interested.

On one occasion at an evening sundowner I was asked by top management to go and
talk nicely to and entertain the sponsor’s wives. Apparently they were usually
neglected at such functions as the young female employees of the Club were busy
socialising with the players, and the (male) sponsors were drinking with the Club’s
management. I was informed that part of the reason I was employed (over a man) was
that I was intelligent and articulate and could be used in this way at social sponsorship
functions. This had no bearing whatsoever on my actual job at the Club.26

While experiences vary from individual to individual, club to club and at varying levels,
Kathleen felt that she had respect from her male colleagues, presumably because she
worked long hours and did not have a family. Gabriel did not receive the same
acknowledgement from her colleagues:

It was non-existent. No-one wanted to know anything about what I did, there was no
support, no assistance and no-one to guide me. I became aware of what I would
consider to be a total lack of management in the club.27

When Gabriel conducted business with people outside the club her experience was
different, revealing the internal hegemony existing in an A.F.L. club:

I actually had very few business meetings with anyone in the club. Most of my
meetings were held with outside suppliers, and most of these people were fine.
I was excluded from all the managers meetings at the club, as it was deemed (by
someone, don’t know who) that I was not really a “proper” manager.

26 Interview by email 30 March 2004.
27 Interview by email 30 March 2004.
Possibly, because of what I was doing and the knowledge I had of my particular part of the industry. In other words, the A.F.L. seems (or seemed) desperately short of people with any kind of good business knowledge—the whole place seemed to be run by old footballers!28

Gabriel and Kathleen’s testimony provides additional evidence that retired players have an immediate career trajectory within the industry. Additionally, they indicate that the patriarchal culture also tainted and decentred other women working within the industry. “Experience” not “expertise” is validated and valued. Kathleen acted as a police-protector of the young women she supervised, ensuring that the people she employed had “standards.” Kathleen exposed that many of young women aspire to work with an A.F.L. club to be associated with the glamour of the industry and to be in close proximity with the players. Becoming close to the players provides the opportunity for a potential relationship beyond work. In Gabriel’s case, part of her unhappiness associated with working with the club was not delineated upon gender lines.

Looking back, I realise that it was not only the men who made my life miserable—in fact, it was mostly the women in the club who were unsupportive. I take this to be the effect of women working in this male-dominated environment.29

Summers stated that often it is women who are “their harshest critics” because they have made other choices.30 By her own admission, Gabriel stated that she became “disillusioned” with her position, the club and the industry. Within less than 12 months of her appointment she left and took a new career direction.

Waving The White Flags – Without Surrender

A.F.L. is a very strange culture. You will see at a function they are all standing there as a group, all the girlfriends together and all the players together. They are their own community. They are together all day every day and when they are on holidays. They go out drinking together. They have no life outside of football. Erica31

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid
30 Summers, 2003, 46.
31 Interview 28 February 2005.
The experience of a young woman who is employed in an ancillary football role in a male-centric environment is investigated through Erica, a university student. At the time of the interview she had been an umpire for seven years. Erica began her umpiring duties as a boundary umpire before being appointed to goal umpire. She initially became involved with umpiring through a teacher at her high school who organised boundary umpires for the amateur league. The initial motivation was money: “It paid pretty well for a 14 or 15 year old $40 a match better than $4 an hour at McDonald’s.” After several years, Erica came to the conclusion that she did not have the athletic ability to continue as a boundary umpire and moved to goal umpiring. Then she progressed from the amateur league to the W.A.F.L. I asked Erica whether it was difficult to move up the W.A.F.L. and how she was received as being a woman umpire:

At the time no. I met a few fellas who had umpired at W.A.F.L./A.F.L. level and they rated me fairly highly. So it was a fairly smooth transition.

There are always some people, particularly on the field, that think it is a man’s domain. There is always going to be a handful of people that say “she can’t handle it because she’s a woman” or “that wouldn’t happen [if she were male]” but generally speaking the crowd is usually pretty positive, it is only if something goes wrong.

In Western Australia, the first woman to become an umpire was Alison Moore who was appointed in 1986. At the time of my interview with Erica, there was one other woman umpiring in the W.A.F.L. However Erica stated that during her time as an umpire as many as five women at one time had umpired in the amateur leagues. My informant felt that three of the other women had left because they gained full time jobs or had families (in itself a full time job with no pay). Asked whether my informant aspired to go to umpire at A.F.L. matches, she stated:

Footnotes:
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Interview 27 July 2005.
If the opportunity arose I would certainly embrace it. I am apparently thereabouts. Umpiring is never going to pay the bills though. I was asked last year if I was going to be drafted. I said it doesn’t work that way. I actually have a job.35

Erica told me that umpires have training twice a week and a training camp at the start of the season. There are stringent fitness requirements at league level with a fitness programme and a long distance training programme being involved in the regime. In respect to the physicality of goal umpiring, she stated that although she was the shortest goal umpire, there was an advantage “The advantage is that I am a lot lower to the ground so I have more balance and can take off quickly.”36

Erica stated she is no longer regarded as an oddity after umpiring for several years, “I’ve been around for that long everyone is just used to me.” However, there was much interest from the media when she had her first league game. Journalists from television, radio and the print media came to the match. Erica indicated that she was not comfortable with this attention:

I had the reporters asking would you like to be a role model? I’m not a role model. I am just doing a job and getting a game. That was pretty much the attitude of everyone at the game. It was the League that blew it out of proportion. It was just another game really.37

While it is a positive move that the League acknowledged Erica umpiring her first match, it does little to normalise women in football. Not every man has the attention that Erica received. Nor was Erica the first woman umpire in Western Australia. However, the reception that the players and spectators gave Erica was also encouraging:

The players and crowd were great. They shook my hand and I got cheered back into the rooms at the end of the game. The winning captain shook my hand, wished

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
me luck and said “we will try and keep the ball straight.” One of the coaches came over at the end of the match and shook my hand. I also was given the match ball.38

Connected to the experience of Gabriel and the negative attitudes she got from her female colleagues, Erica was treated with suspicion and aggression from the other umpires wives who perceived Erica’s activity as not an interest or job with football but as if she was a potential sexual competitor. When a woman pushes the boundaries of traditional gender roles in the institution some women feel threatened:

We have two functions a year and all the women ignore me. They are convinced that I am sleeping with their husbands and boyfriends. Their ages are from 20 to 50 and all the women are convinced that I am sleeping with them. One woman will not allow her husband to speak on the telephone and will not allow him to be in a car with me because she thinks I will jump him.

One of the big problems is that they can’t understand why a woman would want to be involved with football. I was introduced to one coach’s girlfriend as the goal umpire and she said “are you serious, why on earth would you want to do it?” I’ve said I like it. She said “Are you insane? Don’t you have a life?” Generally speaking that is the response I get from most wives and girlfriends. I’ve been told to “get a life and stop hanging around her husband.”39

Erica stated that she poses no threat to these women. She regards herself as independent and has ambitions within and beyond football. She is a tertiary student, she has two part-time jobs (one being the goal umpiring), she takes yoga and ballet classes (to help with her fitness and agility for the umpiring) and she has an interest in the fine arts. Notwithstanding the detrimental attitudes toward her by other women, Erica continues to umpire:

Yes, I love it. As hard as it is and the pain that it causes I still love it. I have my moments but that is with all jobs. If you are doing a good job no one notices, there are no accolades.40

During the interview I took the opportunity to ask Erica whether she had ever played Australian Rules Football:

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38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
I played one game of girl’s football in high school but I had the crap beaten out of me. I played with the boys at lunchtime and that sort of thing. I don’t play women’s football now because of the stigma attached to it and the low standard of the game. There are some very frightening women playing it.\textsuperscript{41}

The next chapter discusses women playing Australian Rules Football. The standard of the game cannot be compared to A.F.L. or even W.A.F.L. levels, where the players are professional athletes and have the advantages of institutional support, sponsorship and advertising. Women who play football, play once a week and train once a week. It is not a fair comparison. The perception that ‘some very frightening women’ play football infers the application of a particular ideology towards the ‘correct’ mode of femininity, in terms of bodily contact, aggression and perhaps sexuality. However, Erica’s statement – as an umpire – that “frightening” women play football is a concern. Once more, a single woman in a sporting institution does not – and can not - naturalize the function of femininity in football.

Erica patrols the boundary of women’s involvement with Australian Rules Football. I broached the question of whether a woman would ever play at A.F.L. level:

No. At the end of the day it comes down to shape and size. It’s never going to happen. It’s not going to happen and I don’t think that it would be a good thing for the game.\textsuperscript{42}

Australian Rules Football is indeed a disempowering institution when women themselves prescribe roles and regulations for their own gender. The prescription of roles and regulations for women in football and society has been traced throughout this thesis from fandom, mothers, wives, players, and workers, including scholars.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
**Trail Blazers**

Women football journalists and commentators are one section of the Australian Rules Football industry where women are visible and have a significant presence. Kevin Sheedy and Carolyn Brown state that Corrie Perkin was the first female sports journalist to cover football.\(^{43}\) According to them, Perkin was encouraged by her colleagues and in particular the sports editor, Neil Mitchell, who wrote to the clubs advising them of her appointment and seeking their full support. However, there was resistance to her presence and she was refused entry to the player rooms. Perkins began covering football in the early 1980s. In the last twenty years the number of women sports journalists has increased significantly, including those covering football.

Caroline Wilson is the chief football writer for *The Age* newspaper in 2005. Wilson has received several awards for her journalism from the Australian Football Media Association, including *Most outstanding reporter* and *Most outstanding feature writer* in 2003. The judges for these awards stated:

*Most outstanding reporter*

Caroline Wilson had two big news breaks on one of the stories of the year – the Carlton salary cap scandal. On September 17 last year, she reported that the AFL was investigating the breaches. And later she foreshadowed the extent of the draft pick punishment before the AFL Commission announced the penalties. Her supporting stories were the cancer scare of Essendon’s Adam Ramanauskas and the gambling habits of Melbourne FC players. A true news breaker.

*Most outstanding feature writer*

For outstanding features on the personal anguish of three players damaged by life and/or football: Wayne Johnston, Anthony Stevens, and the late “Nobby” Clarke. The stories were variously wrenching, tragic and melancholic, but Caroline brought out positive messages and lessons for all footballers and their clubs. They reminded

\(^{43}\) Sheedy and Brown, 258.
us that above all, footballers are human beings. This year, it seemed Carole was out embedded reporter in the private lives of footballers.\textsuperscript{44}

In addition to working in the print media Wilson has also had a television position. In 2003 she was a member of Channel Seven’s \textit{Talking Footy} programme. Sheedy and Brown called Wilson “a trail blazer.”\textsuperscript{45} Since Wilson and Perkins entering the football field other women have followed in their footsteps, including Samantha Lane, Tiffany Cherry and Christie Malthouse. Increasingly, young women are taking up careers in sports journalism. Since the refusal of Perkin being admitted to the players rooms in the early 1980s the culture has changed with women sports journalists being one section of the football community and industry where women are normalized.

It is my belief that the normalization of women football journalists can be attributed to Corrie Perkins, Caroline Wilson and also Dixie Marshall who is from Western Australia, who was the first woman to report on football for television sports news during her employment in Melbourne in the 1990s. These women were trailblazers. They had a high visibility and profile due to their positions in the media. Importantly Perkins had the support of her sports editor and colleagues. A further reason is that journalism is now a profession that increasingly requires university qualifications, not only cadetships. Increased access to university courses by women has lead to greater participation in the profession. The last attribute leading to normalization is that the awards that Wilson has received have been awarded by her peers on merit. It is possible to normalize women’s roles in football as journalism has demonstrated.

\textsuperscript{44} “The Age scoops football writing awards.” \textit{The Age Corporate Information}. 1 July 2004.

\textsuperscript{45} Sheedy and Brown, 261.
In *Managing Gender: Affirming action and organizational power in Australian, Canadian and New Zealand sport*, Jim McKay investigated affirmative action plans in Australia, Canada and New Zealand. His investigation covered Federal and State agencies, departments and institute and national sports organizations. The national sports organizations did not include the Australian Football League, although it did include Rugby Football Union and the Australian Touch Organisation. It would have been illuminating if his study had included the A.F.L. In his conclusion, he stated that the opportunity existed for further research to be conducted. I concur with him. A study tracing the careers of men and women in the Australian Rules Football industry would be instructive and would extend this chapter on working women which continues the task of the thesis to map gender relationships and the position of women within the context of Australian Rules Football. A further study, perhaps at postdoctoral level, could provide further evidence and a theoretical analysis, adding to the limited literature on women in professions associated with Australian Rules Football.

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47 McKay was based in Queensland and therefore would have followed Rugby rather than Australian Rules Football.
“It’s not soccer - love!”¹ a young female Titans supporter yelled out to the opposition who kicked the oval ball along the ground on Sunday afternoon 17 April, 2005. The Titans were playing Southern Thunder in the Western Australian Women’s Football League at EFTel Oval. This was no ‘powder puff derby’, but a rematch of the previous season’s grand final. With the exception of ‘no time-on’ for each quarter and 25m penalties instead of 50m, women play under the same rules as men.² In front of a crowd of approximately 250 people, the Titans and Southern Thunder displayed all the attributes of Australian Rules Football. It was a tough game with physical clashes, minor skirmishes and one report for rough play. While I went to the game to conduct research, many mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, friends and boyfriends were present to support these women playing in what is too often considered a “man’s game.” As I watched the match, I pondered the difference between this game and the match I had witnessed between the West Coast Eagles and the Western Bulldogs on the previous afternoon. For all the high level skills of A.F.L. players, the razzmatazz and the roar of nearly forty thousand people, I enjoyed the atmosphere of the women’s league and appreciated their skills and bravery more than those of professional footballers. I took heart that these

¹ Fieldnotes of participant observation of Western Australian Women’s Football League Match Titans versus Southern Thunder held on Sunday 17 April, 2005, unknown teenage girl.
² Women’s Football Australia, Match Rules:
1. Laws of the Game
   1. The National Australian Women’s Football Carnival shall adopt the laws of the Australian Football League which shall be read in conjunction with these Match Rules.
   2. If a match rule is not covered in these Match Rules the Australian Football League Laws shall be adopted. Accessed: http://www.geocities.com/womensfootball/national_rules.html 18/04/2005
women and their families and friends were not stuck in a time warp of social constraints connected to social roles or myths of biology. The women of the Titans, Southern Thunder and their compatriots enjoy playing Australian Rules Football for fitness, fun, sociality for the intense competitiveness. This was the premise on which Australian Rules Football and other codes around the globe were founded. The W.A. Women’s Football League provides not only a view of the past, but a glimpse of the future.

Researching Australian Rules Football, a “hegemonic project” according to Bob Connell, made me unsure of what I would witness that afternoon. Would it be game of “kick and giggle” accompanied by heckling from chauvinist males on the sidelines? The game was quite the reverse. This was a vibrant and healthy game, one that has an over-arching domination by masculinity - either out of control, or in too much control - and fearful of the threat of the “world game” Association Football. Poignantly, the support through fandom, familial support, volunteer work women give to the game is not reciprocated by institutional reification of women’s Australian Rules Football by the men who administer the professional league and who are “the keepers of the code.” As a result, the gulf between the profile and maintenance of men and women’s football in Australia is vast. These women are kicking the oval ball – the Sherrin or the Burley - for themselves yet they are commonly derided and ignored. In his chapter “Playing Like a Girl: Sport and sexual stereotyping” in Saturday Afternoon Fever, Brian Stoddart states:

Of all the deficiencies in the egalitarian Australian sports myth, few are more spectacular than those relating to women. Women have never been accorded equal access to sport; their activities have never been treated with the same importance as those of men; and attempts to improve that imbalance have encountered long and stubborn resistance from a male-dominated, conservative sports world.

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Historically, women’s football competitions have periodically faltered. They are on the periphery because they do not serve the men’s game and therefore have no value to the men’s game. In his support for women playing Australian Rules, Essendon Coach, Kevin Sheedy, who was taught how to play by a Catholic nun Sister Rupert, stated

Women who want to play footy come up against old expectations of women’s roles in football. Many people still think it’s okay for women to have a role in the local club – its fine for women to run the canteen, wash the jumpers, prepare the food and organise fundraising – but they shouldn’t actually play the game, because it’s a man’s game.5 

Throughout this thesis it has been demonstrated that women have a functionality that links them to Australian Rules Football in supporting roles rather than enacting their own active participation. Wedgwood’s case study of Australian women wanting to play predominantly male games raises the structural difficulties women have had in playing Australian Rules Football. Wedgwood states that it is, “easier for women [to play] with the support and approval of men or men’s organisations.”6 Men claim ownership over the game, subletting female participation in ways that serve them. A further possibility for the marginalisation of women’s football may link to men’s own perception of their masculinity. If women can play Australian Rules Football, then what is so special about men playing? Masculine identity is frequently enfolded in sport. Brian Stoddart argued that,

From late-nineteenth-century mutterings about women’s football to twentieth-century disquiet about women’s marathons, the message remains the same, based in social rather than purely physical concerns. Women adopting men’s sport implied that they would first usurp male power values and then undermine the rules of propriety so vital to the socially accepted attributes of femininity. By arguing that they can complete with men in soccer, cricket and other games, women interested in substantial change are inadvertently doing a great deal to hold that reform back – they merely confirm the worst fears of Australian [male] society at large.7

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7 Stoddart, 156.
My discussion on women playing Australian Rules Football will examine reasons for a truncated history. It also examines the state of current women’s football competitions. The discussion investigates why girls are separated from boys at the age of 12 and why women’s football has a lowly status in a sports-mad, Australian Rules Football infatuated country. The discussion also draws comparisons to the women’s Association football in England.

Australian Rules Football is the national and dominant game. Beyond Australian shores, it has a cult following in a number of countries. After the conclusion of the football season A.F.L. teams travel overseas and play exhibition matches against each other. In October 2005 the West Coast Eagles and Fremantle Dockers played an exhibition match in London. In early 2006, the 2005 Premiers Sydney Swans will play the Kangaroos in Los Angeles. Global football is a marginal game within Australia yet it has the capacity to threaten the dominance of the A.F.L. In Australia, the international game of football, Association Football, was “soccer” and once called “wogball.” Johnny Warren, former Socceroos captain, titled his biography *Sheila’s, Wogs and Poofters*:

[This] is the story of my time in soccer in this country. It is a story of discrimination against the game and the individuals in it. I hope the title doesn’t offend anyone – it’s not meant to. And if it does in twenty-first century Australia then you can imagine what it was like fifty-odd years ago. ‘Sheilas’, ‘wogs’ and ‘poofters’ were considered the second-class citizens of the day and if you played soccer you were considered one of them.9

Warren’s rationale for the title of his biography reveals how the two other codes of football, Australian Rules and Rugby, have the capacity to marginalise individuals who play Association Football. Stoddart succinctly provides an insight “Soccer has for long

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8 In this discussion reference to “women” playing football will include young adolescents who are often referred to as girls or school girls.
been considered “sissy” (that is, “poofter”) because it places little emphasis on body contact.” 10  Association Football still reveals tough physical clashes. Players crash into one another or into the ground, although it is not as rough as Australian Rules because of the threat of both a dive and the penalty kick. Roughness is different to toughness and both codes can be tough games.

Australian Rules Football is a misnomer. It is an amalgam of rugby (both codes), football - Association Football or soccer, volleyball and the influence of marn-grook. It is more than feet, heart and mind. It is a full body of hips, shoulders, legs, arms, hands, at times heads clashing or crashing and anything in between. A ball can be scooped up in a player’s hand, who then bounces it and may run for up to 15 metres. At the same time a player is under attack from the opposition and may be dragged to the ground. There is no off-side. The combination of Australian Rules Football’s physicality and high scoring contrasts with the mental concentration and podiatric dexterity of Association Football. Tara Brabazon states:

It is far easier to move and manipulate a ball with the hands, as witnessed through rugby union, rugby league and Australian Rules Football. With so few goals, the sensations of winning and losing are more ecstatic and tantalizing than the other codes of football which feature greater scoring opportunities. 11

Women have mastered both games, yet in England the approach to their women’s football is proactive and forward looking. In Australia, women’s football is trivialized, de-centre and a practice of profound ridicule. According to ‘Colin’ an informant close to the institution’s management, “The A.F.L.’s view of women’s role is to pay to get in the

10 Stoddart, 156.
gate” and think “women’s footy is a joke.”¹² This would explain why the A.F.L. does not provide substantial financial and structure support to women’s football.

This interpretation was confirmed by visiting the Official Website of the Australian Football League¹³ on 20 April 2005. There were no links, news or indeed any mention of women’s Australian Rules competitions. Contrast this with The F.A.Com The Home of English Football, where the women’s competition has had a prominence for several years directly through a link on the masthead. On the same day the A.F.L. website was visited, the F.A. site featured the story “Barwick’s rallying call” and had a section devoted to Women in “More News from Across The F.A.com” on its homepage.¹⁴ At least digitally, English masculinity represents and acknowledges women’s competitions alongside men’s. Indeed the Football Federation Australia, formerly Australian Soccer Association, has direct links to Women’s Football on their website.¹⁵ In the U.K., women and football receive serious attention. In June 2005, the University of Central Lancashire and International Football Institute hosted the four day Women, Football and Europe conference that coincided with the U.E.F.A. Women’s Euro Cup. The conference had two streams - academic and practical - with scholars and administrators from the F.A. and U.E.F.A. participating. There were celebrations of women in football from the Dick, Kerr Ladies and Sue Lopez, Head of Women’s Football, Southampton Football Club and an eight times Women’s F.A. Cup winner winner. In Australia, a hollow celebration coinciding with Mother’s Day is held indicating the level of interest from academics and administrators. Australian Rules Football has created a position of centrality and

¹² Telephone interview 24 August 2004.
authority for Australian masculinity through gender and ethnicity. Stoddart also stated that, “these people [migrants] went to school when soccer was often called “wogball” and thereby marked as non-Australian” prior to Australia’s adoption of multi-culturalism in the 1970s.\(^\text{16}\) By labelling Association Football or soccer “wogball,” attaching the meaning and significance to central and eastern European migrants, it also disconnected the yoke of its English colonial masters, also a significant migrant community after the Second World War. The perception of differences in masculinities between the codes are best explained by Brabazon in “What’s the Story Morning Glory?” where she discusses the case of the then newly formed Perth Glory in an era of de-ethnicizing Association Football in Australia:

Not all of Perth has been captured by the passion and fashion of football fandom. In Western Australia, the ‘problems’ with Glory manifests itself as a division between Association Football and Australian Rules, yet differences of class and disparate renderings of masculinity are also factored into the mix.\(^\text{17}\)

She aligns the differences between the codes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian Rules</th>
<th>Association Football</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Coast Eagles</td>
<td>Perth Glory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exclusive</td>
<td>inclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>family(^\text{18})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The words “exclusive” and “masculine” equate to a dominant form of masculinity in Australia as demonstrated clearly by the A.F.L.’s website.

A further confirmation of the maintenance of patriarchy through Australian Rules Football is the high volume of histories and biographies that exist on male players, clubs and competitions where the manifestation of power relations can be established. These

\(^{16}\) Stoddart, 178
publications laud male achievements, whether as a player or an administrator and can also preserve the masculine archetype. Where women are mentioned, they are marginalised and trivialised despite their solid support of men’s competitions. This status is demonstrated by the centenary publications of the A.F.L. *100 years of Australian Football: 1897-1996* and the WA.F.L.’s *Behind the Play: A History of Football in Western Australia* where few women, let alone those who play Australian Rules, are included in these celebratory male-centric histories-biopics.\(^\text{19}\)

Women have a history of playing Australian Rules Football since the late 1900s, yet the history is scant and fragmented and has usually incorporated into a related topic. In *Half the Race* Marion Stell states, “Women did not compete with men in football, but they did form their own Australian Rules teams in both Melbourne and Perth from the 1890s.”\(^\text{20}\) In Western Australia, women’s football matches took place during the period 1914-1918 between women employees of the department stores of Foy and Gibson and Boans. While Sandercock and Turner do not discuss women playing football they include an illustration from *Table Talk* 28 July 1921 with the heading “Should Women Play Football?”\(^\text{21}\) The A.F.L.’s *One Hundred Years of Australian Football* states:

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\(^\text{18}\) Ibid, 61


July 23. The ladies football match played at the St Kilda football ground saw Fleetwoods beat Chorleys 4.2 (26) to 2.4 (16) before an enthusiastic crowd. The umpire is a man in a dress.22

Where women’s football does have a history, it is consistent that during both World Wars it was considered unpatriotic for males to play football and instead charity matches with women playing were held. Peter Burke states that matches between Foy and Gibsons and Boans in Perth were organised as a “fund raiser for men at war.”23 However he also notes that, “As soon as the end of the war was in sight, official company support for the games was withdrawn.”24 Support would not necessarily have meant financial support. It may have been a tacit approval that was withdrawn and without approval the women would have had a difficult time in organising to play. Nikki Wedgwood has revised the history of women’s Australian Rules Football competitions in “Doin’ It for Themselves! A Case Study of the Development of a Women’s Australian Rules Football Competition”25 and states “incursions into hyper-masculine sports by females have occurred mostly during historical increases in women’s freedom and power, such as industrialization at the end of the nineteenth century and immediately after both world wars.”26 A parallel situation occurred in 1917 at Preston, in the North of England, where women from munitions factories formed teams, the famous Dick, Kerr Ladies team being one.27 Hargreaves states that by 1921, around 150 women’s football clubs existed in England:

But as soon as the women’s game was consolidated and reached a peak of success, so the seeds of its downfall were being sown. Williams and Woodhouse (1991:18) suggest that one cause was a shift in social conditions: the charitable causes and the

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22 Ross and Hutchinson, 107.
24 Burke, 58.
25 Wedgwood, 396-414.
26 Ibid, 396.
social context of wartime Britain upon which the female game was built, and which
remained the raison d’être, were by 1921, beginning to fade from the collective
memory.

But it was the Football Association (F.A.) that had the power to damage the women’s
game irreversibly. Whilst it had originally provided the support needed for the game
to flourish – most importantly, in the provision of pitches – by the end of 1921 this
help was withdrawn. The F.A. claimed to be responding to complaints about the
appropriation of charity money, but supported its position with a conventionally male-
chauvinist statement that ‘the game of football is quite unsuitable for females and
should not be encouraged.’ (ibid: 17).28

During World War Two in Australia, “exhibition” matches were held as part of
fundraising for Christmas parcels. Cinesound and Movietone News filmed the two
matches of 1944. According to Australian Rules flourished post World War Two with an
Australian Rules match in Melbourne 1947 drawing a crowd of 25,000.29 Furthermore,
Stell says that women’s teams were drawn from the established football suburbs of South
Melbourne, St Kilda, Footscray and Carlton. During the period from World War One to
post World War Two, women’s football competitions were characterised as a substitute
for men’s matches and for their novelty value. Little has changed in the intervening
years. In 2004 as part of the A.F.L.’s Women’s Week (an acknowledgement of women’s
support of Australian Rules Football coinciding with Mother’s Day) a match between the
Victorian Women’s Football League’s Melbourne University versus St Albans was
played at the Melbourne Cricket Ground as a curtain raiser preceding the main event.
Similarly, in Western Australia, the W.A.W.F.L. played “a powder puff derby” prior to
the Western Australian Football League’s match.

Women’s football, regardless of code or country, continues to suffer boom and bust
periods. A recent example is the Women’s United Soccer Association that was re-

28 Jennifer Hargreaves. Sporting Females: Critical issues in the history and sociology of women’s sports.
29 Stell, 201.
launched by the Women’s Soccer Initiative in December 2004. The W.U.S.A’s website outlines its rise and fall:

The W.U.S.A. is the world's premier women's professional soccer league. In the 2001 inaugural season, the eight-team league featured the best players from the 1999 U.S. World Cup Championship Team and top-flight international players.

Their victory in 1999, helped boost women's soccer in the U.S. and around the world as well as increase the W.U.S.A.'s popularity through the 2003 F.I.F.A. World Cup, where the U.S. Women's National team finished second to Germany who took the first place victory. Over 40 U.S. and international W.U.S.A. players participated in this event.

Unfortunately, the financial backing did not continue to support the League after the W.U.S.A.'s third season and the announcement was made on September 15, 2003 that the League was suspending its operations immediately. A group of former League officers joined with the Player's Association to revive the W.U.S.A. in 2004 and beyond.30

Hegemonic masculinity prioritises funds to protect and preserve male football competitions. At the time of its collapse, U.S. sports columnist Mechelle Voepel wrote:

It’s a lot easier for corporate C.E.O.’s to be “socially conscious” and “visionary” when the economy’s good. When it’s bad, like now, they fear the balloon might be plummeting and look for ballast to toss. And it’s all too easy to throw out sponsorship of women’s sports.

The W.U.S.A. could have used more fans. But its most immediate need was sponsorship money. And that dried up.31

Altruism – or affirmative feminist/progressive politics – was apparently the motivation for support of the W.U.S.A. but it was not sufficiently a strong enough motive to continue. Voepel followed this statement with the reminder to the reader that it was “the reality of business, which exists to make money… which is an overall risky business.” In her discussion of the demise of women’s football in England in the early twenties Hargreaves stated:

Like other female sports which had grown rapidly at this time, football illustrates how in some cases women needed the support of men and men’s organisations to develop their game. The case of football also illustrates the power that men had to impede the smooth progress of women’s sports and the way in which they did so when the success of the women’s game seemed to be threatening the enactment of traditional masculinity.32

Capitalism is not only an economic system. It is in a masculine project. Masculinity is a currency fiercely protected by a patriarchy that preceded free enterprise. Sports’ marketing is the archetypal risky business. Marketing women’s sport is the confirmation of this principle.

“**You girls can really play!”**

In 2004, 133,363 children played Auskick.33 Girls and boys can play together in Auskick, the A.F.L.’s junior competition. From age 5 to 12 years Auskick caters for Australian primary school children wanting to play. Kevin Sheedy provided the lead in acknowledging women’s support of Australian Rules Football. Yet in *Football’s Women: the Forgotten Heroes* he admits that when he first heard about women playing the game he “thought it was a bit unusual” and then realized that “Sometimes we resist change for no good reason.”34 In the chapter devoted to “Playing the Game” Lisa Hardeman, coach of the Fairfield Falcons, stated:

> “My grandfather is in his eighties and he is a former footballer. When I first started playing, he said, “Girls don’t play football!” I said, “Hang on – you taught me how to kick!””

Lisa explained how her grandfather changed his attitude to women playing football after he came to watch her for the first time: “The first game he ever came to was one of our Finals matches in 1996. At half-time we were losing, and he was calling out, “Pull up

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32 Hargreaves, 1994, 143.
34 Kevin Sheedy In Sheedy and Brown, 181.
your socks. You’re playing like a bunch of girls!” We came out in the second half and ended up winning. At the end of the game he said, “You girls can really play!”

Despite the obstacles undermining women’s Australian Rules competitions have grown over the last three decades. The Victorian Women’s Football League was formed in 1981 according to Stell. It was the result of calls from the 1960s for a women’s Australian Rules competition to be re-established in Victoria. In 1981, the V.W.F.L. started with four teams. Australian Rules has been so popular with women that growth has been rapid since 1993 when there were just over 200 registered players to 2004 when there were 700 registered players. In 2005 the V.W.F.L. comprises 24 teams and 20 clubs spread over three divisions. In 1987, a women’s league was established in Western Australia with four teams. This number grew to six teams in 2005. There are also competitions in New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

Interstate games have been held since 1994 and an annual national women’s competition was inaugurated in 1998 in Victoria. Since then the annual national games have rotated around the country. In 2000 following the National Women’s Football Championships in Canberra “a national body was formed to establish national standards and to aid in the organisation of future national carnivals.” Although Women’s Football Australia has a Director of Operations, Nicole Graves, and a delegate from each state, development and

35 Lisa Hardeman cited in Sheedy and Brown, 181.
36 Sheedy and Brown, 182.
37 Stell, 255.
support for each state is not coordinated by the A.F.L., the self-appointed keepers of the
code and the leader of the industry. The A.F.L. website states:

In 2004 Football Victoria appointed Nicole Geaves [sic Graves] as the first female to be given a full-time role in developing and delivery female football programs. Focus is given on programs in Victoria including primary and secondary school and open-age programs, coaching, administration and umpiring. In 2004 football brought together a female football advisory group to help access current and up-to-date information on female participation in sport and recreation, therefore improving their capacity to provide innovative and inclusive programs for women and girls in Australian football.40

Clearly Ms Graves has an enormous task and responsibility, both in Victoria and throughout Australia. However, women’s Australian Rules Football competitions around Australia remain fractured and meagrely supported by local leagues, government departments and private sponsors. ‘Maxine’ the captain of a team in Western Australia advised me that only in early 2005 have officials from the WA.F.L. became remotely interested in women’s football.41 Similarly to the A.F.L.’s website, there are no links to the W.A. Women’s Football League from the WA.F.L.42 Yet women’s football continues to thrive due to persistence and love of the game from supporters and players.

The stimulus to play football is complex. Motivation for playing such a physical game is provided by Lisa Hardeman:

Football is the only sport where you can use every skill you can imagine. You use your hands, your feet and your fitness. There’s no other sport I can think of where you regularly do that. You have to win the ball, get rid of the ball and have the stamina to play the game. It’s physically demanding; there’s no other sport like it.43

Fitness was one reason an informant of the W.A.W.F.L. told me she liked playing. The other reason was for the social aspects, meeting new friends and the camaraderie of being

41 Interview 17 April 2005.
43 Sheedy and Brown, 184.
part of a team.44 Hardeman also cites the camaraderie and social side as being additional attractions to playing.45

Young women are drawn to the game through the enjoyment of the competition, skill, tactics and endurance. Merinda Blakiston, aged 16, stated “You can really get into the game in footy – more so than other sports... It shows that we can take the contact and that we are up the skill level required.”46 Merinda was playing in the 2003 Schoolgirls' Football Carnival which had 140 girls participating. At that time in Western Australia, there were 35 school girl teams, with the expectation that 50 teams would soon make up the competition. In 2005 there were 47 school girl teams drawn from public and private school girls, from metropolitan and regional areas.47 This demonstrates how strong the schoolgirl competition is in Western Australia, which is comparable to other Australian states when judged by the interstate carnivals.

Women in Australian Rules Football have pride in their play and are not afraid of the physical side of the game. Carrie Green of Bunbury stated “The first knock I got was a bit of a shock but now I don’t notice and I like it.”48 Drawing a contrast between the male and female, Carrie Green draws the separation: “The difference is that we don’t resort to brawling like boys do.”49 Brawls are rare in women’s football. Women seem to concentrate on the contest between teams and maintaining possession of the ball rather than landing deliberate blows on their opponents. The argument made here is that space

44 Interview 17 April 2005.
46 Ibid.
48 Adolph, 18.
needs to be created to develop women’s games and to recognize the plurality of roles that women occupy in all levels and modes of the sport. Before addressing the role and place of women in ‘men’s teams,’ it is first necessary to give women the space, place and support to develop infrastructure, sponsorship and skills.

In 2004, a new girl’s competition for under 17 years was started in Victoria. This competition was a response to a complaint by three girls to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal in 2003. Having played in the junior leagues for several years, Penny Cula-Reid, Helen Taylor and Emily Stayner were banned from playing with their teams. In July 2003, the three teenage girls fought bans by Football Victoria and the Moorabbin Saints Junior Football League to prevent them from playing. They appealed to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to allow them to continue playing and Justice Morris, President, granted an interim injunction against Football Victoria to allow the girls to play the remaining matches of the season. Justice Morris cited human rights and fundamental values as being the issue at stake.

Football Victoria and the Moorabin Saints Junior Football League stated that the ban upon girls playing after 12 years of age was based upon proven differences between boys and girls in strength, stamina and physique. Size and physical difference seem to be the preoccupation of those opposing women and girls playing in mixed competitions. For example, in The Age’s article “After the legal all-clear the girls let fly”, one spectator is

49 Ibid.
quoted “She’s a beautiful kick, … but you’ll get some idiot who will want to test her out – I’m worried about the upper part of their bodies.”

While there are physical differences between men and women, the degree of the difference relevant to sport, including Australian Rules, should be questioned. In *Challenging the Men: Women in Sport*, Ken Dyer, senior lecturer in Social Biology at the University of Adelaide, stated:

> Men and women differ in almost every aspect of their biology. There are features for which the average and the distribution of values differ, but for which there is still a great deal of overlap between the sexes, these include height, weight, brain size, haemoglobin content of the blood, heart and lung size and many others. There are characteristics which show much clearer differences.51

Dyer outlines further differences in body fat content, woman’s breathing capacity and bone structure. Women’s heart size that is also smaller, which in turn reduces the circulation of blood. However Ruth Hubbard argues that the physical difference (apart from those associated with procreation) is not that great. Hubbard states “Women’s biology is a social construct and a political concept, not a scientific one.”52 Hubbard argues that the differences in height and weight are often affected by other factors including class, race and diet. Often the reason for concern about females playing football, or other types of physical games, is that they will hurt their reproductive organs and their breasts. This mode of thinking goes back to the 19th century. Women’s health and disease became a tool of the male medical profession to exercise social control over upper-class women. According to Gena Corea:

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To 19th century doctors, upper-class women were natural invalids. These physicians fostered female weakness, helped train women to be sickly and then used woman’s frailty and “nervous susceptibility” to declare her unfit for any occupation outside the home.53

The frailty myth has also been discussed by Colette Dowling who states that it “has been so systematically entrenched that it could fairly be called a hoax.”54 The idea of biological determinism still saturates the semiotics of women’s sport. In fact, the female’s reproductive organs have more protection than a male’s. The womb and ovaries are protected by the pelvis and by a layer of fat. Men’s genitals are external to a bone structure and are protected by thin skin, hence the need for male athletes to wear athletic supporters or “boxes” in cricket.

Fear about hurting a woman’s breasts is another limiting fallacy in patriarchal discourse.

Amanda Smith from the ABC Radio National’s The Sports Factor, interviewed Kate Lawrence, a Victorian lawyer and Australian Rules Footballer about this issue:

Amanda Smith: All right, now girls, can we talk about bosoms please? Because they are the things that are always put up as the reason why women can’t or shouldn’t play the contact football codes. So are bosoms an issue? Kate?

Kate Lawrence: No, I’m breast-feeding at the moment and I’m playing full-on football and it doesn’t make any difference.55

Breast cancer is the most common cause of cancer-related death in women in Australia. The risk to women below the age of 49 years of age is low but still accounts for 24% of women diagnosed with breast cancer according to the National Breast Cancer Centre.56

None of the risk factors listed on its website relate to any possible damage to the breast through physical contact. It is the reverse and states:

A blow or injury to the breast

A blow or injury to the breast does not cause breast cancer, but it can draw attention to a pre-existing lump. An injury can damage tissue and blood supplies, but does not damage the genetic material in the cells. It is errors in the replication of this genetic material that is the basis for the development of a cancer cell from a normal cell.

If you have breast pain as a result of a blow or otherwise, then consult your doctor.\(^\text{57}\)

If a woman was to receive a blow to her breast that did have a pre-existing lump then it could lead to treatment rather than remaining undetected. Being exposed to the sun when playing and training means that skin cancer poses more of a risk to both male and female players. The fact sheets available from Sports Medicine Australia website cover nutrition, pregnancy, osteoporosis, menopause and pre-menstrual syndrome. These are not meant to be warnings but informative and encouraging the facilitation of women playing sport. There are no fact sheets concerning trauma to the breast through sport on Sports Medicine Australia’s website.\(^\text{58}\)

Australian Rules Football does have hazards. At the Titans game, I spoke to a woman sitting close to me whose daughter was playing for the Titans. I asked her if she was happy about her daughter playing and she replied “No.”\(^\text{59}\) She explained the reason she came to watch was in case her daughter was injured she could take her straight to hospital. Her daughter had never had any serious injuries - only minor like a dislocated finger and

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\(^\text{57}\) The National Breast Cancer Centre website accessed 10 May 2005.


\(^\text{59}\) Fieldnotes 17 April 2005.
grazes. This woman had three daughters and no sons. I asked if she had a son whether she would feel the same. She replied “yes” and explained that she thought that Australian Rules was too rough.60 This was despite her following the A.F.L. as she explained to me later that she had been a member of the West Coast Eagles and Fremantle Football Club.

There is also the thought that some type of interference of a sexual/physical nature could occur to females if they play with males. Men can also be inappropriate touched. John Hopoate, National Rugby League player, was banned for 12 months, for “interfering” with another player by probing his fingers up his opposition’s anus. Although notorious, it is not an isolated case:

In possibly the most bizarre judiciary case ever, the National Rugby League tribunal imposed the heaviest ban in four seasons after hearing more than three hours of evidence about players grabbing opponents by "the nuts", "the stork" and "the arse" in order to intimidate them. North Queensland players Peter Jones and Glenn Morrison testified that Hopoate had inserted his fingers in their anuses after they had been tackled during the match at Townsville last Saturday night.61

The ‘squirrel grip’ is a similar tactic used by some players in the A.F.L. according to Sam Newman of The Footy Show.62 The ‘squirrel grip’ has been described by Gregory Bond in a post match report of the match between Geelong and the Fremantle Football Club as:

Let's try, um, "Manhandling the upper groin area" (ABC Radio) of Geelong's Gary Hocking. (So the Handbagger got handbagged!) Other entries in the euphemism of the week competition: Squirrel Grip, Groin Grabbing, countless references to 'Groin area', "upper thigh", etc. "testicles" got a mention, "balls" got a couple but "gonads" missed out. The winner of the comp was doubtless Hocking himself, at the tribunal: "He squeezed me in the balls, excuse the expression". Hocking affirmed it was a hard grip and intentional, and Wira is out for 2.63
Newman, who has displayed all the hallmarks of a chauvinist and racist, asked Hardeman if women had an equivalent. She replied that they do, it is called “nipple cripper.” Clearly, decorum is not limited to either gender. Appropriate play and behavioural standards should apply equally.

At the time, Justice Morris granted an interim injunction to Cula-Reid, Taylor and Staynor allowing them to play out the season with their respective teams, he found that the relative differences between the strength, stamina and physique of boys and girls was not significant enough to be relevant in the participation in an Australian Rules Football competition for under 14 year olds. Ken Gannon, Chief Executive of Football Victoria, who had previously stated that “the girl ban was necessary because of medical reasons” immediately responded that “We’re very comfortable the rules (banning girls) are necessary and will be put in place permanently.” When the final judgement was handed down by Justice Morris on 17 February 2004, he dismissed the complaint. He found that that it was lawful to discriminate “finding that the relative difference between boys and girls under 15 years is sufficient to be relevant.” In his conclusion he stated,

I wish to make it clear that I am not giving my endorsement to a rule which excludes girls from under 15 football. Rather my decision is that it is lawful for a football association to adopt and apply such a rule. For my part, the decision as to whether girls play under 15 or, even, under 16 football should be left to the girls themselves.

It seems that the arguments and evidence provided by Football Victoria did not fully convince Justice Morris and that possibly Mr Paul Milo’s, Projects Manager, Football

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67 Stuart Morris, President, Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, Human Rights Division, Anti-Discriminationn List, VCAT Reference No.s A249, A250, A251, A254, A258, A259/2003 available at:
Victoria, explanation of the rationale behind the rule “first and foremost, it is designed for the safety of the players; and, secondly, it is to avoid the possibility that boys may modify their behaviour during play because of the presence of girls” (emphasis added). The problem therefore is not what happens to females who play football, but what happens to men when females play football. When Baron Pierre de Coubertin founded the modern Olympic Games in 1896 the aim was to create goodwill and peace among men but not women. Females were not allowed to compete until 1912 in swimming events and then later in 1928 females were permitted to compete in track and field athletics. The Baron stated that "competition was natural for a man, but profoundly unnatural for women." In Ancient Greece the Heraean Games, where girls and young women competed and held in honour of Hera, the Queen of Heaven, are reputed to be an older and the more important religious festival than the Olympiad that barred females. At the 2004 Olympics women competed against men in equestrian, shooting and other events. Physical activity for females gives them increased vigour more resilience and more self confidence. Women who undertake physical activity not only get stronger in their bodies, they get stronger in their minds. In addition, sport provides females with an opportunity to gain leadership skills.

Women attaining leadership skills, becoming physically stronger in body and mind is the real cause for concern for patriarchy and the debate of whether women should play football. Not only do women become stronger but do men somehow become weaker? If Australian Rules Football is a “man’s” game - physical, rough and tough - then women players shread the masculine ideologies from the sport. In some twisted cognitive
reasoning, men become emasculated and women masculinized through the playing of football. I asked women and men what they thought about females playing football.

Friends were delighted that their daughter played in the schoolgirl competition. They have no sons and it is unlikely to make any difference. During my interviews, two informants voiced their opposition to women playing. One informant interviewed for my fandom research was adamant that she never wanted to watch women playing in the A.F.L.\(^69\) Another informant working at state league level replied that she had been poleaxed by a hefty player when questioned about whether she had every played. She labelled the women who played football as “lesbians,” inferring firstly that this sexual behaviour and identity was a problem and secondly that transgressive women who play sport must (inevitably?) transgress heteronormativity.\(^70\) Making sexualized assumptions about women who play football is not restricted to Australian Rules. In the United Kingdom, Jayne Caudwell explored the labelling of girls and women who played football.\(^71\) Her research confirms a further confluence with females who play football across code and country.

At the Titans and Southern Thunder Game, concern was expressed to me by the mother of a woman footballer that the women who play get labelled as “butch” or “lesbians.”\(^72\) She felt this was unfair because there were all sorts of women playing, in terms of shapes, sizes, looks, hairstyles and backgrounds.\(^73\) My observation on that day supported the

\(^{69}\) Interview 13 August 2004.
\(^{70}\) Interview 28 February 2005.
\(^{72}\) Fieldnotes 17 April 2005.
\(^{73}\) Caudwell also discusses size and appearance and the label “butch”.

claim. Her daughter had first started playing in 1998 as a school girl, continued at university and then joined the women’s league in 2002. Her daughter is now a school teacher at a girl’s school and coaches the schoolgirl team. Sport and sexuality is a topic that requires specialist attention, but must be noted in this chapter and thesis. In *Sporting Females* Jennifer Hargreaves states:

Because male sports emphasize the link between masculinity and the physical, muscular body, masculinity and athleticism are only considered to be desirable female characteristics if they are bonded with a heterosexual orientation. Women who are flat-chested, physically powerful and well-muscled stand more risk of being labelled deviant or lesbian than women who confirm to dominant ideas of femininity. The notion of ‘male’ and ‘female’ roles in sports implies narrow and biased definitions of masculinity and femininity, and marginalizes others. Lesbianism is stigmatized because it is perceived to violate popular stereotypes, and this has a powerful effect on the attitudes and behaviour of sportswomen, whatever their sexual preferences. Heterosexual sportswomen have a deep fear of being labelled lesbian, and lesbians feel driven to ‘pass’ as straight because of the fear of victimization. The overriding concern about sexuality in sports results in divisions between women and different sexual preferences, and in this way sports structure relations between different femininities.74

Women who play football do not rely on an imposed style of femininity and social expectation and independently chose their physical sport. Australian Rules Football does not have a history of women players, the Lily Parr’s and the Dick, Kerr Ladies, Sue Lopez, O.BE., Hope Powell and Gail Owen, to provide role models. Lily Parr, Hope Powell and Sue Lopez are included in the Hall of Fame in The National Football Museum at Deepdale, Preston. There is no parallel in Australia of acknowledging women footballers. Nor is there likely to be in the near future.

Former A.F.L. coach, David Parkin, has raised the vexed question of whether there will ever come a day when a woman plays at A.F.L. level. The laws of the game could be

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74 Hargreaves, 261.
adjusted to suit women playing. Rules are adjusted all the time. The high prevalence of knee-injuries over the last five years caused the A.F.L. to change the centre bounce rules and circle. This was a safety reason. Other rule changes are less safety minded. Often rules are altered to enhance the game, particularly for television. Rules are also changed to facilitate the umpiring of matches. Touch football has mixed teams, basketball has mixed teams. Recently, the A.F.L. has started Rec Footy a mixed competition with modified rules “It's fun, safe, inclusive – it’s a game everyone can play.”\textsuperscript{75} It is very different from the mainstream game, although it has established in most states. Yet modifying the rules according to Mr Milo’s logic would lead to modifying men’s behaviour. Modifying men’s behaviour is called social change.

Those who resist change do so because either they feel threatened or they feel they have something to lose. I do not believe the day will come when women play with men - not because there will not be a woman good enough, or brave enough. It will not come until the patriarchal alpha-males who administer the game stop considering a woman playing as devaluing and emasculating men. Another reason why a woman will never play in the A.F.L. is because that the competition is at the crossroads. As a patriarchal project, the A.F.L. has made some errors, including explicit racism and sexism: “Eddie [McGuire] is everywhere.”\textsuperscript{76} The A.F.L. is out of step with the sporting community it serves. A recent case regarding a St Kilda player, Nick Riewoldt, who was injured demonstrates the increasing divide between sport and society. Riewoldt broke his collar bone in the match against the Brisbane Lions. As he was coming off the oval injured, holding his shoulder,

\textsuperscript{75} AFL Recreational Footy Policy, the Australian Football Leagues official website, available at: \url{http://afl.com.au/default.asp?pg=recfooty} accessed 10 May 2005

\textsuperscript{76} Eddie McGuire, Television Personality; Host of Channel Nine’s The Footy Show; Football Commentator of Channel Nine A.F.L. broadcasts and Chairman of Collingwood Football Club. McGuire is regularly admonished by his peers (some reject the notion that he is a journalist) and the public for his conflict of interest as the Chairman of C.F.C. and his media involvement, particularly in calling matches.
two Brisbane players deliberately bumped into him. The A.F.L.’s tribunal did not penalise the Brisbane players. The A.F.L. Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Demetriou, said that the A.F.L. would not intervene in the matter despite the level of concern being expressed by the community. The Herald Sun canvassed women’s views, including Beverley O’Connor, Board Member of Melbourne Football Club. O’Connor stated:

I thought it was very disappointing to be honest. I thought it was very unsportsmanlike behaviour. I was disappointed because I’m actually a great fan of the Lions.

Most people I’ve spoken to over the weekend were very disappointed, and I’m sure if they (Michael and Scott) reflect on it, they wouldn't do it again. What we love is a clean and spirited contest.77

If the media were canvassing a “soft” female approach, Patrick Smith, Columnist for The Australian was far more critical than the women quoted in the Herald Sun and stated:

It would be interesting, though, to know whether the A.F.L. commission thought the spirit of the game had been breached if not its rules and regulations.

Given the manner in which the football world, as distinct from the broader community, accepted the actions of Michael and Scott, it was always most likely that the match review committee would clear the incident.

In the revamp of the tribunal system, the power is now in the hands of past players. Former Hawthorn defender and coach Peter Schwab heads the match review and former footballers have been added to the tribunal jury.

As there is clearly a chasm between the views of the football and general communities, the A.F.L. has a problem if it continues to preach that football is an instrument of the people. Racial vilification, drug and sexual conduct codes have been introduced in the past decade as the commission tried to align the sport with its spectators.

It now has a tribunal system that appears out of step with its audience.78

The future of football in Australia will be football - the round ball type. Global influences including convergent media will come into play. Success will be tilted towards organisations like the F.A. who have already embraced women playing football.

The ultimate goal should not necessarily be whether women play with men, but the acceptance and sustained viability of women’s teams. There is no reason why the A.F.L. cannot embrace women’s football in a serious and unthreatened manner. Women have supported men for over 150 years. Yet the A.F.L.’s support to women’s teams is flimsy, it needs to be supported in a positive, obvious and continual manner. The A.F.L. has given meagre support other than to organise a new competition in 2004, to divert a High Court challenge. As keepers of the code, they should be the keepers of the code for all football supporters and players alike, not for an exclusive circle of men, who have been celebrated as players and mollycoddled in their post-sporting career. The Victorian Women’s League states on their webpage that the A.F.L. are keepers of the code. So they must be for everyone not just some. Otherwise what is their motive?

Women’s football requires sustained economic and institutional support. This includes attracting and retaining sponsorships, giving women’s football a public profile by encouraging the media to promote it in a positive manner through radio, television and print. It needs assistance through coaching, administrative and para-medical assistance. In particular, support should not be as a separate entity with males overseeing what is given and what is taken away. Men’s and women’s competitions can be run in conjunction. The pivotal intervention necessitates more women being involved at all
levels of governance of Australian Rules Football. Women’s sports are too vulnerable when controlled by men.

It will take a shift in the culture, not only in football culture, but society generally for women to gain acceptance in playing football. Yet even the most conservative of private girl’s schools have formed teams and competitions to play Australian Rules Football over the last five years.79 Once this would have been unthinkable, untenable even, for schools that educated girls to become wives and mothers, to play Australian Rules Football.

“**Yes, it’s not soccer love!**”

By comparison to Australian Rules football England’s women’s competitions appear to be healthy and supported. Interest in women’s football was demonstrated by the University of Central Lancashire and the International Football Institute who held a conference in June 2005 devoted to *Women, Football and Europe*. This growing status and visibility is one reason why Association Football - football - has the potential to threaten the viability of the Australian Football League resulting in Australian Rules Football into a regional game. The past, present and future of Australian Rules Football lies, not with males who have controlled the game since 1856, but with females who have too patiently been handmaidens or helpmates to the game without “getting a kick.”

In thirty years, it could be a loss to the Australia sporting community that it’s “own game” is a remnant of the past, played only by a handful of people in remote communities.

79 Interview 27 July 2005.
Surely Johnny Warren, who was always supportive of women playing, would have a wry smile if an exhibition game of Australian Rules was a “powder puff derby” on a heritage weekend as the curtain raiser to Australian [Association] Football. In 2005, the A.F.L. is at the cross roads. If the challenges are configured as a threat, then an opportunity for economic expansion and social justice will be lost.
Conclusion

THE FINAL SIREN

In 1995, two biographies of A.F.L. coaches were published. The biographies’ subjects reveal opposing attitudes to the status of women within the Australian Rules Football context. The first, an autobiography of Ronald Dale Barassi, co-written with Peter McFarline, entitled *Barassi: the life behind the legend*. According to Robert Pascoe in *The Winter Game*, Ron Barassi helped to “shape Australian masculinity.”¹ The other was *Sheeds: a touch of cunning* by Tom Prior, with Kevin Sheedy having the last word in writing the final chapter. Apart from the context and the year published, the two biographies are dichotomous. Although it is clear that Barassi had a great love and respect for his mother, women are very much on the periphery of his book. The following extract typifies an entrenched patriarchal attitude towards females:

In an interview with journalist Doug Aiton in the *Age* in 1988, Barassi described the success of his marriage to Cherryl as being based on their having such independent personalities. ‘I only rely on her for wifely things like clean undies.’²

In contrast I have documented here that Kevin Sheedy respects women and normalises women and/in Australian Rules Football. The introduction of *Sheeds* outlines the meeting of three couples, including Sheedy and his wife Geraldine, to offer Sheedy a coaching position with the Sydney Swans. Prior describes Swans executive Peter Weinert relaying tea and coffee orders for the guests to his wife Janine, then clicking his fingers, twice to hasten her “to obey” and:

² Ron Barassi and Peter McFarline. *Barassi: the life behind the legend*. (N.S.W.: Simon and Schuster Australia,1995), 120.
A shadow seemed to pass over Sheedy’s face… It was like a draw-bridge came down… We knew the negotiations … were over as far as Kevin was concerned.³

Kevin Sheedy turned down the offer to coach the Sydney Swans. Ironically, or perhaps not, Ron Barassi coached the Sydney Swans from 1993 until he retired from coaching at the end of the 1995 season. Sheedy celebrated 25 years of coaching at Essendon in 2005.

This thesis has taken a broad approach to researching women and Australian Rules Football in their many and varied capacities. The scope of this thesis incorporates not only those individual roles, which could have been research projects in their own rights, but confirms the range and spectrum of women’s function and place within a sporting institution in Australia. One of the problems, demonstrated by Barassi and Sheedy’s inclusion in the conclusion, is that while the thesis is about women and Australian Rules Football, it continually returns to the men and masculinity. The argument means that while women are vital to the maintenance and sustainability, they are yet to achieve an equal status that normalises and validates their contribution. Eight years after Dave Nadel called for a woman commissioner in More than a Game⁴, the A.F.L. finally made an appointment of Sam Mostyn in June 2005. In the intervening time, the now former Chief Executive Officer, Wayne Jackson, stated in 1998 “it was only a matter of time” [that a woman would be appointed to the Commission] yet Chris Langford joined the Commission in 1999, Graeme John in 2000, Bob Hammond in 2001 and Mike Fitzpatrick 2003.⁵ Mostyn’s qualifications included being a solicitor, an insurance executive, a former political adviser to a Prime Minister (Keating) and a former pay television executive. Strangely, despite my claims of a Melbourne-centric culture of the A.F.L.

⁵ “AFL head lobbies for a woman on board” In The West Australian, 19 October, 2004, 1.
Mostyn was from Sydney. If a cynical motive regarding the geography of the appointment could be found, then it would be that the appointment coincided with the A.F.L.’s further promotion in a mainly Rugby League state and city. Moreover, although Mostyn rejected of claims of tokenism - "I have never done anything in my life that could smack of tokenism" - the A.F.L. Commission was expanded from eight to nine members to include her appointment. The men were not about to retire or resign their place to make way for one woman. Chilla Bulbeck has stated: “young Australian women might have colonized the caring professions but they have not invaded boardrooms or football ovals.” If women were to colonise the football boardroom, this transformation would truly signify a change in Australian society. Again, when women have a high stake in football, one woman commissioner on a nine person commission, is clearly not normalizing women in football.

In the year 2005, another woman exited from the A.F.L.’s hierarchy. The A.F.L. tribunal was disbanded and replaced by a match review committee to arbitrate on players’ on field transgressions. Elaine Canty was appointed to the now defunct A.F.L. Tribunal in 1996. Nadel stated:

When the A.F.L. appointed Elaine Canty to the A.F.L. Tribunal in 1996 it was trumpeted as a great and controversial step forward. In fact, there should have been at least one female member of the A.F.L. Commission, since it is the Commission rather than the tribunal that makes policy.⁸

Not all Nadel’s colleagues share his vision. In an interview with one, I asked ‘Wally’ what his views were on the possibility of a woman being the C.E.O. or Chair of the AFL:

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Personally, I think those positions should be filled by an ex-elite player. Although if the person has the qualifications and an experienced team around them I guess it would be ok but it is [the A.F.L.] a business unlike any other business and you need to know the pressures upon the participants. It is a totally different view, totally different world.

[There is a] Problem with women being on the tribunal but that has changed now that there is a new system.

I don’t like tokenism, women should not be directors just because they are a woman. They should be selected because they are qualified.

I’d like to see anything that would break down male elitism, ie the John Elliot types. I’d like to see a breakdown in the culture of drinking. I think it’s great in the country where they have netball and football teams socialising together.9

His position was at the very least, contradictory, rejecting one form of Australian masculinity but at the same time, retaining a patriarchial position on the appointment of women to positions of authority within the A.F.L. and its clubs. Also, his definition of ‘qualified’ not only requires qualification, but critique.

It is a source of exasperation that women are waiting to be appointed, rather than demanding their equitable place. This is a rendering of Australian society when woman are content to allow men to control one of its strongest institutions and it speaks volumes about the culture of Australian Rules Football and gender relations. This thesis is a gauge of how equality for women is being measured in Australia through the institution of Australian Rules Football. This thesis confirms the multifaceted nature of the revisionism, discursively, historically and methodologically. This thesis has been carried out by a woman and supervised by another woman. It has also been carried on the opposite side of the country where Australian Rules Football is administered. This usurps not only males from the research but also the Melbourne establishment. As a result this has been a rebel project.

The chapter on female fandom proved that it is not necessary to have played football to be knowledgeable and passionate about the game. Notwithstanding this argument, popular culture moved ahead of A.F.L. policy when the foxy morons from Fountain Lakes, *Kath and Kim*, satirized women’s fandom through their obsession with Richmond and ultimately performed at the 2004 Grand Final as extra-curricular entertainment.\(^{10}\) *Every Club Should have a Rosa* demonstrated that women’s football fandom is far more complex than Jane Turner and Gina Riley’s satire suggests. Yet in an example of how life does imitate art, Dawn Leicester and Penny Mackieson cement the shallowness with *Real Women Love Footy*. Kath and Kim’s Tia Maria and Footy Franks are Leicester and Mackieson’s Twisties and wine cask, as they follow around their favourite players collecting photographs and mementoes and professing their love of the game without questioning the structural inequalities of the institution’s administration.

My research also demonstrates that while Ann Summers was incorrect in her assertions about women who do not understand the technical aspects of Australian Rules, only attend as partners and not as interested spectators in their own right, she is correct about a certain section of female fandom who follow football or rather footballers due to reasons of the celebrity culture with is sexual-sensationalism. Moreover, Summers was also correct when she stated that women could not be a bone fide part of the football culture, in keeping with Mary Brady. In *Age of Equality*, Summers critiques the lack of progress towards an egalitarian gendered society in Australia, but did not revisit football or sport. She should have. Despite rhetoric, the visibility of certain women either in professional

occupations or on club boards, the high female attendance rates at matches or as television
viewers, and the celebration of Women’s Week, means that women are still valued more
as volunteers, home-makers and fashion items or trophies. Women are still not
proportionately represented on club boards, on the A.F.L. Commission and in
management and other occupations in Australian Rules Football.

The arguments and analysis presented here have not only celebrated women’s role in
football. Such a mode of presentation does not assist women or football. The aim has
been to examine the history, geography, fandom and players of A.F.L. with clarity and
complexity. It has dared to critique the dark side. Unfortunately one area of normalising
is women who emulate negative behaviours associated with loutish men. Swearing at the
umpires, racial vilification of players and the encouragement of violence towards the
opposition are aspects of women’s involvement with Australian Rules not often
discussed. While there are superficial positive outcomes when women are civilizers of
men, to superficially ‘celebrate’ the feminine role, such an ideology will not corrode
gender barriers or advance social responsibility of individuals and groups. The binary of
“Damned whores and God’s police”\(^\text{11}\) given to us by Summers needs to be broken to
normalise not only women in football, but women in sport and society.

Women’s Australian Rules Football is a further confirmation of the little progress made in
equalising and normalising their participation in football competitions. Despite
Government initiatives to increase female participation in sport, little support is given to
state leagues or individual clubs. Again, despite the criticism of the media’s ignoring

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\(^{11}\text{Anne Summers. }\text{Damned Whores and God’s Police: Melbourne: Penguin Australia, 1994.}\)
women’s sporting achievements, little or no media attention is given to highlight this growing competition amongst females. Universities have an important role in offering sports media training and balanced journalism.

Australian Rules Football is at the crossroads. It faces challenges from other codes, particularly Association Football, and it is competing in an ever challenging and tightening sporting market. A change is coming and quickly. After thirty years of disappointments, Australia has qualified for the ‘Soccer’ World Cup. Following the Socceroos victory over Uruguay in the World Cup qualifier of November 2005, it was reported:

World cup qualification has propelled soccer into an unprecedented position to challenge the A.F.L.’s stranglehold on the hearts, minds and pockets of Australia’s mainstream sports fans.

According to sponsorship and advertising experts, the game is poised to reap increased sponsorships on the back of the Socceroos’ success.

After a peak audience of 3.4 million tuned in as the Socceroos earned their place in Germany, there is concern in A.F.L. circles.

As Sydney was shaking off the hangover of Wednesday’s success, the presidents and chief executives of the 16 A.F.L. clubs were putting their heads together in a scheduled meeting in Melbourne where the Socceroos’ triumph was mentioned.

How to cope with the threat of the world game was not an official item of interest, though some of the top brass have admitted their concern. “It wasn’t raised as an agenda [item] at all but in general discussion everyone realized that it illustrates that there’s a threat there to the game,” Fremantle Dockers chairman Rick Hart said. 12

The A.F.L., keepers of the code, supreme and arch administrators of the game, have a slow sense of social responsibility borne out through their handling of two important social justice issues: first, racial vilification and then sexual abuse by footballers. Despite evidence of both legal and social breaches, they were not proactive in preventing the incidences and re-acted poorly. Every member of the A.F.L., every club executive, every
coach, every player, should read and learn from this thesis. If the A.F.L. will not take on board the message contained in these pages, then governments, Federal and State, should legally intervene to change the culture of Australian Rules Football. Learning from the complexity of women’s role and function in football, and recognizing where changes are needed, will do more than any Affirmative Action programme because it is going to the core of inequality in Australia. The A.F.L. want to maintain their prominence as Australia’s football code, the Australian Government want increased participation by women in the workforce. The key to these futures is through women. In *Men, Mateship, Marriage*, Don Edgar states:

> key to explaining the yawning gap between many men and women is to look at the way society puts them in different situations and confines them to ‘appropriate’ activities.¹³

Edgar argues that the macho-culture for boys in Australia is damaging and advocates making cultural shifts:

> This means a lot of institutional change is required, because if we continue to structure the lives of boys and girls differently, we will inevitably prolong the peripheral stupidities of gender inequality. School, sports, the groups we belong to, and the workplaces we experience are the key areas that engender and prolong those differences unnecessarily.¹⁴

By normalising women in the context of Australian Rules Football, will be as beneficial to the male community as a whole as it will be to women and those who perceive a threat through the initiating of this cultural shift will be those alpha-males with vested commercial interests and patriarchal attitudes. The complexity of female fandom was mobilised through the model of the Maid, Mother and Crone and it is through The Future Crone of Barbara Walker that I return to find some reconciliation between the adoring audience and their lack of authority. Walker discusses men and war:

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¹⁴ Edgar, 41.
Paradoxical as it may sound, one of the most effective of men’s defense measures has always been war. War offers an excellent excuse for older males to bind younger ones firmly to their service, and not incidentally, to destroy a good many of them in the process. Best of all, responsibility for their destruction can be laid on the enemy leaders. In effect, elder males of both warring nations can safely and blamelessly exterminate each other’s younger rivals. At the same time, each plays the gambling game that can earn more territory for their own greater glory. War leaders can feel themselves admired, effective, and powerful in ways that are seldom possible in times of peace. War is the ultimate male ego trip.\(^\text{15}\)

If the customary metaphor mobilisation of sport and war or football and war is reversed, then insight into the culture of football is gained. In the context of football, the generals are the former players who have taken up senior executive or coaching roles. They direct their troops, the young players. These generals assume glory through their status and through defeating the enemy by winning matches. Destruction to the young competitors can occur through injury, through deliberate violence or by poor form. Walker states:

> To envision a deity in the true female tradition, it is necessary to purge the image of simplistic or unrealistic male interpretations. For example, men’s favourite “sex goddess” figure is useless, because she is not empowering for women; she only represents abject acquiescence to male lusts. … It may be that a truly powerful female image can be found only in prepatriarchal traditions of the complete trinitarian life cycle: Virgin, Mother, Crone. Especially the Crone.\(^\text{16}\)

Walker also asserts that a challenge to patriarchy can be mounted when women act collectively to force a change:

> Men feared the judgemental eye of the wisewoman even when she was socially powerless. This, then, is the chink in the armor of patriarchal establishments. When many women together say no and mean it, the whole structure can collapse.\(^\text{17}\)

This thesis concludes with the hypothesis that the future of Australian Rules Football is held by the maid, mother and crone. Whether or not the patriarchal forces, institutions and ideologies like it, women are in the outer not on the outer. Women must recognize this unmarked power and act accordingly.


\(^{16}\) Ibid, 174.

\(^{17}\) Ibid, 176.
To understand what normalizing women in football it is necessary to look to Norway for the example. Bente Skogvang was accredited as a F.I.F.A. referee in 1995. She has over twenty years experience of refereeing and referees both male and female matches at a national and international level. She also refereed at the Olympic Final in Atlanta in 1996. In addition to refereeing, Skogvang had also been a player, a coach and a member of the Norway Football Association’s Executive Board. Skogvang was not the first woman appointed to their Executive Board. Ellen Wille was appointed to the Board in 1985. In 1996, Karen Espelund became the first Vice-President, followed by her appointment in 1999 as General Secretary, the top executive position in Norway Football administration. The Executive Board has eight members, of which three are women. As a note of clarification, the Norway Football Association administers football in that country for both men and women. Football in Norway is the largest organized female sport with over 100,000 women playing the game. Skogvang, a PhD candidate researching women and football in Norway, stated that the popularity of women playing football can be attributed to their participation in decision-making bodies and because in 1989 the Norway Football Association integrated women’s competition.\(^{18}\) Skovgang also confirmed that some disparity does exist in Norway football between genders with elite male players earning more and attracting more media attention.\(^{19}\) However, the difference between the countries, codes and cultures is as great as the distance between them.


Mother’s Day Luncheons, A.F.L. Women’s Week and A.F.L. Woman of the Year awards do not normalize women in Australian Rules Football. They are anachronistic awards and celebrations. Roslyn Smorgon recognized their retrograde “celebration” when she stated during the A.F.L.’s 2004 Women’s Week:

As we celebrate Women’s Weekend in the A.F.L., it is my hope that women will be further accepted in every aspect of our game – at board levels, in professional and managerial positions, as volunteers and in the media. But at the same time, I hope that in the long-term, we might not need such an event. Perhaps we will become such a part of the fabric of the game that we can instead celebrate different groups within the game, such as volunteers.\textsuperscript{20}

There are ways to normalise women in this environment. Increasing the number of women on the A.F.L. Commission at club and state level is one method. By including women in the national and state Halls of Fame, the criteria for admittance to Halls of Fame are not restricted to players, they include players, administrators and members of the sports media, yet there is not a woman. Integrating the women’s competitions and develop them on an equal footing with male leagues. One example where the A.F.L. has attempted to normalize gender relations in 2005 was to celebrate Football Families during Round 14. It is hoped that when Expressions of Interest are presented to the A.F.L. for a new history to be published in 2007 that one criteria for the success bid is ensuring that women are included in a visible and positive manner and that their involvement is not reduced to one chapter.

There is the potential for further research and development on this topic. One area of specific attention is with regard to indigenous communities, particularly Darwin, Alice Springs and South Australia, where women contribute and have status and are normalized
in the game. The following testimony from one woman demonstrates the how the roles overlap:

‘Amy’

“In Alice Springs there is the regular town competition and there is the community competition.”

BACKGROUND:
I am an Aboriginal woman (Arrernte/Alyawerre) [60 years of age] and was born in Alice Springs. I was placed in a home at the age of 5 yrs after parents divorced. I am married with 4 children and 10 grand children. Educated in Alice Springs and always worked and lived here. Followed and played sports here. Basketball/softball/hockey/soccer --but have always watched and loved Footy since about 12/13 years old.

My first glimpse of footy was when I was about 12 years old. I used to ride my bike into town from a home for outback children (St.Mary’s) to meet family at the footy. Sometimes I would go to the High Jump pits and practice for the school sports – these were at the end of the footy oval but outside the school fence. But when I wasn’t doing this I would watch the game and listen to the supporters. At this stage I didn’t really know what was happening on the field, but it was an interesting place to be and a chance to catch up with family.

When I left school I always met my boyfriend at the football, he was also a player. From then on I supported that club, and almost always went to the footy.

IN VolvEMENT WITH LOCAL FOOTBALL:
I am a member of the local football team Pioneers (Eagles), I have followed this team seriously since about 15/17 years old. I am currently the President.

I attended every match that my boyfriend/husband played – even with all the children (baby and all), Also when he was the coach – he was always the last to leave the dressing rooms, so I always went prepared to the footy (with the baby’s food, milk, bottles etc) - (Whoops! I might have told a fib – three of my children were born in the footy season, so I could have been in hospital – one I remember it was a semi final and one of the women stayed at the footy till she knew they had won to go into the grand final – she was in labour – then she came to the hospital – our boys were born on the same day) Then years later when he became disillusioned with umpiring decisions I used to go alone – after soccer games, I’d race to the footy. After we separated, I continued to go to the footy, sometimes with my best friend (who was crazy about Hawthorn and her newly adopted team in Alice Springs.) We were both on the committee. Later when I was no longer involved on the committee, I would take my brother (who had dementia).

21 Interview by email 7 December 2004.
My three boys all played football from Primary school. They are now 38, 34 and 31 years of age. The 38 yo no longer plays, the 34 yo has applied to coach the side this year and the 31 who played at the SANFL(16 yo) level then was drafted by Essendon (where he played two years of Reserve Grade and then when he finally reached the League side (2 games) blew it and was delisted. They played U14 – U16 – U18 – B Grade then the A grade in A/Springs. The 31 yo is still playing good footy in the local comp, which is hampered by injuries and an inability to button his lips and then experiences the wrath of the umpires. Consequently he misses a good part of the season.

I first became Secretary to my footy Club when I was pregnant for my first child at about the age of 21 years.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT:
Encouragement, consolation for loss/performance, missing out on the team?

[Encouragement, consolation for loss/performance, missing out of the team] all of the that when I was actively involved when the boys were younger. I dare say I will provide the above again to the team and specially to my son as coach.

THE A.F.L.:
Every chance I get [I watch the televised A.F.L. matches], especially when the Bombers are playing. I watch most other games as well, because I just love to watch the game. And we get plenty of coverage here in Alice Springs.

I used to watch a lot of soccer – sometimes I watch Rugby – but don’t care if it’s not on or I miss it, or I can just get up in the middle of it and go about my housework etc. Not a problem. I went and lived at Docker River for 15 months (a remote Aboriginal Community) and Friday night’s and Saturday Footy was my salvation.

APPEAL OF AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL:
For me it’s the athleticism and skills displayed at every level. The grace of a player, running and bouncing the ball at the same and then executing a perfect pass. The goal-kicking, the aerial skills. The brilliance of footy is not only reserved for the A.F.L. Some truly magical moments are seen in country football, because they are not restricted – in A.F.L., players have a role to play – in the country, a player with remarkable leaping abilities might fly and take a mark over a pack of big men. Whereas in the A.F.L., he may have strict instructions to stay on the ground and collect the crumbs/spills. We may never see all of his natural abilities. But it is everything about the game. I also love the fact that you can voice your opinions, Try to put the bloke off, going for goal, yell at the umpire on a bad call barrack loudly for your team. Scream at the top of your voice. Show your emotions. But also having to keep control and follow the Code of good behavior etc. Imagine us trying to sit through a Top Tennis Match and practising Tennis decorum. We would do it with ease -- NOT!

DISLIKES ABOUT AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL:
I don’t like the “sin bin” rule. Specially when a player is reported as well – he and more importantly his team is paying twice for an indiscretion. I don’t like the unfairness which I have seen over the years which quite often borders on racism, but of course this would be denied. I don’t like the differences in treatment of players from different teams at tribunals.
SPECTATOR BEHAVIOUR:
I have become closer to passive now, but I would have been considered a very active spectator, specially in past days as committee member, president etc. I still get a bit loud when I am watching sons and relatives, but I am a lot more controlled. I always make a point of praising the other teams good passages of play, marks, kicks etc.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE GAME:
I think that despite my years of watching the game, one can never give oneself any more than 7-8/10 if one has never played the game. I could never be a tactician as a coach, however I usually know when a free should be awarded, when play is blatantly rough etc.

I feel privileged to have grown up watching this sport which the Aussies have adapted and style-ised and polished to become a beautiful combination of skills to watch.  

The interview was conducted by email following a telephone conversation with this informant, where she urged me to visit Alice Springs to learn about their local competition. She stressed that the women of Alice Spring “ran the competition” although the men played. It was tacit arrangement of mutual respect where neither gender was disadvantaged. This is a model for all sport, derived from the innovation from an indigenous community. The model created by the indigenous peoples of Australia diverges with the stance of Geoffrey Blainey whose work has marginalized them in Australia history and rebuffed their influence upon Australian Rules Football with marn-grook.

The quality of sports scholarship in Australia has varied in volume and excellence. In Cultural Studies Toby Miller, Jim McKay, David Rowe and Geoffrey Lawrence publish internationally. Yet for a nation obsessed by sport a commensurate scholarship on sport has been conducted like women’s football with stages of success then followed by a faltering period. Histories and biographies are produced by journalists, ghost writers, lay historians or commissioned professional historians with varying results. Most scholarship

22 Ibid.
has been locked into history, anthropology and sociology. Both universities and the academic community should accept responsibility for the quality and quantity of sports scholarship. In addition, the Federal Government has been negligent in ignoring sport and society scholarship. Their focus has been on the hard sciences with the potential for investment return with the result that divisions, faculties, schools and departments of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences have been operating under siege. This short-sighted dollar-driven mentality means that there is no investment made to build up any social capital in an area of Australian social life that could unlock many solutions to social and cultural problems. By utilising cultural studies for this research thesis the range of research techniques and methodologies has made a significant expansion in the gaps of sports scholarship. Detailed description here has provided the empirical data of the first major study of women’s involvement with Australian Rules football. The development of the maid, mother and crone trinity model of female fandom provides evidence of independent analysis. This is one of the first extensive pieces of work on women and Australian Rules football. As such it contributes to the field and makes some distinctive contribution to knowledge.

There is much to ponder – and much to do – when writing and thinking about women in Australian Rules Football. If this thesis leads to a debate on the future of Australian Rules Football and the position of women in Australian society, then the research has succeeded intellectually and politically. International academics gain an insight not only into an Australian sporting institution but gender relations, academic rivalries and geographic rivalries. Additionally the proposed model for female fandom is innovative and

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23 Ibid.
insightful. Through these new theories and research into football governance, politics and fandom, the outer is a place of origin and interest, not endings and despair.
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