

In the Outer - Not on the Outer:

Women and Australian Rules Football

By

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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.

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List of Abbreviations

A.B.C.	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
A.F.L.	Australian Football League
A.R.C.	Australian Research Council
I.A.F.C.	International Australian Football Commission
M.C.G.	Melbourne Cricket Ground
N.A.F.C.	National Australian Football Commission
N.B.A.	National Basketball Association
N.R.L.	National Rugby League
S.A.N.F.L.	South Australian National Football League
S.B.S.	Special Broadcasting Services
V.F.L.	Victorian Football League
V.W.F.L.	Victorian Women's Football League
W.A.F.C.	Western Australian Football Commission
W.A.F.L.	Western Australian Football League
W.A.W.F.L.	Western Australian Women's Football League
W.U.S.A.	Women's United Soccer Association