

# **PICTURING FOOTBALLING BODIES: GENDER, HOMOSOCIALITY AND SPORTSCAPES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Key words: Intragender relations; Homosociality; Embodiment; Physicality;

Sportscapes; Football; Visual methodology

Australian Rules football is one of Australia's most popular sports for both spectators and participants. For women who play in this team, the sport offers a unique outlet within which to engage in a women-only space, in a physical, full-contact pursuit, and in what ostensibly remains a 'male' sport. When women in this team play Australian Rules football they interact in ways that other social spaces neither demand nor offer. As a domain largely defined by female same-sex sociality, women's Australian Rules football is a social and cultural space that offers a unique set of circumstances within which to explore women's same-sex bonds.

I use this sport to explore the homosocial dynamics that take place amongst women in such a space, drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Sharon Marcus, Henriette Gunkel and Nancy Finley to build on the theoretical discourses of 'homosociality' and 'intragender relations'. Further, I use Brian Pronger's work to explore the sportscape of a women's Australian Rules football team. In drawing on these theoretical frameworks, I analyse the intersections of embodiment, physicality, gender and space for women who play in this Australian Rules football team, pointing to the implications of women's same-sex sociality more broadly.

Using a visual methodology and drawing on the work of Gerry Bloustein and Gillian Rose, I investigate what we might 'picture'- both literally and metaphorically, when we draw on visual imagery in sports and gender research. Specifically I use what I term

‘photo projects’ and photo elicitation interviews and, through analysis of photographs created by eight women in one Australian Rules football team, I engage in an in-depth analysis of what this social, physical, gendered, sexualised space means for women who play.

Building on homosociality as a framework for theorising women’s same sex bonds that may be applied not only in this field but to female homosocial spaces more generally, I question what this women’s Australian Rules football team tells us about gender, embodiment and physicality. What does it mean for gender when women engage in a sport so deeply entrenched in masculinity and maleness and how do the women in this team negotiate this experience?

Exploring what a visual methodology has to offer gender and sports sociology research I question what we might see through a visual methodology that non-visual methods do not have the scope to elucidate. Further I contribute to research on visual methodologies through the development of complimentary research methods, including photo projects and a staged training session, both mechanisms for engaging subjects in generating visual data for the study.

Through research into this sportscape I demonstrate how space is constructed as physical as well as imaginary. In doing so I build on Pronger’s work, exploring the mobility and transience of the sportscape and the resonance of such for women who play football. Lastly, through engaging with this sportscape and women’s experiences of this sportscape I look at how women are impacted by and simultaneously impact on the sportscape.

Research into this women's Australian Rules football team illuminates this sportscape as a useful sociological field for engaging with the intersections of gender, embodiment and physicality. Further, by demonstrating the different ways that female homosocial bonds manifest, this thesis contributes new ways of thinking about intragender relations in sport sociology.

## **DECLARATION**

Thesis title: Picturing Footballing Bodies: Gender, Homosociality and Sportscapes

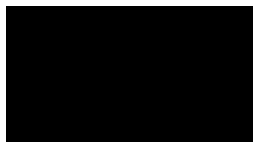
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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION



Image 1. 1 *Untitled* Staged training session sequence

### **Anecdote from the 'Stangas**

It started with a powder blue jumper and a number sixteen, Monash University Women's Australian Rules football team: *The Monash Mustangs* (colloquially labelled 'the 'Stangas'). University sport was fraught with sociality, sex and fun but also infused with competition and aggression. Playing Australian Rules football for Monash University was my introduction to Australian Rules at a competitive level. I was no stranger to having a kick of the footy with friends or family and at secondary school, but to play football competitively was a new and different experience, just what uni was supposed to offer.



The Monash Mustangs were made up of a mixture of undergraduate students and while many played on the team for a number of years, as students graduated the team inevitably changed. There were nursing students, sports students, engineering students, education students, arts and science students. There were local and international students, country and city students and no barrier to participation, you didn't even need to be able to kick a football or be female- we accepted male help in the form of coaching, training and management. We were coached by a male sport education student but were a largely democratic crew; what the coach said did not necessarily go but as a team we generally worked things out. We set our own rules, came up with a name, mascot and uniform, raised funds independently of the University, trained weekly and got ourselves to a number of locations across Australia twice a year to compete at the regional and national University games.

In my second year of competition, 2006, we had a team photo taken after we won gold at the regional university games. For some reason this picture became, to me, an iconic image of the Monash Mustangs. We'd just won the gold medal, were wearing our powder blue football jumpers, celebratory grins and our fingers making a number one signal; we were flying high. As 2006 wore on the 'Stangas, as we called ourselves, competed in the national University games and, in the following year, the regional and then national University competitions. In all this time, that image from the 2006 regional games remained a steadfast fixture for me. It was blown up to an A4 size and hung in the house I rented with university peers and team mates. And every time one of the girls 'came out of the closet', declared themselves 'a lesbian', or began a relationship with another female, I looked at that photo and thought 'another one?'

I had no idea that women's football participation was associated with a lesbian subjectivity. I did not even consider for a moment that sexuality was connected to sport participation. Nevertheless, at the beginning of 2006 there were a small handful of same-sex attracted women on the team, perhaps two or three. By the end of 2007, at least three-quarters of the team in that iconic image had 'stepped out of the closet', me included. That image remains an enigma for me and was the beginning of my research into women's Australian Rules football. I was baffled because if, on average, about ten percent of the population are expected to be same-sex attracted but seventy to eighty percent of the women that I was playing football with were same-sex attracted, why was that? Why were so many same-sex attracted young women seemingly magnetised to this team? This question further perplexed me because when many of the young women started playing football they did not identify as lesbian, same-sex attracted and had not necessarily been with women before. Indeed this topic became one of significant interest amongst team members and friends; what came first, the chicken or the egg, same-sex attraction or football? And, regardless of what came first, what was the connection between intimate desire and sport? I did not have the scope to address this BIG question in my Honours thesis and instead stuck to considerations of normative, queer, and the body. But as I came to begin my PhD I remained drawn to this question; the connection of intimate desire and sport. In this thesis I explore the intersections of sociality, embodiment and physicality within a women's Australian Rules football team, drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985), Sharon Marcus (2007) and Henriette Gunkel (2010) to theorise the notion of female homosociality and Brian Pronger (2004) to explore the significance of the sportscape.

While I remained steadfastly interested in the association of lesbian desire and women's football, as I read academic literature about codes of women's football across the globe one thing became glaringly obvious: women playing football as masculine, compensating for a 'lack of femininity', the 'lesbian stigma', women embodying violence and aggression as highly stigmatised (Gill, 2007), the 'image problem' (Harris, 2005), women playing football as an oxymoron (Broad, 2001), were all positioned as somehow problematic. Women playing football was largely positioned as somehow significant because of women's embodiment of masculinity and same-sex desires. In contrast, the literature I was reading explored women playing football in relation to lesbian desire and lesbian subcultures, for example Caudwell's (2007) influential work in the United Kingdom and, in Australia, Hillier (2005).

So while one body of research positioned women playing football as masculine, lesbian and the negative connotations of masculinity and lesbianism, another body of research explored lesbian desire, identities, subjectivities and spaces for women playing codes of football. As I embarked on my Honours research I simultaneously began playing football for a team in the Victorian Women's Football League and, having played for a number of seasons before beginning my PhD research, continued to be intrigued by the women in this space. However, I was no longer intrigued so much by the number of same-sex attracted women in this space, but the diversity of women. Thus my question had changed.

The team I was now playing for were not all and not necessarily majority lesbian or same-sex attracted. Some were in same-sex relationships, some were in heterosexual

relationships, and some were single. Some played hard football and came off the ground and put make up on. Some were mothers who nurtured their children. Some drank beer and loved to watch as well as play football. In short, women were neither homogenously hetero nor homo-sexual, nor did they homogenously embody masculinity or femininity exclusively. And, most significantly, women were proud of this, engaging in this space together in ways that were seemingly uninhibited and positive. Thus my question had moved from desire and sport, to the social and cultural space that this sport seemed to offer women.

Significantly, I was interested in women playing aggressive, physical football. I was interested in women's strong bonds with one another. I was interested in the social dynamics of this space and what that meant for women engaging with one another within the cultural milieu of a women's Australian Rules football team. Therefore the bodies of research that seemed to exist around codes of women's football as either apologetics (Broad, 2001) for transgressing gender and heterosexual norms or a reflection of a homogenously 'safe' lesbian space (Hillier, 2005) didn't seem to apply to the team with whom I was playing.

This research project is distinguished from the bodies of work I mention above because it deliberately speaks to the intersections of sport, gender, sexuality, space, physicality and embodiment. Queering these fields by drawing them together and theorising gender and sexuality through a framework of homosociality, I speak to the multiple intersections of these fields rather than channel in on gender, sexuality, space, physicality, embodiment or sport independently. By exploring the multiple intersections of these dynamic fields, rather than exploring these fields in isolation,

this research investigates the nuances and tensions that may be revealed when these fields intersect.

Drawing on visual imagery to examine the complex intersection of these fields I offer an insightful depiction and analysis of the ways in which these areas of study come together in a women's Australian Rules football team. The opening image depicts the muscular physique of a (female) player skilfully picking up the ball from an angle that positions the player as powerful and dynamic. Set in stark opposition to traditional conceptualisations of women and the heteronormative perception of femininity as passive and fragile, this image serves to provoke questions about regimes of gender that position women as feminine and femininity as weak.

I catapult the hegemony of gender into the realm of 'what if?' What if femininity is playing Australian Rules football? What if women are masculine? What if male plus female doesn't equal desire? What if female plus female doesn't equal desire? I question what can be seen beyond the heteronormative and homonormative<sup>1</sup> regimes of gender and sexuality, peeling back the surprise of 'Oh, there's a women's football league?' and 'Women play football? Are there different rules?'

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term heteronormative following Berlant and Warner (1998) to refer to the normalising of heterosexuality and gender embodiments and performances that follow the sex-gender-sexuality triad where female is feminine and heterosexual and male is masculine and heterosexual. I use the term homonormativity to refer to a discourse that normalises homosexual desire and performances and embodiments that do not necessarily equate female to feminine or male to masculine.

## Why Football?

As an undergraduate student I studied sport and outdoor education and it was through these studies that my interest in sports sociology was ignited and sport became not just a physical pursuit but also an intellectual pursuit in which I found myself asking why the status quo existed as it did, what attracted people to different sports and how sport gained such prominence in Australian culture. In thinking of sport sociologically I questioned why I was so passionately attracted to playing Australian Rules football and established that what I prized most highly was the intense physicality of the sport- the physical demand of playing football on my body, the training and fitness required, the intensity of the sport, and that I was a woman who could play.

Women playing football challenge the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, disturbing rigid gender expectations not because women are *physiologically* unsuited to playing football, but because they are *culturally* positioned as unsuited to playing football. Sport is a space that can simultaneously reinforce hegemonic gender norms as well as cultural transgressions of these gender norms and, while normalising and naturalising dominant gender ideologies, sport equally acts as a counter site to heteronormativity and male domination (Hovden & Pfister, 2006). Women have traditionally been perceived as lacking the power and aggression required for successful sporting performances and those who have succeeded in the sporting arena have typically run the risk of having their identity masculinised and ridiculed (Hickey, 2008).

A number of scholars are writing on women playing codes of football across the globe, for example soccer in the UK (Caudwell, 1999, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2011a, 2011b; Harris,

2005, 2007), New Zealand (Cox & Thompson, 2000), and Austria (Marschik, 2003); rugby in the UK (Gill, 2007), United States (Broad, 2001; Chase, 2006), and New Zealand (Chu, Leberman, Howe & Bachor, 2003), and Australian Rules football (Hillier, 2005; Wedgwood, 2004, 2005a) in Australia, while Migliaccio & Berg (2007) claim to be laying the foundations of research on women playing American football. What is notable about each of the above studies though is that self-identifying as a woman is integral. Despite gender being positioned as inherent to sport, research that questions the nature of gender itself is scarce within sport literature.

Through their study on women playing American football, Migliaccio & Berg (2007) expected that they would ultimately uncover a common thread that brought these women to the football field. What they found however “was exactly the opposite. We can’t even suggest that a love of football is the commonality” (p. 274). Suggesting that women’s football may be an ideal site for exploring “the intersection of identities that exist in sport” (p. 285), Migliaccio & Berg (2007) cite age, class, ethnicity, sexuality and a range of body shapes and sizes as the ‘diverse array of women’ that come together to form a football team. Migliaccio & Berg, however, do not consider gender as contributing to the ‘diverse array of women’ that play football on the basis that, I suggest, they consider ‘women’ to be a homogenous category. If gender is more than either masculinity or femininity, then gender is a key aspect of the ‘diverse array of women’ playing football.

For women “sport is a vexed sphere...It has historically been the site of public anxiety about women’s gender and sexuality, and their development of unfeminine muscular bodies” (Baird, 2004, p. 79). The ways that subjects move and choose to move are

inherently connected to whom that subject is and who they want to be (Gard, 2008) and, through an emphasis on embodiment, both sport and gender are pertinent sites for such explorations. Diverging from the rhetoric of 'women in football' this study aspires to question gender not in relation to the narrow male-female binary but exploring how women might embody masculinity and femininity and asking what it is that distinguishes women in this particular sporting realm.

As I engaged with all of this research I continued to question what it meant for women if culturally Australian Rules football was "one of the last bastions of men's traditional power and privilege" (Messner, Carlisle Duncan, Willms, 2006, p. 38) and how women experienced their bodies when they played; how women negotiated the intensity of the sport and their womanhood. It was this last question that led me to draw on a visual methodology to conduct my research; what do women who play football look like?

Women's Australian Rules football is a subculture in which women are drawn together twice weekly to train and spend most of Sunday preparing, playing and socialising. Women who play football are typically projected by the wider culture homogenously through the rubric of 'women footballers' yet from within this subculture women seem incredibly diverse. The women in my team, for example, range from fifteen years to about forty years of age. Some are still in high school while others are members of the police force or work in corporate environments, warehouses, bars, social work, journalism or sales. Some women have husbands, others have girlfriends or long term partners and some are single. Some have children, others don't. Some women have played for up to seventeen years and are fit, muscular and skilled on the field; others



are playing their first season of football, still learning skills and not very fit; and most of us are somewhere in between.

Despite the myriad differences amongst women, playing football seems to have a way of uniting us. Sharing a passion for football, this subculture is a space that fosters social acquaintances, strong friendships, romances and simply women interacting with other women, even with those they may not particularly like. Some players spend time together during the off-season, others won't see team mates for four months between seasons.

Beyond the relationships that are formed within this subculture the ways in which women interact in this space is also interesting. For example, at training one week our coach was explaining a drill to us and says 'you must try and keep the opposition out of your region', which was responded to by the players with a chorus of sexualised innuendos about other people's 'regions'. In another instance we- the players- were in the change rooms preparing for training when conversation arose about sex and the female reproductive system. The big question that was posed was: 'what is that round bit all the way in the vagina and why does it feel so good?' This conversation continued amongst players until a conclusion was reached. Even later that evening I received a phone call from one of my team mates explaining to me what the body part in question was and proceeded to inform me of how it worked during sex and why it felt 'so good'.

These anecdotes highlight that, at least for me, the interactions and conversations that occur amongst football team mates may be idle chatter, jokes and laughter but can

also be honest and candid. Some team mates are 'mates' to socialise with, others are simply team mates and on field support, and still others are close friends and confidants. It is the varied relationships, bonds and interactions that take place amongst women in this subculture that has drawn me to research women's Australian Rules football. I therefore use the notion of homosociality to engage with women's same-sex bonds and to undertake a nuanced exploration of this subculture specifically asking:

How does homosociality encompass the interactions that exist within the subculture of women's Australian Rules football?

How does homosociality provide a framework for considering power and desire within the subculture of women's Australian Rules football?

How can observations and explorations of a women's Australian Rules football team expand the concepts of homosociality and gender?

What does a visual methodology offer to work on gender and embodiment?

What does research within a women's Australian Rules football team tell us about space, power and social dynamics?

Having outlined the background of this thesis and the research questions that I seek to answer, I now offer an overview of the contributions to knowledge that this investigation makes.

### **Contributions to Knowledge**

A considerable amount of academic literature drawing on feminist poststructural theoretical frameworks does so relative to lesbian spaces and/or subjects. In contrast, I

use queer theoretical tools to investigate a space that is not a homogenously lesbian space and subjects who do not unambiguously identify as lesbian. This contribution to knowledge is important because I draw on queer frames of reference to explore the dynamics of a particular social and cultural sportscape without foregrounding the space or subjects as either homogenous or necessarily lesbian. Instead, I engage with what takes place when a queer theoretical lens is applied to a particular sportscape, rather than lesbian spaces or subjects, and question what this framework allows us to see.

Literature shows that a significant gap exists between what is categorised as 'lesbian' spaces and 'friendship' spaces. Griffin (2000) notes that much feminist literature, although not denying the existence of lesbianism, harbours a tendency to overlook the possibility of same-sex desire among women, irrespective of sexual identification. I found that, within this sportscape, same-sex desire, opposite sex desire and asexual bonds all take place and intersect within this single social and cultural milieu. This means that neither 'lesbian' nor 'friendship' discourse has the scope to describe the meaning or content of women's bonds in this space. Further, I suggest that the terminology subjects draw on says very little about the social bonds to which it refers. Based on this, I demonstrate how the theoretical discourses of homosociality and intragender norms help us to see the complexity of women's same sex bonds and interactions and question what takes place when we do not assume spaces, subjects or interactions to be necessarily sexual or asexual.

Drawing on the epistemological framework of homosociality (Marcus, 2007; Sedgwick, 1985) and intragender norms (Finley, 2010) I do not presume women's bonds and

relationships to be something that they may not be and this is, I argue, a significant contribution to research on girls and women's friendship studies. While the rhetoric of friendship often leads researchers to perceive a bond as platonic and to a degree affable, I do not presume that women's interactions in this space are necessarily genial or platonic. Nor do I presume them to encompass sexual desire or eroticism. One of the key contributions I make in this work is to the field of girls and women's friendship, where I explore social interactions for what may emerge rather than foregrounding them with discourses that determine in advance what a given social bond might entail.

Research into women's sports tends to engage with bodies and embodiment through a gendered lens. In this thesis I engage with the notion of *footballing bodies* rather than through a gendered lens of *women's* footballing bodies. I explore bodies and embodiment for the ways they engage in activities and performances they embody which, I suggest, may lie along a spectrum where masculinity and femininity are at opposite poles. I do not explore the gender of subjects, but rather the acts and embodiments of subjects. This is a notable contribution to sports sociology research because it draws attention to bodies' capacity to perform and act regardless of, or despite, the sex of that body.

Through applying a visual methodology to sport and gender studies I attempt to expand perceptions of physicality, sporting bodies and gender in academic research. Without the aid of visual methods I would not have been able to ascertain the diverse incarnations of gender and physicality that the women who partook in this research embody. Through developing a visual methodology for use in this study, I have drawn attention to aspects of gender, embodiment and physicality that might otherwise not

have been possible and which I suggest may be useful for other studies engaging with gender and/or sport.

Sportscapes offer a theoretical framework through which I engage with the physical manifestation of this sporting space. In addition, I make an argument for the imaginary space of the football team that is constructed by and through participants. Offering insight into this teams' sportscape, I further contribute to the development of a theory on what I describe as 'imaginary space', demonstrating that what takes place within a sportscape brings it to life, while the ways that people conceptualise and engage with/in the sportscape creates meaning for that sportscape. In chapter six I elaborate further on this notion. Drawing on the lens of a sportscape enables me to explore the particularities of this space as distinct from other spaces in which women may be involved. Theoretically, engaging with the notion of the sportscape enables me to explore how subjects' act and interact within the physical and imaginary space of the football team, while acknowledging that what takes place within this sportscape does not necessarily reflect what happens in other social and cultural landscapes.

### **An Outline of the Thesis**

Having introduced the topic of my research and the contributions this work makes to scholarly debate, I now briefly outline the content of this thesis. In the chapter that follows, chapter two, I articulate my area of research by engaging with existing literature in relation to: sex, gender and sexuality; female sociality; women and sport; and women and football. I draw attention to these areas of research because of the way they frame the social and cultural landscape of women's Australian Rules football.

Through this discussion I question how existing bodies of knowledge frame women's sociality, embodiment and physicality, and show how this research project is positioned in relation to the literature I draw on.

Throughout chapter three I explore the notion of homosociality, developing this as my epistemological framework. I build on Sedgwick's (1985) pioneering work on male homosociality and Gunkel's (2010) contemporary theorising of *female* homosociality drafting what I describe as 'the homosocial spectrum'. I discuss how this can act as a mechanism through which to distinguish gender/sexual behaviours and actions from sexual identities while drawing on Gunkel's work to understand how gender embodiment intersects with power dynamics amongst women.

Further to this I introduce Marcus' (2007) text *Between Women* as an example of a framework through which to explore women's bonds and interactions without assuming them to be positive or negative, 'properly' sexual or asexual, and neither limited by labels which denote 'types' of relationships as necessarily sexual nor asexual. In theorising female homosociality, I question how the sex-gender-sexuality triad assumes a powerful discourse through which heteronormativity is sustained as the dominant and pervasive gender order. In this chapter I discuss how homosociality may be used as an epistemological framework, enabling me to engage with the ways that gender and sociality manifest between women in social spaces, specifically within the space of a women's Australian Rules football team.

Drawing on the work of Gerry Bloustein (2003) Gillian Rose (2007), I draw on what I describe as complementary research methods, specifically visual and qualitative

methods and in chapter four I engage in a detailed discussion of how I use these methods, the challenges I encountered and the reasons I chose these methods for this research. I introduce the team and the league in which they play and, specifically, the participants with whom I conduct the research, before discussing the ethics, obstacles and merits of engaging in research with a team of which I was a member at the time of data collection. I then discuss the deployment of my research methods and what led me use these methods within this particular field of study. Outlining the phases of data collection I highlight how these took place and the obstacles I came across before discussing ethical concerns, method of data analysis and introducing the research participants.

Chapter's five to seven are where I analyse and discuss my research data and I do so with the images created throughout the study. In chapter five I use photographs to analyse how sociality is manifest within the field of research, drawing on the concepts of homosociality and intragender relations to do so. I explore the presence of sexual and asexual sociality amongst women, drawing on 'intragender relations' to explore how discourses of power and gendered embodiment (Finley, 2010) are manifest and significant for and amongst women in the study. These theoretical lenses are not distinct but rather overlap and intersect and I argue that explorations of sociality, sexuality and power dynamics cannot be explored in isolation from one another. I unpack the ways that participants embody femininities and masculinities and engage with how women experience the physicality and aggression women's Australian Rules football demands. The analysis of intragender relations and homosociality highlights the contextual dependence of sociality between subjects, and throughout this chapter

I discuss the particularities of the social and cultural context of this women's Australian Rules football team.

In chapter six I focus on space - the physical space in terms of the sportscape and imaginary space in relation to players' affective experiences. I explore physical space through Pronger's (2004) notion of the sportscape where sporting experiences may take place which, in this study, I take to be the football oval, the clubrooms and the change rooms. I identify three key avenues through which space emerged as significant: masculinity and male sportscares, private spaces and the sexualisation of the sportscape, using images to do so. The ways that players embody and perform masculinities, femininities and physicality in this space is reflected through the images participants created and I draw on these images to help me engage with issues of gender, embodiment, physicality and the intersections of these fields.

In the final data analysis section, chapter seven, I focus on the use of visual methodologies in the study. I argue that, given the very visual nature of sport and gender, using visual methodologies offers insight into these fields that non-visual methods alone cannot. I specifically discuss the advent of visual methods relative to what I describe as *footballing bodies*. I use this terminology to denote that footballing bodies tend to be culturally inscribed as male footballing bodies and I attempt to disrupt this iconic image by analysing the ways that this research data disrupts the stereotypical image of the white, lean, muscular, male footballing body. I engage with the ways that research participants embody, experience and perform subjectivities in ways beyond that of 'footballer'. In concluding chapter seven I draw attention to



attitudes surrounding the use of the body in the football sportscape, exploring the presence of heroic endeavour, physical violence and injury.

## **Conclusion**

Sport is influential in Australian culture and women are playing more diverse sports in growing numbers. Where once girls and women playing Australian Rules football was seen as carnivalesque, now they are playing this full-contact, aggressive, physically demanding sport in leagues across Australia that cater for women and girls of all ages. When girls and women partake in activities that resonate with masculinity their gender is typically questioned and homophobic slurs are not uncommon. As a sport traditionally portrayed as celebrating all things male, the advent of female participation in Australian Rules football offers a sportscape in which to explore gender, homosociality, embodiment and physicality.

Playing football is more than a sport, more than a social endeavour, more than a fitness pursuit. Women playing Australian Rules football tend to be perceived as transgressing traditional gender roles and therefore the site of a women's team is an interesting space: what does it mean for gender when women engage in masculinity? What is it about this sport that engages some women so emphatically in participation but not others? What can the women in this sportscape tell us about women's same-sex bonds? What do the rhetoric's of lesbian and friendship discourse say about bonds between women and what might women's bonds look like if we see beyond these discourses? Indeed, what can women playing football show us about the potential, capacity and significance of women's same-sex bonds, embodiment and physicality?



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I begin to highlight the key contributions that I make to academic literature on female sociality, gender, sexuality, space and the sociology of sport. Although I also make contributions to the literature on issues of homosociality, embodiment and visual methodology, I engage with these issues in the following epistemology and methodology chapters. In the current chapter I engage with the following topics: Sex, gender and sexuality; Female sociality; Women and sport; and Women and football. I explore the current literature in these fields and demonstrate how my own work is informed by, intersects with and adds to this existing body of work.

This research makes two significant theoretical arguments in relation to gender and sexuality studies and I begin by clearly articulating these claims and drawing attention to the ways they intersect with the existing fields of study. Firstly, I argue that much of the work that draws on queer theoretical frameworks does so in queer spaces, such as Corie Hammers (2008) work in lesbian bathhouses or Judith Halberstam's (1998) research on female masculinity and transgender. In contrast, this research draws on queer theoretical tools to interrogate a space that is not a distinctly queer space. Women's football tends to be positioned not as a fundamentally queer space, but a sporting space. Engaging queer theoretical tools within sporting spaces is a key distinction between this research and other sociological research on sports participation and sporting spaces. Much sociology of sport literature tends to engage with issues of gender, sexuality and embodiment through discourses of gender binaries and homo or hetero-sexual identity categories. The current research offers an

exploration of gender, sexuality and same-sex sociality through an engagement with queer theoretical conversations and the concept of homosociality. This study is distinguished from other sociology of sport studies through the queer discourses that I draw on, influencing the questions that I ask and the conversations that I have with the data.

While distinct from other sociology of women's sport and football studies through the uptake of queer theoretical tools, this research also deviates from much queer research in that it does not engage with unambiguously queer spaces or subjects.

While much queer theoretical work tends to engage with queer spaces, queer subjects and the challenge of hetero-norms, I engage queer theory with a sports space that is not decidedly queer. This distinction is significant in that I draw together queer and sport not to produce a queer space or explore queer happenings, but to engage in a nuanced exploration of the dynamics of this sportscape that does not foreground the space or subjects as either queer or homogenous. I explore what happens when a queer theoretical lens is applied to sporting spaces rather than queer spaces or subjects.

The second contribution that I make to academic conversations in this research is to explore what takes place between 'lesbian' spaces and asexual spaces. While much research explores spaces and subjects as distinctly lesbian and others engage with spaces and subjects as homogeneously asexual, I question what we see when we do not assume spaces, subjects or interactions as necessarily sexual or asexual. I suggest that distinguishing lesbian or sexual spaces and interactions from asexual spaces and interactions limits the ways in which we see those spaces and interactions.

This research is unique for its exploration of spaces and subjects as neither necessarily lesbian nor necessarily asexual. For example friendship and sport discourse tend to be positioned as always and only asexual while lesbian describes a space, subject or interaction as exclusively sexual. I engage with what takes place when we do not assume a space or interaction to be necessarily sexual nor asexual. I combine sporting spaces and sporting participation with sociality *and* desire, drawing together sexual and asexual polarities to explore what we might see when we do not ascribe 'lesbian', sexual or asexual to spaces, subjects or interactions.

### **Sex, Gender and Sexuality**

Women can be seen as unfeminine, but that does not make them 'unfemale' (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 134).

To refuse to be a woman, however, does not mean that one has to become a man (Wittig, 1992, p. 12).

I draw attention to the quotes above by West & Zimmerman (1987) and Monique Wittig (1992) in order to highlight, from the outset, my position on gender in this thesis. These quotes demonstrate a divergence from the hetero-normative sex-gender-sexuality triad where male, masculine and heterosexual, or female, feminine and heterosexual are posited as normative, idealised subject positions. West & Zimmerman acknowledge that women and females may not embody femininity but that this does not make them 'unfemale' while Wittig argues that for a woman to distance herself from femininity does not make her a man. These quotes ask the reader to question the association of women as (only) feminine and men as (only) masculine. In this section I discuss how sex and gender are drawn together in a (hetero)normative and

unquestioned ways which, I argue, limits our capacity to see gender as more than either feminine or masculine but as multiple and diverse.

Sex and gender tend to be defined by the overarching system of heteronormativity. Berlant & Warner (1998) define heteronormativity as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent- that is organized as a sexuality- but also privileged” (footnote #2, p. 548). Heteronormativity operates beyond simply heterosexuality (Berlant & Warner, 1998), valorising limited configurations of the sex-gender-sexuality triad. This triad expects females to be feminine and desire males, and males to be masculine and desire females. Indeed, the heteronormative triad constitutes heteronormative subjectivities and those who do not embody or perform sex, gender and sexuality following these heteronormative ideals tend to be positioned as ‘other’ and outside the purview of normative culture. This thesis suggests that gender may be conceptualised as multiple and divergent, contending that the heteronormative paradigm of sex, gender and sexuality limits our capacity to see sex, gender and sexualities in more diverse ways.

While I draw on sex in this thesis, it is in order to explore the concept of gender.

Sedgwick (2008) delineates ‘sex’ as chromosomal sex, that which has been typically used to determine biological male-female difference, traditionally including genital formation, hair growth, fat distribution, hormonal functions, and reproduction. Based on the raw science of chromosomal sex is the social construction of gender, “the far more elaborated, more fully and rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviors” (Sedgwick, 2008, p. 27).

While I acknowledge the perception of sex as fixed, I draw on sex as the way that

subjects self identify as male or female while recognising that sex, like gender, is an increasingly malleable and relational social construct.

This thesis takes up gender as a social, cultural and political construction built on the perception of biological and chromosomal sex difference and invested with power dynamics. Sedgwick (2008) writes that “People are different from each other” (p. 22) and while acknowledging that race, class, gender, nationality and sexual orientation are political distinctions that differentiate people, Sedgwick contends that these distinctions fall crudely short of encompassing difference; it remains that “even people who share all or most of our own positioning along these crude axes may still be different enough from us, and from each other, to seem like all but different species” (p. 22). Sedgwick’s argument draws attention to the differences that potentially exist between subjects regardless of gender, sex, race, ethnicity, or class categorisations. Following this trajectory, I explore how genders might be embodied in diverse ways, and that gender need not align subjects along normative axes. Rather, I suggest that femininities and masculinities may be taken up, embodied and enacted in multiple, fluid and subjective ways, regardless of the sex with which subjects identify.

I also recognise that biological and chromosomal sex categorisations overlook Trans and intersex experiences, creating a binary of male or female subject positions where those who do not fit normatively within either sex category are positioned as problematic. While I acknowledge the complexities of sex categorisation it is not in the scope of this research to address the issue. For the purposes of this dissertation I understand sex as the sex with which one self-identifies.

Throughout this thesis I position gender as the embodiment and performance of femininity and masculinity. Similarly, Francis (2008) contends that while 'male' and 'female' relate to biological sex identification, 'masculinity' and 'femininity' relate to gender identification. Masculinity is traditionally described in binary opposition to femininity, where the discursive construction of gender assumes that certain bodies, behaviours, personality traits and desires fit neatly into one of the two sex categories male or female (Schippers, 2007). I suggest that femininity and masculinity need not conflate with either female or male sex, but that femininity and masculinity may be embodied and experienced by either female or male bodies in diverse ways, simultaneously and in different times and spaces.

Heteronormativity produces gender as aligned restrictively with sex and structures certain behaviours as either feminine or masculine practices and thus either female or male behaviour, activity or embodiment. Schippers (2007) argues that through the "recurring patterns of social practice" (p. 91) masculinity and femininity become not only individual gender identities and displays, but "a collective iteration in the form of culture, social structure, and social organization" (Schippers, 2007, p. 91). It is through these 'recurring patterns of social practice' that heteronormative conceptions of sex and gender conflate feminine to female and masculine to male.

Narrowing in on normative performances of gender takes attention away from the diverse ways that gender might be embodied and performed. Kaelin Alexander (2011), in a paper entitled *Men's studies: Masculinities in the margins*, suggests that traditional models of masculinity have left little space for telling or reading 'other' stories about masculinity. Alexander argues that demonising 'old' stories of masculinity offers us



very little, but that we might “simply...tell *more* stories, about *more kinds* of people, who give us *more ways* to think about masculinity” (section 1, para. 8, emphasis in original). Alexander notes that these ‘more kinds of people’ may be women, transfolk or gay men, people who have, traditionally, been at odds with the power and privilege usually associated with masculinity. Landreau & Murphy (2011) similarly argue for dislocating masculinity from the property of men and making it available to a range of embodied practices, acknowledging that these may be easily comprehensible within the heteronormative binary gender system. Recognising that masculinity may not only be ascribed to heterosexual men but to all subjects regardless of their sexed body or the subject of their desire clearly disrupts assumptions about who might or *should* embody masculinity.

This thesis questions how gender is created and policed to produce powerful norms that influence subjects’ gendered behaviours and embodiment. Landreau & Murphy (2011) trouble the association of masculinity and men by framing masculinity as “a range of social practices and relationships- theoretically independent of male embodiment” (p. 133). Similarly problematising the notion of femininity, Paechter (2006a) asks why the ways that boys are undeniably feminine do not “count as femininities or as forms of femininity?” (p. 254). Similarly, Francis (2008) asks if labelling subordinated masculinities as ‘effete’ inculcates us into social misogyny “by refusing to name feminine productions by men as feminine for fear of further pathologising those concerned” (p. 212). Paechter and Francis draw attention to the ways that femininity and effeminacy are devalued when enacted or embodied by male sexed bodies. This thesis questions how subjects embody, experience and enact both masculinity and femininity either at different times or simultaneously. For example,

can a woman embody both femininity and masculinity when she plays Australian Rules football and if so, what does that look like?

Further contesting binaries of gender, sexuality and embodiment Judith Halberstam, in her text *Female Masculinity* (1998), questions the association of masculinity with the male body. Halberstam recognises that masculinity conjures up notions of power, legitimacy and privilege, yet tends to be upheld only when embodied in a male body. In seeking to understand masculinity, Halberstam suggests that masculinity “becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle class body” (p. 2); what masculinity looks like and what it represents, becomes clear only when we divorce it from the dominant, white, male, middle class body.

Ultimately, Halberstam (1998) explores female masculinity to investigate queer subject positions with the goal of challenging hegemonic models of gender conformity. The text addresses what Halberstam describes as the “collective failure to imagine and ratify the masculinity produced by, for, and with women” (p. 15) and asks the question: “How does gender variance disrupt the flow of powers presumed by patriarchy in relations between men and women?” (p. 17). What happens to social and power dynamics *between men and women* when women embody and enact masculinities? What happens to social and power dynamics *amongst women* when women embody masculinities and, further, what constitutes masculinity?

Girls and women embodying masculinity tend to be positioned as illegitimate women, often derided as ‘lesbian’ not as an identification of their sexual desires, but as an insult to their identification of the category woman. What is stigmatised is not only

their sexual preference but also their performance and embodiment of gender.

Questions of gender and sexuality are inextricable from one another; one can only be expressed in terms of the other, yet in the current climate gender and sexuality operate on different analytic axes and questions of gender and sexuality are not the same (Sedgwick, 2008). Binary categories of identification offer us normative mechanisms through which power dynamics are produced yet, as Sedgwick articulates, this does not mean that subjects do, perform, experience or embody these categories of classification in the same ways.

Queer theoretical work such as Corie Hammers' (2008) offers an example of the diverse ways that subjects may experience subjectivity outside of narrow sex, gender and sexuality categories. Hammers' research on lesbian/queer bathhouses highlights the overt diversity of genders and sexualities that fall beyond the rhetoric of male, female, feminine and masculine. Further, Hammers' work shows how the space of the lesbian/queer bathhouse creates scope for this diverse subjectification. For example Hammers finds that subjects draw on "queer boi dyke", "bi-boi" or "genderqueer-bi-fag" (p. 149) to describe their subjectivities. This highlights the overt diversity of genders and sexualities that fall beyond the rhetoric of woman, masculine-feminine, queer or lesbian. This work demonstrates what Hammers describes as a "convoluted picture of gender" (p. 155) where individuals could "display their gendered and sexed selves unabashedly and without apology" (Hammers, 2008, p. 155), offering insight into the multiple ways that subjects experience their selves.

Under heteronormative conceptualisations of masculinity, characteristics associated with 'masculine' must be unavailable to females in order to ensure and legitimate male

dominance over females. The same is so for women and 'femininity'. Paechter (2006a) contends that gender should not be restricted to how one is perceived by others but "who one experiences oneself, including one's embodied self, to be" (p. 258), while Francis (2008) argues that "the power of the 'reader' to assign gender is an integral aspect of 'authentic' identification" (p. 215). Both Paechter and Francis position gender as a subjectivity that might be either perceived by others or self-described. I diverge from both positions and ask what it looks like to describe *behaviours* and *embodiments* as gendered rather than *subjects* as gendered. In doing so I challenge the assumption that subjects embody and perform gender in fixed ways arguing instead that the ways that subjects take up, embody and perform gender may differ across different times, spaces, and social, cultural and political settings.

Women's Australian Rules football is a social and cultural space in which gender is illuminated. Paechter (2006b) notes that "in most circumstances it is more helpful to focus on localised practices linked together in wider constellations than to discuss genders (or sexes) as monolithic entities" (p. 13). Moving beyond heteronormative conceptualisations of gender within a women's Australian Rules football team, I explore how women experience, embody and enact gender within this particular 'localised practice'.

Femininity and masculinity as they have been traditionally theorised are constraining and restrictive. This research aspires to explore and expand reifications of gender. Following Alexander (2011) I seek to tell '*more* stories about *more kinds* of people' in order to explore gender as diverse and multiplicitous. Football is positioned as a masculine domain and thus (hetero)normalised for male participation. From this

limited perspective, female participation is positioned as transgressing gender norms. I take women's participation in Australian Rules football in a different direction by drawing on West & Zimmerman's (1987) opening quote: women are playing football, but that does not make them unfemale. What then, does this say about gender?

### **Female Sociality**

Female same-sex sociality tends to be explored through a discourse of either 'friendship' or 'lesbian' which, I argue, positions bonds between girls and women as either distinctly sexual or asexual. I ask what interactions between girls and women might look like beyond these rubrics; what do we see if we do not assume an interaction between females to be an exclusively sexual or asexual bond, friendship or lesbian relationship? What is an interaction between girls and women if they are neither friends nor a lesbian couple? This section questions the discourse of friendship and lesbian and begins to explore how homosociality has been deployed and might be a useful alternative for exploring interactions between girls and women.

Friendship is an often deployed but rarely defined term. While relationships, interactions and bonds between people are inherently diverse, theorists tend to draw on the overarching rubric of 'friendship' to describe these social connections. Adams, Blieszner & De Vries (2000) contend that perceptions of friendship vary but rather than research this variation "most scholars ignore the complexity, bemoan the difficulty it causes in analysis, or eliminate it" (p. 117). For example Morris-Roberts (2004) considers the importance of schoolgirl friendship in producing and contesting femininity and compulsory heterosexuality but, while engaging in a comprehensive

analysis, evades defining how the research uses the notion 'friendship'. Despite using language such as "through their formations of friendship" (p. 240) Morris-Roberts neglects to distinguish just what these formations are. Similarly, Hills' (2007) research provides insight into the physical education experiences of girls "particularly in relation to difference, competence, and friendship" (p. 331) yet does not elaborate what is meant by the term 'friendship'. Through neglecting to consider how 'friendship' is deployed these researchers disregard the complexity inherent in friendship, social and peer relations.

Without clear definition the term 'friendship' is deployed as an overarching umbrella term that seemingly defines all non-sexual interpersonal relationships between subjects. Indeed, the concept of friendship says little about what actually takes place between 'friends'. For example, while Frith (2004) argues that "girls' friendships have often been romanticized as a haven of warmth and support, intimate self-disclosure and trust" (p. 357), Ludwig (2007) suggests that negative interactions between girls have "been dismissed for years by many as normal rites of passage ('girls being girls' type behaviour)" (p. 32, brackets in original). I suggest that girls and women's sociality is influenced by power dynamics, and that friendship discourse offers little insight into exploring how power affects female sociality.

Female friendship groups tend to be represented as "ripe sites where compulsory heterosexual romantic norms are vigorously negotiated" (Korobov & Thorne 2009, p. 51). Further, Korobov & Thorne suggest that "orienting to compulsory heterosexual romance usually confers status and popularity with like-minded young women, which in turn can promote social status" (p. 51). This demonstrates how power dynamics

infiltrate girls and women's same-sex female friendship groups and follows the notion of men's traffic in women as explored by Gayle Rubin (2006) in her paper *The traffic in women: Notes on the "political economy" of sex*. In this article Rubin unravels the relationships of power through which women become the prey of men, a notion Rubin refers to as 'traffic in women'. Male 'traffic in women' is a discourse which infiltrates female consumption of goods and services, their bonds with one another and their transaction of self, yet offers little insight into women's interactions with other women.

The contention that Korobov & Thorne (2009) make, that heterosexual romance confers social status for those who adhere to heterosexual desires, does not tell us how girls and women who *do not* orient to heterosexual desires are positioned along axes of social status. Rubin (1993) writes that "sexuality is political...organized into systems of power, which reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others" (p. 34). While girls and women's relationships with males may offer females privilege and status through heterosexual bonds, it is through bonds with males. How do the systems of power that Rubin describes influence girls and women's bonds with *one another*, rather than with males?

While there is a significant body of research that explores girl's and women's friendship Christine Griffin (2000) suggests that while one body of research tends to study young and presumed heterosexual girls and women's friendship, another body of research studies young women who self identify as lesbian, bisexual or queer. As a result, same-sex desiring girls and women tend to be rendered absent in friendship discourse. While there are a number of other factors that may affect social bonds

between girls and women- for example race, ethnicity, dis-ability or socio-economic status- in this research I draw attention to gender and sexuality as it intersects with friendship and sociality between girls and women.

Griffin (2000) avows “Where same-sex female desire and lesbian existence (or the possibility of lesbian existence) is ignored, this is an absence that matters” (p. 228, brackets in original). I draw on Griffin’s work to invoke a connection between female same sex desire and female friendship discourse. While heteronormative paradigms tend to delineate same-sex desire and friendship discourses, I draw attention to the space in between these polarities. Friendship between females is largely presumed to be asexual while same-sex desire and lesbian studies are presumed to be speaking to sexual interactions. I question this assumption and argue that this distinction makes generalisations that predicate what ought to take place in bonds between women and girls without actually exploring what these bonds and relationships mean for those involved in them. What might relationships and interactions between girls and women look like when they are not foregrounded by ‘lesbian’ or ‘friendship’ discourse?

Girls’ passionate relationships have long been recognised. For example, referring to Lillian Faderman’s earlier work, Jeffreys (1989) describes the way in which middle-class women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shared passionate friendships with other women. To us in contemporary times these “passionate declarations of eternal devotion and descriptions of highly sensual interaction are startling because we have been trained to see such behaviour as indicative of lesbianism and not part of the everyday lifestyle of the majority of married middle-class women” (Jeffreys 1989, p. 20). Similarly Griffin (2000), reviewing research on adolescent and young women’s



friendships, contends that much academic work has little to say about sexual and erotic dimensions of women's relationships and says little about the role of these relationships within the construction of young women's sexualities. The significance of these theorists' work is that regardless of whether or not passionate bonds between girls and women contain a sexual element, they may nonetheless reflect a deep bond between girls and women. The possibility of positive and passionate bonds between girls and women tends to be obfuscated under the rubric of 'friendship' because 'friendship' implies an asexual dynamic. I suggest that this limits what we can see when we explore what we describe as 'friendship'.

Distinguishing lesbian from friendship polarises the discourses of sexual and asexual dynamics between women, but what of same-sex interactions that are neither friendship nor lesbian? Julian Carter (2005) demonstrates how conceptual and social categories for considering women's relations with other women- 'romantic friendship' and 'lesbianism'- cannot properly demarcate the complexity and nuances that women's interactions with other women may hold. Carter demonstrates how a lesbian identity occludes certain subjectivities. 'Lesbian', Carter avows, has been typically associated with female masculinity and androgyny, while feminine gendering has had a complex relationship to same-sex desire. Lesbian as an identity category is not simply about same-sex desire but about a performance of 'woman' where sexual desire of the female object is conceived as masculine and thus a woman desiring another woman is structured as a masculine trait.

Carter (2005) argues that structuring female masculinity as inherent to 'lesbian' complicates and restricts lesbian subjectivity. For example, how are feminine women

who have loved and had sex with other women positioned within a lesbian subject position? This demonstrates how identity categories are exclusionary and create social norms that position certain subjects' performances as 'legitimate', while others are subject to scrutiny or disavowed.

That women's relationships and interactions with other women are diverse is born of the notion that women are, in and of themselves, diverse. Sharing a commonality of identifying as female does not mean that women experience 'womanhood' in the same ways. That women may fit the social category of 'woman' or 'lesbian' negates the diversity of 'woman' or 'lesbian' as individual subjects. Carter (2005) specifically draws attention to the way that queering gender suggests we should reconsider the relationships between lesbian history, queer history and theory. This draws attention to the ways that women embody and enact femininity and masculinity simultaneously and in varied ways, pointing to diverse subject positions of girl, woman, female and desire. This further suggests that acknowledging the inherent diversity among people who identify as female means that we must also explore females' relationships with other females from a point of inherent diversity and complexity, which a rubric of lesbian or friendship does not afford.

A useful concept to expand girls' and women's same-sex bonds and interactions is a modified version of Sedgwick's (1985) homosociality. Homosociality, as conceptualised by Sedgwick, is a means to conceptualise men's same-sex interactions and traffic in women. What I suggest is that *female* homosociality may be used to explore bonds between women. Denoting neither the presence of a sexual element, nor its absence, homosociality may have the scope to encapsulate a wider range of bonds and

interactions between women without highlighting the presence, or the absence, of males.

Homosociality can be used to conceptualise “the feelings bonding and dividing people of the same gender” (Edwards, 2009, p. 33) and can be drawn upon to describe both the positive and negative interactions that may occur between people of the same sex. Indeed, the basic premise of homosociality, same-sex sociality, can be seen to underpin any interaction or relationship between two or more members of the same sex; family, friends, peers, lovers, acquaintances or opponents in conflict. Significantly, homosociality does not foreground an interaction as either sexual or asexual.

While homosociality does not have the scope to encompass such concerns as race, ethnicity, dis-ability or socio-economic status it does challenge the pervasion of heteronormativity. I suggest that female homosociality may offer a mechanism for exploring girls’ and women’s relationships as more than just a passage to hetero-romantic love or hierarchy and may explore female interactions without foregrounding them as necessarily ‘friendship’ or ‘lesbian’. I argue that within the scope of a women’s football team, the dynamics between women are many and diverse and that homosociality may offer a mechanism through which to explore these varied bonds.

Masculinity studies have identified powerful links between masculinity and homosociality (Flood, 2008) and explore (male) homosociality in relation to the maintenance and reproduction of (male) power dynamics. Power dynamics amongst people who identify as male are exacerbated through (male) homosocial relations; males’ “attempt to improve their social position in masculine social hierarchies”

(Flood, 2008, p. 341) seeking approval from other males by identifying with and competing against them (Flood, 2008). Hegemonic masculinity subordinates other performances of masculinity and femininity, reinscribing traditional binary expectations of gender as relating inflexibly to sex where female equates to feminine and male to masculine.

Drawing on homosociality, I explore how the sexed body intersects with sociality, expanding theorisations of friendship and sociality by contributing to the dearth of literature on homosociality as it relates to girls and women. Male homosociality is a means of perpetuating this hierarchy and the neglect of literature on female homosociality can be seen as demonstrating the subordination of women under masculine hegemony because, if homosociality is “social bonds between persons of the same sex” (Sedgwick, 1985, p. 1), then women are clearly homosocial beings.

Gender is integral to conversations around homosociality and although not necessarily *inherent* to discourse around friendship, there remains an abundance of literature considering friendship in relation to gender. For example the *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* dedicates an entire special issue to “differences between the friendship experiences of boys and girls” (Bukowski & Saldarriaga Mesa, 2007, p. 508), contending that studies on friendship may be an ideal way to explore and understand gender; “Friendship puts the effects of gender into sharp relief as it draws out the ways that being a girl and being a boy make a difference” (Bukowski & Saldarriaga Mesa, 2007, p. 518).

Highlighting the diversity of the papers in this special issue Bukowski & Saldarriaga Mesa reflect upon the “multifaceted nature of research on peer relations and on differences between boys and girls” (p. 508). Reflecting on the diversity of social bonds

*between* females and males and *amongst* females and males this special issue points to the influence of the sexed body on sociality.

## **Women and Sport**

Social conventions like facing the door in the elevator are often so well-ingrained that they are invisible to everyone until someone doesn't conform. The irregularity, the moment of resistance, or the deviant act tends to illustrate the rule (Messner et al., 2006, p. 36-7).

Sport is notoriously deployed as a masculine domain and despite women participating in burgeoning numbers literature on women's sport participation typically remains centred on women's participation as a gendered experience rather than the experience of athletes. While women's participation in competitive sport might be read in terms of overcoming dominant gender norms, literature suggests that female sports participation is not always so simple. Some female athletes find that they must 'compensate' for what is perceived as a performance or embodiment of masculinity in sport by emphasising an overt performance and embodiment of femininity *away* from the sports field. For example, wearing their hair long in a ponytail to ensure that they are 'read' as female.

The image of women athletes as tough, powerful and strong tends to be a disavowed subjectivity and women are expected to compensate for such displays of masculinity. Ross & Shinen (2008) suggest that although some female athletes are able to create a reality that allow them to perceive themselves as women as well as serious sports competitors, women's sport participation continues to be positioned as inconsistent with "prescriptive gender roles" (Ross & Shinen, 2008, p. 53). Where women playing

sport transgress heteronormative ideals by performing masculinity, they tend to be positioned as women engaging in masculinity rather than athletes, foregrounding gender over athleticism.

While some sports women are able to mesh female athleticism with femininity, such as tennis or netball players, sports which are culturally positioned as acceptable female pursuits, many are not. Sporting pursuits that demand traits such as overt physicality, full-contact, aggression, toughness and competition are typically unable to synchronise athleticism with femininity. Harris (2007), in work on football in the UK, suggests that women have been able to legitimise their participation “to the stage where the term woman football player was no longer perceived and mocked as an oxymoron” (para. 6.2). However, as Ross & Shinenew (2008) attest, this is challenged by the high degree of energy that some athletes put into “constructing a traditionally feminine image” (p. 53). Similarly, Harris’s research explores extensively the ‘image problem’ of women’s football implying that while the term ‘woman footballer’ may no longer be an oxymoron it nonetheless contests gender norms and expectations. Essentially, these research projects conclude that women juggle the opposing positions of ‘femininity’ and ‘athlete’ and that while some women manage this disjunction others attempt to counteract their performances of perceived masculine athleticism with overt performances of heterosexual femininity.

Women’s sport literature remains largely predicated on the premise that sport is masculine and masculine is male. Mean & Kassing (2008) establish that female athletes may achieve athletic identities by using “culturally established discourses of male athleticism while simultaneously managing femininity” (p. 142), yet embedded in the

identities and discourses of these female athletes is traditional male hegemony and thus these (female) athletes re/produce traditional power relations (Mean & Kassing, 2008). This argument is based on the notion that, despite a subject's sex, performances of masculinity are valorised over femininity.

The rhetoric of women's empowerment and athleticism through sport remains predicated on the deployment of masculinity. Mean & Kassing (2008) avow that "identities are subject to discourse" (p. 127) yet this research, as well as Ross & Shinew's (2008) work does little to address the contention that masculinity, despite the subject's sex, remains hierarchalised at the expense of femininity. Contemporary sports participation for women is subject to gendered scrutiny where discourse continues to position female athletes as "women who play sport rather than athletes first and foremost" (Mean & Kassing, 2008, p. 127). Although research has recognised that women must negotiate athleticism *and* gender within the sports realm, little academic literature has addressed how women experience sport when their female gender is not at the fore of their embodiment in sports.

Popular culture, including sport, reveals much about gender relations (Grindstaff & West, 2006) and while Gard (2008) contends that dance is an interesting site for explorations of gender because "for all intents and purposes, it is simply another form of physical activity which people may or may not choose to do" (p. 184), Messner et al. (2006) note that sports are not a space isolated from wider culture but are rather intertwined with aspects of social life. Ross & Shinew (2008), for example, use the phrase "throwing like a girl" (p. 40) to frame their argument that women in sport remain marginalised with inferior capabilities relative to males playing sport, while

males who are not proficient in sport are degraded as inferior to women in sport creating a hierarchy whereby athletic prowess is valorised via its proximity to masculinity.

Exemplifying sport and gender relations 'throwing like a girl' is interpreted as females not having the ability to throw proficiently, positioning female sporting abilities on a lower rank than male sporting abilities and, further, those females who can throw proficiently as "unusual or possessing male-like qualities" (Ross & Shinenew, 2008, p. 40). Gender relations foreground and politicise sport through the heteronormative perception that sport is masculine and therefore 'real sport' is male.

Problematized through the perception that men and women are not necessarily restricted to the masculine and feminine respectively, the current research challenges the adage of 'throwing like a girl'. Gender subjectivity is affected by the way that individuals embody and perform gender, layered with the ways in which their gender is read and perceived by others. That subjects' may embody and enact gender in various and multiple ways challenges assumptions that position some sports as male and others as female. Gill (2007), exploring what she describes as 'violent femininities', notes that sporting contexts define gender as primarily embodied, inscribing meanings and uses onto bodies. I argue that gender is not only embodied but is also enacted, in diverse ways, and that through the use of the body subjects create space for participation in activities that normative expectations of embodiment alone may surpass. For example women who have a small body size might not be expected or encouraged to play a full-contact sport like Australian Rules football, yet through their physical use of their body may find that they are capable of playing the sport well.



Gender then, must be understood to be both embodied and enacted because when we foreground either to the exclusion of the other, we limit the possibilities of gender and bodies.

Given that sports typically suit different body types, demand certain movements and a particular uniform, they are a prime site in which the body might be 'read' by others as well as the self. Gard (2008) contends that the body is 'read' by others, that its shape, movements, and dress project an image that is read, and thus interpreted, by others. Writing that culture, including gender, influences how we choose to use our bodies Gard (2008) suggests that "our bodies are both biological and social entities" (p. 189). Our bodies allow us to define and redefine ourselves through use and presentation. Gard's deployment of gender demonstrates the various ways in which we might embody and enact our gender at different times and in different spaces. While we may use our bodies in certain ways on the sporting field, we may embody a different gender performance off the field, with family or in workspaces.

Traditionally sport possesses strong historical relations to masculine values and practices (Hickey, 2008) and inherent to sport is the maintenance and reproduction of what it is to be male and, by association, female in the given culture. Described as "one of the last bastions of men's traditional power and privilege" (Messner et al., 2006, p. 38), sport has been inaugurated as promoting a desired display of masculinity where an emphasis on strength, courage and power has become associated with "'true' maleness" (Burgess, Edwards & Skinner, 2003, p. 210). Often exemplifying hegemonic masculinity, sport serves to maintain traditional ideas of "male superiority and female frailty" (Messner et al., 2006, p. 38) and, since heteronormative conceptualisations of

gender position women in binary opposition to men, while sport is masculine and male it cannot be considered feminine and female. Contesting gender as masculine or feminine exclusively challenges the capacity to identify sports as normatively male or female; while sports may be more masculine or feminine in certain respects, this need not position them as wholly male or female.

To position bodies as biologically predisposed to certain sports over others prevents subjects from embodying and enacting genuine expressions of gender. Gard (2008) writes that nobody at birth is programmed to “enjoy playing football or doing ballet” (p. 185), activities typically associated with male and female sexes respectively. Rather, boys and men learn to use and enjoy using their bodies within a particular “social realm of human experience” (Gard, 2008, p. 185). Gard (2008) writes that “the restrictions boys and men place on the ways they use their bodies...are linked to the restrictions boys and men place on what it means to be male” (p. 186). What is at stake is how the category ‘male’ becomes caught up in narrow conceptions of what are deemed acceptable, appropriate and pleasurable ‘male’ pursuits (Gard, 2008). The issue then is not that sport is predominantly associated with masculinity, but that heteronormative culture creates a social and cultural milieu in which certain activities are celebrated as the core of what it means to self-identify as either male or female.

### **Women and Football**

[W]omen and/in football is emerging as a fertile popular cultural practice for feminist analysis of gender and its intersectionality with sexuality and ethnicity (Caudwell, 2007, p. 184).

Caudwell's quote points to the potential of research into women's football participation to offer a unique space for explorations of gender. Gender remains a primary categorisation for female athletes that produces and reproduces females who play sport as women rather than as athletes (Mean & Kassing, 2008). This is distinct from men in the sporting realm, who are often identified as athletes rather than *male* athletes. Since sports are primarily demarcated as already male terrains, gender distinctions for males are redundant. Sport has been deeply sedimented within masculine ways of being and acting (Wright, 2000 cited in Hickey, 2008, p. 150) and is a social institution reflecting dominant power relations and social values (Messner, 1992b cited in Burgess et al., 2003, p. 199). Although sporting pursuits differ in the degree to which they act as suitable contexts for producing and sustaining particular versions of masculinity (Skille, 2008) codes of football are often offered as "exemplars of culturally defined masculinity" (Migliaccio & Berg, 2007, p. 271). In the Australian context, hegemonic masculinity is constructed through rugby league, rugby union and Australian Rules football (Burgess et al., 2003) marking these sites as particularly powerful social forces for hegemonic displays of masculinity.

One of the key elements that connect codes of football to masculinity and its almost impenetrable conflation as a masculine domain is its use of full-contact physicality and aggression. Skille (2008) contends that modern sport serves as an avenue for expressing what is described as socially-generated aggressive urges which are not usually permitted to be expressed through other social contexts. Rugby and Australian Rules football are full-contact sports in which players are rewarded for tackling the opposition to the ground in order to gain control of the ball. The association of these sports with violence and aggression is important for understanding why they act as

exemplars of culturally defined masculinity, aggression that is legitimated for males as acceptable but not so for females.

Traits traditionally associated with hegemonic masculinity such as expressions of aggression, physical power, strength and courage are legitimated within codes of football (Skille, 2008) and are characteristics inherent to Australian Rules football. Indeed, these characteristics serve to reproduce Australian Rules football as a site that permits and promotes the use of physical violence for males condemned as unacceptable in wider society and as unacceptable for women, even in sport.

One of the central elements of sport is physicality and embodiment. Laura Chase (2006), in a study of female rugby participation, suggests that sport has the potential to allow women to reappropriate their bodies but equally contends that rugby is a sporting space in which certain disciplinary processes are in force; women's bodies, rather than becoming subjected to normative femininity, become docile sporting bodies. While many of the women in Chase's study transgressed normative femininity, they worked instead towards achieving "disciplined, athletic and docile bodies" (p. 245). Playing rugby for these women serves as a means to transgress traditional gendered embodiment yet remains unable to provide positive, empowered depictions of femininity; the female body becomes an athletic body and 'femininity' is still unable to encompass the athleticism of rugby. Chase's research provides a strong foundation from which to build on female physical embodiment. However due to her methodological framework and the questions she focuses on, Chase's research does not have the scope to disrupt the disjunction that exists between female athleticism and heteronormative femininity.

Females displaying aggression and power are typically perceived negatively against the heteronormative celebration of traditional femininity. Exploring rugby culture Gill (2007) suggests that physically aggressive women are “among the most stigmatised groups in society” (p. 416) as women displaying physical aggression or violence contradict notions of femininity as passive. Women playing full-contact sports are engaging in physical aggression and violence and are thus positioned by Gill as a stigmatised group. While Chase (2006) suggests that women playing rugby transgress normative femininity and aspire to “disciplined, athletic and docile bodies” (p. 245), Gill (2007) advocates that women engaging in violence and aggression are enacting an “alternate femininity” (p. 424) rather than a non-femininity. The rugby team in Gill’s research are localised in a dominantly masculine and heteronormative culture and while the violent and aggressive displays of femininity may be considered subversive, Gill describes these displays as ‘alternative’ performances of femininity.

Drawing together femininity and violence, a trait traditionally defined as masculine, Gill (2007) succeeds in avoiding the polarisation of women and violence and instead incorporates violence and aggression into a performance of femininity. Gill suggests that women playing male-dominated sports such as rugby are typically characterised as transgressing gender norms, yet the rugby playing women in her study force “a closer evaluation and examination of the ability of women to develop alternative identities” (p. 424). Gill expands the category of ‘femininity’ to encompass women’s athleticism:

Physicality and violence are reinterpreted and understood as an important part of gender identities and relations which does not assume the role of women as

victims and men as aggressors. Rather, women are able to use violence and physicality to perform alternative version[s] of femininity (p. 425).

While both Chase and Gill provide compelling analyses of women playing rugby, Chase maintains the discourse of normative femininity as the base mark from which athletic difference and 'docile sporting bodies' are measured. In contrast, Gill forges an extension of varied femininities with the capacity to meld women's diverse performances of gender into 'femininities'. Gill's constitution of femininity acts as a scale, broadly encompassing traditional, heteronormative femininity but also performances of femininity typically marked as 'non-feminine', 'other' or 'masculine'.

Undertaking an exploration of women playing tackle football in a women's only competition in the United States, Migliaccio & Berg (2007) found that tackle football provides a culture in which participants can enjoy a sense of aggressiveness, physicality and empowerment. Further, the researchers found that the variety of skills and body sizes amongst female tackle football players provides athletic success that many players may not have previously experienced in other sporting pursuits. Migliaccio & Berg found that while playing football invoked behaviours endemic to 'men's sports' such as aggression and competitiveness, that the players also attached strong values of being female with the sport, such as a sense of family, trust, friendship and support. Combining 'feminine' values with 'masculine' behaviours this study demonstrates a feminising of sport. Exploring how feminine values and performances may intersect with masculinity in sport offers insight into how sports may be neither exclusively masculine nor feminine pursuits.

While Migliaccio & Berg (2007) provide a valuable account of women's participation in tackle football the paper does not address relationships or sociality between women in this sphere. Codes of women's football across the globe have been both explored and stereotyped in terms of a lesbian sub-culture (see for example Caudwell, 2006, 2007, 2011a, 2011b; Chase, 2006; Gill, 2007; Harris, 2005, 2007; Hillier, 2005) and while this conjunction tends to reinforce a lesbian in football stereotype, I suggest that it is significant to acknowledge the potential presence of women's same-sex desire within football subcultures. Indeed, I suggest that women's football need not be positioned as either inherently sexual or asexual and that by exploring the potential of female sociality within football spaces, we position football as somewhere between a homogenously lesbian space and a wholly asexual space.

Having written on the women's football (soccer) subculture in the UK, Harris (2007) addresses how women playing football negotiate the contested ideologies of femininity, masculinity and desire. The cultural positioning of women's football in relation to masculinity has a significant effect on how women 'do gender' within this subculture as well as women's perceived sexual orientation. For example, Harris (2007) establishes that for all of the women in his study, "the game (soccer) suffered from a poor image and that their own participation was normally associated with having their sexual orientation questioned" (para. 4.3, brackets added). Women having their sexual orientation questioned implies that the 'poor image' associated with football is a lesbian stereotype, since one's sexual orientation tends to be challenged only if it is suspected to be outside the 'normative' parameters of heterosexuality. Indeed, "the lesbian label and the image of the game were by far the strongest and most visible themes to emerge" in Harris's research (para. 4.5). Throughout the article, Harris

positions the lesbian image as problematic and negative and it is unclear as to whether this is framed by the participants or the researcher. Indeed, the researcher leads us to believe that subjects have difficulty negotiating sexual desire, behaviour and subjectivities in which same-sex desire or female masculinity may be accepted. Rather the research frames a lesbian subjectivity as inherently connected to female masculinity, exemplified in women's football and a problematic subjectivity.

The association of 'lesbian' with non-heterosexual subjectivities offers a limited perception of desire and sociality. For example, exploring a lesbian-identified football (soccer) team in the United Kingdom, Caudwell (2007) suggests that although a lesbian-identified team may disrupt normative heterosexuality, "a critical engagement with lesbian subversion is necessary before claiming lesbian 'subjects' as queer 'subjects'" (p. 183). In attempting to demonstrate the complexity of lesbian sexuality, Caudwell (2007) explores the presence of 'femme' and 'butch' identities within this subculture. Players self-identification of butch or femme 'genders' "indicates the ease with which lesbian players (re)claim and celebrate aspects of lesbian gender in football spaces" (Caudwell, 2007, p. 189). Butch and femme gender identities within this space become normalised and the butch figure "becomes celebrated in football iconography as authentic" (Caudwell, 2007, p. 189). The femme figure and femininity is thus configured as inauthentic within the football space and football as legitimately masculine, regardless of the sex that subjects identify as, is reinforced.

While Caudwell's critical analysis offers insight into lesbian subjectivities, it does not address desire and sociality outside of sexuality categories. Caudwell's exploration of the spatiality of sexuality provides a strong basis for exploring gender, sexuality and



homosociality within women's Australian Rules football. Caudwell (2007) establishes that within this lesbian subculture normative and anti-normative are redefined, yet these subjectivities are relegated to the butch-femme discourse and therefore reproduce a masculine-feminine polarity where the masculine or butch is held up as more authentic than femininity or femme in this space. Caudwell herself contends that the "[b]utch display...does not always represent subversion" (p. 190) to the extent that the configuration of female-masculine-lesbian can be perceived as normative (Caudwell, 2007). While Caudwell offers a lesbian subjectivity as complex and positive, the self-categorising of subjects as femme or butch moves towards re/producing a normative order whereby subjects are expected to fit predetermined identity categories. I expand on this by questioning the ways in which desire and sociality intersect and need not be exclusively sexual or asexual.

While there is much academic literature that explores women in football, in particular addressing issues relating to sexual orientation and gender, very little literature addresses the subculture as a site for homosocial bonds and interactions beyond the lesbian rhetoric. This thesis aspires to move beyond football as feminine or masculine, and beyond empowering or oppressive butch-femme subjectivities to investigate how a women's football subculture may be a space in which women interact with other women, where masculinity and femininity intersect and what this might mean for women who play.

## CHAPTER 3: EPISTEMOLOGY

### Homosociality

Homosociality is a theory of same-sex sociality. Utilised as a theoretical framework in this research project, homosociality speaks to issues of gender, sexuality and embodiment. I build on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's early work on the concept in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) by drawing on Henriette Gunkel's more recent text *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa* (2010). This work is significant in relation to this thesis because Gunkel is a contemporary scholar thinking about homosociality in relation to gender and sexuality. By bringing these theorists together I challenge pervasive discourses that maintain homophobic and heteronormative outlooks and continue to develop a more nuanced account of female homosociality. As Gunkel (2010) notes, homosocial structures are dependent on cultural and historical context and are subject to change. I frame my research within a theoretical framework of homosociality as it is continuing to be developed and challenged with the scope to encompass gender and sexual diversity.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's pioneering work on homosociality demonstrates how various aspects of the social world are innately connected. For example, in her text *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Sedgwick (1985) suggests that the evolution in the structure of male homosocial desire is concomitantly tied up with the evolving configurations of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, hetero and homo-sexuality, their relationship to class and their connection to women and the gender system as a whole. I suggest that this discerning use of the concept

'homosociality' provides an avenue through which to explore the interwoven dynamics

of gender/sexuality, sociality, and power. Although Sedgwick's work is focused on eighteenth and nineteenth century English literature, the current study aspires to use the concept of homosociality in the present to explore the intersections of gender/sexuality, embodiment, space and sport through a visual exploration of women's Australian Rules football. This research uses a framework of homosociality in an effort to queer the persistent dichotomy of masculine vs. feminine and hetero vs. homo-sexual identity categories. Building on Sedgwick's 'male homosocial continuum' I introduce Sedgwick's pioneering work on homosociality and I also work to further expand and question the concept by drawing on Gunkel's (2010) theories of homosociality before exploring other ways the concept is being deployed, and how I engage with homosociality in the current research.

Published in her text *Between Men*, Sedgwick (1985) hypothesises the potential continuity of a continuum entitled 'male homosocial desire' extending from the homosocial at one polarity to the homosexual at the other. Sedgwick explains homosociality as a term that describes social bonds between members of the same sex, while Edwards (2009) further notes that it is a means of "conceptualising the feelings bonding and dividing people of the same gender" (p. 33). Homosociality can thus speak to both the connections and *disconnections* between members of the same sex with the potential for exploring all same-sex bonds and interactions, positive or negative. This is to say that whether subjects like each other or not, their relationship or interaction can still be conceptualised within the theory of homosociality, something that 'friendship' discourse eludes. Essentially, Sedgwick's work is a theoretical discussion exploring sexual and gender politics, recognising that homosociality is:

[T]heoretically interesting partly as a way of approaching a larger question ‘sexual politics’: What does it mean- what difference does it make- when a social or political relationship is sexualized?...what theoretical framework do we have for drawing any links between sexual and power relationships? (p. 5).

Sedgwick’s work speaks to the intersection of gender and sexual acts, behaviours and power dimensions, aspects that this study seeks to explore within the context of a women’s Australian Rules football team.

Drafting the homosocial continuum in an effort to challenge the hetero-homosexual dichotomy, Sedgwick opposes the homosocial with the homosexual and the following figure demonstrates Sedgwick’s polarisation:

Sedgwick’s homosocial continuum

Homosocial -----Homosexual

Figure 1: Sedgwick’s homosocial continuum

While Sedgwick’s continuum has the scope to encompass the entire spectrum of male bonds, sexual or asexual, it simultaneously rejects the lexicon of heterosexual versus homosexual identity categories on the basis that these experiences cannot be neatly differentiated; rather, Sedgwick contends, what is erotic is dependent upon a fluid, unpredictable array of local factors (Edwards, 2009). Sedgwick’s polarisation of the homosocial-sexual and the homosocial-asexual does not speak to identity categories of hetero or homo-sexual but addresses the specificities of the interrelations between same-sex subjects in a particular homosocial interaction. The term ‘homosexual’ is

strongly associated with identity categories and, as a result, I suggest a re-conceptualisation of Sedgwick's continuum as follows:

#### The homosocial spectrum

Homosocial asexual ----- Homosocial sexual

Figure 2: The homosocial spectrum

It is the focus on gender/sexual behaviours and actions, as distinct from sexual identities, that this study seeks to explore within a women's Australian Rules football team.

A queer reading of Sedgwick's 'male homosocial continuum' suggests that a sexual interaction between men need not lead to a homosexual identity categorisation but rather speaks to the sexual dimension of the particular homosocial interaction.

Similarly, an asexual homosocial interaction does not necessarily speak to a heterosexual identity but rather to a particular asexual interaction between males.

The male homosocial continuum therefore allows for an exploration of male same-sex connections and disconnections based on the spectrum of sexual-asexual potential rather than sexual identity categories. Queering the neat sex-gender-sexuality triad by suggesting that sexual behaviours need not necessarily speak to sexual identification, Sedgwick (1985) offers the male homosocial continuum as an alternative theoretical framework through which to explore the presence or absence of the sexual within homosocial interactions, encompassing the fluidity of local factors rather than the rigidity of heteronormative identity framing. Following Sedgwick's question "what theoretical framework do we have for drawing any links between sexual and power

relationships?” (p. 5), this research explores how gender and sexual/asexual social dynamics are manifest in relation to power, the body, and sport within a women’s Australian Rules football team.

In labelling her continuum ‘male homosocial desire’, Sedgwick (1985) disrupts the heteronormative assumption that male-male sociality is always and only asexual or pejoratively homosexual by deploying the term ‘desire’. Sedgwick’s preference for the term ‘desire’ is used to deliberately mark a (potentially) erotic emphasis “in a way analogous to the psychoanalytic use of ‘libido’...for the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship” (p. 2). Thus, for Sedgwick, desire structures a relationship that may be a positively or negatively charged emotive interaction. By conceiving the phrase ‘homosocial desire’ Sedgwick draws the ‘homosocial’ “back into the orbit of ‘desire’, of the potentially erotic” (p. 1). Through the theoretical framework of homosociality, Sedgwick offers a means of perceiving interactions amongst same-sex subjects devoid of sexual-identity labels and without assuming it to be necessarily positive or negative. This aspect of Sedgwick’s homosocial continuum is particularly pertinent to the current research on women’s Australian Rules football given that subjects interact as members of the same team yet these exchanges may or may not be positive.

Little work has been done using homosociality as a modern concept. While Sedgwick uses the notion to explore historical texts, few researchers have used the concept in the current social and cultural milieu. Exceptions to this are Danny Kaplan (2005) and Michael Flood (2008) and while I discuss their work later in this chapter, neither work

explores nor builds on the *concept* of homosociality. Sharon Marcus, while developing the concept of homosociality, utilises the concept in a similar vein to Sedgwick, exploring female homosociality historically, reflecting on nineteenth century literature in her book *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (2007). While Marcus' text offers important insights into homosocial bonds between women which I refer to later in this chapter, my work seeks to explore homosociality as it might be applied to a modern social context.

Henriette Gunkel's work, *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa* (2010), is significant to my thesis as it offers contemporary insight into homosocial theorising. The text analyses, largely through Sedgwick's oeuvre, the context of female sexual politics in South Africa. The text engages with both traditional and post-apartheid social dynamics, drawing attention to how homosociality oppresses women by reinscribing homophobia and patriarchy. I draw on Gunkel's work and explore it in concert with Sedgwick to clarify my theoretical deployment of homosociality. It is significant to note, however, that while building on aspects of Gunkel's work such as the diversity of bonds between women, I also distinguish my work from Gunkel's. Significantly, Gunkel notes that "for the purpose of this chapter, homosocial relationships are not sexual" (p. 84), that there is a clear distinction between homosociality and homosexuality. I argue against this dichotomy and follow Sedgwick's disavowal of sexuality categories. Indeed, this thesis is concerned with the deconstruction of sexual identity categories.

I draw on homosociality in this thesis not only as a theory of same-sex socialites that encompasses the potentiality of sex, but also as a theory of gender. Gunkel (2010)

begins her exploration of homosociality by discussing the politics behind the gang rape and murder of 19-year-old Zoliswa Nkonyana in Cape Town, South Africa in 2006. This is significant to my work because from this incident Gunkel positions *male* homosociality as a theory of masculinity, “a theory that helps us to understand the structural inequality between men and women within a particular society” (p. 83). This is relevant to my thesis because I explore the ways in which gender is embodied and how gender embodiment intersects with power dynamics amongst women.

In exploring power dynamics amongst women, I recognise the way in which gender is policed within the framework of homosociality. Sedgwick’s (1985) homosociality speaks to male traffic in women where men use women as a means of accessing greater social power amongst other men and women are used as a commodity to be exchanged and for which men compete. What is significant in this competition is the contest between men, rather than the woman or women involved (Gunkel, 2010).

Gunkel demonstrates that, with the brutal rape and murder of Zoliswa Nkonyana, the men involved were policing the young woman’s gender and sexuality. Homophobia is not only about sexual desire but also one’s embodiment of gender, with normative femininity defined through sexuality, particularly presumed heterosexuality and its appearance (Bartky 1990, in Gunkel, 2010, p. 85). Zoliswa is described as ‘tomboyish’ and Gunkel asserts that because she was not feminine ‘enough’ she violated the category of female and heterosexuality. Zoliswa’s murderers responded to her embodiment of gender with brutal rape and ultimate death. This act, Gunkel avows, is an act of male homosociality where the group of men were policing Zoliswa’s gender embodiment as well as their own, reinscribing and policing one another’s masculinity and its attendant hetero-sexuality by raping the victim. Had a perpetrator said ‘I don’t



want to rape her', what might the affect on him have been? I suggest that it may have been responded to with a violent disavowal of the man's masculinity and sexuality.

The significance of male homosociality to this thesis is that it positions women as actors that maintain patriarchal dominance. In proposing a framework of *female* homosociality, I diverge from the perspective that women and women's bonds are significant only to the maintenance of patriarchy. While Sedgwick's male homosocial continuum positions men as acting in the interest of men, it is suggested that some women also act in the interest of men in order to access cultural, political, social and economic resources and privileges (Storr, 2003 in Gunkel, 2010, p. 86). Thus, through adhering to the disciplinary regime of gender, women may gain greater access to resources, yet only by acting in the interest of men. Leading up to the violence against Zoliswa two heterosexual girls had been taunting her and a friend for being 'tomboys' and 'lesbians' and had then alerted the group of male perpetrators to Zoliswa and her friend, ultimately leading to Zoliswa's death (Gunkel, 2010). This act of women's cruelty against other women highlights women acting not in the interest of other women but in the interest of themselves and men, taking part in the violent re-inscription of femininity and heterosexuality against other women and acting in the interest of the men involved and their relationships to those men.

Through her reflection and analysis of the circumstances surrounding Zoliswa Nkonyana's tragic death, Gunkel (2010) offers us an insight into the way that power dynamics work through *male* homosociality serving to police not only sexual desire but also a heteronormative regime of gender embodiment. While I acknowledge the situation involving Zoliswa as extreme, it highlights the very real challenge that those

who do not subscribe to heteronormative regimes of gender embodiment and sexual desires may experience. Reflected in a Western context it can be seen quite clearly in Harris' (2005) analysis of 'the image problem', where women playing soccer are concerned that they may be perceived as 'lesbians' and thus regulate their own gender embodiment to counteract this threat. That women feel they must police their own gender embodiment demonstrates the very real threat of heteronormative surveillance and its consequences.

While this section has largely been concerned with *male* homosociality I now explore how *female* homosociality may be conceptualised.

### **Homosociality and the Female Gender**

In this thesis I explore women's Australian Rules football, thus moving the focus of homosociality from male homosocial desire to female homosocial desire. While Sedgwick's (1985) concept of homosociality is based around the triangular exchange of women by men, she recognises that it "did not do justice to women's powers, relations and struggles and that potentially diminished her readers' sense of such possibilities" (Edwards, 2009, p. 39). Indeed, Sedgwick herself acknowledges that better analyses are needed than she could offer in regard to female homosocial contexts (Edwards, 2009). Given that homosocial desire is a means of "conceptualising the feelings bonding and dividing people of the same gender" (Edwards, 2009, p. 33), homosociality is clearly a concept that affects women. Sedgwick, however, argues that sexual and asexual interactions are more strongly differentiated for men than for women in our society, where homophobia is more strongly focused against men than against women, thus forming her theoretical grounds for focusing exclusively on male

homosocial desire. The current research builds on Sedgwick's concept of homosociality in order to explore female homosocial interactions within women's Australian Rules football.

In direct contrast to the male homosocial continuum that polarised the sexual with the asexual, Sedgwick (1985) argues that the homosocial continuum for women extends across the erotic, familial, social, economic and political realms; that for "women in our society who love women, women who teach, study, nurture, suckle, write about, march for, vote for, give jobs to, or otherwise promote the interest of other women, are pursuing congruent and closely related activities" (p. 3). From this perspective, the female homosocial continuum can be equally projected in terms of Rich's (1980) lesbian continuum. Sedgwick argues that for women in our society, the homosocial need not be polarised against the homosexual but can rather denominate the entire continuum, that "an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations links lesbianism with the other forms of women's attention to women: the bond of mother and daughter, for instance, the bond of sister and sister, women's friendship, 'networking', and the active struggles of feminism" (p. 2). For women, Sedgwick could not polarise the homosocial-sexual and the homosocial- asexual. Thus, while Sedgwick perceives male homosociality as diacritically opposing the sexual and the asexual, she follows Rich's assertion that for women in our society the sexual is inherently interwoven with the asexual and thus the two cannot be dichotomised. This is challenged by several scholars (Storr, 2003, Maddison, 2000, deLauretis 1991, cited in Gunkel, 2010, p. 98-99) who argue that this perspective ignores anti-lesbian homophobia. Indeed, Gunkel makes a compelling argument for the existence of homophobia against women as inflicted by both women and men.

Women's Australian Rules football is a female homosocial space and I theorise female homosociality in order to understand the affects of female homosociality in this social and cultural space. Female homosocial spaces tend to be regulated under the disciplinary regime of gender and this is clearly demonstrated by Gunkel's (2010) description of the incident in which the two women harassed Zoliswa Nkonyana for her masculine appearance and same-sex desire before notifying the group of men who subsequently raped and murdered her. While some females embody gender in more masculine or otherwise alternative ways than femininity, there remains a form of gender regulation that disavows this association and a strong drive behind the production of feminine as female and heterosexual, masculine as male and heterosexual. Most notably, Gunkel acknowledges that femininity is constituted as divergent from 'male' regardless of the body attached to it, a juxtaposition that demonstrates the pervasive nature of the sex-gender-sexuality triad.

By drawing on homosociality in this thesis I explore not only the way that homosociality may be used as a mechanism to challenge the hetero-homo sexual binary, but also the way in which homosociality offers a means of identifying how power dynamics operate between women. Gunkel (2010) argues that "technologies of homophobia are not only constituted through male homosociality, but also through female homosociality: both produce heterosexual normality" (p. 106). By drawing on a framework of homosociality, I question how heterosexual gender performance is regulated through the dynamics of same-sex sociality. Specifically, I ask how gender is regulated within the space of women's Australian Rules football and question how women experience heterosexual normality in this space given the cultural positioning of Australian Rules football as masculine.

The complex ways in which embodiment is lived out for the women who play Australian Rules football in this research offer insight into the heteronormative association of feminine with female and masculine with male. Through theorising female homosociality, I question how the sex-gender-sexuality triad operates as a mechanism for powerfully maintaining the heteronormative gender order. Women playing Australian Rules football, a space denoted as masculine in Australian culture, offers an interesting space in which to explore the embodiment of gender.

Male homosociality is a theory through which we can see how masculinity and heterosexuality for men is maintained as powerfully normative. By foregrounding female homosociality in this thesis I question how female gender embodiment and sexual desires contribute to power dynamics between women. In an effort to explore female homosociality Marcus (2007) penned the text *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* suggesting that while women's relations may not diacritically oppose the sexual and the asexual and may have been less violently policed than men's, does that mean they are less interesting (Marcus, 2007)? Women, within male homosociality, are conceived of as objects of male acquisition and if we theorise women in this way we may understand women's same-sex bonds as a means of garnering greater attention from dominant males. The discourse of male homosociality tends to render insignificant female same-sex interactions and desire. In this thesis I ask what we might see when we bring to the fore women's same-sex bonds, sexual or otherwise, rather than theorising women's social interactions through a lens that foregrounds male homosociality.

Marcus's (2007) work is imperative to the discussion of female homosociality because through this framework we are able to explore women's bonds and interactions without assuming that they are either positive or negative, 'properly' sexual or asexual, nor limited by predetermined labels that denote a particular 'type' of relationship. For example, Marcus suggests that while there is a burgeoning body of literature that addresses women's friendship and 'lesbian' relationships, this narrative tends to polarise women's same-sex interactions along the trajectory of sexual orientation. While this rhetoric has served to put lesbian relationships between women on the academic smorgasbord, its premise suggests that women's bonds and interactions matter only as a resistance to heterosexual conformity (Marcus, 2007). This notion can be contested through exploring homosociality as it relates to women, encompassing the sexual and the asexual by reading same-sex intimacy along with homoeroticism and homosexual desire as aspects of the (homo)-social while avoiding the re-inscription of hetero vs. homo-sexual identity categories.

I suggest that female homosociality can be usefully theorised in terms of a continuum that polarises the sexual and asexual, as in the re-conceptualisation of Sedgwick's continuum cited earlier. In a paper on male same-sex intimacy in Norway and Pakistan, Walle (2007) suggests that "it is possible to assert that the difference between male-male physical intimacy and male-male sexual relations are one of positions on a continuum, rather than representing discrete divisions between male friendships and homosexual relations" (p. 149). It is this notion of a continuum of same-sex intimacy and eroticism that I engage in this thesis for the purpose of exploring how interactions between women conform to or contest heteronormative gender and sexual embodiment.

The notion of a continuum of same-sex sociality is not new. It has also been suggested by Adrienne Rich in her paper *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (1980). Rich proposed the lesbian continuum to challenge the politics of compulsory heterosexuality. This continuum has at its core the notion of females acting in and for the interests of other females while foregrounding the presence of a sexual identity. I suggest however that not all women who engage in intimate, erotic or sexual relationships with women adhere to the sexual identity of 'lesbian' and for this reason I acknowledge but do not follow Rich's continuum. My work is distinct from Rich because while Rich's continuum is embedded in the sex-gender-sexuality triad, I avoid this conflation. Further, Rich's continuum is unable to theorise the significance of women's *asexual* same-sex bonds that I suggest remain significant to the ways in which gender is embodied and produced as normative or non-normative.

My thesis draws on a continuum of female homosociality similar to Walle's (2007) observation of male same-sex sociality above, a means of conceptualising female same-sex sociality that encompasses a nuanced account of sociality between women that may include sexual, intimate or platonic bonds. If we conceptualise a female homosocial continuum with sexual at one polarity, asexual at the other, and the recognition that women's bonds and interactions will inevitably move up, down and in between the polarities, then what changes for how we can conceptualise women's relationships? I suggest that a female homosocial continuum offers a more nuanced way of speaking to same-sex sociality as it encompasses both the presence and absence of sexual elements without making assumptions of identity categorisations or sex, gender, sexuality confluences. This is significant to my thesis because it does not presume normative or non-normative gender embodiment or bonds between women

but rather has the scope to observe how the participants in the research experience gender, embodiment, desire, sexuality and eroticism.

While bonds between the genders may be significant, I suggest that interactions between women are an undervalued form of sociality. Homosociality is not just about patriarchy but also women's relationships where men are not the object. I seek to talk about homosociality between women that exceeds and deliberately moves away from identity categorisations of 'lesbian' or 'heterosexual'. Further I suggest that while women's bonds may or may not encompass intimacy or sexual bonds that it is essential to have a framework through which we can acknowledge the potentiality of same-sex bonds to be sexual or intimate beyond the rhetoric of homosexual and lesbian which, in some contexts, has a propensity to carry negative connotations. While subjects may use 'lesbian' to describe a relationship it is a politically charged descriptor and, as we have seen with the fate of Zoliswa Nkonyana, often a highly disavowed subjectivity. Significantly this subjectivity is not disavowed by Zoliswa but rather outsiders disavowing a lesbian subjectivity. I further suggest the importance of a framework with the capacity for theorising the significance of women's *asexual* relationships beyond patriarchy and where men are not the focus. Women's Australian Rules football is a useful site for exploring female homosociality because, while men may be present, women are the central actors in this space and interact in various capacities.

This section has drawn on Sedgwick (1985), Marcus (2007) and Gunkel's (2010) work to explore how homosociality may be a useful framework for researching gender, sexuality, sport and the body within a women's Australian Rules football team. While



both Sedgwick and Marcus use homosociality to explore issues of homosociality historically, Gunkel draws on homosociality in the present. Significantly, Marcus and Gunkel's work help to justify my focus on female homosociality and bonds between women which Sedgwick's work does not. Yet, each of these theorists is instrumental in my discussion of homosocial theory; Sedgwick through theorising homosociality as a theory of power dynamics, Marcus through her exploration of women's bonds as significant and far more nuanced than either a friendship or lesbian discourse can account for, and Gunkel through theorising homosociality as a regime of gender regulation.

### **Heterosexuality, Homosexuality and Homosociality: Distinctions and Intersections**

In order to explore how homosociality may be usefully applied to the context of women's Australian Rules football I now explore how theorists draw on homosociality in contemporary academic scholarship. I suggest that recent scholarship drawing on homosocial theory has tended to use homosociality reductively, limiting its potential to polarising homosexual and heterosexual subjectivities.

I introduce Danny Kaplan (2005) and Michael Flood (2008), analysing and critiquing their deployment of homosociality in order to clarify the way I use homosociality in current scholarship. While I deploy homosociality in a way that does not reinscribe the heterosexual-homosexual binary, this is not the case for all contemporary scholars drawing on the concept. I draw on Kaplan and Flood to highlight divergent uses of homosociality and to distinguish my own use of the concept.

In an investigation of the friendship narratives of Israeli men, Danny Kaplan (2005) analyses the ways in which 'male intimacy' is expressed within the context of male homosocial interactions in semi-public spaces. Kaplan suggests that while one on one male interactions risk the tensions and stigma of homosexual derision, men in a collective interaction create a 'semi-public' space that serves to police the negotiation of male physical closeness. Kaplan goes on to suggest that, despite the growing body of work exploring masculinities and male friendships, few studies are exploring "the specific dynamics of heterosexual male-to-male relatedness, also referred to as homosociality" (p. 572). Kaplan, through clarifying his deployment of homosociality as male *heterosexual* bonds obscures Sedgwick's 'male homosocial continuum'. In a queer movement Sedgwick coined the phrase 'male homosocial desire' to destabilise the hetero vs. homo-sexual tension. Through limiting the field of study to self-identified heterosexual men, Kaplan relinquishes the potential of homosociality to be used to challenge the heteronormative reification of narrow hetero vs. homo-sexual identity categories.

Categorising his subjects in the opening paragraph as heterosexual, Kaplan (2005) can be seen to be defending any homoerotic interactions through the self-protective clarification of the participants hetero-sexual identity claim. Concluding that his study takes "a closer look at the possible characteristics of such dynamics of seduction under a broader theoretical conceptualization of male intimacy, desire, and empowerment" (p. 590), Kaplan suggests that it is the ambivalence of homosocial interactions that produces the seduction of homosocial spaces for men. Yet where is the ambivalence of intimacy and desire in a cohort of men cemented in the heteronormative, unambiguous identity category of heterosexual male? Relevant to the current study on

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women's Australian Rules football, Kaplan's work is useful to highlight the disparaging ways in which the concept of homosociality may be bent.

A further example of the way in which homosociality has tended to be used reductively is in Michael Flood's (2008) study entitled 'Men, sex, and homosociality: How bonds between men shape their sexual relations with women'. This paper explores "the homosocial organization of men's heterosexual relations" (Flood, 2008, p. 340).

Defining homosociality as nonsexual, same-sex bonds, Flood refers to Sedgwick's work on homosociality as 'the traffic in women', "the power dynamics of the erotic triangle of two men and one woman" (p. 341). Flood's discussion of homosociality, however, does not encompass Sedgwick's discussion of the 'male homosocial continuum' and instead relegates homosociality to male same-sex asexual interactions. This omission negates the complexity and potential of Sedgwick's theorising on homosociality, foregrounding male heterosexual traffic in women. The current research seeks instead to explore the dynamics and significance of women's same-sex bonds.

While both Kaplan and Flood draw on heterosexual homosociality, Heidi Eng (2006) draws on homosexual homosociality, both renderings of homosociality that I seek to avoid in my own analysis. Eng, in her research exploring how athletes "living as lesbians, gays or bisexuals experience doing sex/gender and sexuality in sport" (p. 49), uses homosociality as an expression to describe same-sex interactions. 'Homosocial' for Eng is an adjective that describes group segregation based on biological male and female sex. Like Kaplan and Flood, Eng's research seeks participants based on sexual self-identification. While espousing queer theory as a rhetoric that de-normalises heterosexuality and demands that "heterosexuality has to explain itself" (Eng, 2006, p.

51), Eng uses queer as a means to identify non-heterosexual acts and identities. Rather than use queer as an attempt to challenge heteronormativity, Eng reifies narrow sexual identity categories by seeking participants who self-identify as non-heterosexual. Each of these studies, Kaplan, Flood and Eng, select research participants based on sexual self-identity highlighting and reifying a universal distinction of sexual self-identity. In contrast, the current research asks why sexual self-identity is so paramount, applying the framework of homosociality to women.

The contemporary deployments of Sedgwick's work on homosociality I have discussed above focus on exploring gender dimensions amongst specific groups- they do not offer a nuanced exploration of gender, gender dynamics and sexual behaviour. Both Kaplan (2005) and Flood (2008) use homosociality to explore male heterosexual interactions where women are pawns, played with in the game of heterosexual sex. Both discussions, however, are devoid of a dialogue around the power dynamics of male homosocial interactions. Indeed, Kaplan's work documents only positive interactions amongst men, suggesting only generally that male homosocial displays place "both women and other men, in a position of inferiority and exclusion" (p. 592). This work fails to address how interactions amongst men may be negative or how the 'inferiority and exclusion' of 'other men' may impact upon male homosocial interactions and foster or impair power dynamics and/or inequalities. Further, while Kaplan and Flood use 'heterosexual' as an identity category, neither address how same-sex sexual acts and self-identification impact upon the heterosexual identity category they deploy. By utilising dichotomous sexual identity categories, Kaplan and Flood deny both the presence and significance of 'the other' to their heterosexual male research participants.

While homosociality has largely been used to perceive of male same-sex sociality as in opposition to male same-sex sexuality and desires, I have drawn on Marcus (2007), Gunkel (2010) and Sedgwick (1985) to proffer the position that homosociality may be a useful way of theorising female same-sex sociality, both of a sexual, intimate nature or an asexual, platonic bond. Homosociality has not been widely used as a theory of gender, sociality or sexuality largely, I suggest, due to the way it has been limited to male and asexual sociality. This has left little scope for challenging or otherwise exploring questions of gender, desire, intimacy and sexuality. By drawing on homosociality as a theoretical frame for perceiving of women's same-sex bonds, relationships and interactions, I use homosociality as a theoretical mechanism for exploring female relationships with gender, desire, intimacy and sex(uality). It also helps me to identify and analyse 'normative' gender regimes and binary sexual categorisations that are influential in participant's lives.

### **Gender Discourses**

Theorising homosociality and women's Australian Rules football clearly demands delineating sex as a category of identification. In this thesis I draw on sex as a category of *self* identification, relying on subjects' self determined identity of sex rather than outsiders' perceptions of one's sex. While one might be born male or female, it is their self-identification of sex that positions them within a category of sex that I rely on for theorising homosociality in this research.

In order to explore female homosociality subjects must self identify as female. To participate as a player in women's Australian Rules football one must identify as a

woman. Coaches and support staff can be male or female however, in order to participate as a player, subjects must be over eighteen and female. Playing football for the team within which I conduct this research means that each participant in this study self-identifies as female. Self-identification of sex may not be quite so straight-forward in other studies. For example, intersex and transgender subjectivities clearly complicate homosociality however it is not in the scope of this research to explore this complexity. Rather the focus of this research is women and their homosocial experiences.

While I acknowledge sex as a form of self-identification, I do not contend that gender is necessarily fixed as feminine, nor that womanhood can be essentialised as a common way of being in the world. Femininity and masculinity, in line with Jennifer Carlson (2011), are “particular ‘logics’ of subject formation that imply distinct means of achieving selfhood” (p. 76). Carlson theorises contemporary femininity by interrogating the social construction of gender, exploring the ways masculine and feminine subjects relate to and internalise gender norms. This is pertinent to this research because I argue that subjects embody femininity and masculinity in diverse ways, that women have the capacity to embrace both feminine and masculine behaviours and to embody both feminine and masculine ways of being in the world.

Throughout the research I explore how participants embody gender and physicality within the space of women’s Australian Rules football. I argue that gender, embodiment and physicality are strongly intertwined phenomena, inextricably linked by the ways in which bodies are presented to others, how the body is read and gendered, and the physical pursuits we engage in. Further I argue that, following

Hauge & Haavind (2011), gender and bodily practices are intentional and directed. This implies that the way subjects present their selves, embody genders, and act in the world is not always coincidental but rather can reflect an intentional way of being and doing the self.

## **Gender**

The classification of 'sex' is based on binary biological sex difference. While this categorisation does not have the scope to adequately encompass intersex and trans-sexuality it nevertheless offers a clear definition of sex. Gender, in contrast, is less clearly understood and femininity and masculinity are difficult to comprehend as distinct concepts. Throughout this study I engage with gender as the embodiment and performance of masculinity and femininity, suggesting that both male and female sexed bodies may embody and enact a combination of masculinity and femininity and that the ways in which they do so are intentional and directed (Hauge & Haavind, 2011).

In certain cultures and historical moments particular behaviours and embodiments are marked as gendered, as either feminine or masculine and ascribed only to either the male or female sexed body. However these tend to be transient, shifting as cultures and time move. An obvious example is that women today can wear long pants and embody femininity simultaneously whereas in the past wearing pants and femininity were incognisant. Yet if we delve further into gender dynamics it is clear that femininity and masculinity are not quite so clearly delineated. For example in Australia both boys and girls are encouraged to participate in 'Auskick' as children and there are leagues for both men and women to play Australian Rules football through

adolescence and into adulthood. Yet despite the availability of structures for girls and women to play Australian Rules football, playing football is still perceived as a masculine endeavour and ascribed normative for males. Through this research on women's Australian Rules football I explore the dynamics of femininity and masculinity as descriptions of behaviour rather than categories of gender identification.

Throughout this research I explore how participants experience, embody and enact gender while suggesting that gender is not a fixed entity or category of identification. Carlson (2011) asks "what is feminine about *femininity*?" (p. 77, emphasis in original) arguing that:

[F]emininity has been an elusive code to define: its contours are conveniently fluid; its content is imperviously amorphous; its relationship to an always-persuasive masculinity is its only apparent faithfulness (Carlson, 2011, p. 77).

Although certain behaviours, characteristics and attributes are socially coded as either feminine or masculine, it is harder to explain the deeper logic that characterises some behaviours and traits as masculine while others are socially sanctioned as feminine (Carlson, 2011). What does it mean to be feminine? What does it mean to be feminine and play football? Can a woman embody and enact both femininity and masculinity and what does this say about the fluidity of sex, gender and sexuality norms?

Carlson (2011) seeks to understand femininity beyond the ritual discourse of 'gender norms' or essentialising femininity and instead theorises the gendered ways in which subjects *relate* to gender norms. This work is relevant to this thesis because women playing Australian Rules football are engaging in an endeavour that is normatively marked as masculine and male. The women who play this sport however offer no



apologetics (Broad, 2001) for this 'transgression' of gender as can be seen in the growing numbers of girls and women participating in the sport. What I ask is, following Carlson, how do players relate to and negotiate gender norms and what does this say about femininity and masculinity?

Women have entered the workforce, sport and other public spheres in burgeoning numbers, social and cultural spaces which have, in different historical times constituted not just masculine but male spaces. At the same time, Carlson (2011) recognises that men have not entered the domestic sphere or care taker roles, roles which have traditionally constituted female and feminine space, in corresponding numbers. While this suggests that it is increasingly acceptable for contemporary women to engage in masculine pursuits, such as Australian Rules football, men's influx into previously constituted female spaces has not been evenly balanced. Thus while women play football, they also work, parent and undertake domestic duties. Significant to this research, Carlson argues, it is the capacity to dwell between both feminine and masculine that constitutes contemporary femininity.

Following Carlson (2011) I suggest that women playing football likely negotiate both masculinity and femininity and it is from this perspective that this research explores women's experiences of football participation, including their embodiment and enactment of gender. Most academic work on women participating in various codes of football has tended to theorise female players as transgressing traditional gender boundaries, for example Broad (2001), Harris (2005; 2007), Migliaccio & Berg (2007) and Cox & Thompson (2002). This tends to limit the ways that women's experiences of football are perceived. For example how can we explore a woman's embodiment of

masculinity if our focus is concerned with her transgression of acceptable female gender norms? Carlson (2011) argues that “female athletes provide a compelling window into the contours of contemporary...femininity” (p. 81), and that it is much easier for women to transverse gender boundaries without surrendering themselves as women than it is for men. I follow this trajectory suggesting that if we acknowledge that women have the capacity to embody and enact a combination of femininity and masculinity while continuing to embrace themselves as women, then we can move on to explore the diverse ways in which women embody and enact femininity and masculinity.

Although a number of studies suggest that femininity has the scope to encompass a wider range of gender performances than the traditional feminine position as passive and complementary to masculinity, I argue that simply broadening the scope of femininity to encompass more feminine ‘norms’ continues to limit gender performances and reproduces feminine as only female and masculine as only male. One such example is Laura Azzarito’s (2010) work which argues for a discourse of femininity and girlhood that promotes what she describes as ‘hybridity’. Azzarito suggests that ‘alpha girls’ and ‘future girls’ are examples of femininities that actively engage in physicality and construct bodies as strong and athletic, that these girls are confident, assertive and high academic achievers, attributes traditionally ascribed as masculine. This theorisation of gender positions femininity as encompassing more than it has traditionally. Subjectivities such as ‘alpha girls’ and ‘future girls’ highlight “multiple and fluid forms of girls’ bodies, and celebrates ‘difference’” (Azzarito, 2010, p. 272). I argue that although this notion opens up space for girls to engage in and perform a wider range of feminine ‘norms’, that it nevertheless reproduces feminine

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as the only acceptable form of gender performance for females, that masculinity remains a purview of males and that females who perform masculinity continue to be positioned as transgressing gender norms. Azzarito's theory offers little space for theorising how women engaging in what have traditionally been defined as male and masculine activities such as Australian Rules football, might experience gender. Indeed, Azzarito's work on femininity continues to oppose male and female, masculinity and femininity.

When femininity is associated with femaleness and masculinity with maleness we limit the potential of women and men to embody and enact gender in other ways which, I argue, restricts the ways in which we read, perceive and experience gender. Landreau & Murphy (2011), in their introduction to a special issue of the journal *Men and Masculinities* entitled 'Masculinities in women's studies', note that:

[W]e wanted to trouble the assumed connection of men and masculinity by framing masculinity more concretely as a range of social practices and relationships-theoretically independent of male embodiment (p. 133).

The focus on the sexed body has dominated gender discourse so much that the association of sexed and gendered bodies are often conflated. Landreau & Murphy (2011) argue that dislocating masculinity as the property of men makes available a variety of embodied practices which are not all comprehensible under the heteronormative binary gender system. Breaking away from associating male and female bodied people as masculine and feminine respectively allows us to position gender, as Landreau & Murphy suggest, "as a range of social practices and

relationships” (p. 133). What then, might this perspective offer the field of women’s sport?

### **Football, Gender and the Body**

Women’s Australian Rules football is an apt site in which to explore gender embodiment as it is a space in which women engage unapologetically (Broad, 2001) in heavy, physical, full contact, *masculine* sport. Women’s participation in traditionally defined masculine sports has historically been a kind of oxymoron but, as Carlson (2011) notes, contemporary femininity is multiplicitous and marked by its ability to transverse both masculine and feminine gendered behaviours. Moving beyond binary gender characterisations, this research suggests that women’s capacity to play football is symbolic of shifting gender dynamics in contemporary Australian culture.

Engaging in a theoretical discourse of gender that does not foreclose women as homogenous creates a space within which to explore women’s embodiment and physicality as diverse. Carlson (2011) suggests that female athletes move across diverse terrains without necessarily committing to any one in particular. This suggests that a subject playing Australian Rules football does not subscribe only to the gender embodiment of herself as ‘footballer’, but that while women may “gladly engage in masculine-marked practices in the contexts of sport...they may also engage in feminine practices outside of sports” (Carlson, 2011, p. 83). I follow this trajectory in the current research and take it a step further to suggest that while women may engage in masculine practices within sports that they may also engage in masculine practices outside of sports. I also suggest that women may engage in feminine practices within sport. For example the way a player wears her uniform and styles herself may tend to

either a masculine or feminine embodiment. I therefore argue that participation in women's Australian Rules football need not foreclose one's participation as masculine by virtue of participation.

Historically, women's participation in various codes of football has tended to garner a degree of backlash for transgression of gender norms. I argue that focusing on the barriers to women's participation in football has limited the development of research into women's experiences of playing football across the globe. A significant barrier to women's participation in codes of football has been the association of women's football with an often disavowed lesbian subjectivity. For example Harris (2005; 2007) points to 'the image problem' for women playing football (soccer) in the United Kingdom, describing the association of playing football and being 'stigmatised' as lesbian, a subjectivity that is presented as undesirable in Harris' oeuvre. In contrast Caudwell (2006; 2007) explores a lesbian identified football (soccer) team that explores the gendered dynamics of the team where a lesbian subjectivity is desirable. This work, in contrast to Harris, explores the homosocial dynamics amongst players and offers a positive positioning of a lesbian subjectivity. I argue that exploring how women who play Australian Rules football embody and enact gender and the dynamics of homosociality within this space provides a more nuanced insight into gender, sexuality, desire, embodiment, physicality and space than the lesbian in football discourse permits.

### **Gender, Embodiment and Physicality**

Engaging with the body in this research I argue that bodily practices can be broken into two facets; 'being' and 'doing'. I describe these as embodiment (being) and physicality

(doing). I take embodiment to encompass how subjects style, present and identify their selves. Physicality, in this research, relates to the physical activities subjects engage in. I identify these two aspects of bodily practices because I note how research on sport and gender tends to isolate embodiment and physicality from one another which, I argue, limits our exploration of gender theory. For example, while embodiment focuses on the ways the body is read, interpreted and performed, it does not necessarily pay attention to the physical endeavours that a body may take part in, for example a sport such as Australian Rules football. Similarly, how does a body engaging in football, laying tackles and pushing her body hard negotiate her embodiment on the field, off the field and in other social spaces?

While many theorists segment being and doing in women's sport I argue that together they help us to explore the ways in which subjects might embody a range of subjectivities and 'selfhood' (Carlson, 2011) related to gender. For example while Chase (2006) focuses on women's physicality playing rugby, she omits the ways in which women embody gender and rugby simultaneously. In contrast Ezzell (2009), also researching a women's rugby team, channels in on the ways in which players embody gender and a hetero-sexy fit identity, while paying little attention to the physicality that players actively engage whilst playing rugby. Although both Chase (2006) and Ezzell (2009) offer invaluable insight into women's participation in codes of football, I argue that drawing together embodiment and physicality, being and doing, through this research offers a perspective on gender in football that has yet to be elucidated.

## **Gender, Embodiment and Homosociality**

The example of Zoliswa Nkonyana highlights the pervasive association of gender, sex norms and embodiment. In this situation Zoliswa's body was read and gendered. While this example has offered a compelling example of the ways in which gender is policed and the way that homosocial interactions can fuel the regime of gender normativity, I seek to demonstrate what we see in our research if we move beyond discourse of gender normativity. Roussel, Monaghan, Javerlhiac & Le Yondre (2010) argue that "the strictly sociological value of and utility of researching lived bodies and intersubjectivity are overridden by the broader issue of the weight of socio-cultural forces and norms that have the power to ostracize" (p. 107). While this speaks to the broader sociological impact of gender, embodiment and sociality, the experience of Zoliswa Nkonyana demonstrates an individual's experience of the normalisation of gender and embodiment.

While the tragic experience of Zoliswa Nkonyana demonstrates the very real experience of gender regulation, I follow Roussel et al. (2010), drawing attention to subjects lived experiences through exploring the intersection of gender, embodiment, physicality, space, sexuality and desire. Roussel et al.'s paper on female body building questions the nature of gender normativity suggesting that "[f]emale bodybuilders' ways of entering typically masculine territory encourages us to rethink certain cultural principles or aims" (p. 106). If we accept that women are participating in activities like body building and Australian Rules football and move away from the question of gender normativity, embodiment and physicality, what might we see? Roussel et al. posit the question "how can muscularity and femininity be reconciled?" (p. 106).

Theorising gender in a way that positions both women and men as able to embody

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femininity and masculinity interchangeably and simultaneously, moves the conversation from questioning gender norms and behaviours, to exploring subject's experience of the lived body and how homosocial interactions influence subject's experience of gender embodiment and physicality.



## **CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY**

### **Research and the Parkdale Women's Football Team**

Significant to this research is that the team I undertook the study with is the team I had played football with for a number of years. I suggest that this is important to note on a number of counts. As a player researcher, I was in a unique position to undertake research with team mates as I had prior insight and knowledge of the team, its background and the culture particular to the Club. I also had knowledge of the political circumstances that surround the team within the Club at Parkdale, and also within the Victorian Women's Football League. In this section I explore some of these connections and how they impact and inform the research.

Parkdale is a beachside suburb in the south-east of Melbourne, Australia. It is a largely white, middleclass socio-economic community though this ranges from upper middle to lower middle class socio-economic status. The Parkdale Football Club is located on the corner of a major highway and a suburban street and is easily accessible via car or the nearby train station. A number of the players at the Club come from suburbs further south of Parkdale towards Frankston, a lower socio-economic area, while others commute from still developing outer eastern suburbs such as Pakenham. Few players live within walking distance to the Club and many players car pool to training and to games.

The Parkdale Football Club itself at this time was comprised of a strong male cohort with junior through to senior teams and a 'Super Rules' over thirty-five team. The Parkdale women's team began playing at the Club circa 1995 however other than

anecdotal tales, little history exists of the Parkdale Women's Football Club. While there are a number of honour boards in the Parkdale Football Club's clubrooms, these feature the history of the men's teams, including photographs, and there is little memorabilia that shows women's presence as footballers at the Club.

Within the wider Parkdale Football Club, the women's team had little influence. While representatives from the women's team would attend Annual General Meetings and other Club events, the women's team operated largely independent from the Parkdale Football Club. While women had maintained, for the most part, friendly relationships with male members of the Parkdale Football Club, women did not tend to go out of their way to interact with members of the Club outside of the women's team. The women's football team operated largely of their own accord, financially independent and liaising with the Victorian Women's Football League as necessary.

In the season that the research took place, 2010, there was a new President instated at the Parkdale Football Club. The new president was an older male and was described by players as homophobic and 'a dinosaur' indicating that he was old fashioned in his values. These values affected the women's team because they meant that the president did not support women playing football and his actions, consequently, reflected this perspective.

Relations between the women's team and the new president were, during the 2010 season, stilted with the women's team feeling largely unsupported. Following an altercation between male members of the senior football team and female members of the women's football team at a social function the Club was called in to intervene

and apply disciplinary actions. This further deepened the divide between the president and the women's team with the women involved receiving larger penalties than the men and this being deemed a personal inflection of the president's attitude towards the women's football team rather than a reflection of the incident.

At the end of the 2010 season the Parkdale Football Club, led by the president requested a large financial fee from the women's team as well as a written application stating why the women's team should remain at the Parkdale Football Club. This had not been asked for in previous years and was interpreted by the women's team as indicative of the Club's desire to remove women's football from the Parkdale Football Club. Members of the women's team were infuriated and questioned these requests given the, approximately, sixteen years of supported existence at the Club. Female players were largely of the perspective that the new president did not support women's football, not just the women in this team.

Following the 2010 season, the Parkdale Women's Football team folded and players spread out around the league to play with different teams, although a large number of players moved together to form a Club in the outer south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Many players had begun their football careers at Parkdale and were deeply saddened by the disintegration of the Parkdale Women's Football Club with some having played since its inception in 1995. However, this did reflect the state of women's football in Victoria, that teams have tended to be transient regardless of their playing history and that support for women's participation in Australian Rules football has tended to fluctuate and be quite subjective. Indeed, teams have formed

and disbanded from the Victorian Women's Football League since the League was formed in 1981.

### **The Victorian Women's Football League**

The Victorian Women's Football league, known as the VWFL, has developed since 1981 and at time that this research took place had thirty-one teams with over one thousand women playing football competitively each weekend and increasing numbers of corporate financial sponsors (Victorian Women's Football League, 2011). In addition to this was the Youth Girls competition which offered competitive football for girls between the ages of thirteen and eighteen (AFL Victoria, 2010) and ran independently of the VWFL.

The Parkdale women's football team competed in the 2010 season against five other teams in the South-East division. The highest division in the VWFL was the Premier division and the South-East division, although not ranked against other divisions, is a lower level than the Premier division. Amongst the South-East division, the Parkdale team was considered to be very physical in respect to on-field play. This reputation was upheld by players on the team in the way they celebrated 'going hard' and 'tackling hard' as valuable attributes for players.

Within the South-East division of the VWFL there was a strong lesbian community and acceptance of same-sex desire. While not all players were in same-sex relationships or identified as 'lesbian', the presence of same-sex relationships and punk-kind of self styling, often associated with a lesbian subjectivity, was common. Further, drinking beer and bourbon was common among female football players within the League

while spectating at other teams' games and often after matches. This too is positioned as indicative of masculinity and tends to be positioned as 'lesbian'.

Within the VWFL long-term same-sex couples were known by other teams and the physical expression of desire amongst female players was common. Thus while the women's football league was not a homogenously 'lesbian' space, it was a space in which same-sex relationships between women were accepted and even normalised. And while lesbian stereotypes were upheld in this space, they were also challenged by women who embodied gender and same-sex desire in ways that differed from the 'lesbian stereotype'.

### **'My' Team and Ethical Considerations**

While there were ethical concerns in researching football within the team that I played with, such as power imbalances or the risk of coercion towards participants, I felt that the benefits of conducting research within my own team were greater than the potential risks. Significantly, these benefits related to having prior insight into the background of and awareness of the Club's values and culture. Had I researched another football team I would not have had the same knowledge of the Club, its background, history and values, nor would I have had relationships with players or been aware of their football background or the social dynamics between players on the team.

As it was, I felt that conducting research within my own football team placed me in a unique position for undertaking a study on women's Australian Rules football. Knowing the research participants through playing football with them meant that I could relate

to the ways they spoke about football, team mates and issues that occurred while playing within the football team. When players discussed other players or scenarios during the interviews I was aware of the relationships they had to other players and circumstances that might surround a given situation. I also knew the football lingo and I could understand the significance of certain situations for example, when Jonty discussed playing her 100<sup>th</sup> game, I knew how important this was to her. When Jac broke her arm before finals I could empathise with her devastation. When players talked about 'going in and under packs', 'one percenters' and 'looking dykey', I knew what they meant. Players did not have to explain themselves or what certain terms and phrases meant.

In researching the football team I played with I was conscious of my own subjectivity in the research. My personal interests had initiated the research and while I felt a certain expectation that I remain objective throughout the research process, I learnt that researching one's own team and following one's own interest was a highly subjective action. Reflections on my own experiences and perspectives of women's football informed and guided the research methodology though I was conscious not to bring my own opinions and values into conversations with research participants. While my thoughts about football were significant in structuring the research, I was interested in gaining other women's perspectives on playing football so while I was aware that I had my own opinions and perspectives, I was also aware that these were not necessarily reflected by other players.

## **Visual Methodology**

Visual images are ubiquitous which, inevitably, is part of their appeal and their difficulty (Bloustien, 2003, p. 1).

Visual images are embedded into our everyday lives. Indeed Weber (2008) suggests that “We are born into a world of visual images projected onto our retinas, clamouring for the attention of our perceptual processes” (p. 41). I draw on the significance of visuality in this research to explore women’s Australian Rules football. While a number of studies have been conducted that explore various codes of women’s football, none draw on visual methods and I suggest that, given the ubiquitous nature of visuality, visual methods may offer insight into women’s football that non-visual methods alone cannot.

Consequently, this research project has drawn on multiple methods- participant generated photographs, researcher generated photographs, a group interview and individual interviews. By combining visual methodology with other qualitative research methods my aim was to develop a nuanced insight into the cultural space of women’s Australian Rules football that research engaging qualitative methods alone seems to overlook. For example, what more effective way is there to explore embodiment than through images? This section discusses the use of a mixed methods approach to research before exploring what a visual methodology may contribute to the body of knowledge on women’s sports. I then move on to describe the phases of data collection, data analysis and ethics of the research.

Contemporary culture is increasingly influenced by visuality through the ever expanding media empire and exponential developments in technology. Indeed, when it comes to imagery, increasingly accessible and more advanced technology has ensured that we are immersed in visual images through the media, advertising, and our own happy snaps recorded on digital cameras and mobile phones. Gillian Rose (2007), author of *Visual Methodologies*, writes a comprehensive text outlining the complexities of using visual methodology in research. Citing Knowles & Sweetman (2004), Rose suggests that “photos can achieve something that methods relying on speech and writing cannot” (p. 238). By drawing on visual methods I create a mechanism through which players depict and represent their experiences first in photographs and then through conversations around the images they have created, perhaps drawing out data that non-visual methods alone could not access.

The significance of visuality to this research is that while codes of women’s football have been researched across the globe with focuses on participation (Carle & Nauright, 1999; Wedgwood, 2004; 2005a; 2005b), gender (Broad, 2001; Gill, 2007), sexuality (see Caudwell, 1999; 2003; 2006; 2007; Hillier, 2005), embodiment and physicality (Chase, 2006), and gender transgression (Harris, 2005; 2007), each have been limited to non-visual qualitative methods, usually interviews and ethnography. Gerry Bloustien (2003), exploring qualitative methods that encompass visual methods in ethnographic research, suggests that “to understand and analyse differences within the cultures we investigate requires new methodologies, new ways of expressing the insights to be discovered there” (p. 6). Visual methods have not been used widely, if at all, in research around women’s football, nor women’s sport. Given that women’s sport is a growing field of study in current sociological research, I suggest that contemporary

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research methods are necessary. By using visual methods to explore women's football I aspire to offer a different perspective and a different way of 'seeing' women's football that research drawing on qualitative methods alone have not had the scope to carry out.

Acknowledging the value of qualitative research methodologies, I draw not only on visual methods but a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative research methods with visual methods. Complementing language with visual imagery as methods of data collection is potentially a means of accessing a broader insight into the particular field of study. Knowles & Sweetman (2004 cited in Rose, 2007, p. 238) suggest that visual methods are valuable not for what they are but for the analytical and conceptual possibilities that visual methods can achieve. While images in isolation may offer information and insight, that knowledge can be developed through exploring what those images mean and represent for the person who created the image.

The value of images in the current research is summed up succinctly by Weber (2008): "An image can be a multilayered theoretical statement, simultaneously positing even contradictory propositions for us to consider, pointing to the fuzziness of logic and the complex or even paradoxical nature of particular human experiences" (p. 43). The knowledge that an image is likely a multifaceted combination of human experience points to the notion that it is not simply the physical image that provides value to academic research but the analysis and interpretation of those images. By drawing on methods of photo-interviews I am able to explore not only the photographs, but the significance of the images to the participants that created them.

Following the photo-interview process, the images and interview text forms data for analysis and interpretation (Kolb, 2008). Bettina Kolb (2008) draws on visual methodologies to conduct cross cultural studies and suggests that “the photo interview is an important moment of interpretation and understanding, when the respondent explains and makes explicit his or her intention in capturing the image and recounts a first interpretation of it” (para. 18). Indeed, Clark-Ibanez (2004) notes that “there is nothing inherently interesting about photographs; instead, photographs act as a medium of communication between researcher and participant” (p. 1512). It is this communication that forms the photo-interview process and it is the combination of the interview and visual data that provide the richness for this study. Through employing photo-interviews, the verbal data becomes indistinguishable from the image itself as the interview conversation is inherently informed by the image. The photographic image cannot be simply explicated from the interview as the interview data provides insight into the meaning of the image.

The photo-interview phase of this research provided invaluable insight into participants’ experiences of Australian Rules football and the complementary nature of multiple methods in this research is significant in developing the meaning behind images that players created. Reflecting upon the photo-interview process, Kolb (2008) draws on the experience of two multicultural studies, one involving six provinces in China, the other five Islamic communities in the Mediterranean. The use of images in the current research follows Kolb, suggesting that photo-interviews have the potential to initiate a cognitive process that may support participants in “developing and expressing their ideas, feelings and concerns” (para. 7).

The complementary nature of imagery and language through multiple methods cannot be overlooked. Indeed Rose (2007) highlights a certain paradox implicit to using photographs in research; while images may convey information, affect and reflection that words are unable to, visual materials remain dependent on written context in order to make their effects evident. The knowledge that visual data is complemented and understood through language is an essential element of a visual methodology and one that is important to recognise in the research design of this study.

By engaging with the image itself as well as in dialogue about the image with participant photographers, I argue that we are able to generate greater insight into the field of study. Bloustien (2003) suggests that images may be useful in exploring how participants' experiences may be framed, interpreted and represented while Rose (2007) asserts that visual methods can be used more broadly to elicit information, affect and reflection. By drawing on multiple methods I amalgamate both Bloustien and Rose's assertions, combining participants' visual representations. Drawing on these representations, I am able to elicit information, affect and reflection and generating data through visual imagery as well as discourse about the images creates depth in the data.

Images offer something to qualitative methods and qualitative methods to visual methods that each method alone could not hope to achieve. Based on the complementary nature of a multi-methods approach, I suggest that this is a unique means through which to generate knowledge and insight into the cultural space of a women's Australian Rules football team.

## **Visual Methods and Football**

Sports are a space in which the body is integral to participation and through which the body may be sculpted and trained, valorised, abjectified or scrutinised. For example, media portrayals of sport, fitness, and health promotions emphasise the centrality of the body to sports participation; sport uniforms both contain and exhibit sporting bodies; athletic prowess is displayed via bodies in action; and bodies are expected to be in close physical interaction with other bodies on the sporting field. Australian Rules football, “replete with images of maleness” (Parker, 2007, p. 213), has been described as “sacred men’s business” (McCauley, 2008, p. 33). This male and masculine dominated aspect of Australian Rules football, coupled with the high degree of physicality that the sport demands, points to the centrality of the body to women’s participation.

The corporeal focus of Australian Rules football is made manifest in diverse ways: the full-contact nature of the sport encouraging body-on-body contact; the intensity of the game emphasising participant’s fitness capabilities; uniforms highlighting the heterogeneous bodies enrobed by them; and communal change rooms and showers which may display bodies publicly. The ubiquitous nature of the body in women’s Australian Rules football suggests that it may be a site in which a visual methodology can offer insight that language alone cannot.

The current research seeks to overcome the invisibility of the body by using visual data and engaging participants in image making and re/presentation, further exploring these images through photo-interviews. What, for example, might the subjects take photographs of when asked to respond to the question, ‘What do female footballers

look like?', and what kind of data may be elicited when discussing these images in relation to 'the body' in sport with the participants? This research enlists participant photography, described in the methods section below, as a useful means of gaining insight into the perspectives women have of 'the body', and perhaps 'their body' in sport, potentially contributing knowledge that interview data, observations and ethnography in isolation may not be able to provide.

Few, if any, sociological studies of sport have drawn on visual methods which, I suggest, offers the capacity for significantly developing research and knowledge in the sociology of sport, particularly football studies. Most academic research in the fields of sport, gender, sexuality, embodiment and space has tended to draw not on visual methodologies but on ethnography or other qualitative methods such as interviews. Caudwell's (2007) study, for example, explores a lesbian-identified football team in the UK using ethnographic data collection methods and demonstrating that it is an important site for the (re)production of sex, gender, and sexuality. However, while Caudwell discusses how "women's footballing bodies take up footballing spaces" (p. 193), the reader is limited to language as a means of understanding and conceptualising how women's footballing bodies are constructed and re/presented within this locale. Although Caudwell's study explores codes of women's football and contributes valuable knowledge to research on gender, sexuality, the body, and physicality, the current research suggests that a visual methodology combining photographic images with photo-interviews may be an opportunity to build on the existing body of academic literature within women's sport.

I suggest that a visual methodology is apt for exploring how gender/sexuality may be made manifest in Australian Rules football. Women's Australian Rules football is typically denoted as masculine and, as Hillier (2005) contends, women who play blur the distinctions between 'the masculine' and 'the feminine'. Further, women who play football are often stereotyped as 'butch' and 'lesbian' (Hillier, 2005). Yet the women I have played football with present a heterogeneous display of gender and sexuality. A visual exploration of this site aspires to explore how women who play experience gender and sexuality within this field, how these subjects may embody and re/present themselves and, through analysis, how these presentations and embodiments may be read as gendered and/or sexualised.

Guiding participants through taking self-portraits and images of how they perceive female footballers to look as part of the photo projects offers the potential to explore how women themselves perform gender and sexuality as well as how they perceive others to perform gender and sexuality. Orobitch Canal (2004) suggests that photographic images are instantaneous, have a strong focus on detail and are a fragmentation of 'reality'; characteristics that allow us to observe in more detail that which we may miss in observations. This suggests that guiding subjects to capture 'fragmentations of 'reality'' is an avenue through which to gain insight into participants own perceptions and experiences of gender and sexuality that other qualitative methods may overlook.

This invisibility is reflected in Chase's (2006) work exploring the intersections between the body and physicality within women's rugby. While Chase garners valuable insight into women's participation in rugby, the study remains restricted by language in the

exploration of subjects' physicality. For example, Chase suggests that "the shape and size of the female sporting body often contradicts dominant ideas of feminine bodies" (p. 229) yet, through a methodology that privileges discourse over visual data, her study is unable to demonstrate the ways in which female sporting bodies and feminine bodies are constructed, re/presented or contradictory. By complimenting this qualitative data with visual images, I ask what more we might learn about participants' experiences and perceptions of gender and physicality.

Although visual methods have not tended to be drawn on in sports studies they have been used in various sociological and anthropological research. I suggest that these studies demonstrate how visual methods might offer unique insight into research on sport, particularly in relation to gender and the body. Bloustien's research project *Girl Making* (cited in Bloustien & Baker, 2003, p. 66) is an example of how visual auto-ethnographic methods may contribute to research on gender and adolescence.

Bloustien's study explores how ten young women negotiate the complications of growing up 'gendered' in their own worlds through the use of visual methods from the girls' own perspectives. Suggesting that photographs and film have long been heralded as significant cultural symbols in contemporary culture, Bloustien (2003) avows that visual data serves to epitomise particular ways through which real life experiences are framed, interpreted and represented. This contention renders imagery a useful avenue through which to explore how gender/sexuality, embodiment, space and sport are framed, interpreted and represented (Bloustien, 2003) by participants in a women's Australian Rules football team. How, for example, might women frame, interpret and represent their bodies in their football uniforms and how might this compare to the

way they frame, interpret and represent their bodies in the teams' clubrooms after a game?

### **The Phases of Data Collection**

There are multiple methods from which to generate visual data. In this research, I draw largely on participant generated images for reasons I discuss further on. Rose (2007) recognises that there is no established framework for the use of photography in social science research and breaks the use of photography into two groups, supporting and supplemental. While *supplemental* photographs are used as additional to research data and display images 'on their own terms', photographs used as *supporting* the research project are interpreted and the interpretation forms the research data (Rose, 2007). The current research draws on this latter visual method, working with participants to produce images that will then be explored through photo-interviews. Before discussing the phases of data collection, I discuss why I draw on participant generated images in preference to researcher generated images.

By actively engaging research participants in the data collection process I was attempting to create space for participants to creatively explore their experiences of playing football. The active role of participants as photographers in the research process distinguishes the participatory photo-interview method from other visual methods in which the researcher or another professional may take or create the images used in the interview process. Enlisting participants to create photographs as a means of data collection allows the research participants to set the terms of the research.



Both Weber (2008) and Packard (2008) contend that an image may reveal as much about the person who took or produced the image as it does about the subjects or objects figured within it. Consequentially, enlisting participants to create images, following Weber and Packard, provides insight not just into the field of study but also into the subjects creating the images. Packard (2008) notes that “[p]hotographing is an act which renders some things visible, and therefore important, and other things invisible and less important” (p. 69). When I asked participants to create images of what women’s football looks like, the images they created offered information not just about what women’s football looks like, but how those participants *perceive* women’s football, what matters to them and what does not, thus speaking not only to what women’s football looks like but also the subjects’ conceptions and values of this space.

Through actively engaging participants as photographers in this research project, participants make their perspectives explicit through their images and can engage in a very personal way with the research project (Kolb, 2008). Engaging participants in creating images is a means of gaining insight into participants own experiences and perspectives and, as Kolb contends, once the images have been taken, participants take on “an expert role” (para. 18) in describing their images and initiating a dialogue with the researcher. The role of the participant as generating knowledge for the research is contrasted to drawing information from research participants.

Significant to this project is that as a participant researcher I was conscious of my own perceptions and experiences of playing Australian Rules football. Enlisting participants in creating research data acted as a means of ensuring that I was able to gain insight into *others’* perceptions and experiences of playing football. Consequently, I drew on a

combination of data collection methods in an attempt to gain a more nuanced understanding of how issues of gender, sexuality, embodiment and space are manifest within a particular women's Australian Rules football team. The research uses photographs taken/created by participants in conjunction with photo-interviews with each participant; images taken/created as part of a staged football training session and images of the 'empty' football locale in concert with a group interview; and a research journal. The following discussion outlines how these methods took place, describes the nature of the various methods and discusses the difficulties encountered.

The photo-interview process, following Rose (2007), has six steps: an initial interview conducted with research participants that focuses on the questions that the photographs aspire to attend to; the provision of a camera to participants, guidance as to the sort of photographs to take and how many; transferring photographs from the participant to the researcher; photo-interviews discussing the images in detail; interpretation of the interview material and images; and presentation of the research. This research followed Rose's broad guidelines as outlined below.

With approval from the Club I prepared to undertake the data collection phase of the research in the coming year, by recruiting participants during preseason training, due to start in February, 2010. While I knew most of the players from having played with them for the previous three seasons and a lot of these players knew of my research, there were new players at the Club who did not know me and had no knowledge of the impending research. At the end of a training session early during preseason training I introduced myself and my research and handed out flyers to everyone in the

team in order to generate interest in the research. Eight players committed to taking part in the research project<sup>2</sup>.

### **Phase 1: Photo Projects**

The first phase of the research asked each participant to take their own photographs as part of what I describe as 'photo projects'. These photo projects are guided by four broad themes and asked participants to take or create five to ten images for each photo project. Each photo project followed the objectives of the research and requested participants to take or create images along four different themes. The first photo project asked participants to take or create images of 'what women's football means to you'. This question was selected with the goal of elucidating what the significance of playing football was to the participants. I was aware that for many of the players on the team playing football was a powerful force in their lives and something that was often spoken about with fervour. This photo project aimed to tease out why participants played football and what the meaning of football was to them.

The second photo project asked 'what does a female football player look like?' This photo project was designed with the knowledge that women who played football were, to me, diverse. How did other women who play football perceive female footballers to look? Was the stereotype of the dyke, 'lesbian' footballer present amongst women who play football or was that reserved for outsiders of the football space?

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<sup>2</sup> See appendices for recruitment poster, explanatory statements and consent forms.

Photo project three requested participants to take self portraits in their football uniform, in a typical training outfit, everyday 'civilian' clothing, and in a typical work outfit. This request was in line with exploring how these women present themselves within the football space and in other aspects of their life. I was interested in exploring how these women negotiated their embodiment within the football space as well as outside of the football space. I was curious to see how women embodied gender and gender performances across different aspects of their lives. Further, I wondered how this intersected with players' perceptions of other female footballing bodies.

The final photo project, number four, asked participants to take five to ten photographs of 'what you believe women's football looks like'. The aim of this photo project was to gain insight into player's perception of women's football. How did players see the football space, the social and cultural milieu within which they participated? Essentially the goal of this photo project was to see how participants perceived women's football from the outside, even though they were inside the space.

This phase of the research project was designed to generate information about how the participants experienced and perceived football in relation to the key themes in the research; embodiment, gender/sexuality and space and these photo projects were carefully designed in concert with the objectives of the research. This was important to the research as participants were carefully directed to respond to specific concerns of the project. Players generating their own images for the study meant that it was their own insight and reflections that came through the photographs and this was what the research was aiming to elucidate; how do other women who play football experience

gender, embodiment, physicality and the social and cultural space of a women's Australian Rules football team?

For each photo project participants were given a sheet of paper citing the number of the photo project and the question, along with a table asking players to note down the number of the image, the name of the image, a brief description of the image, and a short explanation of why they took the image or what it meant to them. This was in order to be able to draw on this information during the photo elicitation interview should the player not recall the significance of the image. In total this phase of data collection generated one hundred and forty-five images.

## **Phase 2: Empty Football Space Images**

This phase involved the researcher taking photos of 'the empty football space'. These were the only photos that the researcher took for the project and the images were significant in encouraging participants to reflect on the physical space within which football takes place, which took place during the group interview.

I took photographs of the empty football space on a Monday morning in July 2010. This was a good time because the Club rooms still carried the marks of the previous day's game. The women's team had been the last to use this space and thus the aftermath, the mud and grass in the change rooms, the alcohol bottles littering the social rooms, the dishevelled waste left around the Club was the women's by products of the previous day's game.

The objective of this phase of the research was to create images of the space in which much of the footballing activities took place. While I acknowledge that football is

played at the teams' home ground as well as at other teams' grounds (away games), the teams' training, socialising and half of all matches take place at the Club's home ground. As a result, players tended to have a strong affinity for this space. I was interested in depicting this space in photographs in order that the players could engage in a dialogue around the space that they refer to as their home ground. This was interesting to my thesis in order that I might gain an understanding of what this space represented for players, how players engaged with one another in this space and how players embodied the football space.

Photographs were taken of the playing field and surrounding buildings from the perspective of being on the field as well as the perspective of being a spectator. I felt that capturing both perspectives would mean that players would have a broader standpoint from which to discuss this space. Images were also taken of the Clubrooms and the bar, and the change rooms, including the toilets and showers. These spaces were also photographed from different angles and perspectives, generating an array of images.

I coded the images into five categories: Spectator space, social spaces, 'the ground', change rooms and private spaces. The images were then collated, by category, into a power point presentation with a total of twenty-four images, selecting the clearest images that depicted the spaces from different standpoints. At the beginning of the presentation were three questions to prompt the group interview: What is this space? What is this space used for? What does this space mean to the team that uses it? I felt that this would be necessary as I wasn't sure that participants would otherwise

respond much to the images of the football space as, for the participants, they are spaces that they see regularly.

### **Phase 3: Staged Training Session**

This phase involved undertaking what I describe as a 'staged' training session and was an opportunity to create images of participants 'in action' and interaction. Because I was only researching a selection of members from the football team I could not take images during actual training sessions or games as this would likely include players that were not participating in the research. Instead, I organised a staged training session where participants got together and had the opportunity to pose for and create images of the way that they wished to portray women's Australian Rules football. This phase was participant driven and significant in creating images of participants in action and interaction thus drawing data in relation to embodiment, physicality and homosociality. These images were then reflected on through the group interview.

The staged training session was conducted at our usual training ground, our 'home' ground. Five research participants were at the session- Bumpy, Belle, Stella, Mac and Crack. Participants who could not partake in the staged training session were still able to contribute to the group interview to reflect on the images.

The week before the staged training session I briefed the participants, letting them know that they could create images of however they wanted to present football, that this meant they could wear what they wanted and that the session could take place anywhere they wanted it to, which did not have to be at the Club. Nevertheless,

players decided that they would wear regular training clothes and that the session would take place at the Club as usual.

I provided the participants with footballs, cones, tackle bags, drink bottles and a digital camera and told them that I would stand back but if they wanted me to be involved in images to simply direct me where to stand and what to do but that it was up to them as to what was captured on camera and how those photos were taken/created. The session went for forty-five minutes with players dictating when they had had enough.

To begin with participants seemed a bit unsure but soon got into the activity, directing and suggesting ideas to pose for. They began inside the change rooms and progressed outside with footballs, suggesting to one another things to take photographs of and asking each other to pose or to do certain actions. These included taking marks, kicking goals, tackling, stretching, picking up the football, posing in group situations, and images of the surrounding football field such as the mud and grass, mostly traditional moves and situations experienced in a game of Australian Rules football. Following this, players went back inside the change rooms and continued taking photographs. These became increasingly risqué, with images of players on the toilet, at the urinal, in the shower, and posing provocatively and humorously, such as Stella inside one of the football bags. I observed these images taking place and was conscious not to influence what participants chose to take images of and what they chose not to take images of.

Overall this session generated eighty-two images created by participants and proving valuable data for analysis. These images were then coded by the researcher into the following categories: Playful, in action, gender and the body, and togetherness. Given



the large number of photographs I selected the images that, firstly, I felt best represented the four categories for group discussion and, secondly, that captured the breadth of what the participants had depicted in their images. The final result was a power point presentation of thirty images. This slide show, unlike the empty football space slide show, did not have any prompting questions. I felt that because the players had actively participated in creating the images and were photographed in the images, that they would more readily respond to the images.

#### **Phase 4: Group Interview**

Phase four was a group interview that reflected on the images taken during phase two and three, the empty football space images and the staged training session images. This phase was important to draw meaning from and through the photographs and also encouraged participants to engage with one another on the various meanings and significance of images. The objective of the group interview was twofold: to explore the images taken/created during the staged training session and to explore what the football space meant to participants through showing images of the empty football space.

We began by discussing the staged training session. Participants were seated so that they could all see the images on the laptop computer and I tested the microphone and voice recorder to ensure that everyone could be heard and recorded. I introduced the images by asking 'if you look at these images and you think of the themes of the body, of women's bodies, of footballing bodies and of the interaction between these bodies, what sort of things do you think about when you see these images'. We then proceeded to look at each slide with me citing on the voice recorder what number

slide we were discussing. Where participants linked aspects of football to previous images, this was noted by the researcher.

At times participants engaged in conversation, at other times participants simply commented on the images. The interview was open and allowed participants to drive the conversation, with the researcher intervening only to ask participants to say more to clarify their comments. The interview moved from the empty football space images to the staged training session images and this conversation flowed quite comfortably, again the researcher speaking up only to clarify comments or asking participants to talk more on a topic.

The tone of the group interview was playful and reflected the dynamic of the group. Jokes and innuendos took place and at times participants said things like “I feel...but someone else might think otherwise”, inviting and encouraging others to speak up. All participants present contributed to the interview with some speaking more than others. Again, this reflects the social dynamics of the group. The conversation wrapped up as more people began arriving for training and we had finished going through the images. Participants were invited to make any other comments or ask questions before finishing the interview.

### **Phase 5: Individual Interviews**

This final phase of data collection involved interviewing each participant individually and asking participants to discuss the images created for their photo projects. All interviews took place after the end of the season, including the finals series. They ranged in time, one taking just eight minutes, three taking thirty-fourty minutes, and

two taking around twenty minutes. The interview with Jac and Jonty were done at the same time due to convenience for the participants, focusing first on Jac and then Jonty. This interview in total comprised one hour and five minutes.

Interviews took place at a range of venues. The interview with Jac and Jonty took place at their home. The interviews with Bumpy and Crack took place at my office. Tracey and Stella's interviews were conducted at a local cafe, and Mac and Belle's at the end of season trip away. For each interview the researcher had collated each photo project into separate documents and noted what the participant had written on the photo project sheet provided to them. This included the number, title and description of images as well as the reason that participant's had cited for documenting the image.

For each interview we began by going through each image sequentially and I invited the interviewee to talk about the significance of the image in relation to the photo project. At times these comments were short and simply described the photo. At other times the images generated more extensive conversation. When it was necessary I prompted interviewees by asking one of the following: What does the image mean to you? What does the image represent? Why did you take this photo? Significantly, the interviews were open ended and driven by the participants' images. While the photo projects were guided by questions, they were broad enough that the participants had a significant amount of agency over what they contributed to the research.

Each of the five phases of data collection contributed to the research project by providing valuable information through which I have been able to draw a rich analysis. The next section discusses methods of data analysis followed by ethical considerations.

## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis phase of the research project was a subjective process in which, following my epistemological trajectory, I paid deliberate attention to gendered embodiment, physicality, sociality, space and sexual identity categories as they emerged in the images and throughout the interview data.

The research generated both visual data and interview data and I used discourse analysis to explore the data in two distinct phases: visual and interview data as mutually dependent; and visual data in isolation. Each of these phases addressed firstly, the individual photo projects and their concurrent interviews and, secondly, the images taken as part of the staged training session, 'empty' football space, and group interview. This distinction aimed to analyse and interpret in detail each participant's responses and then, building from this, group responses in order to explore more clearly perspectives and experiences of participants' within this particular cultural space.

In drawing on discourse analysis I followed Rose (2007) for the way she describes images as discourse. Rose notes that discourse "is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it" (p. 142) further elucidating that visuality can be understood as a sort of discourse as well. Visuality, for Rose, may make some things visible while rendering others unseeable and, through images, "subjects will be produced and act within that field of vision" (p. 143). Since discourse analysis serves to explicate how subjects construct and

understand their social worlds, Rose's perspective places visual data in a position in which discourse analysis may be used as a constructive means of analysis.

The data analysis phase of the research aimed to gain insight into the ways that subjects understand the social and cultural sphere of women's Australian Rules football, exploring how issues of gender, sexuality, embodiment and space are manifest through participants' images and voices. Discourse analysis, Rose (2007) suggests, must attend to how images produce 'knowledge', identify complexities and contradictions, and look for what may be invisible as well as visible in the data, all the while paying close attention to detail. I draw on Rose and follow my objectives in the research, paying close attention to, specifically, the ways that gender, desire, embodiment, space and sociality are presented within the data.

In isolation images may herald little insight into academic knowledge and be glossed over and simplified like happy snaps of a family holiday. This research uses discourse analysis to critically explore how subjects construct their understandings of the social world (Rose, 2007) through both language and images. Weber (2008) suggests that when we are looking at images it is not what we see that makes images important to academic scholarship but *paying attention* to what we see. Further, Rose (2007) contends that "because images matter, because they are powerful and seductive, it is necessary to consider them critically" (p. 262). By exploring the images not just for what they depict but also for what they represent, how they relate to other images that the same participant created as well as other participants photo projects, I was able to pick out themes and significant issues throughout the data.

Analysing the interview data in conjunction with the visual data allowed objectives, explanations and understandings of the participant's images to be made clear. Building on this by also analysing the images in isolation promotes what Kolb (2008) describes as "a deeper story" (para. 34). For example, when I analysed the images of Mac in her work clothes and football uniform in images 5.5 and 5.6, I observed her embodiment of gender to be distinctly different in each. As a consequence I engage in a discussion of the ways that Mac embodies gender in diverse ways. This was not an issue that Mac addressed in the photo elicitation interview but an aspect of the research that I found important. Had I not have analysed the images in isolation, I would not have had the data to proffer the discussion of gender that I do.

While Rose (2007) describes seeing research data with 'fresh eyes', eliminating any preconceived notions of what the researcher may anticipate in the findings, as a participant researcher it was impossible that I approach the data from a value-free perspective. Indeed I acknowledge that, throughout the research, I had certain expectations, interests and objectives. While I acknowledge my own bias, the research was concerned with the stories, experiences and perspectives of *other* football playing women. Through eliciting others' understandings of playing football the data analysis phase, while influenced by my own perspectives and experiences of playing women's football, was concerned with drawing out other women's stories of playing football.

### **Ethics of the Research**

There were a number of ethical concerns that emerged with undertaking this research project, particularly the ethics related to taking photographs, participants being

identifiable within the research and conducting research within the football team that I play with. Generating photos through the research brought up a number of ethical issues. For example, who did the images belong to and were participants recognised as the photographer? Who was in the images and had they agreed to take part in the research? Both images *of* research participants and images *by* research participants demand rigorous ethical consideration. Indeed, as Rose (2007) suggests, “it is clear that doing research with photos means making a record of identifiable people doing specific things. How that record is made and what is then done with it therefore matters” (p. 251).

Engaging participants in taking/creating images as a means of data collection forms the basis of a kind of collaboration of stories and experiences. Asking participants to take/create images themselves can be empowering for participants, promoting a degree of self-expression often not available in other research methods (Rose, 2007). This is an important aspect of the study because, as a football player myself, I have my own understandings and perceptions of how I make sense of the issues that I explore in this research. While the issues that I am concerned with in this research are subjective, the research aspired to gain insight into *other* women’s experiences, understandings and perspectives of football. Thus by drawing on participants experiences through their own creation of images, I aimed to explore a broader landscape of women’s football perspectives.

Effective collaboration, Rose (2007) suggests, demands reflexive vigilance. Reflexivity is described as “the careful and consistent awareness of what the researcher is doing, why, and with what possible consequences in terms of the power relations between

researcher and researched” (Rose, 2007, p. 253). As a fellow team mate in the football team, reflexivity is imperative not only relative to the researcher-researched relationship but also to the player-researcher position. It was necessary to ensure that the interactions between the researcher and the participants were in no way coercive despite the researcher’s knowledge and participation in the team.

In her introduction to a special issue on visual methods in *Social Analysis*, Bloustien (2003) outlines the necessity of reflexivity in drawing on research methods. Bloustien notes that “to fully understand photography and the camera is to realize that, as a technical device it has never been simply a recorder of actual events” (p. 2). This demonstrates the subjectivity of visual methods, that photographs do not record ‘reality’, but rather portray one person’s subjective perspective or experience. The camera, Bloustien further suggests, is a tool for understanding others as well as being reflexive about oneself. Photographic images are also subject to reflexive interpretation and analysis by the researcher. So while I engage with the images and interviews created for this research project I acknowledge that my exploration of the data reflects my own subjective engagement with the research.

### **The Players**

Asking participants to generate photographs that included images of themselves meant that these players would be identifiable within the research project and that



anonymity would not be possible<sup>3</sup>. While research participants had the option of being referred to by their own names, nicknames or a pseudonym, seven chose to be referred to by their football nicknames and one by a pseudonym which was in fact her dog and I suspect that this is more for humour than to protect her identity. This demonstrates that participants were comfortable in being recognised for what they said and the images they created, including the ones in which they are identifiable. Using self portraits that players created of themselves in their football uniforms, I now introduce the research participants in alphabetical order. Created by the participants I use these images because they offer not only a visual representation of players but also an insight that words may not convey, for example, Belle's playful grin.

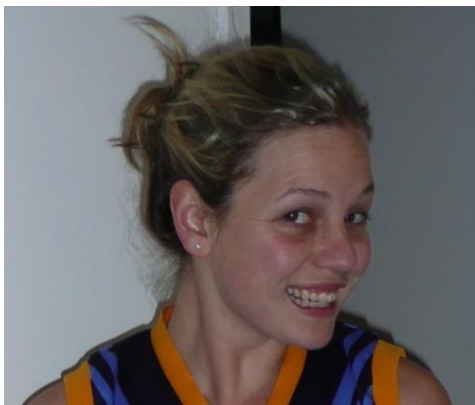


Image 4.1 Belle

Belle cites the social aspects of football and 'having fun' as her motivation for playing football. She is in her mid-twenties and has played on the team since her late teens.

Bumpy has played with the team for close to seventeen years, citing the physical outlet as what drew her to the sport. She says that what keeps her playing now is not just the physical outlet but the social aspects of playing.



Image 4.2 Bumpy

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<sup>3</sup> This was clearly stated in the explanatory statement and the consent form which read: 'I understand that I will be identifiable in the photographs collected as part of the research project'.



Image 4.3 Crack

Crack has played with the team for two years. She joined the team to meet other people and because she 'loves' football.



Image 4.4 Jac

Jac has played with the team for over five years as a player and has also coached the team when she shattered her leg bones. She has been captain and coach of the team and emphasises her passion for 'doing it for the team' in her interview.

Jonty has played for the team for several years asserts her love of the sport as her motivation playing.

and  
for

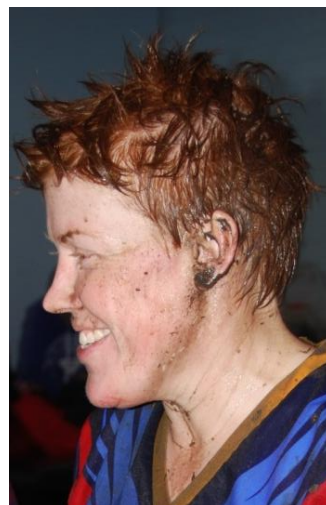


Image 4.5 Jonty



Image 4.6 Mac

Mac has played for the football team on and off for over five years and cites social connections as a significant motivation for playing.

Stella, who did not complete this photo project and thus there is no image of her, cites the physical dimensions of the game as what draws her to the sport. She has been playing for the team for over five years.

Tracey began playing for the team ten years prior to this research taking place, stopping for several years while she was overseas and, upon return, was drawn back to the team.



Image 4.7 Tracey

## **A Final Word on Methods and Reflexivity**

My key motivation for conducting the study was to explore how other women who played football experienced and negotiated their embodiment and physicality. From what I saw amongst my team mates, not all players embodied athleticism in the same way I did and yet that did not detract from their football playing prowess. My interest in this study was getting to the heart of physicality and embodiment as it related to gender, to football participation, to sociality, to desire and to sense of self. Yet simply asking others how they experienced their bodies and what their bodies meant in relation to these areas of interest did not seem like an effective way to explore these fields.

Ethnographic methods also didn't seem like they would get me to the core of what I was interested in because as much as I was interested in observing others' experiences of football, I had done this for several years in playing football and I still had the same questions. Drawing on ethnographic methods could have provided a rich collection of data from my own interpretation of events and offered a different insight into the football field; had I undertaken an ethnographic study I might have interpreted the presence of sex and desire through observing homoeroticism in the football space, an aspect that I was not able to address in depth as it was not an issue that participants proffered throughout the processes of data collection.

I needed resources that could help me to get to the root of how others experienced their bodies playing football and how that intersected with aspects of their embodiment. Further, I wanted to engage with subjects' sociality in the field of

women's football, but not necessarily on the playing field. I knew that sociality was a key motivation for some people to play football and I was curious at the intensity of the bonds between team mates and how playing football together might contribute to these bonds. Further, the association of playing football and identifying as lesbian bothered me. Not all players on my team identified as lesbians although I knew some did and I knew that there were more women in same-sex relationships on my football team than in other areas of my life. However, women's football did not have a monopoly on lesbianism; football was not the homogenously lesbian enclave my brother seemed to think it was. Consequently one of my tasks throughout this study has been to generate resources that could help me get to the heart of exploring others' experiences of physicality, embodiment and the intersection with sociality and subjectivity. The nexus of sociality, sexuality, embodiment, physicality and subjectivity is, I suggest, a complex one and such an inquiry demonstrates how these fields do not begin or end but can be seen as structuring an intertwining web.

Using visual methods to think about physicality, gender and the pleasure of the body in sport is a way to 'see' these fields through an alternate methodological lens. In deploying a visual methodology we can see how the bodies engaged in the research display themselves as football bodies and as female bodies while exploring the ways in which players read gender and physicality off of (other) bodies. Visual methods offer a dimension of reflexivity to research participants in this research who, through being encouraged to create images of women's Australian Rules football, are then invited to reflect on and to discuss the significance of these images in relation to their understandings of gender, of bodies and of these/their bodies in action.

Since the research stemmed from my own experiences playing women's Australian Rules football and I was intrigued by the diversity I saw amongst women in my own team, I decided this offered a fruitful space from which to develop my research design. As a player-researcher I had some insight into my study site but was limited by own lens, my own perspectives and experiences. I was friendly with players and had an established relationship with most of my team mates and thus the research participants. This also meant that I carried my own assumptions about players, about football and about the team which became clearer as I engaged in the data analysis phase of the research.

For example I assumed that players who embody a lean physique were held in higher esteem than players who might be described as overweight. I found that this was not the case and that players who had the capacity to play hard at the ball, run the duration of the football match and keep on trying despite fatigue were more highly respected than players who might otherwise be read as 'looking the part' of a fit, lean, muscular football player. Perhaps this was a perception that I carried from popular culture and the media where idealised sporting bodies are projected not only as skilled and fit for that sport but also 'body beautiful'- lean and muscular. It also surprised me to learn that players found the term 'dyke' to be a negative subjectivity with which they strongly disassociated. My interpretation of the term 'dyke' balanced masculine and feminine embodiment and performance in a desirable way that said 'I am confident in who I am and enjoy the ambiguous performance of gender'. Perhaps somewhat utopian, I nevertheless was surprised to see another self-identified lesbian express such distaste towards the term 'dyke'. I expected 'dyke' to be considered a disavowed subjectivity in a homophobic sphere but I did not anticipate it would be

held in such disgust in this space. Similarly, I was surprised that women in this team felt so strongly about women embodying masculinity. Later in this thesis I discuss a situation where a player is referred to as 'Uncle' because team mates think she looks like a man. I was surprised that given the marginality of women's football in a broader social sphere, that women were so judgemental about others' embodiment of gender.

As a lesbian reading the space, I was biased in my reading of lesbianism in the football team and expected that since I perceived same-sex desire as remaining somewhere outside the purview of the dominant hetero-norm that all lesbians playing football would find some kind of unity within the football community, and that women who did not identify as 'lesbian' would carry less kudos amongst the team. This was not the case; capital and hegemony were deployed along axis' of sporting prowess, personal affinities, self-confidence amongst team mates, and norms of gender performances established within the team.

Clearly this work is not value free and these are just some of the assumptions I had when I embarked on the research. Initiating the research I could not have articulated these as biases that I carried and yet, on reflection, I can see how I had unarticulated expectations of what the research might find. In retrospect and following Allen (2009), I recognise that 'truth' is relational and contextual, with many truths relating to any one event. Through analysis of visual data in this research, it is important to note not only participants investment in the creation of 'truths' but also my own investment in the images, how I influence the data through my own subjective interpretations and analysis and how research can teach us not only about what we don't know, but also about our own preconceived conceptions.

In the following chapters I analyse and discuss the research data. In chapter five I engage with homosociality and intragender relations, exploring the complexities of sociality within this social and cultural space, gender manoeuvring and sexual identities, and Australian female masculinity and mateship. Chapter six discusses the sportscape of this women's Australian Rules football team, specifically in relation to masculinities, private spaces and the sexualisation of the sportscape, concluding with a discussion of the transience and mobility of the sportscape. Finally, in chapter seven, I explore the use of a visual methodology in the study, theorising as I do the notion of footballing bodies and these bodies in action and interaction.



## **CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Homosociality, Intragender Relations and the Complex Social Interactions of a Women's Australian Rules Football Team**

Traditionally, football is overwhelmingly dominated by men and masculinity (Caudwell, 2007) and women's participation continues to catapult those who play into a spotlight of gender transgression and the related "sexual deviance" (Marcus, 2007, p. 113).

Women's participation in Australian Rules football is positioned as deviant through the strong lesbian stereotype attached to playing and codes of women's football across the globe reflect this stigma, some in positive ways, others in negative ways (Caudwell, 1999, 2003, 2006, 2007; Chase, 2006; Cox & Thompson, 2000; Harris, 2005, 2007; Hillier, 2005).

While female homosociality tends to be encompassed by the overarching rubric of 'friendship' or, in the case that an interaction bears a sexual element, lesbian, these terms, as suggested by Marcus (2007), tell us little about the content of bonds between women, and few researchers have addressed women's social interactions within sport beyond the 'lesbian in sport' rhetoric. For example Caudwell's (2007) work explores dynamics between women in a 'lesbian identified' football team in the UK, Hillier (2005) explores women's Australian Rules football through a discourse of 'safe spaces' for same-sex attracted youth, and Harris (2007) highlights the 'image problem' of the 'lesbian in sport'. In this chapter I build on the work of these theorists and question what a closer exploration of women's bonds within the social and cultural space of a women's football team might look like. I suggest that although each of these theorists' work offers important insight into aspects of homosociality that what is

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absent is a broader, more nuanced exploration of female homosocial bonds as they exist and intersect together in a single social and cultural milieu.

Participants involved in this research were conscious that there exists a lesbian stereotype that surrounds women's football in an Australian context and that, in the wider culture, this stereotype was constructed negatively. However participants also found that the social space of this football team offered a cultural milieu in which subjects' sexual desires were not overtly conspicuous but were also not silenced or rendered invisible. As a consequence, this women's Australian Rules football team is a unique social and cultural space due to it being experienced by players as neither an exclusively heterosexual nor 'lesbian' space as emphasised by one of the research participants:

[W]hen you say you play women's football and they don't know anything about it, they will immediately make an assumption um, that [it] is majority lesbians...I think our team is about 50-50 (Bumpy).

Bumpy acknowledges that the team is comprised of a combination of women who are neither exclusively lesbian, same-sex attracted, nor necessarily heterosexual desiring subjects. This challenges the assumption that women who play football must be masculine and therefore lesbian. This is worth noting because research on women's football tends to focus on 'lesbians in football' or the 'lesbian stigma' attached to football participation. For members of this women's football team, players seem to comfortably explore or subscribe to either same-sex or opposite-sex desire, and homophobia is not a dominant discourse. For Bumpy this space is a kind of haven; "[I] don't' fit into the gay world, don't fit into the straight world...but when you're playing

footy, I feel like I belong a million percent” (Bumpy). This space enables Bumpy to feel at ease and offers a sense of belonging that she does not experience elsewhere. In this chapter I explore how both same-sex and opposite-sex desires exist and intersect in the cultural milieu of this team.

Although the lesbian stigma does not necessarily affect subjects playing football in this space, in a wider social context players can experience this stereotype in ways that can be both positive and negative. For some players the ‘lesbian stigma’ has offered entry into something they want to get to know; “the first time I came down to training I was nineteen, I had a boyfriend, I wasn’t open to this gay world” (Tracey). For Tracey the football community and the open expression of same-sex desire in this space “opened this door to my life now” (Tracey) and is something for which she is thankful. Bumpy explains that consciously or not “I made the assumption that women’s football, women footballers were gay, lesbian” and met her partner with whom she now has children playing football; “I wouldn’t have met other lesbians otherwise, I wouldn’t go out to a gay bar...I don’t know where else you’d meet them”. For both of these players football has been significant in exposing them to a space in which same-sex desire is accepted, normative and positive. However this is not the case for all players.

For example one of the players on the team, Crack, experiences the lesbian stigma as problematic and something she takes care to avoid. Crack finds that when she goes out with friends from football and is addressed by her nickname ‘Crack’ rather than her christian name ‘Nicolle’, people ask where her nickname comes from. When she responds that it comes from her football team “with guys the first question is always about how many lesbians are there in your team- it is a prominent question” (Crack).

Through her association with a women's football team and what is perceived as a 'lesbian enclave', Crack's sexual desires are propelled into question and she finds that she must justify her position as a heterosexual desiring, football playing woman. In further defending her desire as an opposite-sex attracted woman who plays football, Crack has also become conscious that how she dresses and embodies her gender



Image 5. 1 *Casual* by Crack

impacts whether she is read as 'a lesbian' or 'straight' subject.

Image 5.1 shows Crack in what she describes as a casual outfit that she might wear at home. Of the image Crack says "When I was wearing this shirt I was told I looked like a dyke. I've never worn it since" (Crack). It is unclear whether

Crack is defensive of the term dyke because of its association with same-sex desire or because for Crack the term 'dyke' is what she describes as a "dirty word". Regardless, as a result of this incident Crack carefully polices her choice of clothing to ensure that she is not read as 'dykey'. Subscribing to heterosexuality, Crack experiences the subculture of this women's football team in a way that is not only about participating in sport but is tied up with sociality, sexuality and self-identity, negotiating her heterosexual desires amongst a milieu in which her football participation catapults her into a stereotype of homosexual subjectivity. As a result Crack finds herself negotiating her heterosexual identity in a way that is not typically required of heterosexual desiring subjects. For Crack, gender is contextual and she finds that she must balance her performance and embodiment of gender through her clothing and the ways in which she styles herself. In a broader culture in which heteronormativity is the hegemonic, idealised model of sexuality, Crack finds herself in a social space in which she must justify her desires, her embodiment of gender and her engagement with and in a women's football team.

The subculture of this women's football team is neither a heteronormative nor exclusively queer community; the women in this research do not make assumptions that players are necessarily or exclusively same-sex or opposite-sex attracted. Hillier (2005) writes that women's Australian Rules football offers a 'safe space' in which women may explore same-sex desire without fear of homophobia. For this particular football team participants suggest that about half of the team either does not subscribe to heterosexual desires or are actively engaged in same-sex relationships and it is not uncommon to see same-sex couples expressing affection for one another, holding hands or standing closely together. While overt physical affection between

couples, regardless of gender, is not encouraged during training, matches or other official football events, in social circumstances when the team is away from the football field- for example after a match socialising in the club rooms- players who have same-sex partners are comfortable, as Stella says, “to sit on the couch with your partner and hold their hand”. Players’ engagement in same-sex and opposite-sex intimacy is thus policed within this social space but is not premised on the gender of subjects’ desires.

The heterosexual matrix highlights the way that modern Western culture constitutes heterosexuality as normative and homosexuality as abject (Butler cited in Marcus, 2003, p. 5). Marcus’ exploration of Victorian England demonstrates how, although this period was organised around heterosexuality, same sex desire was nonetheless evident. Similarly, this women’s football team has carved out a unique space in which neither heteronormativity nor homonormativity dominate. While not subscribing to the narrow assumption that women who play football are lesbians, the team’s culture does not presume that players are necessarily heterosexual. This means that women’s relationships with other women associated with the team are not predetermined as asexual and neither necessarily sexual and offers, I suggest, an intriguing space for sociological analysis.

Little academic literature engages with social spaces in which same-sex and opposite-sex desires intersect. Indeed, Aapola, Gonick & Harris (2005) note that few studies have researched friendship groups “whose members are both gay and straight” (p. 124). This chapter explores the dynamics of what it might look like when same-sex and opposite-sex desire exists in the same social space and what theoretical frameworks

we have to explore such phenomena. I engage with the concept of homosociality followed by intragender relations to begin to unravel the complexity of power dynamics, gender and sociality amongst this team. I further explore how homosociality and intragender relations might intersect and offer complimentary analyses suggesting that while homosociality addresses the potential of women's bonds to encompass the possibility of sexual and/or asexual desires, that intragender relations speaks to the ways that gender may be embodied and performed in diverse ways, influencing hegemony and power dynamics amongst women.

### **Homosociality and the Social Milieu**

The cultural space of women's Australian Rules football is unique for the study of homosociality due to its relative absence of males. Although some women's football teams have male coaches, trainers or supporters, the team involved in this study has a female coach and trainer. Males are involved with the team as supporters, as members of the male Club with which the team is affiliated, and as umpires for the Victorian Women's Football League (although umpires can also be female the majority during the 2010 season were male). The Victorian Women's Football League, within which the team is located, is also largely run by women. The site of this women's football team, run by and for women, is unique due to the noticeable *absence* of men at both the ground level and also at the leadership level. Marcus (2007) notes that women have typically been defined relative to men and where bonds between women have been the subject of analysis it has been explored within the field of lesbian studies. The site of women's Australian Rules football has traditionally followed this trajectory, where women are not defined relative to men but rather relative to other women, this work has been similarly located in the field of 'lesbian studies'. This study diverges from this

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rhetoric and in this section I engage with the ways that female homosociality offers a useful mechanism for exploring the cultural space of this team for which the women in this study play.

Sociality emerged through the study as a significant motivation for women to play Australian Rules football yet academic explorations of women's same-sex sociality tend to focus on either 'female friendship' or 'lesbian love' (Marcus, 2007). Specific to sport, female sociality discourse tends to be restricted to either camaraderie and 'team mate' relationships or 'the lesbian in sport' stigma (Hillier, 2005), a limitation that serves to efface a more nuanced account of bonds between women. In contrast, homosociality acknowledges that a homosocial interaction has the potential to, though does not necessarily, bare an intimate or sexual element. Griffin (2000) suggests that most feminist research, while not denying the existence of lesbianism, tends to overlook the possibility of same-sex desire amongst women, regardless of sexual identification. This research does not speak to 'lesbianism' or sex between women but, following Marcus' (2007) work on homosociality, acknowledges that it would be remiss *not* to explore the potential of same-sex desire amongst women. I have earlier acknowledged that research on girls and women's bonds tends to polarise same-sex relationships as either sexual and therefore lesbian or asexual and thus 'friends' noting that where friendship discourse obfuscates desire between girls "this is an absence that matters" (Griffin, 2000, p. 228). Where desire between women is rendered absent or made invisible, we construct bonds between women as always and only asexual. This is problematic for its capacity to delegitimize and render absent women's same-sex desire and same-sex sexual bonds.



Same-sex desire between women has tended to be explored through lesbian and homosexual discourse or queer theory which seeks to destabilise sex, gender and sexuality binaries and speak to subjectivity rather than identity. I draw on Sharon Marcus' (2007) text *Between Women* to offer an exploration of same-sex desire, intimacy and sex that does not reproduce hetero-homo sexual identities or binaries and neither do I locate this work within queer theoretical discourse. Rather, I seek to offer insight into the unique space that this women's Australian Rules football team has carved out and demonstrate the complexity and diversity of sociality within this locale. Specifically, in this section I engage with the ways that sex and sociality is manifest within this cultural milieu, drawing on Marcus' work to offer theoretical insight into sex, desire and sociality between the participants in the research.

Exploring desire between women, Marcus (2007) breaks her text into three key sections, homosociality, homoeroticism and homosexuality. This division implies that the homosocial, homoerotic and homosexual are exclusive but, as Marcus explicitly states, homoerotic and homosexual interactions are inherently embedded *within* the realm of the homosocial. Every social bond differs "by virtue of its content, structure, status, and degree of flexibility" (Marcus, 2007, p. 4) and thus homosociality does not differentiate nor categorise interactions between members of the same sex. To overlook the potential of women's bonds to bare sexual elements in particular social and cultural spaces is to render invisible same-sex desire in these spaces. Similarly, to focus exclusively on the presence of homosexuality to the exclusion of sociality is to suggest that sex operates outside the purview of sociality. Homosociality brings light to the nuances and diversity of women's same-sex bonds and any comprehensive discussion of homosociality must recognise the inherent possibility of sex and desire.

Significant to this discussion, Marcus distinguishes eroticism from the sexual asserting that although 'sexual' refers to genital arousal, "erotic has no necessary connection to sex acts" (Marcus, 2007, p. 114). Eroticism involves, among other things, intensified affect, sensual pleasure and the dynamics of looking and displaying, dynamics which might exist between two people, a person and object, image or text (Marcus, 2007). This distinction implies that while sex speaks to certain behaviours and may be more easily qualified, eroticism encompasses a broader range of *affective* behaviours that may go unobserved. Homoeroticism is therefore useful to how we might theorise desire between women that does not necessarily relate to sex or subjects, but to physical forms more broadly.

Research participants in the study describe a range of bonds and interactions that take place with members of their football team using the terms 'acquaintance', 'partner', 'closest friend', 'mates' and 'family away from family' however the terms that participants use to describe these social bonds tells us little about the particularities of the relationships participants refer to. Marcus (2007) suggests that social bonds differ from others "by virtue of...[their] content, structure, status, and degree of flexibility" (p. 4) rather than any overriding classification. I suggest then that the terminology we draw on may not tell us as much about a social bond as we may think. Further, I suggest that perceptions of desire tend to be closely linked to performances of gender and I use examples from the research to discuss this.

In analysing the research data I paid close attention to the terms that participants use to describe social bonds and interactions because the terms that subjects draw on, just like a methodology, frame the meanings that we attempt to communicate. Players

clearly had certain meanings in mind when they deployed the term 'mates' and chose this over 'friend', 'acquaintance' or 'team mate' for specific reasons. Similarly, methodologically, when I deploy the term 'same-sex desire' or 'same-sex relationship' over 'lesbian' or 'dyke', I am doing so to present a more inclusive, less presumptuous outlook on women's same-sex sexual interactions. For example while I acknowledge and make reference to research that engages with lesbian discourse, methodologically I have been careful to avoid the term 'lesbian'. This is because I observed in my interactions with others that women tend to have emotive opinions on the term with some people actively associating with a lesbian subculture, desire or subjectivity, and others steadfastly disavowing the term, even those engaged in same-sex relationships.

Neither sex nor eroticism was outwardly displayed throughout the images in the data collection process and I did not ask specific questions about sex and intimacy throughout the interviews. This was significant to my methodology because I did not want to position the research as focused on 'lesbian' or football as a hyper homosexual space. Methodologically in this study I wanted to elucidate whether or not there was a presence of sex and desire within this team without presuming the space to be exclusively sexual or asexual. By foregrounding sex or its absence through the images and associated interviews, I could have positioned the space as a sexual locale. Had I done this, it may have encouraged participants to speak more about sex. However, I was interested in exploring the understated presence of sex and desire and the subtleties of how sex might manifest within this homosocial space. Had I highlighted and drawn attention to the presence of sex and desire throughout the data collection process I anticipate that players might have fallen into the trap described by Sheila Jeffreys (1989), that to modern eyes declarations of sensual interactions or eroticism

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between women are perceived as indicative of lesbianism. It is this presumption that I was seeking to avoid in this research and thus my methodological decision not to overtly address sex and desire in the research design. This is because while 'lesbian' tends to be used to mark relationships between women in contemporary culture, I argue that it says very little about women's sociality, desire, power dynamics and relationships.

While the research data demonstrated no apparent presence of 'sex' or eroticism within the cultural space that this team has carved out, I suggest that amongst the team there exists an underlying current of homoeroticism. In this space women's Australian Rules football players' bodies are on display in team uniforms, players spend large amounts of time together training, playing matches and after games socialising. When on the field, players engage in full body contact, tackling opposition players and protecting their own team mates with their bodies. Players are encouraged to 'go hard' and lay their bodies on the line for the team, working as a collective for a common goal. And, in the aftermath of all this, players share private spaces such as bathrooms and showers, and may get changed in the open space of the change rooms if they choose to. Then, sitting around in the Clubrooms, players candidly discuss whatever is the topic of the day, football, partners, sexuality.

I suggest that Marcus' (2007) theorisation of 'the feminine play thing' offers conceptual insight into the presence of homoeroticism within women's Australian Rules football that discourse such as 'lesbian' or friendship does not have the scope to encompass. For example, within the team involved in this research, players commonly shower together after games. While the Clubrooms have two showers with doors, there are also two shower heads next to one another in the open space of the bathroom as in image 5.2. While some players choose to use the open showers, others



Image 5.2 *Untitled* Empty football space sequence

steadfastly prefer the privacy of the showers with doors, and others do not shower at all. Players walk freely into the bathrooms to use the mirrors or toilets while others are using the open showers with some averting their gaze from players in the open showers while others approach and have conversations with naked or near naked bodies. The presence of nudity is commonly positioned as sexual or as possessing the

potential to be sexual. Women can, in this space, bare their naked or semi naked bodies while showering or getting changed while other women are present. While this does not infer a necessarily homoerotic element, it points to the potential for homoerotic desires to be experienced.

Homoeroticism is demarcated by Marcus (2007) as desire but not necessarily sex.

Within the subculture of this women's Australian Rules football team, homoeroticism was made present despite examples being scarce within the photographs and interviews conducted as part of the research. For example, sexual innuendos amongst team mates and amongst other teams in the league were evident. An anecdote of this took place after a game when a player on the opposing team made reference to group showers and called each other 'hot' drawing attention to the overt homoeroticism amongst team members. In the team that this research is concerned with, players seemed careful not to eroticise players on their own team. Sexual innuendos amongst the team in this study were rife and generated humour amongst players which demonstrated the presence of desire and eroticism within this space. However, they were never directed at specific objects of desire. So while the opposing team made comments about group showers and others' sex appeal, the team in this research were careful not to eroticise fellow team mates or to indicate desire toward team mates unless they were in a relationship with the team mate (which a number of players were). This does not indicate an absence of homoeroticism or desire, but rather a conservative space in which eroticism and desire toward others is deemed private and personal. Further, it suggests that women's Australian Rules football teams do not share homogenous team cultures, an issue that this research does not have the scope to deal with.

The feminine play thing might similarly be theorised within this space through objectifying others' bodies. For example, at the end of a final's game players were excited and one of the senior players hoisted a team mate wearing only her underpants onto her back, 'piggy back ride' style. The player then carried her nearly naked team mate onto the field where spectators remained, using her naked form as an object of play and generating calls of delight and surprise from onlookers. While both players willingly engaged in this display, the use of a woman's body in its near naked form demonstrates the way that women's bodies in this space might be offered as desirable as well as objects to be consumed or played with.

Marcus' (2007) work on homosociality opens up a conceptual space through which we may theorise *the potential* of female same-sex sociality as it pertains to eroticism, intimacy, desire and its absence. However, data from this study suggests that there are elements of sociality that might be further theorised through a distinct but complimentary framework. In this section I have drawn on homosociality to make a theoretical link between sexual and asexual bonds, desire and intimacy without reducing women's bonds to a lesbian or friendship rhetoric but instead demonstrating that the presence or absence of desire need not be polarised, such as the examples I draw on of homoeroticism and the feminine play thing. I now turn to the notion of intragender relations to further explore how sociality amongst women may intersect with elements of power and gender.

### **Intragender Relations and Further Complexities of Sociality**

In her work on roller derby in the United States Nancy Finley (2010) coins the phrase 'intragender relations' to explore the ways that participants in roller derby interact.

Engaging with a discussion of sociality and gender embodiment in the cultural space of roller derby, Finley asserts that 'intragender relations' describes how multiple femininities and the women who practice them interact. Building on Schippers (2007) work on pariah femininities, Finley explores hegemony amongst women participating in roller derby relative to both inter- and intra- gender relations. By focusing on the internal relations of subordinate groups, such as roller derby or women's Australian Rules football, Finley suggests that we may be able to see how types of power other than traditional heteronormative hegemony are available for those involved in different activities. Significant to this research, Finley questions how gender and femininity are structured to produce a unique space in which women interact with other women referring to what she calls intragender relations as a mechanism for "challenging hegemonic gender relations" (Finley, 2010, p. 359). This work is important because, like homosociality, it draws attention to same-sex sociality without presuming that bonds and gender embodiment necessarily reflect heteronormative discourses. Significantly, Finley's work offers insight into power dynamics between 'derby girls' where gender embodiment and performance is not necessarily demarcated by heteronormative discourses.

While homosociality speaks to the potential, though not necessity, of a sexual presence between same-sex subjects, 'intragender relations' speaks to discourses of power and gender embodiment amongst women. Clearly these theoretical lenses are not distinct but may rather overlap and act in complementary ways to offer a more nuanced discussion of sociality between women. A number of researchers who have considered the concept of friendship between females have done so relative to gender (i.e. Aapola et al., 2005; Green, 1998) however I suggest that, although this has its



merits, in order to further the exploration of women's interactions and bonds we must explore intragender norms, stereotypes, power dynamics and hegemonies rather than an overarching sense of 'girlhood' or femininity relative to men, masculinity and the associated heteronormative discourse.

While homosociality speaks to the potential for intimacy and desire within relationships, I suggest that the notion of intragender relations offers an insight into how power and gender might intersect in bonds between women. As Finley (2010) found in women's participation in roller derby, women's Australian Rules football encourages behaviour that includes aggression, strength and violence, characteristics typified as hegemonically masculine and the antithesis of which is demarcated as heteronormative femininity. When displayed by women these characteristics are usually disparaged and those who perform them tend to be derided for transgressing gender norms. In the space of roller derby women enact and embody aggression, strength and violence to be successful participants in the sport. The same is the case for women playing Australian Rules football. As a result, the hegemony of the subject in this space is not determined by heteronormative conceptions of the female role but through a discourse of gender and sporting embodiment and performance that is quite different. The hegemony of gender in the locale of this women's football team, like that of roller derby, diverges significantly from the heteronormative trajectory.

Gender manoeuvring, a concept that Finley (2010) draws from Schippers (2007), is described as "a collective effort to negotiate actively the meaning and rules of gender to redefine the hegemonic relationship between masculinity and femininity in the normative structure of a specific context" (Finley, 2010, p. 362). The significance of

gender manoeuvring is that participants in Finley's research shift familiar meanings of gender, challenge traditional rules of interaction, and alter positions so that links between gender relations might be transformed within that context (Finley, 2010). Essentially, gender manoeuvring "challenge[s] localized gender relations and produce 'alternative' gender relations" (Finley, 2010, p. 362). Drawing on the notion of gender manoeuvring amongst the participants in the football team in this research, I draw attention to the different ways in which subjects embody and perform gender.

In image 5.3, for example, Mac demonstrates an emphatic display of strength, force and immense size that a heteronormative discourse would associate with masculinity and male embodiment. Femininity is associated with female embodiedness and being small, delicate, fragile and passive (Gill, 2007) and Mac's display of strength and size contrasts this. Although these characteristics may not be celebrated in other spheres, they are valued in women's football because when appropriated onto the football field Mac draws on her strength and size to hold her ground and get the ball out to a team mate rather than be tackled and lose the ball. Thus Mac's gender manoeuvring as appropriated to the space of football means that her strength, size and aggression become valuable commodities.

In a similar way to Mac's pose (below) in which she is actively taking up space, which women are not typically encouraged to do, image 5.4 shows a player tackling Mac while Mac remains resolutely strong, standing firm and holding her ground against the display of physical strength that is being imposed on her. Traits like physical strength



Image 5.3 *Untitled* Staged training session sequence

and 'going hard at the ball'- any form of behaviour that might be considered physically

aggressive- are among the most stigmatised characteristics for women to embody (Gill, 2007) but are celebrated as hegemonic for men. Women on the football field however require resolute strength and aggression in order to play football at a high level. In this

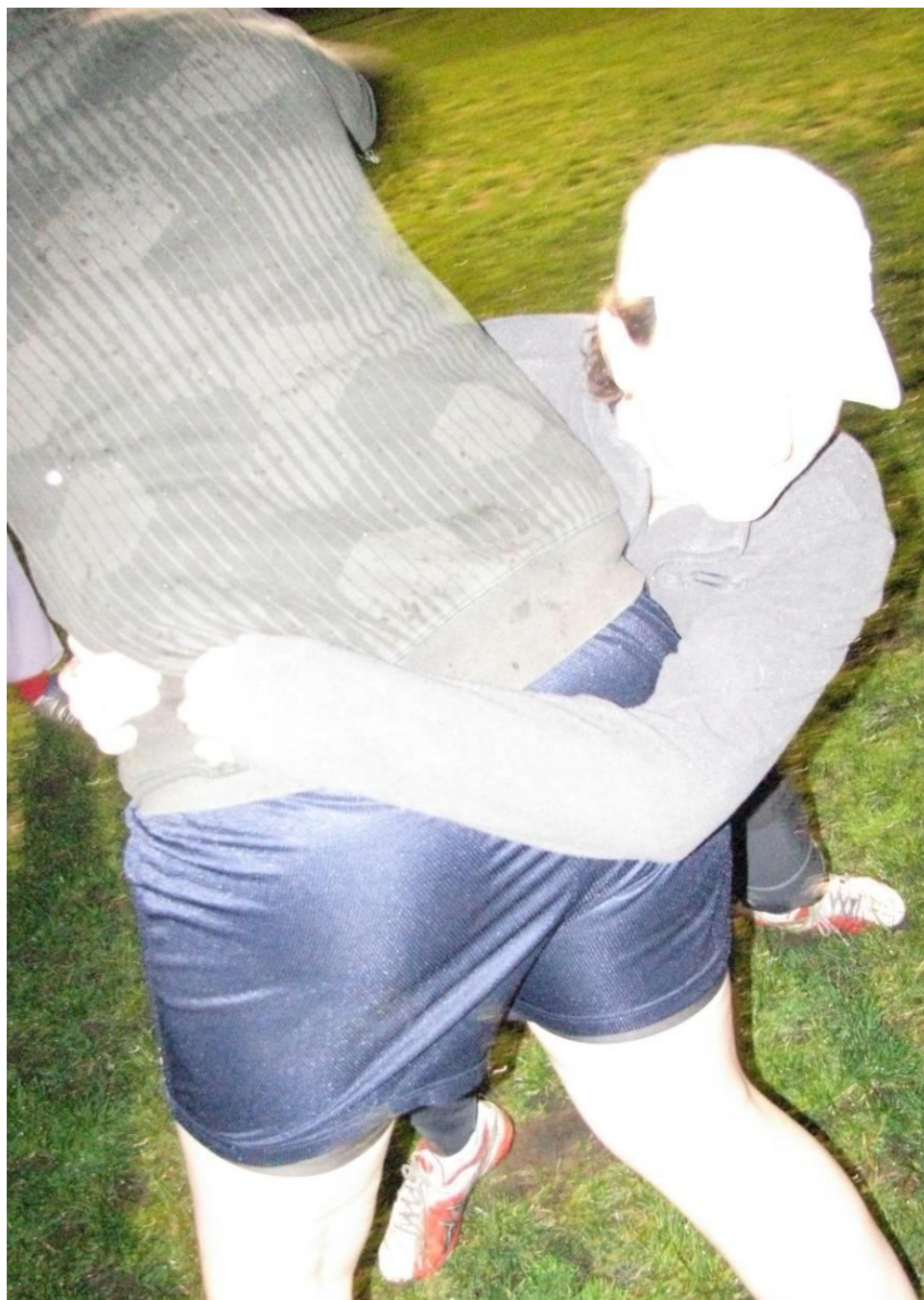


Image 5.4 *Untitled* Staged training session sequence

social and  
cultural  
milieu,  
physical  
size and  
stature is  
translated  
into  
valuable  
attributes  
for bodies  
that play  
football,  
regardless  
of  
whether  
the player  
is a male  
or female  
footballing

body. While Finley (2010) engages with female embodiment of masculinity as one of

'multiple femininities', I do not suggest that it is inherent to a particular form of femininity but rather an embodiment of gender particular to the social and cultural moment.

Were males more present in this football arena I question how women's physical stature and embodiment of physical strength and aggression might be taken up. Following Finley (2010) I suggest that the absence of males at the participatory and leadership levels of women's Australian Rules football displaces traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity as associated with male bodies and opens up a distinctive space for women in which to embody and display forms of strength and power. I suggest that this is unique because there are few avenues within which women have the space to engage physically and socially with other women and in which the presence or absence of sex is not regulated or policed through a patriarchal heteronormative lens. Although sport continues to be male-dominated and male led, within this team women are supporting women (Finley, 2010), however it would be remiss to suggest that power dynamics amongst women do not prevail. While women may not experience nor answer to male embodied hegemony, I do suggest that power dynamics amongst women retain a significant influence. It was clear amongst the team, for example, that the players with the most influence on the team were those who had been playing with the team for a number of years and were confident in their position in the team to speak up and to speak out. So although the team did not present a masculine hegemony, there remained a dominant hegemony of sorts. The more athletic, skilled, experienced players held a higher degree of hegemony on the field and in discussions surrounding football related concerns such as training and game days. However off the field, in social circumstances, those who retained the

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highest degree of hegemony seemed to be those who were most committed to the team and spent time not just playing and training with the team but who also spent a great deal of time socialising with other members of the team.

Another element of hegemony came through subjects' embodiment of gender so although embodiment and performance of masculinity was drawn on during game and training time, as the images of Mac above demonstrate, when players were off the field and out of training gear certain forms of embodiment, while not necessarily valorised as hegemonic, were held in differing degrees of esteem. For example, subjects who embodied masculinity to the extent that they might be mistaken for a male were strongly disavowed. More androgynous embodiments of gender were accepted and regarded positively, while overt displays of femininity such as wearing a skirt or very obvious amounts of makeup were also disavowed as vain, and seeking male attention.

The fine lines of gender performance within this football subculture were evident through the ways that players spoke of other players. For example one of the players on the team embodies masculinity to the extent that others have mistaken her for a male and due to her height (she is quite short), more specifically a boy. This degree of masculine embodiment is strongly disavowed by some team mates who regard her as 'Uncle', not through her own choosing but as a form of disparagement, obvious because players do not refer to her as 'Uncle' directly but rather indirectly when the player is absent. Although masculine hegemony is not manifest in traditionally patriarchal ways amongst this team, hegemony and distribution of power dynamics maintains a strong hold on subjects' participation and those who seem to remain with

the team for the longest are those who seem to hold greater power while those who carry little power have not played for such extensive periods of time and tend to play for fewer seasons, bowing out sooner than those who retain greater degrees of power amongst the team.

### **Gender Manoeuvring and Sexuality**

While I draw on homosociality to explore the diverse social interactions that may take place between women in the social space of this women's football team, I turn to the notion of intragender relations to analyse the ways in which gender manoeuvring, embodiment and performance intersect with dynamics of power and hegemony. The significance of the intersection between intragender relations and homosociality is elucidated through the analysis of a particular anecdote that came out of the research data and offers insight into the complexity of sexual identity categories and the connection with gender performances and hegemony. For some players, the presence of people they describe as 'lesbian' allowed them to validate their own desires, to be able to justify and accept their attraction to other women. Such was the experience for Tracey, "I came down and played and a few months later that was it, just going out to the gay bars and having a ball. It opened this door to my life now I guess" (Tracey). In comparison Mac expresses that the "dykey, lesbian" stereotype is not concerned with sexual desire but rather with physical appearance, a contention that draws together Finley's (2010) notion of intragender relations, gender embodiment and manoeuvring, and couples it with Marcus' (2007) work on homosociality. Mac asserts that:

I think cricket's a little bit more [um] that real dykey, lesbian looking than what football is. Football yeah we go and hit people, not like punch on with them, we

hit them hard and we, we tackle them and people see that as being butch but I find cricketers are more, more sort of dykey- I don't want to sound wrong but, I just, I find them to be more of the male looking females (Mac).

Mac's identification of 'lesbian' is interspersed with identifications of 'dyke' and 'butch', even using the terms interchangeably. The term 'lesbian' within this sportscape is taken up and deployed by participants in different ways. While for some it offers solace through legitimising their desires, for others it is a term that can be used to describe gender performance and is used interchangeably with terms perceived by some as derogatory or as disavowed subjectivities. Mac's strong disassociation with what she describes as certain 'kinds' of lesbian is an interesting insight into her perception of same-sex desire, gender embodiment and performance, homosociality and intragender relations. Her passionate repudiation of the "real dykey, lesbian" demonstrates a sense of othering, where her own lesbian subjectivity is distinct from other lesbian subjectivities, in particular those "more male looking females" (Mac).



Image 5.5 shows Mac in a typical work outfit looking feminised and soft with make up on and her hair flowing around her shoulders while image 5.6 depicts Mac in her football uniform, smiling and with her hair pulled back out of her face. I use these images to draw attention to Mac's own embodiment. Mac has a strong repudiation for women who look like males and what she describes as 'butch' or 'real dykey' looking 'lesbians' and these two images are interesting for the ways that Mac negotiates embodiments of femininity with masculinity.

Mac has a tall, strong physique which I suggest that in her work clothes she hides under the soft feminising of her make-up, hair and choice of clothing. In her football uniform, however, her tall, strong physique is on display and, in the

image of Mac (right), with her stance solid and hand on hip, she appears a formidable

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Image 5.5 *Work Uniform* by Mac

opponent. How does Mac negotiate her own gendered embodiment on the football field and in football clothing with her own same-sex desires?

I suggest that Mac's repudiation of masculine, 'butch', 'dykey' looking 'lesbians' is not at all related to subjects' same-sex desire but rather their embodiment of 'woman'. Mac's disavowal of female masculinity (Halberstam, 1998) is not concerned with her engagement in sports, as seen by her distinction between football players and cricket players. Instead this renunciation of 'dykey' and 'butch' is reserved for women whose appearances do not subscribe to what she perceives as acceptable female embodiment and presentation. When we draw on sexual identity classifications we riskily categorise others'. What does 'lesbian' tell us and why do we retain it as a classification of sexual desire when it is overlaid with a range of differing meanings and connotations?



Image 5.6 *Football uniform by Mac*

The image of 'the female footballer', 'the lesbian' and 'the real dykey looking' embodiment that I discuss throughout this chapter offers a complex exploration of the

ways in which genders and sexualities are embodied, performed and experienced.

Adding yet another element to the mix I draw attention to image 5.5 of Mac in relation to image 5.1 of Crack. Depicted in these images is a certain polarisation of subjects: light versus dark skin tone, feminine versus masculine embodiment and lesbian versus heterosexual identifying. Mac, a female embodying an overt display of femininity and light skin is, I suggest, in a powerful position whereby her sexuality, due to her embodiment of traditional forms of femininity and white Australian heritage does not come under scrutiny. In juxtaposition Crack, depicted in this image as embodying masculinity and of Aboriginal Australian heritage, is located in a less powerful subject position whereby her embodiment of gender and Aboriginal heritage locates her in a less powerful subject position and therefore her intimate desires come under scrutiny. In chapter seven I engage at a deeper level with issues of ethnicity and difference, however here I want to draw attention to the disjunction between the assumptions made of Crack and Mac's sexual desires based on their embodiment and performance of gender. Significantly, while Mac identifies as lesbian, her sexuality does not come under question due to her embodiment of femininity while Crack, through her embodiment of masculinity has her sexuality come into question to such a degree that she monitors her performance of gender in order to avoid being positioned as 'lesbian' or 'dykey'.

Race has been briefly explored in this data analysis but was not a topical issue for research participants, depicted in images and discussed in an interview by only one participant throughout the research. In photo project 2 Tracey depicts how she perceives female footballer's to look and encompasses what she describes as 'racial diversity' depicting two team mates who are visually 'not white'. Tracey's

conceptualisation of 'racial diversity', as Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers (2012) note, is "[c]haracteristic of color blind racism...that White people tend to see themselves as individuals for whom race is no longer an issue" (p. 129). So while Tracey observes non-white team mates as people who represent racial diversity, I suggest that this is an example of 'color blind racism', where race is reserved for people 'of colour' and 'white people' are positioned as having no race. A consequence of colour blind racism is that when white people are not seen and named as raced, they are positioned as a 'human norm' (Dyer, 1997, p. 1 cited in Long & Hylton, 2002, p. 90), gaining greater privilege and positioning non-whiteness as 'other'. Although race is present within this team regardless of skin colour, Long & Hylton (2002) assert that the construction of whiteness is rarely considered an issue yet is consistently reproduced in sports such as football, cricket and rugby league.

The study of whiteness is integral to challenging racism in sport (Long & Hylton, 2002) so while race was not an issue that participants openly discussed in this study, it is present in the football milieu in a way that locates whiteness as non-raced and dominant through the 'othering' of non-white team mates and further research into race and ethnicity as it intersects with gender, sexuality, physicality, power dynamics and women's Australian Rules football would offer further insight into the complexity of this social and cultural locale.

### **Australian Female Masculinity and Mateship**

The notion of mateship is commonly deployed in public discourse as a defining characteristic of Australian nationalism (Smith Page, 2002). Amongst this team, the term 'mate' is commonly used by player's to describe team mates, and mateship was

described as a key motivation to playing football for some of the participants: “football means my mates both on the field and off the field” (Jac); “footy with mates, I mean it’s a massive part of the game. It’s why you keep playing” (Jonty).

‘Mate’ can be used to address someone, for example ‘hey mate’ or to describe, as Jac and Jonty do, a relationship; ‘this is my mate’. In its simplest form, mateship might be thought of as a ‘fraternity’ (Smith Page, 2002), serving to include and simultaneously exclude. Exploring Australian slang, Bartolo (2008) notes that Australian colloquialisms can be used as a mechanism for building “personal, social or national identity and to create solidarity within an in-group” (p. 7). I suggest that the term ‘mate’ as deployed by participants in this research, does not describe the relationship that players have with one another but rather is used by members of the team to create solidarity within the football team. Therefore, through the deployment of the term ‘mate’, players have the capacity to include and exclude, unite and divide, elements that Bumpy draws on in her discussion of team mates and ‘fighting for your colours’ referring to the teams’ uniform.

Built on a white cultural identity after the colonisation of Australia, the connection between mateship and Australian identity harks back to the First World War (Australian Government, 2007). Australians have long sought to identify themselves with the ideal of mateship (Smith Page, 2002) and, consequently, elements of race, whiteness and ‘othering’ are inherent to such discussions. McNeill (2008) notes that “reductive mythologies produce the effect of unifying or essentialising national self-perceptions only at the cost of excluding significant groups within the boundaries of that nation” (p. 26). This is significant because while mateship may be seen as unifying

and inclusive I argue that at the same as drawing subjects together, mateship may also serve to divide and differentiate subjects. I also argue that the term mate says very little about the bond with which it refers.

One of the more profound exclusionary characteristics of mateship as noted by Smith Page (2002) is that women are not encompassed in most understandings of mateship. For women in this study 'mate' was a dominant discourse drawn on to refer to others in the team and yet, as Smith Page notes, "[i]t is often said that whilst men have mates, women have friends" (p.195). In the context of this team *women* use the term 'mate' to, seemingly, refer to someone whom a participant may or may not have an affinity with, but with whom they share a common goal, as in wartime, but in this case the quest for winning a sporting pursuit. Mate is common lexicon in men's sport and relationships and, I suggest, is a term that refers to a relationship that is largely devoid of emotion. It describes a connection but not an intimate connection. When women, projected as the emotive sex, use the term mate they are similarly deploying a bond that I suggest may be non-committal at a personal level but, in the context of a sports team, has the potential to build up camaraderie.

Women are 'supposed' to have friends while men have mates, but when players in this team talk about football team mates they rarely use the term 'friend'. Indeed, participants in this research tended to evade the concept of 'friendship'. While players speak of some team mates in terms such as "a family away from family" (Bumpy), team mates may also be simply acquaintances; "I have people with football who are acquaintances and they come and go through a revolving door and I might see them and will say hello but they're not people who I have at my house" (Bumpy). Despite

the divergent terms players use to describe the affinity, and the absence of an affinity, that players have with team mates the overarching notion that “you play with your mates and you do it for your mates” (Jac) seems to pervade as the most dominant social discourse amongst participants in this research. Regardless of the emotional connection between players, the term ‘friend’ was rarely drawn on by the women in this study and mateship was instead the dominant discourse.

Players in this study tended to describe a strong affinity for one another through football and the commonality of football was cited as a tie that brings players together: “[w]hether you are the same type of person or not you’re doing something common and you reach that commonality through football, on or off the field” (Bumpy); “it’s [football] probably just something that you do together. It’s a bit unique and it’s a bit special and you’re sharing that with your mates” (Stella). The commonality and bond that Bumpy and Stella describe may be particular to football. Jac says that although she played cricket for a number of years, the relationships she has forged through football are distinct from those developed through cricket.

I started playing cricket but it’s not the same feeling that you get from footy I think maybe because footy’s, maybe because it’s more physical and you have to do, like cricket you don’t have to do anything for your team mates like...When you play cricket you’re like oh yeah well done you got a wicket and you all cheer and go in but still it seems pretty individual. It’s not like footy you can have ten people all trying to get the ball...all trying to do the same thing for each other like shepherding and tackling (Jac).

[T]here’s something that you get from football that I haven’t had from any other sport. It’s just that, yeah, team bonding...some kind of unity. Almost oneness but not (Tracey).

[T]here is a big difference in basketball and footy. Like footy there's a lot more people so it's more of a social gathering (Mac).

I played basketball for a long time and you'd turn up, you might train with your mates but you would then turn up to basketball twenty minutes beforehand, play...then go your separate ways whereas with footy you don't, I mean I've met some lifelong friends here at footy (Bumpy).

I suggest that the intense team nature of this code of football, the necessity of on field support, training and physicality, demands a certain respect for one another that fosters a bond between players not necessarily experienced in other sports. For example Jac's description of 'wanting the same thing' and trying to do the same thing for each other refers to players' quests of gaining and maintaining possession of the football. Despite the bonding, unity and dependence that players on this team draw on, they do not use friendship to describe these connections but rather remain fixed on the notion of 'mate'.

The affinity that players describe for team mates is seemingly more than a homosocial bond unique to the individuals and is a significant example of intragender relations fostered through the personal, physical and intense connection between players. It is, however, distinct from 'friendship' which carries emotional connotations. The concept of mateship, derived from World War I lingo and commonly tied to Australian nationality seems to foster camaraderie amongst players. It is a masculine defined concept but I argue this does make it a male concept. Therefore when women deploy the term mate as they do vehemently in this study, they engage in masculinity and help to redefine what it might mean to be a woman.



## **Conclusion**

Collectively, these images and the accompanying analysis depict homosocial interactions and intragender relations in very distinct ways. What this demonstrates is that relations between women must be interpreted within a particular context. In this circumstance, the participation in a football team, the intersection of gender, embodiment, race and desire emerged as significant and intersecting for some of the players on this team.

Throughout this chapter I have engaged in discussions of the ways in which players in this women's football team interact. While not foregrounding relationships in traditional discourses of friendship or lesbian, I have rather explored these social bonds and interactions through a theoretical lens of homosociality and intragender relations. I have contended that while homosociality offers a mechanism through which to engage with same-sex sociality, this mode of analysis also encompasses the potential for an interaction to be sexual, asexual or either in different moments without foreclosing that bond as necessarily defined by the presence or absence of sex or desire.

I have also drawn on the notion of intragender relations with the goal of beginning to unpick the ways that this concept might speak to gender embodiment, hegemony and sociality within a particular cultural context, such as this football team. Power dynamics and hegemony amongst women are rarely explored in the absence of males and masculine hegemony. Through the notion of intragender relations I have begun to explore the nuanced ways in which power and hegemony may be experienced

between women in different social and cultural contexts and intersect with elements of gender embodiment, performance, race and desire. I conclude that the ways in which intragender relations intersects with homosociality warrants further analysis but that in engaging both theoretical concepts we are able to elucidate greater insight than either homosociality or intragender relations may offer independently of each other.

This form of analysis is able to apprehend the ways that interactions between women in this space may be constantly shifting, never fixed or pre-determined but rather dependent on the ever-evolving social, cultural and homosocial milieu of the given historical moment. It also pays attention to aspects of gender embodiment, gender performance, desire, race and hegemony amongst women which I suggest has tended to be under theorised.

## CHAPTER 6: DATA ANALYSIS

### Space and the Sportscape

As soon as I walk through those doors at the start of a game or you know, I

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Image 6.1 *Untitled* Empty football space sequence

clock in the morning it's go time. Nothing else matters but football at that time (Crack).

Crack's opening comment describes the affect that entering the doors to the football clubrooms has on her. These doors mark not only the physical football space but also the entrance to an imaginary space in which '[n]othing else matters but football'. In the sociology of sport there has been what Fusco (2005) refers to as "a return to spatial theorizing" (p. 285) signalling that place and space matter, particularly through sports spaces' tendency to be replete with discourses of gender, race, class, sexuality and nationhood (Fusco, 2005). While the notion of space is most commonly used in its physical manifestations I engage with space in two ways. Firstly, I explore space in its physical manifestation using the notion of a 'sportscape' (Pronger, 2004) and, secondly, I explore how space is simultaneously imaginary. In exploring imaginary space I invoke the concept of affect to investigate how sportscares act on those who use the space to influence their behaviour within the particular sportscape.

### **The Sportscape**

Drawing on John Bale's notion of the sportscape, Pronger (2004) further theorises this notion as a mechanism for conceptualising sporting spaces. Derived from the term landscape, 'sportscape' denotes a background, the spatial context for the sporting activity taking place (Pronger, 2004). It is the sportscape which offers the context and possibilities for sporting experiences and may encompass all spaces in which sporting pursuits take place; for example parks, fields, courts, gyms, locker rooms or swimming pools (Pronger, 2004). The sportscape that the women in this study describe is largely centred on the team's home ground. This space includes the football oval, the club

rooms, and the change rooms, the Australian equivalent of a locker room. Anticipating that these spaces would be significant for players, they are the spaces in which I created images for the 'empty football space' sequence. This sportscape is also the locale in which the staged training session took place. Both sequences of images were brought together for discussion during the group interview which was where research participants most avidly explored the significance of the sportscape.

The notion of the sportscape encompasses more than just visuality and stretches to encompass all of the senses, for example the sounds and smells of the sportsapes (Pronger, 2004). This is clear in Bumpy's description of the football sportscape in image 6.2. Of this image she says:

[I]f I had of seen those images unrelated to football I would have thought about football...it comes with a smell, a feeling... even the night air has a smell...it's a bit wet and there's a noise (Bumpy).







Image 6.3 *Untitled Staged training session sequence*

Images 6.2 and 6.3, taken by participants during the staged training session, transmit more than just a visual depiction just as sportscares similarly stimulate more than just visual senses. These images, along with others created throughout the research project, tap into the multiple senses that Pronger (2004) describes sportscares as encompassing: “visual, aural, oral, olfactory, kinetic, tactile and emotional experiences” (p. 147). For Bumpy the images of this sportscape speak of sensual experiences that, when taken together, Bumpy associates with particular activities, in this case football. The lighting in these images, I suggest, also plays into Bumpy’s association with football training. It is a dark night, yet people are out in it. Ultra bright lights illuminate the playing field while simultaneously creating shadows and dark patches on the field. The mud has a smell and a stickiness that players try to avoid and the air feels cold in your nostrils when you inhale.

What takes place in the sportscape brings the space to life and creates meaning; it is the ways that people utilise and conceptualise a sportscape that gives it life. Pronger (2004) notes that the use of 'place' translates a physical locale into 'space', "a productive opening for actual living, becoming, desiring" (p. 148) and uses the example of shower spaces to demonstrate that, while it is a space designed for hygiene, it may also be spatialised in other ways. The showers in the sportscape of this research, as depicted in image 6.4 of the closed and open showers, demonstrates that this place has been spatialised not only through hygiene and cleanliness but also through the communality of a team that shares this personal space. Male football players are often depicted as showering together in popular media and entertainment, sharing personal



Image 6.4 *Untitled* Empty football space sequence

spaces that, within other contexts, are typically reserved as personal or intimate

spaces. The football sportscape in this study used to have only open showers but, through petitioning by members of the women's team, now have two closed showers with doors and two open showers without doors. This space, while designed for hygiene and privacy is now also spatialised as a site in which women's petitioning and influence created meaningful change for the women who utilise the space. As Pronger suggests it is a site that, through use, has been translated from a physical place into a space that has meaning through what it was designed for, hygiene, but also through its representation of the women's impact on the Club.

This chapter now moves on to explore in greater detail the sportscape of this women's football team and is divided into three key themes. I begin with masculinity and male sportscares, private spaces, and conclude the chapter with the sexualisation of the sportscape.

### **Masculinity and Male Sportscares**

The team's home ground is located in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne and is shared with a number of teams at the Club, including Senior's (over eighteens), Reserves (over eighteens seconds) and Super Rules (over thirty-fives). The physical home ground of the football Club is comprised of the football field itself; spaces from which spectators gather to watch games; Clubrooms with couches, tables and chairs, a large television screen, a bar that is open after training sessions and on game days, and toilet facilities; a canteen that sells snacks and drinks on game days; and the two change rooms, one that is used by the home team and the other for the away team. Each change room has benches that run the length of the walls and hooks for players' gear, massage tables, and a bathroom. Each bathroom has two closed showers as in



image 6.5, two open showers, two toilets, a urinal, two sinks and a mirror. The significance of the physical space of the team's home ground is that players spend a large amount of time here, typically training two evenings a week and playing a home game there on a Sunday, on average, every second week.

Football spaces are typically dominated by men and masculinity (Caudwell, 2007) and the team in this study is no exception. As the only women's team to share the Club's home ground, this team experiences the space in ways that blend 'female' with masculinity. While masculinity is in no way reserved for men, heteronormativity tends to maintain that men and masculinity are somewhat synonymous while women and masculinity are oxymoronic (Broad, 2001). The physical space of the Clubs' home grounds are described by players in this study as 'dirty', 'antiquated' and 'gross', terms that do not tend to resonate with 'woman'. Yet players' fondness for this self proclaimed 'filthy' space is ardent:

I look at other people's footy change rooms and I walk in there and go 'oh gross'. I walk into ours and I think ours is beautiful (Bumpy, group interview).

Bumpy's description 'beautiful' is more cognisant with the ways in which women might typically describe spaces like the beach, a garden or a home rather than what Tracey describes as "[t]ypical men's football change rooms" (Tracey, group interview). The visual element of this research offers insight into the space Bumpy describes as 'beautiful'. This space, I suggest, represents a beauty to Bumpy that a glance at image

6.5 might not transmit. The space offers Bumpy a site in which she can engage with a part of herself that in other spaces she cannot. For example, when describing a typical work outfit in photo project 3, Bumpy says “that’s not about belonging that’s just about putting on some stupid clothes...that’s about dressing up and performing you know?” Of her football uniform Bumpy says “in your uniform, it’s about fitting in, sameness...when you’re playing footy, I feel like I belong a million percent”. The sense of beauty that Bumpy uses to describe the Club’s change rooms is, I suggest, related to the affect of this sportscape. Beyond the materiality of the dirty, antiquated change rooms, Bumpy experiences a deep sense of belonging, something that she does not experience in other spaces, for example, work.

The conversations reflecting on the change rooms of the Club demonstrate an affinity that players have with what they describe as ‘their’ clubrooms. Belle’s claim that “it’s our grossness” offers a sense that the sportscape is not determined by what the space looks like but rather what takes place there and the sense that this sportscape belongs to the players. The connection that players have to what they describe as ‘our’ change rooms can be seen in the way that players take ownership of a space that is also used by other football teams at the Club as well as cricket teams. The reality of the sportscape is that it is utilised by a range of teams playing different sports and that this is the only female team to utilise the space.

In essence, this space can be seen as quite exclusive in that only players and officials enter this space before or after games and on training days. When the team is using the rooms there are, usually, no other football or cricket teams utilising the space.

While the



Image 6.5 *Change rooms* Empty football space sequence

women's team is there the change rooms are, essentially, their haven to prepare for 'battle', debrief after the 'battle' and to be away from the opposition team and spectators. Any 'grossness' that is accumulated in this space, whether it comes directly

from the women's team or the various other teams that use the space, seems to be perceived as almost 'marking the territory'. Yes the rooms are old and rundown but they are 'our' old and rundown space, at least according to players in this study.



Image 6.6 *Untitled* Staged training session sequence

The dank change rooms are a space in which players prepare for training and games and participants created a number of images of this space during the staged training session. Of these images conversation was generated during the group interview around the way that players embody themselves in these spaces and it was concluded that although players may not look 'blokey' in real life, that these images demonstrated to players some masculine ways in which players in this sportscape present their selves. Image 6.6 for example depicts Stella stretching with a player sitting on a bench in the back ground showing a gender neutral, yet practical, style of

clothing that players typically wear to train in. The way that the player in the background is sitting is, as described in the group interview, “like boys sit typically with their legs open ‘cause their balls are going to get squashed” (Bumpy).

The gender neutral ways that bodies in this space are dressed and the masculine ways in which players perform, is cognisant with the masculine environment typical of a traditionally male football space. Yet players were quick to describe aspects with which they deemed ‘male only territory’ as ‘unnecessary’. For example, of image 6.7 depicting a urinal Crack asserts that, “until I’m reminded of it, it doesn’t exist to me” and the following conversation took place during the group interview:

- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| Bumpy  | I don’t know why they need a urinal          |
| Belle  | To wee in                                    |
| Crack  | Boys are...[unclear]                         |
| Tracey | There’s two toilets                          |
| Bumpy  | But can’t they wee in the toilet?            |
| Tracey | Yeah   |
| Belle  | What if someone’s in there?                  |
| Bumpy  | But they would wait, just like we would wait |



Image 6.7 *Untitled* Empty football space sequence





Image 6.8 *Untitled Staged* training session sequence

It is ironic that before a game it is not uncommon for up to six women to be queuing to use the two toilets in the change rooms and the use of a facility in which more than one woman at a time could pee, as a urinal is useful for men, might be somewhat practical. Nonetheless, the existence of the urinal

marks the space as determinedly built for male use and serves as a constant reminder

to the women who play football at this Club that the space is marked out, first and foremost, as men's space no matter how comfortable they may feel here.

The subversion of this space as male territory was seen in the images created as part of the staged training session. Image 6.8 depicts Mac feigning use of the urinal and is, I suggest, indicative of these women reclaiming space through satirical humour. Green (1998) suggests that "in particular circumstances, women use humour to subvert sexist imagery" (p. 171). Nowhere is this clearer than in the image of Mac using the urinal. This deliberately staged image generated immediate laughter when viewed in the group interview. The presence of the urinal is a constant reminder that the space was established for men; indeed the existence of the urinal can be seen as marking the territory as men's and masculine, just as a dog marks its territory with urine so too does the presence of the urinal allow men to mark their territory even when the men themselves are physically absent. As Bumpy says in the group interview "I don't know why they need a urinal". Had the change rooms been built with women in mind I expect that there would not be a urinal but rather more toilets. The urinal serves as a constant reminder that the space is dominated by men. By parodying the behaviour of men in this space the female players are reclaiming it as theirs, using humour as a source of empowerment and resistance to traditional gender stereotypes (Green, 1998).

### **Private Spaces**

Traditionally, change rooms or locker rooms are gender segregated to eliminate sexual advances between men and women, boys and girls. Segregation is based on the presumption of heterosexual desire where men may invade the personal space of



women and vice versa, the underlying assumption being the erasure of same-sex desire. Marcus' (2007) work on the female gaze and homoeroticism demonstrates the ways in which women's bodies have been admired and desired by other women for centuries. Through her exploration of 'the feminine play thing' we are led to see that women's admiration for the female figure begins in childhood when girls are encouraged to dress barbies and dolls and carries into adulthood where women gaze longingly at other women in glossy magazines, and advertising drips in the sexifying of women for other women's gaze in the name of fashion.

Change rooms are a space in which bodies may be displayed and private spaces, if desired, must be constantly negotiated. Up until a few years ago the only showers in the change rooms at this football club were three open showers. As discussed earlier, through petitioning from some of the female players this Club now has two open showers and two private showers. Fusco (2002) describes these as 'privacy' cubicles which she finds present in women's locker spaces. The association of 'privacy' cubicles is located as a decidedly feminine construction. In both Fusco's work and the current study it is women who advocated the construction of 'privacy' cubicles although we are uncertain about male use of the privacy cubicles. Certainly in the current study the same change rooms/locker rooms become male spaces when men are playing football or cricket at the Club. Whether or not men make use of the 'privacy' cubicles this study is clearly unable to ascertain, given its focus on a female team. Interestingly however, the presence of the urinal in the Club's change rooms suggests that at least when toileting men do not necessarily make use of the 'private' toilet cubicles but have the option to. Urinals are used widely in Australian male public toilets and are often the

most obvious factor in differentiating male and female toilet facilities. Whether or not communal toileting links to communal showering in male football spaces is unknown.

Parkdale, as one of the few teams in the VWFL that have showers with doors on them, is described by players as being 'female orientated' a discourse which positions communal showers as male. Fusco (2002) suggests that privacy cubicles do not repress the female body but in fact accentuate the female form. Through hiding the body, do we posit the female body higher on a scale of privileged bodies? Or, through closeting the female body, might we position the body as in a state of heightened desire?

Through the presence of open showers in the change rooms at this Club, women are invited to place their bodies on display *should they choose to*, while simultaneously being offered the opportunity to make their body private.



Image 6.9 *Untitled Staged training session sequence*

While some players choose to wash in the open showers, as in image 6.9, others steadfastly opt for the privacy of a shower with a door and others choose not to shower at the Club at all, opting for the even more private spaces of their homes. The preference of players to showering and nudity was not addressed throughout the interview however, by closeting or making private their body I suggest that women may be following one of multiple thought trajectories which, unfortunately, this research did not have the scope to explore. It is possible that the showering preferences of women stems from the way that women are typically taught to hide

their bodies as girls and so choose to continue to do so at the football Club.

Alternately, women may be self conscious about their bodies and do not wish for others to make comparisons of their bodies to others and, perhaps for others, players have few inhibitions about their bodies or nudity and find the open showers inviting allowing, however discretely, the gaze of other women to befall them.

There are two contravening discourses that tend to frame the presence and use of private spaces in locker/change rooms. Fusco (2006) suggests that the representation of locker rooms with communal same-sex showers is a source of anxiety for many people, specifically due to the subjection of nudity under the gaze of others' while, in contrast, Pronger (1990 cited in Fusco 2006, p. 7) asserts that the locker room is a potentially homoerotic space in which those who utilise these spaces "have the opportunity to enjoy others' bodies and have the opportunities to display their own bodies" (p. 7). In the same vein, sex segregated change rooms are normalised in order to meet both of these views. To avoid the anxiety of the opposite sex viewing (women's) bodies, change rooms are demarcated by sex. To avoid others' having the opportunity to desire/enjoy others bodies change rooms are similarly delineated via sex. By obfuscating, ignoring or rendering unimportant same-sex desire, these frames of thought do not have the scope to encompass the potential of homoeroticism. Clearly divergent from same-sex desire as theorised by Marcus (2007), the potential for same-sex eroticism is distinct from notions of sexual orientations. What I suggest is that within the social and cultural space of this football teams change rooms, indeed in any change room, is the potential for homoeroticism and acknowledgement of this allows us to think of the ways in which homosociality may manifest in these spaces so often premised as asexual or private.

## **The Sexualisation of the Sportscape**

Academic literature engaging with codes of women's football across the globe continues to explore how same-sex desire intersects with football participation, largely to the exclusion of a more nuanced examination of how sex more broadly might relate to football. For example Harris (2005; 2007) explores the 'lesbian stigma' and its attendant problematics attached to women's football in the UK. In contrast, Caudwell (2007) engages with the politics of a lesbian-identified football team, also in the UK. These contrasting papers make valuable contributions to the academic field of women's football yet are both concerned with same-sex desire amongst the players in their research. What they do not address however, is how the sportscape of women's football becomes sexualised.

Gavin Brown, in his conclusion to the text *Geographies of Sexualities* (2007), remarks that academic work for some strands within the geography of sexualities field remains underdeveloped. Specifically, Brown notes that within an urban context focus tends to be either on commercial gay scenes or "non-commodified spaces of public homosex" (p. 219). Between these polarities, Brown asserts, there are innumerable other spaces of lesbian, gay and queer socialisation. Women's Australian Rules football tends to be synonymous with female same-sex desire and lesbianism (see for example Hillier, 2005) yet I argue is not an exclusively 'lesbian' space. Data from the current study shows that while a number of players highlight that although the football team respects same-sex desire and lesbian self-identification, it is not a homogenously lesbian space. Rather this sportscape lies, as Brown describes, somewhere between the polarities of a commercial gay scene and a non-commodified public gay space.

For some of the women in the research, football offers them a sense of lesbian community: "I probably wouldn't have met other lesbians if I didn't play football" (Bumpy); "I came down and played and a few months later that was it, just going out to the gay bars and having a ball. It opened this door to my life now I guess" (Tracey). For these women there is a strong sense that, following Hillier (2005), the football sportscape is a 'safe space' for same-sex desire. For Bumpy and Tracey there is even a sense that players are relieved to have found a space in which they are exposed to same-sex desire and that same-sex relationships are not only accepted but normalised.

In contrast for Stella, although the 'lesbian stigma' hasn't affected her playing:

[I]t's probably affected me in not telling everyone that I play it because the job that I'm in is a male dominated ah, career...I choose who I tell that I play football with because I just can't be bothered with the shit (Stella).

For Stella, her participation in football is something she engages with positively, yet she is aware that the disclosure of her participation to people outside of this sportscape poses a potential stress through association with what tends to be externally perceived as a 'lesbian' subculture. For others, the lesbian stigma surrounding women's Australian Rules football is something that players find unsettling. Mac, as described earlier, expresses that the 'dykey, lesbian' stereotype is not concerned with sexual desire but rather with physical appearance. The term 'lesbian' within this sportscape is taken up and deployed by participants in different ways. While for some it offers solace through legitimising their desires, for others it is a term that can be used to describe gender performance and is used interchangeably with terms perceived by some as derogatory or as disavowed subjectivities. Mac's

strong disassociation with what she describes as certain 'kinds' of lesbian is an interesting insight into her perception of same-sex desire and gender. Her passionate repudiation of the 'real dykey, lesbian' demonstrates a sense of othering. Mac herself is in a long term relationship with a woman but seems to see her own lesbian subjectivity as distinct from other lesbian subjectivities, in particular those 'more male looking females'.

The wider community perception of women's Australian Rules football continues to be that "when you say you play women's football ...they will immediately make an assumption um, that is majority lesbians" (Bumpy). The sexual desire of players is obviously likely to differ between teams as individuals choose to take part in the sport or not. However, one of the participants in this research states that "I think our team is about 50-50" (Bumpy). Sexuality is clearly a significant issue for women in this conceptual space yet it remains unclear as to why the gender preference of team mates' sexual desire is relevant to football. Why would players count the number of 'lesbians' on their team? *Of what significance for the women who play is the object of others' sexual desires?* Is it related to seeing their own desires in others and thus justification of their own same or opposite-sex desires in this social and cultural milieu? Is it being aware of others' desires in order to know who to dis/associate with depending on one's own values and perceptions of same and opposite sex desire?

Jones & McCarthy (2010) explore the sportscape that gay men's football team's create for participants. Situated in the UK, the study highlights notable differences between players in a gay male team and a heterosexual dominated male sports team. Jones & McCarthy describe the gay men's football team in their research as eschewing the

aggression that is often associated with competition. Instead participation is focused on a different set of values; inclusion, community, safety and enjoyment (Jones & McCarthy, 2010). The values that Jones & McCarthy describe for one particular team means that the conceptual space that the team has created has peculiarities other teams may or may not share. For example one player describes the team as akin to an extended family, going out and just spending time together. This may or may not be experienced within all gay men's football teams but for this particular team is an affect that has been carved out. For the gay men in their study, Jones & McCarthy assert that the football team is a safe space away from the risk of rejection and homophobia. Hillier (2005) similarly suggests that for the women in her study their football team offered a safe space away from heteronormativity, where same-sex desires were accepted as a norm rather than dismissed or derided as inferior to opposite sex desire. While I do not mean to affiliate the football team in this research as an exclusively lesbian space, nor necessarily a 'safe space' for same- sex desire, I do suggest that the space diverges from the wider society's preoccupation with heterosexuality and that this may play a role in participants interest in others' sexual desires.

### **Transience and Mobility**

Football spaces emerged for the participants as mobile spaces in which team mates gather, not just spaces in which they play football. Players described social activities relating to football and social activities with team mates outside of football commitments as football spaces and for the players in this research football spaces encompassed activities and spaces such as trips away together and spending time with team mates socially, as in image 6.10. These spaces are not physically connected to the



sportscape but are still described by participants as 'football space'. This is made clearer by Bumpy's reference to her nickname:

Bumpy always was a football name for me. It was made, it was created at football, Bumpy was created at football...it was always reserved for football people (Bumpy).

Bumpy's description highlights that whether she is with team mates on the football field and training or out having drinks with people she plays football with, her football persona is present. Her nickname is not switched off when she is not on the football field but rather, when with team mates, the space remains representative as football space by the presence of her football nickname.

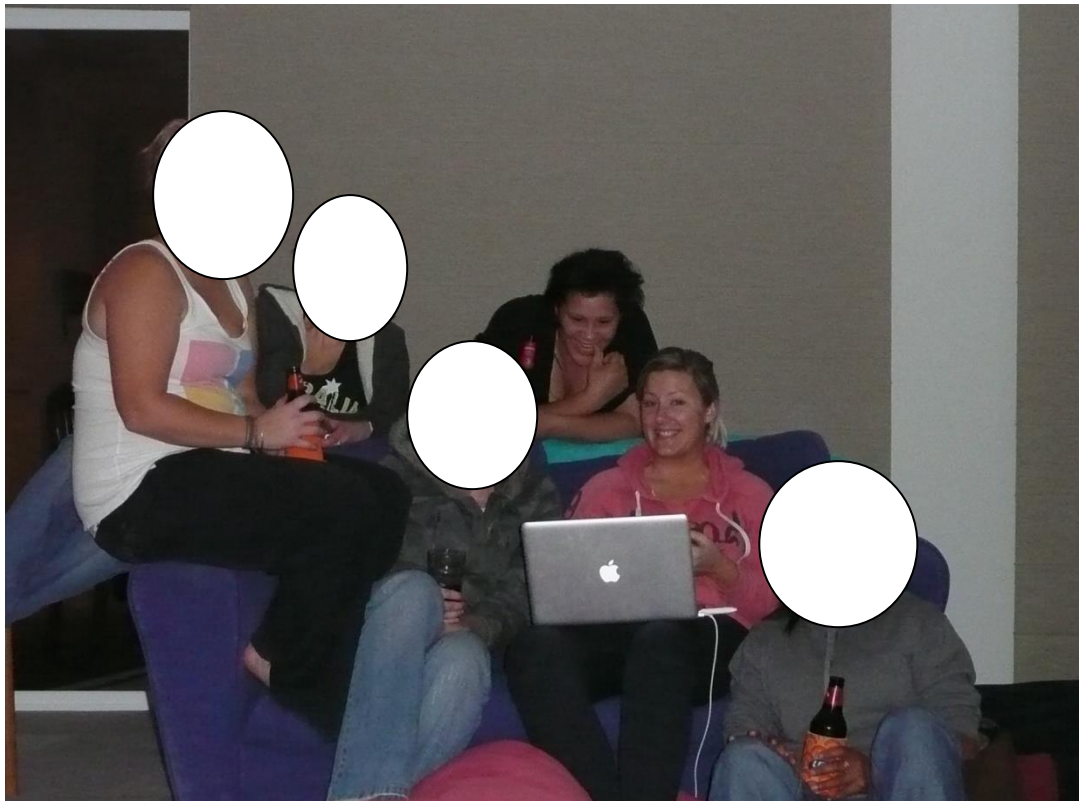


Image 6.10 *Hanging out by Belle*<sup>4</sup>

The sportscape of this women's football team then is not limited to the immediate locale of where football is played, as seen in image 6.10. While players describe a sense of the spaces where football is played as belonging to them, as "coming home" (Jac) when they arrive at their home ground, it was also clear that players' perception of football spaces is transient and mobile. Football spaces and the sportscape of football were found to travel along with team mates and with aspects of their lives that players affiliate with football, such as the football nicknames. For Bumpy, the transience of the football space and her 'football name' is a positive reminder of the fact that at football she belongs "100 percent" (Bumpy). In contrast, when her

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<sup>4</sup> Players disguised are those who did not take part in the research project and thus whose anonymity is preserved.

nickname follows her outside of the football sportscape, Crack finds herself defending her subjectification as a heterosexual desiring, football playing woman. Further, the name 'Crack' gives a sense of marginality, which I suggest may further create discomfort for Crack when her nickname extends beyond the football sportscape.

## **Conclusion**

Space emerged as a significant aspect in women's participation in Australian Rules football. In this chapter I have discussed how the space of this women's football team might usefully be conceptualised as a sportscape, encompassing "visual, aural, oral, olfactory, kinetic, tactile and emotional experiences" (Pronger, 2004, p. 147). I have engaged in the ways in which the sportscape, although dominated by women, retains its position as a masculine locale and the ways women use satire and subversion to reclaim the space as theirs, despite the dominance of male teams who also utilise the space and the presence of male-defined spaces such as the urinal. Private spaces within the sportscape were constantly negotiated and I found that women engage in and with these spaces in diverse ways. Further, the sexualisation of the sportscape surfaced as a pervasive theme with some players aligning themselves with certain sexual subjectivities while others distanced themselves from sexual subjectivities.

It became evident for the players in this research that the football sportscape carries different significance. For some players the sportscape offers a sense of comfort, coming home and freedom. For others it is a locale in which 'mates' come together and interact. And still for others it is a space that operates as an outlet. The football sportscape acts on players in diverse ways and, for better or worse, when players leave

this space may take a part of that space with them, such as their nicknames. The construction of the sportscape, while located within the immediate physical space that the team utilise, was also found to be in some ways imaginary, travelling with the team as they played at different football grounds, socialising in spaces away from the playing field and engaged with team mates outside of football related activities. The emergence of the sportscape as transient and mobile is, I suggest, significant for further research in areas of gender embodiment, subjectivity, and sports sociology.

## CHAPTER 7: DATA ANALYSIS

### Visuality

Images of footballing bodies tend to be culturally inscribed in Australian media as male footballing bodies and iconic images of the archetypal footballer are represented as male, lean and muscular<sup>5</sup>. Although the archetypal footballer has also been traditionally white, this has begun to shift and visual cultural differences have become evident in the Australian Football League<sup>6</sup>. For example there is a growing contingent of Australian Indigenous footballers playing in the Australian Football League disrupting the hegemony of whiteness in the visual icon of the footballer. In this chapter I further attempt to disrupt the iconic image of the footballing body by offering discussion and images of yet another footballing body, that of the female footballing body.

In this chapter I discuss visual methodology in relation to the data collected for the study, notable because little, if any, academic research draws on a visual methodology in the field of women's football and, further, visual methodology is in the early stages of development in sport sociology research. A number of sociological studies use visual methodologies relative to education research (for example Allen, 2009; O'Donoghue, 2007) and research involving children and young people (for example Cook & Hess, 2007; Darbyshire, MacDougall & Schiller, 2005), and I draw on these works to theorise

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<sup>5</sup> See for example the sports sections of the major newspapers in Melbourne Australia: *The Age*; *The Herald Sun*.

<sup>6</sup> A visual view of team profiles in the Australian Football League is testimony to growing ethnic diversity, although the League remains largely dominated by white Australian players and officials.

visual methodologies with respect to women's Australian Rules football and issues concerning the body. Yet, it is with great interest that I note the dearth of research engaging the body, physicality, gender and sport with visual methodologies.

The lack of visual methods within these fields is striking given the significant connection Western culture has with visuality and these very visual fields of study- gender and sport. Both are highly visual within Western culture and images of both pervade mainstream media from news media to advertising billboards. Gender is also visualised walking down the street and in our everyday interactions with colleagues, friends and family. If one is to close their eyes gender may be perceived through touch, smell or listening to someone's voice. Other than this, gender markers are largely visual, and physical appearance, body language and clothing contribute to the visual perception of a gendered body. Sport is likewise a physical and visual experience, drawing an enormous spectator base and transforming physical activity into a visual experience. Beyond spectatorship sport is a visual medium which we train for and, for some, set goals and sculpt our bodies. Indeed the legitimacy of a sporting body is often defined visually through its' appearance, attire and body shape.

The value of drawing on visual methods in research that engages with issues of the body, physicality, gender and sport is a significant development in studies of sociology and sports sociology. For areas of study where visuality is so fundamental to participation, performance and self reflection, visual methodologies offer insights that non-visual methods alone do not have the scope to encompass. The research design that I have drawn on has been unique for the study of the footballing body in a number of ways. Firstly, research participants were invited to create self portraits in

their football uniform, training gear, typical work clothes and casual clothes. This created the opportunity for research participants to present themselves in football attire as a footballing body but also to acknowledge that subjects may stylise and embody themselves in diverse ways in different aspects of their lives. Through encouraging participants to present themselves in their various 'guises' space was created where subjects were able to visually demonstrate the potentially multiple ways that they styled and experienced their bodies.

The second aspect of the visual research design was engaging participants in creating images in which their own and other footballing bodies were captured in action as well as statically. In doing so, subjects were actively reflecting on how they and others use their bodies within the football space as well as how their bodies are read and presented in this space. Thirdly and particularly significant, participants were invited to discuss the images. In drawing participants into conversations around their image production the data is, in a sense, analysed by the participants themselves. Through these conversations the participants drew attention to the significance of the images but also actively reflected on the ways that they read and perceived themselves and each other in the football space through the visual imagery.

This chapter discusses how combining a visual methodology with photo elicitation interviews gives rise to insight that might otherwise have gone 'unseen' within the research project and, collectively, the three visual methods outlined above offer rich data for analysis and discussion, presenting a strong argument for the inclusion of visibility in sociological and sport sociology research. For example, the photo project asking participants to take self portraits in their football uniform, training gear, casual

clothes and a typical work outfit has offered an insight into footballing bodies that non-visual methods alone could not hope to capture. This series of images has generated a sequence of photographs that show how these participants present themselves within the football sportscape as well as outside of this sportscape. This is significant because the participants in this research project share a commonality through playing football for the same team and yet outside of this sportscape may or may not share many commonalties. This photo project was designed to draw attention to the potential for the multiple performances of subjectivities of participants in this study. Research engaging with women who play football tends to isolate women who play football through a single lens of 'footballer' (for example Chase, 2006; Gill, 2007; Harris, 2005, 2007; Hillier, 2005; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007). This study however found that these women perform more than simply 'footballer', experiencing their bodies, their gender performances and their subjectivities in multiple ways. The embodiment of these footballing bodies in outfits other than playing gear draws attention to the range of performativities that these players engage in.

Exploring space, place and masculinity making in primary schools in Ireland, O'Donoghue's (2007) research draws on photographs produced by ten and eleven year old research participants, describing the images as "systematic, not random" (p. 64). This is a significant acknowledgment because it positions the images created by the research participants as focused and deliberate rather than a chance image or insignificant 'happy snap'. Following O'Donoghue I suggest that the images produced by research participants in this study were similarly directed rather than coincidental or unintentional. For example, in photo project two participants were asked to take 'five to ten photographs illustrating what you think female footballers look like'. In

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response to this the images Jac created draws attention to what female footballers look like on the playing field with captions such as 'good footy smarts', 'skilful under pressure' and 'female footballers look like a team'. These images are, as O'Donoghue suggests, deliberately produced to project Jac's perspective of female footballers and it becomes clear through the images that Jac sees and chooses to project female footballers as appearing skilful and athletic. Throughout this chapter I engage with aspects of visual methodology and demonstrate the value of drawing on visual methods for research concerning the body, physicality, sport and gender.

### **Footballing Bodies: Exploring the Body and Physicality without Foregrounding Gender**

In this chapter I focus on the physical body following Kath Woodward and her text *Embodied Sporting Practices: Regulating and Regulatory Bodies* (2009). In this text, Woodward explores the centrality of the body in sport and the ways in which the body is regulated through sporting practices yet notes that although the body is central to sporting practices it is often taken for granted. Woodward draws on the notion of embodiment to explore the body in sport, suggesting that the term challenges the distinction between subject and object and is useful for its integration of self, corporeality, and being, doing and thinking (Woodward, 2009). The body operates in synchronisation with the self; although we may act in ways that are not consciously premeditated by the mind, the intrinsic relationship between the body and the mind constantly serves as a reminder of the unity of the mind and body. While football demands an intense commitment of corporeality the necessity of the mind to operate the body means that any exploration of the body in football, indeed in sport, cannot

take place at the expense of the mind. Thus, following Woodward, embodiment might be seen as a self who is embodied and “cannot be disentangled from its corporeality” (p. 1).

Acknowledging Woodward’s (2009) assertion that the self and the body are invariably intertwined and that the self and the body are dependent on each other for sport participation, in this chapter I move beyond notions of embodiment and explore the concept of what I call *footballing bodies*. In doing so I acknowledge Woodward’s assertion that the mind and body are inextricably connected and that the mind is ever present in football endeavours, for example through learning and performing skills, on field decision making and tactical components of the sport. However, I use the phrase ‘footballing bodies’ to draw attention to the physicality of football. A significant portion of research on the body is entangled with gender and while I recognise that gender cannot and should not be overlooked in research on the body this work seeks to foreground the physicality of bodies in football as an alternative to foregrounding *women’s* bodies in football.

While I recognise the significance of gender and gender performance, my work seeks to foreground the footballing bodies and the selves inherently connected to these bodies, rather than emphasising ‘the body’ and the propensity to describe it as first and foremost gendered. Embodied selves, in line with performativity, are continually produced and reproduced through the reiteration of acts. Woodward (2009) suggests that the embodied selves she addresses “are made and remade through sporting practices with which they engage [and] through the diverse regulatory apparatuses of sport” (p. 2). Butler’s (1993) work on performativity, while not addressing specifically

sport, is echoed in Woodward's assertion. For Butler, it is through aspects of discourse that bodies are produced; through applying discourse to repetition and recitation of performative acts, bodies create subjectivity (Butler cited in Osborne & Segal, 1994). Thus a footballing body is produced not only through performing the acts of football and the reiteration of those performances, but is produced through applying the discourse of football to those performances.

The footballing body has been produced and reproduced as a male body. As Butler's work on performativity suggests, the repetition of acts produces norms. Historically, Australian Rules football has been played by men largely to the exclusion of women with the exception of carnivalesque games until 1981 (Hess, 2005; Wedgwood, 2005b) when the Victorian Women's Football League (VWFL) was established. Since the VWFL has been established women and girls have continued to play in limited numbers and at only a fraction of the participation rate of men and boys. Football remains a domain of men and boys and is only differentiated by gender when women are playing (Woodward, 2009), thus football in the Australian lingo continues to delineate men's or boy's football unless it has the prefix of 'women's' or 'girls'. The reiteration of men playing football in the current media and through history, coupled with the current trend that Australian Rules football remains dominated by men (Wedgwood, 2005b), means that men playing football has produced the norm of a football body as a *male* football body.

Bodies and bodies in sport are conceptualised in varied ways in sociology of sport research. I suggest that there are some bodies whose physical presence and abilities in sport are underrepresented in this literature and that the diversity of footballing

bodies are one of these underrepresented bodies. Footballing bodies tend to be represented as muscular, ultra-toned, well oiled machines, at times with a propensity for injury, but for the most part elite athletic *male* bodies. It is not these footballing bodies that I suggest are underrepresented in the literature and popular media, but *female* footballing bodies. Similarly, in academic studies exploring women's football participation, the bodies of participants as *footballing bodies* are underrepresented as the body is foregrounded as a *female* body rather than a footballing body.

By drawing on the term *footballing* I attempt to describe the body in conversation as one in action rather than as identification. While the phrase 'football body' leans towards the identification of a body as belonging to football, I opt for 'footballing' as a means of describing the action of the body while being careful to avoid drifting into identity categories such as 'footballer'. A body is always more than the sport they play and I recognise this throughout the research. For example, photo project three asked participants to create images of themselves in their football uniform, a training outfit, everyday clothes and a typical work outfit. This photo project demonstrates an example of the multiple ways that a single body can be configured. However in this chapter I seek to highlight the physicality of these bodies in the football sportscape. Thus, by using the phrase *footballing bodies* I draw attention to the physicality of these bodies and the body in action. While women's bodies tend to be ascribed to notions of passivity and femininity, by drawing on the phrase *footballing bodies* I foreground the bodies in this research as physical and active.

I rely on the categorisation of sex in this research as a player must identify themselves as a woman to play in the Victorian Women's Football League. What I suggest in this

section however, is that although a player identifies with the female sex through participating in the women's football league that they are not necessarily performing femininity or subscribing to traditional female gender performances. While I do not mean to eliminate gender entirely from footballing bodies, indeed it is integral for some women in the ways in which they experience themselves, what I suggest is that studies exploring women's participation in football explore these bodies relative to womanhood, to being sexed as a woman. I detach sex and gender, suggesting that although one might align themselves with the female sex, their gender performance is not necessarily aligned with femininity.

While I do not intend to disregard the significant existing body of research on women playing football, I suggest that this work tends to come from a discourse that explores player's experience of being a woman and playing football, rather than playing football. Women's regard as second class citizens "because of anatomical difference from men, in particular, the possession of a uterus, has a long history in sport" (Woodward, 2009, p. 171-2). By foregrounding footballing bodies rather than the reproduction of 'the female body' in sport I aspire to garner insight into participation in football that might otherwise be overlooked. This research is concerned not with 'women's bodies' but with *footballing bodies* in a single team, a team which happens to be a women's team. I explore the ways that participants engage physically in this sport, acknowledging that they are playing in a women's league, while foregrounding the footballing body over the female body or the female footballing body.

## Performativity and a Spectrum of Gender Performance

it is *not* a question of blinding oneself to how a person appears, but a question instead of how the way in which a person appears blinds one to the worth and capability of the person (Butler, 2000, p. 63, emphasis in original).



Image 7.1 Training gear by Belle

Judith Butler's quote above comes from a paper written in response to a lecture concerned with the legal systems attempts to ban discrimination on the basis of appearance. This statement succinctly comments on society's tendency to take the appearance of a subject at face value while dismissing the potential competence of that subject to act in physical, intellectual and creative ways. It is through this disregard of potential competence that the footballing bodies in this research are seen first as female bodies and then as 'women who play football'. By foregrounding footballing players' participation rather than gender issues, space is opened up in this project for discussing the potential of bodies beyond the appearance of those bodies.

Physical appearance does not necessarily offer insight into players' experiences of football. For example of image 7.1 Belle says that she is "just in some footy training gear, I usually just chuck on old clothes that I don't care if they get dirty or smelly and it doesn't matter what happens to them, as long as I'm warm". Belle's comment speaks to her interest in playing football and the functionality of the training gear she wears. For Belle, how she appears at training is not significant and she pays little attention to her outward appearance which tells us little about her capacity to engage in physical activities; it is only by probing deeper that we can learn about Belle's football participation and her motivations for playing. Similar to Belle in her training gear I suggest that when we explore images of women in their football uniform we learn little about their capacity to play, their level of skill or fitness and their motivation for participation.

Following Butler (2000), I argue that in research on women's sports we must be careful not to allow the ways that a subject appears to blind us to a subject's capacity for participation and engagement in physical activities. Judith Halberstam's (1998) seminal work on female masculinity has contributed fruitful theorising to conversations around sex, gender and embodiment noting that "there is remarkably little written about masculinity in women" (p. xi). Halberstam ultimately uses female masculinity to investigate queer subject positions with the goal of challenging hegemonic models of gender conformity and the text addresses what Halberstam describes as the "collective failure to imagine and ratify the masculinity produced by, for, and with women" (p. 15). While Halberstam's work on female masculinity has been valuable, I do not draw on it here as I suggest it continues to create a dichotomy between the masculine and the feminine, regardless of the sex to which it is attached. I argue that

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subjects may embody and enact differing degrees of femininity and masculinity in different times and spaces and that fixed notions of gender performance or embodiment limit our capacity to theorise the potentiality of subjects' gender experiences. I follow Butler's notion that the way a subject appears can blind us to a subjects' capacity to act and, typically, notions of gender, race, soma types and dis/abilities are markers that can blind us to others' potential. In the remainder of this chapter I discuss the footballing bodies in this research, paying attention in particular to issues of gender, race and soma types.

## **Gender**

Football is culturally associated with masculinity and because of football's historical and cultural connection with patriarchy, women's achievements in the sport can be perceived as a resistance to patriarchal dominance and women's attempts to participate in football can be seen as threatening male hegemony (Wedgwood, 2005b; Woodward, 2009). This power dynamic relies on the pervading heterosexual matrix that equates female with feminine, male with masculine. What I question is what happens if we conceptualise gender on a spectrum with masculinity at one polarity and femininity at the other, acknowledging subjects' capacity to perform and embody both masculinity and femininity in diverse ways and at different times? What if we conceptualise gender as fluid, multiple and shifting rather than as distinct and fixed categories?

In order to explore this dynamic I draw on Laura Chase's (2006) work on women's participation in rugby, and Nancy Finley's (2010) study on roller derby. These studies assert that white middle class normative femininity is at odds with sports in which



women are required to “get dirty and bloody, and to hit other women” (Chase, 2006, p. 229). Indeed, the image of the bruised and battered *female* football player, like that of the roller derby player (Finley, 2010), is opposed to images of ‘normative’ female bodies (Chase, 2006). Yet if we conceptualise behaviours as *performances* and describe the gender of the *performance* rather than the *subject*, then gender normativity does not retain so much power. For example, football and its inherent full body contact requiring players to “get dirty and bloody, and to hit other women” (Chase, 2006, p. 229) is traditionally associated with masculinity. The performance of football would likely be positioned on the gender spectrum towards the polarity of masculinity. Thus the football player, regardless of sex, could be construed as performing masculinity. This performance however does not delineate the subject *as* masculine, but rather the subject *as performing* masculinity.

Returning to the opening quote by Butler in this section, “the way in which a person appears blinds one to the worth and capability of the person” (Butler, 2000, p. 63), highlights the way that when we look at a person in a football uniform and see a woman, their worth and capacity to play is firstly limited by the identification of the subjects’ sex. However, if we are to acknowledge that both male and female sexes may perform and embody masculinity, then when we see a body in a football uniform we might see the potential for that person to be a *footballing* body rather than a *sexed* body. Therefore the legitimacy or illegitimacy of that footballing body is not dependent on sex category identification. In legitimising and delegitimising footballing bodies, Bumpy notes that:

[S]ome footballers look like men, some look like women um, but you know, no disguising it, even if they wear pink some of them still look like men, some of them are built like men, they have muscle structures and physically are built like men (Bumpy).

In this quote Bumpy is reading footballing bodies primarily as gendered, conceptualising others as 'girly' or 'like men' despite wearing the same football uniform and partaking in the same sporting pursuit, however we cannot garner from this quote Bumpy's conceptualisation of these subjects' capacity to play football. Beyond subjects' embodiment of gender, Bumpy offers no insight into these bodies as footballing bodies, despite opening her quote with a description of 'footballers'. Although Bumpy is deeply engrained within the footballing subculture, she nonetheless seems to prioritise gendered embodiment over footballing abilities, following Butler's notion that appearance can blind us to the worth and capability of others.

The aspect of visibility in the research design of this project has helped bring to the fore the very visual ways in which players 'perform' gender and the multiple ways in which gender can be read. This section questions the ways in which footballing bodies are read and the mechanisms through which players gender these bodies. Of image, 7.2, Bumpy asserts:

I don't know that you'd look at Mario and go she plays football and she does...They are who they are...Different in all sorts of ways; in looks, in personalities so this one probably demonstrates more your personality than your look (Bumpy).

Bumpy clearly recognises that appearance is not the only factor to be taken into



Image 7.2 *Sox-on-hands* by Bumpy

account when  
viewing an  
image, describing  
image 7.2 as  
depicting “the  
most individual  
player” on the  
football team.  
Drawing from  
the title of the  
image, I suggest  
that personality  
is depicted for  
Bumpy through  
the player’s  
stance and the

foregrounding of her hands in colourful woollen gloves. This suggests that the team is comprised of a group of individuals and a footballing body does not solely determine a subject’s capacity to ‘be’. This is important because research on women’s football teams tends to homogenise players, while from Bumpy’s image we can see that, certainly in this team, players are more diverse and heterogeneous than research on women’s football tends to demonstrate. Bumpy’s conversation clearly speaks to the way that a personality, not just an appearance, might be read through visuality and is

not limited to capturing visuality in photographs but also encompasses the ways that



Image 7.3 *Madison* by Tracey

players may 'read' other players on and off of the football field.

An example of 'reading' others through their appearance and performance of self is seen in the way that Tracey describes Madison<sup>7</sup> (image 7.3) as 'dykey' both through her physical appearance and the ways in which she carries herself.

There is a perception that a certain kind of body equates to a legitimate [female] footballing body.

For example Tracey cites 'dykey' as something she associates with playing football, and research continues to perpetuate the association of same sex desire and the 'butch' lesbian subject with [female] football bodies (see for example Caudwell 2007; Harris

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<sup>7</sup> This player did not participate in the research hence she is not identifiable in the image and a pseudonym has been used in place of her name.

2005, 2007). For example in her interview Tracey uses the term 'dykey' on several occasions to describe players' embodiment, and is a body that seems to be disavowed within the context of this football team, as further evidenced by Crack in image 5.1. The deployment of 'dykey' and the reading of Madison's sexual desires through Tracey's interpretation of Madison's gendered embodiment and deportment suggests that a degree of heteronormativity and gender stereotyping remains within this team.



Image 7.4 *Wedding* by Jac

It is not only players' appearances but also their deportment and behaviours that lead to being read as feminine, masculine or along the spectrum in between. Jac articulates this succinctly when she suggests that "it's not about wearing makeup or being dressed up or anything it's just, I think it's the way you

carry yourself, the way they

wear their uniform, the way they do their hair, their mannerisms" (Jac). This comment

suggests that players' appearance, deportment and behaviour is adaptable, so while a body might be read as a footballing body in some contexts, in others it might not be and I question how this might be contextualised in different spaces and sportscapes.

For example, in the interview with Jac she makes the comment "We still look like we can be girls" in relation to image 7.4. This indicates that Jac acknowledges that her physical appearance, deportment and behaviours play with the gender spectrum I describe earlier, where masculine and feminine are at opposite polarities and subjects' appearance, deportment and behaviours fall along the continuum and are neither fixed nor stagnant, but rather continually shifting according to the subject's 'performance'<sup>8</sup>. Jac's comment suggests that she is aware that her gender 'performance' is not fixed but rather something she adapts to differing circumstances.

When I note that Jac adapts to different circumstances I do not mean to imply that certain circumstances *require* particular displays of gender but rather speak to the way that Jac *chooses* to perform gender in different circumstances. For example, in the image "Wedding" Jac has chosen to present herself in what might be considered akin to a traditional feminine appearance; dress, jewellery and hair softly framing her face. In contrast image 7.5 shows Jac on the football field, her uniform worn loosely displaying little of Jac's figure, hair pulled back and, significantly for Jac, the number-

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<sup>8</sup> I note 'performance' in inverted commas here to highlight that a subject's appearance, deportment and behaviour may be either consciously or unconsciously performed and that 'performance' has connotations of a particular rehearsed, conscious display. I use 'performance' to describe the display of one's physical appearance, deportment and behaviours that are not necessarily premeditated but rather the conscious and unconscious displays that are lived out in one's everyday life.

her number- '15' displayed on the back of her jumper.



Image 7.5 *Footy uniform* by Jac

Of this physical appearance, pragmatism is Jac's goal and gender performance is insignificant. Although Jac appears to opt for a kind of gender neutral performance on the football field, the game field is equally a space in which femininity and masculinity remain present. For example when asked "Do you think you can be girls on the football field?" Jonty replies that "I think there are some girls on the football field representing the girls pretty well" and, in response, Jac says "Yeah bloody get some grunt about them". This comment suggests that feminine behaviour on the field does not constitute legitimate footballing bodies and yet, further in the same interview, both Jonty and Jac acknowledge that players can be "girly" and be "quite good" at football.

This data suggests that women's opinions of females playing football are not changing and do not seem to have the impetus to change. According to these research participants, players embody and perform varying degrees of masculinity and femininity and, while it clearly doesn't determine subjects' capacity to play football, the ways that others' embody and perform gender remain significant to the ways that they are read and legitimised as 'female', as a sexual being and as a 'footballer' to the extent that players distinguish themselves from others: I play football but I don't look like a man; I am a lesbian but I am not dykey; I am a female but I'm not a 'girly girl'.

There are clearly desires to display certain performances of gender amongst this team and I suggest this comes from the varying degrees of capital that certain performances carry with them. However it is also noteworthy that not everyone adapts their performances to meet the displays of the footballing body that carries greater capital, for example the 'girly girls', Madison or 'Soxonhands'.



## **Ethnicity**

'Race' and ethnicity were not issues that were focused on throughout the research; the gendered and sexed body were seemingly more significant for participants than the 'racial' body. However I engage in a discussion of the 'racial' body because embedded within research participants' seeming indifference towards issues of 'race' and ethnicity lie what I suggest are important insights into players' constitution of legitimate footballing bodies. Traditionally Australian Rules football has been associated with white Australian culture although some suggest that the sport evolved from the Aboriginal game Marn Grook (Australian Sports Commission). However the modern game of Australian Rules football, following Australia's 'White Australia Policy' and colonial history, has traditionally been the domain of white Australia and tends to be continually aligned with white Australian culture and identity. Although ethnic diversity is increasing in the national League, particularly with an increase in Aboriginal player's and in children's football with activities such as Auskick, in the league with which the team in this study plays ethnic diversity is scarce.

While some cultures actively encourage girls and women to engage in physical activities (if not always football) other cultures in Australia may have more conservative views on female participation in such active pursuits. For example, Mac says of other [white] players “they grow up with



Image 7.6 *Crack* by Tracey

football. Everyone, like at school you kick a football” indicating that the presence of football for those growing up in Australia is a fixed characteristic of Australian cultural identity, particularly in the south-eastern states of the country. In the absence of the acknowledgment of racial and ethnic diversity/difference by research participants in this study, I suggest that the sub-culture of this team has a largely mono-cultural view of footballing bodies.

Had there not been a visual element throughout the research design of this study I expect that ethnicity and cultural difference would not have been evident. Of all of the research participants, Tracey was the only one to create images in which she perceived female footballers as racially diverse and included in this discussion team mates Crack and Bianca<sup>9</sup>. Interestingly, both of these players might be described as being enmeshed in white Australian culture and the marker of 'racial'/cultural diversity is skin colour rather than cultural background or practices. Crack was raised by her mother who is white and Australian born. She does not know her father but knows that he is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage. Bianca is from Guatemala but was adopted as an infant by white parents in the United Kingdom. Moving to Australia as a child, she too was brought up enmeshed in white Australian culture. Although these players appear to Tracey as people of colour, culturally they have been brought up within white Australian or English culture yet the marker of race remains defined by skin colour.

Although ethnic diversity is increasing in the national league and is encouraged for young people, Australian Rules football remains largely dominated by whiteness as evidenced in the marginality of racial diversity at the coaching and umpiring levels of the game. Australian Rules football is largely a white game in a culture which positions the sport in a particular cultural and political milieu. I suggest that for the players in this team, ethnicity is erased in its homogeneity. For the players of colour in this team, I question how 'race' and ethnicity are experienced within a sub-culture in which racial

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<sup>9</sup> Bianca was not a research participant and the image of her was not able to be reproduced here in a way that would preserve her anonymity.

diversity and even acknowledgment of the absence of diversity, is largely absent. For example, how does Crack experience her presence within the team? Does she experience herself as a woman of colour, an Aboriginal woman or does she assimilate herself with white Australian culture? How too might her nickname of 'Crack' play into aspects of marginality? Amongst this team ethnic diversity and bodies of colour do not disturb the archetypal image of the footballing body as much as the gendered body, however I suggest that the intersection of race, football and ethnicity warrants further investigation.

### **Gender and the 'Big' Body**

While weight and body mass was not something that this research focused on, the following comment draws attention to the presence of bodies within the footballing space as legitimised by others via body mass. Playing a game against an opposition team in the season after the data for this study was collected a player for the opposing team was heard to say "Get off me fatty". This was directed at a player who was tackling her. The player to whom the comment was directed reacted angrily in the short space of time before the ball was thrown up and the game moved on. The comment however offers insight into the Western valorisation of women and 'the cult of thinness' on the football field. While a number of players involved in this research indicated that they would like to 'lose a bit of weight', there tended to be two schools of thought on body mass. The first was that different body shapes had different strengths and that, on the football field, there was a position that suited all body shapes. For example Mac says:

I'm not very trimmed like a female footballer should be...I think any athlete should be, should be fit and that's not fit... someone who [has] a donut as a belly [laughs]...Fit is someone that can get to the ball and get there before the other players and can run all game (Mac).

While Mac is an experienced footballer who has been playing for a number of years, she clearly has a perception of how she believes a legitimate 'footballing body' ought to look and of what it ought to be able to do. However her inability to embody that footballing body does not prevent her from continuing to play football competitively. The second school of thought on body mass and footballing bodies is that "[t]here's definitely different roles...for instance bigger players aren't going to run in the centre so they also, they look at places where those players can go with being fair at the same time...there's different roles for height, weight" (Mac). Players that might be described as overweight, at the level at which this team play, is not uncommon. Levels of fitness vary and this is not always attributed to body size. Fitter bodies tend to be those who have the strength and endurance to run out a game and train regularly rather than slimmer bodies.

Bigger players tend to play in more stationary roles such as full forward or full back where a more solid body can be used to their advantage with a hip and shoulder to prevent the opposition from getting the ball. Further, body mass does not impede players' football skills such as their capacity to mark and kick accurately. Players with a larger body mass tend not to have running positions with leaner counterparts typically taking on the running roles. The 'fat' footballer, like the 'ethnic' footballer, I suggest, does less to challenge the homogeneity of the lean, muscular football physique depicted in media and popular culture than the *female* footballing body. I suggest that

this is because at the local level male footballing bodies also do not necessarily embody the archetypal image of a lean and muscular physique and thus, at least at the local level, there remains a degree of flexibility in relation to a 'legitimate' footballing body's size.

While there remains a stigma in wider society that impels women to aspire to the slender body, as seen in the opening quote of this section, the 'fat' footballing body nevertheless seems to have carved out a legitimate space in women's football.

However I suggest that this is dependent on the 'fat' body's degree of fitness, skill and experience.

### **The Body in Action: Active, Physical and Violent, the Antithesis of Passive Femininity**

Few images generated through the course of this research were able to clearly depict the intense physicality of Australian Rules football. Woodward (2009) notes that different sports require different types and degrees of physicality; Australian Rules football demands a high degree of physical endurance, strength, aggression, competition and training. Chase (2006) found that many of the participants in her study chose to participate in rugby because of either the physical challenge the sport presents or the prospect of engaging in physical contact. While rugby and Australian Rules are different codes of football they share a full contact nature, the ability to tackle opposition players and intense physical endurance. Both sports valorise and reward, within the rules, violence and hard physical work.

Images of the physical intensity of Australian Rules were limited in the data collection for this research. I do not think that this is because players do not celebrate,

acknowledge or participate in the physical, full contact, intense aspects of the game. While there are photos that depict players in action and some that suggest the physical intensity of the game, I suspect that the lack of images of these scenes is due to the fact that players were participating in the activities rather than sitting on the sidelines taking photos. In the instant that images were created of on field physicality, these images were often taken by friends or family of the participant. The drawback of this, however, is the physical distance from the play to the sidelines. An Australian Rules football ground varies from location to location but is generally between one hundred and thirty-five metres and one hundred and eighty-five metres long and between one hundred and ten metres and one hundred and fifty-five metres wide (Hickok, 2003). Hence in order to capture close ups of players in action the photographer must have access to a very high quality camera (which none of the participants in the research did), the play must be very close to where the photographer is viewing from or, as was the case in the images created for this research project, the images tended to show the play in the distance. While players generated a significant number of images 'in action' or of the field of play, faces and expressions are unclear and the overall intensity of the image is lost in the distance. However I draw on these images, along with interview data, to generate a discussion of the physicality that players engage in: physical violence, heroic endeavour and injury.

### **Physical Violence**

One of the distinguishing factors that separate codes of football from other sports is the full-contact nature of the game, with the legality of tackling seen as "the primary difference" between football and other sports (Chase, 2006, p. 237). In Australian Rules football players are permitted to tackle opponents in possession of the ball. A

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tackle involves holding or wrestling a player who is in possession of the ball to the ground. There are correct and incorrect ways to tackle and players can only be tackled at a height lower than their shoulders and higher than their knees. If the opponent does not make an effort to get the ball out to another player, they are called for 'holding the ball' and the tackling player receives a free kick. If the ball comes loose players are free to try to gain possession of the ball.



Image 7. 7 *Hard* by Belle <sup>10</sup>

Belle's image *Hard* shows a player who has tackled an opposition player and, in turn, is being tackled by another opposition player. Team mates stand by as their team mate fights for possession of the ball and congratulate players on 'laying a good tackle', often whether or not they have gained possession of the ball. There is a strong sense

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<sup>10</sup> These opposition players were not part of the research, thus any identifying characteristics have been disguised.



of valorisation in laying what is termed 'a good tackle' yet there is equally a strong rhetoric around making the opposition player hurt, which has strong connotations of violence. Being tackled and tackling, and then getting up to chase the ball is hard work and simply imparting a tackle can give your team an advantage by exhausting the opposition who has had to physically fight to clear the ball to a team mate. The rhetoric of 'making them hurt' is not to injure players, rather to 'make them hurt' is to make it harder for them to gain access of the ball. Of the image 'Hard', Belle says "this is [ah] Sarah<sup>11</sup> getting absolutely squashed...and we're all just watching! [laughs]...Just shows how rough it is how [ah], how tough it is" (Belle). Tackling, for Belle, demonstrates the roughness of the game, the brutality, and yet her laughter at players 'all just watching' belies any fear of other more serious implications of violence such as injury.

Tackling, I suggest, is a rhetoric through which players might associate themselves with a form of 'safe' violence where rules and umpiring minimise injuries to players during the physical intensity of a tackle. While the full contact nature of Australian Rules is at times *perceived* as risky it is, for most of the participants in this study, an aspect that attracts them to the sport. For example Bumpy says:

I can't think of another sport where and maybe some sports are similar, but I just think the physical side of football because you get hit, you get hit as hard as you possibly can in a legal way. I think it's just almost to the point where you could go to hospital like you get hit sometimes...And I think we're happy doing it, like we have fun doing it [laughs] (Bumpy).

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<sup>11</sup> This is a pseudonym as this player was not a participant in the research.

I am very hard at the ball...and there's [sic] a lot of people that pull out of the contest which is a winner for me (Crack).

Participants' pleasure in 'being hard' reflects Chase's (2006) conclusion that tackling, hitting and heavy physical exertion draw athletes to the game of rugby. Crack acknowledges that she has a very competitive nature which comes out at football and does not 'hold back' but rather goes hard at the ball. Although physical toughness and laying one's body on the line is a celebrated aspect of the team's culture, not all players engage in the aggressive physicality of football. Bumpy notes that:

[P]eople still play differently and I think that comes down to their reasons and what they want out of it...I want to play to win and I want to play hard whereas someone who's just going there for fun will back out of a contest...If you're playing for fun and something's going to hurt you, well, you know are you going to do that? Whereas I play for fun but I also play to win and I don't think about getting hurt (Bumpy).

Not backing out of a contest and wanting to play hard for these players translates into being tough on the field. Jac says:

[G]enerally a lot of the girls that play footy, like some of them, well probably most of them as a general rule are able to hold, able to cop more of a hit and stuff than other sports like netballers or something like that...you get some that you bump them and they have to go off on a stretcher but, yeah it's about being tough sometimes (Jac).

Being tough on the field translates into being thought of as a tough player something that at least some players aspire to:

I would like people to think that I was a tough player and I would like my team mates to think that I was tough. Not necessarily strong but tough as in being able to put your body on the line, cop a hard hit or whatever (Jac).

Woodward notes that “[t]he pleasures of sport are diverse and encompass complex satisfactions, thrills and excitement and risks and dangers” (Woodward, 2009, p. 121). There is clearly a distinct pleasure that these women acknowledge when they speak about the physical intensity of football. The valorisation and celebration of what might be considered the violent nature of Australian Rules football, what Bumpy describes as hitting “as hard as you possibly can in a legal way”, is clearly an aspect of the sport that these players derive pleasure and satisfaction from. Following Chase (2006) it is clear that, at least for these players, the physical challenges and the opportunity for physical contact that the sport offers plays a major role in players’ interest in the game of football.

### **Heroic Endeavour- Pushing the Body to its Limits**

There is a sense of heroic endeavour achieved through pushing the body to its limits that has gained a powerful presence in sport (Woodward, 2009). In the sportscape of this team, pain and discomfort are elements that players endure and at times with, as Jonty highlights, a blasé reaction:

[F]ooty to me means a fair bit of pain actually um, whether it be cramping, whether it be copping injuries which I’m pretty good at getting, whether it be spewing your guts up after a training session; I don’t think you get to have the good times without a little bit of pain (Jonty).

When asked if there is a sense of pleasure in this pain Jonty acknowledges that:

I guess in a game too when I'm cramping, not so much when I'm getting injured, but I've pushed myself so hard, I've pushed my body to a point where it's saying enough's enough, like ok you're going to spew or I'm just going to stop your muscles from working or whatever and so it's sort of cool to go ok I know I can push my body that far and then I can go through that little bit of pain and then I know I can push again (Jonty).

Pushing one's body to the point of pain, vomiting and cramping is a source of pride for Jonty that, regardless of how well she has played, she has pushed her body to its absolute limit. I suggest that this eliminates the significance of the result of the actual game of football. Whether the team won or lost, what is important to Jonty is whether or not she pushed herself to a point at which she can say 'well at least I did all I could'. This sense is similarly reflected in Bumpy's account of fighting for your colours; "proving that you're the best [um] and that the group that wears your colour are the best and you're winners" (Bumpy). Winning and losing, I suggest is used by Bumpy to reflect not the final scoring results, but the intensity with which the team collectively play and how committed each player is to the cause.

### **Injury and the Badge of Honour**

In Chase's (2006) study players attach a certain glorification to bruises received while playing rugby; they are constructed as indication of the player's involvement in physicality during the game and an active contribution to the team. Similarly of roller derby Finley (2010) says that "[t]aunting danger and injury is normative in derby... Skaters wear injuries like badges of honor" (p. 371-2). Image 7.8 demonstrates the ways in which bodies are injured and yet maintain their connection to football. Jac broke her wrist playing football during the season but went on to play in the grand

final. While players who are injured throughout the season are encouraged to seek medical advice and not play or train until advised that it is safe for them to do so, the following story highlights one of ways in which the health discourse, and pain, is deliberately overrun in order to play an important game of football.

Jac broke her wrist playing football and was supposed to be in plaster for six weeks for it to heal. One week before her plaster was due to come off was the grand final and so, three days before what was to be the most significant game of the season, Jac and her partner cut her plaster cast off with a bread knife. The risk of re-breaking her arm playing in the grand final was significant and had she re-broken her arm the injury would have been worse than the initial break. Jac's attitude was "if I re-break it I re-break it, I'll just have surgery again... because if we had of won, I don't care, it would have been worth it" (Jac). Her partner and team mate similarly commented that "it would have been so worth it if we had of won a premiership" and other team mates and the coach supported the premature removal of the cast to play the game of football. People outside of the football space however were very sceptical. Jac kept the removal of her plaster a secret from her mother, a nurse, who upon seeing her walk onto the football field to play panicked, fearful that another break would result in further surgery and shortening of the bone.



Image 7.8 *The injured player* By Tracey

Predicting the affect of winning the grand final Jac comments that “success is part of the team and I think it comes back to being with team mates and things and working with your mates towards something that you all want...the ultimate success playing the game” (Jac). Within the physical and conceptual sportscape of this football team personal risk is valorised, celebrated as dedication to your team, your sport and your cause. Yet outside of this space to cut one’s plaster off prematurely with a bread knife is a risk akin to self-harm.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed the impact and use of a visual methodology on sociology of sport studies contending that, certainly for this research, visibility has contributed insight into women’s experiences and perceptions of playing Australian Rules football that could otherwise have gone unseen. Both gender and sport encompass significant degrees of visibility and encompassing visual methods into the research design of these fields of study has contributed significantly to the richness of the data.

Throughout this chapter I have drawn on the notion of footballing bodies in order to draw attention to the physicality of football, foregrounding participants’ experience of playing football rather than foregrounding participants through a gendered lens. The footballing body has been produced and reproduced through heteronormative discourses as a male footballing body and thus the female footballing body presents as an anomaly. By foregrounding footballing bodies rather than the female body in sport I

have attempted to destabilise the normative perception of what constitutes footballing bodies.

Engaging with footballing bodies I have further explored how gender, sexuality and ethnicity intersect with footballing bodies and explored how players experience the intense physicality of the sport through legal on-field violence, heroic endeavour and injury. I argue that these intersections clearly demonstrate the complexity of the footballing body and warrants further attention.



## CONCLUSION



Image 8. 1 *Footy* by Belle

This image of the yellow football on green turf signals a return to the origins of this thesis - a football and a football field. Created by one of the research participants, the image is a simple reflection: “it’s of a football cause that’s what you play with...[it] centres around the ball” (Belle). For the women in this study, football offers a sportscape in which subjects engage in diverse homosocial interactions, intense physicality and a range of gendered embodiments. Stemming from a ball and a football field, this study demonstrates that a sportscape can harbour a raft of experiences for those who engage within it.

At the outset of this study I reflected on the dominant perception that if you are a woman and play football then you are likely to also identify as a lesbian. However I did not set out to explore lesbians and football; this sportscape harbours far more than sexual identity categories. Although research into sexualities and sports offers significant contributions to knowledge, I was interested in what else this sportscape harboured. If I thrived on the physicality of this sport, how did others experience it? How did other players negotiate the tensions between being a woman and engaging in what remained to so many a ‘male’ sport? I had engaged with women talking about playing Australian Rules football with such zest and seen players commit so much time and energy to playing and organising for the team to play, that I was interested in what magnetised players to the sport so emphatically.

For me, football has always been an intense outlet of physicality. I love the feeling of pushing my body so hard on the football field that by the end of a game I feel physical pain, and I love the feeling of chasing an opponent down to launch a tackle. While physicality, women and sport tend to be reduced to lesbian/dyke/butch bodies in

sport, I felt that what I experienced through my football participation was more interesting than this. Yes, some women who played were masculine in their embodiment but some were also quite feminine and some women seemed to be feminine in some ways and masculine in others. Some women identified as lesbian and some women on the team were even couples, but there were also many heterosexual identifying women on the team and potentially women identifying as bisexual or asexual, but of this I could not be sure.

Essentially, from my experiences playing football, I had observed that women who play embody more diffuse incarnations of embodiment, gender, physicality and sociality than the dominant lesbian/dyke/butch discourse commonly associated with women's Australian Rules football and this has structured the trajectory of this thesis. In the following sections I offer an overview of the methodological decisions I made in undertaking this research and I discuss, with the benefit of hindsight, the impact of these choices. Then, returning to my initial research questions, I reflect on how I have responded to these in conversation with the key contributions that this thesis has made to academic knowledge.

### **Methodological Challenges**

This research was personal and I was intimately connected to the decisions that structured the study. It was personal because at the time that I initiated the study playing football was deeply engrained in who I was and how I saw myself. I loved playing football and at this time it was not just something I did, it was who (I thought) I was and it was only as the research progressed that I began to see myself as a subject

who played football rather than 'footballer' as a form of self identity. This encouraged me to draw attention to the women as subjects with many 'faces' and the photo project in which participants create self-portraits in various outfits reflecting different aspects of their lives is a good example of this.

Despite the personal nature of the study, I have remained largely absent as a football player throughout the study. Although I draw on my experiences of playing football to shape the research, I do not draw on my experience of playing as data for the research. The decisions I made about what questions to ask and how to conduct the research came from my experiences and subjectivity as a football player. However, as a football player, I made a deliberate choice to remain absent in the study. I made this decision because to my team mates I am just another player on the team - I am one of the many subjects who make up the field and yet I was conscious of my inherent subjectivity amongst the team. I was aware that my motivations for playing football and my experiences of playing were not necessarily the same as others and I attempted to avoid placing my own footballing subjectivity in the way of researching 'women's football'; I did not want to reflect on my own experiences and perceptions of playing football as much as I wanted to get a broader picture of women's Australian Rules football.

In retrospect, a consequence of my connection with the team is that there were areas of interest that I was unable to see. For example while on reflection I can see how the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class and geography are important elements in a sociological analysis of a women's football team, I acknowledge that this thesis has not offered adequate analysis of each of these elements. Significantly, while I engage

heavily with aspects of gender and sexuality, I only briefly touch on race, something that I see as a significant gap in the study. Whiteness and white Australian culture dominated the team and until this was recognised by my supervisor I could not 'see' what I could not see. My oversight led me to overlook the *absence* of race and ethnicity amongst the team. As a result I suggest that future research might investigate how race and ethnicity impacts and intersects with the production of sportscares in different codes of football in Australia.

I was also unable to see how women may be negatively affected by the social dynamics within the sportscape. The players that volunteered to take part in the study spoke of different social dynamics but I did not see or engage with how these dynamics might also serve to exclude. For example, Tracey noted that during the season in which the research took place she felt as though there were cliques within the team. However I did not analyse the research data in relation to *negative* social dynamics - I did not have a lens for these dynamics and I see now, that this oversight meant that the study speaks to a certain group of players within this team. Had I analysed the negative attributes of the sportscape, I question what I might have seen. What might the sportscape look like from the perspective of someone who feels like an outsider on the team? What might I have seen had I conducted the research with new players to the team and what would their sense of the sportscape look like? Through my own positive experiences playing football, I had my eyes closed to the negative attributes of the social landscape; I could not see how the social dynamics of this football team might exclude players or disengage participants.

## Research Questions and Contributions to Knowledge

One of my research questions was to address how observations and explorations of a women's Australian Rules football team could expand the concepts of homosociality and gender. This study shows that there are several characteristics that make women's Australian Rules football and this team in particular, a unique field for researching gender and homosociality. That women engage in full-contact, intense physicality still commonly reserved for 'men' in the Australian social and cultural sphere was the first aspect of the field that offered insightful intersections between embodiment, gender and gendered performances. With the benefit of the visual methodology I was able to show, for example, how Mac embodied and performed gender in very distinct ways embracing both masculinity and femininity in different guises as in images 5.5 and 5.6 (see p. 146). Through interviews with Jac, Jonty and Bumpy it became clear that there are tensions between performing masculinity and performing *too much* masculinity, as in the example of a team mate being referred to, pejoratively, as 'Uncle' (see p. 143). There were equally tensions between performing femininity but not *too much* femininity. For instance, at times team mates were encouraged to "bloody get some grunt about them" (Jac) while at other times femininity was reaffirmed as an accepted commodity on the field with the recognition that "they're ['girly girls] still pretty skilful footballers" (Jac) (see p. 201). Perhaps most interesting was the ways that gender was read and projected onto others. For example, maleness was projected onto the player described as 'Uncle' while Jac commented that gender is "not about wearing makeup or being dressed up or anything it's just, I think it's the way you carry yourself" (see p. 198). This was interesting because it showed that while players might perceive themselves as performing and embodying gender in certain ways and be comfortable

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in their gendered subjectivity, it was clear that within this sportscape gender performances and embodiments were rigorously policed. What was not clear was the consequences of this policing. How did 'Uncle', for example, experience the sportscape and how was she affected by others' judgements of her gendered subjectivity?

The data cited above demonstrate that there is a wide spectrum along which gender is performed amongst women playing football; gender performances and embodiments vary among women on the field and off the field and this suggests that sex and gender is not fixed but adaptable. The sex-gender-sexuality triad limits the perception of sex and gender and it does not help us to see how sex and gender can be embodied and performed in more diffuse forms and combinations, as was evidenced by the women in this football team. While the evidence suggests that there are diverse embodiments and performances of gender within this space, it was also clear they were not equally regarded. Nancy Finley's (2010) work on intragender relations allowed me to begin to engage with the intersection of gender incarnations and hegemony but I suggest that further research engaging with gendered embodiment and performances, intragender relations and hegemony could help to elucidate how power dynamics might shift across different fields and cultural milieus. For example, a significant area of further research would be a closer look at how 'dyke' subjectivities and female masculinities operate alongside and in conjunction with female femininities and sexual identity categories. Drawing on Finley's work on intragender relations in roller derby would offer a useful starting point for such work.

Expanding the notion of homosociality, I invested a significant portion of Chapter Three to engaging with the theoretical contributions from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

(1985), Sharon Marcus (2007) and Henriette Gunkel (2010). While Marcus' work showed how interactions between women need not necessarily be polarised as sexual or asexual, Gunkel's work demonstrated the potential impact of homosocial interactions and Sedgwick offered the homosocial framework for theorising these dynamics. In drawing together these theorists I attempted to develop the homosocial spectrum and apply it to this women's football team. By eliding sexual identity categories and instead polarising sexual and asexual bonds between women, I argued for a discourse that does not dichotomise sexual identities but rather distinguishes sexual from asexual *acts*. Applying the homosocial spectrum to research with this women's football team demanded deliberate methodological choices. For example, I did not ask or discuss with participants whether they identified with a sexual identity category. Instead, when players discussed topics that related to sexualities I analysed the data relative to the broader social dynamics of the discourse. So, for example, when Crack discussed the application of the term 'dyke', I analysed the ways that she drew on the term (see p. 126). Further, when players identified with certain sexual identity categories, I questioned how they negotiated their own subjectivities in relation to other sexuality discourses they discussed, for instance I analysed how Mac experienced her own embodiment and sexuality in relation to her perception of women who play cricket as being "that real dykey, lesbian looking...male looking females" (see p. 145). These conversations pointed to a dynamic intersection of gender, sexuality, subjectivity, embodiment, sociality and hegemony. Attending to sexual and asexual bonds within same sex groupings in other spaces and social contexts could be a productive avenue for further research.



Drawing on 'the homosocial spectrum' to explore how homosociality encompasses the interactions that exist within the subculture of a women's Australian Rules football team enabled me to see how sexual and asexual bonds took place in the same social sphere and what that meant for gender relations. This women's football team was a space in which neither heteronormativity nor homonormativity dominated; some women were engaged in same-sex intimate relationships while other women were engaged in opposite sex intimate relationships. Literature on women's sociality and sexuality tends to delineate same-sex desire, heterosexual desire and 'platonic friendship' representing these fields as distinct. In drawing on the homosocial spectrum and the work of Gunkel and Marcus I have attempted to show how desire and sociality are not distinct entities. By engaging in an epistemology that did not foreground either sexual or asexual bonds, I could see the potential for sexual interactions without assuming that they were necessarily present. Enlisting homosociality as a theoretical framework demonstrated how bonds between women may be sexual or asexual but that neither need to be delineated at the expense of the other and doing so may limit the scope of what it is possible to see.

### **Visual Methodologies**

A significant methodological contribution to arise from this study has been the use of photo projects. This method called upon participants to create images to offer insight into their perspectives of Australian Rules football and was a useful method of data collection. In Chapter Seven I give examples of how visual methods enabled me to interpret data particularly relating to embodiment and gender and I demonstrate how the use of imagery offered a layer of insight that would not have been possible without the visual methods of data collection. For example the way Crack embodies and

performs gender, her perspective on the term 'dyke', and the way she polices her own gendered embodiment relative to her sexual desires emerged from a single image that Crack contributed to the research. Through photo project three, Crack created this image of herself in casual clothes (see p. 125). Reflecting on this image through the photo elicitation interview generated insight into Crack's perceptions of herself as a woman, as a woman who plays football, and as a heterosexual identifying woman. This example demonstrates the capacity of this style of visual methodology to generate insights that non-visual methods alone could not.

The photo projects and staged training session created a framework through which participants generated images for analysis. These images offer insight into participant's experiences and perceptions of playing women's Australian Rules football. For example image 6.2 offers a depiction of players' perceptions of the sportscape (see p. 158). The image depicts a wet, muddy, cold, dark night through which players were able subsequently to describe the sensual experiences of playing football. These sensual reflections, in turn, contributed to the theoretical construction and application of the sportscape to the study. Text base approaches to the sportscape, I suggest, could not have delivered the depiction that this image did and Chapter Seven's analysis of visual methodologies is testament to the value of images to sports sociology research.

### **Sportscapes**

Researching as I did within a women's Australian Rules football team generated a number of insights into space, power and social dynamics between women in this field and I have identified three key avenues through which space emerged as significant:

through masculinity and male sportscapes; private spaces; and the sexualisation of the sportscape. Despite the sportscape harbouring facilities which render it as a masculine space, female players articulated a sense of belonging in the sportscape as well as the sportscape belonging to them. For instance, responding to an image of the change rooms players describe the space as 'gross', but importantly they qualify this by stating that "it's our grossness" (Belle). That the space is not necessarily appealing in its physical manifestation, as articulated by players in their reference to the 'grossness' of the Clubrooms, points to the affect of this sportscape.

The sense of belonging within this sportscape was further highlighted by Jac when she talked about entering the Club grounds and "coming home" but perhaps Crack puts it most succinctly when she says:

As soon as I walk through those doors at the start of a game or you know, I walk through here at ten o'clock in the morning it's go time. Nothing else matters but football at that time (Crack, see p. 156).

Entering the physical sportscape of the football club signifies entry into the imaginary sportscape for Crack and this is significant for theorising notions of the sportscape, demonstrating that space for the participants in this research was not only physical but also imaginary. This is an important contribution to research pertaining to sportscapes because it highlights a significant motivation for players ongoing participation; as Bumpy says, "it's about fitting in, sameness...I feel like I belong a million percent". This is equally significant for what it says about those who may not experience this connection to the imaginary sportscape. What are women and girls experiences of

such sportscares when they do not feel the positive affect that these players articulate and how, using visual imagery, might they depict the sportscape?

The different ways that players embodied masculinities and femininities in this sportscape was demonstrated through the images participants created and players' reflections on these images. For example, in relation to image 6.6 (see p. 165) players made comments about gendered embodiment; "in the background how you're sitting, like boys sit typically with their legs open" (Bumpy). This points to players' recognition of their own performances of masculinity in the sportscape and the creation of images enabled these reflections: "I've never thought about what we do looking like boys" (Bumpy). The ways that subjects discussed embodiments and performances of gender showed that this sportscape remains one in which gender is continually negotiated and contested, yet this negotiation and contestation may not necessarily be apparent to players who inhabit the space. I suggest that research exploring different female sportscares could compare how spaces construct norms and how those norms impact subjects' gendered embodiments and performances. For example, what gendered ideals might the sportscape of a women's basketball team encourage and how is this distinct from the sportscape of a women's netball team or a football team? Who is attracted to these sportscares and how does it impact or affect their gendered embodiments and performance in these spaces? Further, what might this say about the capacity of gender to be moulded and styled?

### **Footballing Bodies**

Theorising *footballing bodies*, I attempted to demonstrate how footballing bodies diverge from the iconic *male* footballing body to more diverse incarnations of

footballing bodies. When women are spoken of in relation to playing football their participation tends to be foregrounded by gender. Thus by engaging with *footballing bodies*, I attempted to engage with players not through a gendered lens but through a lens that foregrounds instead the body in action and the physicality of the footballing body. In doing so I explored how subjects engage in the physical, intense, full-contact nature of football. For example image 5.4 shows a player tackling another player, imparting all her force on getting this player to the ground in order to gain possession of ball (see p. 141). Regardless of the gender of this subject, they are engaging in the demands of the sport and, while this action or performance might be described as masculine, this does not inherently construct the *subject* as masculine.

Discussing images of Mac throughout the study I demonstrate the different ways in which a subject can embody and perform both masculinities and femininities. This is significant because it draws attention to what we may *not* see when we foreground a subject as gendered because of their sex. I posit the theoretical productivity of a perspective through which I do not define *subjects* as gendered - i.e. - through the frame of “women footballers”. Rather, I have intentionally sought to describe acts and embodiments as gendered because my focus is on engaging with bodies’ *potential* and *capacity* to act, and on seeing all footballing bodies as sharing similar potentials and capacities regardless of the sexed body.

### **A Final Word on the Research**

This thesis contributes to sports sociology research, exploring and expanding on issues of gender, embodiment and physicality. Applying a visual methodology to the

sportscape of a women's Australian Rules football team, I have drawn on the theoretical framework of homosociality to explore how gender, embodiment, sexualities, sociality and subjectivities intersect in a sportscape that remains traditionally male and masculine defined. The visual methodology, combined with this theoretical approach, has led to the notion of *footballing bodies*. This concept is a significant contribution to sport sociology research because it offers a mechanism through which to engage with the capacity of bodies to act that is not defined or otherwise limited by the sexed body. Further, this is not limited to footballing bodies but might be usefully applied to bodies in action in diverse sporting and athletic pursuits, regardless of their sex, as well as other spaces in which sex tends to be read as limiting bodies potential to act, such as in the classroom.

This research has shown the scope of women's intragender relations to encompass mateship, intimacy, camaraderie, sexual desires and 'family away from family' while simultaneously invoking the deployment of power through which gender continues to be policed and negotiated in terms of norms and capital. Male homosociality denotes the traffic in women and this study does not mean to indicate that the traffic in women is not continuing. What I do suggest is that even in a sphere where women enact broader embodiments and performances of gender and sexualities, such as amongst the sportscape of this football team, that gender embodiments, performances and sexualities remain ostensibly policed. Further research on women in sportscares might interrogate the ways in which such homosocial spaces reinforce the traffic of women.

Expanding on notions of the sportscape has shown how sporting landscapes generate significant affective capacity through their physical and imaginary manifestation while building on the concept of homosociality has demonstrated the potential of women's bonds to encompass a greater range than 'friend' or 'lesbian' might suggest. I propose that moving the gaze of sports sociology research beyond binary gender characterisations and dichotomies of sexual-asexual bonds offers the scope to see more than a heteronormative lens allows us to see. In this dissertation I have sought to underscore the capacity of this sportscape to encompass a broad range of gender dynamics and intragender relations that are indicative of a range of affects and subjectivities that permeate contemporary Australian culture.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

Appendix B: Consent Forms -Participants

-Participants under 18 years old

Appendix C: Explanatory Statement, Parkdale Women's Football Club

Appendix D: Explanatory Statement, Participants

# **Volunteers wanted...**

## **To participate in a research project on women's Australian Rules football.**

Forming the basis of a PhD study this research uses photography and interviews to explore issues of gender/sexuality, the body, and sport.

Anyone interested in participating in this research or wanting to know more please contact: Kellie Sanders



## Appendix B: Consent Forms: Participants; Participants under 18 years

MONASH University



Consent Form

### Women's Australian Rules football players

Title: Women's Australian Rules football and homosociality

**NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records**

I agree to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

I agree to take part in the photo-projects and provide a copy of the images to the researcher

☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to take part in a staged football training session in which photographs will be taken/created

☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher

☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to take part in a group interview with the researcher and other research volunteers

☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to allow the interviews to be audio-taped

☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to make myself available for a further interview if required

☐ Yes ☐ No

#### And

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw from the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way up until the completion of the data collection (September 2010).

#### And

I understand that I will be identifiable in the photographs collected as part of the research project and that I will be asked for consent before any of these images are printed in reports or published findings.

#### And

I understand that the photographs and data from the interviews and audio-tapes will be kept in a secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

Participant's name  
Signature

Contact number

Date



Consent Form

**Women's Australian Rules football players (parental consent for under 18's)**

Title: Women's Australian Rules football and homosociality

**NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records**

**I agree to allow \_\_\_\_\_ to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records and understand that agreeing to take part means that:**

I agree to allow my child to take part in the photo-projects and provide a copy of the images to the researcher ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to allow my child to take part in a staged football training session in which photographs will be taken/created ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to allow my child to be interviewed by the researcher ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to allow my child to take part in a group interview with the researcher and other research volunteers ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to allow these interviews to be audio-taped ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to allow my child to be available for further interviews if required ☐ Yes ☐ No

**And**

I understand that participation in this study is voluntary, and that my child can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and can withdraw from the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way up until the completion of the data collection (September 2010).

**And**

I understand that my child will be identifiable in the photographs collected as part of the research project and that I will be asked for consent before any of these images are printed in reports or published findings.

**And**

I understand that the photographs and data from the interviews and audio-tape will be kept in a secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

**Participant's name**

**Contact number**

**Parent/Guardian name**

**Parent/Guardian Signature**

**Date**

## Appendix C: Explanatory Statement, Parkdale Women's Football Club

MONASH University



### EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

12th August, 2009

#### Explanatory Statement – Parkdale Women's Football Club

Title: Women's Australian Rules football and homosociality

***This information sheet is for you to keep.***

My name is Kellie Sanders and I am conducting a research project with Dr Mary Lou Rasmussen, a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education, towards a doctorate at Monash University. This means that I will be writing a thesis which is the equivalent of a 300 page book.

#### **Why did you choose this particular person/group as participants?**

I have chosen to undertake my research with the Parkdale Women's Football Club as I have played with the Club for three years and am familiar with the players and the Club culture. Undertaking research within this team provides an element of familiarity for both the research participants and the researcher which I am hoping may provide a comfortable atmosphere for collaborating in the production of photographic images around football participation.

#### **The aim/purpose of the research**

The aim of this study is to expand on the notion of homosociality, a framework for exploring same-sex social interactions. I am conducting this research to find out how gender/sexuality, the body, and power dynamics intersect within the context of a women's Australian Rules football team, as well as how a visual methodology may offer scope for exploring the intersection of the fields of gender/sexuality, the body, and sport.

#### **Possible benefits**

The potential benefit of this study for the Club is that through dissemination of the research the profile of women's Australian Rules football and the Club may be raised.

#### **What does the research involve?**

This study involves recruiting eight volunteers from the football Club via posters hung up around the Club for a period of three weeks. With consent the following phases of research will then be undertaken:

The first phase is the photo-project phase where participants are asked to take/create photos following four broad questions and fill in a corresponding table briefly describing the image. These are known as 'photo-projects'. Following each of these photo-projects the researcher will meet with each participant individually to upload their images, provide them with the following photo-project and respond to any questions or issues that may arise.

The second phase of the research will involve the researcher taking photographs of the 'empty' football space, the football field, clubrooms, change rooms etc.

The third phase of the research will involve all of the research participants collaborating with the researcher to take part in and photograph a 'staged' training session. The objective of this session is to take photographs of players 'in action'.

The fourth phase of the research involves the researcher conducting an individual photo-interview with each participant to discuss the images that they have taken/created as part of the photo-projects and the fifth phase of the research asks all of the research participants to come together as a collective to discuss the images that were taken/created as part of the mock training session.

#### **How much time will the research take?**

This research project asks for participant's ongoing commitment throughout the football season as demonstrated in the following table:

Phase 1	April 2010	Initial meeting with researcher, briefing/questions on the research projects, distribution of cameras and first photo-project	45 minutes
		Take photos and fill in corresponding photo-project table	(2 weeks)
	May 2010	Meet with the researcher, discuss any problems/questions with the photo-project, transfer images onto laptop, and distribute photo-project 2	30 minutes
		Take photos and fill in corresponding photo-project table	(2 weeks)
	Mid-May 2010	Meet with the researcher, discuss any problems/questions with the photo-project, transfer images onto laptop, and distribute photo-project 3	30 minutes
		Take photos and fill in corresponding photo-project table	(2 weeks)
	June 2010	Meet with the researcher, discuss any problems/questions with the photo-project, transfer images onto laptop, and distribute photo-project 4	30 minutes
		Take photos and fill in corresponding photo-project table	(2 weeks)
	Mid-June 2010	Meet with the researcher, discuss any problems/questions with the photo-project, transfer images onto laptop	
Phase 2	July 2010	Arrange a mutual time with the Club to take photographs of the 'empty' football locale.	1 hour

Phase 3	July 2010	Staged training session	1-2 hours
Phase 4	August 2010	Individual photo-interview	1-2 hours
Phase 5	September 2010	Group photo-interview	1-2 hours

### **Inconvenience/discomfort**

While this research asks for a certain time commitment from the Club it anticipates a minimal level of inconvenience or discomfort. However, if the Club finds the level of involvement or impact of the study to be too great a representative is encouraged to discuss this with the researcher via telephone, email or in person in order to establish alternative involvement. Further, the Club is reminded that they can withdraw from the research at any stage with no consequences up until the completion of the data collection process (September 2010).

Should the Club feel uncomfortable about the images being taken at the Club they are encouraged to contact the researcher and discuss their concerns.

There is the risk that football commitments and research related activities may clash. In order to ensure that the Club, research participants and team mates not involved in the research are impacted as minimally as possible, all research related activities will be conducted outside of football commitments and, with the exception of the staged training session and images of the 'empty' football space, away from the football Club.

### **Payment**

There will be no payment or reward for participation in this study.

### **Can I withdraw from the research?**

Participation in this study is voluntary and the Club is under no obligation to consent to participation. However, I ask that if you do consent to participate that you withdraw prior to the completion of the data collection process (September 2010).

### **Confidentiality**

As this research involves photographs participation in the study cannot be anonymous as the Club grounds and uniforms may be identifiable in the images. However, if the Club's name wishes to be excluded from the research a pseudonym will be used in place of the Club's real name.

### **Storage of data**

Storage of the data collected will adhere to the University regulations and kept on University premises in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for 5 years. A report of the study may be submitted for publication and, due to the images, the Club may be identifiable in such a report. However if the Club chooses not to be named a pseudonym will be used in place of the Club's real name in any publications.

### **Use of data for other purposes**

The data collected in this study may be used for in other publications, for example a journal article or book chapter. Due to the photographs the Club will be identifiable in these publications. If the Club

chooses not to be named a pseudonym will be used in place of the Club's real name however, because of the photographs, the Club may still be identifiable.

#### Results

A summary report of the findings will be provided to the Club upon completion of the research project.

For further details on this please contact Kellie Sanders at [REDACTED] or

[REDACTED] The findings will be accessible for five years.

<b>If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:</b>	<b>If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research is being conducted, please contact:</b>
Mary Lou Rasmussen [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800  Tel: +61 3 9905 2052      Fax: +61 3 9905 3831 Email: <a href="mailto:muhrec@adm.monash.edu.au">muhrec@adm.monash.edu.au</a>

Thank you.

Kellie Sanders

## Appendix D: Explanatory Statement, Participants

MONASH University



### EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

12th August, 2009

#### Explanatory Statement – Women’s Australian Rules football players

**Title:** Women’s Australian Rules football and homosociality

***This information sheet is for you to keep.***

My name is Kellie Sanders and I am conducting a research project with Dr Mary Lou Rasmussen, a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education, towards a doctorate at Monash University. This means that I will be writing a thesis which is the equivalent of a 300 page book.

#### **Why did you choose this particular person/group as participants?**

I have chosen to undertake my research with the Parkdale Women’s Football Club as I have played with the Club for three years and am familiar with the players and the Club culture. Undertaking research within this particular team provides an element of familiarity for both the research participants and the researcher which I am hoping may provide a comfortable atmosphere for collaborating with the research participants in producing photographic images and conversation around football participation.

#### **The aim/purpose of the research**

The aim of this study is to expand on the notion of homosociality, a framework for exploring same-sex social interactions. I am conducting this research to find out how gender/sexuality, the body, and power dynamics intersect within the context of a women’s Australian Rules football team, as well as how a visual methodology may offer scope for exploring the intersection of the fields of gender/sexuality, the body, and sport.

#### **Possible benefits**

The benefits of this study are that women who play football are invited to express their personal thoughts on issues related to gender/sexuality, the body and sport through both visual imagery and conversation. Further, through the dissemination of the research, the community may be able to gain insight into the depth, complexity and impact of women’s Australian Rules football for those who play.

#### **What does the research involve?**

This study involves a number of phases. The first phase is the photo-project phase where participants are asked to take/create photos following four broad questions and fill in a corresponding table briefly describing the image. These are known as ‘photo-projects’. Following each of these photo-projects the researcher will meet with each participant individually to upload their images, provide them with the following photo-project and respond to any questions or issues that may arise.

The second phase of the research will involve the researcher taking photographs of the ‘empty’ football space, the football field, clubrooms, change rooms etc.

The third phase of the research will involve all of the research participants collaborating with the researcher to take part in and photograph a 'staged' training session. The objective of this session is to take photographs of players 'in action'.

The fourth phase of the research involves the researcher conducting an individual photo-interview with each participant to discuss the images that they have taken/created as part of the photo-projects and the fifth phase of the research asks all of the research participants to come together as a collective to discuss the images that were taken/created as part of the mock training session.

#### **How much time will the research take?**

This research project asks for participant's ongoing commitment throughout the football season as demonstrated in the following table:

Phase 1	April 2010	Initial meeting with researcher, briefing/questions on the research projects, distribution of cameras and first photo-project	45 minutes
		Take photos and fill in corresponding photo-project table	(2 weeks)
	May 2010	Meet with the researcher, discuss any problems/questions with the photo-project, transfer images onto laptop, and distribute photo-project 2	30 minutes
		Take photos and fill in corresponding photo-project table	(2 weeks)
	Mid-May 2010	Meet with the researcher, discuss any problems/questions with the photo-project, transfer images onto laptop, and distribute photo-project 3	30 minutes
		Take photos and fill in corresponding photo-project table	(2 weeks)
	June 2010	Meet with the researcher, discuss any problems/questions with the photo-project, transfer images onto laptop, and distribute photo-project 4	30 minutes
		Take photos and fill in corresponding photo-project table	(2 weeks)
	Mid-June 2010	Meet with the researcher, discuss any problems/questions with the photo-project, transfer images onto laptop	
Phase 3	July 2010	Staged training session	1-2 hours
Phase 4	August 2010	Individual photo-interview	1-2 hours

Phase 5	September 2010	Group photo-interview	1-2 hours
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Please note: Phase 2 does not involve research participants.

#### **Inconvenience/discomfort**

While this research asks for a certain time commitment, it anticipates a minimal level of inconvenience or discomfort. However, if you find the level of involvement in the study to be too great you are encouraged to discuss this with the researcher.

Should you feel uncomfortable discussing the images taken/created with the researcher or group of researcher participants you are reminded that you do not have to answer questions or discuss issues with which you are not comfortable. Further, please note that any communication regarding the research will not be discussed with anyone outside of the formal research procedures.

There is a risk that research participants may experience a clash of football commitments and research related activities. In order to avoid this all research related activities will be conducted outside of football commitments and, with the exception of the staged training session and images of the 'empty' football space, away from the football Club.

#### **Payment**

There will be no payment or reward for participation in this study.

#### **Can I withdraw from the research?**

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation.

However, I ask that if you do consent to participate that you withdraw prior to the completion of the data collection process (September 2010).

#### **Confidentiality**

This research involves photographs and thus participation in the study cannot be anonymous as you may be identifiable in the images. However, if you would like your name to be excluded from the research a pseudonym will be used in place of your real name.

Once the images are collated you (or your pseudonym) will be acknowledged as the photographer of the images you have taken/created and your consent will be sought to reproduce your images in any publications that arise from the research.

#### **Storage of data**

Storage of the data collected will adhere to the University regulations and be kept on University premises in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for 5 years. A report of the study may be submitted for publication and, due to the images, individual participants may be identifiable in such a report. However if you wish not to be named a pseudonym will be used in place of your real name in any publications.

#### **Use of data for other purposes**

The data collected in this study may be used for in other publications, for example a journal article or book chapter. Due to the photographs participants will be identifiable in these publications. If you choose not to be named a pseudonym will be used in place of your real name however, because of the photographs, you may still be identifiable. Further, you will be asked for permission before any images are reproduced.



## Results

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact Kellie Sanders on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. The findings will be accessible for five years.

<b>If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:</b>	<b>If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research is being conducted, please contact:</b>
Mary Lou Rasmussen [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800  Tel: +61 3 9905 2052      Fax: +61 3 9905 3831 Email: <a href="mailto:muhrec@adm.monash.edu.au">muhrec@adm.monash.edu.au</a>

Thank you.

Kellie Sanders

