

**“It’s so much better playing with all girls”:
Examining gender politics within a women-only
association football club in Melbourne**

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ABSTRACT

Women's soccer in Australia has historically been met with hostility. The Australian national women's team is more accomplished than their male counterparts in terms of performance outcomes, yet they continue to experience considerably lower financial support and inferior media focus. At the same time more girls are playing soccer compared to netball, traditionally the most popular sport for girls. Women-only soccer clubs and teams have in part facilitated the growth of women's soccer as they encourage girls and women to participate (and stay) in soccer because (as many feminist scholars have stated) women-only spaces allow the embedded power inequalities that exist within hegemonic masculine spaces to be overcome. This research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of 'female empowerment' by exploring the politics and structure of a women-only soccer club, and the lived experiences of its members. Stemming from my extensive involvement in and experience playing soccer I employed an ethnographic methodology to carry out the research. I spent two seasons 'in the field' as a player and committee member at a women-only soccer club in Melbourne conducting observations and life-history interviews. The findings reveal how the soccer players negotiate gender and the different ways in which they are, or feel, empowered through belonging to the club. The thesis contributes to the broader sociological literature on female sport and highlights the politics and paradoxes of sex-segregated sport.

STUDENT DECLARATION

"I, Aliantha Vandermey, declare that the Master by Research thesis entitled "It's so much better playing with all girls": Examining gender politics within a women-only association football club in Melbourne' is no more than 60,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FFA:	Football Federation Australia
FA:	Football Association of England
FIFA:	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (International Federation of Football Association)
FFV:	Football Federation Victoria
WNPL:	Women's National Premier League
PFA:	Professional Footballers Association
WMFC:	West Melbourne Football Club

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Crossing the Rope

June 1999

It's cold, just like every other Sunday morning at 8am, but the excitement of the day warms my bones. It is game day, and we are already at the soccer fields. In this small country town, the soccer fields on Sunday morning are the place to be. I am seven years old, and love Sunday mornings, even this early. My mother helps to get my brothers ready for their games while my sister is probably annoying them all. I get the all-important duty of helping Dad and the other fathers set up the fields. I manoeuvre rope through eyelets on sticks that separate the players from the spectators. I help carry the heavy number blocks to the scoreboard, ready for display to the crowd of parents, friends and family, showing which team is winning and which is not. I feel imperative to the success of the day with my small chores, as though I'm special, chosen for these tasks.

Once the first game begins, the day is a carnival: excited children and proud parents, cheering and whistling, winning and losing, all in the name of fun. I rarely see Dad after this, as he is coaching, refereeing and cooking the canteen BBQ. He also talks with other coaches, referees and club presidents. It makes me feel important too, knowing that *my* Dad is so busy with important things to do. I'm also busy though, so I don't mind. I watch my two brothers and two cousins play their matches, and then I play with them all on an empty field. We always want to do the scoreboard, a job that earns you a lolly from the canteen, where my Auntie works. While it is only a two-person job, sometimes we get extra lollies to share with the others, or Mum gives us a dollar to buy a bag to share. It's like we are at that field for forever, feeling as though time stands still. But before we know it, the sun is setting, the fields are being packed down by those that set them up, and we are packing our eskies and bags in the car, ready for the drive home. I love the festival feeling, and playing with my cousins and friends for the whole day. Even if we weren't physically together all day, and despite the boring talk of tactics and strategy between Dad and my uncle, who wanted to re-live every game on the way home, I cherished this family time.

I especially loved watching my twin brother's games. He was the best on the team, and I cheered for him for the whole game. I sat on the bench among the other boys and pretend to know what was going on. If I didn't talk too much, they would forget I was

there and wouldn't complain that I was annoying them. While sitting among the boys wearing their black and white striped jerseys, I couldn't understand why my twin brother was able to play this cool game, make new friends and have all this fun, and I couldn't. We were the same age, and in my mind this meant that we could do the same things. Why should he be able to do this, and not me? In this small country town, soccer teams are a mix of boys and girls, though there are always more boys than girls on the field. This didn't bother me at all, and so in my pink outfit that matched my little sister's I decided there and then that I wanted to be like my twin. I called out to my parents "next year I am going to play soccer".

And I did.

The following year, I played my first game of soccer. It seemed as though I had waited forever for this moment. While I had kicked a ball and played with my brothers and cousins, this was different. People were here to watch me. Mum and Dad cheered *my* name. With their hands cupped around their mouths, they chanted for *me*. I would urge them to stop, though smiling in delight. I am finally a soccer player. I wore a real soccer uniform, not an outfit matching my sisters. I stood with teammates, not my brother's friends. And I was on the other side of the rope.

The game that day was a frenzy of activity. Fourteen eight-year olds ran around the field, abandoning position and structure for a touch of the ball and a shot at the goal. Parents cheer for their daughters and sons, who were feeling a sense of achievement despite the chaos of the game. I left the field with a sense of pride, knowing that my parents were proud of me, my coach was pleased and I was a part of something, rather than just watching from the outside. I did not know it at the time, but this was the start of a lifelong relationship with soccer.

Eighteen years since first crossing to the other side of the rope, I still get the same butterflies I got as an eight year old. Eighteen years later I still look forward to training, and enjoy the basic drills that others find boring. I love the burning smell of deep heat on game day, and even the dirty boot odour that seems to have permeated my car. However, I also remember being seven years old, and feeling confused as to why I couldn't play soccer as my brothers did. Why did I have to ask to play, while my brothers didn't? Why would people comment 'oh she's good' in surprise when I played in a team of boys? Did they expect me not to be? And why was I often the only girl in a team of boys?

This research has developed out of my personal experiences playing soccer throughout my childhood, adolescence and now into my adulthood. In my 16 years (and counting) playing soccer, I have played in country and city competitions, playing in regional and state championships, played in teams where I was the only girl and in teams where I was one of the girls. I consider myself a competent player, yet there have been times when I have been excluded from the soccer field due to my sex.

In response to my desire to play on the male soccer team in my final year of secondary schooling, a teacher remarked; “The only way you would be able to attend is as the water girl”. The girl’s team was playing on a different day to the boy’s team, and the girl’s competition was held the same day as a mandatory excursion. This was my final chance to play on the school team. I knew that I was just as good (if not better) than most of the players on the boy’s team. I had been playing soccer for nine years at that time, and I had not been expecting this response from the physical education teacher. I knew if I attended a training session that he would change his mind, but I wasn’t given the chance at all. I was rendered speechless at this overtly exclusive stance to soccer teams, which lead me to drop out of the school soccer team in my final year.

Eighteen years later, I am back on the other side of the rope. I want to understand why I felt out of place as a girl sitting on the bench with my brother’s friends, feeling as though I should be silent. I want to question that although my mother is a strong woman, why she was outfitting the children while my father filled positions of authority? I need to know why I was often excluded from soccer in the last eighteen years purely because I am a girl, while my brother was encouraged and given more opportunity to play. I am looking at the field and the people on it through a sociological lens, in an effort to gain an in-depth understanding of the sport, the women who play it, and the gender politics of the women-only soccer club.

Contested Fields: Separatism and the Quest for Equality

Historically, sport is a pedagogy for masculinity, that emphasises a value system “that promotes and maintains sexual stereotypes” (Kane 1988, p. 88). Sport is considered a male institution where characteristics such as strength and power have been considered masculine, and favoured over traits regarded as feminine, such as grace and aesthetics (Hardin & Greer 2009; Lenskyj 1998). Men’s bodies and sporting performances have been used as a yardstick to which all sporting performances are compared, while women’s bodies and performances have become a negative reference used to mock those that cannot reach the male standard (Lenskyj 1998).

In response to the problem of institutionalised sexism, sport researchers and activists have proposed and implemented a range of strategies to empower women in and through sports, such as soccer. One example of this is legislation such as Title IX that has influenced sport and policy internationally. Other strategies include: ensuring that women's needs and values are represented in sport through initiatives such as the 'Women's International Sports Movement' (Hargreaves 1999), as well as providing spaces in which only women can participate in sport, such as sex segregated gyms, single-sex schools, and women-only sports teams or clubs. This last particular strategy follows what gender theorists call separatism; a "belief that women will develop their own strengths only if separated by male institution" (Humm 2003, p. 257). This particular strategy is not specific as to whether the space must have a separatist committee or board, or operate within a separatist organisation. Most, if not all sports, compete in separatist leagues within organisations that cater for men's and women's sports. For example, women compete only against other women in the women's soccer leagues under the state federations within Football Federation Australia (FFA), but may exist in a club, and are registered with state and national governing bodies that coordinate and govern both men's and women's soccer. In this way, the competition is separate, but the authority is not, and coupled with the application of gender relations (Connell 2009), I argue that preference in these spaces is given to those that govern them. While some call for "further academic inquiry into the effects of gender integrating sports", there is similarly little investigation of separatist spaces, such as women-only sport clubs (Anderson 2008, p. 276).

Women-Only Spaces

To be critical of women-only spaces, I must first be clear by what I mean by a 'women-only space'. Broadly, these spaces are physical or emotional spaces that are occupied only by women. Within sport, a women-only team can be an example of a women-only space, even though they exist within a larger, mixed-gender organisational structure. A women-only club is another example, where the club exists to provide a service only to women. Typically, these spaces are classified as being created by women, for women, and maintained by women, and they may or may not have men involved in supporting roles. They are spaces "voluntarily occupied by women and not instances of gender segregation... socially sanctioned by men" (Power 2008, p. 1).

Women-only sporting spaces have become a phenomenon worldwide. Women-only gyms have increased in popularity, promising a safe and empowering environment for women to exercise (Ostgaard 2006). Similarly, women-only sporting clubs cater for the

needs of women, allowing women to experience sport in an environment that prioritises their engagement. Anderson (2008) contends that sex-segregation in sports may not be beneficial, likening them to men-only spaces, where “there are no women to contest these narrow understandings [of women] as sex objects and devalued as athletes” (p. 274). The actual effects of these spaces on the experiences of women in sport and on sporting structures are yet to be examined. There has been little research determining the number of as well as analysing women-only spaces as well as why women create and use these spaces. Further, “we don't really know how women benefit (or not) by having access to such spaces” (Power 2008, p. 325). I therefore question whether women-only spaces truly empower and support women, or if they “replicate hegemonically-defined masculinity and femininity” as seen in men's or mixed-gender sporting spaces (Ostgaard 2006, p. 2). The extent to which women-only sporting spaces are paradoxical for equality, whereby they exclude men and reinforce institutionalised sexism that marginalises women's sports and others them, will be examined.

Research Aim

The aim of this thesis is to explore the effects of sex-segregated sport on the empowerment of women within the context of a women-only soccer club. In particular, I question whether sex segregation offers more opportunities for empowering women in and through sport, whether the effects may be more problematic than previously conceptualised?

Empowerment is defined by Page and Czuba (1999) as a

Multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power ... in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important.

Empowerment can be understood as “women's ‘power to’ create new opportunities and identities which are not automatically or uncritically prescribed by traditional gender norms” (Raisborough & Bhatti 2007, p. 463). Further, empowerment can also be both a positive outcome and part of the resistance process (Shaw 2001).

In order to explore female empowerment in, and through, soccer I have employed an ethnographic methodology. I spent two seasons 'in the field' as a player and committee member at a women-only soccer club in Melbourne conducting observations and life-history interviews. I sought to understand the extent to which this particular group of women have experienced increased and continued access to sporting spaces previously

denied them, autonomy in their decisions to participate in sport, and enhanced perception of their ability to perform tasks that challenge gendered expectations through their membership and participation in a women's only soccer club.

Thesis Outline

Women's soccer* has historically been met with hostility. Women in England were encouraged to play during the Great War years to improve their health, extending their role as 'temporary men' from the workforce onto the soccer field (Brennan 2007). However, in 1921 the Football Association of England (The FA) placed a ban on women's participation, claiming soccer has masculinising effects on women and was dangerous to the reproductive system (The FA 2009). This ban was not lifted until the 1970s. Similarly, soccer in Brazil was not available to women until 1971 (Knijnik & Horton 2013). In Chapter Two I discuss women's soccer from local and global perspectives, focusing on particular inequalities within women's soccer. I conclude by stating that there is a lack of research in the women-only space, despite the increase in their prevalence and popularity. This project utilises an ethnographic methodology, focusing on one women-only soccer club in Melbourne.

In Chapter Three I describe the process of selecting this club and recruiting participants for interviews, before illustrating how I collected and analysed interview and observational data. I also demonstrate my involvement with the club, providing a snapshot of the hours I spent in the different roles I occupied within the club. I conclude this chapter detailing the ethical safeguards taken to ensure this project complies with the appropriate ethical procedures, protecting myself the researcher as well as the participants.

Chapter Four contextualises the site of the ethnography, placing the club within its broader community and the competition structure in which it competes. I describe how the club was formed and some biographical details about the club during the time of the ethnography, such as information about the members, committee, coaching staff and the clubhouse. A short biography of each player interviewed is provided at the end of this

*Note: throughout this thesis, I will refer to association football by both its formal name, 'football', and its Australian name 'soccer'. Where other football codes are discussed, their formal names will be used.

chapter, giving some contextual background information about these women before the findings are presented in Chapter Five.

The findings of the interview and observation data are organised according to four major themes, and are presented in Chapter Five. These themes emerged from the data, as they were present in each of the participants' life histories. These themes are gendered bodies in sport, barriers and enablers of women participating in sport, the women-only space and empowerment through this space. While I expected each of these themes to be present in the data due to their prevalence in previous research, I was not expecting the diversity in the types of empowerment experienced by the women, and the extent to which women felt both empowered and empowering in this space.

In Chapter Six, I review the results and discussion of the interview and observation data, where I place my findings within the current scope of literature regarding women's sporting experiences, women's soccer and the women-only space. I question the ability of the women-only space to contribute to gender equality; does it operate within a 'bubble' that reproduces dominant masculine ideology, while reinforcing men as natural athletes and leaders to those within and outside of the space, or does it provide women with a refuge in which they gain knowledge and confidence, before challenging broader social issues?

In the final chapter, I present my conclusions, providing some recommendations for future research, and identifying limitations present within the current project. I reiterate that the women-only space is an under-researched area, presenting many unanswered questions surrounding the ability of the space to empower the women within and outside them, and the influence that the presence of these spaces has on broader social issues surrounding gender and equality.

CHAPTER TWO

Exploring Women in Soccer

Historically, women's attempts to play soccer were often met with hostility and oppression (Downes, Syson & Hay 2015; Harris 2001; Williams 2016). Women's entrance into the workforce during the Great War marked a time of increasing numbers entering the women's game. This increase in soccer participation has been attributed to women's heightened financial independence (Downes, Syson & Hay 2015), the boost to reinforce women as 'temporary men' during war times (Simkin 2014), the lack of a male league and the encouragement women received from their workplaces to play for health reasons (Brennan 2007). However, women's involvement in soccer was short-lived. In 1921 the FA placed a ban on women playing soccer in England that was not lifted until the 1970s (The FA 2009), effectively hindering the progress that women's soccer had made during the war years and stimulated their international participation (Brennan 2007; Harris 2001). Women's involvement in soccer was considered irritating and unwanted, and comparable to gambling, cheating and commercialism (Williams 2016). Reasons for the ban included medical advice from doctors, male and female, that denounced "the masculinising effects of the game and the dangers of strenuous exercise to women's reproductive systems" (Vertinsky 2008, p. 174). Further, upon the return of the men to England from the war, women were no longer required to take men's roles as they had while they were absent, including in the workplace and on the soccer field. Women were subsequently banned from playing soccer. Soccer as a 'man's thing' is not restricted to Western cultures. In Brazil, a law existed until 1979 that banned women from playing competitive soccer. In 2001, the Football Federation of Sao Paulo organised a soccer tournament, advertising that "only the 'beautiful ones' could play" (Knijnik & Horton 2013, p. 60). Hargreaves (1994) and Harris (2001) note that while women's soccer is seen as a recent advance, there is evidence of women playing soccer in England as far back as the Victoria era. Women's involvement and achievements in sport, generally, and soccer, specifically, are often forgotten, ignored and minimised.

Women's achievements in sport have historically been ignored or not publicised, despite (and perhaps due to the fact that) many of their successes are more prestigious than that of their male counterparts. For example, Lily Parr is noted as one of the best goal scorers in England's soccer history- male or female (Owen 2014). Her goal count exceeds 1000 in her 31 year career with the Dick, Kerr Ladies team. However, her efforts were not inducted into the National Football Museum's Hall of Fame until 2002 (National Football Museum n.d.; Owen 2014). Inequalities in achievement recognition are also

seen in Australia in more contemporary times. The 2010 Australian women's national soccer team, the Matildas, won the Asian Football Confederation championship, marking "the first time a national team from Australia, male or female, had achieved success at this level", yet "recognition of the women's game... still lags well behind the men's game in public exposure, as do many other sports in Australia where women are high achievers" (Downes, Syson & Hay 2015, p. 1). Reasons for lack of support by men of the women's game include protection from their exploitation by commercial organisations, fears that women would "bring the game into disrepute or that they might use playing a male sport as part of a broader campaign for social, political and economic equality" (Downes, Syson & Hay 2015, p. 4). Early emergences of the women's game in Australia were "regularly extinguished by the clichés of patriarchal concern" (Downes, Syson & Hay 2015, p. 4). Nevertheless, the women's game emerged throughout Australia despite these deterrents, often as acts of resistance.

Participation as Resistance

Hollander (2002, p. 475) defines gender resistance as "acts of opposition to conventional gender expectations or beliefs". Acts of resistance may be unintentional, such as a single father performing feminine nurturing tasks for his children, or intentionally challenging, such as a woman entering a traditionally masculine workplace. Whether the resistance is intentional or not, Hollander (2002) asserts that gender resistance has occurred. Sport is identified as a place where gender resistance occurs (Deutsch 2007; Hollander 2002; Knijnik 2015).

Women's participation in soccer presents a contradiction, whereby women are actively colluding in, and visibly challenging, male hegemony in football" (Harris 2001, p. 22). Women's involvement in soccer represents both freedom and constraint, where women have gained access to a space that is dominated by and reinforces masculine values (Jeanes 2011). Further, while women participating in soccer challenge sport as exclusively male, women in these spaces continue to feel compelled to "legitimise their participation by constructing an idealized feminine appearance away from the pitch" (Jeanes 2011, p. 404) (see also Cox & Thompson 2000 and Harris 2002). For example, in Brazil, soccer is a pinnacle of hegemonic masculinity, where women resist this narrative and fight to play, or conform to normative femininity to be acceptable within broader society, where gender norms are strict (Knijnik 2015).

While girls playing soccer is considered more acceptable today, Jeanes (2011, p. 402) finds that the way that girls play is "heavily restricted by traditional notions of femininity".

Young (1988, p. 266) argues for three “contradictory modalities of feminine bodily experience” in which women “literally embody their disempowered and inferior social status” (Wedgwood 2004, p. 140). The first, ambiguous transcendence, refers to women limiting the amount of space they occupy, keeping their limbs close to their body, even when playing sport. The second, discontinuous unity, involves women abstaining to use their whole body in a task. In most sports, performance is often heightened when these two modalities are avoided. In an Australian Rules football study, Wedgwood (2004) found that girls avoided physical contact and other aggressive behaviours, such as challenging the ball and tackling, as these were perceived as inappropriate to their gender roles, even while necessary for the sport. Similar performances are found in soccer, where girls are reluctant to physically challenge another player for the ball, or do not ‘follow through’ when kicking the ball, a technique used to achieve long-distance passes (Jeanes 2011). The third and final modality refers to women assuming they cannot complete a task, often before attempting them, particularly tasks involving power and skill.

Underrepresentation and Inequality

Gender inequality among governing bodies is present within soccer (Claringbould & Knoppers 2008; Clark 2011; Hong & Mangan 2003). Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the international governing body for soccer, is rife with gender inequalities among its committees. Of the 15 members of the 2010 Committee for Women’s Football and the FIFA Women’s World Cup, both the chairperson and deputy chairperson were male and nine out of 13 of the other members were female (Clark 2011). Improvements in the gendered make-up of the FIFA committees are observable by looking at the same committee for 2016, where both the chairperson and deputy chairperson are female and 17 out of 20 of the other members are female (FIFA 2016a). However, it is clear that committees with no gendered focus are dominated by men, creating and reinforcing the assumption that women are only qualified to manage women’s sport. The 2010 FIFA Executive Committee had no women in any of the 25 positions (Clark 2011), and in 2016 five women held positions in the 33 available roles. Of those roles, women were absent from all presidential roles (FIFA 2016b). While FIFA have employed strategies to help increase the number of women on their boards, committees and councils (FIFA 2016c), women continue to dominate women’s committees, and remain absent from the broader soccer discussion. Women’s elite and professional soccer has indeed come a long way since the inaugural FIFA Women’s World Cup of 1991, only twenty-some years after bans on women’s soccer was lifted in

England (Brennan 2007), and since women's soccer in Australia started to gain public acceptance (Downes, Syson & Hay 2015). Women's professional and grassroots soccer has advanced exponentially, yet has enhanced the visibility of gender inequalities existing in soccer nationally and internationally.

The FIFA Women's World Cup offers a site where gender inequalities are addressed and acknowledged on an international stage and gender inequalities are exposed (Zirin 2015). Clark (2011, p. 835) examines the 2010 FIFA World Cup specifically, as an example of the "perpetuation of the dominant hegemonic masculinity within football", noting that while the

hegemony is not static and is being challenged... it is maintained by the reinforcement of gender roles, through the types of positions dominated as well as the amount and content of media coverage.

While some argue the tournament reinforces hegemonic masculinity, others note its potential for challenging male dominance and promoting positive change (Hong & Mangan 2003; Knez, Benn & Alkhaldi 2014; LeFeuvre, Stephenson & Walcott 2013). Women's soccer progression follows men's soccer in most, if not all countries. The existence of women's soccer in Qatar was well behind that of the men's, with the women's national team non-existent until 2010 when Qatar was announced as the hosts of the 2022 men's World Cup. This means that women did not participate in any of the seven FIFA Women's World Cups since 1991, or 18 of the Women's Asian Cups since 1975, and did not have a national women's competition until 2012, which today hosts seven teams (Doha News 2014; Knez, Benn & Alkhaldi 2014). Despite its slow progression, there are many examples of women's soccer being more successful than men's in terms of national achievements. The Chinese national women's team were particularly successful during the 1980s and 1990s, winning the Asian Cup and Asian Games ten times between 1986-1999, winning silver at the 1996 Olympic Games, and placing second at the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup (Hong & Mangan 2003). The female soccer players were so revered in China that they were used to inspire the men's national team to qualify for the 2002 World Cup. This was all done without private funding, as the Chinese Football Association were already sponsoring three men's teams, and while they wanted to increase the standard of women's soccer in China, they were unable to offer a budget (Hong & Mangan 2003).

Using FIFA/Coca Cola world rankings*, as shown in Table 1, many countries report a more successful women's team, particularly Sweden, Australia and Japan, who are placed in the top 10 for the women's rankings, but the men's team are currently places in the bottom 10 out of 50 rankings.

Table 1: *FIFA Men's and Women's World Rankings, May 2017*

Men's Top 10 Rankings			Women's Top 10 Rankings		
Country	Men's Rank	Women's Rank	Country	Women's Rank	Men's Rank
Brazil	1	9	Germany	1	3
Argentina	2	**	USA	2	23
Germany	3	1	France	3	6
Chile	4	**	England	4	14
Colombia	5	22	Canada	5	109
France	6	3	Sweden	6	34
Belgium	7	23	Japan	7	44
Portugal	8	38	Australia	8	50
Switzerland	9	16	Brazil	9	1
Spain	10	13	Korea DPR	10	115

** Inactive for more than 18 months and therefore not ranked

Further, there are 18 nations with a women's team in the top 50, but do not have a men's team in the top 50. Thirty-five nations have a women's team that outrank the men's team, 29 of which outrank the men by 10 or more positions (FIFA 2017a; b). However, there is still a clear sex discrepancy in some countries, where eight nations have a men's team in the top 50, with no ranked women's team (2 of which are in the top 10). Only nine nations have men's and women's teams within 10 rankings of each other, where they

*The FIFA/Coca-Cola world ranking is a status system where points contribute to a number, which is assigned to a country to represent their position compared to all other national teams. Rankings move based on team performance against other national teams, with points dependent on the difference between two competing teams' ranks, and the level of competition. The rankings are used to compare national teams, and to allocate teams into pools for international tournaments, such as the FIFA World Cup and FIFA Women's World Cup.

are both in the top 50 rankings. The Australian women's team made Australian soccer history when they made it through the first round of the knock-out Round of 16 in the 2015 Cup, a feat never achieved before in Australian soccer by men or women. The Australian women's national team, the Matildas are currently ranked 8th in the world (FIFA 2017a) while the men's national team, the Socceroos, are ranked 50th (FIFA 2017b). Nevertheless, women's soccer trails behind men's in terms of media coverage, funding, facilities, participation numbers and public reception.

The Australian Context

Despite origins of the Australian women's game in dating pre-20th century, the documentation of women's soccer in Australia has been neglected, as has the documentation of women's soccer internationally (Downes, Syson & Hay 2015). Existing histories of women's soccer in Australia note the slow progression of the women's game, with male custodians "[alternating] between ignoring the women's game altogether and attempts to squash or hinder its progress when it seemed to be developing an independent momentum" (Downes, Syson & Hay 2015, p. 2). These documentations also communicate that while women's soccer has "come a long way... discrimination against and marginalisation of women within the male football culture still persists" (p. 2).

While men historically have dominated the game, women have struggled to be seen as naturally associated with soccer. This is also true for soccer and its perception of an Australian sport. Australians have historically and contemporarily viewed soccer as an un-Australian game. Hay (1994) breaks this perception down into three stages. In the first stage, soccer in Australia is a migrant sport, part of the country's colonial baggage, and therefore seen as 'British football'. The second stage is during and following mass migration into Australia from (particularly) European countries, whereby it was nicknamed 'Wogball' due to the heavy presence of European migrants in the game. Finally, soccer in Australia and internationally is now called the 'world game' due to its global presence. Soccer in Australia is not considered a local game in any of these stages; rather, it is opposed, as women's involvement has been opposed. Soccer is currently the dominant football code nationally, and the most popular sport for girls aged 6-13 years (Roy Morgan Research 2015; Westbury 2015). While participation in soccer is evidently rising in Australia, gender inequalities prevail.

Governing Australian Women's Soccer

In the last four years, FFA, FIFA and state governments have established policies and programs to increase women's and girls' involvement in soccer in Australia, at all levels of participation and management. In 2014, FFA and FIFA announced they were allocating \$536,000 towards Women's and Girls Development Programs, including creating nine positions within Australia's state and national football federations "responsible for the growth and engagement of women and girls in football" (Football Federation Victoria (FFV) 2014) and establish a Female Coaches Mentor Program aimed providing support to current female coaches, and attracting new female coaches.

In 2015, FFV created the Women in Football Network, established to support women in soccer regardless of their role. FFA also introduced the Women's Football Development Guide, providing clubs with information about how to maintain and expand their female membership. In late 2015, the Victorian Government introduced Change Our Game, and initiative aimed at increasing women's and girls' involvement in sport within a 5 year timeline. FFV is one of the nine partner organisations implementing the strategies proposed by this initiative (Change Our Game 2015).

In 2016, FFA and all of the state bodies launched Female Football Week, an initiative coinciding with International Women's Day to increase the number of women involved in soccer in both playing and non-playing capacities. The 2016 event also ran in conjunction with the launch of the Women's National Premier League (WNPL), as well as programs such as Fit Football, Miniroos, mother's social football and discounted coaching and refereeing courses for women.

Professional Footballers Australia (PFA) created a roadmap in early 2017, to create and track pathways for young women in Australia to enter elite and professional soccer (PFA 2017a). More recently, Melbourne City FC, working with the FFA and FFV Women's and Girls Development Officers, hosted a series of Melbourne City Challenges in 2017, where young female footballers were invited to attend a series of workshops in which they discussed and addressed some leading barriers to women's and girls' participation in soccer. Further, FFA announced Australia would be bidding to host the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2023, with Victoria set to host many of the games in Melbourne (FFV 2017). The most recent achievement of these collective programs and strategies is the salary increase and introduction of minimum wage for professional Australian women soccer players, with the expectation of salary increased in the near future (PFA 2017b). The agreement also ensures that women playing professional soccer are financially

supported by their clubs during injury, illness and parenting responsibilities, where before they were not. Since FFA and FIFA began promoting and increasing the women's soccer program in 2014, increased funding and opportunities have been experienced at all levels of participation.

Most recently, September 2017 saw the Matildas play Brazil to two sell-out crowds, one of which broke the attendance record for that stadium. Myths about people not wanting to watch women's soccer are falsified by the attendance of more than 30,000 people to two friendly matches, which pushed Australia into the number 5 position on the FIFA rankings. While the recent success of the Matildas has created a frenzy of interest about the national women's team, there are still many inequalities that exist between men and women's soccer, both nationally and internationally.

Women's Empowerment Through Sport?

Gender inequalities exist within soccer because men's and women's soccer are not equally valued (Cress & Hart 2009). I argue that these inequalities are evident where men and women are sharing resources, or operating within the same sporting space, such as media and sport governance. The outcome of women and men not sharing these spaces and resources is unknown, with little research examining women's sport in a space that is reserved for women. Despite the overwhelming amount of research invested into understanding, analysing and critiquing women's sporting identities (e.g. Bryson 1987; Cahn 1993; Dunning 1986; Gill 2007;; Guérandel & Mennesson 2007; Jones 2008; Kane & Disch 1993; Palmer 2015; Pope 2012), there is relatively little research done to understand women's sporting identities or experiences free of comparison to men, masculinity and male-dominant spaces, as well as in spaces that are dominated by women. The ability of these spaces to empower women, as well as their role in promoting gender quality and equity, is unknown.

In this thesis, women are said to have experienced empowerment through increased and continued access to sporting spaces previously denied them, autonomy in their decisions to participate in sport, and enhanced perception of their ability to perform tasks that challenge gendered expectations. While previous research suggests that sport can be a site for the empowerment of women (Blinde, Taub & Han 1993; 1994; Hämäläinen 2014; Hargreaves 1994; Sveinson & Hoeber 2016), the way in which empowerment manifests and is observed in a women-only space is under-researched.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Due to the limited amount of research investigating women-only soccer clubs and women-only spaces in general, a qualitative methodology was adopted for this thesis. In order to critique the gender politics of sex-segregated sports and obtain detailed accounts of the lived experiences of women within a soccer club, fieldwork was the best approach to studying the experiences of women in these spaces. Therefore, an ethnographic methodology was adopted, and data was collected through participant observation and interviews. The focus of this method of research is on understanding what is happening in the field, and analysing the meanings people ascribe to their thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviours, as well as how these meanings are understood and expressed by the individual and society more generally (Atkinson & Hammersley 1994; Brewer 2000; Burgess 1984; Gernsten 2013). Ethnography accounts for the social world not being reducible to something that can simply be observed, but as something that is “created or recreated, perceived and interpreted by people themselves” (Brewer 2000, p. 34). Gill (2008, p. 93) acknowledges

this is achieved through the active participation of the researcher in this world, and subsequently, the reporting of this engagement. As such the researcher describes the social world as he/she sees it, having become a member himself.

Choosing a Club, Recruiting Participants

I began my master's journey with a simple question: how did Australian women experience soccer? There was a lot of information about women in the Americas and Europe, as well as media attention of female athletes and of large sporting events. But I could not find much information about Australian soccer, barring some historical information buried in books and articles about general Australian soccer history. My interest was driven mostly by my own experience in soccer. I played soccer for seven years in regional Australia, before moving to Melbourne and playing in metropolitan competitions. My own experiences in soccer differed greatly from regional to metropolitan competitions, from sex-segregated teams to mixed-sex teams, and from representative to grassroots levels of competition. I knew that women's experiences of playing soccer in Australia did not follow a single narrative, and that my experience in this space allowed me access to the means of discovering these different stories (Patton 2002).

Ethnographies rely on the researcher being 'in the field', and due to my experience it also seemed prudent for me to be 'on the field' as well. So, I needed to select a club. I had played at the same club for seven years in Melbourne before taking a year off. I wanted to join a new club, not only for the purposes of this project, but due to philosophical differences I had with club procedure; they believed that men's soccer was more important than women's. To find a new club, I thought about what type of club I should consider. From my experience, clubs with teams in the higher levels of competition were much more competitive and serious about soccer than those with teams in the lower levels of competition. This also meant that the experiences of the women in these spaces would be different. I knew I was more than capable of successfully gaining access to teams in the lower levels of competition, but was not so confident in gaining access to clubs that were more advanced. I decided that I needed to find a club that hosted a team in a level that I was comfortable competing in. I sent emails and made calls to five different clubs that were located conveniently to me, and had teams in divisions that I felt comfortable playing in. Of these five clubs, only one club responded, saying that I should attend their open day at the start of the season, and begin training with them. After attending the open day, I learned that West Melbourne Football Club (henceforth referred to as WMFC) was a women-only club, formed after separating from a mixed-sex club for the same reasons I left my own previous club. The club's philosophy was very much aligned with my own, and I began to structure my research question to align with these values. My research question evolved from a vague investigation into women's experiences in soccer, to an ethnographic exploration of a women-only soccer club, to better understand gender politics of women-only spaces. Therefore, while the club was not selected due to its political position, its politics informed the foundation and justification of this thesis.

The selection process for participant recruitment for interviews was structured around three selection criteria; the participants must be 18 years and older, be able to understand and communicate freely in English and were a playing member of the selected women's soccer club. Despite advertising for participants on the club's social media pages and through flyers on the club noticeboard in the club house, I received little interest from club members. Further, when players informed me of their interest in participating, some were unable to commit to interview times. Some of the participants were approached, due to their experience (or lack thereof) in soccer, as I attempted to create a sample of women of different ages and with different levels of experience within soccer. Due to the diversity of the club, this was important to gain an overall account of the club.

Summary of Club Involvement

This project had an observation period of two soccer seasons from 2015-2016. Each season consisted of 18 competition rounds during the season, two lots of two hour training sessions per week during the season, three months of pre-season training and practice matches, as well as social events and activities before, during and after the season. During my time at the club, I played for one of the senior teams, volunteered my time at the canteen and other fundraising activities, coached the junior team to substitute the coach who was on maternity leave, and joined the club's committee for the second season as responsible for fundraising activities and grant applications. It was easy to become very involved with this club, and this positively influenced the amount and type of data I was able to collect. Due to the level of my involvement, I have had the experiences of being a new player, a returning player, a volunteer, a coach, a friend and a committee member with the club. Each of these types of experiences or observations contributes to the overall picture of the club, and makes for a more comprehensive analysis through collecting many different stories.

Data Collection: The Observant Participant

Ethnographic participant observation involves "observation of people in their natural social environment" (Brewer 2000, p. 59), and requires some level of involvement with the participants. Moeran (2007, pp. 4-5) describes participant observation where:

The researcher finds herself closely involved – participating in and observing – the everyday lives of a particular set of actors or informants... participant observation obliges the fieldworker to take into account all aspects of a particular community of people. It thus enables her to synthesise disparate and apparently disconnected observations into an integrated whole, and thereby to arrive at a holistic interpretation or construct of the social or cultural form under study.

This personal involvement not only allowed me as the researcher to observe and understand my participants, but to study my own reactions and changes through my engagement with the participants. This method of data collection acknowledges the researcher's central role in the interpretation and collection of data, and does not present data as "external stimuli unaffected by the intervention of participant observers" (Brewer 2000, p. 59). In this way, the researcher becomes the main research instrument, used in conjunction with methods of data collection.

The importance of the insider-outsider status is often debated amongst ethnographers. 'Insider' status refers to the researcher's ability to connect with their participants, identify with them and become accepted into the group in order to be able to observe and understand them. However, a certain level of professional distance, or 'outsider' status, must also be upheld (Brewer 2000). Some ethnographers, such as Atkinson & Coffey (2003), note the importance of maintaining a balance between these practices, while others such as Burgess (1984) point out that a researcher's insider/ outsider status changes throughout the observation, as well as with different groups or individuals. The terms 'insider' and 'outsider' have become polarised approaches in ethnographic literature, buoyed by the notion that only insiders can ensure an "authentic account" (Allen 2004, p. 15), and only outsiders can avoid bias and 'going native', both of which are problematic. However, these ideas seem particularly important to ethnographers when describing moments of distress, as a means of regaining professional control. Leigh (2014) notes that during a time when she felt as though she was losing control, she knew "as a researcher, [she] also had to 'get a grip' and understand what was happening and why" (p. 436). Similarly, Paulle (2013) emphasised his need for a day off following a stressful ordeal, as he felt too strained to continue the following day professionally, both as a teacher and as a researcher. Following these researchers and the work of Burgess (1984), I considered myself always both an insider and outsider within the club, acknowledging that these statuses are not mutually exclusive.

Moeran (2007) and Becker and Geer (1957) discuss observant participation as the ideal method of observation to which all ethnographic researchers should aspire. Importance is placed on the researcher in this method, where I become involved in the activities of the participants, and can study their attitudes, behaviours and beliefs through their lived experiences and everyday activities, as well as my own reactions and participation in the space. Moeran (2007) continues to emphasise the importance of observant participation as a way to ensure that collected data is valid. Simple observation methods can result in participants behaving in a particular way, during the study, yet act differently when the study has finished. This researcher effect can be reduced, if not removed, by the researcher remaining present long-term, and becoming an observant participant with "the ability to see beyond the social front that informants present to strangers in their everyday lives" (Moeran, 2007, p. 14).

Participant observation offers the researcher the unique opportunity to experience the everyday activities of the groups or people that they are researching, where I as the researcher was able to examine my embodied responses in the field. For example, Leigh

(2014) discusses her fearful experience as a social worker in a company where there was rumour of mass dismissal, describing the situation as being, like her colleagues, “just as consumed by the panic and the paranoia that was circulating swiftly around the office” (p. 436). Paulle (2013, pp. 96-97) also describes a moment after a confronting ordeal:

Hours later I was still feeling the aftereffects of the ordeal as I walked out of the main exit to collect the shelter-providing vehicle... While still reeling, I finally began feeling safe only when I was inside the car and had locked all the doors with the flip of a switch.

In these examples, the ethnographers describe and highlight moments of intense emotions, where they are consumed by the panic and fear that their participants are also subjected to. This allows them to experience and reflect on those moments systematically and academically, analysing the experiences not only within the context in which they occur, but also the impact that it has on them, the individual. Using the observant participant method, I was able to make real connections and relationships, and examine them from an insider’s perspective. I am on the field, in the change rooms, at the social events, winning and losing with the team, and embodying what it is like to be a club member and player in the space I am researching. Observation notes were vital in recording these experiences, interactions and observations in the field.

Taking Observation Notes

Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995), define fieldnotes as “accounts *describing* experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating in an intense and involved manner” (pp. 4-5; italics in original). The process of taking observation notes is further depicted as writing down “in regular, systematic, ways what [the researcher] observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of life of others... accumulating written record of these observations and experiences” (p. 1). I took direction from Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) in the way I create my fieldnotes from their systematic ‘how-to’ book, that they note as being overdue in a body of literature that places much importance on fieldnotes, yet little attention on how to take them, and what they should include.

As suggested by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995), within 24 hours of training sessions, games and social gatherings, I made field notes to be reflected upon at a later stage. This means I may have been writing in my car after spending two hours running around the field, or after playing a game in between canteen shifts. These notes were not complete and comprehensive, so some time was spent either that afternoon or the following day building upon the brief notes I made while sitting in the cold car, waiting for

the engine to warm up. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) note that elaboration and some interpretation within fieldnotes is important to ensure the meaning of the interaction is preserved. Organising my fieldnotes was thus essential for me when I needed to reflect on past observations, so I knew what was said or seen, what the intended or interpreted message was, and the context in which it was said or observed. It was also important to keep what was said and done separate from my in-field interpretations, so that the analyses were made from the original meanings.

The observation timeline ran over the two years of this project. My first year as a player and club member allowed me to create and consolidate relationships with key gatekeepers within the club, and 'find my feet' within the formal and social structures of the club and the teams. Few notes were kept during this first year, mainly consisting of first impressions and some memorable moments for later discussion. During the second year, field notes were kept following most training sessions, games and social events for the year 2016. Some examples of noteworthy records include basic information, such as location, weather, dates and times, the activity and people present. Specific examples data includes attire, general conversation topics, attitudes, feelings and beliefs expressed, as well as my own reactions to these exchanges. Field notes were either orally recorded or hand written, before being typed on a computer. All original and typed copies of these records were stored securely by the researcher. The observation notes exceeded 11,000 words in total.

Life History Interviews

Life history interviews are self-presented autobiographical accounts of particular life experiences (Burgess 1984). The interview questions are open and general, allowing the participant to discuss particular topics very broadly, before becoming more specific where the researcher focuses on particular topics that are raised by the participant. While life histories can include dairies, letters, autobiographies and interviews, only the latter was used in this project to collect data. This type of data collection method is also called oral histories, as the data is in the format of a recorded interview, rather than a written document (Berg 2004).

"In life history research, researchers study and analyse how people talk about their lives, their experiences, events in life and the social context they inhabit" (Germeten 2013, p. 612). Life history interviews offer participants the opportunity to "reflect on and recall their lives over time" (Bornat & Bytheway 2012, p. 292). This information allows the researcher to contextualise the responses given in the interview regarding topics that are relevant

to the research project. For example, Bornat and Bytheway (2012) were able to learn about their participants' current aging process and family life through the participants' reflections on their past. While this individual advantage is available to participants of oral history interviews, these stories are also valuable to the 'bigger picture' history that is often missed in the analysis of historical documents alone. Samuel (1975 cited in Berg 2004, p. 246), notes that history is often written from the vantage of those in power, and thus only one perspective of the past is learned. Germeten (2013) identifies women as part of those who historically "have not been able or permitted to tell their life stories to society" (p. 613), making their stories vital to holistic 'truths'. Using oral histories, missing information about a particular event, moment or time can be learned and recorded, filling in historical knowledge gaps. In the same way, women's lived experiences in soccer can be told from the perspective of women involved in soccer. Further, this method is advantageous for me as the ethnographer, as the interview process enables me to discuss interactions and conversations I witnessed during my participant observations. This offered me an opportunity to reflect on and member-check my observation notes for errors, as well as discuss particular encounters in more detail. Life histories gained through interviews is the most appropriate method for this project. While life histories can also be gathered through studying documents, oral histories are the most suitable ethnographic method to collect life histories.

Berg (2004) notes the benefits of life histories in analysing voices of ordinary people, and while written documents can be a source of analysis to gather life histories, oral life histories have the added benefit of analysing spoken word, and non-verbal cues during the interview. Using life history interviews, attention can be given to how the story was told, what language used and any non-verbal behaviour displayed by the participants. I am able to note if the participant is excited when discussing a particular topic, or withdrawn, indicating they find the topic uncomfortable, and I should move on or rephrase the question. These situations rely on the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. Burgess (1991) emphasises the importance of the researcher developing friendships and positive relationships with the interviewees to help "[facilitate] entry to groups that would otherwise have been difficult to enter... [provide] access to a different range of perspectives on [the setting]" and encourage more people to want to be interviewed (p. 51). Adler and Adler (2003) also note that ethnographers are in a favourable situation whereby they have already established rapport with their participants through continued contact and trust. My position as a participant observer means I have already established rapport and I can more easily approach sensitive topics (Adler & Adler 2003).

Ethnographic interviews provide the researcher with an advantage, where I have already gained trust and established rapport with my participants before approaching potential interviewees. While rapport can be established using different methods, Holt and Sparkes (2001) note the importance of insider status as helpful in gaining trust, where the researcher is recognised as 'one of them', due to his race and knowledge of the setting. Similarly, McDonald used his experience and knowledge of rowing to gain access to a rowing club in Japan, as did Sylvester with Kendo (McDonald & Sylvester 2014). For this project, my status as a female soccer player and my experience playing soccer in many different levels and locations gives me useful insider status, and I am recognised as part of the group. This status allows me to easily build relationships within the club, and this style of ethnography would be impossible if I were a man. Further, while my age is younger than the average player at the club, I am not the youngest, and do not see this as an inhibiting factor. In fact, this may positively influence the interview process, as I can present myself from the perspective of an outsider, in that I do not know what it is like to grow up playing soccer in Melbourne with the challenges and barriers they may have faced, in a time that was different to my own, nor do I have experience entering a sport in my mid-20s. While building trust and rapport is important, the interview structure is also important to ensure that I get the right information from my interviewees, in terms of answering my research questions and meeting the aims of the project, as well as exploring emergent topics during the interview. Therefore, the interview was structured using the Interview Schedule (see Appendix A), to ensure that discussion remained on-topic, while also allowing room to explore emergent topics and avenues of discussion.

I conducted eight life history interviews, with each interview lasting about one hour. The interviews took place during the time of the second year of the participant observation, simultaneously with observations. The participants interviewed consisted of eight senior players, six of whom were current committee members at the time of the interview. Each interview followed the same interview schedule, with some of the questions tailored during the interview to the responses given to earlier questions. At the commencement of the interviews, rapport had been built in the time that I had already been at the club. Four interviewees were selected and approached due to their role within the club, the number of years they had spent with the club, and from topics of interest recorded during observations. Of these four participants approached, none refused participation. Other participants volunteered by responding to an Information Flyer posted on the club's private Facebook page, and the club noticeboard in the club rooms (see Appendix B). All participants were required to read and sign the Informed Consent Package, stating

that they understood their role in the project, and their rights to withdraw at any time (see Appendix C). The interviews were conducted in a quiet, confidential location that was convenient for the participant at times that suited the interviewee. Five interviews were conducted at my office, located close to the club, and three were conducted in the homes of the interviewees. One interview was conducted in person, using a messaging application at the request of the participant. The other interviews were recorded using a voice recorder application on a Samsung phone as well as on a Nokia phone, as a safeguard in case the primary recorder failed to record the interview. Phones were used due to the casual nature of my relationship with the players, and a phone on a table being easily forgotten, creating an ordinary environment that allowed participants to speak freely. I also took some notes throughout the interview to help tailor the later questions to information already given in the early sections of the interview, and record non-verbal information. After the interview had finished, I asked the participants whether they wanted to elaborate on anything we had discussed during the interview, or raise any other topics they wanted in response to anything we had discussed. Participants were also given the option to request that particular topics discussed be omitted from the written report. After these final comments were given, the interview was closed, and the recording devices were turned off.

The Interview Schedule

The Interview Schedule (see Appendix A) was developed following the work of Berg (2004) and Robertson (2006). A general outline was initially developed, starting with some basic demographic questions to make the interviewee comfortable, before moving into broad areas related to the research question and aims. These broad areas were further divided into smaller topic areas and individual interview questions. This was designed in this way so that I could ensure I followed each line of questioning as far as possible within each area before moving on, and to help organise the thoughts of the interviewee. The interview topics moved chronologically through the participants' lives. The schedule was organised into a table, with the broader topic areas organised in the first column, and the smaller topics and interview questions organised in the middle column. There was also room in a third column to record some notes against each area that either could be used later in the interview, or could not be picked up by the audio recording; for example, body language. The interview schedule covered seven main topics, with some leading questions linked to each topic area.

One interview was conducted via WeChat, a desktop messaging application. The interviewee attended the interview in person, and the interview schedule was tailored so

I could copy and paste questions from the schedule into the chat application on one laptop device and the interviewee could type responses from a second laptop. This style resulted in questions and answering being shorter but more frequent, with an informal chat style adopted by the participant and by me accordingly.

Data Analysis

At the conclusion of the observations and interviews, there were over 11,000 typed words of observation notes and over 8 hours of interview material. I transcribed the interviews verbatim using a free online transcription aid *oTranscribe*. This process transformed the interview recordings into interview transcripts, which could be used for analysis. I used thematic analysis to organise and examine my interview and observation data, which allowed me to identify patterns within and between the different data, and examine them in relation to previous research findings, rather than treat each interview as a separate narrative. Therefore, journal notes and interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis techniques, where common themes and patterns were identified and explored in more detail.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analyses identify and examine meaningful and significant themes within data. It involves looking for themes present in the data and creating a framework in which comparisons can be made between respondents (Gomm 2008). The themes may be influenced by trends in the literature, or they may emerge from the data. Nevertheless, the themes are identified and organised using a system of coding, which includes the selection of themes and the selection of thematic evidence. Before the coding process can occur, however, the data must be organised.

Organising the Data

The interview transcripts and observation notes were organised into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The formats of these spreadsheets were based on the work of Gomm (2008), whose coding tables are simple to complete and easy to follow. I selected Microsoft Excel for this task due to my previous knowledge and the features of the system, particularly the filter function that allows me to view themes individually and organise the codes easily. Further, I was able to enter all of the interview data into separate tabs, allowing me to store all of the data within one document. I included all of the interview and observational data in the tables initially, with each new response entered onto a new line. Later, when coding, the response was cut into smaller pieces

with responses corresponding to a new code starting on a new line. I could then organise the data according to the order it was given (using the line number filter) or by the theme (theme number filter). After the interview and observational data was initially organised into these tables, the coding could begin.

Coding the Data

Some of the themes in this data set were selected according to the research aims and interview questions, while some were identified in other similar research projects, and were applied to this data set. Other themes were emergent. After compiling a list of known themes, I assigned each of them a number. I then began to read through the interview transcripts and observation notes that had been organised into the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, typing the code number into the appropriate column that applied to a response, or partial response. Where new themes were identified, a new code name and number were added to the list. After the interview and observation data had been coded, the tables were pooled and sorted by code number. I was then able to keep or change the code selection I had made, and combine some codes that were similar. After this process had finished, I examined the list of codes and themes and organised the data according to higher order themes. More than one code was not applied to one piece of data. Where one response held examples belonging to more than one code, the response was split into smaller segments, each one belonging to a different code. Once this process was finished, I had four main themes: gendered bodies in sport; participating in women's sport: barriers and enablers; the women-only space and empowerment through the women-only space. The results are organised and discussed within each of these themes.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the nature of this project, ethical approval was gained through Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, approved on February 15th, 2016, and considered low risk. In line with this approval, all identifying information, such as people's names, team names and club names were assigned a pseudonym to protect anonymity.

The participants were given the opportunity to review their interview data once the interviews had been transcribed. A copy of their transcript was emailed to the participant for them to check their information. They were also given the opportunity to omit and elaborate on responses in this time. I ensured it was clear which responses were original and which were altered by giving the participant colour coding instructions, if they wished

to make changes. Only one participant omitted responses, which were largely 'um's, and moments she thought were redundant to what she was saying, rather than omitting sensitive information. I reminded all participants that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time, even after the interview was completed. In this contact, I was able to clarify any topics and discussion points that were unclear after the interview had concluded. All transcripts and recorded data was kept and stored securely by the researcher.

The following chapter describes the site where the ethnography was conducted, and the series of events that influenced the selection of one particular club.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Women-Only Soccer Club: WMFC

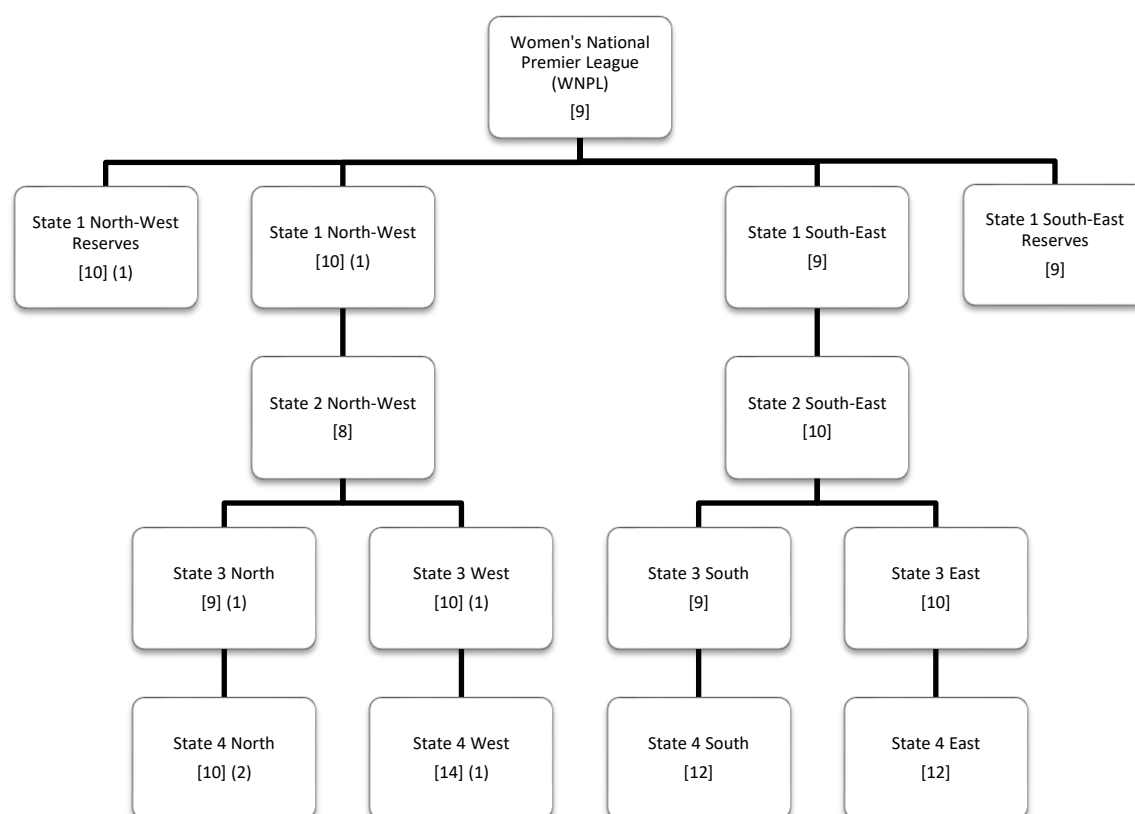
Locating the Soccer Club

Comprehensive searches of all soccer clubs in all of the Melbourne women's metropolitan state league competitions showed women-only clubs are uncommon. One Melbourne-based club identifies as a women-only sporting club, offering a range of sports such as Australian Rules football and soccer. Another is labelled as a women's soccer club, but is associated with a long-standing men's club, with which they share their name. Another two identify as women-only clubs after they divorced from mixed-gender clubs. Finally, in 2015, a number of mixed clubs developed a women-only component, made up of about 4 teams which were entered into the WNPL beginning in 2016. These women-only clubs were small, elite and still very much affiliated to their parent club.

In order to examine the women-only space, the impact it has on its members and the services it can or does provide for women, the space must be clearly defined. For the purposes of this study, a women-only soccer club is defined as a sports club where women can play soccer, and are governed by a committee independent of another club. This study focuses on the Melbourne metro competition, due to resources and the ethnographic methodology used. I am not including the WNPL clubs, as they consist only of a small number of elite teams, and are therefore considered to be a collection of teams, rather than independent soccer clubs. Within these parameters, only three women-only soccer clubs were found to exist within Melbourne, and one of which was the site of this ethnography.

In 2016, the FFV Zagame's Women's State League and WNPL competition hosted 151 teams divided into 15 leagues within 5 tiered divisions. Figure 1 outlines the complete league structure for the 2016 Victorian women's competition.

Figure 1: FFV 2016 Women's State League Structure



KEY

[n]= number of teams competing in that league

(n) = number of women-only clubs with a team in that league

Note: Figure 1 does not include all clubs within the Victorian competition, only those with a senior women's team. Clubs may be absent from this structure if they only cater for junior teams, or they do not cater for senior women's teams.

Within the Women's State League structure outlined in Figure 1, there were 71 teams in the North-West women's leagues, 71 teams in the South-East leagues, and 9 teams in the WNPL. There were six teams belonging to three women-only clubs, all of which existed in the West and North-West leagues, and none of which competed in the WNPL. One of these women-only clubs was the site of this ethnography.

The Formation of WMFC

Only one original founding member of WMFC still exists within the club. In her interview, Maggie, a 37 year old player, described the process where she and a small group of women and men created a space for women to play and enjoy soccer, in a community that valued women's sport. WMFC was established in 2010 according to founding

member and player, Maggie. This was in response to the frustration Maggie and her teammates experienced at their mixed club, where the women contributed more than the men in the running of the club, and reaped fewer rewards in terms of quality of coaching, game scheduling, uniform quality and club culture. Maggie recalls a particular inciting incident in which she and her friend were scrubbing toilets after a function:

Maggie: We had like, you have like the end of season clean where you clean up the pavilion at the end of the season you leave it in a certain condition for council, so you get your key back and you don't have to pay any extra money um, and the four of us, three, two, four of us including myself were the only ones that turned up, so none of the men turned up to help um, and we were sort of there, a friend of mine she was scrubbing the toilet, we were cleaning and we were doing it, and I was like, I just had this moment where I was like 'no, this is not cool, this is not right it's not ok that we're here and that we're women and that we're here doing this, um [pause] and I thought, we're doing this now and we're gonna continue to do this if we stay here so, I just said, in a moment of frustration 'we need to go and create our own club, that's [bangs fist on table] just about women and [bangs fist on table] and it's just about girls, and that's what we're doing that's what we should do, like, stuff this, what are we doing here you know, this is like a dead hole that we're sitting in basically', so and yeah, the girls were pretty keen, they said 'oh that actually sounds like a really good idea' and I was like 'ok, well, ok let's do that'.

Maggie emphasised the importance to creating a new culture at this new club. They wanted the club to be only for women and girls, that they could send their daughters to, and that created a really positive experience for its members. Maggie describes the first years of club operations as an important time in establishing a space that could reproduce that culture:

"In the first year we didn't play as we needed to organise the legal side of running a community club, as well as establish a committee. We also came up with a philosophy or ethos of what we wanted to club to do, and what we wanted to get out of the club. Part of that was offering a service to women in the community, and so we have decided not to have any men's teams, or mixed juniors. We even discussed having only women coaches, but decided we didn't want to discourage men from supporting our cause, so have allowed men to become involved in all non-playing aspects of the club".

Fieldnotes, June 2015

The Clubhouse

If you were to look at the club house from the outside, it would look like a cheap brick building, square-ish, surrounded on three sides by parkland, residences and dead-end

streets, with a small car park at the back. There is a children's playground at one end, and palm trees lining the longer side of the reserve, reminding you of more tropical places, confusing your sense of temperature in winter when your breath clouds your vision. Mostly there is grass. Lots of grass. It is generally green, though brown patches highlight the stress of soccer boots on our favourite sections of the field. White lines cut into the green, marking out a soccer field at the opposite end of the reserve to the playground, with 2 goals standing guard at each end. A single practice goal, long unused, stands lonely in front of the club house.

Fieldnotes, August 2015.

The common room occupies about one third of the total building space. Comfy old couches line one section of the room, though they often move around to face each other, or move to different parts of the room depending on the occasion. The windows overlook the field, thinly decorated with homemade lace curtains. Pillars divide the room into 3 sections, with small goals stored in one area, chairs stored in one corner and tables and chairs are set up against one wall. An old broken pool table sits on a fold-up table in another corner, a kind donation from a club member's friend, though it has been long since it was in playable condition. In this room, we hold our formal events, such as the AGM, registration night and in-season committee meetings, as well as social events such as the end of season disco for junior players, ping-pong battles before games and trainings, and hosting the waiting parents during junior training sessions.

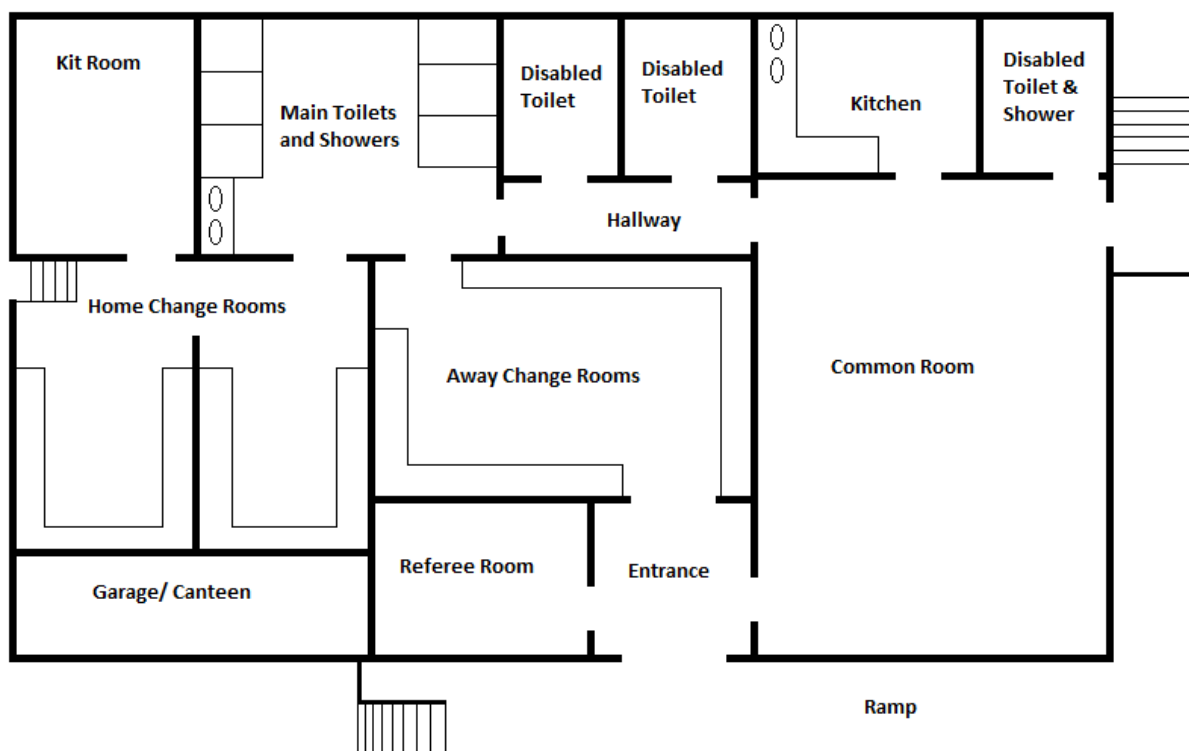
The home change rooms have an interesting configuration, whereby there isn't enough room for the whole team to change in one section. This means that the team splits into smaller groups, normally the first to arrive sit in the area closest to the exit, and others congregate in the second area, closest to the bathrooms. When the coach is ready to speak to the group before the warm up, all players sit in the area near the exit, where there is enough room for everyone after they have changed, and don't need the extra room required to put on the uniforms. On days when the entire team is in attendance, this is a squashy fit. It is in this room we have our pre-match talks, our half time discussions, tactical talks and post-match analyses.

Fieldnotes, August 2015.

Club houses in community sport clubs are considered the heart of the club, both physically and emotionally. Trainings occur around them, they house kitchen and bathroom facilities, events may be held in the common rooms, and players get changed and prepared for matches on game days. At WMFC, we held our committee meetings and AGMs in the common room during the season, as well as some junior fundraising events. Our clubhouse is owned by our local council, and we rent it from them for a small

amount throughout the season. This gave us a locked booking for training nights and game days, and while other groups may reserve the facilities around our schedule, we received preferential bookings for events held outside of our normal schedule. Figure 2 illustrates the layout of WMFC's club rooms.

Figure 2: WMFC Club Room Configuration



As evident in Figure 2, the common room occupies about one-third of the total building space. The open plan allows for diverse use of the room, arranging chairs in rows for our AGMs, or clearing the floor for our annual junior disco fundraiser. The away change room is the centrepiece of the building, and is used by WMFC players during training nights and by visiting teams for home matches. Both the home and away change rooms have access to the main toilet and showers, and only the home change room has access to the kit room, where equipment for training, games, first aid and other storage resides. While the common room hosts windows overlooking the training area with the field also visible, no one sits inside to watch the games, and only parents sit inside during trainings if it is raining.

While this is the home of WMFC during the winter months, the committee returns all keys back to the council at the end of the season, leaving the facility empty for four months

over summer. The sporting equipment is kept behind locked doors, but anything left in the common room, kitchen and change rooms are accessible by other groups that book the facility in this time. This certainly creates a 'seasonal home' feel for the members, where ownership is temporary. Some level of frustration is caused by this, where the members cannot hang a photo or even a club logo on the external building without council permission. For example, it took 18 months for permission to be granted to hang whiteboards in the change rooms, and only if hung by a qualified professional. Most social events are not held at the clubhouse, mainly due to the small venue capacity, but the lack of personality in and out of the building does not encourage the members to use the space for social purposes, outside of the training and game schedules.

Coaching and Training Personnel

Coaching staff were predominantly male. In the 2015 season, there was one female junior coach, one female senior coach and two male senior coaches. In the previous season, there were no junior teams registered with the club, and only two senior teams, both of which were coached by men, with one having a woman as assistant coach. In 2016, two female junior coaches juggled three junior teams, and three men coached the three senior teams, as well as one male assistant coach for the more advanced team, and one coach occasionally bringing his pre-adolescent old son to assist with drills. It is clear that coaching at WMFC is still heavily dominated by men. While the club and committee enjoy the passion their coaches have for women's soccer, they hope to recruit more women coaches for future seasons.

The Members

The players on the teams consisted only of women, varying from 6-12 years in the junior age groups, and 16-45 in the senior teams. Through my observations and conversations, I found that most players lived in the Western suburbs of Melbourne close to the club, though some would travel 30 minutes to the club for trainings and home games. Only two players travelled more than this, and one of those players discontinued into the 2016 season due to personal and health reasons. The players varied in ability and playing history, from one player who, in 2016, was in their 17th year of playing soccer, to players that were playing their first year of club soccer. Some had played at school and did not continue playing after secondary schooling, while others had played socially in either indoor or outdoor competitions, in mixed-sex or women's teams. Some had moved from another club to WMFC, and over the course of this ethnography, only one player had left WMFC for another club, largely due to her partner's coaching commitments. The main

reason for players discontinuing to play for WMFC was travel, with many players moving overseas, interstate or intrastate, making the commute to trainings and games difficult.

The Committee

WMFC is unique in that one of the founders of the club still exist within the space in a playing capacity. WMFC is less than 10 years old, and is a player-run club. This is also different from other clubs, whose committee make up does not often include players, but a range of previous players, community volunteers, wives and husbands of past alumni and parents of current players. In this way, the club is controlled and governed by the women who play, enabling them to shape their experience and be active in this process, rather than fitting into a system that does not accommodate for, or is ignorant to their needs and interests. Committee elections for WMFC occur at the Annual General Meeting, held in August at the end of the winter season. This means that committee positions are held from the end of one season, throughout the off-season and pre-season months, and throughout the season in the following year. In 2013/14, there was only one man on the nine person committee, in 2014/15, there was one man on the 11 person committee, in 2015/16 there were 13 women and no men, and in 2016/17 there were two men on the 13 person committee. In each of these years, there were no men in executive committee roles. While the faces of the executive committee members changed throughout my involvement in the club, particularly into the 2015/16 season, they were always women, and mostly still involved with the club in a playing capacity*.

The Players

Eight women were interviewed for this project, all of who were senior players at WMFC at the time of their interview. In order to understand the experiences of these women while they are a WMFC, it is important to understand more about them. I present character profiles of each player to help contextualise their experience at WMFC, and make sense of their stories.

Maggie

Maggie is one of WMFC's founding members, and the only founding member to still be actively involved at the club as a player and a committee member. She is motivated toward social justice and equality, and is known to 'walk the talk'. Maggie is 35 years old,

*For the 2014/15 season, the president and treasurer were not current players. In 2015/16 and 2016/17, all committee members either coached or played at WMFC.

and grew up in country Victoria riding horses. Her first involvement in soccer was as a young adult, and was encouraged to play by her friends. She recalls her favourite childhood memories as baking with her grandmother, and definitely represents the mother-figure of the club. Maggie was a committee member during the ethnography, and has had experience in most of the committee roles.

Andrea

During the first year of this ethnography, Andrea was pregnant, and coached the inaugural junior girls' team. In the second year, she returned to the field and continued to coach, while operating as the junior coordinator on the committee. Andrea is 38 years old, and is one of the more experienced players in the club. She grew up in England where her father and brother both played and watched soccer, but did not start playing herself until she started university. She admits her frustration to me where she understands the tactics and what she is supposed to do, but her execution is sometimes lacking. Andrea is determined to provide junior members of WMFC with a positive female role model on and off the field due to some of her own negative experiences as a player.

Danni

Danni is 27 years old and grew up interstate, moving to Melbourne for work in her early-20s. She did not play any sport as a child outside of school, though enjoys running and going to the gym. Danni had not played soccer before joining WMFC and found the number of other women who were beginner players reassuring. Her bubbly personality always made others smile, and her enthusiasm both on and off the field was welcomed by the committee when she was elected for the 2015/16 season. Danni enjoys the fitness component of soccer the most, and is always seen with a Fitbit, or another piece of technology used to measure fitness goals.

Macy

At 24 years old, Macy is the youngest player that I interviewed. She has always enjoyed playing soccer, though has faced many barriers to play, first by her mother, then by her school, both of whom believed soccer was a sport for boys. Her early experiences in club soccer were varied; she was elated that she was finally able to play club soccer at the age of 19 years, though uncomfortable that she played with 10 year olds due to her inexperience. She says she has found home at WMFC, and has never felt more accepted in a community. Macy is always happy to volunteer at the club, enjoying the social aspect of club events as much as she enjoys the games and training.

Olivia

Olivia is 32 years old, and played her first season of club soccer at WMFC. She grew up in the country, where netball was for girls and women, Australian Rules football was for boys and men, and soccer was not popular. She was introduced to soccer as a young adult after moving to Melbourne, playing socially with both men and women. She described the moment she played her first game with only girls as “eye opening”, and loved that the women and girls at WMFC own the space and own the game. Olivia is a gentle woman off the field, but plays the game with determination and strength.

Camilla

Camilla is 26 years old and is one of the few players at WMFC that grew up playing soccer. She describes her childhood self as a tomboy, and links soccer to her identity. She discontinued playing soccer after school, focusing on her career and relationships, before joining WMFC in her mid-20s. Despite playing soccer casually in primary school and in organised competitions throughout her secondary schooling, Camilla doubts her ability, expressing her nervousness when joining MSFC that she may not be good enough, and would be laughed off the field. She continues to overcome limits that she has set herself, as she learns and becomes comfortable in new positions and in leadership roles.

Shae

At 42 years old, Shae is the eldest player I interviewed, and describes herself as someone that listens to her heart, and often does not think things through. Her decisions have taken her all over the world, where she first learned to enjoy soccer from her friends while in South Africa, while it hosted the FIFA World Cup. She grew up playing Australian Rules football at school, before playing netball as an adolescent, which was acceptable for girls. She expresses her regret at not challenging these gender norms, though acknowledges it was difficult for girls to access sport when she was younger. Shae joined WMFC after returning to Australia in her early 40s, motivated by the social component of team sport, and the interest in the game she acquired while living in Africa and England.

Rachel

Rachel describes her involvement in sport as mostly driven by those around her. She is 39 years old, and started playing soccer as a young adult, when her then boyfriend encouraged her to join the women’s team of the club he played for. Rachel grew up in New Zealand exposed to many different sports, and was always willing to try something

new. However, after starting to play soccer at university, she has not moved on to a different sport. She describes her motivations to play any sport as being social with some level of fitness, and that she is happy to be mediocre on the field, as she has high expectations of herself in other aspects of her life. She acknowledges her husband as her biggest supporter, who after introducing her to soccer as a young adult has continued to encourage her involvement.

The Players: Overall

In an effort to protect the anonymity of the players at WMFC, I must summarise certain aspects of the players' characteristics, rather than discuss individually.

Of the eight participants, two openly identified as homosexual, and six identified as heterosexual. Four of the heterosexual women were in long term relationships, with two of those women married. One of the married women had a child, and the other seven had no children or dependents. Only one of the players interviewed identified with a disability. Two of the women interviewed identified as non-Australian (one English and one New Zealand, with Indonesian heritage). While the other six women identified as Australian, four also identified with a second nationality (two Chilean and two Vietnamese).

These eight women demonstrate the diversity of the club as a whole. While a comprehensive survey was not administered to gain a complete understanding of all of the demographics of the players at WMFC, the women interviewed represent the diversity of nationalities, ethnicities, sexualities and ages. This is important to note, as while only one club was the focus of this study, the participants were diverse. These individual experiences of empowerment share a commonality in that their experiences transpired through their engagement with a women-only sporting space.

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings

The women I interviewed were a diverse group of individuals in terms of age, employment, sexuality and level of athletic ability. Despite their differences, their stories were similar. As children, sport was not always easily available for these women because of their sex. They had to overcome others' as well as their own perceptions of appropriate feminine athleticism, and they felt empowered through their involvement with WMFC. This chapter draws on fieldwork and interviews and has been organised according to the following themes: gendered bodies in sport; participating in women's sport: barriers and enablers; the women-only space; and empowerment through the women-only space. The data reveals that while women's experiences in sport vary, the women-only space is a destination for many who have overcome barriers to participation, finding support in women-only spaces, and have, overall, more positive, rewarding and empowering experiences.

Gendered Bodies in Sport

For many of the women I interviewed, the opportunity to play sport as children was limited to play breaks at school. Particularly for sports such as soccer, rugby and Australian Rules football, the games were dominated by boys, and their participation not encouraged. Shae told me how her and a friend were the only girls playing Australian Rules football at primary school at play times. Shae suggests that even at a young age gender roles influenced behaviour in relation to play and sport:

Shae: Look I was probably a tomboy and me and my friend would always, we'd always play it [Australian Rules football] but there wasn't any other, really, any other girls, you know and so... no not really it was just it was kind of not the norm.

Camilla experienced similar situations through her schooling where she was among the few girls playing sport with boys. However, while she did not care what people thought of her involvement in sport as a child, she acknowledges that this is not the same for everyone:

Camilla: I think there's still that barrier of females disengaging from sport, and there are certain stereotypes about what that means if you do participate in sports.

Shae explains that while she was as equally skilled in Australian Rules football as her male peers, she was not encouraged to play, both at and after school. Similarly, Macy

expressed her desire to play soccer as a secondary school student, but was not offered to girls, while the male students played soccer as part of their curriculum.

Shae: I played netball and I played basketball it was you know, it wasn't really encouraged for girls to play um, you know even though I probably could have been just as good as the boys, um, it just was not really the, the norm... there was no, not really any clubs for girls in particular, it was harder to find sport, you know my brother could play cricket but there wasn't any girls cricket, there wasn't, so it just kind of got left.

Macy: I ended up playing netball but I did not enjoy it as much as I enjoyed soccer, no contact was allowed. I tried to keep playing soccer during PE, we would beg my PE teacher to let us play soccer. The school made a rule that girls could only play netball. One of my friends who is very passionate about soccer tried to fight that rule but the teachers gave us a warning- if we still complained, then no sports for girls! We had no choice. We had to play netball.

Sammy told me a similar story of her childhood in New Zealand, which I recorded in my fieldnotes:

"In New Zealand, rugby begins when you're 5 years old and everyone is born with a rugby ball in their hand. So I played rugby for 2 years, and then netball starts when you're 7 years old. All of a sudden I was told I couldn't play rugby and I was pushed into netball. After a while I said 'enough of this, I want to play rugby!'"

(Fieldnotes, September 2016)

Throughout the interviews and observations, it became clear that, as children, these women did not understand why boys were encouraged to play sport, and girls were not. Sammy, Camilla, Macy and Shae wanted to play sports such as cricket, rugby, soccer and Australian Rules football; all sports that boys were encouraged and enabled to play. Of these four women, Camilla was the only one who was able to play the sport she wanted as a child and adolescent, although only through school competitions. Despite the 20-year age range among the participants, all of the women I interviewed were encouraged to play netball as a suitable feminine alternative. All of these women that played netball as children preferred or wished to play outdoor sports that involved some contact, such as rugby, soccer and Australian Rules football.

Camilla and Danni stated one enjoyable aspect of soccer is being able to get muddy and throw one's body around. Camilla also told me:

Camilla: I just felt that there wasn't that you know real contact the way you have it with soccer... I just thought I needed to be in a sport like that where I could get really into it or really physical... I just really wanted to run free and run wild (laughs)

Some of the participants describe their younger selves as a tomboy, a word that is mostly associated with young girls who adopt masculine traits, behaviours and pastimes. Unlike young boys who portray feminine behaviours, tomboys are generally socially accepted. This is due to the underlying assumption that they will adopt more feminine characteristics as they enter adolescence. When girls resist dominant femininity, particularly through playing sport, they are (self)labelled as tomboys. Interestingly, the women defined being a tomboy as playing sport and not doing typically 'girly' things:

Camilla: I was always a sporty person back in primary school, I considered myself a tomboy... [girls] were more inclined to probably sit around, do stereotypically girly things like gossip (laughs).

Shae: They were running around, I don't know playing skippy or something and (laughs) or hopscotch or something with elastics you know all that stuff which to me was a bit boring.

While these young girls enjoyed playing sport, often their participation was restricted to playing at school due to the lack of community sporting clubs available where women and girls could play:

Olivia: When I played that um, inter-school Aussie rules competition as a kid, I loved it so much and, I wanted to play afterwards and mentioned it to a few people, saying 'why couldn't we start a girls league?' and that just sounded too hard to people I think, and so they would say 'ohh, no, it just wouldn't be possible, we wouldn't have the change rooms, and I remember thinking as a kid 'oh yeah, right, you wouldn't have the change rooms... surely we can do something about that?'

It was evident through the interviews that, as they entered adolescence and adulthood, these women became aware that they were not complying with social feminine norms. The women experienced adverse reactions by men towards them due to their playing sport, reinforcing the notion that sport conflicts with traditional notions of femininity. Through my observations, and in my interview with Rachel, I found that sexist language towards or about women is common within mixed-sporting spaces, and used to reinforce hegemonic masculinity and discourage women's membership:

Yesterday was the first match of the season proper. A men's game was being played when I arrived, and I watched the final minutes of the first half as I sat on the grass, putting my boots on. When the men's teams took a break for half time, one team came near I was

sitting to discuss their performance before going back on. The captain was talking to the team, highlighting their poor performance, and the need to want the ball. "Like a bitch in a nightclub, you need to work for it". This absolutely shocked me that men, mostly over 35 years, were ok with this language, and thought it appropriate to use such language to encourage other men to work harder on the field.

Fieldnotes, April 2016

Rachel: The men were like, the players were sooo sexist and homophobic and, and that was a real eye opener like, [husband] quit after that year because like he used to get sent emails um, like just really homophobic and misogynist emails and so at one point he said he actually told the team 'maybe, you know we shouldn't be sending those sorts of things out' and he completely got ostracised for it, yeah, I know so like I was thinking 'oh the poor guy', um and, like they used to even at presentation night one of the men would be like on the women's thing it would be about a prize for one of the women's teams and one of the men would yell out 'show us your tits' that's like, god it's bad, yeah so it was like that was quite an eye opener.

While not all of the women I interviewed told stories as extreme as Rachel's, they certainly reported experiences where men treated women poorly in sport. Most of these experiences centred on men's preconception that women do not understand sport, both in tactics and skill:

Andrea: I just think... it was this feeling that he [the coach] was male and he played football and therefore he knew better than any of us... it just drove me crazy... I yeah, I think that's what probably has drove me into coaching was just this feeling like 'don't you dare patronise me because you think I can't possibly know as much as you', um and also the fun went out of it, I think that's probably been the closest I've felt to walking away from it.

Olivia: I started to realise, just sort of looking at the way that the guys played and the way that um we played and realising that... every time, umm... every time one of the girls got the ball... I think we would kind of project this little bit of panic, like 'oh shit, you're gonna stuff it up now'... the guys would react by wanting to just quickly make that all better... it was sort of like they felt compelled to call it as soon as you got it and you felt compelled to pass it, ummm, and so I just realised after a while, I was never running with the ball, they all were, but I never was 'cause I was passing it off straight away... umm... so I started thinking 'well, I just won't pass it unless they're in a good spot, I would just try running', umm.... and it was actually quite difficult to do 'cause the first few times it really did upset people, like I could see that they were going 'what are you doing?' you know, umm... and they would be like "Olivia! Olivia! Pass it!" and I'd just ignore them and kind of run on with it, ummm.... and over time like I- I found- I got better really quickly doing that and they

stopped calling it, they started um, I think they just adjusted and they'd start- I started playing the way they played so they started treating me the way they treated each other... I just sort of felt like for the girls who- if you don't... if at that point you stop playing, um, when you- when you sort of plateaued and you're never getting any better and you're not getting that much joy out of it 'cause running with the ball is half the joy you know, umm... you're not getting that kind of, positive reinforcement and then developing your skills more, it confirms for you that you can't- you're never gonna be that good, and you stop playing and it confirms for the guys that 'yeah girls, it's fun to play with them, but they're never gonna really get good, it's just not in them', and we all kind of, umm... reinforced this outcome that doesn't actually have to happen.

Olivia both conforms to and resists her male teammates; she resists their expectations to pass the ball as she conforms to their playing style of running with the ball. Olivia found she must conform to the men's style of play in order to be accepted as a competent woman in that space. Andrea could not conform and subsequently left her club. Both Andrea and Olivia realised they could not continue playing sport unless they were able to overcome the male control of the space. Preconceptions about women's ability (or lack thereof) to play and manage sport are reinforced by the gendered divisions of labour among club volunteers and staff. Where women occupy invisible and supportive roles whilst men exist in public, authority positions, men are reinforced as leaders of sport, and women as their assistants. The women spoke in their interviews about previous clubs where traditional gender roles, particularly around coaching and canteen management, were very much practiced:

Olivia: It used to drive me crazy how much effort um the [Australian Rules] football wives would put into football and the guys would do absolutely nothing for netball, they wouldn't lift a finger, and, and it would be the women in the canteen, it would be the women running the presentation nights, cooking the bloody casseroles and you know, (laughs), ALL of that, there was just no expectation for the men to lift a finger to help or watch the women's netball games, so usually the netball would be off on a little court behind everything, like it would be behind the parking lot or behind the club rooms, the footy would be, the football field would be the whole focus of everyone's time there and so the guys would never come and watch their partners or their sisters or their mums playing netball, but as soon as the netball game finished all of the girls would go over and watch the guys

Maggie: Generally speaking when push came to shove you know we'd just get the old shirts that the guys didn't use any more, it [women's soccer] definitely wasn't a priority.

Similar gender roles and discrimination were also experienced in the broader workforce, highlighting that gender inequities are not limited to this space, and both inform and are informed by broader social norms:

Olivia: I really think that you know that experience of being, having the ball called from you, never actually getting to learn the skills and then everyone confirming their idea that women therefore can't play I think that's replicated across society, absolutely, we see so many fewer women in um, boards and executive positions and whatever that when they do get there, it's the same kind of experience I think, they're constantly um being treated differently and not getting the same opportunities to develop as men do and then being judged extra harshly.

Throughout the interviews, the women described moments in their childhoods where their sporting pursuits were met with disapproval, and where they were redirected into more gender appropriate sports, or no sport at all. As children, and into adulthood, these women experienced tension between their femininity, and what it meant to be a girl or a woman. They also relayed moments where their gender was used to limit their potential, either athletically or through gendered roles within sporting clubs. While today, women are often not formally excluded from positions of authority, invisible barriers limit women's participation in sport and occupancy of authority positions. This is due to the perception that men are naturally more qualified to exist in these spaces, both as managers and participators. This is a major barrier for women in mixed-gender sporting spaces.

This and other barriers women experience in sport as highlighted in the interview and observational data will be discussed in the following section. I will also highlight the ways that women have negotiated and overcome these barriers, as well as the enablers that allowed them to gain access to sport.

Participating in Women's Sport: Barriers and Enablers

All of the women interviewed described both aids and obstacles to their participation in sport. The women explained how they overcame and continue to overcome barriers to their participation in soccer. An enabler of participation was said to be influential people and support networks. However, there were also people that presented barriers to participation. Parents, particularly mothers, were described as such:

Macy: My mum and dad were bit of old-fashioned, they wouldn't let me play any sport at clubs. They thought it was only for boys.

Camilla: My mum, she's like 'out of all the sports you could have chosen why does it have to be the rough one, why does it have to be the one you know that people are going to be you know really physical' and I said 'well that's the same thing back in high school you know you said the same thing'.

These interview responses show gendered assumptions influencing parental permission to play sport, serving as a barrier for girls to participate in particular sports, such as soccer. Social pressures were also acknowledged as creating barriers to participation, particularly the negotiation of particular sports for boys and girls during adolescence. Camilla explained how girls often did not engage in sports due to embodied assumptions about socially acceptable spaces for women and girls. She notes while these assumptions are shifting, they still create barriers to participation:

Camilla: I think because there's a sort of underlying idea of what women's sports are, and while that has shifted especially now with more females in soccer than netball that's where the change will happen where it will break down the barriers of what constitutes sports that are appropriate for females, I guess.

Particular sporting spaces enforce gender norms through exclusion, such as not providing girls' teams, and not allowing girls to play in boys' teams. This is true particularly for those participants who grew up in country Victoria, where not all sports are accessible, and is discussed as being a barrier to participation. While geographical location was linked to some of these responses, gender was also expressed as a barrier linked to access. The women stated that their brothers and male peers were able to easily access sport, while they had to negotiate limited availability for women's and girls' sporting competitions:

Shae: My brother was old enough to kind of get himself places but being a girl I don't know by yourself it was just more... you had to kind of go further and you had to find I don't know, you had to look a bit harder to get things, um, but eventually when people were older that was, we could drive or ask friends to drive us it became a little bit easier, because we always had to ask mum or dad to someone to drive and they were too busy often, you know, so yeah I suppose that was a big barrier, if there was something more local, that you could walk to or get to... eventually we moved down like, to [suburb] then you know so you had to go far to compete and that was kind of a bit of a problem if you didn't have a car.

Andrea: I used to, um, you know dream of playing for Liverpool or playing at Wimberley or playing in the cup final and, for a long time it just didn't occur to me that that wasn't going to happen just because I was a girl, I just, I just never thought about it (laughs) and so, yeah, of course I absolutely wish that I'd been given the, well, thought that it was something

I could do when I was 5 years old like it was for my brother... you have these moments where you think 'oh, if only that had been available, if that was an option you know, when you were growing up'.

The women I interviewed told me stories of barriers, challenges and difficulties they faced throughout their participation in sport, all experiencing gender as a barrier to participate. They comment that their male counterparts were easily able to access sport, while they struggled to play sports that weren't netball, regardless of geographical location, (dis)ability and age. However, the women told me that despite being faced with challenges to participate, they overcame these encounters. Influential and supportive people were the main enablers of participation for these women. The women I interviewed discussed people in their lives who were instrumental to their involvement in soccer, enabling their participation. Family and coaches were reported as being very influential to sporting participation:

Olivia: [My step-dad] looooved that I played in that little lightning, um... whatever it was called, lightning competition or whatever the inter-school thing, um... don't know... I- don't think he took any interest in the sort of netball, basketball really, but he was very encouraging when I played footy.

Shae: I scored my first goal, and I thought I would never have experience that if [coach] didn't say 'you can do it', or 'have a go at this', so, different, you know, different ways and different methods but achieving you know helping you to achieve different things.

While coaches and family were important and supportive of the participants' soccer and sporting participation, friends and teammates were overwhelming positioned as the most important people to aid participation:

Andrea: There's a girl that plays at [club] that I've known for a few years who turned 50 last year and she's still playing, and so she won't let me retire until she does [laughs] so I just keep asking her to retire [laughs] but I think you know it's quite nice to have somebody that's still proving that they can play at, you know, at any level basically, if they can still do it then I can still hop around on the pitch as well (laughs)... she's had so many injuries and so many knock backs um but really still she now coaches and still playing as well so yeah she's quite inspirational.

Similarly, Maggie was reported to be a source of inspiration, particularly for her work ethic and passion for soccer and the club:

Rachel: I really admire the way Maggie plays, um, well not just so much the way she plays but more her enthusiasm for sport and just her general, her ability to bring people together

and all of that, I think... I mean in all frankness she... like she just tries you know, really hard and I really admire people who put a lot of effort into what they do even if they're not the most talented person at that particular thing.

Therefore, while male authority figures such as coaches were seen as enablers of women's participation, female role models and facilitators were viewed as far more influential in supporting and aiding women's involvement in sport. Many of these examples were given about other women at WMFC, where the women described the culture of WMFC as being an enabler of participation. In the following section, I discuss the women-only space as both a potential facilitator and barrier to women's participation, before moving on to discuss WMFC in more detail.

The Women-Only Space

The women-only soccer club was said to be a supportive place where women could play soccer away from the male gaze and the male attention that often results in women leaving sport. Similarly, the women-only space was seen as a solution to many of the barriers and challenges expressed in the interviews, as well as overcoming gendered sporting roles through sex segregation. Generally, these women-only spaces were described by participants as supportive, communities, families, where women control the space and are free to just be there, without apologising for or proving their membership. Descriptions of these spaces were overwhelming positive. They were recounted as supportive, where the women encouraged each other to join and continue to participate in those spaces:

Shae: Just supportive, I'd say, supportive, inclusive and like a family... you know someone's got your back, and you know if you're ever struggling with something you know people will understand... I would say it's more about the team and being part of a family.

Maggie: Being welcoming and inclusive is really important... the fact that I can walk into that space and I know that it doesn't matter, you know people will accept me the way I am.

Women-only spaces were described as social spaces, which is one of the main motivators for joining the spaces and staying involved. Camilla spoke about joining a gym and using the women-only section, while Andrea, Shae and Rachel spoke specifically about soccer being a good way to meet people when moving to a new city. While they did not talk specifically about women-only clubs being a means to make friends, they spoke of women-only teams being a productive site for social engagement:

Rachel: I just moved back to Australia and to a new city so decided soccer was a great way to meet people... I think for me playing sports is very much a social thing and so my participating is practically always driven by friends.

Danni: Playing was social for me and playing was social because everybody on the team became my friend, and not only that people on the other teams [within the club] became my friends too so going to soccer was like a gathering between friends and playing a sport that we all enjoyed and loved.

While the women-only space is emphasised as social, many of the women describe these spaces as being safe, where women can exercise away from the male gaze. They found the spaces more accepting of their level of experience, and expressed their concerns about entering a space they were not familiar with:

Camilla: I like the ladies section [of the gym] which is, obviously much smaller than the rest of the space but because it's contained and its isolated from the rest of the bigger space um, it feels like you're comfortable to just sweat it out and no one is looking at you (laughs)... I think it minimises that whole anxiety of being observed, because I wasn't sure about using the equipment... but there's that space where you feel that, if you mess up its ok because you know you're not getting that male attention and it feels like a safe space.

Safety was definitely an important aspect for these women, influencing their decision to join a women-only space. The promise of support and safety provided by these spaces was critical to its (potential) membership. Women in these spaces created support networks, where they felt comfortable discussing their issues and concerns. This in turn fostered the physical and emotional safety of the space, where women felt more empowered through their social relationships and opportunity to speak freely.

Olivia and Rachel described their time spent in Indonesia, and the women-only gyms that they used while living there. Olivia told me:

Olivia: ... it very much had the feeling of being closed off from the rest of that gym and it was sort of hidden off... it was really fun being just in a room in that space actually was like 'oh yeah, this is...' I think beforehand was kind of a bit annoyed that it had to be that way I sort of thought, 'how ridiculous that its segregated', you know thought it was great that it was there but think on some level thought we shouldn't have to be segregated we should be able to be all in together, but once got in there actually though 'no this is really valuable', um, there are so many reasons why it's not comfortable.

Olivia admitted her reservations about the value of the women-only space, yet concluded that they offer opportunity for women to exercise without restriction and inspection by

men. Religious views and cultural values were also a reason why women preferred sex segregated spaces, as expressed by Olivia and Rachel in their descriptions of the women-only gym space in Indonesia. WMFC also attracted women and girls who would not be able to play soccer in a mixed-gender club due to their beliefs, or felt uncomfortable doing so. Both of the women who used these spaces in Indonesia stated they did not mind using the mixed-gender space, but saw the value in the existence of women-only spaces. This was a belief also held by other interviewees:

Andrea: I've never felt the need to go to a female only gym I've never been... I've never been that bothered I've never... felt... different by the guys that are in there it's never really bothered me that much um... but I can see why it would bother some people and that therefore feel better in the female only space if it gets them to keep going or, then it can't be bad really.

These women valued the space and the opportunities they offered, despite stating they did not necessarily need a women-only space to exercise. They talked about women-only spaces offering the opportunity for women to engage in activities that they otherwise would not in a mixed-gender space.

While the women-only space is often a place where women feel protected and safe, there was also a sense that the space itself needs to be protected. Maggie mentioned this to me during a drive to a game in my first year with the club, and was discussed again amongst committee members:

"We had a case with the juniors in the first year where one of the parents wanted their son to join his sister in the team (juniors can play in boys, girls or mixed teams up until 12 years old). We told the parent no, and were accused of gender discrimination. Upon looking up what that meant we discovered that it was legal for us to not allow boys to join the club if there clubs where boys could play in the geographical community, which there were. We wanted to make sure that we were giving every opportunity to the girls to enjoy soccer, especially those that were older and had never played before.

Fieldnotes, June 2015

The coach that came with us from our previous club wanted to take the club in a direction that we weren't comfortable with, so he ended up leaving through differences of opinion... In the past we have been approached by men's clubs that want to be affiliated with us, but we have had to turn them away. When asked why they wanted to affiliate with us, they responded that it was to increase their funding".

Fieldnotes, June 2015

The protection of this space from men and boys suggests that women need this exclusive space while men do not. This is the paradox, where equality is attempted through exclusion, and this process reinforces that men and women are different.

Women in positions of authority within the club were able to give importance and a voice to its female members. However, women are not always represented in positions of authority within organisations, including sports clubs. While women are often not formally excluded from positions of authority, invisible barriers often exist to deter them from applying for and filling these positions. The women-only soccer club offered a space where barriers to perform these roles are removed. The increase in opportunities for women at a women-only club to fill these positions was evident in the interviews:

Camilla: Things like being able to take on that leadership role as the vice-captain um... I never really saw myself as a leader um, and so being given that opportunity, I just thought um... that wouldn't have happened if I hadn't joined a team, especially a women's soccer team, and if I was in a mixed group, that probably wouldn't have happened, I probably wouldn't look like the first go to person to approach in terms of something like leadership um... and so I definitely thought that would only happen if it was a women's only team.

The women also spoke of the invisible barriers that existed for women in mixed-gender settings, where women felt they were naturally unqualified for particular roles:

Olivia: It's great that we have female coaches for the juniors 'cause they're getting to see its normal.... yeah but yeah I do, I wonder how much of it is that they're just aren't enough um home grown women who've been involved in soccer long enough to coach and how much it is that there's a perception that it needs to be a bloke or it needs to be someone... who's grown up with a strong soccer culture around them... I think there's plenty of women that could step into coaching roles if they um... I think yeah I think we still have that thing of you know 'why would I do it 'cause there would be plenty more guys who could do it better than I could' sort of thing.

Throughout the interviews, the women told me anecdotes, both their own and others', about experiences as a woman in a mixed-gender space. Some reflected on their soccer experiences, while other talked about women-only sections within gyms. They explained the inequities with facilities, timing, resources and treatment in the mixed-gender space:

Olivia: When I was having those conversations early on with Lily, I wouldn't have known why it's important for it to be an all-girls club, I thought 'oh that's great' but I wouldn't have realised that actually it means we do... um... err.... you know where other clubs the girls are very much second um, class citizens of the club... the real thing that seems to um come through, I hear this from other players, when people have played for mixed clubs they've

found that the women get the shittier change rooms, they get- they don't get the good pitches, they don't get the attention within the club and I definitely see that when we go and play other teams, we're always, if there's- if its- if it's a mixed club and there's men's games on they're on the good pitch and we're always on some back lot with the, you know, portable dunny to change in.

While the women discussed the women-only soccer club as providing more opportunities than a mixed-gender club, one participant told me about her experience in a women-only section of a gym, and the inferior facilities of this setting:

Danni: It's just a normal gym, what you will see in a normal gym room you would see in there, just a lot less, probably a few machines that wouldn't be in there, the weights aren't as heavy in there as well but they're heavy enough I think the highest weight to do dead lifts is 30kg... but then outside the women's gym there's no max weight, but then they have the normal machines where you can keep tweaking it where you can go up to 100kg for the legs, or arms or shoulders um, there's treadmills, there's enough in there to get you by, to work on every body part or aspects... if only it had better machines.

The experience at the women-only soccer club was overwhelmingly positive, with the women telling me of the increased opportunity to govern the space, and access to facilities. However, this was not the case for all women-only spaces, as women-only gym spaces provide less equipment compared to the mixed-gender gym space.

Control of their own space was an important theme that emerged from the interviews. Not only were women given more opportunity to occupy leadership roles, but they could also own and control the space, making decisions about their own participation:

Olivia: If you're in a mixed club... it seems like the women kind of get lost in that club and the role models will still be the guys whereas within an all-women's club there's... even though we do have all male coaches we've got a female president and mostly female committee and we do have the female junior coaches and it's all about the women and the girls, so, um, if we had an equal, you know a gender equal society, we wouldn't need that extra focus but actually we really do or else I think the women's and girl's side of the club gets lost.

Olivia: I think having... having um female coaches, I do actually think it's really important 'cause I think it shows that, it is [emphasised] *our* game, I think as long as we only have men coaching it does still feel like it's the men teaching us how to play their game, um and think our male coaches are excellent and it's great to have them and that they put in so much to the club but yeah I do feel more broadly that there is this sense of, it's the men showing us how to be a part of their game... playing with these girls was like 'shit, these

guys all like it is THEIR game, they are there playing their game'... it was quite amazing to have a whole bunch of women and girls there who just owned the game, like we're all here 'cause we all love soccer and we wanna play and we're not just kind of you know, playing the boys' game.

Women playing their game and owning the space was also important for young girls playing soccer:

Olivia: You can see that when girls have role models to watch, it just makes such a difference, like they start to feel like it is [emphasised] their space, and their game... I'm such a, I have that activist kind of head set I just love seeing so many girls owning that space and um... that's probably been one of my favourite things actually, is just yeah seeing all these girls and women just kind of, out there playing, because they want to play.

The women described experiences where they had felt particularly tokenistic, as though they were representing all woman, and proving that women could play soccer:

Olivia: I feel like when you're in that mixed environment I still really enjoy that too like my mixed sports and whatever else but I feel like there is a constant sense that you're proving yourself in the mixed environment and in the women's environment its more that you're participating in something... I remember going to this all day indoor soccer tournament, they put me in a team with a bunch of students and when I got out there on the day I was the only female... the feeling was just 'oh god, so I'm gonna have to prove myself all over again, all day'... you know it was great but I felt like, ok so I'm not just playing, I'm proving that can, for the whole day.

The women explained that being in a women-only club not only allowed them to control their own experience, but they were also able to just be there, without being tokenistic, or needing to prove their worth:

Andrea: I like the idea that it is female only 'cause it was just too many... bad experiences [laughs] of being the kind of token females to a male, oriented club, just yeah I thought 'this is probably a good step'.

Shae: When I did join I thought yeah this is nice not having, you know being overshadowed by the boys and the men.

The interview responses demonstrate the number of advantages women have when participating in soccer in a women-only club. These advantages have focused on increased social relationships, offering supportive and safe spaces for women to play soccer, and increased opportunity for women to sit on committees and assume roles of

leadership and authority. It is clear from the interviews and observations that women have more opportunity to play, govern and engage with soccer in women-only spaces.

Empowerment through the Women-Only Space

In this thesis, women are said to have experienced empowerment through increased and continued access to sporting spaces previously denied them, autonomy in their decisions to participate in sport, and enhanced perception of their ability to perform tasks that challenge gendered expectations. Throughout the interviews and observations, it became clear that women are empowered through sport, and through sport in women-only spaces. This empowerment manifested in four ways: community, social, political and physical. Each of these is discussed below.

Community Empowerment

Women experienced empowerment through their ability to give back to their community through engagement with the women-only club:

Andrea: I think yeah I definitely say I felt empowered and I think because how it's comes about that I'm coaching at WMFC, I do think that perhaps those opportunities wouldn't have come about at another club, um especially at a bigger club that maybe already had juniors or, you know to get something like that has to go through a million people whereas it was really, it was a very much more of a family conversation like 'do you want this?' 'yeah, great', yeah it was just easy and it was encouraged rather than felt like 'oh, it's just another thing we've gotta do', it was always really, positive yeah, so it was really, encouraging for me.

Andrea particularly enjoyed her coaching role, and how she was able to pass on her soccer knowledge to children. She noted that this opportunity may not have been possible in a mixed, or even a larger club, and felt empowered by her involvement with the club in this way.

While the women experienced empowerment through their involvement with WMFC, they also felt as though they were empowering each other. Further, participating in sport itself was also found to be empowering:

Maggie: I think a woman who grows up around strong women, like in WMFC for example, with strong female role models out there in the world is less likely to feel disempowered and be taken advantage of in different ways in the world that we live in, so sports a really big part of that and an important part of that I think.

Role models for the junior members were an important part of the women-only club. Olivia spoke about women-only clubs not having 'watered-down' role modelling, while Maggie discussed the importance of role models in the media, and that increased coverage of women in soccer allows more girls to feel empowered to play sports.

Maggie: there's those little girls growing up watching women on TV and it's really important that they're seeing examples of strong, capable, confident um women in the sporting arena, in all arenas but in the sporting arena definitely, 'cause the physical, that physical stuff tends to be more of a men's domain, 'cause women aren't seen as being physical, as being physically strong, generally, it's not an association or stereotype you know, so having more of that in the sporting arena, little girls will be like 'oh, well I want to play soccer and I want to play footy and I want to have a strong body and I want to be a strong woman'.

The women put particular emphasis on empowering the junior players at the club, ensuring they had positive role models and created a space where they also felt empowered. Some discussed WMFC as a site for this empowerment, while others put the responsibility on elite sporting organisations to promote women's sport more in media, close the gender pay gap for athletes and sponsor a positive image of female athletes for young girls. With women receiving far less media attention than men (Brown 1995; Capranica et al. 2005; Fink 2015), the women I interviewed could see how this influences broader perceptions of women and girls in sport.

Social Empowerment

The women at the club also felt empowerment through social interactions with others within the club. While the women-only club and women-only spaces more generally are described as being increasingly social, they also are a site of social empowerment. In this context, social empowerment is the process whereby women gain autonomy and confidence through their interactions with and involvement in the women-only soccer club. The women spoke of the networks they had made and the skills they had gained through their involvement in WMFC:

Camilla: think particularly last year being my first time joining a soccer club um, what I really didn't expect was to really develop really good bonds with each player I think I just felt that um, I got to know a lot of people on a personal level um, on and off the field, um, and I was always exposed to people that I probably normally would have not been exposed to because- through soccer.

One woman explained empowerment in women-only spaces as the opportunity to take ownership of their engagement with the space, and to eliminate gender as an excuse for ability or performance:

Me: and do you think that women are empowered in these women-only spaces? **Andrea:** yeah, yeah definitely I think um... I think there's no excuses, huh, for as much as my last answer, but as far as themselves, there's, they're not comparing themselves to something that they can't do, so when there's only females there or if they're in a running club with only mums they haven't got that excuse that they can't do it because they're a female or because they're a mum like that's all there is so therefore that's not your excuse, you have to have a different one you know if that's what you use, so I think they do feel empowered I think it's um... it's can be a positive, I think it always depends on the individual, I think some people need that and some people don't.

Andrea explained that where women are exercising or playing a sport where there are no male participants, they are able to think of their performance in terms of their personal challenges and achievements, rather than because they are a woman. This notion was also discussed by other interviewees, as they described the women-only space as empowering due to the social support that women received.

The participants described moments in their soccer experiences of heightened emotion. They explain how particularly instances stood out to them, changed them, and are memorable as being one of the most enjoyable aspects to playing soccer:

Maggie: I always get emotional and nervous before a game [laughs] it doesn't matter how many I play, I always get butterflies in my stomach.

Olivia: I remember thinking specifically that this was going to be really difficult. I played basketball and netball and you know a bit of umm, Aussie rules footy where you use your hands but the idea of playing with just my feet was really... umm... kind of... yeah, just a bit weird and... but I said yes and I just loooved it from the first game... I really love just the feeling of playing, like it's such a, um... such a kind of high, exciting sport to play, um, I really love the feeling.

I record a particularly emotional game, where the outcome was very important to the club, to my team and to myself. These observations demonstrate the many emotions elicited while playing soccer, and the sense of togetherness achieved after overcoming obstacles as a team:

This was it. We had played each team once through and were sitting second on the ladder to the team we were about to play. We all wanted this game. You could tell this by the focus

on everyone's faces. In their scrunched eyebrows. In their eyes. The change rooms were uncommonly silent. Deep heat burned the nostrils, which would be unpleasant to most, but for soccer players it represents hard work, while also masking the smell of dirty, sweaty shin pads and boots that had layers of mud caked to the gaps between the studs. In the sectioned change rooms, we squashed together for the coach's briefing. "Play our game, focus on us, close your eyes and imagine the win". He announced the line-up and his expectations of us in those positions. The silence continued during the warm up, which was thorough and focused. Yet there was no tension in our silence. There was no daydreaming or thoughts other than the win we wanted. Winning this match meant we equalised in points with this team we now faced, but would become first with our superior goal difference. This would put us to the top of the ladder for the first time ever in club history. The highest position on the ladder previously earned was a third finish in 2013. A lot was on the line here and we all understood our part. Before the kick-off, in our huddle, moments before the starting whistle, we closed our eyes in total focus, wanting this for ourselves and for our teammates and for our club. Looking back, it felt scripted like one of those bad sports movies where the girl kicks the winning goal as part of a boys' team, or the underdogs become champions through fair play and hard work. I can't remember much of the game, but we all remember the feeling. The win felt amazing, like we were movie stars. We were all so proud of ourselves, smiling as soon as the final whistle blew.

Normally, following a game, two or three players hang around to assist at the canteen, but most others go home. The coach stays until the food is announced as free to avoid waste, then he takes his lunch and leaves before pack-up duties commence. Today, the whole team stayed behind to reminisce over our win. We sat there refreshing the page that would announce us as ladder leaders, and when our result was published, we openly and vocally cheered as our logo sat on the top of the ladder. Poppy screen-shot the image and made it her background. Another player commented that our recent opponent had only lost 2 games so far, and they were both to us. The team manager loaded the screen shot of the ladder onto our team's Facebook page, where we continued to post celebratory comments all week.

Fieldnotes, June 2016

Political Empowerment

Women-only spaces are also politically empowering, where women's involvement in sport in these spaces challenge social perceptions, resist dominant gender norms and enhance women's sport for future generations. One of the founders of WMFC spoke about her upbringing, and the values she learned then that she has helped to instil in WMFC:

Maggie: within the family, it was 'you're a woman, women are strong, women can do anything that men can do', you know there was that sort of part of my upbringing that was quite positive in terms of being a woman and being just as capable of achieving anything that I set my mind to as any man could.

The addition of the junior members to WMFC made the women reflective of their own childhood sports, or lack thereof. The women players and the parents of the junior players at the club expressed the value of young girls playing sport, and the importance of the players being well-represented in media outputs:

Camilla: I think now there's a bigger focus on the juniors I think maybe just because things are changing mainly in society where a lot more parents are seeing the value of having girls playing soccer and being part of a team.

Our communications officer was discussing the need to get parental permission with the parents before posting pictures of the junior players on our social media and website. One of the parents said "yeah, I think if they're pictures in a positive context, you know running and looking strong, I think it's great!"

Fieldnotes, August 2016

While women's equality and equity in sport and specifically soccer still has a long way to go, the increased involvement of women in the sport is contributing to changing and challenging social perceptions about appropriate female sports:

Maggie: for me until I started playing soccer I wasn't... not that I wasn't aware of it, I was aware of women's issues in terms of gender equality and what not in other aspects of life but not in the sporting arena so it's really through playing the sport and being involved in um particularly involved with WMFC that I've really become more passionate about that, I've always been passionate about any issues around inequality and anything like that, especially in regards to gender inequality um... yeah but definitely through involvement in WMFC soccer, that's definitely where I've become, more interested and more passionate, hmm about women's sport.

Sammy, the club president, gave a speech at both the junior and senior presentation events about a particular moment in her final game of the season. She felt this moment best represents the importance of WMFC in the community and for women's sports more generally:

"In the last game of the season, we were losing and I was very frustrated because I felt like we should be winning, but I guess that's what sport is about sometimes. Anyway, one group of 10-12 year old boys were walking around the field, with their heads bent over their

phones, probably looking for Pokémon, when a couple of them started to say 'Go West Melbourne!' Now, they didn't know me, they didn't know my team or the score. They may have been brothers or friends of our juniors or maybe had a soccer ball accidentally kicked into their background, and looked us up, but for some reason while hunting Pokémon they felt like they should support us, and they knew our name. They could have easily walked past and took no notice, or look up from their phones and said nothing, but they felt justified in supporting us. This is really exciting not just for our club but for the future of women's football, that a couple of young boys don't see women's soccer as strange or abnormal, but part of the scenery, and even worth cheering for. I believe our continued and growing presence in the community is so important to the future of women's soccer, and women's sports".

Fieldnotes, September 2016

Other women within the club expressed similar experiences, where they learned that women playing soccer face many challenges, particularly in the mixed-gender space. Through their involvement in soccer, these women have become more sensitive to broader social issues for women, feel more confident to challenge and resist hegemonic masculinity in broader social domains, and have become agents of change in their communities. Olivia described the complexity of the enjoyment she gets in proving that she can play soccer. While she felt as though she should not need to prove that she and women can play sports, she enjoyed the feeling of proving others wrong, and changing their expectations.

Olivia: I, I reckon like I always had this thing at the back of my mind like there's this pressure on you to prove that girls can play and so as soon as you get the ball you think 'shit, I'm going to stuff it up and ruin it for the whole gender (laughing) you know. **Me:** You felt a responsibility that you were representing all women when playing mixed soccer? **Olivia:** yep, yes exactly, yep. And it feels, the thing is it's like this double edged thing 'cause it feels really good when comes off you know, like you get this extra kind of boost out of showing that yeah girls can play and I'm sure you get this, like it's probably fun having that reinforcement of, ah... you get treated a bit differently and that's really fun but actually it would be great if... if we all were just treated as though 'of course we can play' and 'of course we can do well' and yeah.

While some women-only spaces exclude men from all on and off-field positions, in the formation process of WMFC, the founding women decided that men needed to be part of the process in creating more opportunities for women, and challenging gender norms. They felt that both men and women should want and pursue equality, and did not want to exclude those men from the process. This was also clear in Shae's experience in

Zanzibar. Shae explained that men aided women's participation in soccer, and women challenged gender norms through their assisted participation:

Shae: In Zanzibar it's 97% Muslim so even these women were doing things that were not normal, women don't play sport [laughs] you know, and Zanzibar is a little bit different, because it's a tourist place... but I suppose in terms of the way they, worked together or played together, yes and their passion for it, but I would say that would be, that connection that they wanted to play regardless of what anyone else said, they still did it, you know, and they did luckily have some people that support them, like some men that just used to come and help them and train with them but if you were to deal with, the majority of people they would be like 'no, women don't play', like over there that was the mentality, that women don't do anything, they should be home cooking and, and having babies, that's it.

Andrea spoke of her experience coaching girls, and the way in which she has been able to influence their beliefs about women and girls playing sports. She also spoke about why she took on a coaching role, saying that she did not want these girls to walk away from the sport because they could not compete with the boys:

Andrea: it I thought' oh, I wonder if I could do that, I could help because the way it was worded was these girls were just really enthusiastic but they were just getting thumped every week and have no idea and I thought 'you know, they kind of deserve a bit of help but they're just there wanting to learn and nobody's able to give them that and they're probably just going to walk away and not play it'... they were just running around but they just had no basic skills as to how to even pass a ball or kick a ball um, and so the parents were really enthusiastic and I think we started off doing Saturday mornings... in general I found [coaching] really really rewarding.

Through coaching these young girls, Andrea felt both empowered and empowering, as she and her team demonstrated that, given the opportunity, women and girls can thrive in sport, overcoming challenges and barriers.

Maggie emphasised the importance of women playing soccer as well as other sports. She states that the small victories experienced at WMFC, where women are encouraged to play sport and feel empowered as a consequence, are part of larger social gender issues. Maggie felt the way that women and girls are treated within WMFC should be an example for broader communities:

Maggie: I'm obviously a woman and I've been a young girl as well and I suppose for me my personal experience and the experience of my friends who are women and their children like all the little people in my life that are little girls as well, um... I always think about them when I'm at the club, because, it's not just about the women who are playing

in the club I mean it is obviously a big part of it but it's about, women being represented and given opportunities you know the same sorts of opportunities that men and little boys are given you know in sport, obviously because that's West Melbourne's um, focus but I think generally thinking that's symbolic of how the rest of the world should be treating women and girls as well, so, yeah it's, it's bigger picture stuff as well, it's not just WMFC.

Physical Empowerment

Bruising or injury as a result of playing sport is regarded as evidence of your power and strength, rather than weakness among the women at WMFC. The appealing physical component to soccer and the resulting 'war wounds' are best demonstrated in the following fieldnote:

Last night after training, I pointed out that Millie had a lot of bruising on her legs as we were getting changed to go home. She said "yeah I think they come from the games, most of I time I don't know where they come from". Poppy said "yeah I'm the same, sometimes I don't know I'm bruised until it colours. I just get bruised easily". Poppy had started a 'bruise thread' on Facebook in 2015, where people could share their bruises and other injuries almost like a battle scar. They were worn and shared with honour, demonstrating that you played hard and weren't scared to tackle. This thread has been very popular, with all sizes and locations of soccer-inflicted bruising shared. Most of the time a post would be commented on, asking for details about how it happened, offering advice on how to treat the injury and congratulating the person on improving upon the last bruise posted. Few are comments of pity, such as "poor you" or "that looks painful".

(Fieldnotes, May 2016)

Figures 3 and 4 show examples of the photos and comments from the Facebook bruise thread.

Figure 3: "Bruise thread" photo and comments



Figure 4: "Bruise thread" photo



Where women play 'the harder stuff' and earn bruises that are admired by others, they are using their bodies in ways that are not sexual or passive, but strong, assertive and

dominant. The women-only soccer space offers women the opportunity to experience physical empowerment, as they use their bodies in a traditionally non-feminine capacity.

Summary

Women in sport experience many barriers and challenges to participation, and report that supportive people are the most important factor for overcoming these barriers. The women-only space is also an enabler for participation, offering women a space that caters for their needs and exist due to the lack of opportunity women have within mixed-gender spaces, particularly with participation and the opportunity to occupy leadership positions. While some of the women explain that they do not necessarily need a women-only space to have a positive experience in sport, all of the participants agree that the women-only space is valuable and empowering for women. All of the interviewees describe moments where they have either felt empowered through involvement with WMFC, or where they believe they have empowered others in the space. While women-only spaces present their own challenges, they have an overwhelmingly positive impact on the women who use them.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

Sport has historically been a space created by men for men, where hegemonic masculinity is (re)constructed and reinforced, and women's engagement is met with hostility (Light & Wedgwood 2012; Olive, McCuaig & Phillips 2015). The gendered nature of sport, where sport reinforces hegemonic masculinity and gives privilege to heterofemininity, is well documented, and evident in women's experience throughout their involvement in sport. Women-only spaces such as WMFC have emerged to offer women the opportunity to engage in sport in a space that caters for them.

Empowerment can be understood as "women's 'power to' create new opportunities and identities which are not automatically or uncritically prescribed by traditional gender norms" (Raisborough & Bhatti 2007, p. 463). Further, empowerment can also be both a positive outcome and part of the resistance process (Shaw 2001). This was certainly seen throughout my observations and interviews, where women created a space in resistance to their experienced inequities. These spaces allowed the women within them to experience opportunities and roles they could not or did not experience in mixed-gender settings.

There is a belief that "women will develop their own strengths only if separated by male institution" (Humm 2003, p. 257). However, the impact of these spaces on their members and the broader gender discussion is not comprehensively documented. In this chapter, I discuss the women's experiences of playing soccer in a women-only club, and the extent to which these spaces can empower its members.

Girls Who Play Sport: *That whole 'tomboy' thing*

Sport as a whole remains to be an arena that is dominated by and emphasises masculine values. When women participate in sports that are considered to masculine such as soccer, they challenge "traditional stereotypes of female physical passivity and attempts at physical invisibility" (Weaving 2014, p. 130). Soccer is identified as "predominantly the realm of men" (Clark 2011, p. 834) and sports such as soccer

favour men and masculine character traits, where the hegemonic norm of men as leaders and decision-makers is seen as natural and public [and] the majority of women are kept in private places both physically and visually.

This poses deterrents to women entering this space, who must “challenge dominant notions of ‘appropriate’ female sport” in order to “enter the powerfully male-defined and controlled world of football” that is rife with “conventional stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity in western culture” (Scruton et al. 1999, p. 101). Sport is identified as a place “in which women must negotiate their gender by finding a balance between the strength required to play and the necessity to maintain a no-so-muscle body that conforms to the dominant femininity” (Knijnik 2015, p. 67). Women develop a feminine femininity or masculine femininity in order to negotiate masculine or male-dominated spaces (Pope 2012). Some of the women at WMFC emphasised their femininity by adding hair bows to their uniform or wearing short or tighter clothes to training and games. In this way, the women reinforce their femininity while playing a sport often considered ‘for boys’. While some of the women added bows or wore make-up and fitted clothing in other aspects of their lives, some women at WMFC actively produced a self in the sport context that rejected these markers of femininity. For example, removing make-up and jewellery before training, wearing longer shorts and tying hair back. These women tended to think of themselves as more legitimate occupants of the space, looking down upon those who feminised the space or themselves within the space. Shae tells of her own playground interests being the “harder stuff” as opposed to the “boring” activities played by the girls. Shae also highlighted that playing sport for other girls was a means to be with the boys, while her own focus was purely about playing the sport. Similarly, Danni and Camilla laugh at the women who “fluff around” at the gym, while their own engagement in the space is focused on exercise. In these stories, other women’s behaviour is reported in a negative tone, and is looked down upon by those using the space for its sporting and exercise purposes. Essentially they are protecting the masculinity of the space by negatively reinforcing the hyper-feminine behaviours within them.

While the interviewees laugh at the feminine behaviour of their peers, hyper-femininity is a strategy often used by women athletes who engage in masculine sports, to compensate for their temporary masculinity (Bernstein 2002; Caudwell 2003). Many elite female athletes accept that they will gain more recognition and sponsorship for their off-field endorsements rather than their on-field performance. For example, American Olympian, Amy Acuff, stated her ambitions were not in winning gold, but to work on the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue*, “because people get a lot of attention for that” (Bernstein 2002, p. 423). While female athletes must emphasise their femininity in order to be accepted as an athlete, this often comes at the expense of their legitimacy as a serious athlete. Women’s athleticism is thus only permitted in aesthetic sports that emphasise athletic femininity, or where women are still able to remain attractive to

heterosexual men, and meet traditional gender roles (Dworkin & Messner 1999; Whiteside et al. 2013).

While the women indicated in their interviews they had struggled to overcome the masculine nature of particular sporting spaces, their discouragement of particular feminine behaviours contributes to the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity in sport. There was more acceptance of diverse femininities reported within the women-only space, yet there was still an understanding among some women that displays of hyper-femininity were not appropriate. This reinforces and reproduces the notion that femininity in sport is inappropriate, and therefore women's occupancy of these spaces is not suitable. At WMFC, the social players, or those that were playing club soccer for the first time were more likely to add feminine touches to their uniforms, or wear active-wear to training, while the more experienced players wore loose shorts and jerseys. This may be due to their expectations about joining a sport that is traditionally masculine, and needing to demonstrate their femininity in this way. Displays of hyper-femininity were therefore more team-based than club based, and was more evident among the younger players, who were more likely to wear make-up to training and games, while the older players did not.

Gender Roles: *It's the men showing us how to be a part of their game*

The women at WMFC felt empowered through an increased opportunity to govern the space. They expressed their enjoyment of being able to own the game and own the space through their involvement on the committee and in other roles. Owning and being responsible for the space was important for the women at WMFC, as they felt as though they were playing their own game. However, this is not always the case for women in sporting organisations. Despite being represented by all National Olympic Committees at the London 2012 Games, women continue to be under-represented in sport governance. Women represent between 45-50% of their national governing bodies in Britain within sports deemed feminine or gender neutral, while women in masculine sports, such as rugby and soccer, represent a mere 10% (Clark 2011). Claringbould and Knoppers (2008, p. 81) support that "women are under-represented in most positions of authority including senior management and governance". Gender quotas and targets are identified as a common method for increasing gender diversity on boards (Adriaanse & Shofield 2014; Murray 2014). While a numerical approach is adopted by many organisations that implement gender quotas or targets, gender equality transcends equal numbers, and that women's participation in decision-making, policy shaping, program developing and resource allocation should be considered when evaluating gender

equality on boards. Further, while participation in women's sports has increased internationally, "the desirability for the positions of authority within women's sport and the percentage of coaching and administrative positions held by women has decreased" (Clark 2011, p. 836; see also Brush & Naples 2011). Gender quotas have been introduced in some spaces to increase gender diversity in governance (see Clark 2011 and Hovden 2010), though "not all boards comply with the regulations, and often those that do limit women to entry level positions, while men maintain positions of true power and authority" (Clark 2011, p. 836). While quotas encourage and create perceptions of equality, the interaction between gender and power positions needs further examination. This interaction can best be analysed through Connell's (2009) gender regime, where four dimensions of gender relations are identified. These four dimensions are production relations, power relations, emotional relations and symbolic relations. While I acknowledge that these concepts cannot operate independent of the others as they "interweave and condition each other" (Connell 2009, p. 85), I will focus on production and power relations and their application to the sporting context.

Production relations, also referred to as the gendered division of labour, relates to the ways in which particular tasks are identified as commonly performed by men, and others are performed by women (Connell 2009). This results in the gendering of particular tasks, and stigmas associated to those that perform tasks not complimentary or consistent with their gender. Engaging in tasks not associated with one's gender is often followed by consequences that serve to discourage those from deviating from their gendered labour. Within sport governance, tasks involving leadership, power and authority are normally performed by or allocated to men, and tasks that do not involve these attributes are performed by women (Adriaanse & Shofield 2014; Litchfield 2015). Olivia explained how the women and girls would play their netball in a carpark court, before going to the football field to watch, cook for and support the men's sport. Similarly, Maggie noted that at her previous soccer club, women were more likely to cook in the canteen and clean up at the end of the year, and were less likely to coach. The literature demonstrates "men's privileged position in sport leadership roles... the gendered structure of sport organisations... and the gendering of the recruitment processes" (Adriaanse & Shofield 2014, p. 487), reinforcing production relations within sporting spaces that result in men gaining and maintaining positions of authority and leadership.

The division of labour at the organisational level within sport governance is very much gendered, particularly in relation to positions of authority and power. Phillips and Madgalinski (2008, p. 499) highlight that "women perform a disproportionate amount of

ancillary work in the sport setting (cooking, cleaning and fund-raising)", and struggle to enter positions within coaching or administration. Men are often performing practical or visible sporting roles, such as coach or player, while women are commonly found in supporting roles, such as manager, transporting children to training and matches, or supporter (Traill, Clough & McCormack 1996). The invisibility of women's work and the prolific men's work reinforce women's work as less valuable, and men as natural authority figures. This can also be separated into the 'main field' and 'off field' duties, where men occupy the main field in work such as the refereeing or umpiring, coaching, playing and rule making, while women are restricted to 'off field' duties, such as washing uniforms, driving children, cutting fruit and waving banners (Claringbould and Adriaanse 2015). Similarly, Clark (2011) reports that for the organisation and running of the 2010 FIFA World Cup hosted by South Africa "senior administration and decision-making positions went primarily to men, while women occupied lower tier predominantly administrative positions" (p. 834). This finding is not uncommon within other sport organisations (see Brush & Naples 2011; Claringbould & Adriaanse 2015; Dempsey 1989; Hovden 2010; Schlesinger & Weigelt-Schlesinger 2012).

The division of labour is often the consequence of perceived or invisible barriers for women to enter leadership roles, rather than formal, institutional or structural constraints. Traill, Clough & McCormack (1996) show that women believe they cannot fulfil these roles due to lack of role models in those positions. Andrea reinforces the importance of positive role models for young girls, stating that she wants to show the junior players at WMFC that women can play, coach and have children, without having to give up one or more of these things that she enjoys.

Interestingly, though not surprisingly, barriers for women to enter leadership positions were found to be particularly present in mixed-gender clubs, and noticeably reduced in women-only clubs (Litchfield 2015). At WMFC, committee positions are held mostly by women, and during this ethnography, all executive positions were filled by women who played at the club. This management structure allowed the players to influence and direct the club, spending time, money and resources on aspects of soccer that are important to the women that play there. This is unlike other mixed-gender sporting clubs, where executive committee positions, coaching roles and other formal positions of leadership are typically occupied by men, while women serve in the canteen, wash uniforms and perform other 'invisible' and often unpaid labour (Claringbould & Adriaanse 2015; Phillips & Magdalinski 2008; Thompson 1999; Traill, Clough & McCormack 1996). While women may not be formally excluded from these positions of authority, invisible barriers exist to

deter them from applying for and filling these positions (Litchfield 2015). Traill, Clough & McCormack (1996) report that women often believe they cannot perform particular duties, such as coaching and playing sports, because of their gender. In the women-only setting, particularly at WMFC, women are encouraged to take on these roles otherwise denied them, as there are no or few men to take those positions. Nevertheless, senior coaching roles were still male-dominated at WMFC. Andrea said during her interview that she felt there would come a time where she would not be able to teach her team anything more, and would have to limit herself to coaching below a particular age group. Andrea made no mention of completing extra courses and qualifications as the male coaches have done to increase her knowledge base, seeing her lack of participation as a child as a barrier to her continued coaching as an adult.

While most of the women I interviewed expressed no desire to coach a soccer team, those that did felt that they were unqualified, as they had no experience, and did not have enough soccer knowledge to pass on. Production relations and power relations inform perceived barriers to women occupying positions of power and authority within sports governance (Connell 2009). While women are often not formally excluded from positions of authority, invisible barriers limit women's participation in sport and occupancy of authority positions. This is due to the perception that men are naturally more qualified to exist in these spaces, and is a major barrier for women in mixed-gender sporting spaces. Further, this often results in women not entering positions of authority, such as coaching, despite the wealth of assistance provided to new coaches by the state governing body.

Within women-only spaces, women's presence in these authority roles are essential to the existence of the space, thus increasing the opportunity for women to populate committee positions and control the space in which they participate. This opportunity is not always so available at mixed-gender clubs. While men still dominated coaching roles at WMFC, and consistent with previous research (Adriaanse & Shofield 2014; Connell 2009), the interviews and observations show the women experienced increased opportunity in all aspects of running a club and managing its teams. Women made up most if not all of the committee in the time I was at the club, always in executive positions, and felt more stimulated to give back to a club that exists to provide women increased access to sport.

Segregated Spaces: We're not just playing the boys' game

Humm (2003) proposes that women will thrive and develop in separatist spaces, where the equivalent mixed-gender space maintains male privilege. Where before there were real or perceived barriers to participation, women-only spaces offer its members increased opportunity to participate in sport. Further, they create communities of support, friendships and networks, attracting women wanting to play sport while remaining social.

Women in women-only spaces create support networks, where they feel comfortable discussing their issues and concerns (Power 2008). Women-only spaces are described as inherently social, both throughout the interview responses and in previous research. Social interactions were found to be highly important in women-only hockey clubs (Litchfield 2011), gyms (Ostgaard 2006) and other women-only spaces (Power 2008). Indeed, I have also found the women-only space to encourage and facilitate social relationships more so than the mixed-gender space. According to the interview and observational data reasons for joining the club were almost always social, where joining a women's sporting team was described as being a good way to meet people when moving to a new city. Rachel, Andrea and Shae said they joined WMFC to meet people, Danni and Olivia joined with other friends, and Macy and Camilla had played soccer before, and were pleasantly surprised by how welcoming and social WMFC was for them. Women also felt comfortable discussing their issues and concerns in these spaces (Power 2008). Maggie and Camilla reported an increased sense of safety in women-only spaces, where they could exercise away from the male gaze, and felt more comfortable doing so. While the other women reported no difference, they understood how the women-only space is valuable for those that do not feel comfortable in the mixed-gender setting.

The women at WMFC describe the club as a space where they can 'just be'. They are not the token female, they are not the canteen lady, and they are not cheerleaders. The women become soccer players, athletes, community leaders and role models. They own the social and physical space, playing their own game. Olivia told me in her interview that when she played casual soccer with men and women that she felt as though she was playing the men's game, and that she could not experiment or grow as a player. She expressed how much she enjoyed playing with women who played their game, not the boys' game, and that girls who experience playing (masculine) sport with just girls, "start to feel like it is their space and their game". This importance placed on ownership was stressed by all of the interviewees, and came across in my interactions with other club members at games and trainings. Many discussions at committee meetings revolved

around the club remaining independent, and not affiliated to larger mixed-gender clubs. The club had many strategies, mainly around fundraising, sponsorship and grant funding, to ensure it can remain financially independent, and had a strict policy where only women and girls can be playing club members.

Women-only spaces offer a unique and valuable experience for women to engage in an activity away from the male gaze, where men do not dominate the space and where women have increased opportunities for participation and governance. However, the ability for women-only sporting spaces to offer both performance and participation levels of sport is unknown. While the women discussed the women-only space in terms of social gains, safety and increased opportunity, none of the women emphasised performance or discussed pathways to elite soccer. This may be due to the average age of the women at WMFC being beyond that of the target age in the elite pathway system, but with the club supporting a junior membership, some may move to other clubs that support those elite pathways. This was discussed among the coaching staff and at committee meetings, after the promotion of one team into a higher division following the 2016 season. The club's limited resources were a predominant concern, along with the preservation of club culture and remaining accessible for all abilities. Nevertheless, women wanting to play elite soccer may turn to larger mixed-gender clubs that support a male-sporting model.

Blinde (1989, in Boyle 1997, p. 8) notes the movement of women's sport since Title IX towards a male sport model that emphasises "winning, intimidation, aggression, commercialization, professionalization, and conformity". Typically, mixed-gender sports clubs operate under the male sport model, where inclusion gives way for competition, and the aim is to win. While WMFC aims to be inclusive, they operate within a broader male sport model system, where each team aims to be promoted into higher levels of competition, and trains to be able to play well and win games. Scores and results are tracked, and the rules are clear: if you do not win games, you risk relegation. Therefore, while WMFC strives to be inclusive and wants to offer competitive and social teams, the governing body to which it belongs supports a different system. Perhaps to be truly inclusive, women-only spaces must operate outside of these organisations.

The interviewees discussed their experiences at women-only gyms or spaces within gyms that were reserved for women. Camilla and Danni observed that the space was usually smaller and under-resourced compared to the mixed-gender gym spaces, and that particular equipment was often not available, such as heavy weights. They also noted that the equipment was often outdated, and while they felt more comfortable in the

women-only environment, they were disappointed in the resources available. WMFC is also a women-only space that is under-resourced and smaller compared to mixed-gender clubs. There is only one soccer pitch, not enough lighting to safely train all teams at night, equipment that is shared among the teams rather than reserved for each team, and heavily reliant on fundraising and sponsorship to exist. While these spaces offer a sense of freedom and empowerment for its members, it remains limited by its funding and resources. However, WMFC is not an old club, and already has more resources now than when it was founded. These limitations are possibly better explained by the age of the club, rather than due to it being a women-only club.

Toward Social Change: *I've become more passionate about gender equality*

Sport is a site where women and girls can be empowered from their involvement in sport (Blinde, Taub & Han 1993; 1994; Hämäläinen 2014; Hargreaves 1994; Sveinson & Hoeber 2016). While the women-only space was identified as a site where women felt an overall sense of empowerment, political empowerment was most the commonly reported experienced of the women at WMFC. The women felt increased opportunity to enter positions of leadership, as well as the ability to challenge and resist social gender norms that reproduce hegemonic masculinity in sport. Women's issues in sport were seen as common to women's issues in the workforce and other social arenas, such as women having to prove themselves as worthy or able, while men are seen as naturally qualified to perform particular tasks (Claringbould & Adriaanse 2015; Connell 2009; Thompson 1999). Through their involvement in soccer, these women have become more sensitive to broader social gender issues. They now feel more confident to challenge and resist hegemonic masculinity in broader social domains, and have become agents of change in their communities (Sveinson & Hoeber 2016; McGinnis, Chun, & McQuillan 2003).

Andrea felt responsible to be a positive role model for her junior team, demonstrating that a woman can play soccer and coach a team, all while maintaining her employment, relationships and starting a family. She and the other women I interviewed, such as Maggie, felt that providing the junior members at WMFC with positive female role models was imperative to maintaining the club culture, and that raising strong soccer players and strong women through the junior system contributed to the social change WMFC wanted to be a part of. However, this places immense pressure on the women at WMFC to represent women for the junior members in the way that they felt they had to represent women soccer players in a mixed team. They become examples of sportswomen, though this time not through others' perceptions, but the accountability they place on

themselves. Evident from the interviews and observations, the women at WMFC felt as though the club was part of the process in achieving gender equality. They acknowledged the club's role in raising strong women and providing increased opportunity for women to self-develop, occupy positions of authority, and increase their confidence. However, the ability of a women-only space to help achieve equality is questionable, when the lessons learned by women are not learned by men. Women learn that they can occupy executive positions, can play and coach sport, and that their gender does not have to limit their opportunities to take on particular roles. However, men do not learn that women can be athletes, women can be coaches, and women can be executives. While the women at the club felt empowered through their experiences in the women-only space, the ability of the space to influence social change is still questionable, especially when half of the population is absent from the conversation.

The women-only space presents a paradox; women are empowered through their participation in these spaces, yet they reinforce women's sport as something different to men's sport. While this research has demonstrated that the women in these spaces feel empowered, I cannot comment on whether these spaces create social change, and whether this change is towards or away from equality. I argue that if women are feeling empowered in sport through the use of women-only spaces, then these spaces cannot be detrimental to equality. I see two conclusions to this narrative: these spaces reinforce women's sport as different to men's sport, where women's performances are compared to men, contributing to the opinion that women are therefore inferior athletes, or; these spaces reinforce women's sport as different to men's sport, which is unlikely to change as long as men and women compete separately to one another. In this thesis I have demonstrated that in a women-only setting, women have increased access to resources and opportunity than in a mixed-gender club. Until men and women compete with and against one another, women will be compared to men. When athletes are compared to other athletes based on ability and performance, regardless of gender, then women-only spaces will be redundant. Until this time, women-only spaces continue to empower women, offer opportunities and increase women's access to sport.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions

The aim of this research was to explore the effects of sex-segregated sport on the empowerment of women within the context of a women-only soccer club. An ethnographic exploration of one particular women-only soccer club in Melbourne was conducted over a period of two years. Through observation and interviews, I questioned whether sex segregation offers more opportunities for empowering women in and through sport.

This study has increased our understanding of women-only spaces, and the opportunity for empowerment they provide the women who occupy them. These spaces are experienced as supportive, inclusive and social sites where women can 'just be'. The interview responses reveal that women in these spaces are empowered in different ways, but empowered nonetheless. The women experienced greater social confidence, increased awareness of broader social gender issues and a sense of community service, where they were able to give back to the community through their engagement with the space. The women-only soccer club, WMFC is a unique space within the Melbourne context, as it is one of few women-only spaces that caters for women's and girls' soccer. The club exists within a larger structure that reinforces and (re)produces hegemonic masculinity, and the concerns and opportunities (or lack thereof) associated with women-only clubs operating or competing within a larger mixed-gender association should be addressed in future research. This is recognised as a limitation in this study; while the club aims to be inclusive of all women, it must abide by the rules and regulations of the state and national governing bodies, which may not be as inclusive as WMFC (for example there is no policy regarding transgender women, or males that identify as women).

This thesis offers three suggestions for future research in women-only spaces. First, future research might consider the relationship between access to sport for mothers and their daughters, and how this motivates mothers to enable or deny their daughters from participating in particular activities seen as masculine. In this research, mothers were identified as a barrier to participation in particular sports, including soccer. While some mothers encouraged their daughters because they were never given the opportunity to play sport, others denied their daughters access, as they saw the sport as 'for boys only'. Further research should also explore other familial relationships. Parental and sibling support for has already been linked to increased (particularly adolescent) girls' sporting

participation (Eime, Casey, Harvey, Sawyer, Symons, & Payne, 2014; Eime, Harvey, Craike, Symons & Payne, 2013; Hopwood, Farrow, MacMahon & Baker, 2015). More focus should be applied to adult women demographics and the encouragement they receive (or do not receive) from their support networks, including partners and children. Second, the interviews and observations showed that women and girls experience different barriers to participation. Gendered barriers were more prevalent for young girls and those not already in a sports club, while the adult women who were playing for a club discussed aging and injury as major barriers, which are not a gender-specific barrier, but a common preventative for all sportspeople. Further, gender as a barrier to participation manifested differently for adult women than for children, and should therefore be addressed differently. Future research should examine obstacles to participation from these perspectives, examining in more detail how these factors influence women's and girls' participation. Finally, while the interview responses about the women-only soccer club were overwhelmingly positive, there were some negative experiences within women-only gyms. The women-only soccer club was shown to improve access and opportunity within sport, yet the women-only gym was described as a smaller space with fewer resources compared to the open mixed-gender space. Therefore, future research in this area must consider the type of women-only space, as the experiences within different spaces are diverse.

In conclusion, the women-only space increases women's participation in and access to sport. They are a haven for many women who experience barriers to participation and other opportunities within the mixed-gender soccer space. The women-only space offers many opportunities for women to engage in all aspects of sport, and provides the opportunity for the women in them to feel empowered, and empower others.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Introduction	“My name is Ali Vandermey and I am interviewing [interviewee’s name] about their experiences in soccer within a women’s only soccer club for my Masters project. Today is [today’s date] at [place] in [suburb]”		
	<p>“Do you understand the informed consent form that you have signed, and do you have any further questions? Can you please confirm your consent to participate in this project by saying ‘I verbally confirm my consent’”</p> <p><i>Last check for equipment, answer any questions, check that participant has water, is comfortable etc.</i></p>		
Anchor	Key Question	Prompts	Comments
Opening Qs	Tell me about your involvement in soccer.		
Biographical Details	Can you tell me your age please?	<p>Where did you grow up?</p> <p>Primary school activities, high school activities</p> <p>Family life (siblings)?</p> <p>Do you currently work, study, both?</p>	

	Can you tell me about your childhood?	<p>What do you do?</p> <p>How did you come to be doing that?</p> <p>What sports were you involved in?</p> <p>How did you become involved in these sports?</p> <p>For how long were you involved?</p>	
Introduction to Soccer	How did you become involved in soccer?	<p>How old were you when you became involved in soccer?</p> <p>How did you become involved?</p> <p>What team did you play for?</p> <p>Who encouraged you to play?</p> <p>Is there anyone who discouraged you to play?</p> <p>Did your brothers and/or sisters play? (if yes to above)</p> <p>Did you have any time off? Why? (injury, travel etc.)</p> <p>What position do you play? What made you want to play that position?</p> <p>Have you played another position? (Which do you prefer?)</p> <p>Have you ever wanted to play in another position?</p> <p>Have you had any experience in other roles? Coach etc.</p> <p>What were these roles?</p> <p>How did you get involved into these roles?</p> <p>Did you ever want to get more involved?</p>	

Soccer Experience	Have you had any other experience with other teams or clubs?	<p>Can you describe what these experiences were like?</p> <p>How long were you involved with them?</p> <p>How were you involved?</p> <p>Any other teams/clubs?</p> <p>How long did you play for them?</p> <p>Were they women's only teams? Clubs?</p> <p>How were they different to MSFC?</p> <p>What was good/bad about them?</p> <p>What was the club culture like?</p>	
	Where there any people that had a particular role in developing you as a player?	<p>Did anyone influence you (positively or negatively) in soccer?</p> <p>Were there any coaches?</p> <p>Players you admired from your own or other teams?</p> <p>Were there players you viewed as role models?</p> <p>Do you see yourself as a role model? (Why/ not?)</p> <p><i>Parents or friends that were encouraging? Discouraging?</i></p>	
	Off pitch what were some of the things you would do as a group/team?	<p>Did you go away on team trips?</p> <p>Were there any social rituals?</p> <p>Are you involved in these social outings?</p>	

	<p>Did you follow the Matilda's at the 2015 FIFA women's world cup?</p>	<p>Can you describe your pre-game routine- is there anything you do to prepare?</p> <p>Can you describe the process of you deciding what to wear to trainings and games?</p> <p>Can you describe what you experience when you change from your everyday clothing into the soccer uniform?</p> <p>Why/ Why not?</p> <p>Have you followed them before?</p> <p>Do you follow women's soccer? Any particular leagues?</p> <p>Do you think women's soccer should be promoted more? What should be done?</p>	
<p>The Women's Soccer Club</p>	<p>Describe the events that occurred that lead to you MSFC?</p>	<p>How did you become involved in this club?</p> <p>Did you plan on joining a women's only club?</p> <p>How did you hear about the club?</p> <p>Can you talk about your experience belonging to a women's only soccer club?</p> <p>What's good and bad?</p>	

		<p>Would you change anything?</p> <p>Good and bad?</p> <p>Is it different from other clubs/ what you expected?</p> <p>What is the first thing you think about when thinking about Maribyrnong Swifts?</p> <p>Can you talk about how you became involved with the committee?</p> <p>Have you ever been (or wanted to be) involved with any other committees?</p> <p>Tell me about that club and the committee</p>	
Women's Only Spaces	Do you belong to any other women's only spaces?	<p>[Why don't you belong to any other women's only spaces?]</p> <p>Gyms? Work places? Community clubs?</p> <p>Can you describe the space?</p> <p>Bathrooms, posters, staff, facility etc.</p> <p>What do you like about this women's only space?</p> <p>Not like?</p> <p>How is the women's only fitness space different from the women's only [insert previous answer]</p>	

		<p>Do you think/ know (due to experience) how the women's only space differs to a mixed space?</p> <p>Are there any positives about belonging to a women's only space?</p> <p>Are there any negative?</p> <p>Do you think that women are empowered in these spaces? (empower= makes someone stronger, more confident, gives them power to do things)</p> <p>Do you think that your experience with the Swifts has empowered you?</p>	
Barriers	How does soccer fit with your other commitments (to work/study/family etc)?	<p>Did/do you have to make financial sacrifices to play?</p> <p>Did/do you have to make social sacrifices to play?</p> <p>Did/do you have to make other sacrifices to play?</p> <p>Do you wish you started playing soccer at an earlier age?</p> <p>What stopped you?</p> <p>Were there any barriers you experienced to playing or becoming involved?</p> <p>Who/what got in your way?</p> <p>Do you think it could have been avoided?</p> <p>Who do you think could have avoided these</p>	

		barriers?	
Reflection	Why do you play soccer?	<p>What have been some of the most enjoyable aspect of being involved in soccer? What is the most negative aspect?</p> <p>Looking ahead, what do you think your future holds for soccer?</p> <p>Do you think you will ever stop playing?</p> <p>Do you think you will stay involved in soccer? Why?</p>	
Conclusion		<p>Is there anything that we have covered today that you want to talk about more?</p> <p>Is there anything else at all that you would like to add?</p> <p>Is there anything else I can ask you and other interviewees to better understand your experience in soccer, and playing at MSFC?</p> <p>Thank you for your participation in this study.</p>	

Appendix B: Informational Flyer

Invitation to participate in a research study:

KICKING LIKE A FOOTBALLER:

Examining gender politics within a women's only association football club in Melbourne

You are invited to participate in this research study which is being carried out by Ali Vandermey for her Masters by Research Degree at Victoria University.

What is the study about?

Women are often discouraged from playing sport through the embedded power inequalities that exist within a traditionally masculine space, such as soccer. In response to this problem, sport researchers and activists have proposed and implemented a range of strategies to 'empower' women in and through sports, such as providing spaces in which only women can participate in sport, for example, women's only sports teams or clubs. These spaces are still not very well understood, and through analysing the experiences of women in these spaces, I hope to examine this paradox of gender politics in sport.

Who can participate?

Women who are

- aged 18 years and older
- able to understand English and can verbally communicate freely in English
- a playing member of West Melbourne FC

What is involved?

An interview that will take up to 2 hours at a time convenient to you, face-to-face either at Victoria University or another location convenient to you.

Participation is voluntary and confidential

Please contact Ali Vandermey for more information, and to express your interest in participating in this study

PHONE: **** * * *

EMAIL: *****

Appendix C: Informed Consent Package

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled *KICKING LIKE A FOOTBALLER: Examining gender politics within a women's only association football club in Melbourne**.

This project is being conducted by Ms. Aliantha Vandermey, under the supervision of Dr. Brent McDonald and Dr. Fiona McLachlan of the College of Sport and Exercise Science at Victoria University.

You are eligible to participate in this study, if you are:

- aged 18 years and older
- able to understand English and can verbally communicate freely in English
- a playing member of West Melbourne Football Club

Introduction

I am Aliantha Vandermey, studying a Masters by Research at Victoria University. This research project examines the experiences of adult women who play soccer in Australia, as they reflect on their past and present involvement in soccer. You do not have to decide today whether you would like to participate in this research project. Before you decide, I can answer any questions about the research. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them of me.

Purpose of the research

Women are often discouraged from playing sport through the embedded power inequalities that exist within a traditionally masculine space, such as soccer. In response to this problem, sport researchers and activists have proposed and implemented a range of strategies to 'empower' women in and through sports, such as providing spaces in which only women can participate in sport, for example, sex segregated gyms, single-sex schools, and women's only sports teams or clubs. The extent to which women in these spaces are empowered, and how notions of gender are negotiated (i.e. reinforced, challenged or transformed) in and through these women's only settings is still not very well understood. This project aims to examine the paradox of gender politics in sport by critically analysing the structure of a women's only soccer club in Melbourne and the lived experiences of its members.

*Note the title change- this is the initial title before the title was changed following the interviews

Type of Research

This project utilises an ethnographic qualitative methodology, which includes observation and interview techniques to collect information from participants. This project will involve the researcher collecting field notes about social interactions during trainings and games, as well as your participation in an interview that will take approximately two hours.

Participant Selection

You have been invited to participate in this research because of your experience within a women's only soccer club. Your experience in this space can contribute to my critical analysis of these spaces.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. If you choose not to participate, this will have no impact on your involvement with the women's football club or on your relationship with me, the researcher. Your involvement in this study will be confidential. You may change your mind and stop participating at any point of the research, even if you previously agreed. Any information revealed in the interviews and discussions can be requested to be removed and not used in the research study, the research thesis, and further publications from this study.

Procedures

We are asking you to help us learn more about the experiences of Australian adult women's experiences playing soccer within a women's only soccer club. We are inviting you to take part in this research project. If you accept, you will be asked to attend one 2 hour interview. All times are flexible.

The interviews will begin with me answering any questions you may have about the interview process, the research project, and confirming your consent to participate. The content of the interview will chronologically follow your experiences in sport and soccer, ultimately leading to questions surrounding your current involvement in a women's only soccer club. I will have some questions prepared, but the interview should feel informal, allowing your responses to direct what we discuss. You should understand that you do not have to discuss any content that you do not feel comfortable sharing, and that any information revealed during the interviews can be withheld from the report, if requested. The entire interview will be tape recorded, and I may make some notes during the interview. The tape recording will remain confidential, available only to the research team, and the information stored electronically under password protection. The discussion will take place at a private location to be confirmed, to ensure your confidentiality and the security of your responses.

After the interviews have taken place and the recordings transcribed, I will send your transcribed interview to you via email, where any further thoughts and ideas can be raised, and further questions can be asked of the researcher. You may request that information be omitted from the final product.

The observation and field-note component of the data collection will be completed by the

researcher during trainings and games, where social interactions, attitudes and thoughts (where relevant to the research) will be noted. All aspects of the observations will be confidential, only the primary researcher will know the identity of those that are documented, and only the research team will have access to these notes. The original notes will be kept secure by the researcher, and will be used to support ideas, thoughts and experiences that are discussed in the interviews.

Duration

The entire research takes place over 24 months in total. During that time, I will meet with you once to interview you, which will last for about two hours.

Risks

There is a risk that you may share some personal or confidential information by chance, or that you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. However, we do not wish for this to happen. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the interview if you feel the question(s) are too personal, or if discussing them makes you uncomfortable. There is some risk of your participation in the study being identified by the information that you share. As such, anonymity cannot be guaranteed, but there are opportunities to review information shared, and remove any information you do not wish to be reported.

Benefits

Individual: We hope that the interview processes allows you to reflect on your personal experiences of soccer, and allow you to gain knowledge about women's experiences in sport more generally.

Community: Sharing your experiences of soccer within a women's only club may help to contribute to a better understanding of women's soccer in Australia, and can be used to identify methods to improve yours and others' experiences playing soccer. While there is much research about young girls playing sport, there is little research that examines adult women in amateur sport, and even less about women's only soccer clubs. Your participation will contribute to this essential yet underdeveloped field of research.

Club: Findings may be shared with the club, where information may be able to improve the performance of the club and the experience of its players and members.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided any incentive to take part in the research. However, the researcher will work according to your schedule to ensure you do not experience loss of income, or inconvenience.

Confidentiality

Due to the study focusing only on one football club, your involvement in this project and some of the information you provide may identify you as a participant, and as such, we cannot guarantee your anonymity. However, extra precautions will be taken to ensure your confidentiality, such as changing your name, places and the name of the football

club in the final written product of this project, and changed in all written products that are produced from this research. Your real identity will be known only to the research team throughout the research process, and all information shared with the researcher will remain confidential. I remind you that any information shared may not be included in the written product, at your request.

Sharing the Results

The results from this project will form part of the primary researcher's Masters by Research thesis, which will be finished and submitted by March 2017. A copy of this thesis can be made available to all participants, and any questions about the thesis can be answered. There is a possibility of smaller research papers being published from the main thesis that will use the information and knowledge from the interviews, as well as external researchers citing those publications in their own work. Results from this study hope to be published as smaller articles in academic journals, which may inform policy, attitudes towards women in sport, and further research.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

This is a reconfirmation that your participation is voluntary and includes the right to withdraw at any time during the research process. Choosing to participate will not affect your position at the football club in any way, or your relationship with the researcher. You may stop participating in the interview at any time that you wish, with no adverse consequences. You will have the opportunity after your interview to review your remarks, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those.

The Research Team

College of Sport and Exercise Science, Victoria University

Primary Researcher: Ms. Aliantha Vandermey

Phone: **** * * *

Email: *****

Primary Research Supervisor: Dr. Brent McDonald

Phone: **** * * *

Email: *****

Secondary Research Supervisor: Dr. Fiona McLachlan

Phone: **** * * *

Email: *****

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher, Aliantha Vandermey.

Any further queries about this project may be directed to any of the researchers listed above. If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

I have been invited to participate in research about women's experiences in soccer. I voluntarily give my consent participate in the project, **KICKING LIKE A FOOTBALLER: Examining gender politics within a women's only association football club in Melbourne**, being conducted at Victoria University by Ms. Aliantha Vandermey, under the supervision of Dr. Brent McDonald and Dr. Fiona McLachlan.

I certify that I am at least 18 years old and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study. I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by Ms. Aliantha Vandermey and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- One 2 hour interview

All of my responses will be kept confidential by the researcher. I know that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, and can request for information not to be included in the written report. I accept that there is some risk that my responses in the interviews may reveal my participation in this project, and I accept that the researcher keep my identity confidential and anonymous under the requirements of the Human Research Ethics Committee.

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily consent to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____
DD/MM/YYYY

The researchers may wish to contact you in the future for future studies on women in soccer, or publish the results of this research in further works. Your anonymity will be protected under the requirements of the Human Research Ethics Committee

I allow the research team to contact me for future research projects (circle) **Y/N**

I allow the research team to publish my results in further works (circle) **Y/N**

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher, Aliantha Vandermey.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 9919 4461.