An Examination of Women in Leadership Positions in Sport: A Case Study of Australian Rules Football

By

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ABSTRACT

Sport is a platform that both reinforces and challenges gendered stereotypes and it is often seen to privilege men over women. However, women are becoming more visible in roles and positions that have traditionally been held by men in sport (such as roles in sports departments, sports journalism and managerial positions). These changes have challenged the traditional gender hierarchy in sport and are gradually changing the perception of women working in sport. This thesis highlights the lived experiences, beliefs and opinions of 26 women working and volunteering in leadership positions in Australian rules football. Using methods such as in-depth interviews, case study analysis and thematic analysis, this thesis investigates whether these women ‘fit in’ or challenge the traditionally male environment. The extent to which Australian rules football practices gender inclusivity and equality is also explored. Participants shared both positive and challenging experiences within their respective workplaces. These women shared experiences where they were proud to forge a pathway for women following in their footsteps. They also believed they brought diversity to their workplace and for the most part, did not feel there were gendered barriers in place. However, participants also faced challenges, such as institutional barriers, sexism and a pressure to conform to gender stereotypes. At times, females were also held to higher standards and expectations (compared to males) and showed a hesitancy to advocate for gender equality. Adopting a third wave feminism perspective, this research concluded that the environment of Australian rules football is both empowering and oppressive for women in leadership positions.
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge and belief, understand that it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

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Name Kelsey Richards

Signature

Date
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<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>Australian Football League</td>
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<td>AFLW</td>
<td>Australian Football League Women’s (AFL Women’s)</td>
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<td>ARU</td>
<td>Australian Rugby Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<td>FD</td>
<td>Football Department</td>
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<td>North East Australian Football League</td>
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<td>NRL</td>
<td>National Rugby League</td>
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<td>NSO</td>
<td>National Sporting Organisation</td>
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<td>South Australian National Football League</td>
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The significance of sport to Australians is well known. Engrained in the nation’s culture, sport is an integral part of the Australian landscape (Cashman, 2002, p. 27; Sport Australia, 2018), with Australians having ‘long considered themselves one of the greatest sporting nations in the world’ (Melnick & Wann, 2011, p. 456). The influence that sport has on Australian society is evident in the role it can play in either alleviating or perpetuating wider social issues. For example, issues in relation to class, race, gender and ethnicity can be addressed via sport (Litchfield, 2011, p. 1). Sport can act as a platform to both reinforce and/or challenge stereotypes, with the ability to influence wider society on such discussion points. One sport that has a strong influence on individuals and in Australian society is Australian rules football.

Australian rules football has a particularly long and rich history in Australia. The sport is followed passionately by individuals in most areas of Australia (Frost, 2005, p. ix). The sport originated in Melbourne, with the first recorded game held in 1858 and the first official governing body, the Victorian Football Association (VFA), established in 1877 (Hess, 2000, p. 111). This followed with the development of the Victorian Football League (VFL) in 1896 (Hess, 2000, p. 113), which then expanded to become the national men’s competition, the Australian Football League (AFL) in 1990 (Hindley, 2006, p. 17). Since then, the sport has expanded further and currently includes 18 national men’s teams (10 teams in Victoria, with two teams in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia respectively). In 2017 the national competition for females, the AFL Women’s (AFLW) competition, was established (Willson et al., 2017, p. 1704). The women’s competition currently includes eight teams (four teams in Victoria and one team in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia respectively – with plans to expand the league from 2019 onwards).
Willson et al. (2017, p. 1705) state that the introduction of the AFLW competition is predicted to have ‘cultural, social, and economic impacts for sports generally, and for women’s participation and leadership in and through Australian sport specifically’.

Despite Australian rules football being the highest profile sport in Australia (Melnick & Wann, 2011, p. 465; Willson et al., 2017, p. 1705), outside of their strong spectatorship (Hess, 2000, p. 114), historical acknowledgements of women as having an impact on the sport itself are rare. The history of women’s involvement in Australian rules football highlights perceptions of women as ‘peripheral to the game’ (Hess, 2000, p. 114). Hess states that this view supports and echoes traditional beliefs and standards of hegemonic masculinity in sport (2000, p. 114). Women were traditionally (and are still often today) assigned to roles that support men in playing the game. As Hindley (2006, p. 280) describes, ‘men claim ownership of the game, subletting female participation in ways that serve them’. Traditionally, women have often been relegated to the role of supporter or volunteer rather than having the opportunity to either play Australian rules football or hold a leadership role and have significant professional influence in the sport.

At the national and state level of Australian rules football, there is just a small percentage of females working in leadership positions, such as on boards, in the football department of clubs (as coaches, analysts and trainers, etc.) and in journalism positions, where they are reporting or commentating on the sport. Women in sport across Australia (including Australian rules football) have been (and continue to be) significantly underrepresented in leadership positions (Brown & Light, 2012, p. 186). Women involved within male dominated sports such as Australian rules football (as fans, athletes or employees) are also often subjected to scrutiny or discrimination. This discrimination can come in the form of a lack of belief in their passion, knowledge and abilities, a continuous comparison to men and being judged as inferior, no matter the role they
play. Given the historically masculine culture of Australian rules football, often women can find the environment challenging.

There is a consistent and growing body of literature exploring the experiences, beliefs and opinions of women involved with sport in various domains, including women as athletes, fans and employees (Klugman, 2012, p. 417). What is emerging more recently is a renewed focus on the experiences of women (locally, nationally and globally) involved specifically in traditionally male dominated positions within male dominated sports, such as various football codes, basketball and athletics. It is the contention of this thesis that this avenue be explored with a specific focus on women in leadership positions in Australian rules football. The current thesis explores the experiences and perspectives of 26 women employed or volunteering in positions of leadership in Australian rules football at a state level (12 participants) or national level (14 participants), during the 2016 football season. As outlined below, the aim of this thesis is to explore how inclusive Australian rules football is of women (at a state and national level) and whether the national body, the AFL, is practising gender equality.

1.1. Aims and objectives

The aims of this current study are to: 1. Determine the depth of gender inclusivity in relation to leadership roles within Australian rules football; 2. To explore the experiences and opinions of women working or volunteering professionally within Australian rules football; and 3. To determine whether the culture\(^1\) of Australian rules football ensures the inclusion of women at all levels of employment.

Therefore, the specific research questions this study will address include:

1. Is the culture of Australian rules football inclusive and welcoming for women in leadership

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\(^1\) Culture may be defined as the characteristics, values, actions and social behaviour commonly associated with a group of people or an organisation (Maitland, Hills, & Rhind, 2015, p. 502). In the current case, the culture of Australian rules football is being investigated.
2. To what extent have women in Australian rules football faced discrimination or exclusion based on their gender identity?

3. What are the motivations for and barriers faced by women in their specific leadership roles within Australian rules football? Do the motivations to succeed in a male dominated workplace outweigh the (gender) challenges faced?

4. To what extent does Australian rules football practice gender equality?

As women become more heavily involved in male dominated sports, there is a need to carefully research this domain to explore the experiences and thoughts of women (and men) in this environment. There is a growing body of literature (both nationally and internationally) of women in leadership positions in male dominated sports, with authors such as Cooper (2018), Dyson, Kurdus, Heenan, Wallace, and von Doussa (2010), Hess (2000), Hindley (2006), Nicholson et al. (2005), Willson et al. (2017) and more, providing a solid foundation on which the experiences of women in sport in Australia are analysed. This current thesis adds to this body of knowledge by focussing on the male dominated environment of Australian rules football and how women have been welcomed into such environments. This thesis can be used as a resource or reference not only for those involved with Australian rules football, but also by various male dominated sporting codes in Australia (and internationally). For example, leaders within the AFL (as well as leaders of state and grassroots Australian rules football competitions) can use this information to analyse and improve their organisation’s environment and practices to become mindfully inclusive, supportive and encouraging of women. The significance of this research lies in the ability to increase an understanding of the lived experiences of women in leadership positions (as told by these women) in male dominated sports in Australia and specifically, in Australian rules football.
1.2. Chapter summaries

Chapter Two of this thesis explores academic literature in reference to gender, sport and leadership. This discussion includes research on the historic and contemporary views about gender in society and sport; women in sport; and women in leadership roles in sport (including, but not limited to, coaching, umpiring, management and journalism). The chapter also provides an insight into the historical and contemporary perspectives of feminism (including first wave, second wave, postfeminism and third wave feminism) in sport. The literature then provides a more focused insight into women and Australian rules football.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the methodological design of the study. The aims and hypotheses are initially outlined, followed by the theoretical framework of the study. A third wave feminism perspective is the principal lens through which the research is analysed, however, critical feminist theory, role congruity theory and postfeminist theory are also acknowledged and discussed. Qualitative research methods of purposive and snowball sampling, the case-study method, semi-structured interview method and thematic analysis are used to recruit participants, collect and analyse data. Similar research projects have also been incorporated to provide examples of these qualitative methods being suitable for such research.

Chapter Four outlines the results of the data analysis for the study. Topics discussed in this chapter include: A breakdown of demographic information; participants’ relationship with Australian rules football; participants’ pathway into Australian rules football; token appointments and quotas; gendered barriers in Australian rules football; behavioural comparisons in the workplace; and participants’ general views on gender equality in Australian rules football.

Chapter Five is a discussion of the key themes from the results. Some of the main findings discussed in this chapter are: Australian rules football as a positive environment for women;
conscious and subconscious barriers for women in Australian rules football; a reluctance to advocate for gender equality; and higher expectations of females in the workplace. These themes are then followed by a summary of the discussion points from a third wave feminism perspective.

Chapter Six, the final chapter of this thesis, is the conclusion. The conclusion provides a summary of the main findings of this research in relation to the research aims and objectives and concludes with recommendations for Australian rules football and for further research. The recommendations aim to encourage Australian rules football (and by extension, other male dominated sports) to practice gender inclusivity and gender equality, to ensure females are being treated respectfully and given fair opportunities for employment in leadership positions in sport.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

The following review of literature is an exploration of the social construction of gender in society and, more specifically, in sport. In particular, this literature review explores the subordination of women in society and sport. This discussion begins with a historical and contemporary view of the roles that men and women hold in society, including an overview of the various waves of feminist movements that have occurred throughout history (including a robust analysis of third wave feminism), providing context on the progression of gender equality to the present day. The literature then expands to provide contextual information on the roles men and women play in sport and follows with a discussion of the underrepresentation and mistreatment of women in leadership positions in sport. This is then explored more specifically within the environment of Australian rules football, bringing into focus the foundation of this study. Finally, the role of women in sport from a third wave feminism perspective is considered to provide a theoretical perspective to the literature.

2.2. History of gender (and society)

Traditionally, in all aspects of life, males and females have been compared and contrasted (Pfister & Radtke, 2009, p. 231). According to Connell (2005, p. 21) and Agnew (2011, p. 57), during the nineteenth century, a ‘gender role theory’ became apparent in society. This theory is based on the physical traits of and differences between men and women and influences the expectations that society has about the way in which different genders are ‘meant’ to act and the

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2 Gender refers to “the state of being male or female as defined by social expectations as separate from biological ones” (Posey, 2016, p. 95).

Over two decades ago, Poynton and Hartley (1990, p. 148) explained that these gender based assumptions and expectations were created in a society that, in its early days, was dominated by males, where decisions about society and the nation were made by and usually favoured men. As Sheppard and Aquino (2017, p. 695) explain, these prescriptive stereotypes are the beliefs about the traits men and women should have and the behaviour they are expected to exhibit. Consequently, men are seen as assertive, dominant, ambitious and competitive leaders (March et al., 2016, p. 682; Mehta, Hojjat, Smith, & Ayotte, 2017, p. 395; Roseberry & Roos, 2014, p. 12; Rutherford, 2011, p. 62) and are expected to carry traits and play roles that emulate independence, self-confidence, domination, strength, courage, power and aggression (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015, p. 3; Hindley, 2006, p. 89; March et al., 2016, p. 682). Women however, are viewed as sensitive, sympathetic, gentle, passive, emotional and affectionate (Crites et al., 2015, p. 3; Koca & Ozturk, 2015, p. 3; Roseberry & Roos, 2014, p. 12) and as ‘naturally weak, dependent care-givers’ (Dyson et al., 2010, p. 20). The impression of these socially defined gender roles has resulted in the oppression of women in society (Humm, 1995, p. 259). Fink (2016, p. 3) explains that it is normal to believe that women are not suited to certain roles due to their gender; despite the fact gender is not indicative of capabilities and success. Put simply, these ‘socially constructed sex differences’ are reflected in an environment where gender equality is not present3, ‘where men are privileged and women are devalued or ignored’ (Sibson, 2010, p. 380). This is known traditionally as hegemonic masculinity.

As highlighted in Connell’s (2005) research on masculinities, hegemonic masculinity is the most common form of (the many forms of) masculinity when it comes to the theoretical analysis of sport and gender. This dominant form of masculinity is the underlying foundation for the

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3 Whereby rights, responsibilities and opportunities for both genders have been largely uneven and have most often favoured males.
relegation of women to the bottom of the hierarchy and their labelling as inferior. As Fink (2015, p. 337) explains, hegemonic masculinity ‘refers to ideological practices that reinforce the supremacy of men and the subordination of women in society’. The male figure and ‘myths’ about manliness and masculinity (strength, power, boldness) became the focus of society. Women have, as recently as just a century ago, been viewed as morally and intellectually inferior, with men holding all legal and political power (Roseberry & Roos, 2014, p. 1). These socially constructed gender roles have also created ‘deeply entrenched patterns of division in the workplace’ (Pfister & Radtke, 2009, pp. 231-232) and have impacted on the positions that men and women have historically held. The constraints placed on women are not merely a result of organisational structures, but a reflection of societal practices (Rutherford, 2011, p. 13).

Adriaanse and Schofield (2013, p. 500) and Sibson (2010, p. 380) argue that organisations should be viewed as sites that are characteristically gendered, as they function upon a foundation of clear distinctions between male and female and masculinity and femininity. Hoeber (2008, p. 261) explains that organisation cultures are embedded with gender assumptions that ‘reinforce guidelines and delineate boundaries about what is normal or expected in the organisation’. This foundation influences the ideology, structure, practice, policy and identity of organisations (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013, p. 500).

Due to influences such as culture, family, media and peers, men have traditionally held positions that have emulated strength and power (such as manual labour), which have transitioned to positions of leadership and management roles as society has developed (Agnew, 2011, pp. 23, 57). For women, looking after the home and family have been more traditionally desirable roles as opposed to focusing on building a career (Agnew, 2011, p. 22; Gutsell & Remedios, 2016, p. 29). Additionally, the expectation on females to uphold domestic duties has been perceived to have an impact on their availability and eagerness to enter and progress in the workforce (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008, p. 97; Mayrhofer, Meyer, Schißfinger, & Schmidt,
It is these specific gender roles, as in ‘men’s work’ and ‘women’s work’ that are the key elements behind hegemonic masculinity and the subordination of women in society (Agnew, 2011, p. 22).

2.3. Contemporary perspectives of gender (and society)

Modern society is still facing issues of gender segregation where ‘social positions of men and women … remain markedly different and fundamentally unequal’ (Bongiorno, Bain, & David, 2014, p. 217). Rutherford (2011, p. 6) contends that when put in its historical context, the progression for women in workplaces around the world appears dramatic. However ‘formal exclusion’ has incrementally been replaced by ‘informal exclusion’ and it is evident that women have only made minor inroads into positions of leadership. Bongiorno et al. (2014, p. 217) explain that whilst the encouragement and backing of traditional gender roles has declined, women are still carrying the burden of domestic labour and are also largely responsible for looking after dependents. In the workplace, women are also concentrated in traditionally feminine roles such as waitressing, clerical work, caretaking, nursing, teaching and retail and usually receive less pay and maintain a lesser status (Bongiorno et al., 2014, p. 2017; Heyes, 2012, p. 278).

From an Australian perspective, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), an Australian government agency promoting and improving gender equality in Australian workplaces (Workplace Gender Equality Agency [WGEA], 2017), produced a report in 2016 regarding gender segregation in Australia’s workforce. The report contends that in the last two decades, occupational gender segregation ‘has remained persistent’ (WGEA, 2016, p. 2). While there have been improvements to the rates at which females are appointed as managers in male dominated workplaces, the gender pay gap favours men (WGEA, 2016, p. 4) and there has only
been a marginal change in the gender balance in Australian boardrooms, with most boards not addressing gender equality issues (WGEA, 2017, p. 1).

It appears, in contemporary society that ‘portrayals of gender operate in increasingly complex ways’ (Toffoletti, 2016, p. 205). So while these deeply engrained gender biases about the roles and capabilities of men and women are still relevant today, Willson et al. (2017, p. 1711) believe that traditional binaries and dominant interpretations of gender roles (such as the expectations of “men’s work” and “women’s work” as mentioned above) are being challenged by new and emerging perspectives. Bongiorno et al. (2014, p. 231) claim that it has ‘become increasingly untenable’ that society view women as unsuited or incapable of working in leadership positions and roles traditionally held by men and they state that most people in contemporary Western society openly endorse the right for women to be leaders. Agnew (2011, pp. 22-23) explains that both men and women are challenging gender expectations, the most basic recognition of this being that more men are taking on roles at home and more women are building careers for themselves and challenging the gender hierarchy. Willson et al. (2017, p. 1707) explain that ‘women have had to fight in the courts, in the media, and at the dinner table for their right to participate and to compete equally in traditionally male dominated sectors’.

Adriaanse and Schofield (2013, p. 493) explain that the prominence of hegemonic masculinity in the workplace is characterised by ‘wide-ranging consent to hierarchy, division and the rule of a dominant group’. So, although women are becoming more prominent in the workforce and are perhaps taking on more roles that have traditionally been held by males, often both women and men are allowing the dominance of men in leadership positions to continue by conforming to gendered expectations in the workplace, or not challenging the hierarchy (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 408). Those who are being discriminated against can often view traditionally gendered practices as ‘reasonable, ordinary, or inevitable’ (Hoeber, 2008, p.
This can become problematic, as the gendered culture of workplaces and wider society may not change, regardless of whether more females are visible and/or traditional gender roles are being upheld and adhered to.

Fox (2017, p. 65) recently conducted research on gender inclusiveness in various organisations in Australia (such as Australia Post and the Army). She explains that, in addition to males and females conforming to traditional gender roles, women working in positions traditionally held by men are often critiqued more harshly for their actions. Crites et al. (2015, p. 3) also found that men and women are evaluated differently, particularly in leadership roles. Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013, p. 307) discuss the notions of ‘access discrimination’ and ‘treatment discrimination’, in which individuals are excluded, face extensive barriers, or are treated differently for equal qualifications or outcomes. March et al. (2016, p. 683) explain that skilled women, when compared with skilled men, are often deemed less friendly and women who adopt agentic (masculine) leadership styles are ‘evaluated more negatively than men with identical leadership styles’. Fox (2017, p. 65) suggests that certain behaviour might be ‘considered leader-like if it came from a man’ but females are receiving feedback based on gendered expectations of behaviour. Sheppard and Aquino (2017, p. 696) state that women face social penalties when they ‘violate prescriptive stereotypes by behaving agentially’. As Fox (2017, p. 83) explains, ‘there is a very real risk of punishment for women if they are not seen as “nice”’. Bongiorno et al. (2014, p. 219) support this claim, having found that women may be punished for being unfriendly or insensitive (characteristics which often go unnoticed in men). Additionally, March et al. (2016, p. 689) contend that any support shown in recent times toward women’s roles and characteristics is not necessarily a product of fading stereotypes, but can be explained by a shift in the standards of men’s and women’s roles. However, their findings indicated that women’s gender roles change more quickly over time than do men’s gender roles.
So currently, women are required to balance their agentic and communal behaviours in the workplace.

Aicher and Sagas (2010, p. 166) explain that this unequal and unfair treatment of women is a form of modern sexism, which is distinct because it appears normal or not unusual. So it may be the case that people are conforming to (or not challenging) gendered practices in workplaces because the practices are not actually perceived as anything out of the ordinary. As Humm (1995, p. 194) described two decades ago, ‘the subordination of women is part of the foundation of society’ and it is apparent that this foundation has only changed marginally. Nichols (2018, p. 74) explains that ‘everyday sexism’ is so embedded within many of our daily lives that it becomes normalised through society. According to De Anca and Gabaldon (2014, p. 335) and Nichols (2018, p. 74), the mass media plays a significant role in the way men and women are perpetuated in society too. Nichols (2018, p. 74) explains that the media continually allude to ‘lad culture’ where connections between males and sexist behaviour are often a reflection of societal understandings of the two, while De Anca and Gabaldon (2014, p. 335) argue that ‘these media perceptions have an effect on the image of women, consolidating traditional masculine roles and, at the same time, devaluing or trivializing those of women’. As such, there is a normalisation of the traditional roles men and women play and therefore an adherence to these roles.

Knoppers (2015, p. 499) argues that the construction and production of languages and actions in workplaces (and how such practices are researched) need to be queried in a manner that does not reproduce ‘heteronormativity’. Modern sexism not only leads to fewer recommendations and less encouragement for women for leadership positions, but also perpetuates the gendered practices of favouring masculine traits over feminine traits and the relegation of females to traditional gender roles (Aicher & Sagas, 2010, p. 166). De Anca and
Gabaldon (2014, p. 336) explain that stereotypes of women negatively impact on a female’s ability to reach positions of influence in workplace environments.

The notion of ‘accommodating’ for females is also pertinent. The accommodation of females occurs when females are encouraged to behave in a manner in which they will ‘fit into’ the current environment, or changing the culture of the workplace so it is a comfortable environment for everyone, including females. Rutherford (2011, p. 37) argues that it is often the case that organisations and employers try to create conditions for women to compete with men ‘on a level playing field’ but overlook the fact that structures of organisations themselves are not neutral or unaffected by gender. Fox (2017, p. 155) contends that in the army, men take changes to the culture personally (in reference to taking action on gender) and often wonder how it will impact on them. However, Fox also argues that ‘it’s time to stop lecturing women about how they have to appear to fit in’ (2017, p. 155).

Historically, significant changes within society in relation to women’s rights and gender equality have been actioned by various feminist movements. However, these changes have taken time and beliefs about the roles of men and women are still entrenched in modern society. Furthermore, there are a myriad of theoretical ways in which gender is analysed in research and various feminist perspectives have been adopted to analyse the experiences of women throughout past eras. Some of these feminist perspectives, or ‘waves’ will be examined below to showcase how they have progressed and evolved over time to adjust to gendered practices in society.

2.4. Feminism – historical and current perspectives

The core ideology of feminism is women’s liberation and underlying this belief (in its most general form) is that many women suffer injustice based on their sex (Humm, 1995, p. 94). Budgeon (2011a, p. 2) explains that females suffer discrimination because of their sex; that
females have specific needs which are overlooked; and that societal, economical and political changes need to be made in order to create solutions to these problems. According to Hughes (1997, p. 5), women (as a group) have less power than men (as a group) and have ‘different levels of personal power, economic power and institutional power’. However, the feminist agenda has changed quite markedly over the past forty years (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 18) and this has impacted on the ways in which feminism is interpreted. The effect it has is also dependent on the ways in which society is functioning. McRobbie (2015, p. 16) describes feminism as a ‘formless, headless movement residing in a world of texts, theories, events, books, films, art works, activities, interventions, campaigns, writings, slogans, “postings”, as well as in policies and changes to legislation and so on’. Budgeon (2011b, p. 35) explains that ‘feminism has been narrated as a continuous project’. However, having originated from a single point of focus, feminism has progressed and adjusted to particular challenges that have arisen over time. Donovan (2000, p. 47) explains that what started off as a sole focus on women’s rights developed into a means to effect larger social reform. Feminism, according to Hughes (1997, p. 5), is ‘now an enormous collection of theories’ used to analyse and explain why societies treat women and men differently and why this has occurred for such a long time. Given the changes and challenges in society, interpretations of feminism are continuously coming into question (Budgeon, 2011c, p. 280) and the role of feminism (particularly in modern society) is often scrutinised (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 2).

2.4.1. First wave feminism

The ‘first wave’ of feminism arose in the mid-19th to early 20th century (though the term ‘feminist’ was not coined until 1895) (Sanders, 2006, p. 23). Women historically had very few rights over their own lives and relied on marriage and children to live a somewhat comfortable and supported life (Gamble, 2006, p. 4). Rutherford (2011, p. 5) explains that a century ago,
women were not able to vote, enter certain professions or attend university. However, in the 1850s in Britain and the United States of America (USA), women challenged the prevailing ideas of women’s inferiority in society (Gamble, 2006, p. 4) and began disputing the oppression they were facing. Sanders (2006, p. 20) argues that this decade was perhaps the most important of the nineteenth century with regard to the ‘resurgence of feminist activity’. Women were campaigning for economic independence (rather than relying on marriage); education and work opportunities; and rights to land ownership and political voting (Humm, 1995, p. 98; Sanders, 2006, pp. 20-21). Budgeon (2011b, p. 35) explains that this first wave of feminism created more open minded ideology, which contributed to the progress seen now as part of developing a just society. Women used changes already made in society to argue from the perspective of human rights and social progress (O’Brien, 2014). Momentum was built through the actions of individuals that eventually turned into a movement by which the concern was for women to be able to participate fully in social and political life (Sanders, 2006, p. 24). During this era of first wave feminism, laws and legislations were passed which aided in the improved inclusion of women into society.

From an Australian perspective, the late 19th century saw a strong push for equal rights and opportunity for women in society. According to Lake (1999, p. 3), Australian women lacked basic political, civil and economic rights in the 19th century, in which they were denied access to most professions and could not earn a living wage from jobs they were allowed to hold. Many women relied on marriage for their livelihood during this time. However during the ‘women’s movement’ in the 1880s and 1890s, it was the belief of Australian feminists that they needed political power to create political change, so therefore much of the focus in the late 19th century was surrounding women’s suffrage (Caine & Gatons, 1998, pp. 133-134; Hughes, 1997, p. 27).
2.4.2. Second wave feminism

Second wave feminism arose in the 1960s and 1970s in Western society, where the focus turned to women’s liberation (Henry, 2004, p. 52; Rutherford, 2011, p. 6). There was a belief that the patriarchy, through ideological control, continued to oppress women and needed to be challenged (Thornham, 2006, pp. 29, 31), as women were culturally constructed as ‘other’. The structures of capitalism and the patriarchy were challenged in a wider political movement in which modern progress was called for (Budgeon, 2011b, p. 35).

Hughes (1997, p. 27) explains that in Australia (and various countries worldwide), issues that appear less contentious today, such as education, abortion rights, refuges for domestic violence sufferers, equality under the law and access to childcare, were key focuses of the second wave. Equal rights were sought with regard to women’s economic activities, their personal lives and politics, where women fought for more public and professional opportunities (away from domestic work), rights to jobs in the public sector, equal pay and more understanding of their personal relationships and family life (Caine & Gatons, 1998, p. 134; Hughes, 1997, p. 26). Unlike first wave feminism, which focused on the legal rights of women (such as the right to work and vote), the second wave was expanded to account for all experiences of women, including work and household, family, sexuality, the body and emotions (Humm, 1995, p. 251). Humm (1995, p. 253) explains that combining personal with political changed political thinking at the time. Rather than campaigning for women to have the right to work, or dictate the upbringing of their children, second wave feminism argued for equal pay, equal job opportunities, free contraception and reproductive rights for women (Humm, 1995, p. 252; Thornham, 2006, p. 27).

Second wave feminism saw the development of women’s liberation and human rights groups (Thornham, 2006, p. 26). Initially, there was a hesitancy to acknowledge first wave
feminism, but as second wave feminism caught momentum, the first wave was recognised as the starting point from which women’s liberation evolved (Henry, 2004, p. 52). Thornham (2006, p. 10) explains that a significant feature of second wave feminism was that ‘women come together as women in order to provide mutual support against patriarchal oppression’. The movement consciously sought to bring women together with the common focus that they were, as women, sharing the experience of oppression (Thornham, 2006, p. 28).

In more recent times, second wave feminism has faced criticism for its agenda, which is seemingly now dated with regard to the ways in which it focussed on the joint/shared/collective experiences of females (Budgeon, 2011b, p. 24). It is deemed to have ‘overstayed its welcome’ with its principles becoming obsolete to modern society (Budgeon, 2011b, p. 23). Hogeland (2008, p. 17) has even suggested that the term feminism has become ‘demonized’. Baily (2013, p. 596) and Budgeon (2011a, p. 2) both highlight work from McRobbie (2009), who argues that there is the modern view that feminism is ‘taken into account’ but is then ‘relegated to the past’. In some circles it has been suggested that gender equality has been achieved and therefore feminism is no longer needed because it has done what it set out to do (Toffoletti, 2016, p. 201). It is at times deemed as relevant (to the past) but no longer necessary, as its purpose has been fulfilled (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 17). The more popular notion, amongst academics in particular, is that while feminism is still relevant in society and therefore in research, its function and focus has been altered to improve its relevance to current societal practices.

Freedman (2006, as cited in Budgeon, 2011a, p. 11), with reference to the 21st century, argues that feminism has never been more ‘politically influential than at this point in history’. It can be argued that the basis upon which feminism was created has become somewhat outdated with regard to the way in which society functions in modern times. This foundation, while still somewhat intertwined with modern society, is being challenged and therefore the focus and
meaning of feminism has changed (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 9).

Advancing on from first and second wave feminism is a more modern form of feminism, which has seen feminist thought expand across the past four decades (Tong, 2008, p. 242). Young women in particular are now recognised to have lives that are ‘characterised by a series of ambivalences’ and that dilemmas these women face can be difficult to resolve (Budgeon, 2011c, p. 287). Rather than a universal construct, feminism is being recognised as being more subjective than previous waves and more personalised to the individual (Swirsky & Angelone, 2016, p. 446). Therefore, traditional interpretations of feminism with regard to the women’s movement, a unified front and shared experiences between females does not quite fit the mould when taking into account the individual experiences of females in modern society. Contemporary feminism, evolving from first and second waves, has been interpreted and recreated to account not only for the commonalities and connections between females, but also for the differences, ambiguity and the ways females interpret their own experiences with regard to gender equality (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 2; Baumgardner, 2016, p. 703). The aim of finding a single explanation for women’s oppression, or creating specific step-by-step guides toward liberation have, in this new interpretation, been rejected as too uniform and not encompassing of all women’s experiences (Tong, 2008, p. 242). Budgeon (2011a, p. 16) explains that contemporary feminisms, rather than representing all women as one, focus on how females themselves interpret their environments, experiences and their relationship with feminism. Independence, choice and self-determination have become the focus as opposed to the unification of all females in society and their so-called shared experiences (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 17). This independence and self-determination means that females are expected to ‘be “empowered” and resourceful enough to promote themselves … through whatever means possible’ (Toffoletti, 2016, p. 206). Two modern forms of feminism, developed in the 1990s to the present day, that embrace this outlook are postfeminism and third wave feminism. The following sub sections will discuss these modern interpretations of
feminism.

2.4.3. Postfeminism

Postfeminism is contentious amongst researchers, as it carries a number of interpretations, meaning that the theoretical approach is used in various ways in academia. Various studies (see Budgeon, 2011b; Chananie-Hill, Waldron, & Umsted, 2012; and Toffoletti, 2016) explain that postfeminism can refer to a stance against feminism (due to it not being necessary in modern society). However, postfeminism is also viewed as the next ‘phase’ of feminism following on from first and second wave feminism. Additionally, postfeminism has also been interpreted to be the culture or social context within which third wave feminism has arisen, rather than being its own theoretical analysis tool (Toffoletti, 2016, p. 206). Budgeon (2011b, p. 23) professes that these interpretations create debate surrounding ‘whether post-feminism represents the demise of feminist goals or a phase of feminist invention’.

Chananie-Hill et al. (2012, pp. 34-35) explain that postfeminism, while a contested term, can take the view that second wave feminism is ‘irrelevant’ to many women in modern society in that it is too restrictive and objectionable. Feminism is often portrayed as redundant and dismissed on the basis that it has ‘achieved its primary goals and, since gender oppression has been dismantled, women no longer need a feminist perspective to inform the choices they make in their lives’ (Budgeon, 2011b, p. 23). As Swirsky and Angelone (2014, p. 231) explain, women in modern society are being empowered to move away from traditional gender roles, which can create a belief that feminism is obsolete.

Rather than dismiss feminism as altogether irrelevant, Chananie-Hill et al. (2012, p. 35) have defined postfeminism as ‘part of the third wave shift in the ideologies, identities, and tactics often employed by younger feminists’. They recognise that feminism is still prevalent in society, but with more fluidity and open-mindedness than past ‘waves’. In this shift, individuals adopt
their own expressions of feminism and garner their own power of self-determination and self-expression. As interpreted by McRobbie (2009, as cited in Toffoletti, 2017, p. 463), while postfeminism might reject certain elements of second wave feminism as ‘redundant in the popular mindset’, it does not write off feminism completely. Budgeon (2011b, pp. 23, 28) shares a similar view, by which postfeminism establishes a boundary between second wave feminism and more modern interpretations and needs for feminism in society.

Toffoletti (2016, p. 200) argues that postfeminism needs to be used as ‘an object of enquiry, rather than understanding it as a period after feminism or as a social context in which third wave feminism emerges’. In particular, she believes that viewing postfeminism as ‘the stage after second wave feminism’, does not sufficiently allow for postfeminism to be used to interpret and recognise the production of new femininities (2016, p. 201). According to Toffoletti (2016, p. 206), a ‘postfeminist sensibility approach’ should be adopted by which characteristics that shape modern femininities are recognised. Within this landscape, Toffoletti (2016, p. 200) explains that in modern society, using a postfeminist approach, women are characterised as ‘active and knowing agents of making their own subjectivities’. Women are viewed as ‘free agents’, responsible for their own success or failure, disregarding the patriarchal structures and institutions at play (and therefore claiming women are no longer impeded by structural constraints) (Toffoletti, 2017, p. 463).

It may be the case that females have more freedom to interpret their own experiences and the ways in which they want to embrace feminism. However, to label females as autonomous agents with whom sole responsibility lies, disregards the impact that external factors such as societal practices, workplace environments and those in power have with regard to gender inequality (Budgeon, 2011c, p. 285). By placing the outcomes on the ‘ability or motivations of individuals to make “good” choices’ (Budgeon, 2011c, p. 285), gender inequality is sustained by
putting the responsibility back on females (through casting it in a positive light where they ‘are free to choose how they express themselves’) (Toffoletti, 2016, pp. 204-205). Swirsky and Angelone (2014, p. 231) explain that as women are empowered and feel that feminism is not relevant, there may be a failure to acknowledge, or a disregard of, continued gender discrimination. In this manner, postfeminism then removes discussions and issues of the feminist agenda from public view, reaffirming the gender order (read: gender inequality) (Budgeon, 2011b, p. 24).

2.4.4. Third wave feminism

Whilst third wave feminism is likened quite often to postfeminism (Merriman, 2006, p. 97) (in that it is often touted as the feminist wave that has arisen in the postfeminist era) (Toffoletti, 2016, p. 202), it differs slightly in that it acknowledges that women can be both oppressed and empowered by their experiences. Having emerged in the mid-1990s, Budgeon (2011c, pp. 279-280) explains that third wave feminism does not necessarily have a straightforward definition, but ‘for third wave feminism it is possible to approach popular culture simultaneously as a site of pleasure and an object of critique’. Budgeon (2011a, p. 15) explains that third wave feminism somewhat ‘manages the tension’ between second wave feminism and postfeminism by working with influences from both forms. It highlights feminist concerns of the past, but responds according to current socio-cultural contexts (such as a woman’s right to independence and self-determination - which have not previously been addressed by other forms of feminism) without placing sole responsibility on females for their experiences (Budgeon, 2011b, p. 42).

Chananie-Hill et al. (2012, p. 34) describe third wave feminism as a response to second wave feminism’s rigid rules of femininity and its women as victims approach. Snyder (2008, p. 178) explains that ‘second wavers’ ‘bemoan the invisibility of feminism among young women’, but Snyder argues that feminism is evident in modern society, just in a different, more subtle
form. Baumgardner and Richards (2010, p. 48) explain that although ‘most young women don’t get together to talk about “Feminism” with a capital F’, women are not ‘nonfeminist’, but in fact living feminist lives. Kaplan (2016, pp. 706-707), in her overview of Roxane Gay’s TEDtalk *Confessions of a bad feminist* (Gay, 2015, May), explains that it has been suggested that feminism can be separated from the ‘rigid “rules”’ feminists. Garrison (2004, p. 24) explains that although there is some conjecture surrounding the definition of third wave feminism, it has become a form of modern feminism that young women can relate to.

Snyder (2008, p. 184) asserts that third wave feminism does not follow the belief that all women share a set of common experiences, but they do not discard the concept of experience altogether. Rather, third wave feminism encompasses the notion of ‘individual expression through the sharing of narratives’ (Chananie-Hill et al., 2012, p. 43). As Bruce (2016, p. 369) suggests, third wave feminism embraces the differences and complexities of lived experiences (also see Budgeon, 2011b; Litchfield, 2018; Toffoletti, 2016; and Tong, 2008). There is an emphasis on individualism and personal experience, where diversity is embraced and second wave claims of ‘a collective identity’ (Baily, 2013, p. 597) and ‘shared experiences’ (Snyder, 2008, p. 184) are dismissed.

This is not to dismiss the oppression and barriers females face in modern society. Rather, third wave feminism acknowledges that societal, cultural, economic, technological and environmental changes (all having impacted on the advancement of women) mean that traditional forms of feminism and their battles do not suit modern society (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 1). Therefore, as the meanings and practices of gender relations, sexuality, diversity and demographics change and are questioned, so too is the role that feminism plays in the context of modern society, so third wave feminism may ‘have greater resonance with women’s lives today’ (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 1).
Budgeon (2011a, p. 15) suggests that in modern society, female struggles are not as pronounced and are not a significant part of the dialogue when feminism is discussed. So while feminist language is relatively normal or common in society, female oppression is not discussed despite the mainstream environment and language still ‘perpetuat[ing] a conservative and sexist status quo’ (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 15). This may be the case as the oppression evident in modern society is not the same nor as obvious as the oppression felt in past decades.

With regard to the recognition of simultaneous empowerment and oppression, Budgeon (2011a, pp. 4-5) describes how third wave feminism aims to move away from campaigning for equality and instead aims to embrace differences or ‘otherness’ (including femininity and females). Tong (2008, p. 258) explains that given the acknowledgement of the diversity of women in modern society, third wave feminism is not so much about coercing women into wanting what they should want, but rather responding to what women say they want without judgement. Litchfield (2018, p. 9) explains that the way in which gender, women and femininity are being represented through media are being redefined by third wave feminists. This includes recognising femininity as empowering (Bruce, 2016, p. 369). In modern society, with the introduction of social media, Bruce (2016, p. 368) argues that young women ‘understand the pleasure and power of popular culture’ and are creating stories that traditional media have ignored. Therefore, women are embracing the power to choose the way in which they are represented. This will be discussed further in the ‘Third wave feminism and sport’ section of this thesis. The following section will discuss the ways in which cultural practices and societal views on gender are evident in a sport setting.

2.5. Gender and sport

Within critical sport studies, sport feminism(s) is/are now a recognised area of enquiry (Caudwell, 2011, p. 111). The discussion on feminisms outside of sport is certainly influential
and impacts on the study of sport feminisms (Caudwell, 2011, p. 112). Discussions surrounding gender equality have become more widespread and more mainstream (including the development of women’s agendas across cultural, social and political realms) (Budgeon, 2011a, pp. 11-12). For around four decades, nations such as Australia, the USA, United Kingdom (UK), New Zealand and Europe have ‘sought, and fought, to establish feminism as a legitimate lens through which to investigate sports’ myriad practices and cultures’ (Caudwell, 2011, p. 111).

2.5.1. Historically

Sport is a platform that both reinforces and challenges gendered stereotypes. As Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 410) explain, ‘men initially organized modern sport for men [and] leadership positions in sport were first held exclusively by men … Thus both sport and positions within it were constructed on the basis of what was meaningful and important to men’. Berg, Migliaccio, and Anzini-Varesio (2014, p. 177) reiterate this point, explaining that sport has traditionally been ‘a male haven’ and therefore the sport ethic and the norms of sport are defined by the expectations that men hold in society. ‘Maleness and men have historically been considered the norm and viewed as superior to femininity and females’ (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013, p. 304) and this is reflected within sport and sport organisations, where sport has been a ‘gendered activity’ privileging men over women (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010, p. 317).

Agnew (2011, p. 22) suggests that from an early age, men are encouraged to devalue women as athletes. As explained by Fink (2016, p. 1), ‘boys learn early on that the worst thing they can do is “act like a girl”’. This is historically evident through the exclusion of women in the sporting arena and the apparent sex and gender discrimination in sport (Dyson et al., 2010, p. 22). Hoeber (2008, p. 274) suggests that inequities have arisen in sport because men have dominated decision-making positions in sport. This refers to funding, facilities and equipment, promotion and advertising and coaching. For women, this has resulted in a lack of opportunities
and sponsorship, fewer facilities (Dyson et al., 2010, p. 22), segregation of events (men’s only and women’s only events), labelling of ‘feminine’ sports (graceful and ‘aesthetically pleasing’ sports) and labelling of ‘masculine’ sports (emphasis on strength and power) (Ross & Shinew, 2008, p. 44; Theberge, 1993, p. 302). Masculine sports have been deemed as more popular, they have attracted more media interest and sponsorship and worked to stabilise hegemonic masculinity and reinforce the gender hierarchy (Dworkin & Messner, 2002, p. 18).

In 1972, Title IX was introduced in the USA to eradicate the discrimination against women’s education programs, including access to sports. The law states that ‘no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance’ (Starace, 2001, p. 191). Antunovic and Hardin (2015, pp. 662-663) explain that in the four decades since Title IX, participation in sport by females has increased by the millions and there has also been an increase in women’s professional sports teams. However, the legislation has not eradicated discriminatory and sexist practices in sport, with long held values and beliefs regarding the capabilities of women still prevalent in the sport environment (Antunovic & Hardin, 2015, p. 663).

2.5.2. Gender and sport in a contemporary setting

Willson et al. (2017, p. 1707) state that the struggles that women face in sport contribute to ‘women’s (in)visibility across many societies and cultures’. Knoppers and Anthonissen (2008, p. 93) explain that gender also influences sport organisations and the ways in which they conduct themselves regarding interactions, structures and procedures. Therefore, sociologists also need to look carefully at how power operates in sport organisations (Knoppers, 2015, p. 499). Additionally, Toffoletti (2016, p. 206) highlights that much research has been conducted to evaluate the way in which ‘hierarchies of domination and privilege’ have been maintained and
perpetuated by the language used in sport and sports media, surrounding race, sexuality, class and also gender. Bruce (2016, p. 363) and Pippos (2017, p. 137) explain that women have historically been positioned or characterised as ‘other’ within the environment of sport. Because of the apparent contradiction between femininity and sport, the foundations of the dialogue surrounding gender and sport need to be critiqued given that sport and athleticism have traditionally been linked with masculinity (Bruce, 2016, pp. 363-364).

With regard to this masculinity, there are a myriad of ways in which hegemonic masculinity is celebrated and privileged in a sporting context in modern society. Many of these practices reflect the ways in which masculinity has been celebrated in history. As Agnew (2011, p. 150) suggests, one of the ways in which male superiority is reinforced is the ‘perceived dominance of men over women’. Masculine traits such as strength, power and leadership are still valued highly in a sport setting, implying that men are (continuously) more superior to women (Agnew, 2011, p. 150; Ross & Shinew, 2008, p. 42). As Dyson et al. (2010, p. 10) state, sport has ‘been conceived as an area that reinforces male privilege and female inferiority’. Similarly, in their Australian study on gender segregation in a team sport setting and its influence on gender based employment, Joseph and Anderson (2016, pp. 594-595), found that masculine language is heavily used when discussing potential employees (the use of ‘he’ and ‘him’ over ‘her’ and ‘she’) and there was a preference for ‘masculinized values’. Also, it was the belief of sports employers that often men have earned ‘sporting social capital’ by simply playing a team sport (Joseph & Anderson, 2016, p. 587). These factors contribute to the favourability of males over females and masculinity over femininity.

What has changed is the discussion surrounding gender in sport (both more generally and at an organisational level). Hoeber (2008, p. 259) explains how supposed gender equity has been touted as ‘an organizational value in many sport organizations’. As highlighted by Welford
(2011, p. 366), ‘the movement of women into leadership and decision-making roles is a particularly significant challenge to the male dominance of sport’. In Australia in particular, a number of campaigns have been introduced to encourage the inclusion of women into leadership positions in sport. Some examples of campaigns include Change Our Game (Minister for Sport, 2016); Get Onboard and Lead (GOAL) (Get Onboard and Lead [GOAL], 2016); Women Leaders in Sport (“Women Leaders in Sport,” 2018); and Male Champions of Change in Sport (Male Champions of Change, 2018). All of these campaigns are contributing to the progression and recognition of women in leadership positions in sport in Australia.

The ingrained beliefs about gender in society are hard to escape and often organisations that claim to be implementing strategies for gender equality may not be practicing these strategies in the most effective way. In fact, according to Plaza, Boiche, Brunel, and Ruchaud (2017, p. 12), despite the efforts made by governments to improve gender equality in sport, there is still significant gender stereotyping and gender-based activities evident. Joseph and Anderson (2016, p. 587) commend the efforts within sport to increase the participation of females. However, they concede that these efforts have not translated to greater rates of women’s employment in sport-related roles.

More specifically, according to Rutherford (2011, p. 38), it is apparent that there is a battle between improving gender practices in workplaces and maintaining traditional gender roles and culture. The development of diversity and inclusion guidelines and practices has not aided in improving this tension in workplaces. Rather, barriers for females in sport have become more informal. Pippos (2017, p. 34) explains that the unequal treatment of men and women in the sporting landscape is now somewhat of a habit ‘because that’s the way it’s always been’. Rather than actively engaging in discriminatory practices, leaders in sporting environments can deny the existence of gender inequalities or claim the issue of gender inequality is not their responsibility.
(Adriaanse, 2016, p. 151). However, denying that gender inequality exists is a form of passive resistance (Rutherford, 2011, p. 65). Pippos (2017, p. 34) claims that these gendered practices are reflected in areas such as administration, coaching, umpiring, sports medicine and sports journalism.

2.6. Women in sport

2.6.1. Historically

Historically, the role that women have played in sport has been centralised around accommodating for and catering to the participation of others in sport, namely their families (Scraton & Flintoff, 2002, p. 36; Thompson, 1990, p. 135). As Thompson (1990, p. 137) suggests, ‘sport constructs, reflects and reproduces gender relations and these relations oppress women’. Traditionally, men have had the role of predominantly running (and playing) sport, whilst the role of women has been to ‘service both men’s and children’s sports’ (Scraton & Flintoff, 2002, p. 36). Women have often taken on the role of carer when it comes to sport, washing and mending the uniforms of their partners or children, driving their children to sporting events and volunteering to run the canteen and provide refreshments for these events (Hindley, 2006, p. 48; McKay, 1997, p. 21; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002, p. 36; Talbot, 1988, p. 36). Thompson (1990, pp. 137-138) explains that women were also primarily responsible for fundraising, organising teams and spending their vacations travelling to sporting events. For women, this can often take priority over their own leisure activities and often relegates women to the role of volunteer rather than employee.

Scraton and Flintoff (2002, p. 36) label this as a ‘sexual division of labour’. Traditional beliefs about women as homemakers have not only impacted on the way in which they can

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4 Taking into consideration that women have traditionally been marginalised to secondary positions within sport, it is worth considering whether these volunteer roles held by women in football history were chosen by women or imposed by men
participate as active sportswomen, but gender roles have also dictated the role that women have historically been able to play in sport (Thompson, 1990, p. 140). Thompson (1990, p. 141) explains that even in countries such as Australia and New Zealand where women have long been accepted in sport, women’s involvement has been mediated by ‘powerful patriarchal-based gender relations which has them servicing male interests and male hegemonic power in sport’.

With regard to their sport participation, Berg et al. (2014, p. 176) explain that women’s sport has been greatly influenced by the standards of masculinity that the institution of sport carries, stating that ‘women have been denied access to sport, being seen as weak and limited in their ability’. Additionally, the way that women’s sport was traditionally portrayed in the media tended to reflect societal standards about women, where femininity and athleticism were deemed to be incompatible (Bruce, 2016, p. 361).

2.6.2. Contemporary experiences of women in sport

As men have dominated the sporting arena both on and off field, the number of sports management positions and leadership positions held by women is scarce (Blom et al., 2011, p. 54). Often, women who are employed in sporting sectors take on traditionally ‘feminine’ roles or support and servicing roles, such as secretarial jobs or even as cleaners (“Gender Equity,” 2014, p. 12; Scraton & Flintoff, 2002, p. 36). Willson et al. (2017, p. 1712) explain that women are often on the periphery, as water ‘girls’ or as ‘light entertainment such as cheerleaders’ as opposed to being chosen in higher ranked positions such as coaching, managerial roles and umpiring. As researched by Nicholson et al. (2005, p. 67), these employment patterns are ‘both an indication of the extent of male domination in the sport industry’ and work to maintain the gender order.

Fink (2016, p. 3) suggests that ‘it is our unchecked attitudes about gender that continue to negatively impact girls’ and women’s experiences in sport’. Pippos (2017, p. 15) believes there
is inequality ‘at every level and in every sector of the sporting community’. This inequality is due to society still viewing sport as a masculine domain where the relationship between femininity and sport remains troubled (Pippos, 2017, p. 69). Kaskan and Ho (2016, p. 275) found that female athletes (and this is also applicable to women in non-athlete positions) face ‘an assumption of inferiority, objectification and restrictive gender roles’ in sport. Pippos (2017, p. 15) states that this environment sends a clear message to women and girls that they will never feel as though they belong.

The marginalisation of women and maintenance of the gender order is also reinforced through the sexualisation of female athletes and women employed in sports settings. It has been highlighted in numerous studies (see Agnew, 2011; Litchfield & Redhead, 2015; Toffoletti, 2007; Waterhouse-Watson, 2007; and Wensing & Bruce, 2003) that women, particularly those involved in a sport setting, are often regarded or represented as ‘sexualised objects’. One of the most common ways in which women see themselves portrayed in sport is in reference to their physical attractiveness (“Gender Equity,” 2014, p. 26).

According to Toffoletti (2007, p. 428), the way in which the media represent women associated with sport does not assist in changing the perception of women as sexualised objects. The media portrays what Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018, p. 11) describe as ‘normative gender and sexual identities’ of women in sport. The work of Knoppers and McDonald (2010, p. 317) supports this claim, stating ‘the sport media have played a key role in ... trivialising female sporting accomplishments while frequently promoting themes of sexual difference, beauty and grace’. These representations reinforce gender differences as well as gender stereotypes and inequalities with regard to men and women in sport.

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5 The term marginalisation refers to both the ways in which women are represented in leadership positions (i.e., are there equal/near equal numbers of men and women in leadership positions?) as well as the ways in which women are treated when in such roles (i.e., are women given a voice in such positions? Do they have a level of authority, or are they treated as ‘token’ appointments?).
A contemporary example of this culture surrounds Australian athlete Ellyse Perry. Perry has been a national representative in both cricket and soccer for Australia and has received some notable attention from the media with regard to her sporting ability. However, alongside this attention, Perry is often portrayed in a manner that highlights her physical appearance, femininity and heterosexuality (Litchfield, 2015, p. 11). In Litchfield’s (2015) study on the media representation of Perry, some notable themes arose in which Perry is repeatedly photographed in an evening gown and high heeled shoes (in conjunction with or sometimes instead of photos of her in her sporting uniforms), she is labelled as ‘glamorous’, or it is emphasised that she is a female athlete or part of a women’s sporting team (Litchfield, 2015, pp. 16-18). This type of publicity reinforces Perry’s gender and therefore marginalises her as a female involved with sport. Additionally, in the 2018 AFLW season, a commentator described players Katie Brennan and Erin Phillips as ‘the blonde forwards’ (Weiss, 2018). This portrayal of female athletes in particular can be seen on a regular basis in the media (when female athletes receive news coverage). Litchfield (2015, p. 14) suggests that this representation of female athletes removes the focus from their athletic abilities and physical talents, instead focusing on looks, dismissing the threat these sportswomen carry to male hegemony.

As Litchfield highlights in a number of studies (see Litchfield, 2015; Litchfield & Redhead, 2015), the ‘sex appeal’ of female athletes is considered important by the media and female athletes are most often portrayed in an attractive and ‘hyper-feminised’ (Litchfield & Redhead, 2015, p. 5) manner, by which they are representing ‘an appropriate level of femininity’ (also see Wensing & Bruce, 2003). This representation includes (like the reference to Perry above) glamourised photo shoots of female athletes (rather than publishing photos of them on the sporting field), or judging ‘best dressed’ at sporting events (for tennis in particular) (Zivlak, 2015). Pippos (2017, p. 65) claims that ‘too often we see images of sportswomen as inactive, beautiful objects, and the clear message this sends is that you can only succeed in sport if you
look beautiful’. Litchfield and Redhead (2015, p. 5) state that women are portrayed in this manner because women deemed to be strong and powerful (as male athletes are depicted and celebrated) challenge the masculine culture that is viewed as the ‘norm’ (for male athletes) in sport.

With the sexualisation of female athletes (and other women associated with sport), the media also often portray women as mothers, wives or girlfriends to a male (Litchfield, 2015, p. 14), linking them with a male partner (be it a male celebrity, husband or boyfriend) and again shifting the focus away from their sporting successes (be it on or off field). This is continuously noted in AFLW (see Hooker, 2018; Marlow, 2016; and Moore, 2017). Labelling women as wives and girlfriends rather than as athletes or for the contribution they make to sport, highlights traditional cultural beliefs about women’s roles of mother and home keeper rather than holding a career of their own (Agnew, 2011, p. 22). Although these titles are most often intended to be positive, this perception of females involved with sport has an impact on the roles they are traditionally expected to hold in sport. Notably, as Pippos (2017, p. 50) showcases, ‘a man in sport, or any other profession for that matter, would never be defined by his relationship or family status’. Similarly, Toffoletti (2017, p. 458) explains that by celebrating the progress of women in sport, yet reinforcing traditional gender norms, contradictory messages can be sent.

Despite diversity being proven to have a positive influence on sport organisations (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013, p. 306), Adriaanse and Schofield (2014, p. 485) explain that women are continually underrepresented in sport governance. Sartore and Cunningham (2007, p. 244) suggest that sport is one organisation that most notably persists with gender discrimination and the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity, by which heterosexuality and physical dominance is favoured and works to subjugate women, relegating them to the ‘other’ in the social institute of sport (Burton, 2015, p. 156). This has led to the consistent scrutiny of women who may hold
leadership positions in sport.

Pippos (2017, p. 25) explains that alongside practiced gender roles, various levels of sexism run deep in sport (both on and off field). She highlights that sexism can range from a ‘seemingly innocuous throwaway line between mates’ to deep-rooted concerns such as ‘pay inequality, lack of media coverage, sexploitations and even abuse’ (Pippos, 2017, p. 25). Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018, p. 17) state that often the onus is on women to find solutions to gender discrimination. However, women are often reluctant to speak out on issues surrounding sexism and inequality, particularly if they are the only female voice in a male dominated workplace. Fox (2017, p. 9) contends that challenging ‘established narratives and power structures’ comes at a cost. Creating controversy, or being labelled ‘a troublemaker: a firestarter, a poor sport, not one of the gang, an uptight bitch, a femmo, a prude, a killjoy’ is often much harder to deal with for females than going along with things and handling the workplace environment they are in (Pippos, 2017, pp. 137, 139).

Joseph and Anderson (2016, p. 587) lament the efforts of those striving for the inclusion of women in sport, as they have found that it has not yet translated into an improvement with regard to the visibility of women within sport leadership. In contrast, while there is a continuing dominance of men in leadership positions in sport, according to Dyson et al. (2010, p. 6), changes have been underway for some time. Women are becoming more visible (particularly at a community level) in roles and positions that have been traditionally held by men. Such positions include sport reporters and commentators and board members and to a lesser extent there are also women taking up roles as coaches and umpires and positions in management. Rather than reinforcing the binary gender norms of sport (Chananie-Hill et al., 2012, p. 35), these changes have led to an incremental shift in power, challenging the traditional gender hierarchy in sport and gradually changing the perception of women working in sport. However, despite the
progress that is being made, it will take time for cultural practices and perspectives to be changed in order to achieve equality in sport. The challenging aim is to change the mindset of society (including both men and women) when it comes to sport and thinking that females are only suited to certain sports or certain positions within sport (Hall & Oglesby, 2016, p. 271). Moving away from stereotyping women and girls (and males) into certain roles will likely allow for more women to become leaders in sport, both on and off field.

2.7. Women and leadership roles in sport

Many explanations have been put forward as to why women are underrepresented in leadership positions within sport. It is clear that ‘contemporary understandings of sport reflect masculine norms’ (Antunovic & Hardin, 2015, p. 673) and a common thread of gendered barriers (both perceived and actual) are evident in research on the matter of women and leadership in sport (Walker & Sartore-Baldwin, 2013, p. 304). According to Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, pp. 404-405), despite ‘many of those in high positions in sport agree[ing] that more women are needed’, a majority of males continue to hold positions of leadership. According to AFL club Richmond Football Club in their research into women in leadership in Australian rules football, ‘there is a burgeoning appetite to have women more involved but still some reluctance to give women a “leg up” which in effect creates ongoing resistance’ (“Gender Equity,” 2014, p. 7).

Joseph and Anderson (2016, p. 587) share statistics from across the last decade on women in various leadership fields around the world. In the UK, 81% of qualified coaches are male. In the USA, males make up 95% of sports editors (and 87% assistant sport editors). In radio, 80% of sports hosts are men. In contrast, women make up fewer than 27% of the executive board of the International Olympic Committee (Joseph & Anderson, 2016, p. 587).

Despite some changes being made to the positions that women are obtaining in sporting organisations, according to Agnew (2011, p. 27), the gender hierarchy and men’s domination of
women is still prominent within sport. As discussed three decades ago by Talbot (1988, p. 38), women’s participation in sport (in all forms, be it as athletes, employees or volunteers), was ‘conditional upon its continuing in segregated and less valued forms’. Brown and Light (2012), O’Shea and Toohey (2014), Sibson (2010) and Sinclair (2013) have explored this notion from an Australian perspective. Brown and Light (2012, p. 185) claim that the number of women in leadership positions in Australian sport is worryingly low, despite state and government action. O’Shea and Toohey (2014, p. 2) acknowledge that whilst there have been some meaningful changes in sporting organisations in Australia, still today, decades on from Talbot’s research, women and femininity are still ‘marginalised and devalued’. Sibson (2010, p. 382) explains that gender inequality is perpetuated and women’s access to leadership roles and power is continuously undermined, as men continue to dominate senior management and leadership positions. Women are not ‘handicapped for leadership’ (i.e., they are not physically or psychologically incapable of leadership) (Sinclair, 2013, p. 23), but are subjected to gendered assumptions and stereotypes about their suitability for leadership. This then leads to discriminatory practices in relation to recruitment and promotion of women into leadership positions in sport (Sinclair, 2013, pp. 23-24).

Sinclair (2013, p. 18) claims that ‘the construction of masculine leadership cultures’ needs to be understood in order to then understand how women have been excluded from leadership. Joseph and Anderson (2016, p. 589) label sports leadership as ‘gendered masculine’. They explain that this prevents females from progressing their careers within sporting employment due to ‘gender sport incongruity’, by which females in leadership appears an oxymoron, given the expected gender roles of females in sport. As Bongiorno et al. (2014, p. 218) explain, ‘as agentic behaviour indicates status and power, it is incongruent with women’s subordinate status, and violations of this prescriptive gender stereotype are typically punished through negative social appraisals’. They elaborate, explaining that women in leadership positions are placed in a bind,
because the expected behaviours of a leader do not match the expected behaviours of a female (Bongiorno et al., 2014, p. 218). However, the true bind appears, as Bongiorno et al. (2014, pp. 225, 229) have found, when women who are in leadership positions not only present with masculine, leadership style qualities, but also present with non-agentic qualities (i.e., traditionally feminine qualities). This presents a significant barrier to gender equality (Bongiorno et al., 2014, p. 225) because although females with masculine traits may be frowned upon, females in traditionally masculine roles with feminine traits are also found to be unsuited.

Further, Joseph and Anderson (2016, p. 587) suggest that females working in a sport setting ‘are likely to be marginalised, harassed and encounter career-progression barriers’. They believe the lack of career progression opportunities for women in sport is in part a result of men being over-represented in leadership positions in sport, in which they ‘reflect traditionally masculine gender norms’ (Joseph & Anderson, 2016, p. 587). Dyson et al. (2010, p. 53) indicate that it may be the case that men in leadership positions are reluctant about the inclusion of women because it may be seen as a threat to their power.

As Dyson et al. (2010, p. 19) explain, power can be possessed at the top of the hierarchy, where it runs ‘from above to below’. In sport, this power can be (and has been) used in a negative way. Most often men (because they are traditionally in charge) hold this power over women who are most often below men in the hierarchy. In sport, this model of power can be (and has been) used to ensure that the gender hierarchy remains in place, which means using this power to keep women ‘below’ men. This is similar to observations made by Koca and Ozturk (2015, p. 4) in which men carry the trait of ‘top-down communication’. They explain that masculine characteristics (such as independence, authority, autocratic leadership and top-down communication) are preferred when looking for potential employees and it has been suggested that these characteristics and traits are associated more with traditional male roles rather than
female roles (Koca & Ozturk, 2015, p. 3). Therefore, males may have more opportunities for employment and females are less favoured and less valued when compared to males going for the same leadership positions in sports. This makes it hard for women to break through the glass ceiling (Koca & Ozturk, 2015, p. 5). The only way this power can be changed is for those being oppressed to overthrow the person/people holding the power over them (Dyson et al., 2010, p. 19). However, Bongiorno et al. (2014, p. 231) claim that for women to show ‘unwavering confidence and strength’ (to overthrow those in power) is extremely challenging because of men’s ‘continued dominance in positions of power’.

Sibson (2010, p. 382) explains that in circumstances when females are appointed in positions of leadership, it is ‘assumed that women will have more influence in organisational decision making and process’ and therefore the environment will improve. However, Sinclair (2013, p. 25) highlights the fact that if women are to gain positions in leadership in sport, often the environment they are working in may be ‘authoritarian, oppressive and hierarchical, gendered and racist’. There is also the issue of power in these environments. Sibson (2010, p. 383) discusses various forms of power, including exclusionary power and agenda-setting power. So, despite it appearing as though women are holding positions equal to men, they can be excluded from important conversations and discussions, taking away their potential influence on situations. This can happen depending on the agenda of the organisation and the environment and traditions they may want to uphold (for instance, they want to appear to be gender equal but they would rather not have a female influence in their environment). Additionally, Hoeber (2008, p. 262) introduces the concept of ‘hidden power’, which exists when those being oppressed do not identify that they are being discriminated against. If the oppression is not recognised, the oppressed do not question or challenge the practices in their environment and the power remains in the hands of those who are discriminating against them.
Often it is the case that even when women are placed in leadership positions in male-dominated sports, while they may be accepted, they are not necessarily respected (Dyson et al., 2010, p. 53). Furthermore, as men hold the majority of leadership positions, when women are accepted into non-traditional roles, often it can mean that they are working on male-defined terms (Wedgwood, 2007, p. 398). Women who gain employment further up in the hierarchy often face challenges that men in their positions do not face. As Pippos (2017, p. 140) explains, female trailblazers have to work very hard to be respected. Additionally, if a female in a leadership position makes an error, often her suitability in that role will come into question. Research has shown that women are more likely to be judged harshly and labelled ‘incompetent’ for making a single mistake (Rutherford, 2011, p. 60). Therefore, the pressure to perform well is much more severe in comparison to a male in the same position (Pippos, 2017, p. 140).

As mentioned previously, hegemonic masculinity has resulted in women being excluded from sport in a variety of different ways. As Antunovic (2014, p. 47) states, even when women are not playing sport, they are still viewed as a ‘sideline intrusion’. Hegemonic masculinity relegates females to the sideline as wives, girlfriends, cheerleaders, volunteers and even sexual objects, so when women do fight for these traditionally masculine positions in sport, they are challenging the masculine domain of the sports world (Tingle, Warner, & Sartore-Baldwin, 2014, p. 7).

Another way in which women are excluded from sport is the fact that very few women hold positions at the top of the sporting hierarchy in roles such as coaching, management and sports journalism (McKay, 1997, p. 8; O’Shea & Toohey, 2014, p. 7; Sundstrom, 2012, pp. 3, 5; Walker & Bopp, 2011, p. 47). In Australia in particular, within the last decade, women have been significantly underrepresented in positions of leadership and decision making in coaching, officiating and management in sport (Brown & Light, 2012, p. 186). However, women (and
men) are slowly breaking down these barriers, particularly in male dominated sports and despite the clear discrepancy in numbers, there are more women being appointed in positions that have traditionally been occupied by men. These positions include roles of physiotherapists and dieticians and more recently as coaches, officials, journalists, managers and even Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) (Agnew, 2011, pp. 151-152; Cunningham, 2008, p. 136; Hall & Oglesby, 2016, p. 262). It will take time before women are fully accepted into these positions, particularly in male dominated sports such as in the various codes of football around the world, as well as college basketball and athletics. However, it is evident that the barrier in sport that is hegemonic masculinity is slowly breaking down to allow women an opportunity to play a role in sport that is outside of traditionally ‘feminine’ roles. The following section explores the different leadership positions women are gradually being appointed to in sport around the world. Various studies (see Blom et al., 2011; Hardin & Shain, 2006; Koca & Ozturk, 2015; Miloch, Pedersen, Smucker, & Whisenant, 2005; Spoor & Hoye, 2014; Tingle et al., 2014; and Walker & Bopp, 2011) have been conducted with females working in many sports as coaches, officials, managers and journalists, to explore their experiences. These experiences will be elaborated on below.

2.7.1. Coaches and Officials

Numerous studies have been conducted on the experiences of female coaches and umpires, including female coaches of male college sports (in the USA) and females officiating at various levels of competitive sport (see Blom et al., 2011; Norman, 2010; Tingle et al., 2014; and Walker & Bopp, 2011). For female coaches and officials, the dominant masculine culture has created a work environment that is particularly challenging. Not only do women face discrimination, a lack of support and a lack of opportunities in leadership positions in male dominated sports in particular (Blom et al., 2011, p. 55), but, as iterated earlier, they also face barriers from society and traditional beliefs regarding women and sport.
Perhaps one of the most widespread beliefs about women and sport that has traditionally been carried in society is that women are incapable of coaching men. Twenty-five years ago, Theberge (1993, p. 306) had a number of female coaches in her study state that ‘men don’t want to take lessons from women’. Additionally, participants of the more recent study conducted by Blom et al. (2011, p. 59) believe that there is a stereotype that men should not be coached by women, because men will not listen or respect women, or that women are incapable of coaching men because they have not played men’s sports (Walker & Bopp, 2011, p. 48). However, due to the fact that sport has traditionally had a strong male population, there appears to be no doubt about men’s capabilities in coaching women. As explained by Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013, p. 306), ‘the belief that females should not coach men’s sport teams has been legitimated … as it is just “the way things are to be done”’. According to Walker and Bopp (2011, pp. 47, 50), men are presented with greater coaching opportunities in both men’s and women’s sport, whereas the opportunities for women in female sports are somewhat limited and for women to coach men’s sports is close to non-existent. Even since the implementation of Title IX in the USA, there has in fact been a decrease in female coaches specifically in female sports teams and females coaching male sports remains close to pre-Title IX figures (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014, p. 18). Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013, p. 304) state simply that ‘gender ideology has constructed coaching as men's work and identified a good coach as a male coach’.

Even after having broken into the masculine setting that is sport (more specifically male sports), women face barriers with regard to discrimination, respect, promotional opportunities and gender roles in the workplace (Blom et al., 2011, p. 55). A myriad of papers researching the experiences of females coaches and officials (see Blom et al., 2011; Norman, 2010; and Walker & Bopp, 2011) have highlighted and discussed similar barriers when it comes to females
breaking through the ‘glass ceiling’, in coaching and officiating male dominated sports. Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 412) explain that the existence of the glass ceiling is often either denied or there is an expectation to respect the ceiling (that is, it is normal). Therefore challenges to the hierarchy are made more difficult when those with an influence are passive about acknowledging the barrier.

A barrier that was found for both female coaches and female officials was the lack of role models or mentors in similar positions who could assist women working in these roles traditionally occupied by men (Tingle et al., 2014, p. 7; Walker & Bopp, 2011, p. 51). Tingle et al.’s (2014, pp. 14-15) study on former female basketball officials mentioned that there was a lack of strong female role models in officiating positions when they were working, which resulted in them navigating their own way without an experienced mentor to assist them with issues both on and off the court. Walker and Bopp (2011, p. 57) discuss the same issue, with female coaches in their study stating that despite their confidence in their knowledge of basketball and in their own ability to coach male basketball teams, having a mentor would have been beneficial in assisting them in their role. Cooper (2018, p. 105) explains that a range of benefits can be found from being mentored, including ‘confidentiality; broad-spectrum guidance; gaining self confidence; self awareness and friendship; networking assistance; validation of actions; career development; personal support; and encouragement’. The question may be asked as to whether men newly employed in similar positions have (or require) a mentor. The WGEA brings to light the concept of men being seen as ‘natural leaders’ and therefore not necessarily requiring guidance from a mentor (WGEA, 2013, p. 2). It is evident that when men are newly employed they have males in superior positions to guide them without the label of mentor, whereas women often need to ask for assistance given the lack of females in employment.

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6 Glass ceiling: ‘A term coined by Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) in the Wall Street Journal, referring to an invisible but unbreakable obstacle preventing minorities and women from making their way to the top positions in companies, however well qualified they might be’ (cited in De Anca & Gabaldon, 2014, p. 337).
positions above them and/or a general lack of support from male coaches (for the most part).

The fact that these women have not been provided with a mentor in their position as a coach or official may come down to a lack of support and respect for these women in their role in sport. As Blom et al. (2011, p. 55) highlight, a lack of belief in the ability of females as coaches (and officials) has society questioning their competency, but has also resulted in these coaches facing doubt from their own male athletes. In the study conducted by Blom et al. (2011, p. 58), participants stated that while support was immediate from family and friends and in most circumstances sports administration, it took longer for the female coaches to earn support and respect from their coaching colleagues and male athletes. According to Tingle et al., for female officials, a lack of mutual respect from their male colleagues and the formation of ‘cliques’ made it difficult for them to fit in and created an uncomfortable working environment (2014, pp. 7, 14).

The underlying reason for the lack of respect, support and belief of the capabilities and competencies of female coaches and officials can be attributed to the continuous reproduction of hegemonic masculinity and a belief that sport is a ‘man’s world’. It appears that these barriers are deterrents for women even applying for these positions in sport, despite women showing interest, experience and expertise in these fields (Blom et al., 2011, p. 55; Walker & Bopp, 2011, p. 59). Sartore and Cunningham (2007, pp. 245-246, 261) suggest that women may even talk themselves out of applying for these positions, in that they themselves adhere to society’s dominant ideologies and perceptions within sport. This can result in an overall loss of a female voice in sport (Walker & Bopp, 2011, pp. 50-51).

According to Theberge (1993, p. 303), females who have obtained coaching roles have been highly visible and being in the spotlight creates added pressures for them to perform. In order to fit in to the sporting landscape, female coaches and officials adopt a number of different
strategies to take the focus away from their gender and move it onto their ability to perform. Adopting traditionally ‘masculine’ characteristics in coaching and officiating is one tactic that females in these positions have employed (Blom et al., 2011, p. 60). This tactic was also apparent in Walker and Bopp’s (2011) and Tingle et al.’s (2014) respective studies on female coaches and officials and their experiences with men’s college basketball in the USA. It was found that the coaches and officials both felt it necessary to adopt male-like traits in order to fit in (Tingle et al., 2014, p. 8; Walker & Bopp, 2011, p. 58). Even then, the ‘old boys club’ appeared too exclusive and influential for the female coaches to feel like they belonged (Walker & Bopp, 2011, p. 56). While viewed as undesirable (to wider society), adopting masculine traits (strength, authority and competitiveness) (Sartore & Cunningham, 2010, p. 482) seems a necessity in order to alleviate some of the pressure that comes with being a female coach or official, particularly in male dominated sports.

While these women work to ‘masculinise’ their behaviour, they must do so whilst they preserve their ‘distinctively feminine characteristics’ (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007, p. 249). As is the case with female athletes, where there is a ‘sexualised assumption’ about women who play sport (Hindley, 2006, p. 300), women who work in sporting organisations often get labelled as lesbians if they do not portray the appropriate traits of femininity (Sartore & Cunningham, 2010, p. 483). There is a constant monitoring of appearance, curiosity over their sexuality and judgement with regard to their behaviour should they act too ‘manly’. As explained above, these women are often pressured into portraying themselves a certain way so they can fit in to male territory where they can be deemed acceptable, yet not necessarily a ‘threat to the patriarchal order’ (Litchfield, 2015, p. 14).

It has been highlighted that women have also needed to go above and beyond to demonstrate their ability in these male dominated environments (Norman, 2010, p. 94). Initially, they work
hard to prove themselves in order to first be appointed in the position of coach or official and then to be accepted as legitimately deserving of these roles. According to Walker and Bopp (2011, p. 57), participants of their study implied that they felt they needed to ‘overcompensate’ for being a woman and work harder to fit in and prove their position. Despite many female coaches having a wealth of experience, they are still facing challenges with employment opportunities. Blom et al. (2011, p. 60) explain that studies have indicated that female coaches often have extensive experience at national or international competition level when compared to their male counterparts. The participants of Blom et al.’s study not only had experience in playing sports at a college level and on occasion beyond, but also had a history of playing experience with males, or strong associations with male dominated sports, before being selected in coaching roles (2011, p. 60).

According to Theberge (1993, pp. 303, 305), females have faced the challenge of demonstrating their ability and proving their competency while in a sense, ‘disguising’ their gender, a task that can prove to be difficult given the attention, scrutiny and harsh evaluations these females still face working in traditionally masculine domains. Whilst Theberge’s (1993) study is over two decades old, the research is still relevant today given the lack of progress that has been made with regard to women working in traditionally masculine areas of sporting organisations. Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 408) found that females in journalism and sport governance acted in a way they believed to be ‘gender neutral’, however, often their actions generally reflected masculine norms. This implies that, still today, this pressure of adjusting to the environment is not only encountered by female coaches and officials, but also by women working in other areas of sport.

2.7.2. Executives, Managers, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Board Members

Over two decades ago, McKay (1997, p. 21) explained the concept of ‘vertical and horizontal
segregation’ with regard to men’s and women’s management positions and roles in sporting organisations. In his research surrounding Australian, New Zealand and Canadian women working in the traditional masculine setting of sport, McKay (1997) highlighted the discrimination that was evident in the low number of women present in senior managerial positions in sporting organisations. McKay (1997, p. 21) also brought attention to the specific divide between what managerial roles were ‘suitable’ for men and women and the apparent lack of women in ‘core’ managerial roles in sport settings (McKay, 1997, p. 15). This reflects the prevalent uncertainty about women in managerial roles with regard to contradictions between the supposed requirements in management and the traits of women (De Anca & Gabaldon, 2014, p. 336). Claringbould and Knoppers (2007, p. 497) explain that positions such as managerial roles ‘are associated with objectivity, rationality, logic and competence that are traditionally linked to forms of white middle to upper class masculinity’. They further suggest that this tends to be the reason why more men hold positions of leadership. Additionally, if females are associated with ‘lower ranked’ work (such as clerical/administration or cleaning) and supposedly lack the appropriate traits for leadership, they may be excluded from such positions for not fitting the profile of a leader (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007, p. 497).

Adriaanse (2016, p. 159) and Spoor and Hoye (2014, p. 407) have clarified that women still remain underrepresented in upper management and leadership roles within sport organisations, suggesting that vertical segregation is still evident today and that perhaps little has changed over the last two decades. In particular, Adriaanse (2016, p. 159) completed a detailed study in which 1600 boards of National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) from 45 countries around the world were evaluated for their levels of gender inclusion. Adriaanse (2016, p. 150) used the Sydney Scoreboard, a web-based database used to monitor the statistics of women in leadership roles in sport governance (on a national and international scale) (Adriaanse, 2016, p. 150). The website tracked women’s presence on sports boards in NSOs, International Sport Federations and within
Olympic Committees. According to Adriaanse (2016, p. 152), the website ‘provided a new level of transparency and accountability in regard to gender composition in sport governance’. The findings in her study indicated that ‘women were largely under-represented as board directors’, with the mean statistics showing that women make up just under 20% of board directors worldwide, just 16% of chief executives and under 11% of board chairs (Adriaanse, 2016, p. 149).

Organisations have been well aware of the benefits of gender diversity for many years. Claringbould and Knoppers (2007, p. 495) explained just over a decade ago that females not only bring productivity to boards, but they also bring strengths that men may not carry and, importantly, signify a commitment to gender equity for organisations. Adriaanse and Schofield (2014, p. 485) have echoed this sentiment, explaining that improving the ratio of male to female directors ‘is positively related to board effectiveness and good governance’, as females represent once-excluded stakeholders. De Anca and Gabaldon (2014, p. 338) go one step further and specify that women have been seen to bring value to the boardroom by increasing the diversity of opinions; creating different dynamics; introducing an alternative point of view; and influencing the organisation’s leadership style.

Sibson (2010, p. 379) states that there has been some effort to address this imbalance, as government and non-government organisations recognise the under-representation of women in sport management. The number of females being appointed in leadership positions specifically in sport is (slowly) increasing. However, there are still barriers that women face in order to obtain these leadership positions, particularly in sports with male athletes. Spoor and Hoye (2014, p. 411) believe that barriers contributing to the low employment rates for women in these positions are often linked to gender stereotypes and sexism and also relate to family obligations, structure of work requirements and power struggles. More specifically, in their recent study of employees
in leadership positions in Australian sport organisations, Spoor and Hoye (2014, p. 414) suggested that sexism, discrimination, boys’ club mentality, lack of acceptance from colleagues and patronising attitudes of colleagues are all gender related barriers for women wishing to advance in the workplace. Aicher and Sagas (2010, p. 167) suggest that when people (both men and women) carry the belief that men and women’s capabilities differ based on their biology (rather than societal discrimination) it can impact on perceptions of a female’s suitability in leadership. O’Shea and Toohey (2014, p. 8), in their study of gendered recruitment practices in sporting organisations in Australia, suggest that this treatment of women in leadership positions is a result of ‘taken-for-granted, subtle and insidious gendered practices’, all of which are employed to uphold dominant masculine cultures in sport. As a result of this gender bias and marginalisation of women in sporting organisations, women’s entry into leadership positions remains restricted (Koca & Ozturk, 2015, p. 2).

These barriers women face in progressing in the hierarchy may deter them from even applying for leadership positions. As Sartore and Cunningham (2007, pp. 245-246, 261) explain, the engrained cultural beliefs about women’s roles in sport may create doubt about women’s abilities and therefore females will adopt ‘self-limiting’ behaviours and not apply for jobs, because they convince themselves they are not suitable leaders and hold little power. De Anca and Gabaldon (2014, p. 339) believe ‘women are still thinking in “think manager, think male” mode, which may limit their confidence to put themselves forward for promotion’. Participants of Cooper’s (2018, p. 80) study explained that it was important to have ‘confidence in your own abilities [and] to be comfortable with yourself as a woman working in a male dominated environment’. Adriaanse and Schofield (2013, p. 509) found in their study that male directors, while acknowledging that the traditionally masculine culture was evident, largely blamed women for their underrepresentation on boards. Male board members claimed that it was out of the organisation’s control, as women ‘generated the problem through their individual choices,
priorities and competencies’ (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013, p. 509). However, Massengale and Lough (2010, p. 7) argue that this position by the male board members is ‘victim blaming’ and does not contribute to challenging the current masculinised gender culture. Fox (2017, p. 62) also dismisses this reasoning, explaining ‘like a broken record, the old excuses are circulated that the problems are self inflicted’. Fox further explains that when women are blamed because they do not apply for jobs (due to a lack of confidence or a belief they are underqualified), the onus is then put on women ‘to do the shaping up or shipping out’ (2017, p. 62). Adriaanse (2016, p. 158) concluded that it is essential that organisations recognise their responsibility in ‘taking measures to facilitate gender diversity’.

As was the case for female coaches and umpires, women and men in managerial positions can often reinforce gendered roles in organisations by conforming to traditional beliefs about the roles of men and women. De Anca and Gabaldon (2014, p. 339) explain that women, once appointed as a board member, need to be mindful of ‘traditional patterns of feminine behaviour’ (such as empathy, nurturing and cooperation) to ensure they do not fall into positions traditionally occupied by women. However, not only can females adopt traditionally feminine practices to fit into the environment as a female, they can also adopt traditionally masculine characteristics to fit in to the masculine culture. Sinclair (2013, pp. 22-23) found that women effectively conform to male models of leadership, particularly when a small number of males remain in power, even if there are a large number of women (albeit lower in the hierarchy) in the workplace.

At times, these limited opportunities for females in management positions in sport, rather than being celebrated, have been labelled as ‘token’ appointments and even the result of ‘reverse discrimination’ (McCauley, 2008; McKay, 1997, p. 40). O’Shea and Toohey (2014, p. 17) explain that one organisation in their study had in fact disadvantaged equally qualified men
because of ‘tokenistic hiring’ and special treatment for women. However, the label of a ‘token hire’, given the ‘disproportionality of status and power in favour of males’ may also be seen as backlash to the challenging of the gender hierarchy (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007, pp. 246, 249). Cooper (2018, p. 76) found that despite the ‘rigorous selection process’ that women were subjected to within management positions in Australian rules football, females still felt that male colleagues believed their appointments to be tokenistic. De Anca and Gabaldon (2014, p. 341) explain that the label of ‘token’ is undermining women’s ability. Joseph and Anderson (2016, p. 598) claim that token appointments of females to leadership positions will not change an organisation’s culture. Though they claim that a ‘critical mass’ of females in leadership roles could break down the beliefs of the incompatibility between women and leadership. However, Claringbould and Knoppers (2008, p. 90) refute this, claiming that if females are conforming to traditional gender practices in their workplace, then the culture will not change, regardless of whether a large number of females are employed. Additionally, despite the concerns that there is a lack of diversity in board membership, in Australia in particular, De Anca and Gabaldon (2014, p. 339) explain that the composition of boards, even with a low number of women, tends not to bother males on boards (in that they are not worried about the imbalance of gender representation). Dezso, Gaddis Ross, and Uribe (2016, p. 98) also discuss the notion of ‘implicit quotas’ in which an organisation’s leadership resists the notion of having a large number of women in leadership. Rather, the organisation does the bare minimum required to meet gendered targets, by making little effort to employ more than the minimum number of females. This same sentiment has also been cited in relation to the ratios and practices of males and females in journalism and commentary of sport, as explained below.
2.7.3. Journalists and Commentators

2.7.3.1. Historical considerations

According to Franks and O’Neill (2016, p. 477), across many countries, sports journalism has historically been a male domain, despite female sports journalists being present since the 1920s. Women have historically been stereotyped when it comes to their role in journalism. Franks and O’Neill (2016, p. 476) explain that females were initially employed for the purpose of writing stories to appeal to female readers. These stories were judged to be ‘lighter’ topics, such as ‘fashion, domestic issues and society gossip’ (Franks & O’Neill, 2016, p. 476), because it was thought that women were predisposed to treat news differently to men. This included the belief that women approached news with a focus on ‘soft news’ and the ‘human’ perspective (Miloch et al., 2005, p. 719; Schoch, 2013a, p. 719). Therefore, as women began writing about sport, there were different expectations of male and female sports journalists (Miloch et al., 2005, pp. 709, 711; Schoch, 2013a, p. 708).

As is the case in other areas of sport, hegemonic masculinity has been judged to be the underlying foundation for the marginalisation of women in the newsroom (Miloch et al., 2005, p. 229). Kian and Hardin (2009, pp. 192-193) argue that hegemonic masculinity is entrenched in sport and sports coverage. This is not only the case for how sport is broadcast but also in the way sports newsrooms have been run and how women have been treated in these environments (Toffoletti, 2007, p. 430). According to Miloch et al. (2005, p. 229), the presence of female journalists in a male dominated environment has threatened ‘the traditional power structure between men and women’. This is particularly the case when female journalists have made public their critiques of male athletes’ performances. This ‘blokey newsroom culture’ (North, 2012, pp. 263, 268), or ‘locker room mentality’ (Hardin & Shain, 2006, p. 324) has created an environment in which female sport reporters are somewhat unwelcome. In the past, female sports
journalists have been viewed as less competent with less knowledge than their male counterparts, have been held to higher standards of professionalism in the newsroom and have also been expected to accept basic and low-ranked assignments (Miller & Miller, 1995, p. 883; Toffoletti, 2007, p. 430). This gender bias has been highlighted in a number of studies to result in a lack of promotional opportunities for female sports journalists (see Hardin & Shain, 2005a; Hardin & Shain, 2005b; Hardin & Shain, 2006; North, 2012; and Smucker, Whisenant, & Pedersen, 2003).

According to Miloch et al. (2005, p. 229), while an increasing number of women have been employed as sports journalists, there have been minimal advances with regard to females attaining ‘influential roles’ in their field. They describe an ongoing failure to be taken seriously and therefore a failure to be promoted after being hired (Hardin & Shain, 2006, p. 329). Smucker et al. (2003, p. 405) explain that women have in the past been hired at entry-level positions with early promotional opportunities, however as they have progressed through the ranks, these women found that the ‘glass ceiling is still firmly in place’. This has resulted in women moving on from jobs with the hope of advancing their careers, rather than staying in roles where a lack of career progression is evident (Smucker et al., 2003, p. 407). This reflects McKay’s (1997) research with regard to sports management and the vertical and horizontal segregation, whereby women can move across to positions at the same level, but cannot climb up the ranks to positions that can progress their careers.

2.7.3.2. Modern day

Contemporarily, it appears that gender parity in sports journalism has not greatly improved. Franks and O’Neill (2016, p. 477) state that ‘while other areas of reporting saw a subsequent shift to an improved gender balance … the number of women who enter into sports journalism is still relatively low’. It is pertinent to note that according to the International Sports Press Survey presented in 2011, just 8% of named sports journalism articles were written by women. This
study was conducted across 22 countries with over 18,000 articles examined\(^7\) (Horky & Nieland, 2011). Evidently, women are still underrepresented in sports journalism worldwide and the mistreatment and subordination of women within sports media is well known and well documented by sports media scholars (Harrison, 2018, p. 952). Franks and O’Neill (2016, p. 475) suggest that while there are high profile female sports journalists in most English speaking countries, sports departments across the world remain predominantly masculine environments (Franks & O’Neill, 2016, p. 477).

Pippos (2017, p. 23) does acknowledge that some progress has been made in relation to female reporters in sports media contexts. She claims that it is evident that females have more presence across television, radio, print and online platforms. Franks and O’Neill (2016, p. 479) explain that the UK public believe women are more warmly welcomed into sports media, but suggest that perception is likely due to women being visible in broadcast journalism, rather than print. They claim that in the newspaper industry, women are still relatively rare and the environment is still a ‘largely male dominated area in countries all over the world’ (Franks & O’Neill, 2016, p. 475). Pippos (2017, p. 23) indicates that ‘you’ll even see and hear the odd one [female] with the right to an opinion on sport panel shows – but rarely more than one’.

In Australian journalism in particular, Caple, Greenwood and Lumby (2011, p. 138) explain that there has been an influx of females into the newsroom in the last three decades. However, ‘the media are still overwhelmingly dominated by male editors, executive producers, programmers and managers’ by which ‘male dominance is not only highly visible but arguably explicitly determines the nature and scope of coverage’ (Caple et al., 2011, p. 138). Franks and O’Neill (2016, p. 477) elaborate on this by explaining that men produce sport coverage ‘for men and about men’. Pippos (2017, p. 21) describes her experience as a female sports journalist new to Melbourne, Australia, explaining that her ‘introduction to life as a Melbourne-based sports

\(^7\) This survey was specifically conducted to assess articles in print journalism – it does not account for broadcast or other forms of journalism.
journalist [was] male reporters talking about a male coach who’d supposedly failed male players and a male board’.

Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 404) explain that sport journalism can ‘play a significant role in meanings given to sport and to those participating in sport … The products of sport journalism can shape popular societal images of sport, gender and desired forms of physicality’. Not only that, but sports journalism can be a ‘macho’ working environment, as defined by Bruce (2016, p. 632), in various countries all over the world. Pippos (2017, p. 54) claims that ‘part of the problem with the sports media is that there just aren’t that many women involved’. She states that the number of women in sports journalism may be growing, but ‘the atmosphere and attitudes haven’t changed much’ (Pippos, 2017, p. 54). Bruce (2016, p. 632) suggests that males working in media struggle to comprehend the emergence of sport and femininity and, therefore, female sports journalists feel as though they do not quite fit in to the environment, with both colleagues and athletes. This feeling is not one to be dismissed. As North (2012, p. 267) discovered, suggestions that women who have made it to the top of the hierarchy are token appointments, or a product of the implementation of equality policies, rather than having earned their positions, are evident in the sports media environment. Additionally, females working in newsrooms and journalistic environments have aired their grievances with regard to the need to continually ‘prove’ themselves to colleagues and sports fans (Antunovic, 2014, p. 47).

Many female sports journalists have also had to contend with sexism in the workplace. Schoch (2013b, p. 101) explains that women in sports journalism are often the ‘object of seductive behaviour’ and at times face sexual harassment. Pippos (2017, p. 54) claims that sexism and double standards keep women on the outer. Harrison (2018, p. 953) also suggests that rather than social and industrial institutions being held responsible in changing the culture
and fighting harassment, often women are held solely responsible for their own success (or lack thereof) despite harassment. From an Australian perspective, Pippos explains that ‘the late Rebecca Wilson was subjected to a tidal wave of online abuse for having strong and at times provocative opinions about sport’ (Pippos, 2017, p. 61). Additionally, Caroline Wilson, former Chief AFL writer for *The Age* newspaper, faced constant scrutiny in her role (Pippos, 2017, p. 61). Pippos (2017, p. 26) explains that one of the more mild acts of sexism she herself has faced, as a female sports journalist, is people asking her whether she actually likes sport. Fink’s (2016, pp. 2-3) research provides various examples of sexism faced by women in sport, including situations where male sports commentators have blatantly abused female reporters in sport.

Schoch (2013a, p. 720) suggests that although women are facing these adversities and barriers with regard to accessing traditionally male dominated positions in sports media organisations, there is the view that women are simply conforming to the roles that are expected of them in these workplaces, rather than challenging these workplace stereotypes. North (2012, p. 266) highlights three ways in which female sports journalists have coped with the masculine culture of the newsroom. The first method is to become ‘one of the boys’ and adopt ‘masculine’ traits when working. As it has been noted amongst women working as coaches, umpires, managers, CEOs and board members, women working as journalists have also at times adopted a ‘masculine’ position in their role in order to fit in (Hardin & Shain, 2006, p. 326; Toffoletti, 2007, p. 431). Secondly, women can take a ‘feminist’ approach and make a conscious effort to provide a different perspective and buck masculine trends in the newsrooms (North, 2012, p. 266). Schoch (2013b, p. 107) explains that females use tactics ‘adapted to their vulnerability’. She explains that females control ‘their appearance, language, and attitudes’ and make use of the feminine stereotype when suitable, to attain professional goals (Schoch, 2013b, p. 107). Finally, according to North (2012, p. 266), females can choose to ‘retreat’ and work as freelancers rather than fight the gender battle in the newsroom. Depending on the environment and their
interactions, it appears that females often adapt to their environment and activate various strategies to cope with gendered practices they may be subjected to (Schoch, 2013b, p. 97).

In summary, the male dominated nature of sport impacts on the way in which the environment of sport functions. The lack of women in senior management positions (and coaching, umpiring and journalism) as a result of this environment impacts on the influence that females can have in sport. Those in leadership positions with the power and platforms to influence decisions can dictate the understanding their workplaces and environments have about gender inequities in sport (Hoeber, 2008, p. 262; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2008, p. 93). One such sporting environment in Australia is Australian rules football.

2.8. Gender and Australian rules football

Historically, in Australia, sport has held a significant place in society. According to Caple et al. (2011, p. 138), ‘watching and playing sport are the most popular cultural activities for contemporary Australians’. The development of sport has generally favoured the interests of males (Thompson, 1990, p. 136). Caple et al. (2011, p. 138) explain that in Australia, as in many countries worldwide, sport is played, funded and run by men and ‘equated directly with masculine prowess’. Fox (2017, p. 27) believes that because sport is a part of Australia’s national identity, until recently this has resulted in ‘timid’ efforts to challenge the masculine domain of popular sports in Australia.

Australian rules football is one sport that is of growing scholarly interest, particularly in relation to the study of women and football (see Cooper, 2018; Hess, 1996; 2000; Hindley, 2006; Klugman, 2012; Mewett & Toffoletti, 2011; and Willson et al., 2017). Poynton and Hartley (1990, pp. 144, 155) suggested nearly three decades ago that ‘Australian rules football is a man’s game. Men play, coach, promote, officiate, commentate and follow the footy. Australian rules football is represented as the national sport and the locus of essentialised Australian
masculinity’. However, despite the sport being heavily masculine and male dominated, Australian rules football is one sport that has been somewhat inclusive of women from its inception.

The first recorded game of AFL took place in 1858 (Hess, 2000, p. 111; Hindley, 2006, p. 37;) and women have been active participants in the sport’s community since its inception (rarely in leadership positions, but certainly as spectators and volunteers) (Dyson et al., 2010, p. 8; Hess, 2000, pp. 113-114; Klugman, 2012, p. 416; Nicholson et al., 2005, p. 65; Sinclair, 2011, p. 86; Wedgwood, 2008, p. 312). As Hess (1996; 2000) and Sandercock and Turner (as cited in Hindley, 2006, p. 47) explain, women from all classes were consistent spectators of the game from early in the history of Australian rules football. However, despite the sport often being coined ‘the people’s game’ (Frost, 2005, p. x), from a participation perspective, ‘historically, girls and women have been ideologically positioned and regulated as ‘out of place’ in the AFL with few developed pathways or competition options being offered comparative to the men’ (Willson et al., 2017, p. 1709). As Dyson et al. (2010, p. 6) state, despite being involved with the sport from the beginning, traditionally women have been marginalised to secondary positions or volunteer roles within all levels of Australian rules football.

Academic interest in the topic of women and Australian rules football has grown in popularity over the past two decades in particular, led by Hess (1996; 2000), Hindley (2006), Klugman (2008; 2012) and Wedgwood (2005; 2007; 2008). Nicholson et al. (2005, p. 66) asked the question over a decade ago, whether or not women were still being assigned to the role of supporter or volunteer, or whether there was a belief that they have a legitimate role to play within Australian rules football (outside of volunteer roles, canteen duty or chauffeuring children to sporting events). It has only been in recent years that women are being recognised for the knowledge, passion and perspective they can offer to the sport of Australian rules football.
(however this acknowledgement has not come without scepticism and backlash). Yet, women are still not fairly represented in Australian rules football, be it on club boards, in management roles or in other leadership positions. As Nicholson et al. (2005, pp. 69-70) highlight, it is often the case that women have been employed in administrative and managerial roles (traditionally feminine roles) and are severely underrepresented in positions in the football operations departments (Hindle, 2006, p. 312; Lane, 2015c). Cooper (2018, p. 78) recognises that ‘within the AFL there is still varying levels of formal and informal hierarchical ordering of managers and employees. This hierarchical ordering is often gendered and believed to favour men over women’.

Challenges to the status quo are rising and while the number of women in leadership positions in Australian rules football is not large, more women are gaining employment in these traditionally masculinised roles. Nevertheless, Hindley (2006, p. 5) does pose the question of whether, for example, it ‘is an achievement to have one woman appointed to the tribunal, as an individual success, or [whether we should] ponder why more women are not on the tribunal’. Pippos (2017, p. 23) states that ‘more than one would indicate … real progress’. It may be the case that each individual circumstance be celebrated as a stepping-stone to the success of women working in leadership positions in Australian rules football, while simultaneously striving to grow this number.

Mewett and Toffoletti (2011, p. 672) suggest that masculinity is still the foundation of Australian rules football today, as the sport is ‘played and administered by men ... which has produced and continues to reproduce gender practices that marginalise women’. They suggest that women are ‘secondary subjects’ in the AFL, as their positions in senior management and decision making roles are limited (Mewett & Toffoletti, 2011, p. 672) and have at times been labelled as tokenism (Hindle, 2006, p. 1). Lane (2015c) describes the recent setting of women
in leadership positions in the AFL, stating ‘women employees [in positions further up the hierarchy] at the AFL, historically, have been temporarily promoted to the executive ... invited to attend meetings without having executive status, leave headquarters with executive hopes unfulfilled’. In the current league, there are two women, Gabrielle Trainor (Twomey, 2016) and Major-General Simone Wilkie (AAP, 2014), on a nine-person executive, one female club president (Peggy O’Neal at Richmond Football Club) (“Richmond Directors,” 2018) out of 18 male clubs and three female umpires (Chelsea Roffey, Sally Boud and Eleni Gluoftsis) (Australian Football League Umpires Association [AFLUA], 2018). As Lane (2015c) explains, there is a gender and power imbalance at the highest level of Australian rules football and the AFL risks stalling their progress for inclusion and equality if more women are not given an opportunity at the highest levels of the sport. As discussed below, it is acknowledged that there have been a number of ‘success stories’ within Australian rules football, where women have been successfully appointed in leadership roles, not to mention the introduction of the female national league, the AFL Women’s (AFLW) competition. These women are creating careers for themselves in the AFL; however, they have faced harsh criticism and discrimination by virtue of identifying as a woman.

While it is acknowledged that progress has been made in allowing women opportunities for employment (including in senior positions) in Australian rules football, it has not come without doubt, territorial claims and labels of an invasion. Examples of these (subjective) claims are made by McCauley (2008, p. 30), that women (and in particular feminists) are ‘bullying’ their way into sacred men’s sites, have ‘taken over’ newsrooms and media commentary and are demanding seats on boards at football clubs’. McCauley (2008, pp. 31-32) makes some heated claims with regard to women taking over the ‘men’s business’, suggesting that those females who are fighting for the inclusion of women within the AFL (feminist elites, as opposed to ‘the

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8As at December 2018.
silent majority of women who are supporters of the AFL’), label the sport as a ‘dumb, chauvinistic, sexist embarrassment’. Additionally, when visiting any social media sites and when reading comments under articles regarding the AFLW competition, female umpires and female commentators, it is evident that there are many critiques of these women based purely on the fact they are female. While McCauley’s views may be deemed an exaggeration by some, it is evident that there is still a certain hesitancy around females being involved within the sport, or perhaps at the very least the insistent need for Australian rules football to still be seen as a ‘man’s game’ (Agnew, 2011, pp. 150, 153).

Agnew (2011) has specifically researched the construction of masculinity in Australian rules football, having interviewed past elite players of the sport. The general consensus of a number of participants was that it is a positive and even a necessary progression of the sport that women are being appointed in certain roles, such as physiotherapists, nutritionists and physicians (Agnew, 2011, p. 151). However it was indicated that these positions are ‘appropriate’ for women and traditionally assigned roles for females, therefore implying that in Australian rules football, there are roles that are viewed as suitable for women and other positions that are not (Agnew, 2011, pp. 150-151).

The increase in the number of women being appointed as CEOs, umpires and commentators of the game, while also an important progression, is changing the perception of Australian rules football being a ‘man’s game’ (Agnew, 2011, pp. 150, 153). AFL team, Richmond Football Club (“Gender Equity,” 2014, p. 9), encountered similar findings in their research on gender equity in the AFL, with males discussing the issue of how to assist women in ‘fitting in’ to the existing culture and environment, rather than changing the environment. This liberal feminist approach should be critiqued, as it limits the progression women can make in the sport and holds them in traditionally feminine administration, clerical and supporting roles (Agnew, 2011, p. 151), rather
than changing the culture to be inclusive of women in all roles.

According to Lane (2015a; 2015b), just three years ago, of the 18 male clubs in the top level of Australian rules football (the AFL), only one reached the 40 per cent mark for female directors,\(^9\) with just 25 women holding the Club Director position (there are 150 positions available) in the league. Of the nine-member commission, there are two women and just one on the league’s 10-member executive. However, in recent years there has been an increase in the number of women being appointed in more traditional male roles, such as goal umpiring, commentating/journalism and as board members (Agnew, 2011, p. 153). During the 2018 season, a number of high(er) profile women working within the AFL (and the AFLW competition) include former St Kilda (development) coach Peta Searle (now coach of St Kilda Football Club’s state female team), former chief AFL writer for The Age, Caroline Wilson, President of Richmond Football Club, Peggy O’Neal, goal umpire Chelsea Roffey, field umpire Eleni Glouftsis and commentator Kelli Underwood. To provide some perspective, there are 46 field umpires, 27 goal umpires (and 43 boundary umpires) in the league – with just three female umpires in total (AFLUA, 2018). While Fox Footy (one of two major broadcasters of the AFL) has a number of prominent female journalists and commentators on their channel, there are very few qualified sports journalists commentating on the game (aside from the female commentators and hosts – the males commentating on matches are most often ex-players) (Naghten, 2018; “Five new shows,” 2018). Whilst these females have somewhat ‘broken’ through the glass ceiling of a masculine sporting space, these women represent just a very small minority in the AFL and their appointments have not been without challenges.

Before being appointed as a development coach with the St. Kilda Saints, Peta Searle stated

\(^9\) The term ‘director’ refers to those working in positions on club and AFL boards, as executives and commissioners and those overseeing the running of the sport at club and national level.
that despite coaches at AFL level reassuring her that it was ‘just a matter of time’, she felt that it was a ‘matter of a long time’ before a woman would be appointed in a coaching role at an AFL club (“Peta Searle: Unfinished business,” n.d.). The league’s first female goal umpire, Chelsea Roffey, held initial fears that hers was a token appointment and it took being selected for high profile matches to dispel these feelings (Browne, 2015c). Additionally, many articles celebrating Glouftsis’ senior men’s umpiring debut were marred with comments about her inability to adequately complete the centre bounce (due to the turf) (Cherny, 2017; “Eleni Glouftsis makes AFL umpiring history,” 2017; “Eleni Glouftsis reveals wonderful gesture,” 2017). Peggy O’Neal, the first female president of an AFL club, was appointed to Richmond Football Club on the board in 2005 (the first female board member of any AFL club) and as president in 2013. Even O’Neal, a partner at a prestigious law firm in Melbourne (Browne, 2015b), with her history of passionately supporting Richmond Football Club from a fan perspective, as well as contributing significantly to the club via sponsorship and volunteer work, said she had thoughts about being a novelty appointment at first, even though she knew she was ready and it was her time for the job (Browne, 2015b). Kelli Underwood, the AFL’s first regular female match-day commentator, ‘has never been short of a critic’ (Brady, 2011) and encountered continuous backlash and negative comments, in particular from people on fan forums and blogs, who opposed a woman working in a role seemingly only fit for a male (Wilson, 2011). Her current success as a commentator cannot be mentioned without highlighting the tough road that she has travelled. Furthermore, the AFL’s first female CEO (Tracey Gaudry, at Hawthorn Football Club) lasted just four months – less than a season (Denham, 2017).

These women not only have to work incredibly hard to gain these positions in the league, they also often have to do so in the spotlight, where they face constant media attention that males in their position do not often experience. Roffey said in 2015 that when she was first appointed, she had to do press conferences and interviews, ‘things a male goal umpire entering the game
wouldn’t have to do’ (“Chelsea Roffey, AFL Umpire,” n.d.). Searle has admitted to having ‘a fair bit of weight’ on her shoulders and is aware of the path she and other females in similar positions are creating for others looking to break into the industry (cited in Browne, 2015d).

Roffey in particular has garnered attention from male commentators and journalists, despite having been in the role for a number of years now. She is sometimes patronised and infantilised by television commentators as they remark on her ability to make correct decisions in tough situations. Rose O’Dea, the AFL’s second female goal umpire has described instances of people asking her when she is going to ‘replace Chelsea’, implying that ‘there’s ... a one woman quota and that it’s some sort of token position’ (“Celebrating our women in football,” 2014). Caroline Wilson is another notable pioneer in the AFL, having worked as the chief football writer for Melbourne newspaper The Age for almost two decades, as well as working in radio and television (Browne, 2015a). However, having worked in her role for so long, Wilson has expressed annoyance over people telling her (as a compliment) ‘you’re so blokey or so ballsy’. She has also had threats against her career (and worse) for certain stories that she has covered that have shaken up the football world (Browne, 2015a). One notable incident involving Wilson occurred in 2016 when Collingwood Football Club President Eddie McGuire ‘joked’ on radio about drowning Wilson for charity (Perkins, 2016). These are just some brief examples of the experiences women working in leadership positions in Australian rules football have encountered.

Overall, the number of women in leadership roles in Australian rules football are not proportionate to the number of women working in various positions and at various levels of the sports’ hierarchy who play a role in the maintenance and overall success of the sport (Hindley, 2006, p. 152). Women who do make their way to (or near to) the top of the sporting hierarchy have to face unrelenting barriers and discrimination and are still often subjected to doubt and a
lack of support in their abilities, even after having proven themselves repeatedly. There is little
doubt that it will take a long time to shift traditionally held beliefs with regard to women
working in sport. By having women challenging for these positions, combined with the AFL
working mindfully to employ more women into these roles, Australian rules football can play a
role in building gender equality in sport. Such an achievement may also have a ‘knock on’ effect
in wider society. One development that is expected to contribute to the growth of females in
Australian rules football is the national competition for females, the AFL Women’s (AFLW).

2.8.1. AFL Women’s

The eight-round AFLW competition was introduced in 2017. The first season was deemed a
success, exceeding the expectations of many within the football world. However, as Willson et
al. (2017, p. 1707) concede, whilst the AFLW competition was introduced as the national
Australian rules football competition for females, it has vast differences to the men’s national
competition. There are fewer teams, women play a short season over summer (Australian rules
football is a winter sport), they play shorter games with some modified rules and they are
contracted for fewer hours and paid significantly less in comparison to their male counterparts.
This means that women have to juggle work, training and games through the eight-week season
(Willson et al., 2017, p. 1707). However, despite the concessions made to get the AFLW
competition going, it has still been regarded a success. There has been widespread interest in
attendance at games as well as extensive media coverage (Willson et al., 2017, p. 1707). Willson
et al. (2017, p. 1706) explain that since the competition was announced, there has been growth in
female participants of Australian rules football at all levels. Additionally, with the competition
having run for two seasons now, it is a site where research can be conducted on the wider
implications of having a(nother) national women’s competition in Australia.¹⁰

Willson et al. (2017, p. 1704) sought to find out whether the AFLW competition will place more importance and acceptance on women’s sport and on women ‘in contemporary Australian society more broadly’. They were also curious about the cultural, social and economic benefits for sport generally and for ‘women’s participation and leadership in and through Australian sport specifically’ (Willson et al., 2017, p. 1705). They hypothesised that the AFLW competition is a conflicted space, where hope can be generated, though alongside ‘sites of contestation in the female sporting imagination’ (p. 1705). Willson et al. (2017, p. 1708) argue that while the AFLW competition provides a stronger link to the professional sporting sphere that is the AFL, systemic issues within the structure and foundations of the competition remain, which brings into question the true professional status of the competition and the opportunities for females.

There have been some incredible success stories within the AFLW competition. Players are gaining popularity amongst the wider Australian rules football audience and it has provided opportunities for women to take on leadership positions where they perhaps have not been considered in the men’s national competition before (Dyson et al., 2010, p. 6). There has been an evident increase in female umpires, coaches and commentators in the AFLW competition and by extension (in some areas), also in the men’s national game. Eleni Glouftsis became the first female field umpire to officiate a men’s senior game (Cherny, 2017). On both television and radio, female commentators and hosts have been appointed for both the women’s and men’s competitions (O’Halloran, 2017). In 2016, St. Kilda’s female staff members participated in a three-month empowerment program ‘to encourage them to speak up and aspire to the top jobs’ (Pippos, 2017, p. 132). In the first two seasons of the AFLW competition, two females were appointed as coaches of teams. AFL commentator Kelli Underwood cited the growth and

¹⁰ The AFLW competition is a new female competition alongside women’s leagues in sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby union and rugby league in Australia. These leagues are of growing interest both recreationally and academically in Australia.
implementation of the AFLW competition as a significant breakthrough in welcoming women into professional roles within the sport (O’Halloran, 2017).

Whilst the growth of women in Australian rules football has certainly been assisted with the introduction of the women’s national competition, there are still distinct struggles for women when it comes to their roles as leaders in the sport. Willson et al. (2017, p. 1710) explain that (despite the fact women are more visible within the AFLW competition), ‘most of the organisation and coaching of AFLW competition has been undertaken by men’. Perhaps most pertinently to note is that the two female head coaches in the AFLW competition both resigned after just two seasons (Chadwick, 2018; Fjeldstad, 2018; Lane, 2018; O’Halloran, 2018; Shalala, 2018).

For Australian rules football to be sustainable and receive the continued support, passion and following that it has, it must ‘challenge dominant interpretations and traditional binaries … [and] transcend conventional gender roles and discourse’ (Willson et al., 2017, p. 1711) to cater for the percentage of the population who are female. Women must be discussed and recognised as an important part of the future of Australian rules football (and sport as a whole) and not simply as spectators, partners, or volunteers, but as players, employees and employees suitable for leadership positions. It must be recognised that to include women in the football and sporting sphere is not to emasculate Australian rules football or sport as a whole, but rather to shift the level of power that men have over women on and around the ground in order to strive for equality (Hindley, 2006, p. 26). Willson et al. (2017, p. 1716) believe that despite the historical opposition to females in Australian rules football, it is women themselves who are at the forefront of changing discussions and views on ‘inclusivity, gendered identity, and sport’. Third wave feminism and its impact on women in a sporting space may be explored to further understand the experiences of women in sport. This can assist with building knowledge on the
ways women are interpreting their experiences in a traditionally masculine space and recognising the changes that can be made to the culture of sport to be inclusive of females.

2.9. Third wave feminism and sport

Since the early 2000s, feminist sport scholars have employed third wave feminism to assess the ‘gendered practices of sport institutions and cultures’ (Toffoletti, 2016, p. 201). According to Litchfield (2018, p. 4), third wave feminism has challenged the feminist thought in relation to sport, gender and masculinity, by offering a different theoretical approach. From a third wave feminism perspective, sport is examined as a site of simultaneous empowerment and oppression. Bruce (2016, p. 368) explains that third wave feminism recognises and observes the ‘simultaneous empowering and problematic elements of sports practice’, while Willson et al. (2017, p. 1715) label sport spaces as both ‘sites of contestations and hope’ (emphasis in original). Toffoletti (2016, p. 202) explains that a third wave feminism perspective, with its ability to theorise the multifaceted experiences of women and gender, class, race and sexuality in a postfeminist era, makes it popular amongst feminist sports critics, allowing them to decipher the conflicting perspectives and identities of women in the modern era where cultural and institutional demands on women can become unclear.

In relation to women, sport and third wave feminism, much of the focus is on the way in which female athletes have navigated the inherently gendered sporting environment (see Bruce, 2016; Thorpe, Toffoletti, & Bruce, 2017; and Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). Much of the discussion surrounding third wave feminism and sport revolves around the way in which the media is also used to both oppress and empower women. Toffoletti (2016, p. 199) describes the media landscape as ‘complex and contradictory … that often marginalizes and empowers sportswomen’. She explains that media can depict women as ‘active and powerful while simultaneously highly sexualised’ (Toffoletti, 2016, p. 201). The media play a role in the
perpetuation of gender inequality, by its representation of female athletes (and women in wider society). Athletic attributes deemed desirable for women are often showcased in the media by the use of particular images and language, encouraging certain (i.e., feminine) behaviours and actions (Toffoletti, 2016, p. 204).

Increasingly, females are garnering more control over their identities and the way in which they are represented in media spaces (Litchfield, 2018, p. 9). This representation has become more complex as women are not necessarily ‘sexualised, marginalised and objectified’ (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018, p. 13), but rather represented in the countless number of ways in which females may identify. Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018, p. 26) explain that ‘hypersexual images that in the past would have been considered explicit forms of sexualisation by others – “oppressive” forces like patriarchy and sports media – are now recast as assertions of active and confident sexuality’. According to Litchfield (2018, p. 9), female athletes are conscious of the fact that they hold some power to represent themselves in both traditional and non-traditional feminine ways. Toffoletti (2016, p. 204) explains that there has been a shift in the way in which female athletes have been represented in the media. The media still often exemplifies slenderness and beauty, however the sexualisation of females can now also be a ‘source of personal empowerment’ (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018, p. 13). Alongside such representations are images and depictions of women as strong and athletic, suggesting that gendered characteristics of females are ‘culturally contingent and changeable’ (Toffoletti, 2016, p. 204).

In addition to the way the media portray female athletes, the introduction of social media has impacted significantly on women regaining some control over the way in which they are represented. Thorpe et al. (2017, p. 362) explain that social media allows women to ‘craft and control their own representation’ in ways that challenge the traditional stereotypes about women
in sport. Whether or not females are choosing to represent themselves in a non-traditional\textsuperscript{11} manner or change the perception around the traditional images and language of women in the media, social media is a platform that seemingly has the potential to transform the way in which women in sport are represented (Thorpe et al., 2017, p. 362). Images that would have traditionally been labeled as oppressive or sexualising of females (such as hypersexual images) can be viewed in a manner in which the female is empowered and confident in her own sexuality (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018, p. 26). This is not to disregard the fact that such images and portrayals of females in sport can also be oppressive. Thorpe et al. (2017, p. 362) note that females are often choosing to represent themselves in a manner that is consistent with the media’s traditional oppressive practices, such as sexualising females. Pippos (2017, p. 73) suggests that females can choose to pose in a sexualised manner ‘without consciously deciding to be turned into sex objects’, as it can be empowering for some women. However, Pippos (2017, p. 73) also notes that for female athletes, it can lead to more fans and more money, suggesting that empowerment may not be the only driving force behind representing oneself in a sexualised manner. Thorpe et al. (2017, p. 362) suggest that such ambivalences require further investigation to determine if wider societal ideals may impact on such choices.

As Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018, p. 26) explain, having the ability to use ‘whatever skills and attributes one can bring to the table’ to make a success of one’s sporting career (in this case, off the field) can be exceptionally self-empowering. Females in a male dominated environment might view themselves as ‘one of the boys’ and therefore their masculine traits can make them feel empowered in their work environment. Acting feminine amongst male colleagues might work to their advantage because they stand out and are treated differently to their male colleagues. This too can give females a sense of power and control in the way they present themselves as a female in a masculine domain.

\textsuperscript{11} Read: Non-feminine – women may choose to represent themselves in a manner that would traditionally be deemed masculine. For example, on the sports field, being athletic, strong and empowered (see Thorpe et al., 2017, p. 360).
The fact that ‘masculine’ traits and ‘feminine’ traits are still acknowledged in work places and used as a measure of behaviour and suitability to certain positions is oppressive and restrictive, no matter whether or not females in such environments deem themselves to be advantaged, to fit in or not. Additionally, as women are now recognised as having some knowledge and power to control the way in which they are represented and interpret the experiences they have, full responsibility can be (unfairly) put on them as to how they are represented and therefore treated (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018, p. 26). Toffoletti (2016, p. 205) explains that labeling women as ‘free to choose how they present [themselves]’ creates the belief that sports media is no longer sexist. As women are now recognised as empowered in a sport setting, the onus can now be put on them when claims of sexism are raised (especially if women are presenting themselves in a sexualised manner). It is due to such circumstances that third wave feminism recognises that females in sport are not either empowered or oppressed, but both empowered and oppressed (Bruce, 2016, p. 368).

Females do not necessarily have shared experiences in modern society (as was the foundation for second wave feminism). Therefore it can be more difficult to measure the kinds of empowerment and oppression that females are facing in their workplaces, particularly considering that their experiences are influenced by their own interpretations and each female’s individual relationship with feminism and gender equality. How each woman views certain practices in their workplaces (for example; language and actions surrounding sexism and gender inequality) can differ and what some deem as troublesome might be a non-issue for others. However, as Bruce (2016, p. 370) acknowledges, from a third wave feminism perspective, ‘interpretations of [females’] choices, and the resulting images, need to be taken seriously’, where sport is recognised as a site of both oppression and empowerment.
2.10. Concluding comments

This review of literature provides a foundation of knowledge by which the current study is influenced. Gendered practices are ingrained in society and, as a facet of society, in sport as well. The growing understanding of the culture of sporting environments and the continuing subordination of women (as it occurs in society and sport) is instrumental in the ongoing research into women and sport and, as is the current case, the specific study of women in leadership positions in Australian rules football. Given the growing interest in the sporting landscape as it adjusts for the increased inclusion of women into the environment (as athletes, volunteers, employees and leaders), this current study is relevant due to the first-hand insights it provides from female leaders in sport themselves. This Australian perspective adds to the body of literature that has predominantly been conducted overseas (without disregarding the recent and important work that has been conducted within Australian sport).

Additionally, the popularity of women’s sport is growing in Australia too, with an increasing number of female sporting leagues across traditionally masculine sports such as cricket, Australian rules football and rugby league. As these sports grow and as women are more highly recognised (and more highly regarded) as athletes (and by extension, as commentators, coaches, officials, board members and the like), this study gives a voice to women, therefore providing a foundation of information about how the environment accommodates for women in a traditionally masculine sporting space. Not only that, this study can also act as a point of comparison for research that will likely be conducted in the coming years in relation to, firstly, the female sporting space and secondly, the increase of women in influential positions in the male sports environment.

In the current paper, Chapter Three moves the focus onto the methodological processes of the current research. This includes exploring the qualitative design of the study, the research
questions and hypotheses, the method of data collection and relevant theoretical approaches.
CHAPTER THREE

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The academic study of the gendered culture in sport is an area that is of growing interest on a global scale. The current research focuses on the gender roles in sport and the experiences of women working in traditionally male dominated positions in Australian rules football. Such positions include umpiring and coaching, journalism and management. Various studies, both in Australia and across the world, have investigated the sporting environment for women in such roles. Such authors include Blom et al. (2011) and Tingle et al. (2014) (umpiring and coaching); Hardin and Shain (2005; 2006), Norman (2010) and Schoch (2013) (journalism); and Adriaanse and Schofield (2014), Claringbould and Knoppers (2007), Cooper (2018), Joseph and Anderson (2016) and Sibson (2010) (management). The following chapter will outline the research aims, hypotheses and research questions, as well as the methodological practices and theoretical approaches used in this research.

3.1. Research aims

This research aimed to use the findings from previous studies and apply and compare them to the current state of the gender culture specifically in Australian rules football. After extensive analysis of previous studies, the aims of the current study were developed. The specific aims of this current study are to: 1. Determine the depth of gender inclusivity in relation to leadership roles within Australian rules football. This refers to whether women are being appointed in such roles and whether they are visible in these positions; 2. To explore the experiences and opinions of women working or volunteering professionally within Australian rules football. Such experiences and opinions include how they feel in their role, what their pathway was like, whether they have faced barriers and whether they believe the wider Australian rules environment is gender inclusive; and 3. To determine whether the culture of Australian rules
football ensures the inclusion of women at all levels of employment. This refers to whether the culture is one that is inviting, welcoming, supportive and inclusive of women in all roles, particularly in roles that have traditionally been held by men. The aims of this study are explored through a variety of methods. These methods are comprised of in-depth, semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis.

3.2. Research questions and hypotheses

The specific research questions that this study aimed to address include:

1. Is the culture of Australian rules football inclusive and welcoming for women in leadership positions?

2. To what extent have women in Australian rules football faced discrimination or exclusion based on their gender identity?

3. What are the motivations for and barriers faced by women in their specific leadership roles within Australian rules football? Do the motivations to succeed in a male-dominated workplace outweigh the (gender) challenges faced?

4. To what extent does Australian rules football practice gender equality?

It was the contention of this study that women working in Australian rules football have faced discrimination (such as harassment, doubt over their abilities, been labeled as a ‘token’ appointment or otherwise). It was also anticipated that these female participants have encountered a general lack of equality in roles such as coaching and umpiring, management and journalism. As such, the current research project looked at the range of experiences of these women in such leadership positions. For instance, the research specifically aimed to explore these women’s experiences, feelings, beliefs and desires with regard to working in non-
traditional positions in sport and their position on challenging stereotypes. This includes highlighting these women’s views on working in a ‘man’s world’, the impact that sexism and/or hegemonic masculinity may have on their career progression, the barriers they may have faced in breaking into and progressing in the Australian rules football industry and how these women have had to adjust or adapt to such working conditions.

It is hypothesised that the experiences of women in this current study will overlap at some stages and may be somewhat similar, despite the fact that participants are employed or volunteering in a variety of roles. Females sharing stories of similar experiences may be likened to Sibson’s (2010) study on the underrepresentation of women in sports management and Brown and Light’s (2012) research on women’s sport leadership styles in Australia. These similarities may be in relation to the jobs participants are allocated in their roles within Australian rules football, the kinds of discrimination (if any) they have faced working in a male dominated domain, or their thoughts about Australian rules football and gender equality.

3.3. Theoretical framework

There are a variety of theoretical approaches that hold different levels of relevance within this study. Critical feminist theory is explored to provide some context on the masculine domain of sport and critique the way in which sport functions, in that it does not sufficiently cater for the thoughts and experiences of females. Gender role theory (also known as social role theory) and role congruity theory are explored to explain how the expectations of women and sport leadership are often viewed as incompatible. Postfeminist theory and in particular, third wave feminism theory, are also discussed and used to analyse how modern waves of feminism are progressive with regard to the experiences of women in modern society.
3.3.1. Critical feminist theory

A critical feminist theoretical approach is necessary when investigating the experiences of women working in the male dominated industry of sport. Kane and Maxwell (2011, p. 202) describe critical feminist theory as the belief that the structure of society is built on unequal power relations where some groups (men) are privileged over other groups (women). Women are therefore marginalised and devalued (Kane & Maxwell, 2011, p. 202). As discussed at length in the previous chapter, often the purpose and structure of sport is built upon the beliefs, values and experiences of men. Therefore, masculinity and dominant ideologies about male superiority are favoured over females and feminine perspectives and experiences.

Critical feminist theory argues that sport has a ‘structured centre’ based around institutionalised and cultural values, in which the gender ‘norm’ of sport is currently maintained (Norman, 2010, p. 96). These assumptions and ‘truth rules’ (Kane & Maxwell, 2011, p. 203) need to be critiqued and transformed so that the culture of sport and structures in place can represent the perspectives and experiences of all gender identities. It is highlighted that both cultural and structural changes need to be made in order for gender equality in sport and in society to be permanent (Coakley, Hallinan & McDonald, 2009, p. 43). Several studies in this area of gender and sport have successfully used this type of framework (see Kane & Maxwell, 2011; Litchfield, 2015b; Litchfield & Redhead, 2015; and Norman, 2010).

3.3.2. Gender/social role theory and role congruity theory

Gender role theory (or social role theory) has been applied to the current project. Social role theory suggests that society carries expectations on the roles that men and women are expected to fill. As explained by Burton, Grappendorf and Henderson (2011, p. 37), ‘specifically, social role theory contends that there are qualities and behavioural tendencies believed to be desirable for each sex, as well as expectations regarding the roles men and women should occupy’. Joseph
and Anderson (2016) expand on this, describing how these gender roles undermine the competency and power of females and hold men to a higher social status. Further, role congruity theory is an approach used by a number of scholars in research surrounding traditional feminine and masculine roles in sport. According to Eagly and Karau (2002, p. 575), role congruity theory expands on social role theory by examining the link between gender roles and leadership roles in society. The theory explores the supposed disconnect between the expectations of the roles women traditionally hold and the expectations of a leader (Burton et al., 2011, p. 37). Women are viewed as less suitable for leadership positions and if they do occupy such a role, their behaviour is often viewed to be unfavourable in comparison to a male undertaking the same role (Joseph & Anderson, 2016, p. 588).

When applied to a sport setting, Joseph and Anderson (2016, p. 588) explain that ‘sports leadership is shown to be gendered masculine, preventing women from advancing within sporting employment due to perceptions of gender role incongruity’. Therefore, it can be more difficult for women to become leaders in sport and to achieve success in such positions. As role congruity theory suggests (as described by Whisenant, Lee, & Dees, 2015, p. 483), the ingrained norms and expectations of society are ‘violated’ when women are present in leadership positions. The current study touches on these theories by inviting participants to discuss their experiences as women who have ‘violated’ such stereotypes surrounding the expectations of women in sport, exploring any barriers they have faced and the ways in which they have navigated the sports environment based on such stereotypes and expectations of women in sport.

Similar to Burton et al.’s (2011, p. 43) study on the perceptions of women in leadership positions in athletic administration, both social role theory and role congruity theory are suitable approaches in this current research as they can be applied specifically to the ways in which women are perceived in society and as leaders in Australian rules football. Another
contemporary form of feminist theory applied to this research is postfeminist theory.

3.3.3. Postfeminism

Postfeminism is also acknowledged within this research. Contemporarily, there has been a shift away from second wave feminism’s notions of collective and shared experiences of women in society, as the perceived pressure to conform to a stance and a way of life may not be suitable for females in modern day society who have a different perspective of the world (Budgeon, 2011c, p. 288). However, postfeminism, while being recognised in this research, also does not wholly acknowledge the evident gendered practices within sport and rather hands responsibility over to females to determine their own experiences and choose the way they are represented in sport (Toffoletti, 2017, p. 463). While certainly progressive with regard to acknowledging the ever-changing and individual experiences of females in modern society, postfeminism somewhat puts females in charge of their own destiny but does not sufficiently acknowledge that females still do not hold complete power over their own experiences, particularly in a male dominated sporting domain.

3.3.4. Third wave feminism

A third wave feminism perspective is more encompassing when acknowledging the simultaneous empowerment and oppression of women in modern society, including in sport. As discussed in the previous chapter, third wave feminism embraces diversity and the individual experiences and interests of women, rather than defining feminism as a singular, unified experience (Baily, 2013, p. 597; Snyder, 2008, p. 188). Snyder (2008, p. 178) explains that whilst acknowledging continuing injustices, women in modern society ‘consider themselves entitled to equality and self-fulfillment’.

Third wave feminism is appropriate to this study in that it allows for the experiences of
women in this research to be analysed from various perspectives. It is acknowledged that participants have their own individual experiences and have not necessarily suffered as a collective group simply because they are females in a male dominated area. However, this approach also acknowledges that by working in the same field (Australian rules football), participants in this research may share similar experiences but have different interpretations of said experiences. What some participants might recognise as a barrier might not be deemed so by other women. Third wave feminism recognises that situations and experiences can be both empowering and oppressive, which is suitable when analysing findings on both an individual and group basis.

3.4. Case study method

The case study method (more specifically, the multiple case study method) was initially chosen for this research. The aim was to break the research down into three separate case study sections: Women employed as coaches and officials in Australian rules football; women employed in management positions in Australian rules football; and women employed as journalists and commentators in Australian rules football. The method of multiple case study research allows for a collection of people, activities, policies and the like to be analysed in detail and the similarities and differences of each case to be examined. These details can be analysed individually, but also as a collective to gather information about the bigger picture and the wider issue of the study as a whole (Stake, 2006, p. vi). The case study method was viewed as the most appropriate for this research, given the ability of multiple participants to be analysed in detail and their experiences to be linked through the common factor of their employment in Australian rules football.

Upon analysis of the data, it was concluded that while participants simultaneously have a unique story to tell and their experiences intertwine at certain points, there were no disparities significant enough to separate participants into these categories. Therefore it was deemed
unnecessary to use the multiple case study method in this research and all responses have been analysed together, using a single, descriptive case study approach. As explained by Denzin and Lincoln (2017, p. 346), the focus on descriptive case studies can involve the researcher studying several instances of the case (in the current research, women in leadership positions in Australian rules football) and portraying commonalities amongst the data set. This was most suitable for the current research given the similarities between participant experiences and the way in which the researcher aimed to present the findings.

3.5. Recruitment process

3.5.1. Purposive sampling and criterion sampling

Purposive sampling (criterion sampling in particular) was used to recruit participants of this current study. Purposive sampling refers to recruiting participants for a specific purpose and making strategic decisions about the recruitment process with regard to questions of who?; why?; and how? (Given, 2008b, p. 697). This allows for specific, in-depth information to be gathered in relation to the central issues of the research (Patton, 2015, p. 264). In this current study, a particular strand of purposive sampling, known as criterion sampling, was used to source participants. Criterion sampling refers to selecting participants who meet pre-determined criteria (Patton, 2015, p. 281) in order to represent the key attributes of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 363).

In this case, the research is specific to women working or volunteering in male dominated positions in Australian rules football. Potential participants were required to be over the age of 18 and working or volunteering within state and national level, men’s12 Australia rules football competitions, in roles that are deemed to be ‘leadership’ positions by the researcher. The underlying description of such positions is simply that they have traditionally been held by men,

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12 The AFLW competition was not yet established at the time of recruitment for this research
with a certain level of authority and influence within their workplace. Factors such as location, length of time in role and education levels have not been restricted. Despite there not being a large number of restrictions in the recruitment process, purposive sampling is suitable for case study research given the method of asking specific participants questions about particular topics (Given, 2008b, p. 697). Such an approach is suitable for the current study given that the eligibility criteria for this study was specific with regard to gender and employment/volunteer status within Australian rules football.

To begin the recruitment process, an online search of Australian rules football club and organisation websites (at state and national level) was completed. From here, staff lists (readily available online) were analysed to find out which clubs and organisations (such as media corporations with specialised AFL journalists) had women in leadership positions suitable for the study. It is worth noting that it is acknowledged that women working in journalism positions in Australian rules football are employed by their respective media corporations rather than by a club, the sport or the AFL. However given that individual journalists can be accredited to work within Australian rules football (particularly at a national level), it is therefore believed that journalists and commentators, while often employed by outside corporations, are also employed under the Australian rules football banner. This allows for women in these positions to be compared and contrasted to women in other leadership positions in the sport.

The names of these women were recorded in a spreadsheet alongside their position, their workplace and a contact number or email. There were approximately 100 women on the list whom the researcher deemed potentially suitable for this study. Most often, the contact details were for the club or organisation rather than directly for a person. Once information about potential participants was recorded, an email was sent or a phone call was made to the club/organisation or directly to the potential participant if applicable.
In most cases, the principal researcher was unable to speak directly to the prospective participant they wished to contact. However, they were able to speak, over the phone, with someone employed in administration at the club or organisation. From there, an email\textsuperscript{13} was sent through to that person that had all the details of the study attached (including an information sheet,\textsuperscript{14} informed consent form\textsuperscript{15} and interview questions\textsuperscript{16}) and the person contacted informed the principal researcher that they would forward the email on to the suitable contact/s for the research. The email was structured to allow for the potential participant to contact the principal researcher via email or phone if they chose to participate in the research.

3.5.2. Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling was also implemented to recruit participants for this research. Snowball sampling typically refers to using ‘well-situated people’ (Patton, 2015, p. 298) such as initial contacts and participants to nominate others who meet the eligibility criteria for the research (Given, 2008c, pp. 815-816). This is a suitable method of recruitment if adopted in relation to purposive sampling, given that participants often had knowledge of other people who share the same characteristics and/or experiences pertinent to the research and takes advantage of ‘natural social networks’ (Noy, 2008, p. 329). This method was helpful in the current study given the professional status of the AFL and the fact that the principal researcher was not able to make direct contact with each potential participant. Given that only a small number of women are in leadership positions in Australian rules football (at a state and national level), many of these women knew each other and therefore those who were initially recruited for the research were at times able to recommend other suitable participants for the study, with whom the principal researcher was then able to invite to participate in the study.

\textsuperscript{13} See Appendix A for email draft.
\textsuperscript{14} See Appendix B for information statement.
\textsuperscript{15} See Appendix C for informed consent information sheet.
\textsuperscript{16} See Appendix D for interview questions.
Of the 26 females who did get in touch with the principal researcher, many (16) organised a time and place to meet in person, others organised an interview over the phone (seven) and a small number (three) addressed the interview questions via email. All of this information was recorded in the initial spreadsheet, with colour coding used to track those who had consented to participate in the research (green), those who had declined (red) and those with a response pending (yellow). From there, the principal researcher organised times for phone interviews and booked flights and accommodation when travelling interstate (from New South Wales to Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria) where face-to-face interviews were conducted.

3.5.3. Challenges in the recruitment process

Several challenges were faced during the recruitment process in this research. Not having direct contact with many of the potential participants meant that the principal researcher relied on a third party to send the research information on to those she wished to contact. It is suspected that some emails were not forwarded on as the principal researcher did not hear back from quite a few initial contacts (there were roughly 100 females on the initial contact list), despite follow up emails being sent. There was also a specific case in which the principal researcher was informed by word of mouth that despite a prospective participant having an interest in being interviewed for the study, she was forbidden by her workplace due to the organisation’s affiliation with a different university. There were also a low number of cases where females expressed their interest in participating in the research but their schedules did not allow them the time to partake in the interview.

It could be the case that some females did not wish to participate in the research given the sensitive nature of the research topic (in asking females about their personal experiences which had the potential to illicit negative feelings). Therefore, it is also suspected that if potential participants were not interested in taking part in the research, then they did not reply to the email.
they received. Additionally, given that females in leadership positions in Australian rules football at national and state level are a minority, there was a chance that participants were fearful that they could be identified via their shared stories. The principal researcher took safeguards to avoid this problem, as listed below.

3.5.4. Ethical risks and safeguards

It must be acknowledged that particular safeguards were taken to ensure that privacy, confidentiality and wellbeing of participants was upheld in this research. As mentioned above, considering that there are only a small number of women working within Australian rules football in leadership positions, it could be possible for these women to be identifiable if too much information about their specific workplace and role was shared in this research. Additionally, some participants of the research may have experienced discrimination and sexism within their current workplaces. Therefore it was acknowledged that some questions within the research might have left participants feeling uncomfortable.

Informed consent, confidentiality, privacy and wellbeing were key considerations in this research. The following steps were taken to minimise any potential risks associated with these factors:

- Ethics approval for this research was formally obtained via the Human Research Ethics Committee in accordance with Charles Sturt University guidelines.

- An overview of the research, including an acknowledgement of the potentially sensitive nature of the research, was shared with potential participants before they made a decision to partake in the study.

- Participants were informed before they agreed to participate that they were free to withdraw their consent from the research at any time (including after the commencement of the interview)
if they were uncomfortable with the nature of the research and the questions being asked.

- Participants were also informed that they did not have to answer questions if particular questions made them feel uncomfortable.

- Participants were informed before the research commenced that any information regarding their identity, including name, workplace and specific role would be de-identified to maintain anonymity upon publication.

- Participants were informed that the information obtained through interviews would be used solely for academic purposes by the principal researcher and research supervisors.

- Participants were informed that the data collected from interviews would be kept secure on the principal researcher’s password protected computer.

3.6. Data collection

3.6.1. Interview method

The interview method was selected for its effectiveness in gathering in-depth information from research participants. Similar to research conducted by Blom et al. (2011, p. 56); Hindley (2006, p. 117); and O’Shea and Toohey (2014, p. 9), semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to cover the relevant topics that the researcher was interested in (including the past and present experiences of participants in relation to Australian rules football). Specific themes covered in the interview for the current research included: General background information; general association with sport; employment in Australian rules football; gendered barriers in leadership roles in sport; and opinions about Australian rules football and gender equality. The questions within each of these categories were created based around the information that the principal researcher wished to collect, with guidance from academic literature.
Interview questions specifically revolved around participants’ experiences in a sport setting, focusing on both their relationship with sport growing up and as an employee in adulthood. This included both positive experiences they had and barriers they may have faced in their role/s in Australian rules football. The questions were structured to provide a consistent foundation of information that was comparable between each participant, but flexible enough to allow the participants to reflect on their experiences, elaborate on their answers and for the principal researcher to ask follow up questions where relevant (Longhurst, 2003, p. 143). This allowed for the questions to be tailored, suiting the individual participant in their specific role within Australian rules football.

The interviews covered content similar to Dyson et al.’s study on the AFL’s Respect and Responsibility Policy, in that the objective was to ‘consult with women involved in ... football clubs in a diverse range of roles, including board members, club administrators, umpires/coaches ...’ (2010, p. 48). Cooper (2018) and Wedgwood (2003; 2007; 2008) have also conducted research in a similar field and used similar methods, interviewing participants on an individual basis to gather information about their experiences and opinions on the gendered culture of Australian rules football. Similarly, Sundstrom (2012, p. iv) also interviewed women in leadership positions in various sports across Australia, to ‘identify their career progression pathways, barriers, experiences and strategies utilised’. Similar to that of Pfister and Radtke’s (2009, p. 237) study, the female participants were also asked of their beliefs with regard to the gender hierarchy in Australian rules football, with a particular focus on the positions that they hold. Additionally, Brown and Light (2012) conducted research seeking out how women observe their own leadership styles in Australian sport sectors, which included self-reflecting interviews. Therefore, not only are the proposed data collection methods applicable, the current study is able to add to this body of research on women in leadership roles in Australian sport.
Each potential participant was invited to engage in an in-depth, semi-structured interview with the principal researcher. Prior to the interviews being conducted, the principal researcher sent an ‘information pack’ to each of the 26 participants via email, which included an information sheet about the research – aims, method, risks and safeguards included; a consent form; and the interview question guidelines. These documents were discussed and the consent form signed prior to the commencement of the interview (in the case of email and phone interviews, the signed consent form was returned via email). The principal researcher met with participants on an individual basis in an environment convenient to the participant (usually their workplace or a nearby cafe), or conducted a phone or email interview if more convenient to the participant. Interviews were conducted between January and August of 2016. These interviews ran between 30 and 90 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded with the consent of participants and later transcribed by either an outsourced company or the principal researcher.

3.6.2. Reflexivity

Recognising that her position as a fan and spectator of Australian rules football may have influenced the approach she took in conducting the research, the principal researcher conducted the interviews in a manner in which she tried to remain aware of her position and potential biases in the research. She also aimed to remain aware of the positions of participants and from there worked to build a rapport with the interviewees, by being friendly and relatable, to engage in a more in-depth discussion and make the environment as comfortable as possible. This can be known as reflexivity, in which self-awareness and awareness of the stance of the participant (such as cultural, linguistic, political and ideological origins and biases) (Cumming-Potvin, 2013, p. 218) are consciously noted in order to draw out the ‘subconscious thoughts and inner voices of participants’, creating rich anecdotes of information for the research (Takhar-Lail & Chitakunye, 2015, p. 22).
3.6.3. Peer reviewing

The process of peer reviewing was also undertaken in this research. According to Rons, De Bruyn and Cornelis (2008, p. 46), peer reviewing has been considered the most effective method of obtaining ‘clear and pertinent advice’ about research processes and quality. Tracey (2012, p. 13) explains that it is recommended to get the opinion of others when completing academic research, as professors and colleagues can provide a fresh viewpoint.

Peer reviewing was adopted in the current research via regularly scheduled meetings between the principal researcher and her research supervisors. These meetings were thorough, with in-depth critiques, feedback and advice shared about all areas of the research as regular drafts of the thesis were submitted for feedback. This reflects Given’s (2008a, p. 604) description of peer reviewing, by which experts can ‘inform decision making’ and ‘provide critical and consultative evaluation of … a research project’. Given (2008a, p. 607) also acknowledges that in qualitative research, different interpretations exist, making individual and/or group perceptions significant to the interpretation of human experience. This was the case in the current research, in which the experiences, knowledge and interpretations of the supervising researchers were shared with the principal researcher. This assisted in analysing the data from multiple perspectives and creating thorough, in-depth interpretations of said data.

3.7. Data analysis

3.7.1. Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from this research. As explained by Bryman (2012, p. 13), thematic analysis involves examining data sets to ‘extract core themes’ within and between data sets. The themes and patterns found amongst the data are then reconstructed in a manner that highlights the key findings (Given, 2008d, p. 867). In the current
study, once interviews were recorded and transcribed, participants were first sorted into categories based on their leadership position.\textsuperscript{17} ‘Football Department’ (FD) includes females working within sporting clubs as trainers, coaches, data analysts, physiotherapists and/or doctors. ‘Board’ refers to women volunteering as board members within the sport. ‘Finance’ refers to women working in the financial department of their workplace. ‘Umpire’ refers to females working as either goal, boundary or field umpires. ‘Media’ is inclusive of women working as journalists, commentators, hosts for television broadcasts, or as media officers at football clubs.

The principal researcher then assessed each interview transcript thoroughly and organised the responses in spreadsheets based on the themes and sets of questions asked of each participant. There were six documents, each made up of a single theme from the interview questions (e.g., general background information, general association with sport, etc.). Each document contained separate spreadsheets with the questions and responses linked to that theme (with the sixth document containing non-specified anecdotes from participants).

From the analysis of these spreadsheets, a number of similar themes arose, where participants shared similar views and/or comparable experiences. It was initially expected that a number of themes would be shared between the case studies, given the similarities between all participants in their employment within Australian rules football. This is the case in relation to the types of discrimination these participants have faced (if any), career barriers they have encountered and their opinions about gender equality and Australian rules football. However, there were no significant discrepancies to justify splitting the participants into separate case studies and therefore the themes extracted from the data have been all encompassing rather than pertaining to women in different roles in the sport.

Rather than organising the data into case studies, the completed interviews were initially

\textsuperscript{17} These categories are noted in brackets with the participants’ pseudonym and age when they have been quoted in the following chapters.
analysed on an individual basis, then similar responses (starting with a simple breakdown of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ responses) were collected and sorted into their own spreadsheets. These responses were organised into the ‘results’ section of the research, where a breakdown of each question was displayed. Once these answers were analysed per question, the principal researcher listed a number of themes that stood out as worthy of further investigation. The results of the study (i.e., a breakdown of each interview response) and the preliminary themes were taken to the supervising team where they were discussed in further detail. Once the supervising team had looked over the results, it was decided that certain preliminary themes should be analysed further to determine what the data means in relation to the research aims and the study as a whole. Several discussions were held in relation to the analysis of the data and themes to determine whether they were continuously worthy, relevant and suitable to the study. These themes then became the focus of the discussion chapter of the research.

3.8. Conclusion

The qualitative research methods of purposive and snowball sampling, semi-structured in-depth interviewing and thematic analysis have been adopted to recruit, collect and organise the current research data into themes that make up the research findings. These research methods are common in sport sociology research and have been adopted in previous research studies, such as those conducted by Blom et al. (2011), Cooper (2018), Hindley (2006), O’Shea and Toohey (2014), Pfister and Radtke (2009) and Sundstrom (2012). The following chapter provides the specific breakdown of results based on the interview questions asked of participants. These results are categorised into the themes presented and relied upon in the interviews.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS NARRATIVE

The following chapter specifically presents the data from this research. The results have been broken down categorically, beginning with demographic information of participants and following on with participants’ relationship with and pathway into Australian rules football. Gendered barriers and behavioural comparisons in the workplace will then be highlighted, followed by the participants’ general views on gender equality in Australian rules football. The demographic details of each participant are also explained below.

4.1. Breakdown of demographic information

This research project involved 26 women who hold what the researchers deem to be leadership positions in Australian rules football (see Table 3 below for a breakdown of participants’ demographic information). These roles include (broadly) positions on football committees and club boards, in club departments (including the football department (FD), finance and media departments) and in umpiring and media roles in Australian rules football. The precise title of positions held by participants have not been specifically expressed due to confidentiality reasons, however general information about the role they held is included. As explained in Chapter Three, when identifying the participants and their position when quoted below, ‘FD’ refers to the football department (inclusive of club trainers, doctors, data analysts and physiotherapists); ‘Board’ refers to women volunteering on boards within Australian rules football; ‘Finance’ refers to women with leadership positions in finance departments; ‘Umpire’ refers to women working as field, goal or boundary umpires; and ‘Media’ refers to women working as journalists, commentators, broadcast hosts and media managers within Australian rules football.
Women only were contacted as potential participants for this study. The focus is on the personal experiences and opinions of females working or volunteering in what could be labelled as ‘leadership positions’ that have traditionally been held by men in Australian rules football. There were around 100 women initially contacted in regards to this study and a total of 26 (14 from national level and 12 from state level) agreed to be interviewed.

4.1.1. Location

At the time of the interviews, participants held positions (paid or volunteer) in Australian rules football, at a state or national level. Participants worked or volunteered in one of four states across Australia – Victoria (VIC), South Australia (SA), Western Australia (WA) and New South Wales (NSW) (associated state leagues being VFL, SANFL, WAFL and NEAFL) mostly around capital cities (see Table 1). Females involved with Australian rules football in Queensland, Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory were also contacted but chose not to participate in this study. The location of participants is not necessarily representative of the highest rates of females employed in Australian rules football; rather, it was linked to the location of the females who agreed to participate in the research and the fact that the majority of both national and state level teams are based around capital cities.

Table 1: Location breakdown (state by state)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of participants in state</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18 Victorian Football League; South Australian National Football League; West Australian Football League; North East Australian Football League.
There may be a specific reason as to why more women from certain states in particular volunteered to participate in this research. There are more football clubs in Victoria, at both the state and national levels. This is the case due to Australian rules football first forming in Victoria. The major competition was called the Victorian Football Association and the Victorian Football League before the national competition, the Australian Football League, was formed in 1990 (Hess, 2000, pp. 111, 113). Western Australia and South Australia were the next to grow their Australian rules football base and they do not have rival football codes such as rugby league competing for popularity (as New South Wales and Queensland do). Therefore, the foundations of the sport are strongest in Victoria (followed by WA and SA), hence the popularity and perhaps the higher numbers of participation in this research.

4.1.2. Age

The age of the participants ranged from early 20s (22 years) to early 60s (63 years). The majority of participants were aged in their 20s and 30s (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Age group breakdown**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number of participants in age range^</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20s</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30s</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40s</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50s</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60s</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^One participant did not specify her age.
4.1.3. Relationship status

Of the 26 participants, 20 were in relationships at the time of interview. These varied from being in a long-term relationship with a same- or opposite-sex partner and also being married. The remaining participants did not have a partner, or did not specify their relationship status. The participants’ family circumstances also varied, as some women were married with children of various ages (and grandchildren) and others were still living at home with their own parents.

The relationship status and sexual orientation of the females participating in this research may seem irrelevant or inconsequential and analysis of this data suggests it has no impact on the results or experiences of participants. However, it must be acknowledged that there has been a stigma around the reasons as to why women are interested in pursuing a career or taking a volunteer position in such a masculine environment as Australian rules football. As explained by a number of participants, early on in their positions they did feel like they had to prove they were not there to ‘find a husband’.

Because I was a single person at that point, I didn’t have kids involved in football, so the concept of a single professional woman, entering into [a football league] because she wanted to make a contribution to the community and she liked football, was very very foreign. And in some cases treated with suspicion. I did a lot of relationship management setting around that time so people understood that I was there for the right reasons, that I was not there to pick up a husband and that I had the best interests of the organisation at heart (Tegan, 42, Board).

Brittany also felt that her intentions, reputation and history was scrutinised in relation to the potential trouble she may cause amongst the male playing group:

I know when you go to get hired at the higher levels they always do a history on you to see if you have gotten with the players or anything previously, because they don’t want you bringing that to it. And I understand, like it’s your workplace and all that, and it’s the females that have given us the bad name that have done that in the past, so it’s more you’ve got to make sure you don’t get those ones (Brittany, 22, FD).
As such, the relationship and family status, along with sexuality was relevant for this reason, among others.

4.1.4. Education

The majority of women in this research carried a university education of Bachelor degree level or higher. There was only one participant who did not have some form of tertiary education. Most participants (17) held a Bachelor degree (in diverse areas including law, teaching, journalism and business). Others held diplomas or certificates in specific fields (for example; massage or human resources). Eight of these women held post-graduate degrees, including Honours, Masters, Post Graduate Diplomas or PhDs, again in various fields (refer to Table 3 for more specific details).

It is worth noting that the majority of participants held some form of tertiary qualification. Given the fact that within AFL ranks, there is a certain level of authority given to players when it comes to employment within the AFL after their playing careers are over, many women employed need to be almost ‘over’ qualified. This is not to say that ex-players are hired in the position of head physiotherapist, or club CEO, which evidently require particular expertise, however, there is a growing number of ex-players who are visible in media positions, as well as positions in football departments. Often these ex-players are not qualified at a tertiary level, but rather their experience comes from playing the game. This is not the case for all ex-players hired in such positions and there are males who have not played the game who are employed or volunteering who are officially qualified. However, this culture does point to the fact that women have to prove their capabilities before they are hired in certain positions, where men are often assumed to have the knowledge and expertise to fulfil a role. This point shall be discussed further in Chapter Five.
4.1.5. **Hobbies and work/life balance**

Outside of work, as somewhat expected, most participants stated that one of their main hobbies is sport or health and fitness. Growing up, the majority of women were active participants of sport and some also played sport as adults. Sports they played in the past, or at the time of the interview, varied depending on what their schools and communities had to offer. Some participants, such as Hayley and Madeline, specified Australian rules football as their favourite sport. ‘Interested in most sports, predominantly AFL football’ (Hayley, 34, FD); ‘Football is my passion and hobby, watching AFL football’ (Madeline, 38, Media). Others mentioned various sports that they had an interest in watching and also played growing up, including Rochelle (24, Umpire), who had varying interests in ‘ballet, tennis, piano and netball’. Other hobbies included spending time with family and friends and travel. Danielle (39, Board) specified ‘it’s really just football and catching up with friends, and dinners and stuff, and travelling’ and Laura (32, FD) explained that she was ‘really close with my family, friends, love going out for brunch’.

It appeared that work heavily consumed their time with many participants mentioning that they have a poor work/life balance, such as Charlotte, who, when asked about her work/life balance, stated ‘Oh terrible. Oh, terrible, because I just work and work and work, it’s really terrible!’ (Charlotte, 55, Finance). Laura mentioned that she put her work first 100 per cent of the time, explaining ‘I haven't missed a game in six and a half years and I don't intend too’ (Laura, 32, FD). The participants did not state or imply that their lack of work life balance was linked to their need to prove themselves or work harder and longer hours. Rather, it mainly came down to the fact that their jobs were more often than not also on the weekend which did have an impact on their life outside of work. Fiona explained that:

> It’s just a job you do at the weekends, so, you know you need to make sure you’re in the best position to do that, but you still need to balance that with having a social life and fitting in your work commitments as well (Fiona, 24, Umpire).
Others, such as Harriet, stated that she could focus solely on work due to not having children. ‘So I guess I’m lucky that I don’t have kids at the present time so I don’t have to bring that into it’ (Harriet, 37, FD). Stephanie claimed that her workplace was quite flexible, so she could raise children and work flexible hours around her family:

It is probably the biggest challenge in my working career, is how you manage work and being successful at your job and being in quite a senior role with being a mum. Work was quite flexible as well as they let me do some work from home, which was really good (Stephanie, 40, Finance).

Overall the demographic information of the participants of this research varied quite significantly. Their ages, locations and fields of knowledge in their careers or volunteer positions were wide-ranging. While they shared some similarities in that the majority of them were tertiary educated, they shared similar hobbies and the majority of them were in a relationship, the differences in their positions across different workplaces resulted in them creating their own paths and having their own unique experiences and relationships with Australian rules football.
Table 3: Demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Length of time in their current role+</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Bachelor of Journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Bachelor of Journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Madeline</td>
<td>Media=</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>Bachelor of Art, Double Major in History and Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Graduate Diploma in Psychology*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Anya</td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Bachelor of Sport Science, Honours &amp; PhD (Sport Science)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Hayley</td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>Certificate 3 &amp; 4 (field not specified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Urban VIC</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Bachelor of Exercise Science, Honours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bethany</td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Urban VIC</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma of Remedial Massage, Myotherapy and Sports Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Perth, WA</td>
<td>35 years**</td>
<td>Masters in Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Harriet</td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Perth, WA</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree in Medicine and Surgery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Perth, WA</td>
<td>8+ years</td>
<td>Masters in Sport Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Milly</td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Urban WA</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Completed High School to age 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Leanne</td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Suburban WA</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Bachelor of PE Teaching*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Brittany</td>
<td>FD</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>South Fremantle, WA</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Bachelor of Exercise Science and Sport Science*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Vicky</td>
<td>Board</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>North Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>Post Graduate Diploma in Arts and Law, Legal Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Board</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Western Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Masters in Education Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Pearl</td>
<td>Board</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Perth, WA</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree (field not specified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>Board</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>West Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Associate Degree in HR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Tegan</td>
<td>Board</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Suburban VIC</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Bachelor of Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Meaghan</td>
<td>Board</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>Bachelor of Economics, Masters of Applied Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>Board</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Bachelor of Commerce, Accounting and Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Suburban SA</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>Bachelor of IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Regional VIC</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Bachelor of Commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Umpire</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>Bachelor of Applied Science and Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Rochelle</td>
<td>Umpire</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree, PhD* (field not specified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Umpire</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Urban NSW</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Bachelor of Human Movement, PhD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Completing degree at time of interview
** Did not disclose length of time in current role
FD Football Department
DND Did not disclose
+ To date of interview, 2016
= Employed external to a football club/organisation
4.2. Relationship with Australian rules football

Participants were asked about their relationship with Australian rules football. This question pertained to their experiences growing up with the sport and the relationship they had with it, be it spectator, fan, player, etc., and how the relationship changed as they began working or volunteering in a significant role within the sport. Being fans of the sport varied amongst participants. Some had no interest in Australian rules football growing up, such as Harriet, who did not follow the sport until her employment in the field. As she explained, ‘embarrassingly before I got involved in the [workplace] I never really followed football at all’ (Harriet, 37, FD). Some women attended a few games with family and others were die-hard supporters, such as Allison and Rochelle, who grew up around the sport. Allison (29, Media) reflected, ‘I’ve just always grown up around it and always had ties to football’. Similarly, Rochelle (24, Umpire) explained ‘I’ve been going to AFL matches with my parents since I was a baby’.

Two women also mentioned that due to the location and timeframe they grew up in, Australian rules football was not really an option when it came to following sport. ‘No. There wasn’t really AFL in New South Wales when I was growing up at all’ (Charlotte, 55, Finance). There were also two participants who did not support the game until they became adults, or met a partner who was a fan. Similarly to Harriet, Milly was one who started following Australian rules football as an adult. She explained ‘it wasn’t until I met my husband when I was in my early 20s and the Eagles had just formed and that was my introduction to Aussie rules football’ (Milly, 53, FD).

Some participants did not follow the sport until they got offered the job/position at their current club/association. Other participants admitted that even at the time of the interview, being

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19 Western Australian AFL team, the West Coast Eagles.
employed or volunteering in the sport, they still did not know so much about the game or did not
really follow the sport outside of their employment/volunteer role. Lauren admitted:

So I’m a round ball person, so soccer is my real football. I’ve grown to love the club
since, and I sort of semi-understand the sport; probably still don’t very well, but I get
that if they kick the ball in the middle [of the goal posts] we’re going all right, and if
we don’t have many goals then it’s probably not a good thing (Lauren, 26, Board).

Brittany said that being consumed by football within a working context meant that following
the sport as a fan became harder. She explained ‘it’s a bit of a drag almost to go to the AFL
games and watch them. It’s like I don’t really mind who wins at the end of the day as long as it’s
good football’ (Brittany, 22, FD). Whether or not they were fans of the sport growing up, or only
since employment, participants were also asked how their relationship with the sport had
changed since they had taken on their work or volunteer role in Australian rules football.

4.2.1. How this relationship has changed since employment

Although the majority of participants started off as fans and spectators of the sport, for some of
them, this relationship changed somewhat upon their employment. It was not the fact that they
did not enjoy the sport anymore or no longer considered themselves fans. Rather, some
participants in positions such as media or the football department stated that their job in
Australian rules football was so consuming that they could not support or spectate in the manner
in which they used to. Rochelle in particular had clear lines between her work as an umpire and
her spectatorship:

When I am umpiring [a football] match, I consider myself an employee. If I am
watching a match that I’m not involved in, then I feel like a fan. However, I am
usually much less emotionally invested in matches than I was before I became an
employee (Rochelle, 24, Umpire).
It is clear that for Rochelle, being an employee of football changed her perspective of the game. She explained how having a passion outside of football was also important to her state of mind and keeping a balance in her life:

> You know the saying ‘if you take something you love and make it your job, it will never feel like work’? I disagree. I think if you take a hobby and turn it into a job, it will become stressful, it will be hard work, and it will make you anxious and sometimes sad (Rochelle, 24, Umpire).

In contrast to Rochelle’s experience, the roles of some participants changed and evolved into bigger and better opportunities to learn about the sport. Some females in this research watched Australian rules football more often because of work and learned more about the sport, including behind the scenes and how to love it. For Kelly, with more involvement, came more knowledge of the game:

> I have become much more of a fan of the game and I have converted a number of my family as well to actually understanding the game. But I actually now can speak, not with authority, but I can speak with an informed position of things that happen in the game, which I couldn’t do five years ago (Kelly, 62, Board).

Pearl believed her long-term involvement lead to more opportunities and responsibilities in her current role:

> The status of my involvement has increased over the years - I started out as a volunteer and although technically that’s still what I am, I now hold sway in important decisions for the future of the [workplace], and am thoroughly enjoying the responsibility and recognition that comes with it! This is something I am very proud of, being one of very few females in the WA footy industry (Pearl, 30, Board).

For Leanne, her employment in a childhood passion furthered her knowledge of the game. ‘I think I've got a bit more respect for it now and I realise how hard it is to manage things behind the scenes’ (Leanne, 24, FD). Similarly for Vicky, more respect was shown towards the sport and she came to the realisation that it is not simply a game. ‘I think I understand more of the
degree in which it’s an enormous business and the complexity that comes to anything involved with it’ (Vicky, 63, Board).

The relationship that each participant shared with the sport of Australian rules football varied. The pathway they took to their current position is also one that is personalised to each participant and has impacted on their current views on the sport. These individual and collective pathways are discussed below.

4.3. Pathway into Australian rules football

4.3.1. Aspirations to work in Australian rules football

Participants were asked if they always had a goal of being involved in Australian rules football. There were a variety of responses to this question. A small number of participants (five) did have a particular ambition to be involved with Australian rules football, and even more specifically, at a football club. Brittany was one such participant, explaining that being involved with Australian rules football growing up influenced her path. ‘Probably yeah, because that was the main sport we’d watch growing up, and you don’t really see too many of the other sports in the media; it was the predominant one. Now it’s a bit more diverse’ (Brittany, 22, FD). Tegan, whilst also pursuing a career outside of football, had been involved with Australian rules football for almost two decades:

So this is now my 17th consecutive year of football administration, as a football administrator … When a vacancy arose, [the current workplace] approached me at that point and after an interview process and after a due diligence process, asked me to join the board at that point (Tegan, 42, Board).

For others, there were no initial plans or desires to work specifically within Australian rules football. Rather, they pursued a career in a particular field, such as journalism, high performance sport or physiotherapy, but did not necessarily pursue Australian rules football as their place of
employment or volunteering. Anya described how elite sport was a drawcard for her, but that she did not have the goal of working within Australian rules football specifically:

Elite sport was probably my thing. I didn’t mind learning you know, about exercise around clinical settings, so diabetes and obesity and even pregnant women, children. I like the knowledge of all that but I never really saw myself working in that setting. It was always going to be performance based, so team, or elite sport (Anya, 27, FD).

Participants such as Bella and Rochelle shared similar thoughts too. Both had an interest in the sport but did not plan to pursue a career specifically in Australian rules football. Rochelle (24, Umpire) explained, ‘I just grew up enjoying watching AFL, and did not aspire to work for them’ and Bella (34, Media) clarified, ‘no, I didn’t really have an endgame when I went in, I just knew that I loved writing’.

In contrast to those working in the sports field, some participants built careers outside of sport, such as in law, finance or teaching. They did not have a particular interest in sport or Australian rules football as a career choice, but nonetheless, their knowledge of a particular area was still viewed as valuable to football clubs and the sports scene. Pearl explained that her experiences outside of sport allowed her to contribute on a voluntary basis for her football club. ‘My line of work (Marketing and Event Management) is traditionally female dominated and I chose to use my skills and expertise in this area to bring a female's perspective to a football club’ (Pearl, 30, Board). Lauren, despite her young age, had previous experience in local government (as a councillor) and the community feel of the football club drew her in:

I used to be a councillor at [surrounding city]. I guess that’s how I got drawn to [current football club] a little bit as well because I just love the idea of building communities, and I think sport provides a great way to do that (Lauren, 26, Board).

Kelly explained how her expertise in her career outside of football was a drawcard for her local football club to ask her to join:
They asked me to join the community advisory group initially, and then my name was put forward [to become a board member]. And, so when the board of [the club] was formed, by contrast to lots of other boards, of football clubs, [the Chairman] was appointed the Chair, and then [previous fellow board member] and myself, were the next two board members appointed (Kelly, 62, Board).

Other participants said it was not really on their radar to work in Australian rules football, until they saw a position come available, saw an opportunity to assist a struggling club, or until they were offered an opportunity based on their previous or current working expertise. This included their football or media knowledge, or specialising on a board for their management, community, business or law expertise. Others had been involved in the sport for many years but had only been in their current positions for a short period of time (usually only two to four years).

4.3.2. Initial employment

When it came to the positions they occupied at the time of the interview, 13 participants initially knew someone at their workplace, or their name was known by word of mouth or by their reputation preceding them. This led to either the organisation approaching them for a job, or it put them on the right path to their position. Ten of the 26 women had worked jobs in similar fields before transitioning over to their current position, including volunteering and university placements transitioning into paid employment. Two women even approached their respective organisations directly asking for a position or recommending that a female should hold a position. Only one female directly applied for an advertised position.

For Vicky and Madeline, having jobs in the public eye lead to an offer from their respective organisations to take on a role. As explained by Vicky, she was hesitant in that her qualifications did not pertain to Australian rules football, but that in the end did not impact on her contribution to the club:

[The Club Chairman] rang me up and said, after a reasonable dissertation first, ‘would you be interested in joining the board?’ and I said ‘look you do know I know
nothing about running football clubs don’t you? Just thought I’d clue you into that’. And he said ‘that’s what would make you perfect’. ... So I think [the Chairman] is quite wise in saying we need a whole range of different views. Different people go to the football; being on the board is not about second-guessing the coach. That is not what we need (Vicky, 63, Board).

For Madeline, coming to the end of her contract (in a high profile media job) led to an offer in Australian rules football media:

   It became aware to executives [at current role] that I was falling out of contract just literally through the grapevine. I got a phone call [offering current role in Australian rules football] and I pretty much made the decision in about two days (Madeline, 38, Media).

Similarly, Emily and Milly both had experiences where their name was known across various circles, which resulted in football clubs approaching them about roles in football departments.

‘[It was] probably more word of mouth of who I was’ (Emily, 33, FD). Milly explained how an old colleague got in touch with her many years after working together, asking if she would like a job:

   Well the CEO I worked with him … many years ago. He went to work for [different club] for many years after … and then he got this job here and then he rang me and asked me to come and work here. So, yeah, so we’re a good team (Milly, 53, FD).

   Other participants explained how they initially had contacts at their respective workplaces and although they were not approached with a job offer, they indicated that it made the application and hiring process easier for them. Leanne explained that knowing someone in the right position could result in the kick-start to a decent career:

   I loved obviously sport back then and still do and had the opportunity to get a job there and … what people say is ‘it’s not what you know it’s who you know at the end of the day’ and I have a lot of people to thank to where I am now in terms of my career (Leanne, 24, FD).

Harriet, Charlotte and Jane all had connections at their workplace as well. ‘Yeah so I think it was a bit of a friend of a friend of someone that was down at the footy club’ (Harriet, 37, FD).
Charlotte explained that she was notified of a position opening at her club. ‘There’s a girl who’s been working there for 19 years … I knew her and the job came up and she told me, and I put my resume in through her’ (Charlotte, 55, Finance). For Jane, gaining a position outside of the canteen was possible early in her career due to her father being involved:

So I really wanted to get more involved in football but I didn’t want to be in the kiosk because I’m a kitchen moron and that seemed to be about the only role that was available to women in those days. And it helped having your dad as the president of the club at the time so I put my hand up to be a trainer at the club and ended up as the assistant head trainer (Jane, 59, FD).

In contrast to being approached for a role, participants Hayley and Meaghan approached their respective workplaces and told them outright that a female was required in their workplace. Hayley explained, ‘I went directly to the CEO and indicated to him that he needed someone with knowledge of women’s football to be assisting them with their strategic direction’ (Hayley, 34, FD). In Meaghan’s case, knowing the club president and asking a straightforward question resulted in her taking up her current role:

As it turns out the person that I knew who was the president, who still is the president, I said ‘when are you guys going to start looking at women on your board as well?’ I just pretty much asked straight out. And he said ‘do you want to be a part of the board?’ And I said ‘well, if there’s a position’. He goes ‘I’ll make a position’. That was in 2014. I ended up joining [in] December 2014 (Meaghan, Board).

For a number of other participants, their current role resulted from taking a path through university, or volunteering for many years before gaining paid employment within Australian rules football. For Anya, Laura and Brittany, internships and work experience through university lead to employment at their respective workplaces. For Anya and Laura, both completed postgraduate studies at their current place of employment and believed that their research position, in conjunction with an internship, lead to paid employment:

So he [High Performance Manager] got [myself and Laura] on board to start with and he was very actively involved in the connection with the uni and making sure
everything was working for our studies and so he supervised both our Honours, or co-supervised both our Honours (Anya, 27, FD).

[I gained employment through] Post Grad Honours, through an internship. I got full time after that. Which I wasn’t expecting, because they said to me for the internship, it’s one year, it’s a contract, there is no position at the end of it that exists at the moment. So I wasn’t sort of replacing anyone, it was ‘oh, actually we really want to keep this kind of work going’ (Laura, 32, FD).

For Georgia, Bella and Bethany, they decided to turn their passion into a career and after volunteering for some time, gained employment in areas they were passionate about. Georgia explained how after 20 years of volunteering, it was time to turn her work in Australian rules football into a career. ‘I guess what I decided was to turn sport into my career, seeing as I was doing so much volunteer work. And went back to uni and did my business degree and have worked in sport ever since’ (Georgia, 45, FD). For Bella, being unhappy in a previous job lead to her offering her time in sport settings to gain experience:

So I came back and I wrote a list of all of the companies that I wanted to work for and I called them up to offer to volunteer. Yeah so heaps of different companies, heaps of different organisations, and the manager at [previous Australian rules football employer] called me back. So at the start I volunteered and then I took on more work and did more and then I got put on part time, then I got put on full time and then coincidentally their comms [communications] officer role came up and I applied and got given it (Bella, 34, Media).

Bethany’s experience was similar, where she volunteered her time at her local football club, which naturally transitioned into paid employment:

Well, I just sort of started out running water and then you obviously get trained with your taping and your massage and go from there. I was a trainer for a number of years and as different people left you kind of get up skilled, so you learn different things. Then I just got asked to be [in current position]. I haven’t looked back (Bethany, 33, FD).

Therefore, the participants have taken a variety of pathways to get to their current positions in Australian rules football.
4.3.3. *Length of time in Australian rules football*

The longevity of participants’ careers also varied significantly. Some were rather new to the role, in their first year and some had spent over a decade in Australian rules football in various volunteer and paid roles (17 years – 35 years). At the time of interview, the majority of participants were in their first four years in their current role.

**Table 4: Length of time in Australian rules football (in current and previous volunteer/paid roles)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of time (years)</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15+ years</td>
<td>3</td>
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The length of time in their role in Australian rules football coincided somewhat with the movement within sport (including Australian rules football) to get more women involved in traditionally masculine environments such as the various football codes (Lane, 2015a). It also coincided with the appointment of a new CEO to the AFL, which perhaps encouraged a shift in discussion surrounding women in Australian rules football as well (“AFL’s culture around women improved,” 2017). In conjunction with this, participants were asked how they feel about their employment (or volunteer position) and whether they think it is merit based or if there are or were any indications of tokenism in their hiring.
4.4. Token appointments and quotas

When it came to employing women in the traditionally male dominated environment of Australian rules football, the overwhelming majority of participants (20) were not particularly agreeable with the concept of filling quotas. The same applied for the thought of women being token appointments rather than (or on top of) merit based appointments. Bella explained her thoughts on a female colleague whose tenure at times had been speculated about. ‘I hate token females and she’s [her colleague] not a token. And she’s not a token female but I think you are always working to prove that you’re not one’ (Bella, 34, Media).

For Laura and Madeline, they believed the focus should be on the best person for the job, rather than creating too much of a focus around females in particular positions in their workplaces:

I'm very much like, if a female’s the right person for the job, give them the job. If a male’s the right person for the job, give them the job. Whether it’s race, religion, gender, I can’t stand it when it becomes like, okay, now we need 20% of all employees to be females. I do agree that there needs to be balance in certain things, but yeah, I don’t like token [sic] (Laura, 32, FD).

Madeline believed focusing on quotas could impact on an employer’s ability to pick the most suitable person for a role:

I think it’s difficult with quotas and I’m really sceptical about that because I truly believe that it should be just the best person for the job. If you have a quota you run the risk of not having the best person for the job because, to be honest, if you’re looking at positions for women aged 35 and above, I don’t think you have the biggest sample size of women to choose from because many women choose to step out of the workforce at that time of their lives (Madeline, 38, Media).

When Lauren was first asked to take up a position in a football club, she was very careful to ensure that being the first female in her position did not mean she was simply a token appointment:
Before I accepted the position, the first thing I said is ‘if I’m being appointed to be the token female, don’t worry about it because I just don’t want to play that role. When I get there I’ll assess whether I think that that’s the role that I’m playing. If I’m just there to be a girl to say that we’ve got a female director then I don’t want to be there’. But I’ve never really felt like that. But I would definitely remove myself if that’s how I started to feel. I’m not really into being someone that’s just there for the numbers (Lauren, 26, Board).

However, some participants suggested that quotas and ‘positive discrimination’ (purposefully employing females) was the quickest way to make change in the workplace. As Rochelle explained, ‘in an ideal world you would not need quotas, but this is not an ideal world. Quotas are the quickest way to make workplaces more diverse’ (Rochelle, 24, Umpire). Brittany stated that quotas demonstrated an effort to include females in a masculine environment:

No, it doesn’t bother me. I guess it’s their way of trying to get females into the sport, and it’s their way of showing we are making an effort to do it. But it shouldn’t be a number; it should be we’re just trying to encourage it and promote it (Brittany, 22, FD).

Lisa and Stephanie explained their thoughts in further detail as to why quotas were perhaps necessary in a workplace such as Australian rules football. Lisa described her experiences in the umpiring ranks of the sport:

I think the AFL generally needs to have positive discrimination because the thing is that women have to work so much harder than men to get to that level. So we need to really acknowledge that. And there’s so few women as well, you really need to get them coming through. You can’t just say it’s merit based because it doesn’t work like that. We don’t have fifty per cent women umpires and fifty per cent men umpires at every level so we can’t do merit based and get that equal representation. So we need to really have things like women’s academies bringing them through and stuff like that (Lisa, 31, Umpire).

Stephanie believed that having quotas created a starting point for mindfully encouraging diversity in the workplace:

I actually like the quotas. I actually think that it’s not a bad thing to have. You need to have these roles. I’m a big believer, though, it has to be the right person for the job but I feel like unless you consider a quota or start investigating that, then maybe it
will just never happen. Doing that, I feel, might actually get people to actually start thinking about what’s forcing people a little bit, while still having the right person for the job. But if you actually have a mandate that, you know what, we’re really going to try and get in here and do this, I think if we don’t do that it probably just won’t change or it will take a much longer time to change (Stephanie, 40, Finance).

Overall the females of this research were also confident in their abilities and did not believe they were necessarily hired for their gender, but rather for their knowledge and experiences in their respective fields. As Pearl explained, ‘all football clubs are run as businesses, and no respectable CEO/General Manager/Football Manager/Coach will appoint a female into a position as a “token” gesture or to meet a quota’ (Pearl, 30, Board). This is not to say that the females in this study had not faced gender biases or gender barriers in their employment in Australian rules football, in both their current or previous positions.

4.5. Gendered barriers in employment in Australian rules football

4.5.1. Barriers in Australian rules football

Participants were asked if they had faced any barriers relating to gender in their roles within Australian rules football. These referred to previous, current and predicted future barriers within their time in Australian rules football. There were varying responses from participants with regard to gendered barriers. A number of participants stated that they had not faced any barriers and that their working environment was very supportive. Participants such as Emily stated that the club/organisation was very welcoming and open to females. ‘I didn’t have a problem or an issue whatsoever, I couldn’t have asked for a better group of people to sort of be inducted into the AFL … just really, really respectful’ (Emily, 33, FD). Meaghan says her introduction onto the board of a club was relatively smooth as well:

I really don’t think so [facing barriers]. The guys were really fantastic in welcoming me. They were prepared to listen to me and to this very day now they will listen to what I have to say. We’ll have a debate about things to the point where there’s [some] swearing going on and that’s perfectly fine (Meaghan, Board).
Laura had some initial doubts on whether her employment was gendered, but it was more a reflection of her surprise at getting the position. ‘To be honest I was really shocked that I got the position. I don’t know. I probably question whether there would be some sort of gender issue. But the minute I walked in here I realised there wasn’t’ (Laura, 32, FD). Vicky, in contrast, had no doubts about her employment, stating ‘barriers? They rang me up and asked me to join. I can hardly say that’s a barrier’ (Vicky, 63, Board).

Some participants acknowledged that gender bias or discrimination was something that they were aware of, however they were quick to state that they had not experienced it themselves in Australian rules football. Allison explained that ‘you often hear a lot of things like “oh football, there’s not opportunities for females” or “we get held back” but I’ve never experienced that’ (Allison, 29, Media), while Danielle stated ‘not me personally, no, but I can appreciate there’s got to be barriers for some women on some things’ (Danielle, 39, Board).

Other participants stated that they had in fact faced barriers in their career, whether it was not feeling wholly comfortable in the environment, facing particular biases from colleagues or feeling as though they were not being encouraged to progress their career. Many of the women’s comments surrounded their initial employment and either feeling they had to prove themselves, or being aware that there were males who had to adjust to having a female in the environment. This was the case in football departments, media departments, on boards and in the umpiring ranks.

Bella spoke of having to prove herself initially. ‘You have to build credibility because you’ve never played the game before’ (Bella, 34, Media). Rochelle put the initial hesitation surrounding her employment down to uncertainty but claimed she didn’t face any specific barriers to begin with. ‘No concrete barriers, but there was some skepticism [sic]’ (Rochelle, 24,
Brittany found that her appointment was a big change for those who had been around her place of employment for many years:

At first it took a while for a lot of the older guys at the club to come around to it, because the old [person in her role previously], he was a male, been here for 20 years or something, and when they got rid of him and got me and it was treading on eggshells for a bit around some of them, because they didn’t like the females being in sporting clubs. They were just real old school (Brittany, 22, FD).

For Stephanie, finding common ground with her male colleagues was a way to break through the barriers when she was initially employed:

I generally tend to find that men tend to be at first a bit uncertain when there’s a female there. Then once they get to know you and find out that you can talk about football and cricket, which generally I can do … like any relationship, you find a common ground. I think probably the answer is that at first I think there’s that barrier but then the barrier gets broken down, generally most of the time, I think, in what I deal with. It definitely is still a bit of a barrier there at first (Stephanie, 40, Finance).

Despite Stephanie feeling as though she could break down initial gendered barriers, there were other participants who faced barriers further into their employment, where they appeared to be segregated or made to feel like their gender was a factor in the workplace. Milly explained that despite her official title being visible across her workplace, she was still labelled as an office manager:

And yet it can say it on my email, it can say it everywhere, and yet they still say office manager because they think that that’s a woman’s role, is working in the office. And I don’t sit behind a desk all day every day, they see me out everywhere, they see me at the game, they see me talking to sponsors, I’m all over it, but they still think [she is an office manager] (Milly, 53, FD).

Bella explained how she had hopes to move into a football department in the future, however a colleague at a previous workplace (within Australian rules football) was not particularly encouraging of the move:
I want to move into the football department eventually, I don’t want to stay in media for the rest of my career. And I said to him ‘what do I have to do to move across’ and he said ‘oh [Bella] it’s not really a girl’s job’ and you’re like ‘are you fucking what?’. And he didn’t mean it in any way. Like I think he really valued me as a person but he just stopped seeing my gender, and that’s cool, but for him to say it’s not really a girl’s job I thought ‘oh my God, like it still exists’ (Bella, 34, Media).

Rochelle was extremely forthcoming in her explanation of the ways in which she was constantly reminded of her gender in her role as an umpire:

You are constantly being reminded of the fact you are different because you are female. There are no concrete barriers, but this makes it harder. Change rooms only designed for men (e.g., urinals, no sanitary disposal bins in the toilets, communal showers with no curtains). Having skin folds taken, and failing them because they’re not adjusted for women’s higher body fat, and being told ‘we understand there are differences, so don’t worry about it too much, but it would be great if you could get them down, and perhaps you should consult a dietician’. Male uniforms. Being criticized for not being social enough, without appreciation of the fact that the social environment is very masculine and hard to break into. So many derogatory conversations about women. Hearing colleagues and coaches say negative things about other females in the AFL, purely based on their gender, and knowing people must be saying these things about me too. Having to do more and be better than my male colleagues just to be perceived as equally competent (Rochelle, 24, Umpire).

Rochelle also explained how the gender bias in Australian rules football was often unintentional, which indicates that such an issue is deeply entrenched in the sport:

I think subconscious gender bias is the biggest issue. It’s a problem for everyone, and you have to actively work to overcome it (I catch myself exhibiting subconscious gender bias all the time). Most people in the AFL don’t acknowledge it’s a problem, so they can’t fix it (Rochelle, 24, Umpire).

Lisa, also an umpire, labelled a lot of the barriers she had faced as ‘microaggressions’ and similar to Rochelle, found that these barriers were the hardest ones to combat in the Australian rules football environment:

But there’s a lot of those, I guess you could call them microaggressions as well that occur, so like men presuming that you’re the goal umpire because they don’t think you can run or make decisions about football. Men saying on the field when you make calls about prohibited contact like ‘it’s not fucking netball’ or something like that. And so it’s like these things happen all the time, and they’re so minor at the
time that it makes it really difficult to deal with them, and sometimes you don’t know how to deal with them. And you’re trying to fit into this environment and you’re trying not to make waves and you’re trying to make friends because it’s your first session, but at the same time, it’s really hurtful and it’s exclusionary and it’s problematic. And what do you do with that? (Lisa, 31, Umpire).

These microaggressions are examples of incidents that participants mentioned, but often dismissed as inconsequential to their experiences as females in a male dominated environment.

4.5.2. Incidences that participants dismissed

Alongside these microaggressions, it appears that there were some subconscious barriers that some females in this study did not view as barriers, or at the very least, they dismissed as actions that did not particularly bother them. These incidents, according to participants, often revolved around swearing, or men adjusting to having women in ‘their’ environment. Many women claimed that such incidents were funny rather than troubling and even defended men in some instances.

Bethany explained how she brushed off any comments made by male players and staff. ‘It’s been good. You have people to rely on and it’s not all bloke talk but at the same time I always tell them you can’t be offended by what the guys say. We’re in their environment’ (Bethany, 33, FD). Bella explained how traditionalists were often set in their ways and therefore to an extent, their actions were let go:

Yeah they’re good … they were just traditionalist old school footy blokes. So they don’t mean to be sexist and actually the one who I was really close to, has two girls my age so I always thought I wonder if he thinks about how his girls would be in this industry (Bella, 34, Media).

Anya described how ‘low level’ comments occurred but were not viewed exactly as issues surrounding gender in her workplace, particularly as it was clear that she got along with males who made certain remarks:
The stuff that I do have, not an issue with, but the stuff that does go on is the more low level comments that you might, you know someone’s half joking but you’re like err don’t know about that. Not directly to me but like we’ve got one guy around the club who’s an awesome guy, everyone loves him, larrikin, been around forever, champion of the club, who at public events will just say things. Whether it’s ‘oh yeah because, you know the women got out of the kitchen’, and you kind of just go ‘did you really just say that?’ And it’s really bizarre because he’s hired women to work for him (Anya, 27, FD).

In her role on a club board, Lauren described how male colleagues often apologised for swearing in her presence, something she put down to the men having been taught to be respectful in front of women:

So it was an intense game last Friday night and there was a lot of f-bombs dropped and then after every single one it was, ‘sorry, [Lauren]’, like it’s quite funny. So they try to be really respectful and deal with the whole gender thing, and it’s just been interesting (Lauren, 26, Board).

Lauren did mention that perhaps they went a bit overboard when trying to make her comfortable in the environment. Meaghan shared similar experiences, however mentioned she was not afraid to call the males out on occasions where she felt they were playing on her gender. ‘I think what happens is that they do try to watch their swearing, if anything, which I think is cute. But I often remind them, “Get over yourself. I’m pretty capable of holding my own ground”’ (Meaghan, Board). In addition to barriers often influenced by the masculine environment of male team sport, was the notion that females can act as barriers to themselves – both inadvertently and consciously. This point was raised by some participants of the current study and is discussed below.

4.5.3. Women as barriers – to themselves and to other women

While a large portion of the conversation surrounding barriers revolved around the actions of males (who occupy the majority of roles) in the workplace, eight of the 26 women in this research suggested that women can either act as barriers to themselves or to other women.
Examples of women acting as barriers to themselves included women doubting their own abilities and capabilities when it came to progressing their careers and women being poor networkers. Often women are labelled as poor networkers because those key opportunities often occur in the time when women may have enough experience in their workplace to move up, but often this time coincides with the choice to start a family (and take a break from the workforce).

Georgia believed that women could be detrimental to their own development in the workplace, stating ‘I think any barriers that are placed on females in the workplace are the ones that we place on ourselves’ (Georgia, 45, FD). Allison shared similar thoughts, suggesting ‘I think that we are not strong enough advocates for ourselves’ (Allison, 29, Media). Stephanie shared a comparable opinion, explaining ‘I do think the other thing that hinders us is … we’re not often the first ones to put ourselves forward and we probably need to do that’ (Stephanie, 40, Finance).

Participants such as Laura believed the barriers that women may face were at times just assumed to be there, or made up. ‘I definitely think there’s maybe some perceived kind of barriers. Whether they’re actually there or not, I don’t know. I haven’t faced any’ (Laura, 32, FD). She explained that often it was women’s self-doubt that may create the perception of gendered issues in the workplace, rather than the workplace environment itself being the problem:

But my experiences here, it wouldn’t have even been a question I think. Whereas in my own mind I was like, ‘oh, but maybe there’s guys out there who have got better footy knowledge, and they’ve played, or they play currently, or whatever’. But it just, it didn’t matter ... I met all the criteria I guess (Laura, 32, Board).

Lauren had similar thoughts to Laura, describing how she thought some gendered barriers were created unnecessarily. ‘But in terms of barriers, I think you can break through most things. I think a lot of gender equality issues are issues because people make them out to be’ (Lauren, 26,
Board). Charlotte and Meaghan both believed that rather than women perceiving barriers, perhaps women were simply reluctant to join the masculine environment of the top ranks of Australian rules football. ‘I wonder whether it’s more that women are too scared to become part of that masculine domain’ (Charlotte, 55, Finance). Meaghan said, ‘do some of them [women] want to be there? Maybe they don’t want to break that ceiling. Maybe they are happy and content’ (Meaghan, Board).

Meaghan also stated that raising a family and networking also impacted on a women’s ability to work their way up the hierarchy in Australian rules football:

Do you know, I really, really believe that barrier is the fact that women are really not good at networking because I’m super intelligent. You’re super intelligent. A lot of women that I come across are very intelligent, very well educated … I have spent pretty much 10 years of my life raising a family. I stopped my networking. So therefore I had another 10 years of trying to build my networks again. We are disadvantaged from where we want to stop and raise a family and then we’re disadvantaged whereby we’ve got to start from fresh again with our networks and really believe that cracking that glass ceiling is a network thing (Meaghan, Board).

In addition to women acting as barriers to themselves in environments such as Australian rules football, Bella and Georgia also suggested that women may act as barriers for other women to progress their careers. Georgia explained that although she had not experienced it directly herself, she felt as though women acted as a deterrent to female colleagues striving for a promotion in the workplace:

The only barriers we put in front of ourselves are generally barriers that females put in front of us, not men. I’m not sure if it’s women not believing, I think it’s women bitching about other women that actually impede women. The old glass ceiling is sometimes made by other women, than it is by men. I’ve never felt like that necessarily myself but I certainly know that sometimes women create barriers for other women because we’re not prepared to work together for a common goal. And you know there’s just as many barriers put on women by women than there is by men ironically, so I think that’s really important too, and that’s obviously in this industry (Georgia, 45, FD).
Bella spoke about a personal experience at a previous workplace in Australian rules football where some women were difficult to work with:

The two women on the exec at [previous workplace] were the most unsupportive women I’ve ever met. They were horrible people, yeah. They wouldn’t help other women in the business, they set poor examples for other women, they bullied other women. It just wasn’t a nice environment for women. So that was probably like a barrier in that in my experience at [former workplace] women didn’t help women (Bella, 34, Media).

Alongside the perceived barriers in Australian rules football is the notion of the ‘glass ceiling’ in the workplace. Participants were asked if they believed there was a glass ceiling in Australian rules football.

4.5.4. Glass ceiling

The ‘glass ceiling’ that is often spoken about with regard to gender equality in workplaces was a recurring topic in the interviews. There were mixed opinions amongst the participants regarding whether or not a glass ceiling exists in Australian rules football, where women can see leadership positions, but cannot reach them. Rochelle believed in the concept of the glass ceiling, explaining that her experiences regarding gender equality in Australian rules football made her a feminist. ‘Yes. It has made me a feminist (I would have been one anyway, but I would have less personal experience in gender inequality to call upon)’ (Rochelle, 24, Umpire). Charlotte, while not speaking from personal experience, believed that women had to work harder to prove themselves compared to men when aspiring for leadership positions:

I think it’s difficult for women … I know that once you get up into those levels you would cop a lot of flack, you’d have to prove yourself 100 times better than a man to do the same thing probably, but you know, it’s not part of my experience to be able to say that I have any real knowledge on that (Charlotte, 55, Finance).

Similarly, Anya acknowledged that there was likely a glass ceiling in place, but felt she has not personally been impacted by it:
Do I believe in it? Yeah look it probably exists … There is obviously something going on because otherwise there’d be more women in those roles … but I haven’t looked somewhere and thought ‘oh I wish I could be that but I’m never going to be able to’ (Anya, 27, FD).

Allison mentioned that the people in the sport itself did not create the glass ceiling, but that the nature of the sport did. ‘I don’t think the ceiling is put there by the people that run the club. I think it’s put there because of the nature of what the club does’ (Allison, 29, Media). Similar to Meaghan’s point relating to raising children (having an impact on career progression), Madeline discussed how women often need to make a choice between a career and family, which makes the top positions in Australian rules football harder for women to reach:

I think honestly the reason that there aren’t true equal 50-50 on boards or corporations or whatever is because women choose. When you get to a certain age, I don’t really think you should probably be in those high positions perhaps until you are a bit older with more experience. For women, unfortunately, that’s your child-raisin years. I think that’s more reflected. That’s a choice by women, many women. They don’t want to do that. They’ve had their career and then they choose to step out of the workforce because they have a new priority (Madeline, 38, Media).

Danielle (39, Board) took a different perspective that she believed stemmed from her work outside of football. She explained that the political side of sport likely creates barriers for women, however, that these can be broken down by women determined enough to reach those positions instead of doubting their own abilities:

I’m not a believer for the fact that a woman can actually do whatever they want to do. And this probably comes from my background in terms of my work history; a woman will look at a job and go, ‘I can do this, I can do this. I can’t do that, I can’t do that’. A guy goes, ‘well, I can do that, can do that, can do this. Yeah, I can half do that. I’m going for the job’, whereas a woman probably has more around the reservations about her not being able to do the job, and it might be only like 10% of the job that she can’t do, but that will stop her for going for a job or a position. I believe it’s the same with boards, etc. as well. So I think there’s no glass ceilings in the personal striving if you want to get to a position. There probably are glass ceilings from a political perspective, and there’s a lot of politics in sport (Danielle, 39, Board).
Alongside the glass ceiling, participants were asked if they feel they are under the spotlight given the low number of women (in comparison to men) working or volunteering in Australian rules football.

### 4.5.5. Spotlight

When asked if they felt that they were in the spotlight as women in a male dominated environment, most women did not feel especially under the spotlight in their role in Australian rules football. Both Laura and Anya believed their respective workplaces had not carried any gender bias and therefore they were not under any extra scrutiny compared to their male colleagues. ‘Not here, I don’t think. I mean I’ve been in here seven years and no one’s really ever given any special attention to the fact that I’m doing this role’ (Laura, 32, FD). Anya explained her view:

> So I didn’t really think too much of it. [The workplace] just is what it is … like my direct boss wouldn’t even know there’s such a thing as a ‘women’s lunch’ [a luncheon to celebrate women in Australian rules football]. I do what I do and he just doesn’t even think twice about it (Anya, 27, FD).

In contrast, other participants did feel that their gender impacted on the way they were viewed in the workplace. Bella explained how she felt scrutinised for her dress sense and her interaction with males around her workplace. ‘I definitely have to … be very understanding and conscious of the way I dress, so yes I do. And I definitely have to be conscious of the way I interact with people, especially players’ (Bella, 34, Media).

Some females felt they were under the spotlight because of their gender, but the spotlight did not bother them, as it was part of the movement of recognising women in the masculine domain of the sport. ‘I’m okay with the spotlight. It was interest and intrigue about how it would work. The only difficult thing was people were asking me questions that I couldn’t answer because I essentially hadn’t even stepped into the [role] yet’ (Madeline, 38, Media).
Pearl believed any attention surrounding her gender was positive, as she was in a role that a woman had not traditionally filled. Therefore she felt she could use her position to her advantage and the advantage of her workplace:

I take it as a positive that because I’m something ‘different’ or ‘out of the ordinary’ for the industry, people tend to sit up and take more notice of what I do and say, but I don’t see this as being scrutinised (Pearl, 30, Board).

Stephanie felt that being under the spotlight was not so much a critique on her ability, but she did acknowledge she was more visible as one of few females in similar roles:

Yeah, I do. I think not so much under the spotlight in terms of making mistakes or not getting it right or anything like that but just more … you’re more visible. And I think there’s a real push within the AFL at the moment to increase women’s visibility and to get more women into executive roles (Stephanie, 40, Finance).

Despite most women feeling comfortable in their positions and the spotlight not acting as a deterrent in their role, when women were asked about their thoughts on advocating for gender equality in Australian rules football, there was much hesitancy when discussing the ways they did or did not use their positions to support women in the sport.

4.5.6. Advocating for gender equality

With regard to being in the spotlight and the increasing recognition of women in Australian rules football, participants in this study were also asked if they considered themselves advocates for gender equality. The majority of participants stated that they were or they were ‘sort of’ advocates for gender equality. Danielle explained that she would often speak up about women in Australian rules football and that her friends spoke highly of her position whenever they could. ‘Yeah, definitely [an advocate]. So actually my friends are very good advocates as well for it’ (Danielle, 39, Board). Kelly and Jane believed they could act as an advocate not just in sport, but in other positions they held as well. ‘I consider myself an advocate for equity and inclusion in
every aspect of my life’ (Kelly, 62, Board). ‘I’ve tried to make it more about diversity than just
gender’ (Jane, 59, FD). Leanne took her position in Australian rules football very seriously when
it came to advocating for women in the sport:

Definitely. Definitely. But, I mean, any opportunity that I get to sell the story of
women’s footy or to sell my story and where I’ve come from and how I’ve got to
where I am the better. The more publicity that we get on the game, I mean, they say
any publicity’s good publicity but it’s been a lot more positive over the past couple
of years which is really nice, and if I can voice my opinion and be a role model and
advocate for the game in terms of females I’ll just keep plugging away and doing
what I’m doing I suppose (Leanne, 24, FD).

Stephanie explained that she was mindful of the way she interacted with the women around her,
but felt her advocacy could always be improved:

Probably more subconsciously than consciously, I definitely try and encourage and
look to the females around me in the club and encourage them … I feel I try and
build little bonds with people around the club, particularly who are female. I think
it’s something that I could do more of as well. I think we can all do that a bit better
(Stephanie, 40, Finance).

However, the response of ‘yes’ to advocating for gender equality was not always confident,
with a few females stating that they ‘had to be’ or that they were advocates simply because of
their role. A lot of comments were based around ‘I guess so’, ‘I guess I have to be’, or ‘quietly I
suppose’. Vicky explained her perspective, considering, ‘I don’t know about an advocate
because that sort of implies that you’ve taken it up as … acting, but when the opportunity arises
I’d say something. Do I go out of my way to say something? No’ (Vicky, 63, Board). Anya took
a similar view, explaining that she was not an active advocate for encouraging women to pursue
a career in the sport. ‘So if being an advocate is for equality okay sure. But no I’m not
particularly passionate about yes let’s get more women involved. And I support the women’s
league … to me it just seems stupid not to’ (Anya, 27, FD). Brittany explained how she had not
given much thought to the role she could potential play regarding gender equality in the sport:
I’ve never thought of it that way, I’ve never really seen myself in that way, but I guess I could be, and some people do say, ‘oh wow, that’s pretty cool, a woman at your level’ but I’ve never really seen it as a big deal (Brittany, 22, FD).

Harriet shared similar thoughts, considering that she did not actively use her role as a female in a sporting club as a means of encouraging gender equality in Australian rules football:

I guess I don’t go out and actively defend my role as a female in sport but I suppose just the fact that I’m there I suppose makes me an advocate. But yeah I certainly don’t actively go out and advocate for the fact that I am a female at a sporting club really (Harriet, 37, FD).

Participants such as Bella and Allison were much more forthright in their opinions regarding their advocacy for gender equality. Bella acknowledged that she did not often speak up and she would not if it was going to put her career in jeopardy. ‘Yeah I wouldn’t say I speak up that often. So if I had to choose between the longevity of my career and being a trailblazer fuck no I’m choosing my career’ (Bella, 34, Media). Allison admitted that she was really content in her role and did not feel the need to advocate on behalf of others:

I don’t really feel like I need to be, so I don’t know. And the first couple of years I used to be really uncomfortable because you would sit there and there’d be females going ‘you can do it’ and ‘you can get that job’ and ‘we need to fight to get more women in football’. And I’m like no, everyone just be good at your job and get the job you deserve. I’m really uncomfortable by that notion that we have to all fight together and I’m really cool with where I’m at and I think that I get great opportunities and I don’t think I’m held back in any way, so I don’t feel like I need to fight for everyone else (Allison, 29, Media).

There were mixed responses from participants regarding gendered barriers that they had or had not faced in their roles in Australian rules football. For some, their pathway into building their career in the sport had been smooth and therefore they did not feel any pressure of being under the spotlight or breaking through the glass ceiling. For others, their environments were somewhat uncomfortable, where they felt that their gender impacted on the way they were welcomed in their role. Several participants felt under the spotlight more or chose to use their
position as a female in a male dominated environment to speak up about gender equality and encourage the sport to be more mindful of employing females. Each participant, despite often sharing views with other women in this study, followed their own unique path to their current role in Australian rules football.

4.6. Behavioural comparisons in the workplace

Participants were asked a number of questions in relation to their behaviour in the workplace. These included whether they believed they worked differently to men, whether they had to adjust their behaviour in the masculine workplace and if they thought they were treated differently based on their gender. These questions also included a focus on whether they believed being a female benefitted them in their respective roles.

4.6.1. Benefits of being a female in their role

Due to being outnumbered in a traditionally male dominated environment, participants were asked during their interviews if being a female in the masculine domain of Australian rules football benefitted them in any ways. This question resulted in a variety of responses. One view was that being a female allowed them to connect better and appear more approachable to those in their workplace. Being involved with media, Madeline believed some people were more inclined to open up to females rather than males:

I think being a woman sometimes in a male dominated sport or arena, you can actually use it to your advantage because I think sometimes males will give a more reasoned or compassionate answer to a question that’s being asked by a female, rather than a male (Madeline, 38, Media).

Brittany shared her experiences of working in the football department, where players shared information with her that they perhaps did not want to share with a male in a similar position. ‘I can help them and I’m easier, more approachable … they can tell me if they’re injured, or
they’ve got a little thing they don’t want the [male in a similar position] to know. They feel that
they can tell me’ (Brittany, 22, FD). Harriet, also in the football department, explained that she
did not feel the pressure or need to be friends with the players as she had seen some of her male
colleagues experience:

So I suppose being a female in some ways means that I don’t feel that kind of
pressure. So I suppose in some ways yeah I feel like it’s sometimes a bit of an
advantage in that you can draw the line between being a buddy or a friend of the
players (Harriet, 37, FD).

Bella mirrored this sentiment, stating, ‘I find the most effective people in media are women.
Because I think they charm and disarm rather than try and be one of the boys’ (Bella, 34, Media).
Charlotte alluded to this as well, stating ‘you just bring a bit of reality to the boys sometimes I
think!’ (Charlotte, 55, Finance). Danielle believed being a female allowed her to carry multiple
contrasting roles of carer and challenger in her position on a club board. ‘Yeah, I probably do
[believe being female benefits her] because I probably can play the Devil’s advocate as well, so
it’s some of that nurturing side’ (Danielle, 39, Board). Milly admitted that she used her gender to
her advantage, as she found that in the male dominated environment, she could often get her way
on matters if she approached them from a certain angle:

Yeah, I think it does. I tend to, and this is so wrong, I do use my femininity and the
fact that I’m a woman to, not flirt, but get around people and I think I can be much
more diplomatic because of being a woman with people and get the result that I want
(Milly, 53, FD).

Georgia, involved in Australian rules football for many decades, believed that she had been
given opportunities that others had not received simply because of her gender:

Many amateur coaches wouldn’t get to be even invited onto the level three coaching
course again. I did mine seven years ago. I’ve spent time at AFL clubs, in the inner
sanctum being able to have some PD [personal development] that’s been organised
by the AFL because I’m a female coach, not because I’m a coach (Georgia, 45, FD).
Another response from some participants was that their gender did not have any particular benefit in their workplace. ‘I do not believe that my gender impacts my role at all to be honest’ (Pearl, 30, Board). Stephanie explained that her role did not have gender specific requirements; therefore, both males and females were more than capable. ‘I don’t think it has an impact either way … There’s a set of skills you have to be able to show as a finance professional and I don’t think it matters either way there’ (Stephanie, 40, Finance). Rochelle explained how her opinion differed from her male colleagues. ‘No [her gender does not benefit her in her role]. But I think some male colleagues think it does, because of the good PR image for the [league]’ (Rochelle, 24, Umpire).

A number of women explained in their interviews that rather than their gender being advantageous for their role, the traditionally masculine traits they believed they carried into their work, such as confidence and boldness were more helpful to their position. Bella, despite stating that women ‘charm and disarm’ in the media explained that it was her ‘male traits’ that benefitted her. ‘I’ve got a lot of male traits in the sense that I really like honest, open communication when I’m giving honest feedback to some admin staff, because players are really direct’ (Bella, 34, Media).

Similarly, Tegan was confident in her abilities and was aware of how her specific traits allowed her to progress in her involvement in Australian rules football:

What set me apart from a range of women who were also involved at a state level and community level was that I’m obviously a very educated person, I’m an articulate person and I’m an assertive person. And I know who I am and I know what my values base is (Tegan, 42, Board).

These differentiations between traits, as highlighted by participants, led to a discussion about what characteristics they felt were ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ and whether they believed these stereotypes were played out in their respective workplaces.
4.6.2. ‘Natural’ traits of males and females

Participants were also asked whether they believed women and men carried natural traits that meant they might work in a different manner in a workplace. In addition to their responses regarding how their masculine or feminine characteristics influenced their role (above), a number of women specifically mentioned that this advantage came from carrying traits such as empathy and compassion, which are traditionally linked with femininity. Some participants also described this empathy and compassion as ‘mothering’ and ‘nurturing’. Harriet explained ‘I think quite a few females do have a bit more of a mothering side and, you know a bit more of potentially a caring side rather than you'll be right, get out there’ (Harriet, 37, FD). Similarly, Stephanie depicted women as a more caring gender. ‘I think women have better empathy and understanding for others. I think women generally tend to be a little bit more caring at times as well’ (Stephanie, 40, Finance).

Bethany and Pearl both stated that they thought women and men carried traits that resulted in them having quite opposing approaches in the workplace. Bethany explained how she believed that men and women approach similar situations in a different manner. ‘I think they [women] have a protective instinct which is completely different to that of a male. A male will go in and with guns blazing, wanting to fight. Whereas a woman will do things differently’ (Bethany, 33, FD). Pearl subscribed to the saying ‘men are from Mars, women are from Venus’, explaining ‘that’s what makes life interesting - as genders, we’re so different!’ (Pearl, 30, Board).

Some women in this study stated that they do not really think that traits pertain specifically to gender, such as Laura, who queried ‘I don’t know if it’s a gender based thing, or if it’s more just a personality type, or skillset’ (Laura, 32, FD). Rather, they explained that perhaps the traits
are linked with a person’s personality so therefore men can be compassionate and women can be tough, despite traditional beliefs regarding how traits are linked to gender:

I think the right guy for the job would do the same thing as well, like, I’m not saying that just ‘cause I’m female and I have the ability to do that thing, there’s lots of men that … do have the same ability and do perform their jobs really well (Emily, 33, FD).

Rochelle did not buy in to the stereotypes of personality traits being specifically linked to gender and therefore did not speculate about the differences between men and women in her workplace. ‘Men and women differ on average, but the distributions for most traits overlap enormously, so it is erroneous to make assumptions based on people’s gender’ (Rochelle, 34, Umpire). Overall, most participants felt that their own behaviour did not need to change in their Australian rules football environment.

4.6.3. Adjusting behaviour for the workplace

Despite the differing opinions about the personality traits of males and females, the overwhelming majority of participants stated that they did not have to change their behaviour in their workplace in order to fit into any sort of ‘masculine’ environment. Allison stated, ‘I think it’s kind of what makes me good at my job is that I just am me and they are just them, and it just kind of works. And everyone gets along’ (Allison, 29, Media). Some females said the environment was a stark contrast to other areas of their life so there may be a general change, but they had not had to act a particular way to fit in based on gender and traditional ‘feminine’ characteristics.

A number of participants stated that they fit in well to the environment, however this had been followed by them explaining that they were quite sporty or classed as one of the boys. ‘Not really [she had not changed her behaviour], I mean, because I’ve grown up around it, you are kind of just classed as one of the boys. They don’t discriminate’ (Bethany, 33, FD). Fiona
described how her sporty nature and interest in ‘masculine’ hobbies made the fit into the football environment simpler:

Obviously for me I’m a pretty sporty kind of person, I mean I’ve played cricket and I played football growing up and they were kind of my main sports so I’ve kind of always been around that, you know I’ve had an interest in the same things as the boys do regardless of my gender. So it’s never really been an issue for me about getting on with the boys. And I still like to wear dresses and dress up and things like that (Fiona, 24, Umpire).

In contrast, participants such as Tegan and Jane had been made to feel more ‘aware’ of their gender and had to be mindful of their behaviour at times. Tegan said when she initially took on a leadership role (prior to her current position), she had to ensure she got people on her side, as she was most often outnumbered when it came to gender:

I was very much aware of my gender is what I would say, because I was usually the only woman in a room, all filled with men, or there may be one other woman present, but I was generally the most senior woman within that room. That then meant that my style and my management needed to be adapted to that, and what I mean is in order to bring people with you, people need to understand you and not be suspicious of you (Tegan, 42, Board).

Jane described how she once approached situations in boardrooms and at meetings in a more aggressive manner, but quickly realised this did not make the impact she had hoped for:

What I have done a lot of which in the beginning especially, yeah I did have to get a bit feisty and aggressive sometimes but that didn’t actually make a difference. That actually made people’s eyes glaze over and you could see their body language going ‘oh my God here she is banging on again’. So I actually realised that I couldn’t do that because people would shut down and not engage. And I had to engage them in other ways and go a little bit more softly. But what has never changed is that I have not stopped providing the evidence or challenging the way they go about things and I suppose it’s my persistence that’s changed that (Jane, 59, FD).

In conjunction to this, participants were also asked whether colleagues treated them in a different manner to the way they treated their male colleagues.
4.6.4. Similarities and differences in treatment in the workplace

There were mixed responses when participants were asked if they felt as though they were treated differently to male colleagues. Some women stated that they were not treated any differently because of their gender. Danielle explained how her longevity within the sport gave her perspective about what it took to contribute to a club and it was not dependent on gender. ‘No [she was not treated differently], because having been a volunteer myself for many years I know whether you’re a male or female it takes the time and effort and the passion to be able to do something for the club’ (Danielle, 39, Board). Georgia reflected on how she had always been supported in the various positions she held within Australian rules football. ‘I’ve never really felt that way. I’ve always been around good people that have supported me and you know, my legitimate coaching ability or playing ability or thought process or business’ (Georgia, 45, FD). Pearl shared similar thoughts to Georgia and believed her male colleagues in similar and higher positions to herself always supported her:

I believe there is very little gender bias. I am the only female on the Board and I feel that the CEO, President and all other Directors that the club, and opposition clubs, are supportive and respectful towards me and other females (Pearl, 30, Board).

Other women stated that their male colleagues did treat them differently, or they had been treated differently compared to their male colleagues. However, these differences mainly surrounded incidences such as their male colleagues’ particular use of language. The females who had experienced this gender bias viewed this offence on slightly different levels. For example, Anya and Brittany both experienced incidences where they had been sworn at or in front of and then the offender had apologised for swearing. However, both participants viewed the treatment differently. Anya was somewhat bothered by the specific attention based on her gender:
I can’t even remember if it was this year or last year, sort of something happened on the bench and one of the players sort of screamed and swore and then when he realised it was me he was screaming at came to apologise afterwards. And I was like ‘oh please don’t. Like if that wasn’t me, if that was him, would you have thought about that for the rest of the game? No’. So the last thing I want is them to spend the rest of the game thinking ‘oh shit I yelled at her’ (Anya, 27, FD).

Brittany’s concern did not appear to be linked with her gender, but simply about the nature of the language being used in general:

When I first started they all used to be really good around me; they wouldn’t swear, they would be respectful. And then now I’ve been there five years, they’re like, ‘oh, you’re just one of the boys. We can say this’. So they’ll swear and I’ll be like, ‘guys, come on’ and they’re like, ‘you’re just one of us. You’ve been here long enough’ and I’m like, ‘mm, but still have a bit of respect’ (Brittany, 22, FD).

Rather than swearing, Brittany’s experiences with gender differences revolved more around her male colleagues being surprised at her knowledge of Australian rules football:

Not so much growing up; now it’s a bit more like guys find it a bit weird that I can hold a conversation with them about it and talk about it, and know a bit of the structure of the play and all that, and they get a bit standoffish. But then eventually they think it’s cool that a girl can talk footy with them (Brittany, 22, FD).

Overall, participants appeared confident in their own behaviour and did not feel the need to adjust the way they conducted themselves to fit into the workplace. These questions did prompt responses surrounding gendered stereotypes and the ‘natural traits’ of men and women; with some females believing that the traits they carried (whether they were more traditionally feminine or masculine) benefitted them in the workplace. Following on from this, participants were also asked about their general views on gender equality within the sport.

4.7 General views on gender equality and the AFL

At the conclusion of interviews, participants were asked their opinions specifically about the AFL (the Australian rules football national competition and by association their governing body)
and whether or not the league was working hard enough for gender equality in the sport (at all levels). There were two components to the discussion, firstly, did they think the AFL was practicing gender equality; and secondly, did they think the AFL was working hard enough for gender equality. Responses to both of these questions, some quite impassioned and others speculative, varied.

4.7.1. Practising gender equality

Of the 26 participants, five stated outright that they did not believe the AFL was being inclusive enough of women within the sport. The women who stood for this view appeared quite impassioned about their opinions and explained their thoughts in detail. Their explanations often linked back to examples where people in the sport had been mistreated, or to the fact that Australian rules football is simply a male dominated sport. For example, Kelly stated ‘no [the AFL is not practicing gender equality]. Because if they did Caroline Wilson wouldn’t be treated the way she was. They don’t practice equality because Adam Goodes wouldn’t have been treated the way he was’ (Kelly, 62, Board).

Bella, Lisa and Laura, all from varying departments within Australian rules football, also explained their stance on the topic of the AFL practicing gender equality:

They’re not, no. They only put an exec [sic] on last year who was a woman because they needed to replace someone else and they were like ‘oh fuck put a woman in’. I don’t think they support women at all. I think they think that they hold things like a course on female leadership and they think that’s supporting women whereas women feel like they can’t go for jobs like we’ve just been talking about and that, them changing culture would be really supporting women (Bella, 34, Media).

Lisa detailed her thoughts on the culture of the AFL:

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20 At the time of the interviews, Caroline Wilson was the chief AFL reporter at *The Age*, a Melbourne newspaper. She had been mistreated by other media personnel regarding her gender and her outspoken nature surrounding Australian rules football (Wilson, 2017).

21 Adam Goodes is an ex-AFL player who has faced criticism for speaking about and celebrating his Indigenous heritage.
I think broadly the culture of the AFL is very driven towards men and men benefit from that culture and women don’t benefit from it. So that’s why we see men getting to the top level easily and why we need to acknowledge that and have positive discrimination is because at the moment the institution is built around men’s success rather than women’s success. So we need to shift that and upend it (Lisa, 31, Umpire).

Laura believed that the AFL was practicing gender equality, but she was sceptical that it was simply a phase the sport was going through until a new fad would come to light:

Oh look, in the last 12 months I do think so, because it’s their flavour of the month. Yeah, I don’t know. I think that they tend to kind of go, ‘okay, this year we’re going to push multiculturalism, this year we’re going to push this and this year we’re going to push this’, and whether where the new focus comes in and that one falls by the wayside a little bit. I can see that happening, but I mean I don’t know. It sounds like they have a fairly long term plan for the women’s league and things like that. But I don’t know if ... I don’t have the best opinion of the AFL as an organisation, I don’t know (Laura, 32, FD).

The views some women held within this study were contrasted by the majority of participants who believed, or tentatively suggested that the AFL was at the very least making an effort to be inclusive of women in the environment. Madeline acknowledged that progress was being made, but that it was slow going. ‘I think the AFL is certainly making headway in that but you can’t expect those things to happen overnight’ (Madeline, 38, Media). Georgia also believed the AFL was growing the game to be more inclusive of women, stating ‘they’ve celebrated females coming into their game and into all those roles so they’ve been really proactive in that. Particularly you know the last sort of decade, so you know it was the right time for them to promote’ (Georgia, 45, FD).

Lauren and Charlotte were a bit more hesitant in throwing their complete support behind the actions of the AFL, but did believe work was being done to include women in the ranks. ‘No, at a local level, I don’t feel like they actively do but I would say at an AFL level it seems that they try to appear to do so’ (Lauren, 26, Board). Charlotte did question the efforts of the AFL but acknowledged that there was a push for women across all levels, particularly as players:
Do they practice gender equality? Well I’m not sure that there’s actually equality at this point because I think it’s a very male-driven industry, however there is an attempt to get females involved right down to the player level, because they’re trying to start up women’s competitions and things now, so there must be someone out there thinking that they need to get women involved in it somehow, because that’s what we’re trying to do at grass roots (Charlotte, 55, Finance).

While participants were hesitant to give full credit to the AFL and claim that the sport practiced gender equality, they were also asked whether they believed the AFL was making an effort to address and improve the gender imbalance within its ranks.

4.7.2. Working hard enough for gender equality?

When asked the question on whether the AFL was working hard enough for gender equality (acknowledging that the sport may not be practicing it wholly), most participants did believe that the AFL was making an effort to get women involved in the sport. Danielle believed that the talk had turned into action. ‘It’s really been that whole big, “let’s push for women” and so it’s not all talk. There is some action behind that talk, so it’s good’ (Danielle, 39, Board). For Fiona, it was evident that when those in power were pushing for change, then it was more likely to occur. She explained:

The thing is that I know that that is all being worked towards so obviously with Gillon McLachlan [AFL CEO], he’s a champion of change, you know he’s really keen, obviously he’s brought in the female football league, which is fantastic and so the good thing is knowing that there is change in the works. And so obviously, could we become equitable, of course, but we could in lots of different ways and so for me, the most important thing is that those who are in charge are hoping for change and are willing on change and that’s the most important thing (Fiona, 24, Umpire).

A number of participants suggested that the hard work was happening more at the club level rather than coming from the top, or that perhaps some work was being done but that everyone could work harder:

I think we can probably all work harder and I don’t necessarily think it’s just the females in the sport but it’s probably in all, you know, backgrounds. So whether it’s
inclusion of females, whether it’s inclusion of other cultures into our sport. I absolutely think we could work harder at all of that (Harriet, 37, FD).

Kelly expressed her concern that while the clubs were pushing for change, that some personalities in higher, more powerful positions were not making a concerted effort to recognise the value of women:

I actually think within the clubs, most clubs are trying really really hard to lift to a really good core set of values. I’m extremely concerned that [some in power] do not understand, that if they do not stand strongly, for critical Australian values … to understand, that Australians, and particularly women expect our core values of fairness and respect to be upheld. And I don’t think the AFL in the last 18 months has come through this very well at all (Kelly, 62, Board).

Nonetheless, there were a few participants who doubted whether the work was genuine or if it was simply to build up the public’s perception of their efforts. Laura and Lauren expressed their distrust in the true intentions of the AFL. ‘Sometimes I question whether they’re just doing it for show, or it’s genuine’ (Laura, 32, FD). Lauren explained that she was concerned that the push for gender equality by the AFL was due to external pressures rather than internal interest in the matter:

You’d hope that they’d been genuine, but there’s no doubt that probably the only reason they’re striving for gender equality is from a public perception point of view, otherwise you wouldn’t make a big deal of it; you would just do it and not try and promote it or market it and things like that (Lauren, 26, Board).

A number of women cited the introduction of the national women’s football league, the AFLW competition, as a point of interest regarding their views on gender equality in the sport. At the time of interviews, the AFLW competition had been introduced but the first season had not yet been played (the exploration of the league’s impact is discussed further in recommendations for future research). Therefore, participants were speculating about the impact that the league may have regarding gender barriers and gender equality within Australian rules football.
4.7.3. Impact of the AFLW competition

Despite some hesitation from a number of participants regarding the AFL’s position on gender equality, participants were hopeful or held a positive attitude regarding the introduction of the AFLW competition for 2017. The question asked of participants regarding the women’s league was whether they believed that the league would create more opportunities for women to become employed in leadership positions in Australian rules football (both in the women’s and the men’s competitions).

All participants except for one stated that they believed or at the very least were hopeful that the AFLW competition would lead to more leadership opportunities for females in Australian rules football. The one female who was against the implementation of the AFLW competition, was not against women being given opportunities in sport, but rather was influenced by her own ‘generational’ upbringing, which impacted on her views on women in Australian rules football. Milly explained that she did not have an interest in women playing football, given the aggressive nature of the sport:

I mean I don’t really, and I’m a woman, I don’t really like watching women play football. Not that I don’t understand why they’re doing it. I think it’s great, that keeping active and that kind of thing. It’s just nothing that I enjoy watching and I wouldn’t want my daughter to be playing. I don’t know. Because I think it’s so aggressive, and so, yeah, and I think that’s just a generation thing. So I think that that’s what it’s all about (Milly, 53, FD).

Of the women who believed the women’s league would be positive for gender equality in Australian rules football, their opinions spread across various areas. They considered opportunities for playing, coaching and administration across both the women’s competition and the men’s competition. This also included how clubs and the AFL could facilitate this change in culture. Stephanie acknowledged the role her club could play in this change, stating, ‘coaching opportunities and administrator opportunities are definitely without a doubt and it’s really
putting a focus on what we can do as a club overall and just little changes we’re making as well, like women’s change rooms’ (Stephanie, 40, Finance). Leanne shared similar views and was hopeful that there would be opportunities for women who could not or did not want to play the game, but who wished to support and contribute to the game. ‘You’ve obviously got females that absolutely love the game but don’t want to play it … So I really do hope there’s opportunities for females to, I suppose, look at other avenues, not just playing’ (Leanne, 24, FD).

Tegan went further in her explanation and discussed how the introduction of the women’s league would impact not only on the employability of women in the sport, but also impact on the wider community:

What the national women’s league will do is, number one normalise the engagement of women within sport; two, it is going to put the representation, the imagery, the engagement, the role of women, into the consciousness of men and women who currently operate within football but the general broader public, it’s going to do that on a week in week out basis. There is also an integrity that comes through from being able to play the game. It’s not essential but there’s an integrity that comes through being able to play the game really well and I think that is going to translate into both components, for the male part of the game and women operating within that and the non-female part of the game. And I can see that within operational football activity, i.e., coaching, medical etcetera, that it’s going to open up options for women to be entering into those professional fields of engagement in a way they haven’t done before (Tegan, 42, Board).

In some cases the positive outlook regarding the opportunities for women in Australian rules football was followed with some scepticism about the AFLW competition perhaps being tokenistic. Some participants also voiced their opinion that women should not need a women’s league to progress to the men’s league if they wished to. Kelly, Lauren and Allison shared their concerns, specifically bringing up the potential tokenistic nature of the league. ‘I think it’s going to help as long as it’s not going to be token. They are very late to the party for how long women have been playing AFL’ (Kelly, 62, Board). Lauren aired her concern about women being represented in a cliché manner, stating ‘if women’s football does get off the ground I think that’d
be fabulous, again as long as it’s not tokenised which I think when they did that game last year [exhibition match] [it] became a little bit of a joke’ (Lauren, 26, Board).

Allison believed the way in which the women’s league was to be showcased would highlight the true support of the women’s league:

I think the women’s football league will be interesting. I’m yet to decide whether or not it’s been a token move or if they are actually invested in women’s football. So I think we’ll learn a lot about the AFL in the next year and how much they are committed to it (Allison, 29, Media).

Meaghan, in contrast, was concerned that the women’s league would be tokenistic in the fact that women may be overemployed in the sport. ‘You know what? I hope with the creation of the women’s league that we don’t become gender unequal on the other side as well, just because it’s women’s league, right?’ (Meaghan, Board). Danielle believed that while the AFLW competition would extend the opportunities women would have, females should be able to work in leadership positions in Australian rules football without the women’s league’s influence:

So I don’t think it’s just necessarily the creation of the actual league, but I think that it helps go into a traditionally male dominated sport, that women can actually, if they really want to, it’s opening the doors again, the opportunity. So it already exists but it’s just widening the opportunity. So a woman now can think, ‘I can be the CEO of AFL Australia because there’s a women’s competition’. I personally don’t see that link because I personally think a woman can do it anyway (Danielle, 39, Board).

There was a range of responses from participants when asked about their views on gender equality within Australian rules football. While attitudes were mostly positive, the underlying hesitancy, or scepticism shared by some participants in reference to tokenism and gender equality being a show does suggest a lack of confidence within the AFL in particular. After sharing their thoughts about the current state of gender equality within Australian rules football (and in particular the AFL), participants were asked to share their thoughts on their predictions for the future of gender equality within Australian rules football.
4.8. Gender equality in Australian rules football in the future

Overall, many women in this study have faced barriers in their employment in Australian rules football and most have voiced their opinions that the sport is not currently gender equal when it comes to women working in leadership roles. However, the women involved in this study were for the most part hopeful of gender equality in Australian rules football in the future, both on and off the field. ‘In twenty years’ time I can see there being gender parity on the AFL board and in management positions at all clubs’ (Rochelle, 24, Umpire). Milly hoped that her thoughts on women being involved in Australian rules football do not deter younger generations from working in the sport, admitting ‘I think, well I hope that your generation of women are determined to get there. And don’t be held back by, not my negative thoughts, but my apprehensiveness and my concerns’ (Milly, 53, FD). Madeline was hopeful that in the future, talks of gender would not be an issue, as females working in leadership positions in Australian rules football would be the norm:

I’m hoping that it won’t be an issue in the future, to be honest. I am hoping in five years’ time that women, whatever role, whatever position they hold in AFL, whether it be on TV, radio, the AFL Commission, board members, on clubs, I hope that we won’t be talking about it all. I hope that it won’t be an issue and I’m pretty confident that society and the community is moving in that direction that soon it certainly won’t be front page news (Madeline, 38, Media).

However, participants were aware that creating an environment more inclusive of women, while beneficial, would not happen overnight and often used terms such as ‘eventual’ ‘generational’ and ‘incremental’ change. Meaghan also explained that getting more women involved in leadership roles in the sport did not mean it had to be an even numerical split between men and women:

It’s a very slow ride. I am confident that over time we will get that nice balance, whether it’s two thirds men or a third women. I don’t like to put any specific statistics there but it’s a case of at least having a different opinion, a different view, a different way of looking at things. It means you need diversity, so you need someone
with maybe an Indian background or Chinese background. You need someone who is a female. They’re the sorts of things that I’m talking about (Meaghan, Board).

A number of women, including Bella and Allison, had conflicted thoughts about the progress that has been made and the progress that may be made in the future. ‘Sometimes you feel really happy about where we’re at and then other times you’re like “oh God we’re fucking nowhere”’ (Bella, 34, Media). Allison was concerned that the focus on women in Australian rules football was simply a trend or phase that would eventually end when the focus moved to another aspect of the game:

I have a feeling we’re going to go through this boom period where we’re like ‘we love females and women’s football and awesome, and let’s just talk about how much we love women’ and then it will settle down … and get to the other end of it and we’ll be like ‘cool, let’s just have the people that are good at what they do and move on’. But I’m definitely a little bit anxious about this next period and it being really forced (Allison, 29, Media).

Brittany and Harriet were both hopeful that more women would be visible in leadership positions in the future. They mentioned the influence the media and the AFL could have to push for equality over the coming years:

I think there definitely will be a lot more women in higher up positions and on the board and coaching levels, but to what extent, it’s hard to tell and hard to see. The media’s going to play a big part on how they portray it and what side they take, and it’s just having the support from who’s already there now to support them. But hopefully there definitely will be a lot more females, and even in coaching areas (Brittany, 22, FD).

Harriet was hopeful that gender equality in Australian rules football is something that can be achieved sooner rather than later:

I would like to think that equality in AFL is something that we’re able to reach pretty soon. That’s certainly going to be something that the league is driving for and I hope the league is able to attain as well (Harriet, 37, FD).
The current environment of the AFLW competition (coming into its third season) is explored further in the following discussion chapter.

4.9. Concluding comments

The results of this research indicate that although participants of this study were all working or volunteering within the same sport, their environments and experiences were unique. It must be acknowledged that the experiences shared by participants are their own and each one does not necessarily directly reflect the culture of Australian rules football as a whole. However, each participant’s experience, particularly when analysed together, can contribute to growing knowledge of what the sport of Australian rules football is like (across a range of domains) with regard to the inclusion and acceptance of women in traditionally masculine leadership roles within the sport.

There were varying views with regard to barriers these women may have faced in their workplace, their views on gender equality within Australian rules football and the ways in which these participants viewed their own fit within the traditional male team sport. Common ground was evident across a number of discussion points, in that women at times had similar stories to share. However, often when experiences shared by participants had some similarities, the way each participant viewed the experience differed. Overall, it is clear that whilst there were many positive experiences shared by participants, barriers are still evident in relation to women working or volunteering in leadership positions at state and national level Australian rules football and the sport itself, at various levels, can mindfully work toward improving efforts to be inclusive and welcoming of females working and volunteering in leadership roles.

The following ‘discussion’ chapter addresses particular themes that have arisen from the data in this chapter. The points to be discussed refer more broadly to the positive and negative
experiences faced by women in leadership positions in Australian rules football, their thoughts on advocating for gender equality and the state of gender equality in Australian rules football.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

There are a number of themes that have arisen which have been deemed pertinent to this research and therefore require further exploration and analysis. In relation to the environment of women in leadership positions in Australian rules football, themes that require further discussion revolve broadly around both the positive experiences and barriers faced by women in the sport, a certain reluctance around advocating for gender equality and the critical nature surrounding the abilities of women. A third wave feminism lens has been used throughout this chapter to provide an analysis for this simultaneous empowerment and oppression of women in traditionally male dominated sporting environments.

More specifically, this chapter will begin with a brief overview of the current workings of Australian rules football, followed by a discussion about the positive experiences and impact females have on the culture of Australian rules football. Positive experiences include females creating pathways for future female employees; bringing diversity and different perspectives to the workplace; the lack of barriers experienced in their role; and the AFLW competition as a positive inclusion into the sport of Australian rules football. This will then be followed by a discussion focusing on the barriers that females may face and have faced in the Australian rules football environment. Such barriers include the masculine culture of the sport; institutional barriers; females adapting to gender expectations; sexism; and the perception that females are barriers to themselves.

Further to this, the reluctance of some females to advocate for gender equality will be explored. This will include discussions surrounding the stigma of feminism; women not
‘needing’ feminism; fear of jeopardising careers when speaking out about gender inequalities; and the potential consequences of not speaking up. The different expectations on females in a male dominated workplace will then be examined, including the difference in education levels between females and males; the pathways and timeliness of the appointment of females in their roles; and the concept of tokenism and quotas. The chapter will then be concluded with an overview of these points from a third wave feminism perspective.

As discussed in Chapter Two, there have been a number of studies, both in Australia and internationally revolving around the experiences of women working in various male dominated environments, particularly in the field of sport. More specific studies surrounding Australian rules football, such as Cooper (2018); Klugman (2012); Mewett and Toffoletti (2011) and Willson et al. (2017) have concluded that within the last decade the sport has been heavily masculinised, administered and run by males. It has been acknowledged by scholars such as Willson et al. (2017) that progress has been made with regard to gender equality in Australian rules football, although it is still evident that females are underrepresented in leadership positions; they continue to face barriers in their roles in traditionally masculine sports; and gender inequality is still evident within sporting environments.

From a third wave feminism perspective, women working in the male dominated environment of Australian rules football might share similar experiences, but their interpretations of those experiences may differ. On an individual level, participants have decided whether their experiences are empowering or oppressive in nature (or both, or neither). Although the results of the current study show that barriers are still evident within Australian rules football for women in leadership positions, there were also many positive stories shared which indicate that women can be welcomed, comfortable and confident in the Australian rules football environment.
5.2. Australian rules football as a positive environment for women

To begin this section, it must be noted that these are experiences that participants have defined as positive in their individual situations. There may be conflict around how experiences can be interpreted (particularly from a third wave feminism perspective) and further along in this chapter the principal researcher will unpack the interpretations of participants’ experiences based on the information they have shared. This is not to undermine the fact that participants have said these experiences are positive, but rather to critique the environment in further detail.

Many of the women who took part in the current study expressed their satisfaction in their job. Many stated that they had not faced barriers in their roles and therefore they felt as though they had opportunities and could progress their careers further in their workplace if they so wished. It has been acknowledged that changes are being made and there is increasing recognition of the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in male dominated team sports. In recent years, there have been an increased number of women employed in positions traditionally held by males, not only in Australian rules football, but other sports as well. There are also ongoing and progressive conversations about women in leadership in male dominated sports in Australia, including national leagues such as the AFL, National Rugby League (NRL) and Australian Rugby Union (ARU) (see Brooks, 2016; Burke, 2014; Newton, 2018; and Walter, 2018).

In Australia, there have also been campaigns (at local and government level) to encourage the employment and the application of women into roles in which traditionally women have not been involved. A number of these campaigns have been focused specifically on getting women into leadership positions in sport. These campaigns are not solely focussed on just one sport, but various sports across Australia. Change Our Game focuses on challenging gender stereotypes and supports women breaking the mould and gaining positions in leadership in sport (Minister
for Sport, 2016). Get Onboard and Lead (GOAL) works to attract more female leaders to sport (GOAL, 2016). Women Leaders in Sport is an initiative managed by the Australian Sport Commission, which aims to provide women with development opportunities in leadership in sport (“Women Leaders in Sport,” 2018). Male Champions of Change in Sport is working towards redefining the role men can play when taking action on gender equality (Male Champions of Change, 2018). All of these campaigns are contributing to the growth and recognition of women in leadership positions in sport in Australia.

Having been appointed in leadership positions in Australian rules football, the women in the current study have voiced their opinions about their ability and the ability of other women to bring a new perspective and diversity to the workplace. Some participants also stated that they were in a position to be a role model for women coming through. The majority of females were also hopeful that the inclusion of the AFLW competition would create opportunities for females to become more recognisable in the traditionally male dominated sport.

5.2.1. Females creating pathways for the future

There are some well-known women in the realms of Australian rules football who could be or have been labelled as trailblazers for women in the sport. These women have been employed in roles traditionally held by men, such as in coaching and managerial positions and they have shouldered the media and spotlight as the first females in their respective positions. Examples of female trailblazers in the sport include Sam Mostyn (AFL Commissioner), Chelsea Roffey (Goal Umpire), Peta Searle (Assistant Coach), Peggy O’Neal (Club President), Susan Alberti (Club Vice-President) and Caroline Wilson (Chief AFL Writer). Most of these women and their contribution to Australian rules football were discussed in Chapter Two. A number of these women still occupy these roles and others have since moved away from Australian rules football, but nonetheless, hold the title of the first female in that specific role. Since their appointments,
there has been a growth in the number of females in some of these roles, particularly in goal umpiring as well as in the media (O’Halloran, 2017; AFLUA, 2018).

Overall, the participants in this study do not have a particular problem with working in a male dominated field and while acknowledging that it has been challenging in the past for women to gain such positions, there is a belief that their appointments can create pathways for other women to gain employment as well (even if at times they mention that their appointment is ‘no big deal’). Despite being outnumbered based on gender, it is positive that a number of females believe they can encourage other females to apply for traditionally male dominated roles, by creating a pathway for other females.

Trailblazers in these positions have also shouldered the spotlight and often viewed the spotlight as a positive experience, as it gains them exposure and showcases their capabilities as a female in a male dominated environment. In an interview with the AFL Umpire’s Association, (former) goal umpire Rose O’Dea explained that the spotlight was a benefit of being a female goal umpire:

The possibility of being a role model was one of the perks of my added visibility, and I always liked the stories of children sitting behind the goals who would exclaim ‘it’s a girl!’ I hope it won’t be long before there are so many women umpiring in the AFL that it’s no longer remarkable, but progress is slow and it’s not inevitable (“Rose O’Dea is not defined by football,” 2017).

As Stephanie (40, Finance) explained, the attention she received was positive as it was seen to shine a light on the growing visibility of women in the sport. Anya and Fiona acknowledged the spotlight via the increasingly accessible pathways into Australia rules football for women (the ones created by the sport, not by trailblazers). Anya (27, FD) believed there is an increased focus on pathways for women in the sport, stating ‘I actually think we’re coming into a time now where policies and procedures, they’re actually more and more supportive and … opening doors and pathways for women’. Fiona (24, Umpire) believed that without a female pathway, she
would not be in her current position. ‘Well obviously with the female pathway I would never have had this opportunity otherwise’ (Fiona, 24, Umpire). This growing recognition and visibility of females may encourage an increase of women into Australian rules football. Burton et al. (2011, p. 43) believe that a ‘critical mass’ of women (rather than a few token appointments) in leadership roles could break down the stigma of women and their leadership capabilities. Thus, leading to a further increase of and relative normality surrounding women in such positions.

It appears that the pathways for some of the women within the current research were relatively smooth into Australian rules football. Women have addressed the fact that their appointment in their respective roles has been straightforward. This perception is encouraging for women who will be applying for similar positions in future years.

5.2.2. Perceived lack of barriers in career

Women working in leadership positions in male dominated sports continue to encounter a number of barriers (Willson et al., 2017, p. 1710). However, many women in the current research suggested that they have not faced barriers in their respective positions in Australian rules football, despite being in a traditionally masculine position in a male dominated environment. Laura is one such participant, who explained:

I don’t really feel like there’s barriers. I think if you go back and you do the appropriate training study, work experience, I don’t feel like there are. Certainly not in this workplace. But you hear stories about other [workplaces]. Not so sure that it would be the same everywhere (Laura, 32, FD).

Pearl believed that the encounters she had with people within Australian rules football had been positive. ‘I may be in the minority here, but I have not felt that I have faced any barriers due to my gender. All the dealings I have had with people in the AFL industry have been respectful and pleasant’ (Pearl, 30, Board). Madeline (38, Media) explained ‘if you’re asking me
whether I feel limited or inhibited by being female, no, absolutely not. I can certainly list many examples where I feel that it’s actually a positive’.

The fact that some women do not believe there are barriers impeding them in their positions in Australian rules football is both positive for these women and acknowledges the potentially changing culture of the sport. Similar to the current study, Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 406) also found that participants believed that gender did not influence their treatment in sports journalism and sport governance, with both men and women having equal opportunities across all facets of their workplace and believing that the work was gender neutral. Additionally, participants also believed that they were all provided with opportunities and capable of taking on the work they wanted. This can be likened to Harriet’s comments, who explained:

In my career I never felt like I’ve been limited in what I could and couldn’t do because of my gender. I feel like I’m down there because of my skills and capabilities. And again potentially that’s naïve but I like to think that gender doesn’t come into that (Harriet, 33, FD).

Both Anya and Kelly suggested that so long as women showed respect and sense in the workplace, they could find respect from male colleagues. ‘My theory was always … if you give respect and demand respect well nothing can go too wrong from that’ (Anya, 27, FD). Kelly (62, Board) shared her views, stating ‘men accept you and accept your views as long as you’re not spouting stupidity’.

However, in recent times, there have been scandals within the higher ranks of Australian rules football that may suggest that men in high ranking positions are exerting their power in an unethical manner, impacting on how inclusive and respectful the sporting environment is for females. In 2016 during the ‘Big Freeze’ 22 charity event, Collingwood President and commentator Eddie McGuire suggested on radio that he would donate money to charity if

22 The Big Freeze is a charity event that raises money for Motor Neuron Disease (MND). Celebrities and football personalities travel down a slide into an ice bath at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) in a televised event.
someone were to hold journalist Caroline Wilson under the icy water (Perkins, 2016). In 2017 two senior staffers within the AFL (in powerful, decision-making positions) were stood down after it was found they were having affairs with lower-ranked female colleagues. Following this, it was reported that a group of senior men within the AFL had a list of the Top 10 females in their workplace they would like to have sex with (McDonald, 2017). In 2018, ex-player turned radio commentator Barry Hall was fired immediately after making inappropriate comments about a colleagues’ pregnant wife (Lancaster, 2018).

While these experiences do not affect all women involved in Australian rules football, these examples provide a snapshot of the deeply entrenched gendered practices within the male dominated sport. However, there are pockets of resistance to this behaviour, including the AFL’s immediate disciplinary action taken when these issues occurred, which provides an insight into the growing intolerance to such behaviour. It is also perceived by participants that in their own experiences, they have not faced barriers within their roles in Australian rules football. In fact, there was a belief that in addition to feeling welcome and included within the sport, some females believed they brought diversity and new perspectives into their workplace.

5.2.3. Diversity and different perspectives in the workplace

Diversity in the workplace and more specifically, the number of women on boards can impact on the efficiency of the board and the authority of respective companies. According to Adriaanse and Schofield (2014, p. 485), ‘the ratio of women directors is positively related to board effectiveness and good governance’. When women take on positions in male dominated spaces, they can share the perspective of people from different demographics and pathways (who were once excluded) and add value to their respective workplace boards (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014, p. 485). Both Danielle and Madeline from the current study mentioned this. Danielle stated ‘there’s probably some nurturing role and bring[ing] a different perspective from the women’s
side’ (Danielle, 39, Board). Madeline explained that she felt ‘that perhaps that’s one of the advantages that I have that I can approach things just sometimes in a little bit [of a] different way and … put a different little slant on them because I’m a female’ (Madeline, 38, Media).

If women have the confidence in themselves and believe that they can add a new perspective to the workplace, it can perhaps mean they believe the masculine culture of the sport can be broken down and become more inclusive. It can also lead them to believing that they can play a different and individual role in their workplace. Schoch (2013b, p. 107) has conducted research in relation to female sports journalists, with the consensus being that females can use their gender to their advantage in their role and that ‘being a woman is an asset in sports journalism’ (Schoch, 2013b, p. 107). However, this thought of bringing different perspectives into a workplace can also cause inclusivity issues within workplaces if women are conforming to these ideals about women and men being different and playing different roles.23 It may be the case that the introduction of the AFLW competition (and the resulting influx of females into the sport (as athletes)) may have an impact on the male dominated environment of Australian rules football.

5.2.4. Predicted impact of the AFLW competition

The AFLW competition had not yet been introduced when the interviews for the current study were conducted. However, as explained in the results, the competition had been approved for the following season. Therefore, participants were asked their opinions regarding the women’s league and the impact it may have on gender equality in Australian rules football and providing positive opportunities for women in the sporting space. Since interviews were conducted, there have been two seasons of the AFLW competition.

The general consensus amongst the participant group was that the introduction of the women’s league at an elite level would open up opportunities in general, including opportunities

23 This notion will be explored later in this chapter (see ‘conforming to gender stereotypes’).
for women. Emily (33, FD) stated ‘I think it broadens the industry as a whole anyway … so I think it will create jobs. Now, whether that’s female or male depends, again, on what the specific role is and what the needs are’. Pearl (30, Board) explained that the women’s league would be less of a daunting environment for women hoping to get into the industry, explaining that ‘the perceived gender inequalities surrounding our sport … has deterred many others so having a women’s league will open doors’.

Participants were hopeful that the AFLW competition would be a platform to showcase female talent both on and off field, demonstrating the capabilities of females in coaching, umpiring and commentary in addition to females as athletes. Leanne explained:

I hope there’s more jobs available for females because you’ve obviously got females that absolutely love the game but don’t want to play it but they want to support it in another way and work hard to give back to the game. So I really do hope there’s opportunities for females to look at other avenues, not just playing (Leanne, 24, FD).

Georgia (59, FD) believed the exposure of the women’s game would make females more visible within the sport:

Once they’re in the face of these AFL clubs, AFL clubs will realise how good women are to have in their business and I can see that they will pathway through and not just [into the women’s competition], but [into the men’s competition] in the long term (Georgia, 59, FD).

Lisa (31, Umpire) explained how she believed the introduction of the league would impact many women in different fields within Australian rules football, marking a meaningful change within the sporting environment:

We’ve got this women’s league happening. And I think that’s positive in a way because it’s saying that women are valued in the AFL, like we are putting money and time and effort into building this league and building our female fan base and all of these kinds of things. And so those big symbols, people might think they’re tokenistic and all that kind of stuff but it’s really meaningful for all women in the game, including umpires and administrators and all that kind of stuff … Look I’m hoping the women’s league is going to just get bigger and bigger. I’m hoping that the
players are going to be paid properly. I’m hoping the season is going to get longer and that it’s not going to be in summer. I think that’s a massive part of equality because we have to show that women’s footy is just as important as men’s football, because that opens up so many other pathways, you know for management and player acknowledgement and women in umpiring, women in administration, women as players, all of these areas are affected by something like that (Lisa, 31, Umpire).

When analysing the introduction of the AFLW competition from a third wave feminism perspective, it may be viewed as a site of both empowerment (as participants above were hopeful of), but also oppression. Oppression is evident, in that within the national women’s league, comparative to the men’s national league, there are still negative systemic issues at play. The AFLW competition is a shorter season (in summer, not winter), with different rules, with less remuneration, less media coverage and the need for women to still work whilst juggling a football career (acknowledging that the league is in its early days) (Willson et al., 2017, p. 1708).

Willson et al. (2017, p. 1709) also state that the coverage of the first season of the competition (2017) was positive and empowering (but not consistently so). The first two seasons were deemed a success and the popularity exceeded the expectations of even those in power at the AFL themselves. Spectator interest (both at live events and through media broadcasts) has been significant. Women are being recognised as national athletes; they get an opportunity to play Australian rules football at a national level; the media is showcasing them on field (demonstrating traditionally masculine traits); they are heroes and role models to young women who carry (now realistic) dreams to play professionally; and the league is changing perspectives about the capabilities of females in a historically masculine environment. The league is expanding in 2019 and there are also a number of female players with media roles (in both the women’s and men’s leagues). Willson et al. (2017, p. 1716) believe that females lead the way in changing the conversation in the sport with reference to inclusivity and gender. Acknowledging that ongoing efforts are being made by those in leadership positions in the AFL and sporting government positions (coaches, administrators, commissioners and ministers), Willson et al.,
believe that ‘everyday women and girls on the ground’ need to continue to fight for their right to play, fair and equal pay, be included and be visible figures within the sport (2017, p. 1716).

One reality coming into the third season of the AFLW competition is that there are no longer any female coaches in the women’s league. There has evidently been an increase in women in media and umpiring roles (both in the women’s and men’s space), but the two women (out of eight coaches) who coached for the first two seasons no longer hold their positions. When Danielle (39, Board), mentioned that women should not have to rely on the women’s league to gain leadership positions within Australian rules football, she may not have predicted that only men would hold such positions. This is a situation than can perhaps (on a lesser scale) be compared to that of Title IX in the USA (Antunovic & Hardin, 2015, p. 663). While the introduction and implementation of strategies to get women more involved with sport has been successful in a participation sense, it has actually increased the rates that men are coaching women’s sports, rather than increasing the number of female coaches (in female and male sports). At the time of data collection, it was estimated that there are less than 150 women employed in leadership positions at state and national level in Australian rules football (out of possibly thousands of positions). So while the introduction of the AFLW competition has been a breakthrough in that it is giving females an opportunity to play at a national level (although not on the same scale as the men), it appears that men are filling leadership positions more often than women, in the women’s game. There is a sense that the success of individual women in the male dominated sport are being celebrated as group success when in reality (aside from the influx of female players in the AFLW competition) there are few women in leadership positions in Australian rules football. Their individual success, while important and prominent within the sport, is not necessarily an accurate representation of the state of gender equality in the sport.

24 This information is correct as at December 2018.
It needs to be explored as to why the (very slight) increase in the appointment of females in leadership positions in Australian rules football has come about. Is it due to societal progression with regards to gender equality? Have people in influential positions been outspoken about the gender inequalities in their workplaces? Do women in influential positions who still work under a male boss have the power to create pathways if they are not necessarily dictating the employment around them? If the organisation is ready, is there a clearly accessible, public space where women are encouraged to apply for positions within Australian rules football? Despite the positive experiences shared by participants of the current study and some encouraging signs of a focus on addressing the issue of gender inequality, evidently, there are still barriers in place (whether obvious or otherwise) impeding the path for women in Australian rules football.

Additionally, as will be discussed further in this chapter, regardless of the number of women in certain positions and how well they are acknowledged, the culture of the sport and environment may not change if these women conform to it, rather than challenge it (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008, p. 90). If the pathway is being created for women into the sport, it is a positive progression, but it must be explored whether the willingness to employ women is due to these women not changing the heavily masculine culture or whether the sport is adjusting and working to accommodate diversity (including females). This will be discussed further in the following section.

5.3. Conscious and subconscious barriers for women in Australian rules football

It is evident that more women are being recognised in leadership positions in traditionally masculine sports such as Australian rules football. These women are sharing positive experiences about their work environment and the role they play. Again, women are still underrepresented in such positions and evidently barriers are still in place for women working in these leadership roles. Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 404) have recognised that although many female
friendly policies have been implemented and change has been applied to the structure of (some) sporting environments, the skewed gender ratios are yet to change significantly. This can be viewed as a consequence of the history and tradition of Australian rules football (rather than individual shortcomings of women).

In conjunction with results from recent studies such as Cooper (2018) and the findings from this current research, it appears that barriers faced by women working in leadership positions in the sport environment are both obvious and also subtle (or carried out subconsciously) in workplaces. Barriers that were evident from this current research include the traditionally masculine culture of the sport, institutionalised barriers, sexism, females as barriers and the acceptance of gender stereotypes.

5.3.1. Institutional barriers

These institutional barriers are ones that often mirror societal beliefs and practices with regard to gendered behaviours and also gender roles. Kelly (62, Board) was very blatant in her assessment of Australian rules football, stating ‘no one ever intends to find any women, they think the blokes have all got it because it’s footy’. This assessment by Kelly may be linked with the idea that women have to prove their expertise and knowledge prior to even being considered for positions in a male dominated environment. This contrasts with the treatment of males, in which it may often be assumed that men already have knowledge and expertise in a male dominated sport (Blom et al., 2011, p. 60; Fox, 2017, p. 133; Norman, 2010, p. 94). Sibson (2010, p. 380) argues that organisations are fundamentally gendered, explaining that they ‘are reflective of socially constructed sex differences’. These differences, as acknowledged by Rochelle (24, Umpire) in the current study, are ‘caused by socio-cultural factors’. Similarly to Sibson (2010), Adriaanse and Schofield (2013, p. 500) reflect on Acker’s (1990) label of a ‘gendered organisation’ in which organisations (including sports organisations and environments) should
be regarded as sites by which their foundation is gendered, with a division between males and females regarding workplace structure, the ways in which males and females identify and interact and the distinction between masculinity and femininity. It can often be the case that in such organisations, ‘men are privileged and women are devalued or ignored’ (Sibson, 2010, p. 380).

As explained by Joseph and Anderson (2016, p. 588), these gendered environments can lead to women being perceived as inappropriate for certain roles where the expectations of the position are inherently masculine. Leanne (24, FD) alluded to this, explaining that society and media are influential when it comes to expectations within sport. Whisenant et al. (2015, p. 483) conducted a study on females working as athletic directors and explained that the ‘ingrained norms and expectations’ of sporting organisations, as per role congruity theory, are ‘violated’ when women are put in positions of leadership. Welford (2011, p. 371) described this as ‘a challenge to the male dominance of football’ in her research on women in non-playing roles in football (soccer). The hesitancy in having females as leaders can take a number of forms. Whisenant et al. (2015, p. 477) explain that women are often less favoured than men when being considered for leadership positions and their behaviour when in leadership positions is often viewed as less desirable. This is due to the traits of a leader often being attributed to masculinity and male characteristics rather than traditional feminine traits. Therefore male dominance is challenged with a female in charge. As Claringbould and Knoppers (2007, p. 497) highlight, women do not fit the ‘profile’ of a person in a leadership role because women are most often associated with ‘families and domesticity, with emotions and subjectivity’. This conflicts with the traditional ‘masculine’ traits expected of a leader such as ‘objectivity, rationality, logic and competence’ (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007, p. 497). As acknowledged by Burton et al. (2011, p. 37), ‘the assumptions that gender-related attributes are required for certain jobs limit the work
roles and positions that men and women can have’. This can lead to the inference that the male dominated environment is not one in which women are easily welcomed.

5.3.2. Male terrain – ‘We’re in their environment’

Australian rules football very much fits the traditional mould of a masculinised sport. Men have been the dominant gender in Australian rules football across many areas, including as players, employees and leaders of the game (excluding spectatorship, where women have historically been present) (Hess, 2000, p. 114). Tegan (42, Board) acknowledged the gendered nature of Australian rules football, stating ‘[the] AFL environment is competitive, alpha male, testosterone driven from time to time, passionate, emotional and at times common sense can step out’. Lisa also recognised this in her role as an umpire:

It’s just that AFL in general I think is a very masculine institution, it has a history of men dominating it, it has a history of men making decisions and when women enter that, people can make attributions to those women that are unfair (Lisa, 31, Umpire).

Amongst the results, there were several instances in which participants used terms such as ‘one of the boys’ (Bethany, 33, FD); ‘tomboy’ (Pearl, 30, Board); and ‘masculine domain/environment’ (Charlotte, 55, FD; Rochelle, 24, Umpire). Whether participants were being critical or positive about the environment, many participants acknowledged that the environment of Australian rules football is a male terrain, inferring that the culture is not a natural fit for females due to being male dominated and that the masculine culture is hard to break down. Australian rules football is one of many team sports that have been over represented by men who often practice masculinised traditions in the way they conduct their business (Joseph & Anderson, 2016, p. 587). Several participants of the current research refer to the sport as having a ‘boy’s club’ mentality (Lauren, 26, Board) due to ‘the nature and history of the industry’ (Pearl, 30, Board). Also known as the ‘old boys’ club’, this often refers to people in leadership positions preventing the progression of women (and ethnic minorities) while
‘maintaining white, male centred power at the top of organizations’ (Sheppard & Aquino, 2017, p. 692). These references to an ‘old boys’ club’ were similar to descriptions in recent research conducted by Cooper (2018, p. 69), where females working in management within Australian rules football labelled the culture ‘blokey’ and ‘male-oriented’. In fact, in Cooper’s research, all participants described the culture as male dominated and numerous participants felt ‘unaccepted and undervalued by colleagues and the AFL industry in general’ (Cooper, 2018, pp. 68, 73).

Men in leadership positions in sport have a tendency to conform to historical hegemonic practices by which they adopt masculine language, attitudes and actions in their roles as leaders, either consciously or subconsciously (Joseph & Anderson, 2016, p. 589). Therefore when women are appointed in leadership roles surrounded by a masculine culture, ‘they are likely to be marginalised, harassed and encounter career-progression barriers’ (Joseph & Anderson, 2016, p. 587). Claringbould and Knoppers (2007, p. 497) explain that those who dominate these positions (traditionally males) can create barriers unintentionally. Since the masculine culture of the sport is normalised, those who are in dominant positions are able to make decisions that serve their common interest (which is often keeping traditions alive in their sport). As they are the majority, often their decisions are not challenged or new perspectives are not present (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013, p. 509).

This ‘gate keeping’ can also be conducted consciously if those in power wish to keep their environmental culture the same (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007, p. 501). Goal umpire Rose O’Dea mentioned that her experience in a male domain had been insightful, explaining that at times it was hard to cope with the added pressure and scrutiny she felt subjected to (AFLUA, 2017). Jane (59, FD) alluded to this, describing how ‘all the decision makers were men, generally all middle aged, so there’s no diversity in the influence within state sport associations at all. The key influencers and decision makers are basically middle aged white fellows’. Pearl
(30, Board) shared thoughts along similar lines, stating ‘I also think that there are some men whose views will never change’. Women can find it hard to gain a role alongside these men and often their appointment can be met with resistance (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2007, p. 497). Therefore, the decisions that are often being made from the top down in sports such as Australian rules football, maintain the institutionalised barriers of male dominated team sports.

When women are accepted into such leadership roles, the institutionalised male dominance means that women can be placed in a conflicting position in which they must balance their attitudes and actions between fitting in with and relating to the masculine environment (Joseph & Anderson, 2016, p. 595) and acting in an appropriately feminine manner. As Charlotte (55, FD) explained, ‘you’d probably need to be fairly career-minded to stay in this industry if you were looking to move all the way up the top’. Therefore, fitting in to a masculine sporting environment such as Australian rules football can be made difficult for females. Cooper (2018, p. 69) found that participants of her research had contradicting opinions on how to respond to male dominance within the AFL. Amongst the current research and previous studies across various sports, it appears evident that women have felt the need to justify their actions and attitudes either way, whether they believe they have a more ‘masculine’ personality and work ethic or whether they feel that being a female and carrying more ‘feminine’ traits has worked for them in their leadership role.

5.3.3. Conforming to gender stereotypes

It has been found across various studies (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012; Schoch, 2013; Welford, 2011), as well as in this current research, that by accepting gendered stereotypes, by claiming to be ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ in their role, women are not challenging the masculine environment of the sports they are involved in. Rather, they are conforming to the culture and distinguishing between male and female. In the current research, the majority of females claimed
they have not had to change their behaviour in the football environment. However, this has been followed up with many participants explaining that they either had a more ‘masculine’ personality and work ethic, or that they used their femininity to their advantage (despite suggesting that their workplace is gender neutral). This showcases that participants did acknowledge the male dominated culture of Australian rules football. Pearl is one such participant. She believed that she was accepted and respected in her workplace for what she contributed to the job and sport as a whole, but admitted ‘I am the type of personality though who’s always been “one of the boys” and potentially a little “tomboy-ish”. This may be assisting me in fitting in!!’ (Pearl, 30, Board). Lauren also highlighted her character traits, which she believed assisted her in fitting in amongst her colleagues on the board:

I’m probably a very honest and up front, and quite a confident person anyway, so [I never] struggled to start talking. I think from my first meeting I was just being brutally honest and always having a chat (Lauren, 26, Board).

Anya admitted that she has found it difficult to find a balance between fitting in with the masculine culture and upholding her femininity:

So I’d spent a fair bit of time around boys and footballers [and] maybe through that just learnt how to just be one of the boys without being one. There’s a really fine balance between wanting them to accept you as just another one of the boys and then also respect the boundaries between females [and males] (Anya, 27, FD).

Stephanie acknowledged that women might feel pressure to change their behaviour to suit the environment, despite not feeling that pressure herself:

No, I wouldn’t say I have. I think I’ve always been the same way but I can see how others might feel they need to, in terms of maybe being a bit more one of the boys, that kind of need to fit in. I can see how that might be that way (Stephanie, 40, Finance).

Claringbould and Knoppers (2007, p. 498) and Sibson (2010, p. 384) have discussed the ways in which women have both historically and more recently ‘manage[d] their gender’ in
certain work environments. Sibson (2010, p. 384) explains that when they are ‘outsiders’, women commonly adopt certain behaviours to manage their position. Claringbould and Knoppers (2007, p. 498) claim that subordinate groups (in this case, women) can deem their ‘feminine qualities’ as suitable for positions to justify their fit there. Welford (2011, p. 374) also recognises that women may stress the importance of their femininity to their role. Contrary to that, women can also adopt behaviours that contradict gender stereotypes to show they are a natural fit. Fox (2017, p. 165) suggests that given the constant scrutiny females face regarding their unsuitability for many workplaces, ‘they’d have to be very hardened indeed not to be influenced and ground down by the message. Or to modify their behaviour’. A participant in Cooper’s (2018, p. 70) research questioned the point that was made at a women’s lunch, that women do not have to adopt personality traits of males to get ahead. The participant asked ‘how else do you do it? If I want to survive in a guy’s world, how the hell else am I supposed to do that?’ (cited in Cooper, 2018, p. 70). Such a question is pertinent to this discussion.

‘Managing’ one’s gender can be known as ‘performativity’, as discussed by Judith Butler. Butler (1999, p. xiv) suggests that when certain beliefs are so engrained in society (i.e., the expectations of the roles of men and women), then the expectation can end up ‘producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates’. There is what Butler (1999, p. xv) has described as an ‘internal essence of gender’, where we anticipate what the expectations of us as men and women are and then manufacture what we understand to be core, internal traits. However, they are often actually culturally ingrained beliefs that we internalise in our body through the repetition of thoughts and actions (Butler, 1999, p. xv). These influence the way we act in various environments depending on our own predicted expectations of our gender.

Gendered behaviours can be fluid depending on what is required at any point in time. Schoch (2013b, p. 102) found that participants of her study conformed to the expectations male
colleagues had of their behaviour. Rather than suffering under the gendered stereotypes, women took advantage of these roles and used it to benefit them. According to Schoch (2013b, p. 108), although it was not a stance against consistent gendered stereotypes or the male dominated workplace, female journalists believed conforming to male expectations of their behaviour allowed them to work in an efficient manner.

Similar to the studies above, in their research on how women practice leadership in sporting situations, Brown and Light (2012, p. 194) found that women were also fluid in their gendered practices, discussing feminine values but adopting masculine traits when required. The current study is both similar and conflicting to these results, as women often shared hesitancy with preaching feminine values and beliefs, but many did justify their own ‘gendered’ characteristics, whether they were traditionally feminine or masculine practices. Fiona (24, Umpire) is one such participant, celebrating her traditional masculine traits (by stating that she has played cricket and football) but reinforcing that she is still feminine as well (stating she likes wearing dresses).

Women claiming they are ‘more approachable’; ‘more organised’; ‘empathetic’ and ‘nurturing’ (all descriptions from the current research) suggests that males do not necessarily carry such traits. In contrast, women claiming they ‘have a strong personality’; are ‘tomboy-ish’; ‘one of the boys’; or ‘will stand up for myself’ implies that these are masculine characteristics that women carry that allow them to fit in to the male dominated environment of Australian rules football. As Adriaanse and Schofield (2013, p. 509) state, ‘[the] gendered hierarchy is fundamentally consensual’ when women are conforming to other gender roles or the norm when necessary. The belief that women are fitting in or not conforming to certain roles highlights the impact of gender role theory and role congruity theory, in which traits, characteristics and actions are assigned and expected based on gender, including in leadership positions in male dominated sports (see Burton et al., 2011; Eagly & Karau, 2002; and Joseph & Anderson, 2016).
In their research, Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 412) bring to light the concepts of ‘gender neutrality’, ‘gender normalcy’ and ‘gender passivity’. According to their research, women attempted to act in a manner they believed to be gender neutral, whereby the differences between men and women were not a factor in their workplace (even though they were noticed) (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 408). However, it was found that the ‘gender neutral’ behaviours that women attempted to adopt in the workplace favoured traditional masculinity. In an additional study by Knoppers (2011, as cited in Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 412), it was found that women believed certain traits such as leading, teamwork and making tough decisions to be gender neutral, but only based on their experiences within male sport. Bella (34, Media) fits this profile (perhaps subconsciously) in the current research, by simultaneously listing masculine traits she believes she carries, though explaining that women are the most effective media personnel due to their feminine characteristics and stating ‘… do I have any qualities that I think would help? Yeah I do but I don’t think they’re gender specific’. Sheppard and Aquino (2017, p. 696) explain that often this gender stereotyping can happen indirectly, when individuals can openly share their perspective about gendered behaviour in the workplace, but be unaware that they behave in an inherently different manner to the one they think they observe. This creates a level of ambiguity surrounding females in a male dominated workplace, whereby the mix of perceived expectations and actions of females is complicated and often difficult to characterise.

For Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 409) gender normalcy was also evident within board and journalism environments, where both men and women viewed the skewed gender ratios in sport environments as normal (that is, it was normal for a woman to be the sole female on a sport board). Therefore participants felt there was no need to alter the environment (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 409). This passivity was justified by suggesting that the
ratios were skewed because women were simply not interested in being on sports boards or in sports journalism (or else they would be there) (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 409).

This passivity and acceptance of such a culture means that the environment is not challenged and the masculine standards of the environment are maintained as ‘the norm’ (Welford, 2011, p. 367). Women are at times working to fit into the culture rather than challenging masculine ideals that do not wholly accept females in leadership positions. This means that the traditional culture (in which little has changed) does not evolve into one where women are a natural fit, because the traditional gender dichotomy is upheld (Welford, 2011, p. 372). As a result, gendered practices, including acts of sexism, remain prevalent in such environments, acting as a barrier to the progression of females within male dominated sports such as Australian rules football.

5.3.4. Sexism

When sexism is discussed in reference to women in masculine environments, according to Whisenant et al. (2015, p. 478), often it is viewed as harsh, open criticism of females where they are seen as inferior or seen to be trying to control men. As Whisenant et al. (2015, p. 478) explain, ‘sexism is driven by beliefs that women are inferior, less valuable, or less competent in comparison to men’. Often it arises when the beliefs about traditional gender roles are challenged (Gutsell & Remedios, 2016, p. 29). Two participants from the current research mentioned their concerns that assertive, confident and leader-like women are seen as ‘bitches’. Milly (55, FD) stated ‘everybody always thinks that with a strong woman that she’s a bitch’, while Lauren was a bit more critical of the stereotype, explaining:

If I was assertive and I was male I don’t think that would be the case, and it upsets me to say that. It was really strange going into an environment where if you were assertive and a female then you were obviously just being a bitch (Lauren, 26, Board).
Whilst few women in the current study spoke outright about facing overt sexism in the workplace, it became evident that there were a number of actions that fall under the banner of sexism, regardless of whether they were recognised (or brushed aside) by participants. Circumstances where women were treated differently to men were evident (e.g., men apologising to women after swearing in front of them). As Anya (27, FD) explained, ‘I think lower level there’s little things that still go on and sometimes you just can’t change those cultural biases in people’. Lisa (31, Umpire) expressed concerns when discussing her experience as a female umpire, simply stating ‘I get asked if I know the game, just because I’m a chick. It’s just so frustrating’.

These situations, in which it may appear uncertain as to whether sexism was present, has been found in previous research as well. Whisenant et al. (2015, pp. 478-479) and Kaskan and Ho (2016, p. 276) refer to the terms ‘ambivalent sexism’ and ‘microaggressions’ respectively in their research in relation to subconscious sexism that can take place in masculine sporting environments. Actions of sexism that can be viewed as ambivalent or benign are often excused, as it may be viewed as nonthreatening, or even men trying to be nice to females. Microaggressions are often subtle and sometimes subconscious acts of sexism, such as microinvalidations, where the misdemeanour is viewed as minor and therefore often let go by the victim. Kaskan and Ho (2016, p. 277) argue that microaggressions towards women are ‘both rampant and public in the sports arena’. However, often the perpetrator may not be consciously aware that they are doing something wrong. The verbal, nonverbal or environmental signals are often indirect, subconscious or not intended to offend (Kaskan & Ho, 2016, p. 276). However, whether the intent to demean is there or not, Willson et al. (2017, p. 1712) argue that microaggressions ‘undermine, marginalize, and diminish women’s sporting prowess and ability through the implicit negative assumptions embedded’.
Kaskan and Ho (2016, p. 280) explain that women who face microaggressions due to their role in the masculine domain of sport ‘may experience far more stress than their male counterparts who mostly contend with the pressures of the sport itself’. Kaskan and Ho (2016, p. 277) also suggest that because of their subtle nature, often the victim of microaggressions doubt their own perceptions of what has occurred and may be labeled as sensitive or dramatic if they are to raise their concerns. Within the current research, Lisa spoke in detail about not raising concerns about such behaviour:

I think a lot of the time you’ve got to go along with the culture and choose your battles. Because you know, as a feminist and I guess like someone who is aware of how gender operates, you see things happening on the track and you're like ‘that is so not okay’, but it’s so common that you’ve just gotta go along with it or just kind of let it slide. And it’s not like another workplace I guess (Lisa, 31, Umpire).

A further consequence of being subjected to constant microaggressions is that it can alter a person’s (the victim’s) behaviour. Sue (2010, as cited in Kaskan & Ho, 2016, p. 281) explains that individuals can eventually ‘adopt behaviour that is consistent with cultural norms’, also known as ‘forced compliance’. Cultural norms suggest that sport is inherently masculine and women should remain feminine. Therefore, often women are rewarded for conforming to traditional gender expectations and judged if they do not fit the stereotype (Whisenant et al., 2015, p. 479).

Also in relation to conforming to gendered stereotypes is the notion of infantalisation. As explored by Litchfield (2015, p. 14), the language used around females in sport ‘reinforces the existing gender-based status difference’ between males and females. In sport, this involves inferring that women are the inferior sex in comparison to men. Infantalisation can be recognised as the use of labels such as ‘girl’, ‘young lady’ or, for female athletes, using their first name rather than the common practice of addressing athletes by their surname (Litchfield, 2015, p. 14; Wensing & Bruce, 2003, p. 388). For women in the current study who are not athletes, but off
field employees in Australian rules football, a number of instances of infantalisation were recognised. As outlined in the results, a number of participants mentioned that male colleagues would apologise after swearing and Brittany (22, FD) mentioned that male colleagues (eventually) found it ‘cool that a girl can talk footy’. This comparison to males can demean the achievements of women by believing that their traits, capabilities and success are secondary to those of men (Wensing & Bruce, 2003, p. 388).

Society is seemingly more outspoken and there is more backlash against overt acts of sexism within Australian rules football (and other sports in Australia – see “Chris Gayle furore,” 2016; Aubusson & Pierik, 2015). However, sexism is still an issue within sport, whether subconscious or otherwise and can create barriers for females in their employment or promotion within Australian rules football ranks. Another factor believed to impact the progression of females in masculine sports environments is the thought that females create barriers for themselves and other women in the workplace.

5.3.5. Females as barriers

Within the current research, there were various references to barriers that were suggested to be caused by females themselves. Such barriers included a lack of confidence and self-belief; raising children; and women being unsupportive of other women. In their research regarding gender dynamics on Australian NSO boards, Adriaanse and Schofield (2013, p. 509), found that a number of (male) managers attributed barriers women face in sport to women themselves. While they asked the opinions of males regarding barriers females face in masculine sporting environments (because males were in the director positions), some of the responses or reasons shared are similar to the current study. Adriaanse and Schofield (2013, p. 509) found that the male directors believed females themselves created barriers in their own progression through
‘their individual choices, priorities and competencies, all of which were beyond the control of the organisation’.

While not a targeted attack on the abilities of females, the impact that having a family can have on the career of females was mentioned repeatedly. There is a belief that women cannot juggle a family and a leadership position due to the high demands of both roles. Many comments regarding this topic referred to the ‘reality’ of the situation. Madeline believed that this was the case not just in her workplace, but also across other domains:

The reality is that it’s difficult. There’s a great saying, you can have it all, just not all at once. I truly believe that. You can’t be a mother of four and have the highest position in the land all at the same time. It doesn’t work. I mean, it’s great to have this idealistic view that it can but I just don’t think you can give everything a hundred per cent if you’re doing everything at the same time (Madeline, 38, Media).

Stephanie also articulated her thoughts succinctly about the matter:

It’s just reality. That is what happens. The female has the child. They go on maternity leave. There’s a break in the career. They are often the one who is then going back on a part time basis or requiring flexibility or the one that picks up the child when the child is sick. I think that’s reality and I do think it’s hard for women to break through that (Stephanie, 40, Finance).

Allison suggested that the nature of the workplace was not particularly accommodating for women with young families and found that to be a barrier she may face in coming years:

There is no one in a position above me who has young children, and they are doing it part-time or there are … females in management positions above me and they all have older children. That’s where I’ll find it hard to progress (Allison, 29, Media).

Although women do carry and birth children, the primary care role falls to the majority of mothers as well, irrespective of their employment status (Mayrhofer et al., 2008, p. 295). Therefore, despite men also having families, the argument that they cannot ‘have it all’ seemingly does not apply. Having a family is not a factor that greatly impedes men in their
careers, despite men having the chance to be primary carer of their children. As Gutsell and Remedios (2016, p. 28) explain, ‘women may link child-raising intentions to occupational pursuits regardless of whether such intentions are made salient’. They suggest that a woman’s intention to have children in the future can impact on decisions they make about their present career (Gutsell & Remedios, 2016, p. 29). Mayrhofer et al. (2008, p. 298) explain that a person’s family status can impact on their work experience. For mothers navigating work in a male dominated environment with skewed working hours (such as weekend and late night work, as in Australian rules football), it can make the work-life balance more difficult and perhaps deter females from taking on leadership positions.

Another reason for the lack of females in leadership positions included the idea that females have issues with, or are lacking in confidence. Meaghan acknowledged that although she herself was not short of confidence, she believed that other females could be:

Yeah, definitely a confidence issue. I’m a bit different because I am what I am. But for a lot of other women they are not confident to speak up. They’re not confident to make that contribution that could make a huge difference (Meaghan, Board).

Cooper (2018, pp. 80-81) found that participants believed that having confidence in themselves would benefit their employment in managerial positions in Australian rules football. One participant said ‘it’s important to be comfortable with yourself as a woman working in a male dominated environment’, believing that confidence would lead to others valuing them and showing them respect (cited in Cooper, 2018, p. 97). However, when the concept of women lacking confidence is used to explain why more women are not employed in leadership positions, it oversimplifies the issue and overlooks the systemic barriers and bias that is evident in many workplaces (Fox, 2017, p. 163). Rather, it places the blame back on females to correct and improve their own skills and behaviour, by labelling them as the reason for their own lack of progression (Fox, 2017, p. 3).
Similarly, when participants of the current study, such as Bella (34, Media) and Georgia (45, FD) bring up the notion of women being ‘unsupportive’; ‘bullies’; and unprepared to ‘work together for a common goal’, it puts the blame back on females for their lack of progression in a male dominated environment. In their research, Hardin and Shain (2009, p. 639) also mentioned that participants of their study viewed other women as competition, or viewed them with suspicion. There is a notion of ‘queen bee syndrome’ that circulates amongst workplaces with strong female leaders. The ‘queen bee’ syndrome is described as ‘a woman in a position of authority in a male dominated environment who treats subordinates more critically if they are female’ (“Queen bees,” 2018). It may also be the case that a matter of circumstance can create ‘queen bee’ behaviour, particularly when the opportunities for success can appear few and far between (Khazan, 2017). Fox (2017, pp. 170, 177), while acknowledging that some females can be tougher on other women, dismisses the perception that women are ‘predisposed’ to treating other women as competition (e.g., treating them poorly), especially if vying for similar roles. Sheppard and Aquino (2017, p. 692) highlight that the media perpetuates the notion of women preventing the progress of women. Khazan (2017) argues that ‘the term queen bee sometimes gets flung at women who are just trying to do their job’ or alternatively, by misogynists, who wish to paint females in a negative light and misrepresent the term.

The key points that Adriaanse and Schofield (2016, p. 509) highlight are that the way women view their own abilities, the choices they make regarding family and how they feel they fit in the environment are all directly related to the organisation’s culture and the way they view women within their ranks. Women have often made decisions on the premise that society does not value them as highly in comparison to males. Women may doubt their abilities because society has taught them that they are inferior to men. Often workplaces are unforgiving when it comes to flexibility with raising children. Sport, as a traditionally masculine environment is historically a place where women have not belonged (especially male team sports). Therefore,
Fox (2017, p. 3) argues that females cannot be both the problem and the solution when they are the marginalised, minority group with little power in decision making:

Many commentators fail to acknowledge that the lack of confidence so loudly hailed as the culprit here is actually the result of the bias and discrimination woven into the attitudes and assumptions women face every day, year in and year out. Not the cause of it (Fox, 2017, p. 165).

The assumptions made about females and the biases they face in day-to-day life (including in a male dominated sport setting) can make it difficult for females to speak out about the problems they may be facing in their workplace. It may also be the case that they feel grateful to be in a position that is not often held by a female and therefore they may be hesitant to speak out in fear of creating tension in the workplace and jeopardising their position. If females are hesitant in speaking up, it can lead to a lack of discussion on issues such as gender equality within workplaces, particularly in male dominated environments.

5.4. Reluctance to advocate for gender equality

Gender equality can be defined as ‘the term used in international public policy in reference to advancing equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men at all levels across a wide range of arenas’ (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013, p. 499). In reference to the current research on Australian rules football, the question of gender equality refers to whether the sport is inclusive and encouraging of females in the same manner it is of males and if it provides females with the same opportunities as males (and more specifically, in leadership positions in the sport). Given that Australian rules football is a male dominated environment, females in the current study who have some influence within this male dominated environment were asked about their thoughts and actions with regard to encouraging gender equality within their workplace.
The reluctance of a number of participants of this study to act as advocates for gender equality was an unexpected outcome of this research. There is little literature surrounding the ways in which women have spoken out about the issue of gender equality specifically in sport and the ways in which women challenge the domain by speaking out about being a female in male dominated sport. It is suspected that this reluctance amongst the current group of participants (acknowledging that not all of them were hesitant to speak up in support of women) may come down to a number of factors, including the stigma surrounding feminism, a fear of jeopardising their position and the feeling that they do not need to advocate given their positive experiences in the sport. These factors, as well as the impact inaction in this space may have on the sport, are discussed below.

5.4.1. The stigma around feminism – ‘I don’t need feminism’

Firstly, there is a certain stigma around the word ‘feminism’ and being a ‘feminist’. Baumgardner and Richards (2010, p. 49) explain that there is confusion about what feminism is and what it has been. Often the word feminist has negative connotations and carries certain stereotypes where women are painted in a negative light. Hogeland (2000, p. 17) explains that the term feminism has been ‘demonized’. Despite the progress that society has seen when it comes to the rights of women (as highlighted in Chapter Two), for some, the stereotype of a feminist is an angry, humourless women of the sisterhood who does not shave, hates the colour pink and hates men (Kaplan, 2016, p. 706). Therefore, women may be reluctant to put their hand up and say they are feminist; or they may fear being labelled as a feminist if they vocally advocate for equality within their heavily male dominated workplace. In her speech during a TEDWomen talk (Gay, 2015, May), Roxane Gay, a self-appointed ‘bad feminist’ (in comparison to the negative stereotype), stated ‘too many women … are afraid to be labeled as feminist, for fear of what that label means, for fear of being unable to live up to unrealistic expectations’.
In the current research, Jane (59, FD) said she was an advocate for gender equality, ‘quietly, I suppose’ and Anya (27, FD) was ‘not particularly passionate’ about getting more women involved. Georgia (45, Board) explained that she never saw herself as a feminist and Bella (34, Media) explained that ‘it’s hard to want to be a trailblazer because you’re just the woman who complains’. Emily (33, FD) explained that while being an advocate for people ‘doing a good job in their roles’ [she’s] ‘not all feminist’.

Kian and Hardin (2009, p. 189) discuss the idea of people having a fear of feminism. As explained by Baumgardner (2016, p. 703), often people hesitate, using terms such as ‘I’m not a feminist, but …’ or ‘I am a feminist, but …’. Hogeland (2000, p. 18) suggests that a fear of feminism is not so much a fear of gender, but really a fear of politics. Kian and Hardin (2009, p. 189) explain that there is a view that ‘sport and feminism are seen as incompatible’ due to the heavily masculine culture of sport. They found that in some cases, female journalism editors preferred not to bring discussions of feminism into their work and preferred to distance themselves from the women’s movement, putting up a resistance to taking a political stance on women’s issues in sport. In addition to the uncertainty surrounding feminism, is the more recent ‘trend’ or practice in which women are often speaking out about not ‘needing’ feminism. This perhaps links in with a fear of politics, given that females present in past ‘waves’ of feminism have had to fight for their rights regarding political agendas, such as the right to vote, own land and the right over their own bodies (Sanders, 2006, pp. 20-21).

Amongst the current data, as outlined in the results, some participants were uncomfortable with the concept of openly advocating for gender equality, highlighting that their positive experiences meant they did not feel the ‘need to fight for everyone else’ (Allison, 29, Media). Pearl (30, Board) explained that she never felt like she needed to justify her position within the Australian rules football industry and therefore gender equality was not something she felt she
needed ‘to promote or speak out about’. Both of these comments can be linked with the notion of believing they do not ‘need’ feminism.

Contemporarily, it is recognised that women have different needs and experiences to women of past generations, including more freedom across various sectors of society. As Budgeon (2011a, p. 10) states, ‘the “modernization” of gender relations means that equality and women’s empowerment have become accepted in theory, if not consistently in practice, as a social good’. However, Chananie-Hill et al. (2012, p. 35) explain that antifeminism and feminine resistance (such as social media pages dedicated to antifeminism, including “Men and women against feminism” (2016) and “I Don’t Need Feminism” (2013)) often focuses on distancing oneself from feminism and mocking established gender stereotypes, rather than being critical of and challenging societal and structural inequalities between men and women that still exist. Budgeon (2011b, p. 29) discusses the concept of postfeminism disconnecting women from activism. The recognition that females are individuals, empowered and in Western society, have the ability to choose education, employment and relationships, has arguably removed the desire to challenge against female oppression as a common group, as women now stand for themselves as individuals (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 11; Budgeon, 2011b, p. 29). Therefore, when women get on the Internet with their poster paper with written descriptions of why they ‘don’t need feminism because …’, in summary, it appears they are arguing ‘who needs feminism now that women have it so good?’ (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 11).

In contrast to women who feel empowered enough to speak out, are women who may be afraid to speak up. This may arise from a fear of jeopardising their livelihood and more specifically their reputation at work (such as in masculine sporting spaces). Speaking up in a male dominated environment may be particularly difficult for females, considering that often
males in leadership positions can hold contrasting views regarding the abilities of females in a male dominated culture and may wish for the environment to stay the same.

5.4.2. Fear of ‘rocking the boat’

Due to the Australian rules football environment being male dominated, females in leadership roles may fear that their jobs may be jeopardised if they speak up about issues of gender. This could particularly be the case when they suspect they are outnumbered in the support they would receive, or if the men who hold hierarchical power over them disagree with their views. Therefore, they may not want to ‘rock the boat’ or put their employers offside by questioning the environment they are working in. At times, especially if they are personally satisfied in their roles, they may not feel the desire to or want to risk their position to speak out about the gender imbalances in the workplace.

As stated in the results, Bella (34, Media) explicitly stated that she would choose her career over speaking out if it meant her career would be jeopardised. Lisa (31, Umpire) shared many anecdotes about negative experiences (mainly microaggressions) that she had suffered as a female umpire, some of which nearly brought her to tears. Yet, at the end of the interview, she stated:

Probably I feel bad for saying how bad things were, they’re not really that bad … I feel like I’ve given a really bad picture of the environment. It’s actually not that bad. I think, overall, the environment for me has been good, especially at training has been good (Lisa, 31, Umpire).

Similarly, Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 412) describe the attitudes and behaviours of female board members in their study. Women did not want to disturb the way their board operated and chose to adopt a masculine or even an ‘invisible’ stance to ensure they did not cause a stir. It was stated that these women were reluctant to raise women’s issues and instead made it clear that they were grateful for their position. Pippos (2017, p. 142) believes that
women who raise gendered issues in their workplace may be accused of ‘playing the gender card’ and ‘vilified by colleagues, competitors and the media’, particularly in team sport, where the sense of not wanting to rock the boat is pertinent (Pippos, 2017, p. 143). Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 412) reflect on one participant in their research who was ‘not prepared to fight even though she had a feeling she needed to do so in order to effect change’. They also described how participants admitted to taking little responsibility for changing gender ratios and rather engaged in what they labeled ‘practices of gender passivity’ (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 412). In their research, participants conceded that gender did impact on their role at times and they would prefer a more balanced workplace. Yet women did not actively speak up for change. Pippos (2017, p. 135) explains that concerns over what the reaction will be and a desire to simply fit in and ‘get by’ makes speaking up about uncomfortable topics more difficult. Therefore, often the pros and cons are weighed up and the risk of speaking up assessed before one voices their concern (Pippos, 2017, p. 135).

Hughes (1997, p. 25) suggested that perhaps females are not stepping up into vocal advocacy roles because women are not traditionally socialised to be leaders. Pippos (2017, p. 141) hypothesizes that many women who become leaders in male dominated fields certainly do not want to fail. Women may be reluctant to acknowledge the power that they hold or may not want to risk compromising that power by making others around them uncomfortable with frank conversations, which could change the long-held culture of male dominated sport, including Australian rules football.

Where these results differ from the current research is that it appears that the gender passivity of some participants was not always a conscious decision. Rather, not all participants felt that their gender impacted on their work environments. Therefore they felt no desire or need to speak up, as they were happy and comfortable in their workplace. Participants such as
Stephanie and Leanne explained that their respective work environments were really progressive:

I think the [workplace] is quite outstanding in that space. I really do. I feel like … it’s not an issue for [the board and management] if someone has got kids or they’re female or they’re male. It’s very much if you can do the job that’s great (Stephanie, 40, Finance).

Leanne (24, FD) simply described her workplace environment and atmosphere as ‘really, really good’. It must be acknowledged that the reluctance to advocate for gender equality can stem from these participants having a genuinely positive experience in their work environment in Australian rules football. Therefore these women genuinely believe that they are treated equally and do not face barriers. Budgeon (2011a, p. 9) explains that within modern society, women are born with and into privileges that women have not historically had. If women are exposed to positive individual experiences, they may not believe they need to actively advocate for gender equality because they themselves are not suffering at the hands of unequal gendered practices. Additionally, from a third wave feminism perspective, women are more often viewing themselves as powerful, capable, entitled and confident (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 9). Therefore, the means and drive behind more modern forms of feminism does not necessarily reflect, adopt or find relevance with the feminisms of the past; as such, the advocacy role is perhaps not so obviously needed.

The positive experiences of females may, in individual circumstances, be linked to their conforming to the gendered expectations of the workplace. Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 412) suggest that women who define themselves and their everyday practices by their masculine traits might not relate as strongly with femininity and feminism and therefore do not perceive themselves to be suitable advocates. Hoeber (2008, p. 262) also mentioned that research shows that women who ‘recognise their secondary status and gender inequities indicated they had not personally experienced discrimination’. However, the question can be asked, if they have not faced any barriers, is this because they have accepted (and therefore do not challenge) their
secondary status?

5.4.3. Failing to act does not change culture

If women are not acknowledging or experiencing barriers within their employment within the male dominated environment of Australian rules football, it may be due to a number of factors. Females can experience a genuinely positive environment in their workplace. Another factor may be that they are happy to conform to the culture or are not challenging for leadership positions, so therefore they are not subjected to gender bias. Additionally, some women may experience gendered barriers, but be fearful of losing their position so they do not speak up. Cunningham (2014, p. 3) explains that regardless of the reason, ‘when we are aware of injustice and fail to act, we are complicit in its perpetuation’.

This may appear an insensitive statement in the current context, given that sole responsibility does not lie with women when advocating for gender equality, particularly because women are the minority in leadership positions in male dominated sports such as Australian rules football. It has not been ignored that amongst the positive experiences, women face barriers, hurdles and injustices, which can make it difficult for them to speak up and challenge the masculine environment or push for further change. However, participants of this current study and women in leadership positions in male dominated sports worldwide, may be in roles where they may be able to have some sort of influence in their environment to effect change. Jane (59, FD) was involved with Australian rules football through various eras and changes to the game and acknowledged that whilst it is difficult, speaking up is necessary, stating ‘sometimes there is a fair degree of bravery involved in head butting and I could have walked away from this industry probably three years ago’. As Gay (2015, May) suggests, ‘we can commit these small acts of bravery and hope that our choices trickle up to those people in power’. Women (and men) in positions of influence can be program drivers. Allison (29, Media) stated that the glass ceiling
was more a result of the nature of the workplace, rather than the people in the workplace. It needs to be considered that the people who run the workplace have a responsibility to dismantle the glass ceiling and act as agents of change, even if they were not directly responsible for placing barriers in front of women in the first place.

The AFL has recently (2017) updated its Respect and Responsibility Policy. Some notable commitments outlined in the policy include ‘promoting gender equality and ensuring all women participate in the AFL at all levels and in every capacity’; ‘promoting a safe and inclusive environment for all, including women and girls within the AFL industry’; ‘promoting a workplace culture that is inclusive regardless of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status’; and ‘partnering with government and appropriate organisations to deliver programs and education designed to promote gender equality and deliver improved understanding of inclusion and real change’ (Australian Football League, 2017, p. 5). As Ryan (2017), a journalist for Melbourne newspaper The Age, stated:

The AFL will be quick to change the external markers that show their brand in a positive manner, but the real challenge … lies in internal shifts that make an industry a place where women feel valued, supported and able to progress as far as their talents and work allow them.

The term ‘real change’ is pertinent in this situation. Given the skepticism surrounding the AFL’s push for gender equality (in that it may be tokenistic or a phase), the term ‘real change’ indicates that the AFL is going to make true efforts in addressing the issue of gender inequality within its environment and culture. That means putting the first point (‘promoting gender equality and ensuring all women participate in the AFL’) into full effect and really ensuring that females are being given the best opportunity possible to be a part of the sport ‘at all levels and in every capacity’ (Australian Football League, 2017, p. 5).
As Dyson et al. (2010, p. 11) explain, empowering individuals by providing them with the skills and knowledge to effect change is important. While the culture of a heavily masculine environment can be intimidating, women (and men) can make small changes by speaking up against gendered practices in their workplaces (no matter if the issues are overt or subliminal) and they can act as advocates for gender equality (without the need to fit the profile of an angry, bra-burning, man-hating feminist). 25

One challenge for females in leadership positions is that they are more often than not still answering to a male majority that is the patriarchy, particularly in male dominated sports such as Australian rules football. Societal expectations of males and females and the flow on effect into sport means that the expectations of males and females within sport are different. Often, women are underestimated in positions of leadership and are required to work harder for the same reward, or have connections in workplaces to get ahead of their male counterparts. This will be explored below in the following section.

5.5. Females held to higher standards

‘Sporting social capital’ as coined by Joseph and Anderson (2016, p. 587) benefits men in team sports situations as they have been socialised into such sports in a way women have not. This is because women have not historically (or until recently) had the opportunity to play male dominated team sports and therefore the playing career as a precursor to employment is not a step in for women. Bella (34, Media) specifically mentioned that she struggled with building her credibility because she had not played Australian rules football before. As Joseph and Anderson (2016, p. 587) explain, jobs within masculine sporting codes are seemingly ready-made ‘for the boys’. Often it is the case that a successful career on field can lead to a career in other areas of sport, regardless of an individual’s education levels in media, coaching or wherever they may

25 The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that men must be encouraged to play a positive role in fostering gender equality as well (WHO, 2010, p. 11).
work post-athletic career.

In addition to this seemingly effortless pathway for men into leadership positions in masculine sports, is the assumption that men automatically have the necessary knowledge at their time of employment. For women however, it is often the case that they have to extensively prove themselves before they are considered for the same roles (Fox, 2017, p. 133). Bella (34, Media) expressed her thoughts on the matter, explaining: ‘I often feel like women have to be good at their jobs and prove themselves, they have to do both, whereas men just have to walk in and people think they’re good at their jobs’. Even women who have played or had previous experience with female team sports are often deemed to not have the right experiences because women’s sport does not compare to men’s sport with regard to knowledge, ability and power (Joseph & Anderson, 2016, p. 595). Kelly explained:

I think there’s a glass ceiling in the employment in the AFL, yeah. And I’ve seen a number of very, very good women who in my opinion … they seem reluctant to appoint. And I’m not talking about the clubs, because clubs are different, I’m talking about the actual AFL. Reluctant to appoint women or promote women from within. They do promote men within, but they’re reluctant to promote women within and they’re more likely to bring a woman in from outside who has already demonstrated that skill. So it fits with all the research on women’s employment that men tend to be employed more on potential and women on achievement (Kelly, 62, Board).

So the experiences expected of women to gain such positions is often based on unrealistic expectations in relation to a sport they (until recently) could not play. So without the natural pathways of playing or even the same opportunities for becoming educated in positions like coaching and umpiring and to an extent, the media as well, women have found other ways to get their ‘foot in the door’ of these environments. Volunteering in various sectors until they have been deemed ‘experienced enough’ for their current positions is one way some females have proven themselves in the male dominated workplace. It begs the question of whether this is a path males sometimes have to take to gain employment in the same field too. Several women in
the current study spent time volunteering in roles surrounding Australian rules football before being asked to join boards (in a voluntary capacity) or being employed within the sport.

Even within their respective roles in the masculine domain of sports, women at times still feel as though they need to continuously prove their abilities. Hardin and Whiteside (2009, p. 638) explain that the participants of their study linked this with their need to be ‘thick skinned’ and tough to avoid being pushed around and underestimated. Additionally, their participants, similar to those in the current study, attempted to ‘minimise their gendered identities’ by overachieving and making it known that they had a preference for working with men and being ‘one of the boys’ (Hardin & Whiteside, 2009, p. 637). Both of these terms, ‘proving themselves’ and ‘one of the boys’ have been used by participants of the current study in relation to their employment in Australian rules football.

A number of women in the current research have appeared to fit in with the current (masculine) culture and even believed they have not faced any barriers or faced different treatment based on their gender. However, the fact that they feel they have worked hard to prove themselves (a term that could be argued is not notably used often by men) signifies that they have not necessarily been accepted as easily as men when it comes to their abilities. Also, becoming or being ‘one of the boys’ is not indicative of an inclusive or changing culture, simply that these women have personalities or demeanors that suit the masculine environment. Perhaps this is not so much based on their abilities with their actual work, but their ability to get along with colleagues and not disrupt the culture (or both).

Expanding on the point of getting along with colleagues and not disrupting the culture, is a pertinent point that was made by various participants of the current research. Both Brittany and Bella discussed the fact that the females (and only the females) were lectured about not sleeping with male athletes at their respective workplaces. When Brittany (22, FD) spoke about women
getting a history check to ensure they have not previously had relations with players, she mentioned that she believes there is a stereotype that needs to be beaten and that females need to be careful, explaining: ‘I know other clubs [in the league], they get the female prac students in and they just sleep with the boys and get around the boys, and they have a bad image for females in clubs’. Bella shared her frustration at women being targeted for sleeping with male athletes when she believed the topic should have been addressed to the whole workplace (both males and females):

In football environments men tend to think that you’re there to engage in relationships with players so you often have to wait and prove yourself that you don’t. For example, we had a meeting that only the girls got called to, to say don’t sleep with players basically. And I remember asking the CEO at the time, I said ‘why weren’t men in that meeting, they can sleep with players too’, and he said ‘no, that’s not the issue’. It’s that women had to hear that. So things like that happened and you just found that your sex got brought up in a really unnecessary way. Men judge the women in a situation never the man. So that’s maybe an example of the masculinity (Bella, 34, Media).

These double standards evident in situations such as Bella’s reiterate that there can be differing expectations for males and females working in the same environment. These not only relate to sexist views within the workplace, but also the expectations on the education levels of males and females. This is particularly evident when it is acknowledged that males involved with male team sports often get an advantage based on their presumed knowledge of such sports.

5.5.1. Working harder - Education levels

In the current study, 25 out of 26 participants had completed or were in the process of completing some form of tertiary education. This ranged from diplomas, to Bachelor degrees, Masters degrees and PhDs in various domains (human resources, massage, teaching and more). This shares similarities with a study conducted by Claringbould and Knoppers (2007, p. 502). Their research on skewed gender ratios in sports organisations found that all participants of their study worked in a professionally paid position outside of sport, and/or had a Masters degree.
This can perhaps be a result of men being employed on potential and women on achievement. As Fox (2017, p. 133) explains, ‘men are assumed to have merit until proven otherwise and women are assumed not to have merit until proven otherwise’. Particularly as they have not had the same pathways in the sport as some men (regarding a playing career), a way in which women can prove their ability is by gaining a tertiary education.

Education levels do not only pertain to university degrees. It can also be in reference to the knowledge that females have about the sport they are working in. Not only do they often have to be academically educated, but also often they need to make it clear that they have an understanding of the sport. Madeline explained that her appointment in the media in Australian rules football resulted in her being ‘tested’ and she found a lot of people were quick to reassure others that she ‘knows her football’:

When I got this position, there were lots of articles saying they wanted to either point it out, ’don’t worry, she knows her football’, or they wanted to point out that I did have the qualifications to be [in current role]. Whereas, if I was covering a news event [in a role outside of sport], that’s not written about or questioned (Madeline, 38, Media).

Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 404) explain that ‘women have to work harder and are more limited in their influence than men’. As per the current study, not only do women often volunteer in positions to get a foot in the door, but this can also coincide with gaining an education in their field of interest. Women often have to work (or volunteer) to get the documentation and credentials to show they are capable before they are employed. It is natural in most professions that all employees have the required education. However sports employment (not all positions, but media and coaching in particular) is more lenient in that ‘jockocracy’ is present, with ex-athletes advantaged in gaining positions in the media and in the coaching ranks once their playing careers are over (Joseph & Anderson, 2016).
Additionally, Walker and Sartore-Baldwin (2013, p. 307) discuss treatment discrimination, in which individuals have ‘differential outcomes for equal work, accomplishments, or credentials’. A small number of participants mentioned that they have not faced barriers and they believe if they work hard and meet all the requirements in their pathway to their role then they are not discriminated against. However, it brings to light the question of whether they are aware that often the requirements for them to even be considered for a role may be different and stricter when compared to males.

5.5.2. Pathway and timeliness of appointment

The change in employment statuses of females in Australian rules football (i.e., more females being employed in leadership positions in particular) seems to coincide with the employment of Gillon McLachlan as AFL CEO. The majority of women interviewed had been in their current role between one and five years at the time of interview, which lines up with his appointment (“AFL's culture around women improved,” 2017). Aside from the women who have gained employment from volunteering in various roles in the lead up to their current position, there are other women who gained employment for various other reasons. These include working a high profile job outside of sport and their reputation preceding them (Madeline; Lauren; Vicky); knowing males in certain positions or having other connections in the workplace (Georgia; Milly); or even simply asking for a job with the suggestion that having a female in such a position will be a benefit to the organisation (Hayley).

These pathways to employment perhaps do not differ from other organisations outside of sport. However, it is interesting to note that some participants either asked for jobs or were even directly approached to fill positions. This can perhaps generate the question around whether these women were approached for their ability (a positive and encouraging sign for gender equality in the sport), or approached based on their gender and therefore the resulting image of
their respective workplaces. Claringbould and Knoppers (2007, p. 502) found in their research that participants felt they were employed not only for their experience within sport, but their well-paid positions outside of sport and also because of their gender. Meaghan admitted that her role came about due to her contacts:

I only got on the board because of who I knew. It wasn’t anything to do with them seeking me. If I didn’t have that contact I reckon it would have been extremely hard for me to get a position on [the board] (Meaghan, Board).

Also, Tegan describes her appointment as a ‘courageous’ decision by those in charge:

Those guys, after the relevant due diligence checks and all those things that need to occur, were prepared to take a punt on me knowing that there were safer options they could have gone with. So that is my definition of courage. And that’s worked out beautifully for both parties. But that was an unusual step to take at that point in time, and it’s one of the reasons why [the workplace] has been so successful (Tegan, 42, Board).

Cooper (2018, p. 93) too found that participants did acknowledge that within the AFL it is ‘a lot about who you know’. Sibson (2010, p. 392) found that despite the encouraging signs of women holding leadership positions, such as on boards, it did not directly mean they could hold any sort of authoritative role or impact the decision making of the board. This was due to the length of time they had been in such roles and also the history surrounding their appointment and those they shared the board with. Therefore, it may come into question whether women are truly welcome in positions where they can carry some influence, or whether they are still under the hierarchical powers of men who carry more senior roles (or have been around for longer) than they have. This may lead to questions about employment based on quotas and tokenism rather than merit.
5.5.3. Tokenism and quotas

A common question when there is a change in employment patterns in workplaces, including the employment of women in masculine sport settings, is whether the appointment was merit based or whether it was based on tokenism, affirmative action and/or company quotas. According to Welford (2011, p. 366), as women have traditionally been excluded from environments such as male dominated sports, they struggle for recognition in such areas. As they have not been given the responsibility of leadership, some women do not have role models or networks to call upon. Therefore, when women are employed in these positions it can be viewed as somewhat suspicious.

Gender targets and quotas have been implemented in workplaces in recent years to combat the unequal employment rates between males and females in areas such as sport. This is to allow for gender diversity in governance, as there is now more information and understanding around the underrepresentation of women in sport and in particular, in leadership positions in sport (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014, p. 485). Adriaanse and Schofield (2014, p. 487) explain that while both targets and quotas aim to create gender diversity within workplaces, the difference between quotas and targets are that quotas are mandatory, however targets are optional.

Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 411) and Dezso et al. (2016, pp. 98-100) have found that organisations are quite resistant to affirmative action policies. Claringbould and Knoppers (2012, p. 411) explain that board members are often quite forthright in claiming that such measures are unnecessary, or claim ignorance and a lack of knowledge to properly effect change. Fox (2017, p. 101) believes that those who argue against targets and quotas fall back on the common excuse of the gendered benchmarks sacrificing the standard of employment. Additionally, Dezso et al. (2016, p. 98) found that top management teams (not necessarily in sport, but in various organisations) were hiring the minimum number of females but resisted
employing a larger number of women, theorising that the organisations saw a single female as a symbol of success and legitimacy regarding gender equality policies, without impacting so heavily on the traditionally male leadership dynamic (Dezso et al., 2016, p. 100). ‘In consequence, the presence of a woman on a top management team reduces the likelihood that another woman occupies a position on that team’ (Dezso et al., 2016, p. 98). Therefore, women are not gaining traction in leadership positions as implicit barriers are enforced. This means that practices surrounding gender equality, such as stronger networks of women, supporting the capabilities of women and gendered screening tests during job applications, are not really improving (Dezso et al., 2016, p. 99).

In the current study, similar to studies conducted by Adriaanse and Schofield (2014) and Sibson (2010), there were mixed reactions when participants were asked about their thoughts on quotas and targets with regard to the employment of females. Laura (32, FD) was, in her own words, ‘very anti-tokenism’. Allison was strongly opposed to hiring an employee based on their gender, stating:

If someone said to me ‘I think you should hire a female or a male’ I would be really offended. So I would never hire on gender in our department. I think sometimes people will question in the football department should we have more females in there, and I’m always like you should just have whoever is the best physio at the time, or whoever is the best assistant coach and has the best credentials. Just hire them. And if they’re all males, they’re all males (Allison, 29, Media).

Emily spoke adamantly about roles being filled by the best person for the job, rather than having a focus on gender:

I think clubs and the AFL are employing … for the best person for the job. Now if that happens to be male for those roles specific, well then you can’t just go, ‘I’m going to hire a woman and hope that she does a good job’ because it’s detrimental to the position, the industry, but also the woman, themselves, as well (Emily, 33, FD).

However, some participants believed quotas are necessary given that equality is not yet evident.
As Rochelle (24, Umpire) mentioned, it’s not ‘an ideal world’ and equality has not yet ensued. Additionally, Anya believed that quotas could be an incentive for women to apply for leadership positions:

Sometimes they talk about meeting quotas on boards. It’s like alright, I’m going to apply for a board just because they have to put a female. You’d get rid of 50% of your competition that way. From that end I think it’s a really good time for women (Anya, 27, FD).

Perhaps quotas are the kick-starter to encourage workplaces (such as male dominated sport sites) to open up opportunities specifically to females and break down the masculine culture. For Adriaanse and Schofield (2014, p. 493), there is the opinion that enforcing gender quotas in workplaces is crucial to improving gender equality and the ‘division of labour and power’ in the workplace. However, there is a concern that focusing on numbers can ‘undermine the principle of merit’ and leave women feeling like they are viewed as a ‘token’ (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014, p. 487). There is also resistance to quotas as there is the view that the ‘best people’ for the position may be overlooked when the focus is specifically on females (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014, p. 494).

Additionally, simply ensuring a certain number of females are present in the workplace is not enough to create gender equality. However, this has been much the focus in recent times, equaling out the ratios of women to men or ensuring that women are placed in higher positions (Sibson, 2010, p. 383). However, a numerical value of females does not ensure that they hold influence and power in the decision making process in their workplace, which is more the focus of gender equality (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014, p. 487; Sibson, 2010, p. 383). Sibson (2010, p. 379) explains that ‘exclusionary power’ can still be at play, which can limit the impact females can have on their respective workplaces. So in order for quotas to work most efficiently in creating a better gender balance in workplaces such as male dominated team sports, they need to be used alongside other measures. These can include ensuring that those in power value gender
equality in their workplace, that women have a genuine role to play in their position and that the workplace is an inclusive and welcoming environment for females (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014, p. 495).

5.6. The experiences of female leaders in Australian rules football from a third wave feminism perspective

It must be acknowledged that since the time of this research being conducted, there have been several changes in the structure of Australian rules football at both a grassroots and national level, not least of which was the introduction of the AFLW competition. There are many positive outcomes with the introduction of women into the sport in leadership roles, as seen in the results and discussion chapters. However, as studies have previously concluded (see Cooper, 2018; Welford, 2011; and Willson et al., 2017), as the popularity of women’s football (all football codes) has grown and is heavily celebrated, particularly at a playing level, this popularity can mask some of the inequities that exist for women within sport (Welford, 2011, p. 365). One particular issue is that the AFLW competition creates more job opportunities for males within this sport alongside (and sometimes in preference to) females. Evidently, the introduction of women into a traditional male sport creates challenges to the culture and environment and the male dominance of the sport (Welford, 2011, p. 366). So, although change is being made and women are having and creating positive experiences in their respective workplaces, the culture of a male dominated sporting space will take some time to change. Therefore, there are still cultural and societal traditions at play for women in Australian rules football.

The role that feminism plays in today’s society has a greater significance in women’s lives in comparison to previous waves of feminism (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 1). As society progresses and the meanings and practices around gender relations (as well as sexuality, diversity, etc.) change, it is important that feminism adapts to modern society (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 1). The aim of third
wave feminism is to acknowledge that women in the modern era can have conflicting perspectives and identities, particularly when cultural and institutional expectations of women can become uncertain. Females are becoming aware that they can have an impact and input in the way they are represented. According to Tong (2008, p. 258), it is important to withhold judgement when responding to what women say they want, rather than coercing women into certain practices or dictating what they should want. That way, women can embrace their differences and identities in modern society where third wave feminism is embracing of individual experiences.

Acknowledging that environments such as sport can be sites of both pleasure and critique (Budgeon, 2011c, p. 280), third wave feminism offers a different theoretical approach, which challenges feminism thought in relation to sport, gender and masculinity. From a third wave feminism perspective, sport can be examined as a site of simultaneous empowerment and oppression (Litchfield, 2018, p. 4). According to Budgeon (2011a, p. 15), some modern workplace environments (including masculine sporting sites) are still using language and practices that uphold a traditional status quo (from which males benefit). However, it can be challenging to decipher the depth of empowerment and oppression faced by women in male dominated sporting environments, given that their interpretations of their work environment are influenced by their individual experiences, as well as their relationship with feminism and gender equality (Bruce, 2016, p. 370). That said, each individual’s perspectives and interpretations are valuable to the overall picture.

Using a third wave feminism lens, the environment of Australian rules football can be simultaneously empowering and oppressive for women working in leadership roles. In a more general sense, the experiences of women in the current research indicate that females in a male dominated environment (on an individual basis) felt (at times) that their gender was
inconsequential to their career. However, as recognised by Bruce (2016, p. 368), there are foundations within sport that are problematic and in Australian rules football, gendered barriers remain evident, impeding the progression of women in various leadership positions.

When breaking down the point that third wave feminism represents individual thoughts and experiences (and individual expressions of such narratives) (Chananie-Hill et al., 2012, p. 43), the current research indicates that although some women shared anecdotes of similar experiences, it is important to note that the way each participant interpreted such an experience was unique, characterised by the varying ways in which females may identify (for example; as ‘feminine’, ‘masculine’, ‘assertive’, ‘easy-going’, etc.). Despite some individual experiences involving similar scenarios (e.g., men swearing and apologising; their pathway to their current positions; or experiencing subconscious microaggressions), each individual female had their own interpretation of said experiences, which varied between them feeling empowered or oppressed. Some participants felt empowered knowing they were making a difference by bringing diversity into the sport and creating pathways for female opportunities in the future. However, some of these women also simultaneously acknowledged that they had faced barriers. For many of these women, they were one of the first females in their respective positions in the male dominated sport.

Some participants were empowered when they felt they fit into the environment, but the ‘male terrain’ of the sport also had an impact on the way in which women conducted themselves. For instance, many women demarcated their knowledge and experience into ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ traits to ascertain their benefits and contribution in a male dominated environment. As highlighted by Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018, p. 26), women can feel self-empowered by having the freedom to use their specific strengths to be successful in their career. In a male dominated sporting environment, females may feel empowered because they believe they carry masculine
traits that benefit them in their workplace, such as confidence, assertiveness and leadership. Or, they may feel empowered because they bring feminine traits such as nurturing and empathy to a heavily masculine culture. While these are the experiences of the participants, the principal researcher acknowledges that segregating ‘male traits’ and ‘female traits’ is itself an oppressive practice.

What was discovered was a clear link with third wave feminism’s recognition that females do not collectively band together for a common purpose in the same manner that women from previous ‘waves’ of feminism did. Georgia’s (45, Board) comments about females being unwilling to work together for a shared purpose and Allison’s (29, Media) reluctance toward females fighting together in support of one another are just some indications that the notion of shared experiences (Snyder, 2008, p. 184) and females being united by their ‘collective identity’ (Baily, 2013, p. 597) is not so evident amongst women working in Australian rules football. There is a perceived competition in jobs (particular in this case for females in leadership positions in Australian rules football), but there is also a change, or an addition, to the meaning of community in a technologically advanced world. This may be attributed to the individualist nature of the 21st century when looking through a third wave feminism lens. This is not to dismiss the work that is being done by both females and males to encourage the growth of females in the sport. This is simply recognising that the struggles of females are not as overt in modern society and therefore, the discussion surrounding feminism and gendered oppression is not particularly common (Budgeon, 2011a, p. 15), particularly in a traditionally male dominated environment.

It also appeared that some women did not consider the role that they could play in advocating for gender equality. This general lack of open advocacy could be a result of both the empowering and oppressive nature of the environment of Australian rules football. Females in
the current study highlighted hesitancy in advocacy both due to the success they had in their roles (i.e., a perceived lack of barriers) and their concerns about jeopardising their careers in speaking out.

It can be viewed as a positive sign for females in Australian rules football that some participants felt there was no need for them to be gender advocates. Third wave feminism recognises that second wave’s ‘women as victims’ approach (as labeled by Chananie-Hill et al., 2012, p. 34) is not necessarily suitable for modern society, given that women have increased opportunities in various areas of society that they once did not have. Sport is one aspect of society that is increasingly welcoming of females (acknowledging that forms of inclusion for women are relatively new, with more work to do). When participants share a multitude of positive experiences within Australian rules football, it is a positive sign that the sport is moving in the right direction with regard to gender equality.

Nonetheless, there are still issues within the sport with regard to the gendered environment and the inclusion of women in leadership positions. The fact that some females do not feel comfortable enough to speak out highlights the oppressive nature of the environment. Despite claiming to have positive experiences in their current workplaces, some females were hesitant to speak up about gender equality and worried that they may risk their careers or their rapport with their (most often male) superiors and colleagues. Examples such as Bella (34, Media) stating that she would not risk her career by advocating for gender equality and Allison (29, Media) being vehemently against what she saw as over the top support for women, showcases that there are issues within Australian rules football in relation to the inclusion of women in leadership positions; even despite females claiming to have had positive experiences within their own roles.

As taking a third wave feminism approach illustrates, in Australian rules football, empowerment (creating pathways, bringing diversity; hope for the future) can happen
simultaneously to oppression (institutional barriers; male terrain; sexism; conformity to gender stereotypes). Whilst not every participant experienced all of these concepts at once, some participants certainly experienced both empowerment and oppression at the same time. Women, in the male dominated culture of Australian rules football, can have positive experiences and feel empowered in their positions, but can also concurrently experience a number of barriers in their careers.

5.7. Concluding comments

While the current research showcases the experiences of just a small minority, these narratives are ones that are not often heard and it opens up discussions and further investigations into the experiences of women in leadership positions in male dominated sports. What has become evident is that there is a lack of transparency from the AFL in relation to the facts and figures surrounding women involved with the sport in positions of high influence (including employment ratios, pathways into jobs and positive and challenging experiences). Unlike in various other occupations across the country (and worldwide), there is no clear way of establishing figures and no clear indications of women on boards, coaching, or umpiring at a national and even state level. This lack of transparency needs to be addressed.

What has been made clear is that women identify their experiences in multiple ways. This is not unusual, but what needs to be acknowledged is the fact that often, particularly in male dominated spaces, there is an expectation for women to perform in both feminine and masculine ways. When women are expected to perform in both masculine and feminine manners and domains, they are open to criticism for either or both performances. This ‘performing’ is not expected of males in the same manner that it is expected of females. Males are not policed through each area of their life the way that women are, as women are performing gender around masculine power. The division needs to be negotiated so that women are not held to such
conflicting standards in masculine sporting spaces. As Ryan (2017) suggests, although it can be challenging (for organisations such as the AFL to hear from the perspectives of women – if they are negative), hearing the voices of women and about the experiences of women can accelerate those shifts in ensuring the culture of spaces such as male dominated sports are inclusive and supportive of women.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

The aims of the thesis were to: Determine the depth of gender inclusivity in relation to leadership roles within Australian rules football; to explore the experiences and opinions of women working or volunteering professionally within Australian rules football; and to determine whether the culture of Australian rules football ensures the inclusion of women at all levels of employment. The central issue within this thesis was the discrimination and barriers faced by females working or volunteering with leadership positions in Australian rules football. These aims and the topics within this paper were explored through a third wave feminism lens, with some influence from social role/role congruity theory as well. The final chapter firstly reiterates the influence third wave feminism and role congruity theory have had on this research, then addresses the specific research questions of the study. This is then followed by an acknowledgement of how the aims were met. An overview of the main findings and themes of this research is also included, as well as limitations and further recommendations.

A third wave feminism perspective has evidently been interwoven throughout this paper, particularly given the acknowledgement that participants of the current study have been able to freely interpret their own experiences and express their own opinions about their leadership roles within Australian rules football. This showcases the shift from previous waves of feminism to third wave, noting the difference between collective experiences of females to individual experiences of females (even if they may be experiencing similar situations within Australian rules football). Some notable discussion points within this thesis, which highlight the necessity of using a third wave feminism perspective, include the varying interpretations of the experiences participants have had (both positive and challenging), a certain lack of clear advocacy for gender equality (participants were not coming together as a collective to stand
against gender equality - again, both for positive and challenging reasons) and the varying opinions about gendered stereotypes and expectations and their relevance to the Australian rules football environment. There has evidently been a change in the way women are able to express themselves and interpret their own experiences. Rather than having a collective group determine whether they have been empowered or oppressed, women are being given more power to choose their own interpretations of their experiences, both in their workplace and in wider society, which is evident within this research.

Role congruity theory has also had an impact on this thesis, given its direct reference to the ways in which the traditional expectations of the role of women and the role of leaders in sport are seemingly not compatible. This theory shaped some of the interview questions and directed some of the discussion, particularly surrounding whether women felt the need to change their behaviour to fit into the traditionally masculine environment and their own interpretations of whether men and women carry different traits which may influence the ways in which they lead. This theoretical perspective seemed appropriate as a support for third wave feminism to draw comparisons between the traditional expectations of females and the ways in which participants were conforming to or changing such expectations as leaders in Australian rules football.

The first research question addressed was ‘Is the culture of Australian rules football inclusive and welcoming for women in leadership positions?’ According to participants of this research, most felt welcome in their leadership positions in Australian rules football. Most felt comfortable and felt they could progress in their role if they so wished. However, there is an underlying culture within the sport, which is heavily masculine and this, at times, had an influence over the ways in which women conducted themselves, of which they were often self-monitoring. So, while the invitation is there for women to apply for positions and join Australian rules football, there is an underlying issue of whether the sport is accommodating for all females,
or whether it is accommodating for only females who fit in to the current culture. This is explored in depth within the theme ‘Conforming to gendered stereotypes’ in Chapter Five.

The second research question was ‘To what extent have women in Australian rules football faced discrimination or exclusion based on their gender identity?’ There were various levels of discrimination and exclusion experienced by the women based on their gender, but not all participants expressed these instances as ‘discrimination’. The discrimination was not overt in most cases. Women were not necessarily barred from board meetings, key discussions in their areas or overlooked for important tasks, nor were they confronted by colleagues and abused or spoken down to in an aggressive manner. However, the discrimination faced, from the perspective of the participants, was often based on the institutional practices of Australian rules football, or the ‘nature of the sport/workplace’ carrying the assumption that females in Australian rules football are not as talented, knowledgeable or capable as men. Often the discrimination appeared to be an underestimation of ability or the sexism faced was subconscious, such as well meaning, yet demeaning comments or microaggressions.

The third research question was ‘What are the motivations for and barriers faced by women in their specific leadership roles within Australian rules football? Do the motivations to succeed in a male dominated workplace outweigh the (gender) challenges faced?’ The motivations to succeed for women were not based on their role specifically as a female in a male dominated workplace. Being a female in a masculine domain was not a particularly significant factor for a lot of participants when it came to their work ethic and motivations in their role (even though their gender played a role at times). Participants wanted to succeed and did acknowledge that, as females, they were in the minority. However, given that most of them spoke of a positive work environment, they did not have remarkably challenging work place situations where they felt they were in an inferior position due to their gender. Often, despite facing mostly
microaggressions and subtle forms of sexism at times, most participants were able to go about their day-to-day jobs without weighing up whether their career was worth the gendered challenges in the masculine domain of Australian rules football.

The final research question was ‘To what extent does Australian rules football practice gender equality?’ Australian rules football is not wholly inclusive of females, yet the sport is in the process of adjusting, progressing and changing its culture to be more inclusive of females in general, including women in leadership positions. It appears that there are some underlying issues within the culture of the sport (evident in the gender-based scandals that have occurred in recent years), yet for participants, it appeared that their day-to-day operations were not greatly inhibited due to a gendered workplace environment (even though there were examples of sexism and discrimination). It is acknowledged that men heavily outweigh women in leadership positions in Australian rules football, although in the past four to five years, women are being more openly encouraged and welcomed in the sport (at least in the experiences of these 26 participants). However, there are still barriers evident for women looking to gain leadership positions, given that there are such a small number of females employed within the sport at national and state levels. The heavily masculine culture can be adjusted and the practices and guidelines put in place can be continuously analysed to ensure that the sport is mindfully practicing gender equality, by being inclusive, supportive and encouraging of females at all levels and departments, including leadership positions.

This final point addresses the first aim of the research, ‘Determine the depth of gender inclusivity in relation to leadership roles within Australian rules football’. This aim was also addressed in multiple points across the thesis, showcased particularly in Chapter Two, in which it was highlighted that there are only a small number of females in leadership roles in Australian rules football (at state and national levels). Chapter Four also put forward evidence that there is a
lack of depth with regard to gender inclusivity in Australian rules football, given the experiences that women shared relating to a lack of females in leadership positions and their experiences with feeling as though their gender (at times) influenced their workplace environment. However, while the sport might not have a strong history of being inclusive of women, there were enough positive experiences shared by women to show that it is evident that the sport is mindful of its position and practices with regard to gender equality and inclusivity. The positive experiences participants shared in Chapter Four and the resulting theme, ‘Australian rules football as a positive work environment for females’ in Chapter Five provide evidence that there is an effort being made to be inclusive of women in Australian rules football. However, following on from the positive experiences shared by participants were the (at times, concurrent) gendered barriers that women faced in their careers.

These barriers were outlined extensively in Chapters Four and Five and acknowledge the second aim of this research, ‘To explore the experiences and opinions of women working or volunteering professionally within Australian rules football’. The thoughts and experiences shared by participants have contributed significantly to establishing an idea about the environment for women in leadership positions in Australian rules football, by learning first-hand from women working and volunteering in the environment. Their experiences have been explored in depth and are the main contribution of information to the overall thesis.

By analysing the experiences of participants, a theme emerged surrounding a hesitancy to advocate for gender equality. This lack of advocacy was explored in more depth in Chapter Five, where it was suggested that the hesitancy stemmed from both positive and challenging experiences faced by women within Australian rules football. Arising from this theme was the point that if some women are not advocating for gender equality (whether they have had positive
or challenging experiences) then the issue of gender equality may not be properly addressed. This contributes to the overall assessment of aim three, as outlined below.

The response to the third aim, ‘To determine whether the culture of Australian rules football ensures the inclusion of women at all levels of employment’ is complex and nuanced. The general answer is that the culture of Australian rules football, in its current state, is not accommodating and inclusive for women at all levels of employment. There are barriers evident for women in a variety of positions, ranging from subconscious microaggressions to barriers some women believe can inhibit their ability to progress their careers. Additionally this point can also be subjective and determined by each individual participant and their experiences (as per third wave feminism) within Australian rules football. Some participants believed they had no troubles within the traditionally male dominated environment, whereas some women have struggled to overcome barriers that were impeding their progression in the sport.

It is worth noting that the experiences shared and the findings built on in this research are representative of a small number of women. While important and helpful in growing knowledge of gendered issues within masculine sports such as Australian rules football, the findings may not represent the experiences of all women. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the environment of Australian rules football is experiencing a significant change, particularly with the introduction of the AFLW competition. With the constant change occurring within the sport in recent years, it may be fair to believe that the sport is working on improving its practice (and policy) surrounding gender inclusivity and gender equality. However, we must be mindful that individual success does not necessarily equate to group success. It can be determined (tentatively) that the inclusion of women at all levels of employment in Australian rules football is not yet ensured, but is on the way to being improved.
The AFL is an incredibly visible sporting body in Australia. Not only do people tune in to the sport for the entertainment of the game, but the sport also has the power to influence the way in which wider society acknowledges societal issues, such as gender inequality. At a national level in particular, the AFL should be leading by example when it comes to addressing gender inequality issues, starting with their own employment practices and treatment of women in leadership positions. This research will add to the existing body of literature in building knowledge about the experiences of women in leadership positions in masculine sporting spaces. In particular, it can contribute to ensuring that women are welcomed, respected and supported in the environment of Australian rules football.

6.1. Limitations and delimitations

The study is very specific in terms of exclusively interviewing women and further, only women working in leadership positions at state and national levels of Australian rules football. To get a more in-depth idea about the gender culture of sport, there is a possibility of interviewing men, or interviewing people working in other sports, not only in Australia, but worldwide. However, because this study is specifically about gender and women’s experiences in Australian rules football, only women have been interviewed. Therefore, this is a delimitation of the study.

The principal researcher was limited in who she could interview given the fact that there is only a small number of women in leadership roles in Australian rules football (when compared to the number of males employed in these positions). Therefore, the results of this study perhaps cannot be likened to the results of other studies in the same field, or it cannot be assumed that the results reflect the broad culture of sport generally, as the findings only apply specifically to Australian rules football.

A further limitation can be seen in the recruitment phase. It may be the case that some women may not want to speak about their negative experiences working for their current
employers. Some potential participants may not have wanted to be involved in this research in case they appeared to challenge the status quo. It may also be the case that given their high status jobs, females who chose not to participate in the research may not have had time to sit down for an in-depth interview. Additionally, it may have been the case that they were asked by their employer not to participate given the somewhat sensitive research topic. Overall, this means that the data from this study is not generalisable to all women working in Australian rules football. It is essentially a snap shot of the experiences of some women who work in the Australian rules football environment.

The principal researcher is aware, also, of some personal bias given her particular interest as a fan and spectator of Australian rules football. While the bias may be subconscious, the principal researcher may have analysed the data in a manner that highlights her interest in the sport and therefore, there may have been some hesitancy in recognising that the culture of the sport may carry some negative aspects. Additionally, inadvertently, the principal researcher may have made an effort to draw out some issues in favour of the research to ensure that some themes and points of discussion were evident. That said, to overcome this, the principal researcher attempted to adopt a reflexive stance in this research, where she was mindful of her position within the research. Yet, subconscious bias may still have existed.

However, to be able to interview this small percentage of women working in Australian rules football has been beneficial to this field of research, particularly given the media attention these women have received by being trailblazers in their fields. They have most likely had different experiences to other women in other sports and their unique journeys and the information they shared has benefitted this field of research.
6.2. Recommendations

6.2.1. Policy/Sport

The AFL and state leagues need to be aware of the experiences of females in their traditionally male dominated environments. It is not enough to acknowledge that sporting environments (clubs, organisations, sporting bodies, etc.) employ females within their ranks (at all or any levels). While it is encouraging and a positive sign that females are being given further responsibility in such environments, their experiences need to be explored to ensure that they are comfortable and feel respected, encouraged and supported in their role.

League and club policies (from grassroots to the national competition) should be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they are all-encompassing of the varying levels of support that women (and men) require at all levels of employment. As explained in Chapter Five, in 2017 the AFL’s Respect and Responsibility Policy was updated with clear guidelines with regard to making real change in the treatment of women and well-defined avenues to put forward grievances. However, there needs to be more transparency surrounding the current state of gender equality within the AFL. One example of this might be readily available statistics on the employment rates of men and women in all positions within the league. The national league’s plan to proactively embrace gender inclusivity can hold them accountable to their biggest audience, their supporters. If the AFL is transparent with their facts and figures in relation to gender inclusivity and gender equality, this accountability may filter down into state and grassroots leagues as well.

6.2.2. In research

Further research can be conducted specifically on the implementation of the AFLW competition (similar to Willson et al., 2017, who have made a start in this area) to see what impact the
women’s league has had on the inclusion of women in all areas of the sport (including in the male league). It is evident that there are an increasing number of women in traditionally masculine roles since the inception of the AFLW competition. For example, there are more women visible in roles such as umpiring, commentating and journalism. However this has not filtered through to all areas, evident by the lack of female head coaches in the AFLW competition at the end of 2018. This is certainly a topic that is worth exploring, particularly given the prediction by participants of the current study that the AFLW competition would be beneficial to the inclusion of women into Australian rules football.

The current study is one that could also be modified to be undertaken at a community or grassroots level, where Australian rules football is not played at an elite level. There may be similarities and differences between the ways in which the communities and organisations are inclusive of women within their Australian rules football environments. Levels of awareness of such issues and the power to change perspectives may be different at a lower, more amateur level of the sport when compared to state and national leagues. This could also be extended to analyse whether the change that is being made at a national level is filtering through to grassroots Australian rules football.

Other research exploring the perspectives of men regarding leadership positions for women in Australian rules football is also recommended. Such research could gather information about the ways in which men in leadership positions view the roles of women as leaders in the sport and assess whether there are any areas in which men in leadership positions are inhibiting or encouraging females within the sport. The experiences and opinions of female leaders in the sport could be shared with male leaders to educate male leaders about the environment and make them more mindful of how the culture of the sport can progress to be truly gender inclusive.
There is also an avenue to compare and contrast the experiences of women in leadership positions in various male dominated sports in Australia, or internationally. This will provide further depth and insight into the culture of gender equality in various sporting codes, which can contribute to improving (or when necessary, maintaining) the environment to be mindfully inclusive, welcoming, encouraging and supportive of females as leaders in traditionally male dominated sports.

There is also room for the exploration of the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘gender diversity’ in subsequent publications. The Australian rules football environment can be explored in particular with regard to how the concept of diversity (including, but not confined to, gender diversity) is applied in such an environment.
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Dear Miss/Ms/Mrs [NAME],

Thank you for taking the time to view this email.

My name is Kelsey Smith, and I am a PhD student at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, New South Wales.

I am currently in the process of conducting a study titled *An Examination of Women Working in Leadership Positions in Sport: A Case Study of Australian Rules Football.*

The aims of this study are:

- To determine the depth of gender inclusivity in relation to leadership roles with Australian rules football;
- To explore the experiences and opinions of women working professionally within Australian rules football; and
- To determine whether the culture of Australian rules football ensures the inclusion of women at all levels of employment.

Given your position within Australian rules football as [insert coach, official, manager, journalist], it would be great if you would be interested in being involved in my research.

What would your participation involve and how will it benefit you?
I have developed a list of interview questions to explore your experiences, feelings, beliefs and desires surrounding your employment and/or involvement within Australian rules football. It is anticipated that the interview will take approximately one hour. This interview can be conducted at a time and location that best suits the participant.

The data collected will go towards examining women's experiences in leadership positions within Australian rules football. Therefore, this study aims to understand your personal lived experiences in your workplace setting.

Further Information:
Further information, including the participant requirements, the benefits, possible risks, data usage, confidentiality and informed consent processes are outlined in the information statement attached to this email. Additionally, further information can be obtained from the principal researcher directly (please find my details below).

Consenting to participate in the research:
If you choose to participate in this research you will be asked to complete an informed consent form attached to this email.

How to get involved:
Please let me know if you are interested in participating in this research and sharing your experiences. You can do this by replying to this email OR by telephoning me on the phone number below. I will aim to see you at a date and location of your convenience for an interview.

I appreciate your time in reading through this email.

Kind regards,

Kelsey Smith
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Bathurst, NSW, 2795
Ph. 0417 808 646
Email. kesmith@csu.edu.au

[Insert Information Sheet attached]

[Insert Consent Form attached]
Information Statement

Project title: An Investigation of Women Working in Leadership Positions in Sport: A Case Study of Australian Rules Football

Thank you for expressing interest in this research project. Please read and retain this information sheet. Should you have any questions regarding this study, the Principal Researcher and her Supervisors may be contacted at:

PhD Student and Principal Researcher
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Purpose
The purpose of this qualitative research project is to study the gendered culture of sport, in particular Australian rules football. Specifically, this research aims to: determine the depth of gender inclusivity in relation to leadership roles with Australian rules football; to explore the experiences and opinions of women working professionally within Australian rules football; and to determine whether the culture of Australian rules football ensures the inclusion of women at all levels of employment.

Participant Requirements
All participants in the research group will be women working in leadership positions in Australian rules football, in roles that have traditionally been held by men, such as coaching and officiating, managerial, or journalism and commentary roles. Participants will be required to complete an in depth interview with the principal researcher, which will include questions surrounding age, background, marital status, education, employment, etc., as well as details of their experiences, feelings, beliefs and desires with regard to their employment in Australian rules football. Interviews will be audio taped unless the participant explicitly requests that this is not to be performed.

Benefits
This research can play a role in changing the attitude and gendered culture surrounding women and sport. By highlighting the gendered culture of Australian rules football, a sport which is very popular in Australian communities, this project can bring awareness to the ways in which women working in traditionally masculine domains have been and perhaps are still viewed and treated.

By highlighting participants’ experiences and achievements this project allows women to share their experiences on a large and somewhat public scale, which can potentially assist in changing the gendered culture of their workplaces and therefore allow them fairer opportunities in the workplace by taking a step closer to gender equality in sport.
**Possible Risks**
We do not anticipate any burdens or risks to the participants. However, there is a small chance that participants may be unintentionally identified due to the limited numbers of women working in leadership roles in Australian rules football. However, every effort will be made to protect the participants’ identity.

Participants should be aware that the results of this study will be available widely for public consumption and even though participants’ names will not be used, nor their specific position identified, the general role held by the participant within the organisation may identify them unintentionally.

It is possible that in sharing personal information during the interview, participants may experience embarrassment in sharing such information. Nevertheless, as stated in this application, participation in this study is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw at any time without adverse consequences to themselves. If at any point you feel you need counselling help related to this interview, please consider contacting *Wire Women’s Support Line* on 1300 134 130, or *Lifeline* on 12 11 14 for free counselling service for women.

**Data Usage**
It is anticipated that the data obtained from this study will address the research questions and aims. This information will essentially be used to develop a PhD thesis. Additionally, the information may be used in scholarly research articles and may be presented at national or international conferences. Reports may also be generated for interested sporting and government bodies, such as the Australian Football League.

**Confidentiality**
All participants in the research will be de-identified; therefore participants can expect confidentiality. The Principal Researcher and Supervisors will have access to the identity of participants, however these details will not be included in the publication of the research. For the duration of the study, the Principal Researcher will hold the data in a secure location on a password-protected computer. The data obtained in this study may, at some point, be used in a future study, but at all times the participants’ identity will remain confidential. Data will be kept for five years, and after this date it will be destroyed.

**Participation and Withdrawal**
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you volunteer to be involved, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions and remain in the study.

**Feedback of the results of this study to the participants**
Participants will be offered the final results of the project upon request.

**Informed consent**
By signing the consent form provided it is understood that the participant is consenting to involvement in the project. Further information about the informed consent process can be found in the ‘Informed Consent Information Sheet’.
NOTE: Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

The Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Academic Governance
Charles Sturt University
Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW 2795
Tel: (02) 6338 4628
Fax: (02) 6338 4194

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
Informed Consent Information Sheet

**Project title:** An Investigation of Women in Leadership Positions in Sport: A Case Study of Australian Rules Football

Thank you for expressing interest in this research project. Please read and sign this Informed Consent Form. Should you have any questions regarding this study, the Principal Researcher and her Supervisors may be contacted at:

**PhD Student and Principal Researcher**
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**Please note:** By signing this form below, it is understood that the participant is consenting to involvement in the project.

Your consent to participate in this research is based on the following terms;
1. The purpose of the research has been explained to me, including the potential risks and discomforts involved.
2. I have read and understood the information sheet provided to me, and have retained a copy of the information sheet provided to me.
3. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and received satisfactory responses to all questions I have asked.
4. I am content that I understand what I will be required to do as research participant.
5. I understand that interviews will be audio taped unless I explicitly request that this is not to be performed.
6. I understand that any information or personal details gathered in the course of this research about me are confidential and that neither my name nor any other identifying information will be used or published without my written permission.
7. I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time before, during, or after participating, without any penalty.
8. I am aware that Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this study. I understand that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I can contact:

**NOTE:** Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

The Executive Officer  
Human Research Ethics Committee  
Office of Academic Governance  
Charles Sturt University  
Panorama Avenue  
Bathurst NSW 2795  
Tel: (02) 6338 4628  
Fax: (02) 6338 4194

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
I, ________________________________ consent to participate in this research.

Signed ________________________________  Date ______________________
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Part One - Demographic information/General background information

- In which geographical location do you currently reside?
- What is your age?
- How would you best describe:
  - Your marital status?
  - Your sexual orientation?
  - Your education level?
  - Your family circumstances? (children, partners, care arrangements etc.)
- Can you give me a brief description of yourself – main interests, where did you grow up, background, etc.?

Part Two - General association with sport:

- Can you tell me about your experiences growing up around sport? (i.e. playing or otherwise)
- Have you always been a fan of Australian rules football?
- When did coaching/management/journalism become a career that you were interested in pursuing?

Part Three - Employment in Australian rules football

- How would you describe your ‘relationship’ with Australian rules football? (E.g., Supporter, employee only, etc.)
- Did you always want to be involved with Australian rules football specifically?
- How would you best describe your current role in Australian rules football?
- How long have you worked in this industry? Have you moved around jobs/positions within this industry (in journalism/management/umpiring OR amongst different sports and different levels of sport)?
- How has this relationship changed over the years?

**Part Four – Gendered barriers in leadership roles in sport**

- Can you tell me about the path you have taken to get to this position?

- Did you face any barriers in being employed initially? Do you believe these were gender related? Elaborate (discrimination, sexual harassment, lack of support, lack of belief in your abilities etc.)

- Have you faced barriers in progressing your career? Do you believe these are gender related? Elaborate (discrimination, sexual harassment, lack of support, lack of belief in your abilities etc.)

- If you have faced barriers breaking into the Australian rules football industry (in this ‘masculine’ role), where do you think the barriers have been created? Is there a hierarchy in which those at the top are opposing your progression? Is it gender related?

- Do you believe in the concept of a ‘glass ceiling’ for women working within Australian rules football? If so, has this culture affected you?

- Do you feel you are under the spotlight more or scrutinised more because of your gender?

- Do you feel that being a female benefits you in your role?

- Do you believe women have ‘natural’ traits that mean they act differently and work different to males?

- Have you had to change your behaviour from previous jobs in order to fit into the current (male dominated) environment?

- How do you manage a family/work/home balance in life? Explain if you encounter any difficulties with this.

- Compare your employment situation to those around you, both male and female. Can you describe some similarities and differences between the ways you are treated compared to others? Are there gender biases? Elaborate.

- Do you feel like you’ve progressed ‘far enough’ or as far as you would like to?

- What barriers do you believe you’re still facing (if any)?

- Where can you see you career progressing to in the near future?

**Part Five - Opinions about Australian rules football and gender equality**

- Do you think Australian rules football practices gender equality? How so?
- Do you think Australian rules football is working hard enough for gender equality?
- Have you seen changes being made that you believe are progressing the inclusion of women in Australian rules football?
- How do you feel about the notion of “token” appointments and quotas?
- Do you consider yourself an advocate for equality and inclusion? Is it a position you fight for or are you satisfied that you have been appointed on your merits? (The ‘best person for the job, regardless of gender’)
- What is your opinion on sport being an area that celebrates hegemonic masculinity (explain this term if necessary) and subjugates women, as athletes and employees?
- Do you believe that the creation of Women’s Australian rules football league will create more opportunities for women in leadership positions in Australian rules football?
- Where can you see the state of equality/equity in Australian rules football being in five, ten, twenty years time?
- Do you have any further comments?

Thank you for your time.