AFL Respect and Responsibility Program

Creating Safe and Inclusive Environments for Women and Girls in Australian Football

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Establishing an Environment that Promotes Women and Girls’ Safe Participation

Review of Literature

Introduction

The AFL has emphasised its position on community and social responsibility, and publicly committed to preventing violence against women. Furthermore, the AFL recognises that women are involved at all levels of community football. This work is framed by the Respect and Responsibility Policy, which is concerned with creating a safe and inclusive environment for women and girls at all levels of Australian Football. The policy calls for the development of organisational policies and procedures to ensure safe, supportive and inclusive environments for women. The policy states that the AFL will:

Foster a culture that creates an environment of equality between women and men. It is difficult to ensure that an environment of equality is generated where women are not appropriately represented at all levels of club administration, or are portrayed as sex objects or otherwise marginalised, rather than being recognised for their skills and contributions. Football clubs are an important part of Australian society and thus need to be safe, supportive and an inclusive environment for women.

... [This] moves beyond the development of formal legal compliance procedures to cultural change within the AFL, AFL clubs and community systems.

The AFL commissioned the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS) to conduct research for a project titled Creating Safe Supportive Football Club Environments for Women and Girls. There were two parts to the research, a review of literature and a series of consultations with women and men involved in AFL Victoria community football clubs.

Culture and environment change literature review

The objectives of the literature review were to:
• Review and evaluate the success of relevant initiatives adopted by other sporting and/or professional bodies that have aimed to change or establish environments that promote safe participation for women and girls.

• Review national and international evidence that can inform the development of programs in this area, including literature that explores contemporary moves to initiate cultural change within businesses or organisations.

Because an initial scan of the available literature about women’s safe inclusion in traditionally masculine areas of sport revealed limited results, a mapping exercise was undertaken to supplement the available literature. The findings of the literature review and field mapping will be merged together in this document.

The World Health Organization (WHO) [see www.who.int/en] defines violence as:

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in, or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (World Health Organisation, 2002, p.4).

Furthermore, WHO describes violence as:

An extremely complex phenomenon that has its roots in the interaction of many factors – biological, social, cultural, economic and political (p. 9).

In relation to the prevention of violence against women, there are three accepted levels of prevention activity: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary prevention aims to lessen the likelihood of gender-based violence occurring through education and attitudinal and behavioural change strategies. Secondary prevention refers to reducing opportunities for violence by supporting individuals who are at risk of perpetrating violence, and tertiary prevention centres on violence interventions and victim safety once violence has occurred (Flood, 2004).
Over the past three years, the AFL has provided training for elite players to prevent violence against women under the Respect and Responsibility Policy. Educating men about gender-based violence to bring about behavioural change is a well-established primary prevention strategy. Addressing women’s safety and inclusion in community football clubs involves issues of community, gender, power and safety. Football clubs have, in the past, mainly been the domain of men and boys, and women’s participation has been traditionally been marginal and limited to auxiliary and helping roles.

In the past thirty years society has been subject to a number of changes, not the least of which is that of the role and place of women. Women’s roles have changed, and women have made inroads in many areas not available to them in the past. Sport is one of these areas, and while not complete, a transformation has been underway in community football for some time. Women are now visible in many roles and positions – at the elite level of the AFL as commissioners, board and tribunal members, and in the media as sports reporters and commentators. In community football clubs, although more quietly and with less fanfare than at the elite level, women are involved as coaches, umpires, officials, administrators, and in a variety of other roles.

As a result of several legal challenges to restrictions on females playing Australian football, girls and women have also become involved in greater numbers as players in community clubs (Play By The Rules, 2005). For example, in 2004, in the case of Taylor, Cula-Reid and Stanyar vs Junior Football League and Football Victoria Ltd., three girls fought a ban on girls playing after they reach the age of 12. In a landmark decision, the court ruled that girls under the age of 15 can play in mixed-gender football teams, while girls older than 14 can be legally banned from playing in male Australian Rules football leagues. Despite the limitations imposed by this ruling, since that decision, the AFL has made efforts to include girls, and girls and women have become increasingly involved as players in female football teams.

In any area that is subject to organisational changes in gender roles or composition, there are a range of complex issues in play. It has been argued that competitive sport can not only strengthen, but, paradoxically, can challenge hierarchical and stereotyped gendered concepts (Elling & Knoppers, 2005). The conflict that appears to have been occasioned by women’s entry into non-traditional roles in football is apparent in community clubs. In these spaces, which have been traditionally masculine, there are likely to be both supporters and those who actively resist changes in gender composition. This
phenomenon needs to be understood and strategies to address the issues developed and implemented, if women are to enjoy safe inclusion outside their traditional roles in community football clubs.

A literature review was carried out to identify ways in which traditionally male-dominated organisations had introduced culture change to become more inclusive of women and address safety issues. The search included peer-reviewed journals, electronic databases, ‘grey’ literature such as newspapers, magazines and community reports. The aim of the literature review was to document program models, policies and guidelines and document key learning from culture change processes in sporting organisations and beyond.

While the main focus of much of the literature concerning women and sport has been on the development of women’s sports, the focus of the AFL’s Respect and Responsibility Policy is the integration of women into community football clubs. Because of the paucity of literature with this focus, thirteen key informant interviews were carried out to map what has been happening in the fields of sport and beyond, concerning the integration of women into traditionally male domains.

These key informant interviews were conducted with stakeholders from sporting, local government, government and community agencies in Victoria and interstate. The aim of the individual key informant interviews was to map what was happening in organisations to make them more inclusive, safer spaces for women. The findings of the individual key informant interviews will be discussed in the literature review

**Culture Change Initiatives**

**Social Inclusion**

While physical activity contributes to overall health, to achieve a state of mental health and wellbeing, a sense of belonging and being connected to others in a meaningful way is also important. It could be argued that the focus on increasing women’s participation in individual, non-organised forms of physical activity neglects this important aspect of health for women, and that being recognised as a valued member of a group, such as a community football club, can make a significant contribution to the wellbeing of members. According to VicHealth, while the physical health benefits of participating in sport are well documented, the mental health benefits are less well known. Belonging to a sporting club provides opportunities for people to develop
friendships, interact with others from varying backgrounds, become part of a team and develop a strong sense of belonging and purpose (VicHealth, 1999).

A sense of community can be defined as ‘a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together’ (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). As discussed earlier, football clubs combine both geographic and relational aspects of community. While football clubs have traditionally been viewed as masculine territory, women are, in fact, active participants in the football community. Around half of all football fans, and 30% of football club members, are women (AFL Victoria, 2007b). In community clubs, women are also significant participants. Succession is essential for community clubs to remain dynamic – new members must continuously enter the club to ‘learn the ropes’ (as players, members, officials and administrators) and eventually replace older members as they retire. Women play an important role in this, as they bring children and young players into clubs, and stay involved as volunteers, thereby ensuring ongoing membership and future participation. The relational qualities of clubs can make an important contribution to women’s sense of belonging if they are valued as members. However, if clubs (or their members) do not value women’s participation, or actively demonstrate disregard for women and girls, particularly in non-traditional roles, they could also be detrimental to women’s health and wellbeing. While gender inequity has for a long time been seen as an issue of social justice, it can also be viewed as a significant health issue – being a valued member of a community promotes health and wellbeing, while being excluded can be harmful.

Segrave (2000) identified reasons why people participate in sport, both as players and spectators. Involvement in sport can provide an escape from daily life. Club or team membership provides a sense of community, offers camaraderie and fosters a sense of kinship. Sport is ordered and predictable, it has rules, promotes fair play and justice – simplicity not complexity – and promotes a sense of purpose and meaning, a chance to temporarily escape from one’s everyday life. Sports grounds are also often culturally significant places, celebrated as repositories of folklore and sentiment. For participants – whether players, coaches, officials or other kinds of volunteers – organised sport can foster a sense of belonging that is unlikely to be present in individual physical activity pursuits, thereby fostering social inclusion, community and a sense of belonging for those who are included.
In and through sport, people not only identify with a team, a town and/or a social group – which carry their own hegemonic or marginal norms and values – but also actively distance themselves from other groups and their assumed values (Messner & Sabo, 1990). In other words, identification with a team or location means that people feel connected to and share values they identify as particular to that group, while at the same time distancing themselves from other teams/locations and their perceived differences. Furthermore, identification with and through sport is closely related to the dominant constructed meanings attached to specific sports and groups of people (Messner & Sabo, 1990).

Sport has been described in the UK as part of the fabric of social services. The constraints and exclusions that women (among others) may experience in sport and leisure include structural factors, poor physical and social environments, poor facilities and community capacity, poor support networks, lack of transport, sexist attitudes, gender stereotyping and labelling, fears of safety and powerlessness (Collins, Henry, Houlihan, & Buller, 1999).

An Australian study examined the range of personal benefits experienced by volunteers in sporting programs, activities and events. Feelings of enjoyment, recognition and being of service to others in their volunteer roles were identified, however, a high turnover of volunteers in many sporting clubs was also noted. This study identified poor committee functioning, lack of training, and a poor social environment as some of the issues responsible for the high turnover of volunteers (Cuskelly, 1995). While the study did not deal with issues of gender, it is possible to project, because of issues such as sexism, harassment, a general sense of disregard, and lower levels of involvement, that there may be a higher turnover of female than male volunteers in community football clubs. This is clearly an area for future research, however, these issues signal that there are clear implications for involving and retaining women in volunteer roles in community football.

**Community**

A sense of community can be defined as ‘a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together’ (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Community is often seen as a geographical or territorial location – neighbourhoods, towns, cities – but another way of seeing community is as relational, that is concerned with ‘the
quality and character of human relationship, without reference to location’ (McMIIlan & Chavis, 1986). Football clubs combine both geographic and relational aspects of community, and the relational qualities of clubs are of particular importance for the inclusion of women. For women to be included as members of the football community, they must feel like they are not only tolerated, but embraced as equal participants.

Football is an important area of young men’s socialisation. It has been described as a place where they can learn to be tough, develop skills through competition, example and mutual support, and participate in a sympathetic social milieu (Boothby & Tungatt, 1978). It has also been conceived as an area that reinforces male privilege and female inferiority (Theberge, 1993). For example, a British study with 10- and 11-year-old children in primary-school settings found that the performance of masculinity through football [soccer] was used by many boys as an opportunity to prove both their knowledge of, and expertise in sport. This was demonstrated through the derision and exclusion of non-football-playing boys and of girls. Boys co-opted the game as inherently masculine, while girls’ athleticism presented a threat to male dominance. The authors of this study argue that the inclusion of girls in football must go beyond simple participation to confront gendered behavioural expectations that condone aggression and animosity and continue to connect masculinity and football without considering the effects this has on both boys and girls (Clark & Paechter, 2007).

A Canadian study described how women playing non-traditional sports were subjected to homophobic abuse – regardless of their sexual orientation (Lenskyj, 1990). For years women have been dissuaded from playing sport that is seen as the domain of men through the use of slurs about their sexual orientation (Hillier, 2006). In response to the fear of homophobic accusations, some women regulate their own behaviour by not stepping outside traditional feminine roles (Blinde & Taub, 1992). Conversely, it has been reported that sport can provide a potential safe space for young gay women (Hillier, 2006). Hillier’s study of same-sex-attracted young women who play Australian football found that football not only gave them the opportunity to be strong and feel powerful, it also gave them a place in which they belonged and felt comfortable.

Spaces such as community football clubs continue to be regulated as masculine and heterosexual by virtue of tradition (Clark & Paechter, 2007).
Just as community is relational, so is power. To change traditional assumptions, issues of gender and power must be addressed in ways that do not alienate men. Rather, any intervention must stress the gains to be achieved from opening clubs to a broader membership, and there is evidence apparent in the research phase of this project that this kind of shift has been underway for some time in community football clubs.

**Community Development**

Community development is a strategy used in the health and welfare sectors to promote health and assist communities to come together for collective gain and positive outcomes. The United Nations (1963, p. 4) defined community development as:

> The process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of the governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities into the life of the nation, and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress. This complex of processes is, therefore, made up of two essential elements: the participation by the people themselves in efforts to improve their level of living, with as much reliance as possible on their own initiative; and the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiative, self-help and mutual help and make these more effective. It is expressed in programmes designed to achieve a wide variety of specific improvements.

The key components of community development are to improve economic, social and cultural conditions in communities; the participation by the people themselves in efforts to improve amenities in their community; and the provision of technical and other services in ways that encourage initiative, self-help and mutual help and make these more effective. Community development seeks to empower individuals and groups of people by providing them with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities.

In working to assist community football clubs to become more inclusive and safer places for women, community development may be an approach that can be employed with clubs to assist them to accomplish the kind of changes required.
Women’s Participation in Sport

International research into gender differences in sport participation has shown that women’s lower participation rates may be more related to sport being traditionally considered the province of men. Furthermore, gender stereotyping may be associated with women and girls’ lower rates of participation in physical activity. Gender stereotyping is apparent in sport; ‘masculine’ sports are more likely to be defined as involving speed, risk and danger, while ‘feminine’ physical activity is more closely associated with aesthetics – for example, beauty and grace. A Norwegian study found that young women were more likely to be involved in physical activity in areas not defined as sport, for example, dance, yoga and aerobics (Kломsten, Marsh, & Skaalvik, 2005). This gender stereotyping of sport and physical activity has implications for women and girls who choose to participate in ‘masculine’ sports, such as football, both in terms of their own self-perception and in how they are accepted by men and boys who may see them as encroaching on their territory.

In the closing decades of the twentieth century, low participation rates in sport and physical activity were identified as representing a health risk for women and girls. In response, a number of international conferences and reports on women and sport put pressure on national governments to address this issue. In 2002, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported on the involvement of people in sport and physical activity. While 23.5% of Australians were involved in at least one kind of organised sport or physical activity, men were more likely than women to be involved as both players (27.3% men vs. 19.7% women) and in non-playing roles (10.9% men vs. 8.1% women). These data show a decrease in sport and physical activity participation (for both women and men) since the previous report in 1993 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002).

In 2006, the ABS published a further report focused specifically on women’s participation in organised sport and physical activity and reported an increase in participation rates. However, the increased participation rates of women and girls in sport can be primarily accounted for by extending the concept of sport to include fitness activities and walking, and only partially by a shift in traditional gendered sport patterns.

Participation was defined by the ABS as being ‘a player, competitor or person who physically undertakes the activity’. This definition represents a departure
from the 2002 survey, which included both playing and non-playing roles, although the 2002 report did not specify what ‘non-playing’ roles comprised. The 2006 definition means that people involved in ancillary roles such as coaches, umpires and club officials were not included in the data, even though these activities may involve a great deal of physical activity. Using the 2006 definition:

- Almost 60% of all Australian women aged 18 years or older ‘participated’ in at least one sporting/physical activity in the 12 months prior to the report, which represents a considerable increase from the 2002 survey.
- A continued decline was noted in participation rates among women as they age – those aged 25–34 years had the highest participation rate (68%) while those aged 65 years or older had the lowest rate (41.3%). Women’s rates of participation continued to be consistently lower than men’s.
- Netball was the most popular team sport among Australian women in the 2006 study, but only 5.3% of women actually participated in netball (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

It is noteworthy that the most popular physical activities for women in Australia were walking, aerobics and fitness, swimming and cycling – all relatively individual and non-organised forms of physical activity that are gender stereotyped as described above by Klomsten et al. (2006).

The increase in popularity of soccer as a participation sport among women and girls in Australia reflects similar trends in Europe, where, since the ban on female participation in soccer ended in 1971, it has become one of the most popular participation sports among women and girls, with elite women’s teams competing in the international arena (Elling & Knoppers, 2005).

Responses to Women’s Low Rates of Participation in Sport

In 1994 the first international conference on women and sport was held in England. Attended by 280 delegates from 82 countries, the conference endorsed the declaration (the Brighton Declaration), which addressed governments, public authorities, organisations, businesses, educational and research establishments directly or indirectly responsible for education, employment, management, training or care of women in sport. The aim of the declaration was ‘to develop a sporting culture that enables and values the full participation of women in every aspect of sport’ (International Working Group...
Another international conference was held in 1998 in Windhoek, Namibia. This conference was attended by 400 delegates from 74 countries, who endorsed the Brighton Declaration and called for its continued implementation and closer partnerships between sport and women’s organisations. It further called for capacity-building for women involved in sport at all levels, encouraged positive media portrayals of women in sport, and the provision of safe, supportive environments for girls and women, by taking steps to eliminate all forms of harassment, abuse and violence (International Working Group on Women and Sport, 1998). A third international conference was held in Montreal, Canada in 2002, attended by 550 people from 97 countries. For this conference, the ‘Montreal Toolkit’ was produced, which contained ideas for increasing women and girls’ participation in sport, and strategies for advocating change, and changing organisations, systems and structures, as well as resources for individual development and action (International Working Group on Women and Sport, 2002b). These conferences and the interest they generated have influenced national developments towards greater participation of women and girls in sport and physical activity around the world.

Developments in Australia.

In 1999 the Australian Sports Commission published a report titled *How to Include Women and Girls in Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity: Strategies and Good Practice*. This report identified a number of good-practice models for programs to encourage the participation of women and girls under the headings *Government and Non-Government Organisations, Participation and Wellbeing; Leadership and Decision Making* and *Education, Training and Development* (Australian Sports Commission, 1999). The good-practice models in this report appear to be mainly concerned with women-only fields of sport, the inclusion of women in traditionally masculine fields of sport is not addressed, nor is women’s safety in these fields. Several case studies in the report do address sports that have worked towards being more inclusive of women, and these are detailed below under the heading *Models of Good Practice*. The report suggests providing girls and women with opportunities to be involved in non-competitive sports and physical activities, which can play into gender stereotypes about feminine sports being associated with aesthetics and masculine sports with risk and danger as suggested by Kломстен et al. (2005). While it is true that some women may prefer non-competitive sports, it is also true that some men do as well, and that other women (and men)
prefer competitive, contact sports. Efforts to encourage women to become more active in sports must address the whole range of possible preferences, not limit them.

**Policy Environment**

Increasingly in recent years, community sport has come under the gaze of government agencies. As sedentary lifestyles and obesity increase among ordinary Australians, sport is seen as an important way of encouraging increasing physical activity, community connectedness and improving health and wellbeing. In this environment, sport has been the focus of research and policy development aimed at engaging Australians in more physical activity. Population research has revealed that women are less active and involved in organised sport than are men, which has also brought about responses from government. The ways in which the policy environment has influenced developments in the area of women and sport will be discussed in this section under the headings Commonwealth Government, State Government and VicHealth.

**Commonwealth Government**

*Building a Healthy, Active Australia* is a commonwealth initiative. Mainly aimed at school children, the program also brings together representatives from all relevant government departments to form a Healthy Living Ministerial taskforce under the leadership of the Minister for Health. Social marketing is a key strategy for this program, which has included such programs as Healthy Active Ambassadors, which aims to raise awareness among Australians of the importance of healthy living and maintaining healthy body weight. It targets all Australians, with a particular focus on youth, and well-known people who live active and healthy lives have been invited to become official ‘Ambassadors’, promoting the benefits of healthy life choices to the community.

**Senate Enquiry**

In 2006, the Senate asked the Environment, Communications, Information technology and Arts Reference Committee to conduct an inquiry into women and sport and recreation in Australia. The report of the inquiry addresses both the physical and social benefits of women’s inclusion in sport. The terms of references were to focus on the health benefits of women participating in sport and recreation activities and the accessibility of women of all ages to
participate in organised sport, recreation and fitness activities. Further terms of references related to the portrayal of women’s sport in the media and women in leadership roles in sport. The report, titled *About Time!* Heard submissions at public hearings in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra, and heard witnesses via teleconferences in the Northern territory and South Australia. The report comments on the health benefits of participation in sport, grassroots participation, elite participation, leadership and governance, and the media. The committee reported that girls have consistently lower participation rates than boys by about 5 percent, and they experience a significant dropout rate in their teens. Women continue to be under-represented on boards and the report stated that greater gender equality on boards and committees of management are in the best interests of sporting organisations (Environment Communications Information Technology and the Arts Reference Committee, 2006).

**State Governments**

In 2006, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to the implementation of the Better Health for All Australians Action Plan. This plan aims to reduce lifestyle health risks such as inactivity, obesity, alcohol and smoking.

Various state governments have addressed safety in community sports. The Sport and Recreation Departments of all states and territories (in conjunction with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination bodies) collaborate in the *Play By the Rules* website, which focuses on child protection issues, but deals with issues of discrimination and abuse in a broad context.

The NSW Department of Sport and Recreation has published an excellent resource for sporting clubs called the *Sport Rage Prevention Kit*, which is available to all community sports clubs in NSW. This initiative was piloted in a soccer club in NSW in 2004, and targeted parents, coaches, referees and club administrators in the under 9, 10 and 11 teams. Strategies to prevent and deal with incidents of sport rage were trialled with a view to developing a web site. Participants in the pilot were encouraged to sign an ‘anti-sledge pledge’, tailored to each group and based on ASC codes of conduct. A survey of 218 people was carried out at the end of the season to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. In addition to the findings of the survey, behavioural changes were measured by using the numbers of red and yellow cards given out in previous years with those given out during the pilot. Changes were noted in relation to send offs, cautions and sideline reports that indicated the pilot had
been successful, and the survey results contributed to the development of a web site and the sport rage kit *Dummy Spits are for Babies.*

The Victorian Department of Sport and Recreation surveyed local sport in Victoria and details the findings in a report titled *Community Sport Counts.* The report provides an overview of what sports are being played in Victoria, and the picture that emerges is one of mainly voluntary organisations of long standing, with limited budgets; a description that fits many community football clubs.

The Victorian Government and the Australian Sports Commission have collaborated to produce a resource – *Keeping Sport Fun and Safe* – that provides model codes of behaviour for junior sports clubs. Codes for players, parents and spectators, coaches and teachers, officials, administrators, and the media are all covered. These codes do not represent a departure from the traditional values of sport: be a good sport; play fair; respect for others, including the opposition; practise tolerance, value the contributions of others regardless of race, gender, ability or cultural background; and know, understand and abide by the rules of the game. This resource identifies the characteristics of a fun, safe junior sports club, which is defined as:

- A community where juniors feel connected to friends and family
- A place where the emphasis is on enjoyment, involvement and being physically active, rather than winning
- A safe physical environment
- A safe social environment which has policies and practices in relation to alcohol use, drugs, child protection and harassment
- A safe cultural environment which has policies and practices that are inclusive, tolerant and welcoming for all juniors, including young people with disabilities, who are indigenous and/or who come from diverse backgrounds
- A place that promotes and enforces appropriate codes of behaviour.

These codes proposed for junior clubs, while not gender specific, are relevant to making sports clubs safer, more inclusive environments – one in which all participants, regardless of gender, can feel safe and included.
VicHealth

Another major contributor to the policy environment is the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth). Through its focus on areas such as physical activity, social wellbeing, and the prevention of violence against women, VicHealth has funded many small projects to develop the evidence base on gender, discrimination and abuse in community sporting bodies. It has also collaborated on a number of resources and published a series of significant reports, which aim to not only promote health and support community development, but also to influence Government policy and program development.

VicHealth’s *Respect, Responsibility and Equality: Preventing Violence Against Women Program* has funded a range of interventions to ensure women’s safety. A number of these projects were contacted in the field-mapping part of this project. In this program, interventions that do not have a particular focus on violence, but address its underlying causes (such as gender inequality), are also primary prevention interventions (VicHealth, 2007).

**Factors That Make a Sporting Club Successful**

VicHealth (1999) detailed a number of common factors for a ‘successful’ sporting club in a report titled *A Sporting Chance: the inside knowledge on healthy sports clubs*. These include a commitment to including others, a strong family and social focus, valuing and rewarding members, and having and regularly promoting policies that ensure the club is safe and inclusive for all members. Features of clubs that have continued prosperity and longevity include:

- Playing a sport that has long-standing importance in the local area
- Generations of the same family as members
- Members who are aware of and promote the club’s history
- Club memorabilia and documentation reflecting and revering past players
- A strong sense of pride.

The club ethos is an important factor in a well-functioning (‘healthy’) club. In healthy clubs, members tend to see themselves as part of the broader community, with a responsibility to assist and contribute to their community.
They are likely to respond to community needs by developing specific programs and holding social events that generate goodwill, which is often reciprocated by other community members and organisations. They also share their facilities willingly with other groups, take an interest in the health and wellbeing of their members and the wider community, and celebrate and respect the history of the club, while actively and strategically planning its future (VicHealth, 1999).

While these characteristics and factors can all contribute to making community clubs safer, more inclusive spaces for women, gender issues also need to be confronted directly. To achieve the goals of the Respect and Responsibility project, an awareness of the needs of all members must to be built into the policies and practices of the club, and future planning must address the systemic and practical barriers to women’s full participation.

Discussion about women’s safety and inclusion in mixed-gender sporting environments is incomplete without consideration of the issues of gender and power that are in play.

**Gender and Power in Sporting Clubs**

Competitive sport has been described as having the capacity to simultaneously challenge and strengthen stereotypical gendered conceptions about sport. Elling and Koppers (2005) argued that unequal power relations and dominant meanings about gender in society are reflected, constructed and challenged within the social practice of sport.

Power can be conceived in two main ways, as power-over and power-to. A power-over model of power is characterised by three main features: that power is possessed, flows from above to below, and is primarily repressive (Sawicki, 1991). In this model, those who possess power oppress those who do not have it, and the only option for the oppressed is to overthrow the oppressor. Another model that has been proposed is of power not as a possession, but as something that circulates in networks between individuals in their mutual relations. In this theory, power is not possessed, is neither positive nor negative, but simply exists. This understanding of power does not suggest that it cannot be used to oppress, or that an imbalance cannot exist, but it does recognise the possibility of resistance, and of the capacity for individuals to take action, which is not present in hierarchical notions of power. From this standpoint, power can be seen as operating between

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individuals and groups who share a common understanding about taken-for-granted ‘truths’ about gender roles and stereotypes. In traditional notions of gender, men are seen as natural, strong and independent leaders, while women are seen as naturally weak, dependent care-givers. Pringle (2005) has argued that using the notion of power as circulating between individuals could be advantageous when attempting to understand issues of gender relations.

Mainstream social and cultural practices (including competitive sport) have been described as strengthening traditional notions of gender roles, although they are constantly being challenged as a result of challenges from new generations and groups such as women and people from diverse backgrounds. (Elling & Knoppers, 2005). In Australian football, as in society, it is apparent that traditional notions of gender roles are constantly being challenged, and that a cultural shift is underway. This explains the increased participation of women in Australian football, legal challenges by women to bans and exclusions, and the development of policies and strategies such as Respect and Responsibility. It also explains active resistance to these changes by those who adhere to traditional values.

In this review, we look beyond the immediate field of the AFL in an attempt to shed light on these issues. Community sporting clubs represent a microcosm of the society and community in which they operate, therefore, here we discuss cultural changes concerning women’s participation in sport and physical activity, the concept of football clubs as communities and the benefits of membership in community sporting clubs. We then identify some programs in sport and other settings, where culture change strategies towards the inclusion of women in areas predominantly occupied by men have been formally addressed, and draw out the principles and learning from these programs that are of relevance to the current project.

**Sport and Human Rights**

In 1999, the *First International Conference on Sports and Human Rights* was held in Sydney. At that conference, it was asserted that the participation of people across racial, ethnic, gender, age and other social groupings can be a model of inclusion and acceptance. Sportsmen, women and children are entitled to enjoy the full range of human rights recognised by international law. There are some United Nations provisions that specifically recognise a right to sport and others that have direct relevance to participation in sport. Among these are the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural
Rights. Article 15 provides the right to take part in cultural life; article 12 the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; article 7 the right to work, to gain a living ‘by work which he [sic]freely chooses or accepts’. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 31, infers the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child; article 24 the right to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health; article 29 the right to education that is directed to ‘the development of the child’s physical abilities to their fullest potential’. People also have the right not to be discriminated against, found in the two foundational human rights treaties, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Particular anti-discrimination treaties deal more directly with this issue. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women provides that state parties must ‘ensure, on the basis of equality of men and women, the same opportunities to participate actively in sports’. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination prohibits discrimination based on race or ethnicity (Sidoti, 1999).

Sidoti (1999) also noted that there are also quite obvious examples of sex discrimination in sport. He reported that fewer facilities and opportunities, such as sponsorships, are provided for women and girls. Prize money and pay for professional women competitors is less than for men competitors. Women’s sport receives much less attention from the media, with less live coverage of actual competitions in the electronic media and less reporting generally. Sidoti’s findings are echoed in the report of the Australian senate inquiry into women and sport in Australia, in which the Senate committee expressed disappointment at the continued poor coverage of women’s sport by all media, and recommended that the ASC undertake an annual survey of coverage of women’s sports (Australian Senate, 2006).

Models of Good Practice

Culture Change

Culture change is not new to the AFL. Since its inception over a century ago there have been changes in the role of women in the game, often as a result of women challenging the accepted norms of the day. In 1921 the first women’s football match – umpired by a woman – was played in St Kilda. In 1981 a woman took the VFL to the Equal Opportunity Board to gain the right
to become a qualified umpire. In 1983 women were allowed into the previously male-only Melbourne Cricket Club Pavilion and Long Room. In 1993, for the first time in AFL history, a woman was elected to a club board, in 1996 the first woman was appointed to the AFL Tribunal. In 1994 the first woman umpire made her debut as a goal umpire for a match between the Brisbane Lions and Richmond. In 2001, Beverley O’Connor became the first ever woman to be appointed vice-president of an AFL Club (Melbourne) and in 2004 Nicole Greaves became the first ever woman to be appointed to a full-time position developing female football programs. In 2005 Sam Mostyn became the first female AFL Commissioner (Heenan, 2007). These changes are mirrored in community clubs, where women have been involved for decades as volunteers, umpires, officials and administrators, although these changes are less likely to be recorded or remembered.

Community sporting clubs and associations have also been the site of a number of health-oriented culture-change programs. Health agencies have offered incentives such as sponsorships, to encourage clubs to develop health-related policies and practices (Dobinson, Hayman, & Livingston, 2006). Programs encouraging smoke-free environments, sun protection, healthy catering, injury prevention and responsible service of alcohol, have, in recent years, aimed to change the culture of sports clubs.

There is little research on where health-oriented culture-change efforts in sport are best located, in peak bodies or at the club level. A systematic review of policy interventions in sporting clubs to promote healthy behaviours reported that no rigorous studies were available that tested the effectiveness of interventions (Jackson, Howes, Gupta, Doyle, & Waters, 2005). Crisp and Swerissen (2003), in a study that investigated health promotion processes in sporting settings such as smoke-free environments, provision of healthy food choices, responsible alcohol management and sun protection, argued that the policy and practice of health sponsorship are best evaluated at the club level. This may suggest that clubs are the most effective site for culture change programs. Dobinson et al. (2006) found that there was a significant association between the existence of policy and healthy practices at the club level. For example, clubs with written policies were more likely to provide support for club members to adopt healthy behaviours. Furthermore, clubs that received practical support in the form of model policies and sponsorship kits were more likely to prove effective in implementing policies. Other factors that have been identified as important in implementing culture change policies
in sports clubs include support and training, advice and resources from health agencies, and assigning responsibility for implementation to a given individual within the club (Dobbinson et al., 2006).

**Culture Change Initiatives within Sport**

Attempts to make the environment in sporting clubs safer for players, officials, volunteers and spectators have been introduced in recent years. Some of these address the broad issue of safety, others more specifically address age-, gender- and race-based abuse.

**Culture Change in Junior Sports Clubs**

A variety of initiatives to achieve culture change towards the inclusion of women, or the prevention of violence against women, were identified in this review, both within sporting bodies and beyond. While many of these initiatives were not reported in any detail, a summary of those identified is provided here.

**Play by the Rules**

*Play by the Rules* is a website that provides online education and information about sport-related equal opportunities and child protection laws. As described earlier in this report, *Play by the Rules* is a collaboration between Sport and Recreation Departments from all states and territories in Australia (in conjunction with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination bodies). It is staffed and co-ordinated by one worker located in South Australia. This resource is mainly concerned with child safety, and is predicated on the position that everyone needs to feel safe and act fairly and respectfully towards each other. There are sections for governing bodies, clubs and groups, coaches and officials, players and participants, parents and young people, which can be accessed by state or territory, to account for differing laws.

*Play by the Rules* offers free, online training courses for coaches, administrators, umpires and referees, as well as for participants and volunteers. The courses are short and may be undertaken in part or all at once, and they make extensive use of case studies. Training is available for coaches, administrators, umpires and referees, players, participants and volunteers.
Sport Rage

The NSW department of Sport and Recreation has developed materials to address the issue of sport rage for sporting clubs. According to its literature, 2002 ABS data indicated that there had been a 26% decline in the number of officials participating in sport between 1997 and 2001 (NSW Department of Arts, 2007). Furthermore, the Australian Sports Commission reported, in March 2002, that this was largely due to a lack of respect for, and abuse of officials. In addition to the decline in the involvement of officials in sport, sport rage results in an unsafe environment for all involved, and in many cases a decrease in levels of player participation, withdrawal of financial support from sponsorship and increased risk of litigation against clubs.

In the resource, clubs are urged to develop codes of conduct, establish disciplinary procedures, incident processes, and to implement training for officials and other club members. Sample codes of conduct and suggestions for disciplinary procedures are provided (NSW Department of Arts, 2007).

According to Play By the Rules literature:

Participation in sport and recreation – particularly at the school and community level – should be fun, safe and fair. The issue of sport rage is of growing concern to all involved in sport and recreation. Sport rage can come in many forms: an unruly parent abusing a referee, a player punching another player or a spectator shouting racial taunts. Dealing with sport rage is a major challenge for clubs. Not only does it reflect badly on the sport, it can deter participation at all levels (Play By the Rules, 2007).

The issues raised by sport rage do not contain a gender analysis, however, when considering the broader environment of safety in community football clubs, the kind of violence inherent in sport rage contributes to an overall sense of threat for women and children that cannot be ignored. Therefore, any attempts to introduce culture change to make clubs safer and more inclusive for women must address not only overt forms, but also the undercurrent of violence and abuse in the environment.
Coaching Boys into Men

This title has been used by several different violence prevention programs. It appears to have originated in the USA from the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF), to encourage men, particularly fathers, to talk with boys about what it means to be a man and to promote respectful behaviour towards women. Thus, while it is designed to affect the behaviour and values of boys, the target of the program is men. In this form, it is largely a social marketing campaign, complemented by brochures that guide men on how to talk with boys about the subject. Some major sporting codes have created their own promotional campaigns to encourage adult male fans to talk with boys about respecting women and taking a stand against violence.

The program has been adopted by soccer in an international campaign, aimed at working with boys and young men to provide positive role models, mentors and teachers to guide them to grow into healthy men who respect women and value non-violent relationships. The campaign is in the USA, Europe and Australia, and a Coaching Boys Into Men Playbook supports and guides the program. Coaches and players are asked to affirm their team’s commitment to ending violence against women through the following pledge:

I believe in treating women and girls with honour and respect, I know that violence is neither a solution nor a sign of strength. I believe that real men lead with conviction and speak out against violence against women and girls. I believe that I can be a role model to others by taking this pledge (Carr, Morgan, & Lee, 2005).

The program uses ‘teachable moments’ to educate boys about appropriate behaviour towards women, and assist coaches to deal with high-profile events such as professional players being charged with rape or sexual assault.

No evaluation of the soccer initiative was found, however tracking research was carried out on the FVPF program between 2001 and 2005, which measured exposure, attitudes and behaviour. Beliefs that men can help reduce violence against women by teaching boys were very high in the 2001 pre-test, but did not increase significantly over the period of the tracking research. The proportion of men who reported they had spoken to a boy about violence against women increased from 29% to 41%, and this was positively influenced by viewing a campaign advertisement (Donovan & Vlais, 2005).
**Bouncing Racism out of Sport**

As a result of incidents of racial vilification on the field, the AFL introduced rule changes in 1995. In response to this, Football Victoria introduced a racial and religious tolerance program called *Bouncing Racism out of Sport*, which was launched in 2003. The program defines racial and religious vilification in legal terms, including how community clubs may be held liable for discriminatory conduct engaged in by a participant. It uses a four-part set of user-friendly resources designed to assist clubs to create an environment that is more inclusive of diversity, and remove barriers to participation. The resources comprise a manual, video, sample policies and a six-step guide to implementing the racial and religious tolerance policy.

The program has not been formally evaluated, however, it appears that, like many efforts to introduce culture change in community football clubs, the implementation of this product has been under-resourced. While the materials discussed above have been distributed, it has been up to clubs to initiate the program with limited support or assistance. In the busy and demanding environment of the club, it is unlikely that volunteers will have time to undertake the work involved to make the changes necessary to implement the policy.

**Good Sports Accreditation Program (GSAP)**

This initiative of the Australian Drug Foundation (ADF) and VicHealth provides support for clubs to introduce a responsible alcohol management and smoke-free policy. Participating sports clubs are expected to participate in an accreditation process that sets standards for alcohol management and service. Such matters as bar management, food and drink options, safe transport, and a smoke-free environment are assessed against criteria set by the Good Sports program. The benefits of the Good Sports program are promoted to clubs as making the culture welcoming to families and juniors, becoming more attractive to sponsors, increased membership and volunteers, and improved public image. The program also promotes such benefits as reduced incidents of alcohol-related injury and damage to facilities, reduced road trauma, increased protection of young people against the misuse of legal and illegal drugs, as well as improved relations between the club and its neighbours.

The GSAP is an accreditation program funded by VicHealth and administered by the Australian Drug Foundation. The program is free to all amateur sporting
clubs, and consists of four levels of accreditation. Level 0 is for clubs that do not sell alcohol or allow alcohol to be consumed on their premises. Levels 1–3 are for clubs with liquor licences and represent progressive levels of changes required for responsible use of alcohol. After registering with the program, clubs are allowed 12 months to get to level 1, a further two years to reach level 2 and another two years to reach level 3. Clubs are supported in the program through a network of Community Partners. There are 11 rural community partners and one metropolitan community partner. Community partners visit clubs to explain the program and are available to assist clubs develop strategies to achieve accreditation. Community partners also promote the program to other key organisations in their region, including local government, regional leagues and associations and the police (Australian Institute of Primary care, 2003)

This program has been the object of a number of research reports and evaluations. In 2002, the evaluation aimed to understand participating clubs’ experience of the process of implementing GSAP, and the process of moving through the accreditation levels. It also sought to identify the conditions that facilitated a club’s progress to accreditation. The evaluation report suggested that it was clear that the more support a club received, the more likely it was to proceed through the accreditation in the prescribed time. Furthermore, it found that club officials were more likely to move their club through the process if they could see tangible rewards for doing so, such as increases in membership, club revenue streams and sponsorship deals (Duff, 2002).

In 2003 an independent evaluation was carried out by La Trobe University’s Australian Institute of Primary Care. This evaluation reported that the strengths of the program included the program’s quality, structure and staff; ongoing program review; the relevance of the program to sporting clubs, involvement of other key stakeholders and organisations. A weakness that was identified in the program related to the involvement of key stakeholders. While local government and the police had been engaged at a state and regional level, this was not reflected at the local level. Overall, the GSAP was identified by the evaluators as an innovative and well-structured program, which had achieved a significant reach; they recommended that the program be expanded across Australia.
This expansion has been underway, however, at the time of writing, there was far greater coverage of GSAP-accredited clubs in Victoria than in other parts of the country.

**Australian Sports Commission**

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) has a website that contains extensive resources for sports clubs, coaches, officials, and players. These resources can be downloaded for use by interested parties. The ASC has also published a booklet called *How to Include Women and Girls in Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity: Strategies and Good Practice* (1999). This document outlines practical strategies and examples of good practice to guide actions intended to break down some of the barriers to women’s full participation. Three main principles feature in their policy and practices:

**Equity and equality:** Australian women and girls, regardless of social, economic, cultural or physical backgrounds and circumstances, should have opportunities equal to those of men and boys to participate in every aspect of sport, recreation and physical activity and, when they do so, should be treated equitably. Equity means that service-providers should recognise, value and respond to differences among their clients to ensure that all clients are treated fairly. In the context of this policy it means responding to the needs of women from diverse backgrounds to address barriers to participation in all aspects of sport and physical activity (Australian Sports Commission, 1999).

**Participation and wellbeing:** Participation in sport, recreation and physical activity at all levels should contribute to the complete physical, mental and social wellbeing of women and girls.

**Education and information:** So that they will be encouraged to take part, women and girls, and the community as a whole, must be fully informed and educated about the opportunities, advantages and risks associated with female participation in sport, recreation and physical activity.

The resource provides strategies to help put each of these principles into practice, and case studies and examples of good practice to illustrate how they work. Some sports have audited policies to ensure language is not gendered or sexist, others have developed equity policies. Many of the programs mentioned are in women-only sports, where bullying and harassment has been addressed. Examples of male-dominated sports that are introducing change to ensure gender equity include:
Orienteering Federation of Australia:

The Orienteering Federation of Australia issued a document that states ‘awareness of gender equity could be raised, and some overt strategies could be implemented to ensure equity extends to all aspects of the sport’. The policy suggests removing sexist language from all documentation associated with orienteering; monitoring promotional or coaching material to ensure that both males and females are shown equitably in all roles associated with the sport; monitoring female participation in all aspects of the sport, including competitions, organisation, coaching and administration; establishing why female participation may be low in some areas of orienteering, and devising and implementing strategies to encourage female participation in those areas in which data indicate low female participation (such as event organisation or senior office–bearers); ensuring that there is equal recognition given to male and female orienteers through prizes and awards. In addition, the federation recommends actively encouraging a gender balance on all committees, providing childcare at all major events, and recognising the contributions that women and girls make to orienteering in ways other than through competition or formal offices.

Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA)

Surf lifesaving states that their programs ‘embrace all Australians regardless of their ethnicity, religious or cultural background, gender or socioeconomic status. Programs cater for young people of all body shapes, sizes and physical abilities. By providing a broad range of learning opportunities to all young Australians, SLSA ensures long-term involvement that leads to safer beaches through a greater understanding of beach safety and the training of future surf lifesavers. SLSA recognises that every person involved in surf life-saving needs to be treated with respect and dignity, in a safe and supportive environment’.

The SLSA policy provides the broad principles for dealing with issues of social justice, equal opportunity and discrimination and is to be read in conjunction with the organisation’s Procedures for Dealing with Harassment. These procedures commit the organisation and its management to discouraging and preventing harassment and discrimination; investigating complaints in a sensitive, responsible and timely manner; imposing appropriate discipline or corrective measures; providing advice, and doing all that is reasonably
possible to support and assist any employee or SLSA member who experiences harassment.

**Western Australian Surf Riders Association:**

This association has taken the initiative to support, encourage and increase the participation of women in surf-riding by incorporating several programs. Through the peak body, elite women’s training camps have been organised that involve both senior female surfers and junior surfers. A manual has been developed for these elite athletes that includes topics ranging from contraception, cellulite and body image, to dealing with the media and athletes as role models. The manual has been designed to emphasise the physical differences between male and female surfers, the social issues faced by female athletes, and the effects of training on the body.

**ACT Coaching Centre**

The Centre provides an annual Margaret Timpson Sports Coaching Scholarship, worth up to $1,000, for female coaches. The aim of the scholarship is to provide opportunities for female coaches in the ACT to develop their knowledge and coaching skills so that they can coach effectively at a higher level. The scholarship offers the opportunity for a female coach to further her career via assistance with attaining a higher qualification in coaching assistance with approved education expenses (for example, the costs of seminars, workshops and conferences); attachment to an ACT representative or Academy of Sport team as an apprentice coach, and any other assistance that is deemed appropriate.

**Developing Female Coaches, ACT – Females in Training (FIT)**

Based in the ACT, FIT is a group in which women of all abilities can enjoy safe, non-competitive training in a supportive atmosphere. The group’s main focus is on the three triathlon disciplines of swimming, running and cycling, and they are particularly interested in providing support for women who are commencing or recommencing their involvement in physical activity.

One of the group’s primary aims is to encourage and develop female coaches. All sessions are coached by women or girls. A subsidy is provided to members who wish to undertake National Coaching accreditation. A coaching policy ensures that coaches have a support network to confer with as needed, and access to group sessions in which to practise their skills. Regular coaching
development sessions are undertaken, and accredited coaches are encouraged to extend their accreditation to higher levels.

Coaching Pathways, Soccer Tasmania

In 1998 the Tasmanian Women's Soccer Federation and Soccer Tasmania amalgamated and, as a result, a women's council was formed to run women's soccer across the state. The council recognised the lack of opportunities for women and the lack of qualified women coaches working at levels above primary school. It also recognised the discomfort many women felt with expressing themselves in mainstream coaching courses. As a result, a women-only level-one soccer course was organised and the seven major southern-based clubs were required to send four participants per club to the course. Those four participants had to be either active players or players who had retired at the end of the previous season. A total of 26 participants attended, with 18 completing the course. The coaching course was held over three sessions with an emphasis on understanding the functions of the organisation and setting achievable goals. The majority of the 18 then attended a development clinic for junior girls, and with the help of Soccer Tasmania development staff, were able to put their new skills to the test. As a result of this successful course, a new league was instigated in 1999 for an under-16 girls’ competition, with women who attended the original course coaching all of the participating teams. In addition, Soccer Tasmania aims to conduct advanced coaching sessions and create pathways for more women to become senior coaches within the league.

Modified Basketball

Goroke P-12 College is a small, isolated school in a farming community in central western Victoria, which battled to field teams of any sex in most sports. Sporting options were limited, so the school developed a modified lunchtime basketball competition to encourage female students to play. Special measures allowed only girls in the basketball court, made substitution compulsory, gave double points for each player’s first goal for the game, and required no set uniform. Students were also encouraged to become involved in umpiring, scoring, timekeeping, arranging teams and draws, and producing a newsletter. Since the competition began in 1991, the number of girls participating has increased by more than 30 per cent. The number of boys participating also rose by more than 10 per cent. Teachers and some parents also began playing with and against the students. The girls were so
enthusiastic that a team travelled up to 70 kilometres to Horsham every week to play in the under-18 competition.

**Commonwealth Games Federation**

In 1994 the International Commonwealth Games Federation (ICGF) introduced a process of culture change aimed at becoming more gender equitable in its sports program, administration and leadership. The process commenced with a position paper presented to the General Assembly. In recognition of perceived resistance to change, the paper was tabled until more support could be generated. The fourth UN World Conference on Women provided an impetus for change in 1995, which the ICGF took advantage of, and the recommendation to establish a Women in Sport Committee was passed. The position paper defined gender equity, provided data on the current situation and goals for the future. These goals specified targets and strategies for the ICGF and for national affiliates. In 1990, only 34% of Commonwealth Games events were for females; by the Manchester Games in 2002, 40% were for females. The ICGF acknowledged that women were still under-represented in leadership positions, and continues to work to address gender equity at all levels of the organisation (International Working Group on Women and Sport, 2002b).

Limited references to the work of the ICGF were found, and attempts to locate ICGF members willing to discuss the program were unsuccessful.

**AFL Initiatives**

**AFL Female Football Program**

In its 2006 Annual Review, Football Victoria stated that its strategic plan would:

Expand participation opportunities for females, multicultural, indigenous and physically challenged population segments ... and promote the wider positive community benefits flowing from participation and quality football environments.

The female football program has experienced continued growth since the introduction of the program.

Primary-school girls can play Australian football in Auskick and in school programs. Women can play in the Victorian Women’s Football League, which
was established in 1981, and has competition in four playing divisions. Girls can play on boys’ teams until they are aged 14 years, after which they are barred from male competition. In 2004 the Youth/Girls football program was introduced for girls aged between 13 and 17, who were at an age when they were no longer eligible to play in Auskick and not yet eligible to play in senior women’s competition.

In 2005 the Youth/Girls program was evaluated. The evaluation explored the following themes: how people found out about the youth/girls competition, girls’ reasons for playing, ‘spin offs’ from, and barriers to, participation. The evaluation reported that the pilot competition was well received and provided opportunities for young women that were not available elsewhere. Players described their love for the game, that it was fun, helped improve their fitness, and simply showed that ‘girls can play a contact sport’ as their reasons for playing football. The benefits resulting from the program were identified as improved fitness, weight management, increased physical skills, self-confidence and strength. Support from families on game days was also seen as important, and an unexpected outcome for some girls was a strengthened relationship with their fathers. It appeared that many fathers understood Australian football and felt they had something to pass on to their daughters, which was not necessarily the case in traditionally female sports such as netball and women’s basketball. However, while some girls had strong family support, others had parents who were unsupportive, which proved a barrier to their participation. Among this group of parents, the attitude that football is too rough for girls was evident.

Women can be trained as coaches by the Australian Football Coaches Association under the auspices of the AFL, and while women are encouraged to become involved as coaches and some female-only coaching courses are provided, the majority of women coaches appear to be trained to work with Auskick and primary-aged schoolchildren. Only one woman in Australia works
as a coach with a senior men’s team at the time of this review.¹ This coach is highly respected across the industry. There are many more women working in community clubs as umpires, with approximately 38 umpiring groups in Victoria providing training and support for umpires, and encouraging women and girls to become involved as umpires.

AFL Victoria Quality Club/Leagues Program

The Quality Club Program, which is about standards in club administration, was introduced in 2005. The program is designed to recognise and reward community football clubs for achieving a base standard of club administration through to levels of excellence. Clubs also have an opportunity to win training gear and cash prizes (AFL Victoria, 2007a). The benefits for clubs from undertaking the program have been identified as attracting and retaining participants, officials and members; providing an environment that will attract sponsors and promote the club to the local council; minimising the risks associated with running a club; creating a best-practice guide for the club and participating in a sport in which quality is highly valued.

Clubs work through an accreditation process and can achieve a bronze, silver or gold standard. At the bronze standard, clubs focus on qualified people and quality practices and procedures. At the silver and gold levels, the categories are similar, but the standards are more demanding. Clubs must work their way through the levels, to be qualified to apply for silver, bronze must be attained first, and for gold, silver must be attained. Financial incentives are offered in the form of entry into a prize draw to receive $500 for the club and a training resource pack, on the attainment of a standard. Recognition is also offered in the form of certificates of achievement, stickers for display in clubrooms, and at the gold level, four complimentary tickets to the annual Football Victoria members’ dinner. Clubs work their way through an

¹ It is understood that after the completion of this report, this coach’s contract would not be renewed, and that in 2008, there will be no female coaching a senior men’s team anywhere in Australia.
assessment form which is submitted to Football Victoria, and checked for compliance with the standard applied for, and recognition awards issued.

The Quality Leagues Management Program was introduced in 2007. This provides a tool for community leagues to ensure consistent governance and management of the leagues. As a new program it is still a work in progress. It consists of five categories, including governance and management, game development, compliance, judiciary procedures and sustaining and growing economic viability.

**Culture Change Initiatives outside Sport**

To identify areas where culture change has occurred towards the inclusion of women and girls in traditionally male domains, this literature search also looked beyond sport to business and education.

**Mobil Oil Australia**

Mobil Oil Australia has a long-standing diversity and inclusion policy and was included in the *Montreal Toolkit* as a model of good practice for gender inclusion. It is clear from the Mobil example that working to achieve equity in the workplace has many benefits for the company, beyond the inclusion of previously marginalised or excluded segments of the workforce.

The Mobil Oil policy on diversity and inclusion promotes a work environment that values diversity and promoted inclusion. The main driving principle of the program is leadership support. Senior managers are expected to ‘walk the talk’ of the policy, and provide coaching and mentoring within their business units, including lunchtime diversity seminars for all staff. A management position was created to oversee diversity and inclusion within the organisation. Mobil reported that the implementation of its policy on diversity and inclusion has reaped both a competitive edge and economic benefits (International Working Group on Women and Sport, 2002b). According to Mobil:

> What we ended up with was a productivity improvement of 25 per cent and a reduction in capital equipment. At the time diversity wasn’t on our agenda. These results indicated what could be done with the creative input of people from all parts of the organisation, who also happened to be people of different genders and ethnic and educational backgrounds.
At Mobil inclusion is defined as ‘culture where every employee is able to fully contribute to the goals of the organisation, feels able to contribute and receives positive encouragement to do so. Diversity refers to gender, ethnicity, understanding and personal life’ (International Working Group on Women and Sport, 2002a). A Diversity and Inclusion Program was proposed and accepted by the board of directors of Mobil in 1996. Part of the program encouraged more female employees and those from non-English-speaking backgrounds to apply for, and fill, middle and senior management positions. Strategies that helped to achieve these goals included networking, mentoring programs and internal communication of diversity and inclusion concepts. The policy was implemented using a systematic, well-resourced highly integrated approach throughout the organisation (Australian Sports Commission, 1999).

Like the Commonwealth Games Federation change process, a long lead time was provided from the inception of the policy to its implementation, to ensure support from all those affected by it. ‘Drivers’ and ‘champions’ were designated to support the implementation process and networking, mentoring and an internal communication strategy were some of the methods used to ensure its effectiveness.

**VicHealth: Arts and Culture**

In 1999, VicHealth identified three main components for mental health: social connectedness, valuing diversity and economic participation. Since that time, it has funded a number of community arts programs that aimed to build partnerships between arts and community organisations to increase participation and access for disadvantaged groups, while contributing to community building (VicHealth, 2002). VicHealth has identified a health-promoting arts organisation as one that creates a healthy, safe and inclusive environment and culture; that develops programs and projects that promote access, social inclusion and mental health and wellbeing; and forms community links and partnerships (McLeod, 2006).

To create a healthy, safe and inclusive environment and culture, VicHealth suggests that there should be clear and logical links between the organisation’s mission, objectives, plans and policies; the physical layout of the venue; staffing procedures, and how the organisation is presented to the community.
To develop programs and projects that promote access, mental health and wellbeing, VicHealth proposes that the organisation should reflect diversity, and provide a voice to marginalised individuals’ groups. To form effective links and partnerships, VicHealth suggests that an organisation must recognise and promote its benefits for the community, identify areas where there are shared goals and synergies, form partnerships with organisations that bring expertise in engaging and working with marginalised groups, and share responsibility for the partnership.

The Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing kit provides activities for organisations to plan to make themselves more accessible and health-promoting. The principles and activities in the kit, while not of direct relevance to the present project, could easily be adapted for use in a resource for use in community clubs wishing to become safer, more inclusive places for women and girls.

### Community Initiatives

#### Local Government

Local Government plays a key role in community football clubs. Almost all facilities used by the clubs belong to, and are maintained by, local government, including, but not limited to, playing fields, club rooms, changing rooms and facilities. In many cases physical facilities play an important part in making clubs safe spaces for women. Womensport and Recreation Victoria suggest that such issues as appropriate lighting in and around club rooms and parking areas, and the availability of public transport are important safety strategies (Womensport and Recreation Victoria, 2003).

Local government is required by law to provide equal access to community facilities for all under the *Commonwealth Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986*, and each state and territory also has equal opportunity

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2 Womensport and Recreation Victoria were de-funded in 2007 and have ceased operations.
legislation that covers gender-based discrimination. Amenities provided by local government must be safe, and equal access to equipment, facilities and playing time must be provided. The environment must also be harassment free, supportive and encourage female participation (Womensport and Recreation Victoria, 2003). In most community clubs these basic equity requirements appear not to be provided. Many club rooms lack female changing areas and women players and officials in community clubs are frequently required to use the public toilets as changing areas, whereas males are provided with their own space for showers and changing.

While no information was identified in the literature search pertaining to relevant initiatives from local government that have aimed to change or establish environments that promote women and girls’ safe participation in sport, several key informants from local government were interviewed to map initiatives of relevance to the field. VicHealth has funded a number of community projects under the Respect, Responsibility and Equality: Preventing Violence Against Women Program. The broad aim of these projects is to support the development of sustained changes in policy and practice to prevent violence against women. These projects target primary prevention, rather than tertiary prevention or intervention. Two of the key informants from local government were working on projects funded under this program, and they will each be considered here.]

**Maribyrnong Council**

Maribyrnong City Council’s project, titled Gender, Local Government and Violence Prevention aims to build on work previously undertaken to prevent violence against women. Project activities include professional development within Council and its Departments, review of policies, and the application of support for local community initiatives to prevent violence against women. This council is a project partner in the Gender, Local Governance, and Violence Prevention (GLOVE) project with the University of Melbourne. The GLOVE project is discussed in more detail below.

**City of Yarra**

In the City of Yarra’s Health Plan, the following actions were identified: to promote positive gender messages and behaviours in sports clubs, programs to further women’s empowerment and seeking funding to support the work of the action plan. The Council’s VicHealth project, titled Welcome to Yarra
Sports, aimed to engage a sports club, establish what women and men want to make the club safe and welcoming for women, and identify strategies for changing the culture accordingly. When the project co-ordinator was interviewed, the project was in its very early stages. Negotiations were underway to engage the participation of a local soccer club.

**Rutherglen**

The Rutherglen community in rural Victoria has been addressing violence against women through a joint initiative between the local police, domestic violence committee and football club. The project, titled Kicking Goals for Healthy Relationships, has involved a public awareness raising campaign, anti-violence against women signage at the football ground, and a white armband game in 2007 between two local rival clubs, Chiltern and Rutherglen. Both teams were awarded $50 for each goal they kicked in the game. Brochures were handed out at the match, promoting the message that domestic violence was unacceptable, and articles on different kinds of violence against women have been in each issue of the club’s newsletter throughout the year. The Corowa/Rutherglen domestic violence committee was also awarded a $15,000 VicHealth grant to assist its anti-violence work (Dean, 2006).

The committee also organised guest speakers and a public meeting about preventing violence against women, and placed posters in local pubs promoting the campaign. Overall, the initiative has been well received. The key informant, a police officer, identified a greater willingness by people to come forward and report incidents of violence against women, and less repeat calls to the police concerning incidents. However, the key informant did note that the numbers of women involved in the community club is still low, and that alcohol is still heavily involved in incidents of violence in the town.

**Prevention of Violence against Women**

Seemingly without reference to women and sport, a considerable body of work exists on women’s safety in the physical environment, and in the prevention of violence against women. This work focuses on changing men’s behaviour towards women.

**The White Ribbon Project**

White Ribbon Day was created in Canada in 1991 on the second anniversary of what has become known as the Montreal massacre. On December 6th, 1990 a
young man walked into L'École Polytechnique in Montreal, separated the women from the men, and shot and murdered 14 women. The white ribbon campaign was started by men to make a statement about their opposition to all forms of violence against women and to urge other men to take a stand and speak out to end gender-based violence.

In 1999, the United Nations General Assembly declared November 25 the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (IDEVAW) and the White Ribbon has become the symbol for the day. From 2000, the Commonwealth Government Office for Women ran awareness activities on the International Day, and, in 2003, the Australian branch of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM, began a partnership with men and men’s organisations to make this a national campaign. Ten thousand white ribbons were distributed in 2003. Currently there are more than 230 White Ribbon Ambassadors Australia-wide, as well as more events across the country and more organisations and individuals participating year upon year (White Ribbon Day, 2007).

The White Ribbon Foundation of Australia aims to eliminate violence against women by promoting culture change around the issue. The major strategies to achieve this are a national media campaign as well as education and male leadership programs aimed at men and boys around Australia.

**Nillumbik Shire Council**

One of VicHealth’s projects funded under Respect and Responsibility is in Nillumbik Shire. Titled Saying No To Violence: A Community Responsibility, the project aims to engage men in local organisations and businesses in preventing violence against women. White Ribbon Ambassadors were also recruited from surrounding communities. A project worker visited groups and organisations in the community to provide information and resources about preventing violence against women and recruiting supporters. The project culminated in a White Ribbon Day event in November 2007, hosted by the mayor of Nillumbik.

**Football Fans Against Sexual Assault**

Football Fans Against Sexual Assault (FFASA) is an initiative set up in response to the 2004 sexual assault allegations against AFL and NRL footballers. FFASA lobbied the AFL and NRL to take a leadership role by working to change what they describe as a culture of tolerance for sexual violence within football
codes. FFASA sees a leadership role for all sports in challenging the attitudes and behaviours that contribute to violence against women. FFASA’s public statement can be seen in its purple armband initiatives, whereby players, spectators and officials wear purple armbands on a specified game day to show their opposition to violence against women. According to FFASA’s website, ‘armbands are worn as symbols of grief and respect, and purple is the colour for women’s rights and wearing the armband symbolises respect for women, acknowledges the pain of sexual assault and stands against all forms of violence against women’. Purple armband games were organised in Ballarat, Bacchus Marsh and Melton in Victoria in 2007. Since 2004 over 500 teams in Australian football, rugby league, soccer, rugby, netball, basketball, baseball and hockey have worn purple armbands (Football Fans Against Sexual Assault, 2007).

Women in Cities International

This international project links together a number of national projects that arise from the concern that research and public policy to reduce violence in the public and private realms are currently disconnected from each other. The international projects – in Canada, Africa, Latin America/Caribbean, Europe, and Asia – share a common analysis of violence and fear of violence, which is described as ‘a major factor preventing the full participation of women as citizens in public life’. The challenge for these projects is to create safer physical, social, and institutional environments, promote full participation in community life, pursue partnerships between community organisations and local governments, involve the full diversity of residents in local decision-making processes, and evaluate the impact of policies and programs.

Good practices in women’s safety projects from across the world were submitted for the Women in Cities International Safety Awards (2004) and featured some common themes that are significant to the present project, albeit with some adaptation to conform to its primary prevention goals. Whitzman, Canuto and Binder (2004) identified these themes as:

- Partnerships between local authorities, community organisations, professional organizations and in some cases businesses and/or academic researchers, which lead to a broadened knowledge base and possibilities for sustainable programs.
• A combination of personal counselling and empowerment approaches with public advocacy and education

• A nuanced understanding of the reality of violence against women as largely occurring within private spaces yet affecting women’s participation in public spaces and public life.

• Innovative and community-specific approaches to the active participation of women.

Other good practices identified by Whitzman et al. included:

• A train the trainer approach to ensure sustainability and effective ‘scarce’ resource utilisation

• Development of safe spaces as part of community mobilisation campaigns

• Development of new materials on healthy relationships

• A social marketing approach

• Emphasis on spiritual, as well as physical and emotional healing

• Excellent evaluation mechanisms.

Hayes (2006) argued that it is evident that good violence prevention strategies engage the whole community and do not focus on individual interventions at the expense of understanding the ways in which the built environment and social structures are implicated in violence against women. Thus, change must occur not only between individuals, but in communities. Stages of individual change concerning men taking responsibility for violent or anti-social behaviour were described in the report *Building Cultures of Respect and Non-Violence* (Dyson & Flood, 2006). Similarly, phases of community mobilisation for change have also been identified, and these can be applied to violence prevention. These include:

• Phase 1: community assessment – gather information on attitudes and beliefs about violence and commence building relationships with the community and service delivery sectors.
Phase 2: awareness-raising – increase awareness of violence including what it is, why it happens, and its negative consequences for women, men, children, families and the community.

Phase 3: building networks – encouraging and supporting community members and services to change practices. Build networks to strengthen individual and group efforts.

Phase 4: Integrating action – making actions against violence part of everyday life in the community and integrated into institutional policies and practices.

Phase 5: Consolidating efforts – strengthening preventative actions and activities to ensure they are sustainable and continue to grow and progress (Hayes, 2006).

These phases are grounded in community development principles discussed earlier. With some modification, this model may be applicable to the introduction of culture change in community football clubs. Extrapolating from the safer cities context into cultural change in the community sporting clubs context, these principles might include:

- Partnerships between such agencies as local government, community health and other local agencies and stakeholders who can provide support, resources and assistance to bring about change.

- A community development approach that combines individual empowerment with public advocacy, education and adherence to the values of sporting behaviour.

- A clear understanding of issues concerning forms of violence and women’s safety within the club environment and beyond.

- Innovative policies and practices to encourage a gender balance in all aspects of the club – including players, coaches and officials, volunteers, members and spectators.

- Providing training for implementing safe and inclusive policies and practices, and ensuring that this is sustainable using a train-the-trainer approach and ongoing support.
• A focus on conciliation between women and men in all aspects of an intervention.

• Building in excellent evaluation and follow-up mechanisms to promote sustainability.

The GLOVE Project

The Gender, Local Governance, and Violence Prevention (GLOVE) Project is an Australian project under Women in Cities International. It is working with local government to develop policy that can take an integrated approach to violence prevention in both public and private space, using a gender mainstreaming process and a community–government partnership model. The project, based at the University of Melbourne, is working with four local government/agency partnerships in Victoria to analyse current local government community safety policies in the light of international good practice on violence prevention. Case studies will be developed from these projects which will inform training materials and workshops for local government officials, community agencies, urban planners and health professionals in the final phase of the project. The project is funded by an ARC grant.

The GLOVE project is in the early stages, and no results are available to date. However, given that local government is the main provider of facilities for community football clubs, there may be potential benefits for maintaining links with councils involved in the project. For example, Maribyrnong Council (discussed on page 31) is a project partner and the project manager was a key informant for this project. The key informant pointed out that, while health and welfare workers in local government are very aware of issues concerning women’s safety, sport and recreation workers may not be as aware. Issues such as separate changing rooms for women and men in council-owned sports facilities, and convenient, well-lit parking, are issues local government is more likely to be able to achieve than voluntary club boards and committees. Therefore, partnerships and active involvement between local government and the community football club will be important in promoting women’s safe inclusion, particularly in relation to physical facilities. According to the project literature:

Women are the main victims of sexual harassment and assault. This means that in large cities most women restrict their movements or activities because they feel unsafe. We have
already seen how this feeling acts as a way of socially controlling women’s activities … one of the ways in which women can reclaim their city in order to gain full benefit from its resources and move around freely whatever the hour is to actively go about changing their environment together with municipal authorities and other community institutions and groups (Smaoun, 2005, p.38).

The World Health Organization’s 2006 report on Violence Prevention argues that a public health approach to violence prevention that is ‘cautious about the extent to which expenditures on policy and corrections will reduce rates of crime and victimisation’ (p.46) is more likely to succeed. Such an approach seeks to understand:

- Who are the victims of violence?
- What are the causes of different types of violence?
- How does context affect different types of violence?
- How can this knowledge be used to reduce the incidence of violence? (Hayes, 2006).

This model has important implications for efforts to bring about culture change to make community sporting clubs safer, more inclusive spaces for women and girls.

**Discussion**

While a great deal of effort has gone into increasing women’s participation in sport at all levels, and into improving the media profile of women in elite sports, women and girl’s safe inclusion in community sporting clubs remains an under-researched area. This is not to say that culture change initiatives have not been happening at the grass roots level, however, they have not been reported on to any extent, and have not been the subject of research that would inform efforts to bring about change in line with community standards.

Models of good practice for culture and behaviour change are plentiful in areas such as health promotion and much can be learned from programs such as sun smart and Quit, which have successfully introduced changes in individual
behaviour and club culture. In relation to gender women’s safety, work done by the United Nations, Women in Cities International and the GLOVE project all provide insights into women’s safety in public spaces.

The AFL is an organisation that has proved its ability to respond to change, as evidenced by their response to the 2004 case in which young women attempted to be included in male football teams. Despite winning the case brought by the young women, AFL Victoria set about creating opportunities for these young women by expanding their female football program. This program has now become a significant part of many community football clubs, and has brought women into clubs in roles they have not held before. This capacity to change will be an important asset in the future as AFL community clubs work to implement the Respect and Responsibility program.
Priority Areas for Establishing Safe Supportive Environments in AFL Community Clubs

Research Report
Research Goals

The goal of the research phase of the AFL project, Creating Safe and Inclusive Environments for Women and Girls, was to ‘contribute to the existing evidence-base through holding a small number of consultations, forums and interviews that seek the views of women and girls on priority areas for establishing safe, supportive club environments.’

The objectives for the consultations included:

- To consult with women involved in community football clubs in a diverse range of roles, including board members, club administrators, umpires/coaches, players, volunteers, trainers and social members.

- To identify, where appropriate, key informants for follow-up individual interviews in order to gather more information and written documentation of policies, guidelines etc.

Methodology

Group Interviews

In all, five group interviews (or consultations) were held. Four of these were with women only, in all, fifty-five women attended a consultation. One key informant group interview was also held with twenty-eight male AFL Victoria football development managers. To ensure that participants felt free to openly discuss issues of gender in the group setting, the women’s consultations were facilitated by female researchers, and the men’s group by male researchers. The group interviews involved discussion around themes, and were semi-structured in order to follow different directions of relevance or interest which emerged from discussions. Themes focused on the club’s ethos and environment, physical facilities, conduct and conflict resolution, community partnerships and barriers to women’s involvement.

All of the group interviews were recorded. Extensive field notes were also taken during the women’s consultations, and the notes were checked against the transcripts for accuracy. The recording from the men’s group key informant interview was transcribed. All data were analysed thematically, using N’Vivo 7.

Recruitment

In each consultation, a key woman from a community league or club was identified and approached by the female football development manager at AFL Victoria to ‘host’ a
consultation. These ‘hosts’ were provided with invitations that detailed what would be asked of participants, as well as place, date and time details. The invitations were then circulated through local networks. All consultations were catered, and held at a convenient time and place for the women who might be able to attend. The first contact between the participants and the researchers was at the consultation.

**Ethical Implications**

Ethics approval for the consultations/interviews was obtained from La Trobe University’s Human Ethics committee. Holding women-only and men-only group interviews was seen as a strategy to ensure that free and open discussions could take place. Participants were assured of anonymity, and the only place where consultation participants’ names could be identified was in their consent forms. Key informants were advised that they might be recognisable because of their role in the community, but their names and personal details have been disguised as much as possible to protect their anonymity, by substituting pseudonyms and leaving details intentionally vague about places of employment or club affiliation. Before any direct quotes were used in the report, they were cleared with the key informants first to ensure they were comfortable with their words being used.

**Findings**

Two groups were held with women who had a variety of areas of involvement in their clubs – including officiating, management, coaching and social membership. A further two groups were held, one with women umpires and another with women players. The consultation objectives were twofold, to gauge understanding and inform participants about the AFL’s Respect and Responsibility Policy, and to establish what the participants felt was needed to make community football clubs safer and more inclusive for women and girls. A number of open-ended questions were posed during a facilitated discussion. These questions included:

- What is it like now for women and girls in your area of involvement?
- In a club safe, inclusive and supportive, what would it be like for women and girls?
- What would need to happen to bring this about?
- What are the barriers?
- What processes, guidelines or policies have been developed? How do they work?

A further group interview was facilitated by male researchers and held with men only. As the men’s group consisted of AFL Victoria Development Managers, who are employees,
this was a key informant group. This group was selected because the participants work directly with community leagues and clubs, and have a broad overview of how they operate.

The consultations opened with a brief presentation from Melanie Heenan (AFL) on the work currently underway within the AFL to implement the Respect and Responsibility Policy, and a showing of the AFL Youth Girls video. The video, produced for the women’s round in 2007, shows the range of roles women and girls play in Australian football. At the elite level, where women and men are fairly equally represented as spectators, women are involved in supporting, administrative and service roles. In community football, girls play in the youth/girls competition, umpire and relate how they have developed life skills and confidence through their involvement in football. This provided a background to the project, and information about the current situation. After the presentation to the men’s group, Melanie left the room to ensure the men in the group felt comfortable to discuss the issues. The themes for discussion at the men’s group were:

- Women’s current involvement in community clubs
- Development managers’ experience of working with clubs to be more inclusive of women, and of supporting and mentoring women in football.
- Changes over time
- Understanding and acceptance of the AFL’s Respect and Responsibility Policy
- Barriers and facilitators for change
- Acceptance and uptake of culture change programs. Potential sites for piloting culture change.

The findings will be discussed here under the themes identified in the analysis of the data from the group interviews. The findings from the women’s groups and the men’s group will be presented in the same section, to allow the reader to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the different groups.

**Knowledge of Respect and Responsibility**

Participants were asked whether they were aware of the introduction of the AFL’s Respect and Responsibility Policy. In the women’s groups, few of the participants had ever heard of the policy, or the work being carried out to implement the various initiatives under the
Respect and Responsibility Policy. In all, only seven participants across the four consultations were aware of the existence of the policy.

In the men’s group interview all were familiar with Respect and Responsibility, but there was some confusion about what it encompassed. A number did not see the policy as being relevant to the involvement of women. Several informants indicated that they thought that the Respect and Responsibility Policy was specifically concerned with sexual harassment more than women’s involvement in community football clubs. One participant in the men’s group said: ‘I would have thought ... Respect and Responsibility is how you treat women where there’s alcohol-fuelled situations, or at social functions or at footy trips.’ Others saw the policy only in the context of elite players, which is illustrated by comments such as:

Didn’t this sort of Respect and Responsibility sort of emanate out of players behaving badly at AFL level outside the club environment ...? [Roger, men’s group participant]

... I thought this emanated out of the fact that, you know, the footy club mentality, the footy club culture, going out, getting on the drink and acting like tools, you know harassing women. You know, I just think these two things [are] separate – I’m just wondering if these are two separate things? [Jim, men’s group participant]

Discussion about end-of-season trip and ‘footy’ club parties featured. There was a general sense that the kind of behaviour in which some clubs engaged was unacceptable. Overall, the participants felt that Respect and Responsibility was more about:

... if you see some guy hit a girl [on] footy trips or on a Saturday night, what do you do? ..., or how some men are [not] respecting women [Bill, men’s group participant].

These comments appear to be directly related to training provided by the AFL in 2005 with US violence prevention expert Jackson Katz. This highlights the need for the AFL to develop a communication strategy to ensure that the Respect and Responsibility Policy is fully understood by AFL staff, member clubs and the community.
Why Do Women And Girls Get Involved In Clubs?

In the women's groups it was apparent that women join community football clubs for a number of reasons, many of which have to do with remaining connected to their family members who were already members. For example:

I joined because I wanted to see my family. My two sons play for the side, my husband is on the committee and my daughter works in the social club as a barmaid [Mary, general consultation participant].

However, the overwhelming reason women gave for joining and staying involved is for a sense of belonging and their love of the game. Some women had overcome a number of obstacles, for example, one woman who had been involved for many years told us:

I joined to see my husband who was with the club. I wanted to join to spend more time with him. I would make suggestions. I started up a ladies’ committee and we made suggestions. It was like banging your head against a brick wall with the men who would not listen. The men did not want a woman telling them what to do. I used to get upset and then I would say: ‘Stuff this, I’ll go for it.’ I had arguments with the general manager and was in tears. It wouldn't matter with him if I was right or wrong. I knew I was capable of more than the canteen. I stuck to it and would prove them wrong. In the end I had the general manager help me to apply for more senior roles in the club. I know I do a good job and I am staying whether they like it or not [Jane, general consultation participant].

What Is It Like For Women Now In Community Football Clubs?

In response to the question ‘What is it like now for women and girls?’, a number of different issues arose. As discussed in the previous section, while women with husbands and children had a relatively easy route into club membership, this was not so for single women, who at times were treated with suspicion by both men and other women for wanting to join. One woman told the group:

There are a number of barriers for a [single] woman to enter into football. If a person is interested and they don't have a child or a partner that plays [football] they are seen to have less credibility. There are a number of challenges. Your credibility is questioned by people who don't know what you have got to bring to the club. They don't know what skills you have. They are worried that you have never played. If it was a man, the men would 'feel you out'. But with me they want to know what my motivation is.
Why on earth would I put myself through entering a man’s environment? Finding your feet when you first start is an isolating experience. There was no buddy. As a woman you get lost. The positive solution to this would be to have a designated female buddy and mentor. Improving the culture of football boils down to people having the capacity to engage others. Women get lost. Women get tested. Men think we have no brain [Ellie, general consultation participant].

There was a strong sense in all the women’s consultations that women were accepted but not respected. While in many cases women were welcomed in voluntary roles, many felt that ‘men in higher positions on the committee [were] often not enthusiastic about the involvement of women …’ and that ‘if women do complain about [unacceptable] behaviour, they are perceived to be nagging’ [Nora, general consultation participant].

The attitudes expressed by the women were not matched by those of the men, who were mostly supportive of women’s involvement and unaware of the difficulties women experienced. The participants in the men’s groups were not the women’s counterparts in the clubs, but employees of AFL Victoria who worked with community clubs in development roles, which may to some extent account for the different perceptions. However, it is more likely that there is a gap between what women are willing to disclose in a safe space with other women, and in what is seen as a more unsympathetic space in the club environment. As a result, men may not be aware of women’s attitudes about safety and inclusion in club settings.

The men acknowledged that women had become more actively involved in clubs in recent years, one said that this ‘forces clubs to have a look at how they embrace women, how they treat women … A lot of clubs are being forced to form opinions about how they deal with women that are involved in their club’ [John]. Others acknowledged the increased numbers of women in areas previously seen as the domain of men with comments such as: ‘there’s certainly a lot of women in – you know – trainers and things like that, which is a big thing’ [Tom]. And Peter said: ‘I think there’s a lot less ladies’ committees in footy clubs as there were in the past. The ladies are now on the general committee.’

There was some discussion in the men’s group about how some clubs provide a more friendly, inclusive environment for women than others. In response to the question ‘what is it about those clubs, what’s the difference?’, Paul responded ‘… it just gets down to the leadership, the policies they bring in’.

There was a strong feeling in the men’s group that women add value to clubs, particularly as volunteers. John said
I think the biggest thing I’ve seen over the years is the volunteers. Ladies want to be volunteers. So it gets back to the same rule. It doesn’t matter if you’re male or female, as long as there’s hands up who wants to do the job, we’ll take you on board.

He went on:

There’s a realisation around the clubs that women can bring certain skills to their clubs that give them a strong advantage. Administratively and also in support mechanisms. You know, at our club we’ve got a female board member now ... the skills they are able to bring to the clubs, the clubs are really seeing an advantage to them over what the guys traditionally bring.

Not only were women notable for their willingness to volunteer, but also for staying on in positions.

Women, when they take on the role, there seems to be a greater longevity of them staying in that role. ... they might have greater tolerance in those sort of roles. I don’t know. But there seems to be women who have served roles and been there a long time. Whereas, as I understand it, the men seem to turn over ... quite a bit [Bill].

Women’s concerns ranged beyond violence and abuse directed against them, to a more general environment in which they did not feel comfortable or safe, and in which they were concerned about how disrespectful behaviour among boys and young men was tolerated and even supported by men in the clubs. The following exchange took place:

**Pam**: Women see things differently; this boy’s behaviour represented a lack of respect for authority.

**Evelyn**: The male coaches have the attitude that if the player is winning premierships then don’t step in and put any barriers up for them.

**Pam**: Some male club members that are over 40 see themselves as footy failures and redeem their egos through the boys playing.

Women who entered domains within the club that were predominantly male were more likely to be the target of blatant abuse. To discuss what it is like now for women in clubs, here we report on roles such as such as coaching and officiating, then on physical facilities and social settings. The section closes with a discussion about where women in
clubs find support, and the contested nature of women’s involvement in community football club environments.

**Coaches**

There was a common theme of ‘bad behaviour off the field being tolerated for good behaviour on the field’ that emerged in each of the women’s consultations. They reported that there was acceptance of some boys behaving badly, typified by an attitude of ‘boys will be boys’, and that male coaches were most commonly associated with this kind of attitude. This culture of un-sportsmanlike behaviour was illustrated by Brenda:

> The opposition team burnt the jumper of our team at training and then put the photo on the ’net [internet]. It is possible to understand that 16-year-old testosterone-charged teenagers would do that, but disappointing to know that adults were there and sanctioned [the behaviour]. One dad tried to stop the burning but was stopped by the coach.

A number of women commented on the need for guidance for both coaches and players. In relation to the situation above, Brenda told the group that women who do reprimand young players for bad behaviour are accused of ‘worrying too much’. She described how, when there was a complaint made to the committee of management about the above incident, ‘the males on the committee said leave them alone, you are worrying too much’.

The issue of coaches supporting behaviour that was unacceptable to women was raised by another woman, who told us:

> People are not prepared to say that there is a problem with the coach, so it is hard to act. Without feedback there is no proof. Mostly it is the women, mums, who will say that they think there is a problem. People are scared to complain because they are worried about upsetting the boys [Jane, general consultation participant].

A female coach related a personal experience of disrespectful behaviour on the field:

> I was at – we were playing – I won’t mention the club ... and the coach from the opposition team, I have never heard such foul language in my life – and I mean I’ve been involved in football for a long, long time. To the point where I turned around and just looked at him and shook my head. ... at one stage the coach called the boundary umpire a F-ing fat C. And I turned around and I said so this guy could hear ‘if a player said that to an umpire he would be reported’. ...That is a disgrace that he’s standing there
as a coach mouthing off like that – all right, kids hear it, I know kids hear it, but … [Pat].

She went on:

We won the game … I walked over to shake [the other coach’s] hand and he turned around and walked away. That’s one big negative that gets me, because you don’t do that. I mean you have your differences or whatever, and you shake hands and you get on with it. … I’ve had other men who, at the end of games, I’ll go up to shake their hand and they’ll pretend they don’t see me coming. I suppose in 14 years of coaching football, that’s probably worse than being called a name [Pat].

In another example of disrespect between a male and female coach, a young female coach told the group:

[After one game] a male coach would not shake my hand when I offered it to him. I left my hand out. The same male coach pulled off one kid who missed a hand-ball and made him do 20 push-ups. I now have all players shake hands of opposition players before the game as a mark of respect. The players need to respect the other team players and the coaches [Merilyn].

Merilyn’s comment was strongly supported by others in the group.

In the men’s group there was dissent about women in coaching roles, with some arguing that coaching was not for women, and others arguing that there was no good reason why women could not coach men. One man challenged the group saying:

We have to confront the fact that there is a belief that coaching is about the true dynamic what a football team really is – which is about a coach and his players … A group of men get really close together and there is a fear that this may be destroyed if a female becomes part of the process. … I think the biggest barrier we’ve got to get over is that sort of inner circle thing of what football is really about, and that’s the coach and his players [Paul].

A number of men argued that women were not capable of taking the kind of strong stand that was needed to coach men’s teams. There was also an opinion that it was not possible to coach Australian football unless you had played. Some felt that a club that appointed a
female coach could be held up to ‘ridicule’ by others and that clubs would not be prepared to ‘take that risk’.

There was also acknowledgement that with female football and increased numbers of women coaching Auskick and junior teams, and that over time, change at the senior level was inevitable. Paul said:

I know of a couple of women who made a conscious decision some time ago, because of their children, that they wanted to coach, and they’ve successfully done that. I’m not aware of anyone with that mindset that failed, or of any club who deliberately made a decision not to. I just think it’s natural, when they’re seeking a coach they don’t consider gender, they look for the best person. And to be honest, up till now, men are the ones that put their hand up.

**Officials**

Goal umpires reported being abused often when they made decisions that were unpopular with spectators, and often the people abusing the umpires were parents, both male and female. The issue of ‘ugly parents’ was raised in another consultation. Tricia told the group:

... we would have a female goal [umpire], you know, the mums would do the goal umpiring as well. And ... the abuse that they put up with from other clubs was not attractive.

And Melody said:

We lost a female trainer because the players were disrespectful to her. They would say ‘strap me’ and then go to the male trainers for more serious issues. She complained to the president but nothing was done, so she left.

Fran, who was responsible for security during a match, told the group:

We had a group of men [spectators] who were so offensive. At half-time I said if they were still there I would not go out. The problem with [some] men is they have a problem with women in authority. My daughter was a junior field umpire and has left because of abuse from the spectators and the parents. Female umpires get more harassment. There is not the same respect for female umpires. Players are less likely to abuse female umpires.
My daughter was an umpire and a female spectator, this really big woman, bailed her up in the toilets and threatened to kill her because her son’s team lost. She had to call the police. Because there were no segregated toilets/change rooms she had to use the public toilets and then ran into the spectator.

A theme of generational difference came up again and again. Younger women were less willing to tolerate sexist comments or abusive language. Many participants saw sexism as being mainly promoted by older men in their clubs. Mary, an older woman, told the consultation:

I was the first female goalie 10 years ago. I got through the first year. I got abused by the players and the crowd. I figured if you can’t beat ‘em join ‘em. But the younger [female umpires] come up and they don’t like what is being said to them so they challenge it.

Disrespect was not unique to men in clubs. Girls are sometimes abusive towards other women and girls, particularly with young women of a similar age who may be seen as getting involved to ‘catch a boyfriend’. One umpire told the group:

Being younger, the other girls vilify me while I am running. I have been doing this since I was 11 years old. I’m now 18. They call out stupid things to me like saying things about my hair or that I am only doing it for the boys and personal things like that. Every six or seven games it happens [Melody].

Social Settings

Despite many clubs participating in the Good Sports program (discussed on page 20)³, excessive consumption of alcohol and lack of control over alcohol consumption were raised as serious issues. Polly told the group:

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³ Good Sports is a program of the Australian Drug Foundation, supported by VicHealth, that promotes responsible alcohol service and consumption in sporting clubs. Accreditation is given for reaching certain goals. For more information, see <http://www.goodsports.com.au/>.
We had two grand finals where we had wet and dry areas. The dry areas were not checked for eskees and people bought in alcohol. If we don’t sell alcohol the club doesn’t make money. There was a ‘blue’ [fight] in the dry area and the police had to be called. There were no security guards present to check people were not bringing in alcohol.

And Nora said: ‘we have no alcohol on junior days but it gets served out of the canteen and people serve it out of the boots of their cars’.

Jane told the group:

We have a no-alcohol policy. Twenty-five years ago the fights were so severe. Now we have no alcohol and you can see the difference. We have limited spectators and would have more if we did have alcohol. We share spectators with [another league] so we notice the difference when people go elsewhere for alcohol. We have less people but less mob mentality. Spectators are calmer, they come to watch the game.

**Physical Facilities**

This was the most contentious matter to emerge from the consultations. Few metro clubs appear to have separate changing rooms for women and men, and the changing facilities that do exist are allocated to male players. Local government was largely blamed for the lack of facilities. Clubrooms are generally on Council property and clubs lack resources to make improvements to existing facilities. Lack of changing facilities was cited in one consultation as a reason why more women do not become involved in their community club.

Most women who play or officiate at games are left with the choice of changing in public toilets or going home to shower and change after a match. It was this lack of facilities for female umpires that led to the situation, discussed above, in which a young female umpire was threatened with violence in a public toilet. As Mary, who related the story, said: ‘A male umpire would not run into spectators because they have their own toilet and change room.’

The issue of privacy was seen as one of respect, demonstrated largely as a lack of respect for women’s preference not to be exposed to male nudity. While male players and officials are used to nudity and partial nudity in the changing rooms, this is not the case for women. Also, football culture expects pre- and post-game meetings between players and coaches to take place in changing rooms, and while this is not an issue for same gender
coach/player teams, with the influx of women and opposite gender player/coach/official combinations emerging for both female and male players, the environment in the changing facilities is becoming more contentious, especially for women who have greater expectations of privacy.

The [male] players strip off and don't think about it. And it is embarrassing, especially for younger women [Candy].

Coleen: My daughters have a male coach who comes into the room when they are naked...

Sandra: [girls] need to feel comfortable to say if they are not comfortable.

When female umpires come to our club they walk into the change rooms and there are no showers for them, no curtains and no money to improve facilities, so [improvements] will never be done. So we are always on the back foot. People are standing out in the cold because they can't use the showers or are going home without a shower [Merilyn].

In winter I come off the field and have to pull on my trackie and drive home without a shower. It’s gross. My daughter does the same thing and she has to get changed in a room with a urinal! [Selina]

There are some guys I will not get changed in front of. I just get the feeling it’s not OK. We have 200 umpires and only six are women. There are five boundary umpires and when the game is over they just nick off. They don’t wait for a shower because there are no facilities. All they have to do is put a door up [to separate the facilities], but it doesn’t get done [Candy].

Even facilities that have undergone improvements have not addressed the issue of privacy for women. Evelyn reported:
Albert Park [sporting facilities] redid their change rooms for the Grand Prix and they are all open. No segregated showers. That’s the mentality. Men don’t mind a communal shower. Women prefer separate showers.

One woman, who was a club president, described how her office space was located within the male changing rooms, and how she had no choice other than to pass through the space before and after matches. Women in the consultations were not arguing for men to change their own behaviours as much as for separate facilities, with amenities such as shower curtains, for their own use. The older women treated the issue as something of a joke on their own behalf, with comments such as ‘I’ve seen all that before’ and ‘there’s not much to look at, just their little jiggly bits’. However, they were concerned about younger women, and issues of men’s vulnerability to accusations of sexual harassment, and inappropriate behaviour as well as young women’s need for personal space when they were menstruating were raised, as were concerns about women from culturally diverse backgrounds where there are stricter divisions between women and men. In these contexts it unlikely that young women would feel able to speak up about feeling uncomfortable.

**Support**

While women did recount experiences of incidents when they were subjects of disrespect and harassment, they frequently found support from men within their clubs. One young umpire told the group:

> I have been doing this for a long time so people from the football club look out for me. It’s the supporters and the netballers and the players’ girlfriends are abusive, and they shouldn’t be doing that [Pauline].

Women whose family members were also involved with the club described how this often functioned to protect them from being subjected to some of the behaviour or treatment experienced by single women. One umpire told the group:

> We are protected by our husbands. We are part of the same [umpires] association. Because our husbands are umpires people know them and so we get protected. I don’t know what would happen if our husbands stopped. I might suffer [Coleen].

A club that lost a young female umpire because of the abuse did address the club’s lack of response to her complaints, albeit belatedly:
We got a new [male] president who said that if there were issues he wanted them taken to the committee and they will be dealt with regardless if it was male or female. We are making steps forward. We have three women on the committee and that helps [Coleen].

The resilience of women was demonstrated by one young woman who said:

I really, really like the game. After I have been abused I come back stronger. The majority of people are nice. People know who I am. It doesn’t affect me that much. Its annoying and upsetting but I am supported by the club [Candy].

And Tricia summed up the general attitude of women at all of the consultations when she said ‘you have to show leadership skills to be a club person. You have to be willing to do things’.

**Club Responses**

Despite the stories women related about lack of respect and abusive behaviours, the situation is not all negative, and many clubs have implemented strategies to address irresponsible behaviour. For example, the following exchange took place at the consultation with a group of female umpires:

**Sandra**: We have the ‘green shirt policy’ through the VFL for first-year umpires. We have zero tolerance of abuse to anyone in a green shirt. We opted for this because the young kids umpiring need to be protected ... We need respect and responsibility in the junior league ... it has improved people’s behaviour. Players now tell each other to pull their head in. It has helped quieten their behaviour. We give them a yellow or red card if they swear or use the word cheat.

**Selina**: Anything on field is OK but using the word ‘cheat’. That’s not OK. We also use black cards and players are sent off for the whole game if they get a black card.

Another participant explained a rating system for disciplining unacceptable behaviour.

We have a one to five discipline system. Anything above four is investigated. At the end of the year we provide an award for the best behaved club. The award is highly regarded and can bring as much as $1,000 to the club [Fran].
Despite the existence of a range of AFL Victoria policies and codes of conduct to guide club operations, a number of concerns were raised about non-adherence to these codes. The following exchange took place in one consultation:

**Fran**: We have a grievance officer and a player liaison officer [general agreement that this was a useful model].

**Pam**: Is ‘Conduct Unbecoming Policy used?

**Fran**: ... falls down because it is not read.

**Sandra**: ...needs to be given to people in face-to-face session rather than handed out. Clubs are expanding and expected to do more and be more accountable.

**Pam**: [The] policy needs to be understood better and have life breathed into it.

Some clubs have developed their own evaluation processes. Participants in clubs that did not have end-of-season evaluations in place warmed to the idea of establishing similar processes.

Women don’t do things better, they just do [things] differently. The coaching role is crucial, safety is crucial, evaluations and grievance procedures will be taken on board. We need support from men and women. Some men are very supportive [Nora].

**What would clubs be like if they were working better?**

Each consultation group was posed the question, what would clubs that were operating well look like? How would they function if they had a ‘gold star’? Responses from the women’s consultations can be broken down into the following headings: Ethos And Environment, AFL Responsibilities, Processes, Relationships, and Mechanisms for Supporting Women.

**Ethos and Environment**

There was a marked lack of dissent about what the general environment in a well-functioning club would be like among the women who participated in the four consultations. They suggested that clubs would:
• Promote their values widely. Leadership and direction from the AFL about the overarching expectations of community clubs was seen as an important step in assisting clubs to do this.

• Have leaders who demonstrated the club’s expectations by example to all members and players. The Sydney Swans ‘no dickheads’ policy about unacceptable behaviour was held up as the gold standard to which community clubs should aspire. This policy includes training and support to keep players out of trouble and recruiting people with qualities above and beyond their capacity to play well, described by the Swans as ‘superior skills’. In the community-club context, this policy could be employed in recruiting for all positions across the club, not only for players.

• Practise high-quality communication. All members would know what was expected of them, issues would be discussed openly and resolved in a respectful and responsible manner.

• Women and men would be equal partners, and this would be actively demonstrated in all aspects of the club’s operations.

• Reduce alcohol consumption and dependence on sales of alcohol. This was seen as an important step in making the environment safer for women.

• Address rowdy and disrespectful spectator and parent behaviour, and make sure that football for children was about having fun and being active, not solely about winning.

**AFL Responsibilities**

The women’s groups felt that community clubs needed leadership and support from the AFL. They called for the AFL to:

• Widely promote the involvement of women in all aspects of Australian football. A social marketing campaign was suggested, which used television, posters and other media to spread the word throughout the population, not only within the membership.

• Provide credible representatives as speakers to educate community clubs about Respect and Responsibility in practice, and the expectations of the AFL.

• Provide training for senior players in community clubs similar to that provided for elite players.
• Educate children in primary schools about good sporting behaviour and the values of the AFL.

• Provide financial support for women’s football.

Processes

In relation to promoting positive sporting values and addressing code violations, the women called for clubs to:

• Carry out end-of-season reviews and evaluations to understand what is working well and where improvements could be made.

• Ensure that all players, coaches, officials and volunteers abide by codes of conduct.

• Implement systems for dealing with bad behaviour in the club. For example, institute grievance officers to deal with complaints and code violations, and where necessary, to enforce codes of conduct. Furthermore, institute a system of player advocates to provide support and advice to players concerning codes of behaviour and respect and responsibility.

• Improve game-day security to better manage spectator behaviour and monitor alcohol consumption.

Relationships

There was strong agreement in the women’s consultations that men needed to take a stand and support women in their clubs. Women called for mutual support between men and women in clubs, and for men to lead by example. Club leaders were urged to interact with all club members so they would understand what was going on. Furthermore, women suggested that a strategy for community engagement needed to be implemented. Using the local press to promote the social benefits of the club as well as match scores was seen as one way of doing this.

Mechanisms for Supporting Women

Women called for a range of responses to provide those already in clubs with greater support. Among these:

• There was support for a women’s foundation at the league level, to enable women to network across clubs and support each other.
- Actively recruit more women as members and to all roles in the club. Participants suggested that until there was equal representation of women and men, the environment would continue to be somewhat hostile towards women.

- To recruit and train more women coaches and mentor new coaches.

- Mentoring was seen as an important step in supporting women in all roles within clubs.

- There was a feeling that while women players supported men in their teams, this was not reciprocated. Women players thought that having support from the men in their club would be a great improvement.

**Men’s Consultation**

At the consultation held with men who were development managers at AFL Victoria, there was a great deal of discussion about the difference between country and city clubs and leagues. The country model is one of combined football/netball clubs, while in the city, football clubs stand alone. Local government in country areas appears to support football/netball teams to a greater extent than stand-alone football clubs in metro areas, in that there are generally better physical facilities for women. In the city, there appears to be a more difficult relationship between local government and community football clubs, which translates into lack of facilities for women, and in some cases, substandard facilities for men. Every local government area has a department of sport and recreation, and an officer who liaises with community sporting groups. There was some indication from the men’s group that at times there may even be hostility between urban clubs and their local government sport and recreation officer.

Overall, the men’s group was not forthcoming with many suggestions for what a well-functioning club would be like. Bouncing Racism out of Sport was cited as a high-quality program, and there was support for the formation of women’s foundations similar to those already established in the eastern (Ladies of the East) and western (Women of the West) suburban AFL Victoria leagues. The men’s group was more focused on the day-to-day difficulty of volunteers running clubs that are increasingly becoming complex businesses, the pressure they are already under to deliver, and the time constraints on volunteers.

**Discussion**

Based on the findings of the literature review, this research is groundbreaking in that, apparently for the first time, systematic research has been carried out to establish what it
is like for women and girls in community football clubs, and what needs to happen for them to feel safe and be included alongside their male counterparts in their clubs.

Overall, when analysed alongside each other, there was an apparent disconnect between the opinions and attitudes at the women’s and the men’s consultations. Women indicated they felt at times excluded, talked down to, unsupported and discouraged from taking on roles in the club that have been traditionally considered the domain of men. They felt that they brought a different attitude and approach to the club in that they demanded respect and responsible behaviour, had a family orientation rather than a ‘boys’ club’, and were willing to volunteer and contribute more willingly than many men. There was a strong theme that they were seen as good enough to take on men’s roles if no men were available, but in the presence of a willing man, were expected to take a back seat. There was remarkable unanimity among the women, with only one dissenting from these attitudes across all the consultations. Her position was that if men and boys behaved badly, it was the women in their lives who were responsible because they had not raised their sons to be respectful.

Attitudes in the men’s group were more divided. Some were supportive of women in all roles in football clubs; others appeared to prefer separation typified in the country football/netball clubs. In this model, women play netball, men play football and they socialise and share voluntary responsibilities. It should be noted that these clubs do appear to provide better facilities for women than metro clubs. There were some men who feared football clubs would be ‘ridiculed’ if women ‘took over’, and to some extent that men would be denied their fun by expectations of ‘responsible’ behaviour – which appeared to be equated with being denied enjoyment.

It is likely that this disconnect plays out in the community-club context, and that men are unaware to a greater or lesser extent of the women’s concerns. As some of these concerns place women at risk of discrimination and abuse, or place clubs at risk of losing much-needed volunteers, this matter needs to be addressed seriously.

To ensure it is clearly understood, the AFL needs to articulate the Respect and Responsibility Policy, disseminate information widely and provide education to key stakeholders in the AFL, both workers and volunteers.

Interventions such as AFLV’s Quality Clubs and Quality Leagues Programs aim to institute change within clubs, so it is important to bring together interventions such as these, that are already in operation, with Respect and Responsibility, to ensure that clubs are not subjected to more interventions, but to one integrated program to support them to carry out their work to the best of their abilities. This would link together programs such as
Quality Leagues and Clubs accreditation, the Disability Policy, the whole suite of policy and code of conduct templates for community clubs, female football and Bouncing Racism Out of Sport to complement further interventions to implement Respect and Responsibility.

While this research has started to identify what might be needed to bring about culture change from the perspective of women and girls, overall, there are two important questions that remain to be answered:

- What is in it for community football clubs to change their culture and be more inclusive of women? and

- What needs to happen for men to join with women as partners in change, so that the sport, recreation and leisure needs of each member can be met fairly and equitably, regardless of gender?
References


