Life After Football

The construction of masculinity following a career in elite Australian Rules football

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed .... Date ....

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to James, who first inspired me.

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Abstract

Elite Australian Rules footballers are portrayed as exemplars of hegemonic masculinity, and are some of the most recognisable faces in Australian society. Retirement from sport is inevitable, and regardless of the circumstances, a period of readjustment to no longer receiving so much praise and adulation inevitably follows. This research will describe how masculinity is constructed through the Australian Rules football league, an under-researched area, while also adding to the body of literature on retired athletes.

This investigation aimed to explore the meaning of masculinity in the lives of retired Australian Rules footballers, specifically addressing the impact of the experience as an elite AFL footballer on understandings of masculinity, and the impact of retirement from elite sport on the way in which these men now see themselves and their masculinity. This was a qualitative study in which 20 men took part in individual semi-structured interviews. The data was analysed through an inductive, thematic approach, utilising the Braun and Clarke (2006) model.

The nine themes that arose through analysis were orthodox/hegemonic masculinity; society and culture; the 'perfect life'; always a footballer; distrust of the media; staying in shape; the denial of pain; moving on; and life is brilliant.

The following conclusions are offered. Sport continues to be an important avenue through which masculine identity is developed, and an activity in which 'normal' boys are expected to show an interest. Further, involvement in sport was perceived as being in the footballers' 'blood'. Being an Australian Rules footballer is an important part of the men's identity, and remains important as such even in retirement. Involvement in a team sport shapes the way men

perceive themselves. As an opportunity for men to 'do' masculinity together, sport leads to a sense of belonging that can positively influence men's sense of masculine identity.

Although an inclusive style of masculinity has been evident in recent research (Anderson 2002; 2005; 2008b), traditional perceptions of masculinity are still being produced and reproduced. Australian Rules football also continues to be a highly homophobic sport; an example of cultural perceptions enacted through AFL football that need to be challenged.

Whether men retired voluntarily or involuntarily, time was always required for readjustment and reconstruction of identity. The footballers' constructions of masculinity in life after elite sport were largely comprised through subsequent employment, demonstrating the importance of an alternate career path.

Recommendations for further research include: the homophobic nature of AFL football; a comparative or longitudinal study with early and late career players to explore the changing nature of masculinities; an investigation into whether the sense of belonging gained from participation in team sports can be gained through other male-orientated workplaces; and the attitudes of AFL footballers towards the services offered by the AFL player's association (AFLPA), to help identify possible further support for retiring AFL footballers.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This study is an investigation into the construction of masculinity in the lives of retired Australian Rules footballers. Sport is one of the crucial arenas through which masculinity is constructed, negotiated, and reinforced. Elite level Australian Rules footballers are arguably some of the most prominent 'faces' in Australia society, and as such receive much adulation. Therefore, upon retiring from sport, a period of reconstruction may be necessary in order to adjust to not receiving the same accolades and attention as they did during their AFL career. This chapter will discuss the background to the study, an introduction to the formation of Australian Rules football, the importance of sport to many Australians, and the associated issues surrounding masculinity within Australian culture.

Background to the study

As a young child I grew up watching a significant amount of sport. My father's love of sport became my love of sport. Admittedly, the sports I particularly watched were dominated by men, as these were allocated the majority of the media coverage on television. When Adelaide was granted a team in the national Australian Rules football league, my passion for the game was born. I regularly attended games, dressed in inordinate amounts of club colouring, celebrated when 'my' team won and became decidedly upset when we lost a game. My passion for football led me to take steps to be further involved in the game. Having enrolled

in a Human Movement degree at university, I was given the opportunity to undertake a sports trainer course that would qualify me to work with a sporting club, particularly in the area of injury management. Upon completion of this qualification I started working as a sports trainer with one of the Australian Rules football teams in the stated based SANFL (South Australian National Football League) competition. I was unaware at the time how my involvement with such a football team, outside the role of supporter, would greatly change my perception of the game about which I was so passionate.

In 2005, during one of the first few games I had worked as a sports trainer, one of the players (who was contracted to an AFL side at the time) put his arms up to defend a mark. As the ball hit his arm, his shoulder dislocated, not for the first time in recent weeks. I was sent out to inspect his condition and immediately he assured me that he was 'fine' and ran off to continue playing. As I observed him in the following minutes he remained on the field despite being unable to lift up his arm, making him functionally incapable of playing football. At the time I remember asking myself 'why would they do this to themselves?' This player was clearly in pain and yet refused to come off the ground and receive treatment. I did not understand what would motivate a person to try and push through such obvious discomfort. I reported his condition to the senior head trainer who then made the call to 'drag' this player off the ground. As this player came off the ground he declared he would never play football again and has not since. This incident proved the catalyst for my interest in masculinity and sport. As I was thinking about this player, and whether he would in 10 years' time be left with a semi-functional shoulder, or have difficulties getting out of bed in the morning: I considered what seemed to be significant long term costs of playing elite

Australian Rules football. I began to question what it is about sport, particularly for men, that would lead them to display such overtly archetypal masculine traits, why sport is so important to men and how they come to be socialised into such risk-taking behaviours.

Despite the growing involvement of women in Australian Rules football, it remains a largely masculinised sport, particularly at the elite national level. For a number of years I have been the head trainer of the junior football teams for the same SANFL club that sparked my interest in men 'doing' masculinity through Australian Rules football. What began as a path to understanding why men 'do what they do' in an effort to better help the footballers whose safety on the field is my responsibility, has developed into an investigation about which I am passionate and wish to continue to learn more.

I come to this research, then, with a background as a sports trainer with an interest in player welfare and knowledge of some of the process and cultural values that exist within football clubs. I have also completed an Honours thesis on the attitudes of SANFL footballers towards playing with pain and injury, which has developed my understanding of masculinity within a sporting arena. However, I am neither a footballer nor male, and as such I have no experience with what it 'feels' like to be a male footballer.

Sporting Passion

The 1989 *Australian Bulletin* (cited in Adair & Vamplew 1997) stated that sport is as much an Australian icon as Kangaroos, meat pies and Holden cars. Such is the importance of sport in many Australians' lives, it has become a way of life.

The *Bulletin* argued that while Australians may stop short of obsession, sport is a necessary part of life in Australia.

In the 2008–2009 annual report the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) ascertained that 66% of the Australian adult population and 64% of the Australian child population between the ages of 5 and 14 participated in some form of sport or physical activity (ABS 2009). In addition, almost half of the Australian population attended a sporting event during the 12 months leading up to the survey period, with Australian Rules football being among the top two sporting events attended by both males and females. As these statistics show, sport holds a central place in the lives of many Australians, and has long been regarded as important in Australian culture. Sport in Australia originated from British colonial sport and has been adapted to form a unique 'Australian style'; one of the more significant reasons why Australians place so much importance on sport can be traced to national history and culture (Adair & Vamplew 1997). Colonials enjoyed the opportunity to beat their opponents; therefore sport became a measure of achievement. The pride in sporting prowess that was developed in the pioneering period is still evident in Australian society today (Stewart et al. 2004). Much of Australia's global image is defined by its representation in sporting events, the outcome of which has the power to unite the nation (Stewart et al. 2004). Land and Butner (1982) state that Australia's passion for sport is linked to noble allegiance, fair play and fanatical endeavours to represent state and country. The development of this passion has primarily been associated with Australia's cultural heritage, physical environment and convict and pioneering past, as well as Australia's generally mild climate in which sports can be played all year round. Early in Australia's settlement, the 'pioneering spirit' was argued to give

Australian males a sense of mateship, courage and manliness, and sport as a form of nationalism to demonstrate superiority to other colonies (Land & Butner 1982).

Adair and Vamplew (1997) criticise the perception that Australians are 'obsessed' with sport, arguing that to be obsessed suggests an unnatural attraction to sports compared to people elsewhere. However, Stoddart (1986) argues Australia's reputation for being obsessed with sport is not denying other countries' devotion to sport, but that sport has been an integral part of the social development of Australia. Adair and Vamplew (1997) do concede that there are distinctive features to sport in Australia. For example, despite the origins of Australian sports as British, Australians have adapted these activities to form their own styles of participation. Also, Australians have developed 'norms' of sporting behaviour that have been described as the Australian 'way' of sport (Adair & Vamplew 1997 p. xi). For example, Australian competitors have a reputation for being relentless and aggressive, particularly against the English in the cricket. Another Australian sporting tradition is the adulation of sporting heroes who are placed on a pedestal, thus creating a hierarchy, with sports stars at the top, who are looked up to as people to emulate. This creates the notion of athletes being role models and ambassadors of national achievement and pride (Land & Butner 1982).

Whether Australians are 'obsessed' with sport or merely enjoy a sense of national pride through sporting achievement, it is evident that sport is an important part of many Australians' lives, particularly men's. Therefore research into the construction of masculinity through sport can lead to an understanding of masculinised cultures, such as sport, as well as men in general.

Australian masculinities

Masculine identities "are multiple, complex, quite unstable constructions, even within one culture or one time" (Moore 1998 p. 8). As a settler society, the complicated nature of Australian masculinities has undergone major shifts since settlement. The Australian male image has historically been related to a love of the bush, 'swaggies' heterosexual ancestry through convict settlement, the 'ANZAC spirit', sport, and lifesavers (Moore 1998). This image has led to the most celebrated Australian heroes being the 'bushman', 'larrikin', and 'ocker' images (Hanley 2010). Much of Australia's national identity has been constructed through the images of men. Connell (2003 p. 9) states this image revolves around "the convict shaking his shackled fist; the heroic explorer facing inland; the bushman plodding down a dusty track; the digger scrambling up the slopes at Gallipoli; Bradman and McCabe facing the bodyline attack." The common factor in these images is that that they are all of men, demonstrating the centrality of the Australian *masculine* identity in Australia's *national* identity. Connell argues that until recently the images of Australian men and subsequent critiques have had little effect on social practices. However, with the increased research on men and masculinities a deeper understanding of men in gender relations has been gained. This research will add to the growing body of literature on men and masculinities, with particular regard to sport and elite athletes, as well as men in general.

Australian Rules football

Hess and Stewart (1998) stated that Australian Rules football is not only the indigenous Australian game, but also one of the most passionately supported for more than a century and a half. Given the popularity of Australian Rules football

Hess and Stewart (1998 p. 1) argue that "Football is more than a game: it has become an integral part of the cultural life of many Australians."

Australian Rules football was developed as a game to replace cricket in the winter, in order for cricketers to remain fit. Following his suggestion to the Melbourne Cricket Club committee in August 1858, Thomas Wentworth Wills was given the task of devising a game that kept the ball more in the air than in Rugby as the hard grounds in Australia made playing Rugby difficult (Sandercock & Turner 1981). Wills and his cousin, Henry Colden Antill Harrison, are attributed with being the founders of Australian Rules football, having developed the first rules of the game. However, despite the evidence being circumstantial, some date the game's origin to the 1840s goldfields, where Irish immigrants played a variation of Gaelic football (Blainey 2010).

Early in the history of Australian Rules football, schools became one of the major influences in the development of the game from the various British versions, with the first recorded match being between Melbourne Grammar and Scotch College in 1958 (Grow 1998; Sandercock & Turner 1981). The military also played an important role in the development of the game, particularly in the way it was embraced by local crowds and how players were perceived. Generally the soldiers' teams played rough and were praised for this approach by the local media. This style of rough play was a prime reason for the early popularity of the game (Grow 1998). However, as the game developed, rough play became an issue requiring regulation.

On October 1 1986 the VFL proposed an expansion of the League for the first time since 1925 (Nadel 1998). The national League was to include teams from

Brisbane and Western Australia, however remained known as the *Victorian*
Football League. It was not until the end of the 1989 season that the VFL changed
its name to the Australian Football League (AFL), with the first season of the
AFL in 1990. The AFL and was expanded again to include a team from South
Australia in 1991.

Since its beginnings in the 1800s, Australian Rules football has undergone
numerous transformations. From the unstructured matches in the 1850s and 60s
to the current billion-dollar business, football remains arguably the most popular
sport in Australia, and an important aspect in the lives of many Australians. The
culture of the sport has also changed from an early focus on heavy collisions and
romanticised violence to a more civilised game with trial by video and anti-
vilification laws minimising on field brutal behaviour (Hess & Stewart 1998).
This does not mean the current form of the game is 'soft', or any less masculine
than it was in the 1800s; players still accept pain, injury and heavy body contact
as an implied and acceptable part of the game. The laws in place however, have
brought player safety into consideration and have minimised the 'white-line'
fever ideology that renders acceptable breaking an opponent's nose for example
during a game whilst remaining friends after the siren sounds (Hess & Stewart
1998). The rule changes have allowed for football to remain a highly
masculinised game, where body contact and collisions are permitted, while
rendering malice unacceptable (Hess & Stewart 1998).

For the latter part of more than a century and a half that football has remained the
most popular game in Australia, television has been instrumental in that
popularity. Television reaches millions of viewers, creating heroes, myths and
images that maintain viewer interest. In addition, the sale of media rights has

injected millions of dollars into football, moving player participation from leisure to full time employment (Hess & Stewart 1998; Booth 2009; Kelly & Hickey 2010).

Australian Rules football has not been embraced as an international sport, although annual modified games between Australian Rules footballers and Irish Gaelic footballers have attracted some interest. However, as Hess and Stewart (1998 p. 261) state, "so long as sport followers around Australia see Australian Rules football as a valuable part of their lived experience, then the game will continue to strive."

The early history of Australian Rules football is especially entrenched in Victorian culture. However, a new era began when the Victorian Football League expanded nationally to become the Australian Football League (AFL). This research will investigate the construction of masculinity in retired footballers who have played in the *national* AFL competition after its first season in 1990.

Purpose of the study

This study will focus on the social construction of masculinity and Australian Rules football. The AFL is a highly masculinised domain, through which hegemonic masculinity is both produced and reproduced. Footballers typically enter the AFL system in their late teens to early 20s, a critical time in the development of their identity as men. Within football teams there is a broad range of ages, and young men are often influenced by older teammates. Having been socialised into masculinity through cultural practises in football, upon retirement

(whether voluntary or involuntary) a period of adjustment and redefining masculinity is required (Fortunato & Marchant 1999; Kelly & Hickey 2008). The purpose of this study is therefore to investigate the meaning of masculinity for retired AFL footballers and how their masculine identity may be redefined in retirement. It will explore the ways in which football has assisted in the construction of masculinity for this group of men, and how this may change when football is no longer prominent in their lives.

Aim

The aim of this research is to explore the meaning of masculinity in the lives of retired Australian Rules footballers.

Research Questions

1. What is the meaning of masculinity for retired AFL footballers?

2. How is masculinity lived and embodied in the lives of elite AFL footballers?

3. How has retirement from elite level sport impacted the way in which these men perceive themselves and their masculinity?

Significance of the study

The link between sport and masculinity has remained stable for many years. Sport is argued to be a representation of the dominant societal views; therefore, it is possible the findings of this research can be applied to men in general as well as

other masculinised sports. Sport is one of the most influential arenas in which masculinity is taught and learnt. Contact sports in particular provide a training ground for masculine characteristics such as aggressiveness, competitiveness and the ability to dominate others. However, while many masculine characteristics are normalised and tolerated within the sporting culture, there are also some instances where alternative characteristics are also tolerated; athletes crying when losing finals, for example, which contradicts the view that masculinity promotes the suppression of tenderness and vulnerability.

The concept of the Australian 'professional footballer' has really only been in existence for the past decade. Professionalism in this instance can be understood as the "development of a specific relationship to oneself and others. To be a professional is to be a person who must do certain, quite specific work on oneself so that one can be considered to be a professional" (Hickey & Kelly 2005 p. 5). This notion of a 'professional footballer' is relatively new, meaning that the experiences of these men as footballers are largely unknown. There has been one study on the retirement of Australian Rules footballers and identity (Fortunato & Gilbert 2003) and one on forced retirement from Australian Rules football (Fortunato & Marchant 1999). And although Messner (1990; 1992), Torregrosa, Boixados, Valiente and Cruz (2004) and Grove, Lavellee and Gordon (1997) have conducted research into retired athletes, and Turner, Barlow and Ilbery (2002) have researched retired athletes and pain, no research has yet been conducted into the meaning of masculine identity in the lives of elite Australian Rules footballers across their careers. Further, research into fans and crowd participation has been conducted from the perspective of the fans, but none has been conducted into the impact of fans on the footballers' masculinity. The

current research investigates the construction of masculinity in the lives of Australian Rules footballers in retirement and the changes that have taken place over their career. Research of this nature has not been conducted before, and is therefore offers important insight to assist in understanding masculine identity and masculine sporting subcultures.

Given the great significance that sport has in many men's lives *in Australia*, this research is also important in assisting the understanding of how as Australians, masculinity is constructed and how this changes following retirement.
The findings of this research into retirement and masculinity among elite Australian Rules footballers will not only assist in the understanding of the social construction of masculinities in sports, but also in other highly masculinised settings. Understanding the changes that occur to perceptions of masculinity after retirement from sport can assist in understanding the issues faced by all men when approaching retirement and life after work. In particular, given that elite sportsmen often retire at a younger age than men in traditional occupations, the findings of this research may assist in understanding the transitional phase from work to retirement, particularly if cessation of work is unplanned and involuntary. Through studying this group of men in a specialised masculinised setting insights into the broader constructions of masculinity can be gained. This research will attempt to understand the ways in which masculinity changes throughout the course of an AFL career.

This research will be qualitative research using a life history and social constructionist perspective. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews will be used to gain an understanding of the experiences of footballers throughout their careers from the beginning of their career, into retirement and life after football. This

research will add to the current body of literature on retired athletes, while also providing specific insights into the Australian Rules football league. It will also explore the ways in which masculinity is socially constructed through sport, and specifically the Australian Rules football league, which is an under-researched area.

Thesis outline

This chapter has provided a background of the important factors relating to the research, as well as the purpose and significance of the study. The following chapters will examine and discuss the current literature concerning men and masculinities including the related topics. The theoretical framework details the methodological reasoning utilised in this study. This research uses both social construction theory and life course theory, and as such both will be discussed in detail. A conceptual diagram is also provided in order to illustrate the outline of this investigation. Following a discussion of the theoretical framework, the methods undertaken will be described in detail.

The findings of this research are organised into themes, each with several subthemes in relation to the construction of masculinity in retired elite Australian Rules footballers. Following the themes is a discussion relating to the current literature and theoretical framework underpinning the study. Finally, based on the thematic analysis and subsequent discussion, conclusions and recommendations are made.

Chapter 2

Literature review

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the social construction of masculinity following retirement from elite sport. It will identify the ways in which retired male athletes reconstruct their masculinity following a sporting career, and the issues they face in life after elite sport. In addition, it will identify the gaps in the current literature and the need for further research in the area. This review will focus on Australian Rules football and male former athletes.

Masculinity

There are many ways in which masculinity is categorised, including both biologically and sociologically (Connell 1995). Biologically, masculinity is categorised through the possession of hormonal, physical and genetic features, which through genetic programming leads to certain behavioural traits. Sociologically, masculinity is created through the influences of social processes and culture (Connell 1995). Universally masculinity is often defined in contrast to femininity (Connell 1995). Femininity permits females to display emotions such as being anxious, depressed, frightened, happy or loving. Similarly, being open and vulnerable are acceptable, almost expected, characteristics of females, but not of males. For men, to display these characteristics could be perceived as being weak (Brannon & David 1976; Oransky & Marecek 2009). This is particularly so

for adolescent boys for whom being stoic, tough and unfeeling are crucial aspects of masculinity (Oransky & Marecek 2009). Patriarchal definitions portray feminine characteristics as being dependant and fearful, and this, along with the prohibition of certain forms of emotion, attachment and pleasure, promotes a dominant style of masculinity, which subordinates both femininity and other masculinities, such as gay, black and Asian (Connell 2001; Connell 2005). Character traits associated with masculinity include aggression and dominating behaviour, interest in sports and heterosexual sexual conquest (Connell 1995) whereas feminine characteristics emphasise passivity, weakness, pathology and irrationality (Anleu 2006). Anleu (2006 p. 359) also states, however, that "the social norms and cultural values governing women's bodies, behaviour, and appearance are far more restrictive and repressive than those regulating men's bodies."

Founding researchers on masculinities, Brannon and David (1976), specified four rules of masculinity; no sissy stuff (avoid all behaviours that even remotely suggest the feminine); be a big wheel (success and status confer masculinity); be a sturdy oak (reliability and dependability are defined as emotional distance and affective distance); and give 'em hell (exude an aura of manly aggression, go for it, take risks). These rules have changed little over the past three decades (Kimmel 2008), and represent a dominant or hegemonic style of masculinity (white, middle-class and heterosexual) against which other forms of masculinity are compared. Other characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity include being willing to take risks, being able to withstand pain and the desire to accumulate power, money and sexual partners (Kimmel 1990).

Connell (1998; 2000; 2010) argues that different cultures, as well as different

time periods, see masculinities constructed in many ways, and there is therefore not *one* masculinity but rather *multiple masculinities*. In addition, more than one form of masculinity can be identified in the same culture. The social relations between the masculinities have created a hierarchy, in which masculinities are dominant, subordinated or marginalised (Connell 2000). Carver (2006) identifies dominated, oppressed, variant, and dissident forms within the hierarchy of masculinities. Further, success or failure as a man is judged according to one's progress through the male hierarchy.

Crisis of masculinity

For years debate about an apparent crisis of masculinity has been commonplace (Kimmel 1987a; Connell 2005), fuelled by a historical collapse of patriarchal power and the liberation of women through the feminist movement, which challenged the traditional gender definitions and meanings (Connell 2005; Kimmel 1987b). This 'crisis' developed through the rise of feminism in the twentieth century, sparking a range of responses from men, including a retreat to traditional configurations and a strong assertion of a renewed masculinity (Kimmel 1987b p. 262). The concept of a 'crisis' can be thought of as a "relationship between some immediate experiences and responses on the part of men (young men in particular), which are linked to changes in employment, the family, and the gender order, and which together are constituted as a more general crisis" (Morgan 2006 p. 109). The rise of feminism and the changes in the labour market and division of labour link this crisis of masculinity to wide ranging social and economic changes. Morgan (2006) warns us however, that it is

important to remember the difference between the crisis in masculinity and the crisis in patriarchy, although there are similarities.

The collapse of the patriarchal dividend outlined by Connell (2005) as the advantage men gain by the subordination of women, has fuelled debate about the crisis in patriarchy. Morgan (2006) argues that while patriarchy has been adversely affected by the impact of feminism, it has not been eradicated completely. However, given there are multiple masculinities, the use of the word patriarchy may be oversimplified (Carrigan et al. 1987; Connell 1987). The concept of patriarchy tends to perceive men as an undifferentiated category, while also downplaying the contradictions and fluid nature that exists within gender categories (Messner 1990 p. 205). The use of the term 'gender order' therefore, may be more appropriate, as it recognises that the power men may hold over women is not complete, total or uncontested (Messner 1990).

Encouraging arguments emerging from this crisis of masculinity include the notion of the 'new man' as opposed to the 'retributive man' (Edley & Wetherell 1997). The 'retributive man' represents a more traditional male role, in that he is the main breadwinner and the primary source of authority in the family, as well as being tough, competitive and suppressing emotion. In contrast to the 'retributive man,' the 'new man' is more sensitive and caring, does not use sexist language and is prepared to participate in traditionally female assigned roles within the home, such as shopping and caring for the children (Edley & Wetherell 1997). The development of the 'new man' has been linked to changes in social and economic practices such as the 'feminisation' of the workforce, computer based technologies and the feminist movement (Edley & Wetherell 1997). Kimmel (1987a) argues that crisis tendencies arise from simplistic constructions of 'sex

roles' through which men and women are defined. Historically these sex roles define masculinity through traits that imply authority and mastery, and femininity through traits that imply passivity and subordination. However, the 'crisis' of masculinity and subsequent response indicates that masculinity is part of a broader gender relation issue rather than being purely socially isolated as a 'sex role'. Connell (2005) cautions against associating a crisis of masculinity with the traditional sense of crisis tendencies, through which a coherent system is destroyed or restored through the crisis, as masculinity is not a system in this sense, rather it is a "configuration of practise *within* a system of gender relation" (p. 84). Therefore, instead of outlining a crisis of a configuration, addressing the gender order as a whole and *its* disruption is more appropriate (Connell 2005).

Masculinity is impacted upon by social and economic conditions as well as by the altering position of women in society, and as such is socially constructed and reconstructed by these definitions and men's responses to them (Kimmel 1987a). Indeed a 'crisis' of masculinity may not always disrupt masculinities, but can initiate attempts to restore a dominant masculinity (Connell 2005). Further, Courtenay (2000) argues for the concept of agency: "the part individuals play in exerting power and producing effect in their lives" (p. 1388) is a central component of constructionism. From a social constructionist perspective, men and boys are not passive victims of a socially constructed role, but are themselves active participants in constructing and reconstructing the dominant forms of masculinity (Courtenay 2000).

Hegemonic masculinity

The concept of hegemony was derived by Antonio Gramski, and can be defined as "moral and philosophical leadership; leadership which is attained through the active consent of major groups in a society" (Bocock 1986 p. 11). The idea begins with a class and its representatives exerting power over subordinate groups through coercion and persuasion (Simon 1982). Hegemonic masculinity is "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 1995 p. 77). Previous notions of hegemonic masculinity have often been referred to as the "male role" with strong links between business, sport and the media evident (Connell 2003). Importantly, however, this definition acknowledges that hegemony is neither a fixed nor unchallengeable concept. At any given time women can challenge the dominant position of some groups of men or other subordinated groups of men and a new hegemony is established (Connell 1995). Messerschmidt (2004) argues that men socially construct masculinity based upon their position in society, and therefore, men situationally accomplish masculinity. This creates a hierarchy of men dependent upon their socially constructed circumstances, while also establishing subordinated stigmatised and marginalised masculinities within the gender order framework (Messerschmidt 2004; Connell 1995). Subordinated masculinities include gay masculinities; gay men are commonly perceived as being at the bottom of the hierarchy of masculinities due to the association between homosexuality and femininity (Connell 1995). In addition, within groups, some men are marginalised according to race and or social class. Within sporting cultures, black athletes

become exemplars of hegemonic masculinity as they are often assumed to have superior athletic ability (Ferber 2007; Buffington & Fraley 2008; Van Sterkenburg & Knoppers 2004). However, their fame and wealth does not create social authority for all black men (Connell 1995). Anderson and McCormack (2010) suggest that the cultural images of speed, strength and muscularity problematise Black men's abilities and leads to a disempowered status of many Black men in sport, thus contributing to the marginalisation of Black masculinities.

The notion of multiple masculinities is an important aspect of the emerging discussions on masculinity. Hearn and Morgan (2007) state that the concept of multiple masculinities refers to the way in which masculinities are developed and enacted in conjunction with other social divisions and social differences. Therefore, the most prominent displays of hegemonic masculinity are not necessarily by those who hold the most powerful positions; however, successfully asserting authority becomes a significant indicator of hegemony, and is often underpinned by violence (Connell 1995). In addition, the number of men who consistently engage in hegemonic practices is relatively small, although many men benefit from the overall subordination of women and other marginalised masculinities (Connell 1995).

Lipman-Blumen (1976) explains the patriarchal nature of sex-roles through a homosocial approach. Homosociality can be defined as the non-sexual attractions held by men for other men (Lipman-Blumen 1976; Bird 1996; Flood 2008). Taking a homosocial view of sex-roles maintains the hierarchy of men and their domination over women. The notion suggests that men can "derive satisfaction for their intellectual, physical, political, economic, occupational, social, power

and status needs – and in some circumstances their sexual needs – from other men" (Lipman-Blumen 1976 p. 16). Homosocial relationships are therefore encouraged and carefully organised (Plummer 1999). Kimmel (1994 p. 121) furthers this notion by stating that masculinity is homosocial enactment through which manhood is demonstrated for approval from other men. Control of resources such as land, money, occupations and family ties have led to a hierarchical dominance order among men and over women. Lipman-Blumen (1976) suggests the origins of this dominance stem from the historical notion of the male as the hunter, warrior and protector. Since the emancipation of women through the feminist movement however, women are now experiencing a redistribution of some resources, including power relations, which has now allowed them to create homosocial networks of their own, in that they are no longer solely reliant on men to provide resources (Lipman-Blumen 1976). In addition, Kimmel and Kaufman (1995 p. 17) argue that the traditional definitions of masculinity that rely on economic autonomy with control over one's labour and self-reliance in the workplace now do not exist, due to the transformation of the workplace. However, male homosocial relations continue to be significant in the lives of many men, particularly for those who participate in highly homosocial subcultures, including sporting groups (Flood 2008).

Bird (1996) outlines three areas through which hegemonic masculinity is maintained through homosocialilty. These areas are emotional detachment, competitiveness and the sexual objectification of women. As masculinity exists in relation to femininity (Connell 1995), being masculine means not being feminine. Gender hierarchies are maintained through emotional detachment; men rarely display their feelings or show emotions, especially by crying, as this reveals

weakness and potentially ostracises men from their homosocial group (Bird 1996). However, given that masculinities are not fixed, each situation a man encounters requires a renegotiation of masculine ideals. For example, in a male homosocial environment, emotions and feelings are generally suppressed. However, in a heterosocial environment a man expressing emotions to a female may be acceptable behaviour, and therefore does not challenge a man's masculine identity (Bird 1996; Courtenay 2000).

Within the sporting context, Anderson (2008) suggests that men are encouraged from an early age to devalue women as athletes and value them as sexual objects. Given that there is a long heritage of masculinised practices within sport, and very few women present within the male sporting arena to challenge ideals, the influence on young men entering the institution is significant. Additionally, so much of an athlete's time is consumed by the sport and associated off-field occasions that, Anderson (2008a) argues, these men are placed in a near-total male institution, which exacerbates the cultural practices produced and reinforced through sport.

Proving one's masculinity encourages competition with other men (Bird 1996). Competitiveness also perpetuates the dominance of men over women (Pleck 2004). It is argued that through homosocial competition self-worth and status can be gained, while heterosocial groups deemphasise competition (Bird 1996). Competition between men extends to the objectification of women, as men compete with each other for female attention. Women are regarded as objects of sexual pleasure for men, who often boast about their sexual conquests to other men, and his status as a man can be reinforced if he is successful in pursuing a beautiful female (Bird 1996; Lipman-Blumen 1976; Kimmel 2001; Flood 2008).

Pleck (2004) extends this argument by stating that often women are the *ultimate* source of competition between men and become a significant symbol of a man's success.

This objectification of women as sexual beings for men is a fundamental characteristic of hegemonic masculinity (Donaldson 1993). Women provide sexual validation for men, thereby negating men as objects of sexual pleasure for other men (Donaldson 1993). Hegemonic masculinity is categorically heterosexual (Connell 2000). Homosexuality then is considered counter-hegemonic and is a subordinated masculinity. Donaldson (1993) outlines three main reasons why this is so: aggressiveness towards homosexuality is viewed as a critical aspect of male heterosexuality; male homosexuality is considered to be effeminate; and lastly the act of homosexual pleasure itself is regarded as subversive. The traditional ideologies of the family, with clear social divisions of labour and the physical prowess and social power that are associated with heterosexuality, have lead to widespread homophobia (Connell 2000). Gay men are labelled as feminised men and have been subjected to derogatory jokes and even hatred (Connell 2000).

The division of labour, including socially defining tasks as either 'men's work' or 'women's work' is a key element of hegemonic masculinity (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1987). Traditionally men held positions that required strength and were consistent with their physical attributes, while women's roles orientated towards the home and family (Harrison & Lynch 2005). Given these differential social roles of men and women, gender roles were constructed leading to the expected characteristics and behaviours of men and women (Harrison & Lynch 2005). Therefore, tasks that involve heavy manual labour are most often referred to as

more masculine than white collar and professional work, with the exception of management roles (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1987). Today, many men and women are challenging these traditional gender roles and performing tasks historically held by the other sex, with more male homemakers and female leaders (Harrison & Lynch 2005). However, those who do not conform to the socially constructed norms of how men and women are expected to behave may experience negative attitudes from those who hold these traditional gender role orientation views (Harrison & Lynch 2005).

The social division of labour is not confined to the workforce, but extends to household duties. Typically men are responsible for manual jobs such as repairs, digging and construction and maintaining cars and household machinery, all of which require strength, skill with tools, exposure to the elements and toughness (Connell 1983). On the other hand, the household duties of women include cooking and cleaning as well as child rearing (Connell 1983). Tang and Cousins (2005) suggest that despite more women entering the workforce, they continue to perform the majority of household duties, particularly in Western society. O'Brien (2005) supports this, contending that in contemporary society a father's domestic role is predominantly in childcare and not in housework. Traditionally as women gave up employment in order to raise the children, the father's role has been that of the 'breadwinner'. Culturally, 'work' has been categorised as a male domain (Connell 2005). This ideal has been reinforced through societal notions of the male wage-worker and the female domestic-worker, which links masculinity with the public realm and femininity with domesticity and consumption (Connell 2005).

The importance of employment is taught early to young men as they learn that they are what they do (Keen 1991). Messner (1992) identifies that it is a common occurrence for men, particularly in early adulthood, to define themselves in terms of their occupation, which Messner argues is based on men's socially defined desire to be recognised as 'somebody'. Therefore, one's profession becomes a key conversation initiator in adult life. Pini and McDonald (2008) contend that a man's commitment to, and capacity for, success and career ambition are important ways through which to demonstrate hegemonic masculinity. Further, a young man's first full time job is a significant rite of passage from boyhood into manhood, and requires sacrifice and responsibility (Keen 1991; McGinley 2011). Wealth too, is implicitly linked to power, and an important element in establishing masculine identity (Keen 1991; Whitehead & Barrett 2001; Kimmel 2007). As such, men who are unable to hold regular employment are argued to have not yet attained adult masculinity (Keen 1991). However, increased economic need, along with women's emancipation and education, has challenged the masculinisation of the working environment (Connell 2005).

The notion of the male breadwinner role, based on the assumption that in a traditional family the male was responsible for earning a wage and the female for caring for the family, is argued to be in decline (Lewis 2001). While there have always been women in the workforce, the male breadwinner model highlighted the social reality and indeed the social classes of countries (Lewis 2001). The dramatic change in the 'traditional' family structure in recent times has had a significant impact on the decline of the male breadwinner model. With the divorce rate and subsequent single parent families on the increase, as well as the increasing need for dual income households, it is no longer the sole responsibility

of the male to provide for their family (Lewis 2001; Kelan 2008). Indeed, the majority of male participants in Laws' research (2009) determined that in contemporary society, a second income is a requirement, rather than an option, in order to provide adequate financial support for a family. Further, Laws (2009) found that not only are the financial rewards beneficial, but that the emotional rewards are positive aspects of employment for women. However, Kelan (2008) argues that the performance of a masculine breadwinner mentality is still necessary and is characterised by an individual worker focussing on full-time work. For many men, work comprises much of their identity and they may therefore find it difficult to construct an alternate identity based around home life should they be unemployed (Kelan 2008; Russell 1999).

Masculinity and sport

Burstyn (1999) describes sport as a symbolic representation of the principles of the masculinised system. Further, sport is often portrayed as an exemplar of hegemonic masculinity, as it "literally *embodies* the seemingly natural superiority of men over women" (Rowe & McKay 2003 p. 206). Sport, as a unified culture for men becomes an arena in which traditional competitions take place. Participation in high contact sports in particular encourages natural aggression and physical strength, as well as a high skill level and agility, and reinforcing hegemonic masculinity and potentially leading to improved social status (Welland 2002; Pringle 2009). For a particular masculinity to be hegemonic it must be culturally exalted, with exemplars who are celebrated as heroes (Connell 2000). Burstyn (1999) argues that sporting culture is important in the gender

order because it maintains an empowerment of certain people in society by producing inclusivity and exclusivity, as well as entitlement and marginalisation. In the sporting arena this leads to the construction of sporting heroes.

Sport is claimed to be an important masculinising process by which young boys are taught early to accept the values associated within sport, such as competition, toughness and winning at all costs (Messner 1989). This is a process in which heroes play a significant role. According to Wright (1998) boys who reject such values can have their masculine identity questioned. However, different sports lead to different masculine characteristics being learnt (McLaughlin 2004). For example, in team sports such as Australian Rules football, group loyalty and the denial of pain is learnt, whereas individual sports such as golf promote self-reliance and rationality (McLaughlin 2004).

Early research on sport by Theberge (1981) described sport as "a fundamentally sexist institution that is male dominated and masculine in orientation" (p. 342). Team sports in particular are still argued to be responsible in part for the promotion of sexist and misogynistic attitudes among men towards both women and gay men (Anderson 2005). The hierarchy and competition between men and the exclusion and domination of women are key elements within the sporting arena (Messner 2002). Not only does sport create an institution in which men are dominant over women, it is also argued to be one of the most homophobic arenas. Because young boys learn what it means to be a man through sport (Messner 1992; Drummond 2008; Hickey 2008), boys learn early that to be homosexual is unacceptable (Plummer 1999). This also extends to being unable to prove one's heterosexuality (Messner 1992; 2002). Young boys involved in sport learn that to be too emotionally open with his peers might render him being labelled gay or

'sissy'. Further, insults such as 'you throw like a girl' are commonplace, which denigrate women while attempting to humiliate men. Messner (1992 p. 36) states, "homophobia and the sexual objectification of females together act as a glue that solidifies the male peer group as separate from females, while at the same time establishing and clarifying hierarchical relations within the male peer group."

The classification of activities as masculine or feminine is largely a social construction (Koivula 2001). Sports are classified as gender neutral, masculine or feminine, based on perceptions relating to gender, beliefs, gender differences and appropriateness or participation due to gender (Koivula 1995). Sports that are regarded as appropriate for females to participate in are those that maintain the female gender role stereotype and allow gracefulness, beauty and aesthetic pleasure (Koivula 2001). In masculine cultures, female bodies are perceived as objects of sexual pleasure for men to enjoy, so females are socialised to use their bodies to please others (Koivula 2001). Sports that provide opportunities to display visual attractiveness are therefore portrayed as appropriate for females in which to participate, as they uphold traditional cultural stereotypes of femininity (Koivula 2001; Duncan 1994). Sports that are regarded as masculine are argued to be categorised according to danger, risk and violence, team spirit, speed, strength and endurance and masculinity (Koivula 2001). Attributes that contribute to the labelling of sports as masculine include the characteristics of the rules of the sport, features of the attitudinal mode, identifying men as a group that is distinct from women and the requirements that participants possess physical capabilities related to speed and strength (Koivula 2001).

As established in Chapter 1, sport is a vital part of Australian culture (Connell 1998; Drummond 2002; Pettigrew 2009). Socially and culturally many

Australians place great importance on sport in their lives. This is particularly so for many Australian males, as sport has long been seen as a masculinised domain, for reasons outlined above (Drummond 2002; Pettigrew 2009). A prominent theme in research conducted by Pettigrew (2009) was the persistent gender segregation in sport that has important links to how masculinity and femininity are constructed in society. Indeed, sport provides an important insight into many of the social values in Australia (Hindley 2005). Already established is the way in which sport is often regarded as having an important role in the development of young boys into masculine men; by investigating men in a social setting that has long been regarded as a masculine domain, we can gain an understanding of how groups of men display their masculinity.

Pioneering research by Messner (1987) stated that public masculine identities are concerned more with *doing* and *achieving* rather than with enjoyment, therefore the constant striving for success through sport becomes a way to connect athletes together (p. 57). Further, Lally (2007) argues that identity often has many compartments, but that often one dimension may become dominant with the other dimensions being viewed through the preferred lens. Hickey and Kelly (2007) argue that the football subculture imposes subordinate non-football demands. This is particularly pertinent for young footballers yet to establish themselves in the AFL. Often the sole focus for early career footballers in particular is on football, which leads to the neglect of other pursuits (Hickey & Kelly 2007). Such importance of sport in the lives of male athletes, together with the influence of sport on the development of masculine identity, can lead to a dominance of a football or sporting identity, with all other dimensions of identity being viewed

through the football lens. This has important implications as sporting careers finish, when an athlete's identity may need to be redefined.

The male body

The male body is a central feature in the construction of masculinity. Connell (1995 p. 45) stated that "true masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body." Given that many men construct masculinity through doing, rather than being, the body becomes a central site for proving one's masculinity (Drummond 2005). The body either drives and directs action or sets limits to action (Connell 1995). In a sporting sense the body is often viewed in terms of what it can do. Kelly and Hickey (2008) argue that the body can be defined both objectively and scientifically. For athletes, defining the body through what it can do allows it to be strengthened, repaired, cared for, and able to be understood by both the individual and those responsible for getting it out on the field each week (Kelly & Hickey 2008). This mechanistic perception of the body is an important concept, as it can lead to violence against oneself or others, as will be discussed in the following section (Messner 1992).

Significant indicators of masculinity are being muscular and strong (Pope et al. 2000; Drummond 2003). In fact strength, muscularity and masculinity are often regarded as a triplex, particularly for young males for whom the "muscles maketh the man" (Drummond 2001 p. 8). This can create problems for those males who do not live up to this perceived masculine archetype. Culturally masculinity has been described in terms of vigour, competitiveness, bodily strength and

assertiveness. Therefore, the sporting arena naturally becomes one of the key sites for rites of passage for young boys into manhood (Petersen 1998). Strengthening one's body is often linked with strengthening one's will, creating the mind/body dichotomy (Petersen 1998). The discipline needed to develop a masculine physique is regarded as displaying the ability to conquer the mind, and thus demonstrate masculinity (Petersen 1998).

For many, masculinity is inherently physical, in that big muscles are attributed to being manly. One participant in Agnew's research (2007 p. 32) stated that masculinity is "the amount of muscle on your body and how well you can see it." The sporting body is arguably the most public visual body, and in Western society is portrayed as the ideal male body (Loland 1999). Bordo (1990 p. 94/95) argues that "the firm, developed body has become a symbol of correct *attitude*; it means that one 'cares' about oneself and how one appears to others, suggesting willpower, energy, control over infantile impulse." Having a well-developed, muscular physique is linked to achievement, dominance, power and control, and therefore to hegemonic masculinity; and so it becomes desired in Western society (Loland 1999; Klein 1995; White, Young & McTeer 1995). In the sporting arena, tough muscular physique and the acceptance of body contact that could result in injury are central features of the male sporting culture (Stempel 2006). The discipline and sacrifice required to succeed at the elite level are argued to be 'character building' tests for athletes, and in this way participating in sport is explicitly linked to creating manhood (Stempel 2006).

As mentioned above, one of the defining characteristics of hegemonic masculinity is the sexual objectification of women. Ironically now, the well-trained male body has become sexually objectified for the pleasure of women.

Research by Wedgwood (2003; 2008) illustrates how it has now become commonplace for women to be sexually attracted specifically to sportsmen. Through her research, Wedgwood observed groups of scantily dressed women regularly attending sporting matches who appeared to be more interested in the sportsmen rather that the sport. While the young male participants in this study were seemingly aware of the attention they were attracting from the female 'groupies', they were careful not to respond. Wedgwood argues it is "this cool, strong, and aloof masculinity that many of the young footballers embody which attracts the young groupies in the first place" (2003, p. 198).

Pain and injury

The concept of pain is more than physiological. Within a sporting context pain is linked with willpower and passion, and often those who overcome it and continue to play receive much adulation (Roessler 2006). In addition, withstanding pain challenges the body's limits, and extending these limits through the desire to compete is a measure of self-enhancement (Roessler 2006). Thus, athletes are consciously aware of the challenge to overcome pain and are often active participants in the acceptance of it (Roessler 2006; Pringle 2009). Early research from Nixon (1992) outlined a 'culture of risk' within sporting clubs that can be defined as the belief system through which athletes accept pain and injury as being 'part of the game' or 'for the good of the team'. This leads to the socialisation of athletes towards pushing oneself to withstand pain or ignore the risk of injury. Further, the tolerance of pain is an important indicator of an athlete's commitment to the team's pursuit of success, and is therefore a socially

valued practice (Litson et al. 2006). The culture of risk institutionalises the belief that accepting pain and injury is the only choice if one is to succeed in their chosen sport (Nixon 1992). Often the distinction between good and bad pain is made. Training and competing is linked with good pain, whereas injuries or unplayable pain is perceived as bad pain. Most athletes agree that pain is a 'normal' career expectation, and that this is acceptable. However, this is based on the condition that the pain has nothing to do with injury (Roessler 2006).

The mind/body dichotomy, introduced above, demonstrates a mechanistic view of the body in which the body is viewed in terms of its functional capacity (Agnew 2007). This perception of the body as a machine is common to many athletes. Pioneering research by Messner (1992) found that an athlete's attitude and the drive to prove oneself, achieve and win leads to a certain type of relationship with his own body. Often athletes view their body as an instrument, are goal orientated and can view other people as objects to be manipulated and defeated in order to achieve their goals (Messner 1992 p. 62). The instrumental and mechanistic view of the body ultimately leads to violence against others or, in particular, oneself. Within the sporting environment, violence and aggression are often viewed as naturally occurring in this arena, but are left on the field when sportsmen are not on the ground (Messner 1992; Messner 2002; Agnew 2007). Further, those who participate in high contact sports perceive them to be 'safe', despite the aggression, as the rules of the game provide boundaries through which the aggression is controlled (Messner 1992). However, in this sense the body becomes a weapon used to defeat an objectified opponent (Messner 2002).

The risks many men take with regard to their health are particularly evident in contact sports. Pain and injury are tolerated, emotions are suppressed and how

much a male athlete is prepared to sacrifice his body in pursuit of success becomes a measure of his masculinity (Messner 1992; 2002; Young, White & McTeer 1994). Short-term pain is perceived as a frustration, as men are not accustomed to viewing their bodies as weak (Young, White & Mcteer 1994). Pringle (2009) argues that the acceptance of pain and injury as a normal career expectation should not lead to athletes being perceived as being passive participants in this normalisation process, rather active participants in the pursuit of success who enjoy playing sport. The participants in Pringle's study (2009) on New Zealand Rugby allowed the sport to dominate their weekly schedules, even though they were consciously aware of the subsequent risk of sustaining a serious injury. The same can be argued for Australian Rules footballers, who also choose to participate in a heavy contact sport with a high risk of injury.

Athletic success comes from both training the body in order to perform functionally and through training the mind, again demonstrating strong links between the body and the mind (Messner 1992). However, the body and mind must also be separate entities. When one's goal is to win, the body must be subordinated from the will to win. Messner (1992 p. 64) argues "to mentally and emotionally subordinate one's body toward the goal of winning is to make of the body a tool, separate from the mind," further illustrating the mechanistic view of the body that many athletes adopt.

Playing with pain and injury is a common occurrence in sport and has been widely linked to the construction of masculinity (Young, White & Mcteer 1995; Messner 1992; 2002; Hempill 2002). To not conform to what Sabo (1994) termed the 'pain principle' risks the questioning of one's masculinity. Indeed, as Messner (1990 p. 212) states, " to question their decision to give up their bodies would

ultimately mean to question the entire institutionalised system of rules through which they had successfully established relationships and a sense of identity." The pain principle, evident in sport through the commonly used phrase 'no pain, no gain', socialises men into enduring pain and injury in sport, as it is perceived as being courageous and manly (Sabo 1994). Young sportsmen learn quickly that behaviour that displays the 'correct attitude' such as playing with pain and injury is rewarded, while those who are not prepared to do so can become stigmatised and ostracised (Roderick et al. 2000; Murphy & Waddington 2007). This concept, Sabo argues, can affect male athletes in two ways. Firstly, it represses the awareness of their bodies and limits emotional expression. Secondly, the suppression of certain emotions allows them to build up internally and then be channelled into an emotional rage that is then directed at opponents; the mechanistic perception of the body results in violence towards oneself and others (Sabo 1994; Messner 1992). Further, Hempill (2002) states that in the sporting culture, continuous improvement in performance, dominating one's opponent and winning are crucial, therefore, aggression and violence are central features. Sabo (1994 p. 86) recognises that this principle is not confined to the sporting arena, but can be seen in nonathletic men who are 'workaholics,' or in those striving for success who deny their physical and emotional needs, which can then lead to the development of health problems.

This willingness of athletes to accept playing in pain as a normal career expectation has been described as positive deviance (Hughes & Coakley 1991). Positive deviance involves over conforming to the sporting ethic – the norms and values within the sport that "emphasise sacrifice for The Game [one's sport], seeking distinction, taking risks, and challenging limits" (Hughes & Coakley

1991 p. 307). For many athletes, conforming to this sporting ethic is perceived as what it means to be a 'real' athlete and is often reinforced by fans, the media, coaching staff and other athletes. One of the more significant aspects of the sporting ethic is being willing to play through pain or with an injury, with athletes encouraged to not give in to pressure, pain or fear. This refers to Nixon's (1992) culture of risk, where the notion of a 'real' athlete is depicted through a person's willingness to compete in pain, while at the same time risking further damage to one's body on the sporting field (Coakley 2009; Leahy 2008; Litson et al. 2006; Murphy & Waddington 2007). Through not giving in to physical risks or pain, athletes are perceived as having moral courage with regard to their sport. As such many athletes do not view themselves as being deviant through over conformity to the sporting ethic, rather as confirming their identity as athletes (Hughes & Coakley 1991). Conforming to the sporting ethic extends to the reluctance of athletes to talk about their pain and injury with medical staff, coaches and other teammates (Nixon 1994). Those who voice concerns about the widespread acceptance of pain and injury often harbour feelings of guilt, shame, uncertainty and frustration. This includes when an athlete is returning to play after serious injuries (Nixon 1993). However, often the distinction between good and bad pain is made, and talking about the 'good' pain associated with training is acceptable within sporting clubs.

Participants in Howe's research (2001) were willing to talk about injury and the associated pain "only if it was related to training and the goal of becoming a better athlete" (p. 294). This demonstrates an important concept in the conformity to the sporting ethic, in that pain and injury become viewed as an acceptable risk in the pursuit of success and those who are able to withstand the pain are often

perceived as being more successful than those who cannot (Iso-Ahola & Hatfield 1986).

Research on pain and injury in Rugby players found that while the men generally accepted pain and injury as normal within the sport, they both normalised and problematised injury (Pringle & Markula 2005). This continued into retirement when concerns were raised about injury, pain and health, which were often the cause of withdrawal from the sport. As the men aged, their relationship with their sport changed. Pringle and Markula (2005 p. 489) state, "the discourses of masculinity that dominated their teenage years – which celebrated aggression, toughness, and pain tolerance – lost their exalted status and were no longer typically thought of as masculinising." The men no longer had the desire to prove their masculinity through the often painful contests in Rugby. Masculinity is neither a fixed nor an unchallengeable concept, and as such different periods throughout a man's life can affect the way in which he perceives masculinity.

As men age their perception of masculinity changes and even challenges the hegemonic masculine ideals that were thought of as important in their teenage years (Pringle & Markula 2005). However, such is the dominance of the injury normalisation in sport, many of the men argued they had been 'lucky' to escape permanent disability through having played Rugby (Pringle & Markula 2005). The research by Pringle and Markula was conducted with former Rugby players, while the current research is with Australian Rules footballers. However, given Australian Rules football is heavy-contact masculinised sport, it is arguable that AFL footballers might also experience changes in their perceptions of masculinity in retirement, thus emerging as an important area for further research.

Australian Rules football and masculinity

Burgess, Edwards and Skinner (2003) identify sport as crucial in the construction of masculine identity. Sports that provide an opportunity to display masculine characteristics have been argued as being the means for idolisation, and therefore support Connell's (1990) notion of hegemonic masculinity having celebrated heroes, which leads to the cultural glorification of this form of masculinity. Fitzclarence, Hickey and Matthews (1998a) describe football as "a site appropriate for defining a set of core characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity, namely physical strength and toughness, emotional neutrality, assertiveness, control and entitlement, individuality, competitiveness and rationality" (p. 2). South Australian National Football League (SANFL) footballers identified sport as being an important part of their identity (Agnew 2007). As football requires a significant commitment in terms of time, diet, sleeping and social patterns and discipline, it is not surprising that the participants in the research described football as highly significant in their lives. This research supports earlier research by Messner (1987), which found that from a young age and into adulthood sport often becomes a central aspect in the lives of men. However, the majority of SANFL footballers have careers other than football, and as many footballers at the elite level have no alternate career, it is arguable that football has even more significance in constructing masculine identity among AFL footballers. This research into the ways in which retired AFL footballers construct their masculinity, particularly post-career will therefore be instructive.

The importance of football in the lives of elite AFL footballers from an early age was also a central theme in research conducted by Fortunato and Gilbert (2003). Participants in Fortunato and Gilbert's (2003) research identified an enjoyment of

football and a sense of loss when football was no longer central to their lives. Given that the hero status of footballers allows social opportunities that may not have otherwise been offered, loneliness is another concern for retired footballers and warrants further investigation (Fortunato & Gilbert 2003), particularly since total immersion in the football culture often means the majority of a footballer's friends are also involved in the sport. Fortunato and Gilbert's research (2003) utilised a grounded theory approach, in that the data generated is said to be the theory (p. 65). The current research is not aiming to develop a theory, rather an understanding of the meaning of football in the lives of retired AFL footballers as well as the meaning of masculinity to these footballers. As such, a life history approach through a social constructionist perspective will be utilised.

Messner (1992) conducted research into the lives of retired athletes and the development of identity focused on the commitment of male athletes to their sports. He further investigated how their sports affected other aspects of their lives such as relationships, health and personalities. Messner's (1992) research concentrated on 30 former athletes from four different sports, which were arguably the major sports in the United States of America: football, basketball, baseball and athletics. Messner (1992) argued that addressing this research through the social construction of masculinity was a useful way to answer the research questions, which aimed to generalise the relationship between masculinity and sport as well as the experiences, feelings, issues and motivations that male athletes share. Messner's research (1992) utilised a life history approach and compared two categories based on social status. The current research will also use life histories, but will focus on a relatively homogenous group of male athletes from one sport, Australian Rules football.

Messner (1992) states that success as an athlete is significant in constructing young boys' masculine "positional identity" (p. 49). Whitson (1990) argues that young men who excel at sports have happily profited from the fact that the ability to be successful in sporting contests is an important requirement for status in the majority of adolescent peer groups. Further, the adulation successful athletes receive from fans forms a way for a sportsman to connect with the world. This adulation and hero status provides an affirmation of their existence as men, and this is a powerful aspect of maintaining masculine identity (Messner 1987). This supports Whitson (1990) who claimed that the social attention and acclaim given to male athletes help to confirm patterns of male privilege, within and outside sport. Thus, the role of the crowd, family, peers, teammates and media becomes extremely important in constructing and maintaining the self-images of young men (Messner 1987). At the beginning of an athlete's career, family and peers largely influence identity, but as their career develops, the role of the crowd becomes increasingly important as the basis of an athlete's identity (Messner 1992; Webb et al. 1998; Stephan & Brewer 2007).

Often a sportsman's self-definition is reliant on this public recognition, which is often short-lived and highly dependent on performance (McPherson 1980). Mumford (2009) argues that "performance pressure" is a fundamental characteristic of the athletic role and links the athlete to the wider community. The recognition given to successful athletes is generally positive, therefore a sportsman's public reputation as an athletes is a significant part of their overall identity. When careers finish and crowd adulation is no longer prominent in the lives of athletes, identity can become vulnerable, particularly for those who have

been given significant status and prestige as sportsmen (McPherson 1980; Teitelbaum 2008).

Messner (1987) and Anderson (2005; 2009) suggest that the construction of identity through sports becomes problematic because not only is there a high probability of failure, but success itself involves the construction of a personality that magnifies many of the destructive traits of masculinity, including being highly goal-oriented and viewing one's body as a machine or weapon in order to defeat opponents. Messner (1987) goes on to question whether young men are socialised into placing a large emphasis on success as an athlete and what these men expect to gain from the sporting experience. This may be due in part to many professional athletes receiving much attention and prestige through being successful in sports from an early age (McPherson 1980; Teitelbaum 2008). It is therefore important to conduct further research into the experiences of young men involved in sport and the ways in which the sporting subculture and experience develops identity in terms of the needs of young men.

Retirement

An inevitable part of elite competition is retirement. Whether retirement is voluntary or involuntary, a sense of loss is common to many athletes. Fortunato and Marchant (1999) state that the circumstances surrounding an athlete's retirement can lead to difficulties adjusting to life following a professional sports career. Those who retire voluntarily appear to have smoother transitions into life after sport than those who are forced into retirement through injury or de-selection (Lavalee, Grove & Gordon 1997; Gordon 1995; Fortunato & Gilbert

2003). However, Kelly and Hickey (2008) maintain that the retirement transition must be seen as more than going from a footballer to a non-footballer. It is, they argue, more than a moment, it is a process, and while research indicates that this can be a difficult time, most athletes are able to work through the changes and rebuild their lives. For some this takes a few weeks, others years and for some it does not happen at all. The problem does not lie in what else they *can* do but in what else they *want* to do, as nothing compares with life as an AFL footballer (Kelly & Hickey 2008).

Factors that can effect the transition into retirement can be athletic or non-athletic factors, such as the voluntariness of retirement, the athlete's subjective evaluation of their career achievements, the education levels of the athlete and the prevalence of athletic identity (Erpic, Wylleman & Zupancic 2004). In addition, acceptance of not playing their chosen sport at an elite level again, as well as finding an alternative career can also present problems for retiring athletes (Price 2007). Difficulties following career termination may be due in part to athletes generally being quite young when retirement occurs, rather than after long careers in other professions, which allows for anticipation of the issues that may occur after retirement. This supports earlier work by McPherson (1980), who argued that while those who retire at 65 also experience loss, the issues facing retired athletes are exacerbated, as they often retire before the age of 35.

The issues facing these athletes following retirement include a perceived loss of identity, status and self-esteem, as well as financial concerns (Fortunato & Marchant 1999). These issues are exacerbated when an athlete is forced into retirement through omission or injury. Other issues confronting athletes who are forced to retire is a perceived lack of control, feelings of incompetence, low self-

esteem and self-respect, all of which heighten the feeling of loss (Fortunato &
Marchant 1999; Erpic et al. 2004). Often young men striving for a career in elite
sport consume much of their time in the pursuit of success. This can come at the
expense of their education, as young men frequently disassociate themselves from
their education long before they leave school (McGillivray & McIntosh 2006).
Therefore, McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh (2007 p. 102) state, "players are
being discarded bereft of the exchangeable, readily transferable skills necessary
for a future in an alternative employment field." Young men often define
themselves primarily in terms of their employment (Messner 1992), and as such
when athletic careers are over, men may be faced with difficulties as they
redefine themselves as a former athlete. Coakley (2009) states that even if
athletes are fortunate enough to extend their athletic career beyond ten years,
retirement from sport leaves around 40 working years in which the individual
needs to have an alternative occupation, and that this is an aspect of a sporting
career many athlete ignore.

Hickey and Kelly (2005) argue that while the AFL encourages young footballers
to pursue professional development, in the form of a TAFE or university course
or short certificate, at the club level this development of an 'off-field footballer' is
largely nurtured and administered independently. In addition, the recognition that
footballers must be aware of life after football, and as such develop outside
interests, can be problematic in that "from the time that a young man sets out to
develop an identity as a professional footballer he is encouraged to plan, to think,
and to take steps NOT to be a footballer" (Kelly & Hickey 2008 p. 16). Tensions
arise between and within the AFL sporting industry about the meaning of a
professional AFL footballer. Further difficulties arise due to the hierarchical

nature of football clubs, where the coaching staff often hold significant power over the players, and as Hickey and Kelley (2005) found, "it must be said that in most cases there was a willing acquiescence to the existence of this hierarchy on the grounds that in the interest of being a footballer, matters football must necessarily take priority over other things" (p. 8). A small percentage of young men become successful AFL footballers and as such the *chance to make it* often becomes a singular focus, leading to the prioritising of football over all other things. This creates a tension for these aspiring footballers between their perceived necessity to give football *everything they have* and the recognition that they should have interests outside of football (Hickey & Kelly 2005). Participants in Hickey and Kelly's research (2005) admitted they would only continue with part-time study or professional development *if* it did not interfere with their football training. Given the average AFL career is becoming shorter, being just 2.9 years or 34 games, with less than 10% of players extending their careers beyond 10 years or 200 games (Hawthorne 2005), young men can often finish their football career without having finished qualifications to prepare themselves for life after football. This is one area Hickey and Kelly (2005) outline as an important area of research, in order to develop a deeper understanding of why young footballers either drop out or fail courses. This would assist in the reduction of these incidences and lead to an enhanced professional development experience for AFL footballers (Hickey & Kelly 2005).

In Fortunato and Marchant's study (1999), also conducted with Australian Rules footballers, all participants indicated that football formed a major part of their life and following retirement a sense of loss occurred. Similar results were reported in Kadlcik and Flemr's research (2008), who found that the demands of sport

consumed a significant amount of time, and following retirement, many athletes were unsure how to utilise their spare time. Given Australian Rules footballers often receive 'hero status' in Australia, it is not surprising that Fortunato and Marchant's research (1999) concluded that being known as a footballer and the loss of this stardom was a central issue to the athletes when retired. This view was supported by participants in Kadlcik and Flemr's study (2008), who described the loss of social status as one of the challenges they faced in retirement, as they were "suddenly a 'normal' person, not a famous sportsman (p. 263)." Kadlcik and Flemr's research considered both male and female athletes' adjustments to retirement from sport in the Czech Republic, and focussed on strategies and interventions to ease the transition period into retirement. The current research's exploration into constructions of masculinity following an athletic career adds to such literature on life after sport, while also providing a particular understanding of masculinities and masculinised settings.

Fortunato and Marchant's study (1999) supports earlier research by Grove, Lavalee and Gordon (1997), who found that athletes who maintained a strong and exclusive athletic identity throughout their careers are often more vulnerable to loss following retirement and often find career transitions difficult. Grove et al.'s study (1997) was quantitative, however, differing from the current qualitative study, which will aim to obtain rich and deep data for a comprehensive understanding of how these issues facing retired athletes impact upon their identities. Preliminary findings by Phoenix and Sparkes (2006) suggests similar results to Grove et al. (1997): athletes with a strong athletic identity may be at risk for emotional disturbance in the transition out of elite sport because they are "less likely to explore other career, education and lifestyle options due to their

intensive involvement in and commitment to sport" (p. 117). Further, if young athletes perceive themselves to be in their 'peak' during their athletic careers, everything that follows it is subsequently inferior, thus causing difficulties in the retirement transition period (Phoenix & Sparkes 2008).

Having a strong athletic identity does not always lead to difficulties in the retirement transition process. The footballers in Kelly and Hickey's research (2008) stated they were optimistic about their futures, anticipating that the profile and skills they had developed throughout their AFL careers would stand them in good stead in their life after football. Further, Lally (2007) found that retirement encouraged former athletes to explore other identity dimensions that may have been neglected or abandoned during their careers. In addition, participants in Lally's research (2007) relished the opportunity for self-exploration, and even proactively reduced the dominance of their athletic identities as they approached retirement. These findings indicate that identity is fluid not static. Lally (2007) stated that the disengagement of athletic identity prior to retirement is not well documented in the literature, these early insights indicating that further research is warranted.

Retirement and the male body

Another important issue facing retired men is the changes that occur to body image and bodily function. Particularly towards the end of long careers, athletes become focussed on their bodies (Kelly & Hickey 2008). Many admit that they understand their body will ultimately determine their ability to continue playing at the elite level (Kelly & Hickey 2008). In fact, Kelly and Hickey (2008 p. 178)

argue, "there is no way of escaping the physical effects of years of AFL football. The accumulated effect of the pressures, stresses and bumps take their toll on even the most durable body, mind and soul." In this sense, the management of the body becomes a central focus, so much so that often for retired footballers, the non-physical factors that led to retirement are often subordinated (Kelly & Hickey 2008).

Athletes are often perceived as the epitome of good physical conditioning and health, but in reality suffer a high incidence of permanent injuries and disabilities (Messner 1992). Retired athletes who give the appearance of still being in excellent physical condition may actually endure long-term pain. One participant in Messner's research (1992 p. 71), when asked how tall he was, admitted,

> Oh I used to be about 6'2 – I'm about 6 even right now. All the vertebras in my neck, probably from all the pounding and stuff, … used to be further apart … It hurts all the time. I hurt all the time. Right now, that's why I put my legs up here on the table, to take the pressure off my lower back.

Thus, while looking relaxed and in good physical health, this athlete had to accommodate long-term pain resulting from having been a sportsman. For some, permanent pain and injury is a mark of honour, worn with pride like battle wounds. However, many also acknowledge that the health of their body is a heavy price to pay for sporting glory (Messner 1990). Drummond (2002; 2011) argues that the notion of a cultural archetypal male body, which centres on muscularity, athleticism and youthfulness, is particularly prevalent in Western culture. Prior to retirement, a man's career helps to uphold a specific type of masculine identity, which lessens following the end of a career. As the body ages,

physical deterioration leads to a loss of control, particularly physical control, which has important consequences for masculine identity (Drummond 2003). As Fortunato and Marchant (1999) identify (mentioned above), many athletes retire due to injury, and retirement occurs at a much younger age than for those in traditional careers. Drummond's (2003) research found that as the body ages, functionality begins to fail, which has implications for masculinity, as many men construct masculinity through 'doing' rather than 'being'. A man's masculinity may therefore become vulnerable if his body cannot do the things it used to do.

The notion of the body as a machine can lead to feelings of disempowerment for athletes if their body can no longer be viewed in terms of its functional capacity due to pain or injury (White, Young & McTeer 1995). For the ageing men, Connell (1995) argues that as a result of debilitating injury, gender identity can become vulnerable and men either have to reject hegemonic masculinity or attempt to redefine it through overcoming their physical ailment. Drummond's research (2003), demonstrated that the failing body led to feelings of ineptitude, anger, frustration and not being a 'complete' man (p. 191). Turner et al. (2002) suggests some athletes may be reluctant to challenge the decisions made during athletic careers at the expense of their future wellbeing. However, many retired athletes who have sustained permanent injuries do not begrudge their decision to have been involved in elite sport. As summarised by Lilleaas (2007 p. 44) "they could live with their bodily pains and injuries because that was the price for doing what they liked best of all."

Conclusion

There are many factors influencing the construction of masculine identity, one of which is sport (Burgess et al. 2003). The sporting culture encourages the display of characteristics that are seen as masculine, such as toughness, aggression and the suppression of emotion (Fitzclarence et al. 1998b). Further to this, elite sportsmen are required to make a large commitment to their sport in terms of diet, discipline and social patterns, which renders immense the significance of sport in their lives (Agnew 2007). Retirement from sport can thus lead to identity becoming vulnerable, particularly in the event of forced retirement (Fortunato & Marchant 1999).

However, retirement from sport can also lead to a period of self-exploration in which athletes can flourish (Lally 2007). Smith and Stewart (1995) argue that only a small amount of research has been conducted in sporting cultures, and as the experiences of Australian Rules footballers are still largely undocumented, there is much room for further research. While an existing body of literature on retired athletes does exist (Messner 1987; 1992; Grove et al. 1997; Fortunato & Marchant 1999; Lally 2007), little research has been conducted specifically with retired AFL footballers. This highlights the importance of the current research for gaining an understanding of the issues confronting elite AFL footballers, and their masculine identity as they enter retirement.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

This study is an investigation into the social construction of masculinity following a career in elite Australian Rules football. Many theories have been developed in order to study the process of retirement transition. Theories most commonly employed include gerontological and social death or thanatological theories. Several theories have been adapted from the existing retirement theories in order to explain the transitional issues specifically related to sports retirement. The current research is concerned with how masculinity is constructed in the lives of retired male footballers, and as such retirement theories alone would not suffice to adequately understand this construction. Gender role frameworks will therefore also be discussed. This chapter will discuss some of the commonly used theories in relation to retirement, sports retirement, social construction and gender roles and outline a conceptual framework for this research.

Gerontological theories

While several theories have been applied to research on retirement, some of the most commonly employed are gerontological theories. Retirement from the workforce is perceived as a major social event, and as such social gerontology addresses the problems associated with this transitional phase (Fortunato & Gilbert 2003). The six major theories associated with social gerontology are 1) activity theory, 2) disengagement theory, 3) continuity theory, 4) subculture theory, 5) social breakdown theory and 6) exchange theory.

Gerontological theories were initially popular in athletic retirement research;
however, many criticisms have since developed about the applicability of such
theories to career transitions in sport (Lavalee 2000). Most convincingly,
gerontological theories have been developed in order to study retirement in the
ageing population. Athletes generally retire from elite sport at a relatively young
age, and gerontological theories have limited adaptation to younger populations
(Fortunato & Gilbert 2003). Blinde and Greendorfer (1985) argue that because
athletes retire at a much younger age than those who leave the workforce much
later in life, they are unable to socially withdraw as gerontological theories
suggest. Many retiring athletes are still in need of a regular income, and so must
develop an alternative career once they have retired from elite competition. In
addition, these theories assume that retirement from sport is an inherently
negative event, not allowing for the possibility of a positive retirement process
(Lavalee 2000). Furthermore, the current research is an investigation into the
construction of masculinity following retirement from elite sport therefore, the
application of a gerontological theory would not adequately describe the ongoing
process through which men construct their masculinity that begins early in life.

Social death theories

Thanatology is the study of death, dying and grief and is the area through which
social death theories originate (Fortunato & Gilbert 2003). Social death is the
"condition of being treated as if one were dead although still physiologically and
intellectually alive" (Gordon 1995 p. 478). This awareness context has had some
use in the retirement from sport as Gordon (1995) summarises. However, unlike

actual death, recovery from the 'social death' that occurs upon retirement from elite sport is possible. Nevertheless, social death theories have a useful role in understanding retirement from elite sport, particularly if retirement is involuntary, as it is argued that the lack of control over the timing of retirement increases the difficulties associated with the retirement process (Gordon 1995). As mentioned in relation to gerontological theories above, thanatological theories have also been criticised for portraying retirement from elite sport as an overly negative experience.

Both gerontological and thanatological models when applied to sport suggest that serious adjustment to retirement is required, though this is not always the case (Gordon 1995). Other criticisms of the application of gerontological and thanatological theories to sports retirement include the assumption in both models that retirement is a single, abrupt moment that terminates the role of the athlete. This assumes the identification and involvement in a given sport of the athlete ceases upon their withdrawal from the sport as an athlete, thereby ignoring the various ways in which athletes remain involved in sport post-retirement involvement (Blinde & Greendorfer 1985).

Sports retirement theory

Early research into retirement by Sussman (1971) outlined a model detailing the factors associated with an individual's retirement. These issues include individual variables such as lifestyle, motives, values and information level, perceptions of situation such as choice of options, previous experiences, social context of interactions and evaluation of alternatives, pre-retirement factors such as

circumstances, social class position and retirement income and the utilisation of liking systems such as friendship groups, marital system and work systems. This model outlines the retirement transition process, but does not describe any predictions as to how easy or difficult the transition will be for the individual (Fortunato & Gilbert 2003).

In order to address the emerging concept that retiring athletes face a period of adjustment upon withdrawal from competitive sport and engage in a new career, Werthner and Orlick (1986) designed a study to explore the experiences of athletes in Canada as they transitioned out of sport. Analysis of the interviews with 28 former Canadian athletes revealed seven factors that "appeared to have played an important role in determining the nature of the transition out of sport for a great number of the athletes" (Werthner & Orlick 1986 p. 351). These seven factors were:

1. *A new focus:* having an alternative to engage in upon leaving sport was helpful in easing the transition out of sport

2. *A sense of accomplishment:* having accomplished all they initially set out to achieve in the sporting career was important for a positive transition out of sport

3. *Coaching:* the role of the coach and their relationship with the athlete had an important influence on the way in which athletes perceived their time commitment to the sport and ability to cope with life after sport

4. *Injuries/health problems:* injuries were generally a negative factor in determining how an athlete coped with retirement from sport, particularly if the injury was the determining factor on retirement

5. *Politics/Sport association problems:* the amount of support given to an athlete by the relevant sporting association had a significant influence on whether the athlete experienced a positive or negative transition out of the sport. The more support given to the athlete, the more positive the transition period was

6. *Finances:* if the athlete had financial problems, a more difficult transition out of sport was experienced

7. *Support of family and friends:* if the athlete had a good group of social contacts, the transition out of elite sport was eased. Those who did not have support from family and friends experienced a more difficult retirement process.

This research by Werthner and Orlick (1986) found that most of the athletes had positive recollections about their sporting careers and, despite some hardships, remembered their careers as enjoyable and rewarding. Following the termination of their careers there was almost always a period of adjustment as they moved forward with their lives, and this proved to be a difficult transition for many. This was an important study in sports retirement, as it allowed athletes to discuss in detail the factors associated with sports retirement.

Due to increasing dissatisfaction with the theoretical models being applied to sports retirement research, Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) developed a conceptual

model for sports retirement research. This model (Figure 1) outlines the retirement process in its entirety through five stages; identifying the causal factors that begin the retirement process; specifying the factors related to adaptations in retirement; detailing the available resources that will affect the response to retirement; describing the quality of the adaptation to retirement and finally intervention strategies for a reaction to retirement (Taylor & Ogilvie 1994).

Gordon (1995) enhanced the literature on retirement transition by adapting several transitional models, including Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994). The conceptual model developed by Gordon (1995) demonstrates the causal factors that initiate the retirement transition process such as de-selection, age, injury or free choice; the interacting factors that can differentiate responses to adaptation such as the trigger to retirement, duration of transition, role changes involved and current stress; individual characteristics such as identity as an athlete, ego development, personal skills and socioeconomic factors; and the options available to an athlete, including social support within and outside the sport. These factors can assist with intervention programs and counselling in order to minimise the trauma that can be associated with retiring from elite sport. Fortunato and Gilbert (2003) argue that while models such as these enhance the literature on sports retirement, data supporting or refuting the use of such models is required.

Causes of Athletic Retirement:

Age
Deselection
Injury
Free Choice

Factors related to adaptation to retirement:

Developmental experiences
Self-identity
Perceptions of control
Social identity
Tertiary contributors

Available resources:

Coping skills
Social support
Pre-retirement planning

Quality of adaptation to athletic retirement

Retirement Crisis:

Psychopathology
Substance abuse
Occupational problems
Family/social problems

Healthy career transition

Intervention:

Cognitive
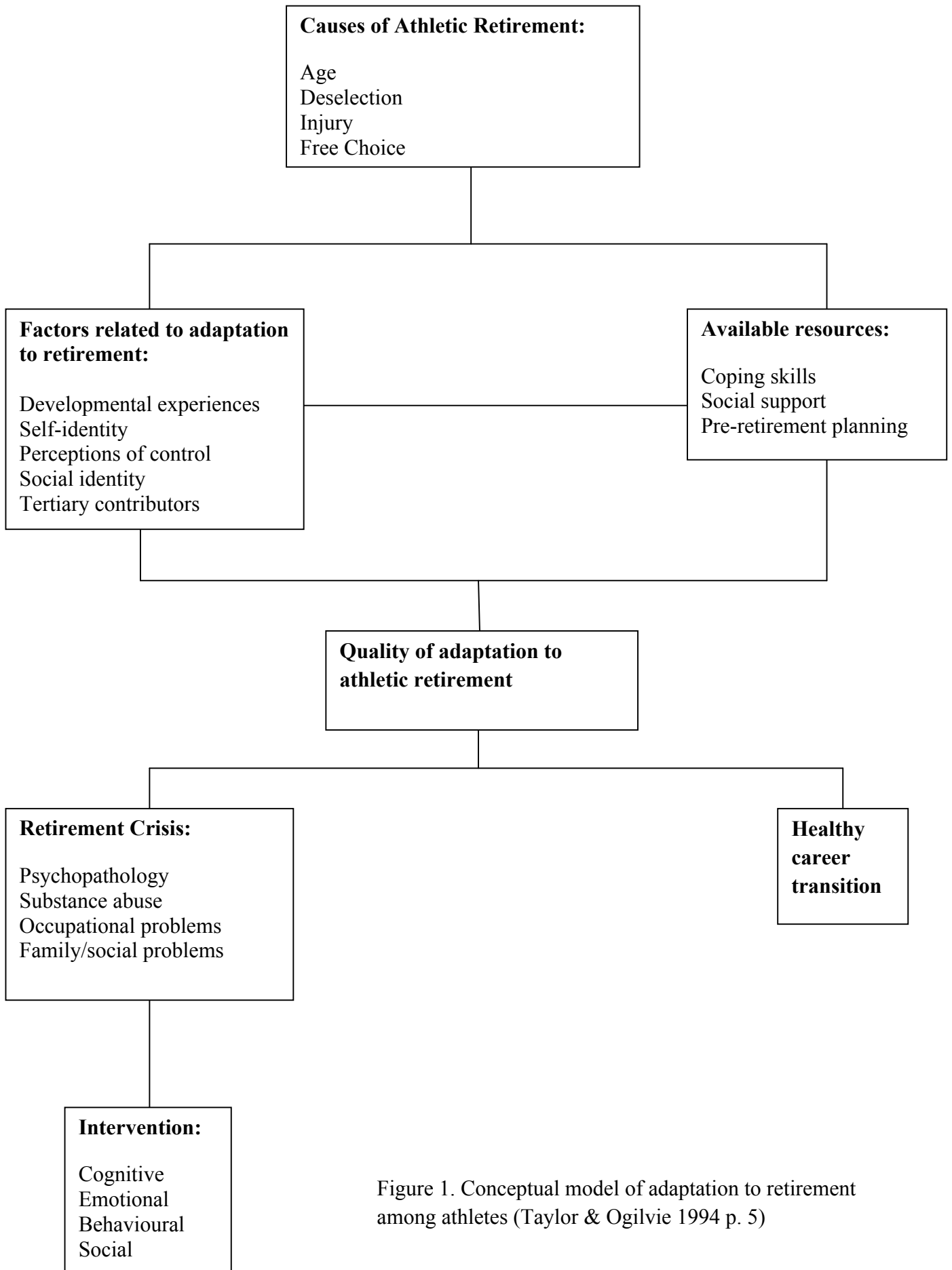Emotional
Behavioural
Social

Figure 1. Conceptual model of adaptation to retirement among athletes (Taylor & Ogilvie 1994 p. 5)

Gender role framework

The gender role theory or sex role theory arose in the nineteenth century when scientific doctrines of sex differences enhanced the resistance to women's emancipation (Connell 2005). There are two ways in which the sex role can be applied to gender, the more common being a as specific set of expectations on how one should act according to one's sex (Connell 2005). This creates two sets of sex roles, one female, and one male. Masculinity therefore can be described as the internalised male sex role and femininity the internalised female sex role. The adaptation of these roles through socialisation allow for their roles to change over time according to social expectations and external influences such as culture, family, the media and peers (Connell 2005). The notion of a gender role framework suggests an appropriate and acceptable set of characteristics dependant on biological sex (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985). Criticisms of the sex role theory include the lack of applicability to actual reality, given that not all individuals strictly adhere to all sex role characteristics. For example, not all men are successful in their chosen employment (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985). Thus, "the sex role literature does not consistently distinguish between the expectations that are made of people and whey they in fact do" (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985 p. 578). Indeed, Kimmel (1986) agues that the sex role paradigm consists of "two fixed, static and mutually exclusive role containers, with little or no interpenetration" (p. 521). None the less, Messner and Sabo (1990) state that the gender order framework is useful in investigating the meaning of sport and its relationship with the modern political system.

Social construction theory

Social constructionism is a sociological theory that is based on the concept that things may not need to exist as they currently do, as people construct their every day experiences rather than discover them (Hacking 1999; Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Closely related to symbolic interactionism, which states that people construct their identities though everyday experiences and social interaction, social constructionism aims to illustrate the processes by which people make sense of these "lived experiences" (Burr 1995; Gergen & Gergen 2003; Nieswiadomy 1998).

While social constructionism encompasses many sociological disciplines, there are four aspects that are perceived as fundamental to the theory: a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge, historical and cultural specificity, knowledge is sustained by social processes, and knowledge and social action go together (Burr 1995). These will be explained in more detail below.

1. A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge

The social constructionist perspective constantly reminds us to be critical of what we perceive to exist and what actually exists in reality. It challenges the notion that people's observations of the world are unproblematic and that knowledge is based on an objective, unbiased view of the world (Burr 1995). With regard to gender, the social constructionist perspective argues against the notion that there are two different genders: male and female. Through social constructionism, the challenge is whether these observations are a reflection of two naturally occurring different types of human being. While there are distinct biological differences between men and women, the importance of having two genders and two separate

gender identities for humans is questioned through the social constructionist perspective. Burr (1995) argues, for example, that other categories to separate human beings could be applied, such as tall and short.

2. Historical and cultural specificity

The way we understand the world has cultural and historical significance. The perception of the world and how we understand it depends upon the time and place in which we experience it (Burr 1995). In addition, different cultures determine different understandings. Social constructionism reminds us that the cultural and historical specifics that shape our understandings of the world are not necessarily any better than those of a different culture or time period (Burr 1995).

3. Knowledge is sustained by social processes

The social constructionist perspective argues against the notion of our understanding being naturally occurring. Where, then, *does* it come from? Social constructionism argues that we construct it through interactions with other people, through language and social experiences, all of which develop shared constructions of knowledge (Burr 1995). Therefore, understandings of the 'truth' vary across cultures and historical time periods, and the accepted social behaviours and understandings of our environment are the product of these interactions and social processes in which people engage with each other (Burr 1995). Masculinity therefore, as a cultural understanding, is a constructed notion in which young boys are taught the acceptable behaviours of men through interactions with family, culture, peer and social groups. What it means to "be a man" differs across cultures, and is constantly changing throughout different

periods of time. This suggests that masculinity is not a rigid structure, but rather a fluid motion that is shaped by many different influences.

4. Knowledge and social action go together

Each construction of an understanding encourages a different kind of social action from people. For example, historically, patients with a mental illness were seen as a danger to society, and were therefore institutionalised to remove them from society. However, recent understandings of mental illness invoke treatment options and outside help for the individual in order for them to function in society, therefore negating the need to institutionalise sufferers. Within the social constructionist perspective constructions of the world therefore maintain some patterns of social action while excluding others (Burr 1995).

Given that social constructionism reflects a number of different sociological areas, the above features can be used as a set of guidelines rather than a rigid structure. Not all social constructionists will adhere to all four features, but rather encompass some and not others. Therefore social constructionism can be described as having a foundation in one or more of the above features (Burr 1995). The earliest developments of the social constructionist perspective are attributed to Berger and Luckmann's (1967) "the social construction of reality," in which it is argued that social phenomena are created and maintained through social processes. Berger and Luckmann contend that individuals are socialised into society through both externally projecting themselves into society while simultaneously internalising the process of the social world, thereby actively participating in them. It is only through actively adopting these processes that the individual becomes a member of society. Thus, according to social construction

theory, being born a male biologically does not automatically make the individual masculine; rather the perceived masculine characteristics and behaviours are learnt through a negotiation between the social world and the individual's acceptance of and participation in it (Mussen 1969).

If, then, men are not born into manhood, but rather are socialised into learning masculine practices through social construction, masculine identity is learnt through cultural interaction, which changes over time. As Kimmel and Messner (1998 p. xx) point out, "our sex may be male, but our identity as men is developed through a complex process of interaction with the culture in which we both learn the gender scripts appropriate to our culture and attempt to modify those scripts to make them more palatable." This statement by Kimmel and Messner refers to the internalisation and externalisation negotiation process that Berger and Luckmann (1967) term socialisation. Masculinities and the meaning of masculinities differ throughout and within cultures; therefore, men participating in the social world must choose to either accept or reject the dominant meanings associated with masculinities. One of the significant arenas in which men are exposed to these processes is that of sport. Early researchers of masculinity and sport, Sabo and Runfola (1980), argue a primary function of sport is to reinforce the traditional masculine values of male superiority, competition, work and success. Further, they contend that through sport, young boys are initiated into becoming men who demonstrate the societal expectations encapsulating the male role. Given this perception, and the importance of sport in the lives of many Australians, the current research will utilise a social constructionist perspective in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the processes in Australian Rules football through which masculinity is socially

constructed and then maintained following retirement from participation at an elite level.

Life course theory

Life course theory was developed with reference to several theories and empirical streams of research related to social change, social structure and individual action. Prior to the emergence of the life course theory, human behaviour was studied either through a structural social relations method, centred on the whole society or small groups and closely related to functionalism, or through a dynamic temporal approach that followed people's life stories over time, focussing on special subgroups or individuals and associated with Marxism conflict theories. Giele and Elder (1998) outline a four-part paradigm they argue has been developed out of recent life-course theory research.

> *Location* in time and place refers to history, social structure, and culture. *Linked lives* are the result of the interaction of individuals with societal institutions and social groups. *Human agency* is embodied in the active pursuit of personal goals and the sense of self. *Timing* covers the chronologically ordered events of an individual's life that simultaneously combine personal, group and historical markers. (Guile & Elder 1998 p. 2)

Historical demography, sociology of ageing, life history and longitudinal studies are four areas that assist life course research. Each of these four areas loosely correlates to one part of the four-part paradigm. A key concept of the life course framework is that social change and the movement of individuals through time and place are interdependent. However, the timing of events is greatly influenced by cultural standards and the individual's active shaping of their life course
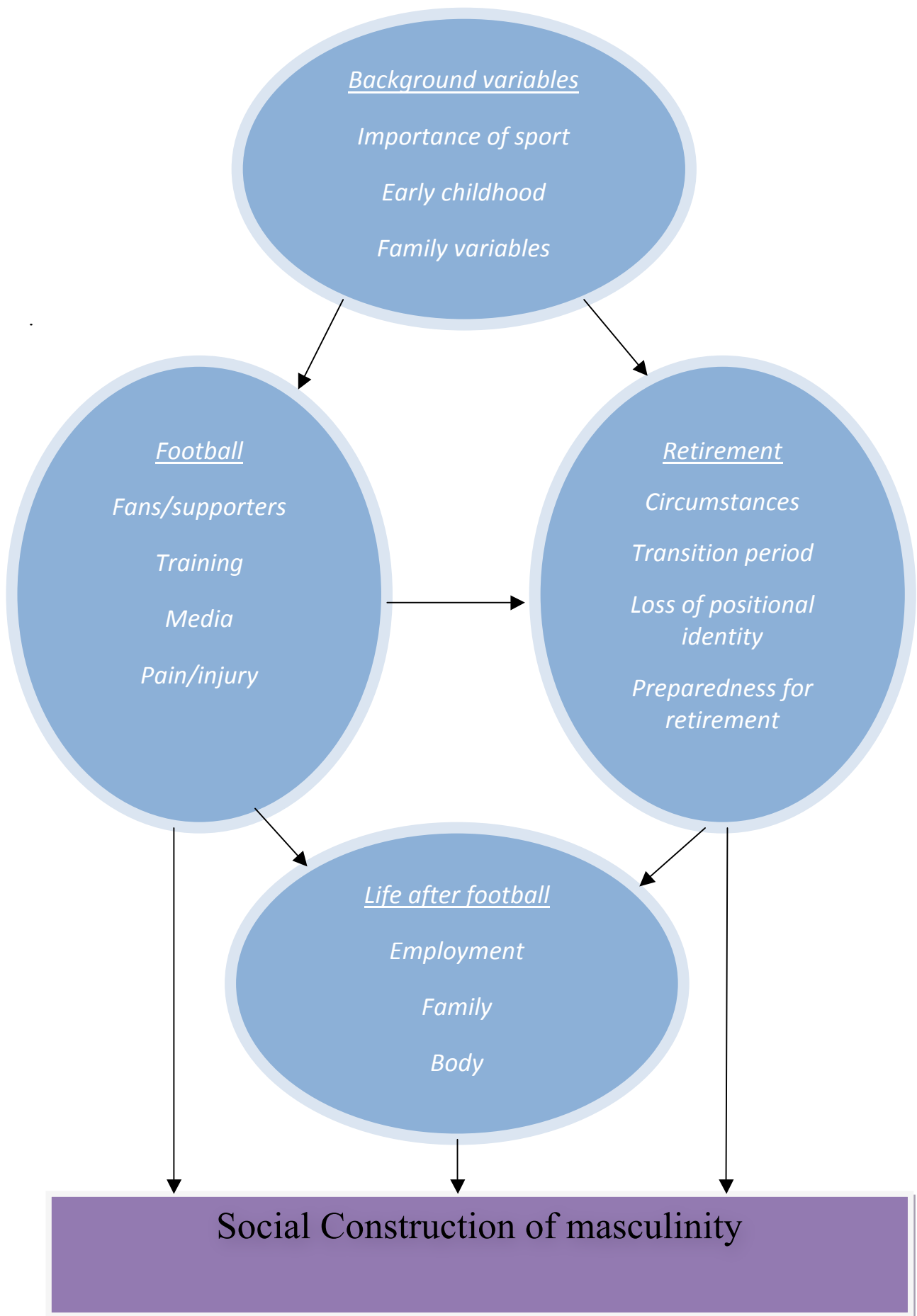
(Heinz & Kruger 2001). Life history, which is the focus of this research, is related to human agency in the face of social constraints and opportunities (Guile & Elder 1998 p.12). Life histories have evolved from the study of an individual to groups of individuals who experience similar circumstances at roughly the same time. This is thus an excellent method for the current research, as the group of elite athletes that are the focus of this investigation have all played Australian Rules football since the inception of the national AFL competition in 1990. While individual experiences across their life-course, or even the course of their careers, may not be identical, the extent of the similarities renders a life-history approach an appropriate method for this research.

Life histories are retrospective accounts that describe a person's life either in whole or in part through narrative statements (Watson & Watson-Frante 1985; Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Life histories originated through ethnography, and are designed to represent a particular culture through selected individuals (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). In addition, the theorised life history can be a powerful tool for the study of social structures and their dynamics as they impinge on (and are reconstituted in) personal life (Connell 1990 p. 84). Life histories are commentaries of people's lives from their personal view as they understand it, and therefore provide an appropriate method by which to obtain rich descriptive information about the lives of retired AFL footballers from the beginning of their career to the transition into retirement and life after football. Life-history interviews of a select group of retired footballers will appropriately and effectively provide an understanding of the meaning of masculinity in their lives.

Conceptual framework

As these theories show, there are many models available to assist in the understanding of retirement from professional sport and the subsequent transition phase. As the current study, however, is an investigation into the construction of masculinity following retirement from sport, theories based on the career transition phase alone would not adequately facilitate this research. While employment is an important aspect in a man's masculine identity, there are other factors that must be considered, and to this end this study will utilise social construction theory, as well as life course theory, in order to understand the many factors that influence masculine identity throughout a man's life. The social construction of masculinity in retired elite Australian Rules footballers is the basis of the conceptual framework for this study. In order to understand how AFL footballers construct their masculinity in retirement it is important to consider the variables that have an impact both before and after retirement. The importance of sport is reinforced early in life for young boys as an activity in which boys are expected to want to participate. Family values and the early life of the child also have an important role in the construction of masculine identity. Participation in an elite, highly masculinised sport such as Australian Rules football is a powerful reinforcer of the ideals learnt early in life. As such, retirement from elite sport may require adjustments and alternative ways to construct one's masculine identity. This research intends to investigate this in order to understand how retired Australian Rules footballers construct their masculinity. Figure 2 provides a diagrammatic representation of the conceptual framework for this study.

Figure 2. A conceptual framework for the current study

Background variables

Importance of sport

Early childhood

Family variables

Football

Fans/supporters

Training

Media

Pain/injury

Retirement

Circumstances

Transition period

Loss of positional identity

Preparedness for retirement

Life after football

Employment

Family

Body

Social Construction of masculinity

Chapter 4

Methodology

Introduction to methods

This chapter will provide an outline of the design of the research. It will describe

the sample size and the rationale for participant selection. This research will

utilise interviews as the data collection method, which will be explained in detail

in this chapter. An important element of qualitative research is reliability and

validity and these elements will be addressed here, as will ethical considerations

and the limitations of this study.

Design

This will be a descriptive, interpretive qualitative study. Qualitative research

involves examining the world through an interpretive, naturalistic method in

order to gain an understanding of the meanings people bring to their everyday

experiences (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). This is achieved through an in-depth

description of people's experiences through patterns and themes in the data,

rather than through testing a hypothesis (Nieswiadomy 1998). Qualitative

research is a particularly valuable method for studying groups, as their

experiences can be observed in their natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln 2003).

Descriptive research aims to document and describe in rich detail the complex,

previously unexplored phenomena of interest and to investigate the actions,

events, beliefs, attitudes, social structures and processes occurring in this

phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman 1999). Analysis in qualitative research is embedded in thick description:

> A thick description does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions. And meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (Denzin 1989 p. 83)

Qualitative descriptive studies often draw on the general principles of naturalistic inquiry, in that there are no pre-selection or manipulation of variables to study, but rather a commitment to study something in its natural state (Sandelowski 2000). In interpretive studies, thick descriptions "are deep, dense, detailed accounts of problematic experiences" (Denzin 2001 p. 98). An interpretive framework "must be grounded in the worlds of lived experience" (Denzin 1989 p. 10). The purpose of interpretation is to make sense of people's experience in terms of language, meaning and intention; thick description is thus the foundation of interpretive studies (Denzin 1989; 2001).

The objectives of thick description include examination of the context of the action, the intentions and meanings that organise the action, the development of the action and the presentation of the action in a text format that can then be interpreted (Denzin 2001 p. 53). Without thick description, the meanings and understandings of the subject group is not possible. Therefore interpretive studies need to include critiques of the social processes and structures as well as the

general cultural foundations surrounding the phenomena of interest (Denzin 2001).

Interpretive approaches allow either confirmation or challenge of the patterns and assumptions held by society about a particular group of people. Misunderstandings sometimes shape opinions held about certain populations, and an interpretive approach allows for correction in such circumstances (Denzin 2001). The interviews with the participants will elicit commentaries on their own lives and according to their own understanding, as per the life history methodology outlined in Chapter 3. In this way, the inductive approach will attempt to isolate the pivotal experiences in the participants' lives and situate them in their social world. For example, the adulation given by some people to Australian Rules footballers creates certain perceptions around the behaviours that are expected from these men in a highly masculinised sport. An interpretive approach facilitates in-depth exploration of such issues from the perspective of the players, leading to a greater understanding of both the men and the sport. Interpretation gives meaning to the experiences of the subject group.

Sample

Participant selection

Twenty retired AFL footballers took part in this study, providing a sound basis through which an understanding of the lives of retired AFL footballers was gained. Participants were male, over the age of 18 and had retired from the AFL after 1990, as this was the beginning of the National AFL competition. Some of

the men had relatively short AFL careers, playing just 5 senior games, while others had lengthy careers and played over 300 games. This ensured that a breadth of experiences was represented in the data. Participants played for AFL clubs in South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales. Many played for more than one club during their careers. For some of the participants the decision to retire from football was outside of their control, as their club delisted them, but for others retirement was solely their decision. For a limited number of men retirement was forced through injury.

Participant selection in qualitative research depends entirely upon what the researcher would like to discover (Patton 1990). The focus of qualitative research is most commonly on small samples that yield in-depth, rich information (Patton 1990). This is achieved by selecting participants who are central to the phenomena being selected.

Purposeful and snowballing sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. Purposeful sampling involves selecting cases that will provide information-rich data (Sandelowski 2000; Patton 1990). Snowball sampling involves identifying potential participants of interest through people who know which people would provide information-rich data (Patton 1990). Participants were drawn from the extensive pool of retired AFL footballers living in South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria. Potential participants were sent an information letter detailing the research with the researcher's contact information. As is the nature of snowball sampling, additional participants were contacted through the assistance of the initial contacts. Participants were asked to sign a consent form to participate in the study. Copies of the information letter to potential participants and the consent form are included in Appendices A and B.

Ethics

Ethical concerns in qualitative research revolve around informed consent, the right to privacy and protection from harm (Fontana & Frey 2000). Before giving consent to their stories being utilised for this study, participants were informed about the research project and the risks and benefits of participating (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Following the requirements for informed consent, participants were informed verbally and were provided with an information sheet detailing the project before being asked to sign a consent form confirming their voluntary participation. The men were also informed that at any stage before, during or after the interview they were free to withdraw from the research without consequence. Copies of the information sheet and a sample consent form are included in the Appendices.

Confidentiality or the right to privacy concerns the protection of the identity of the participant (Fontana & Frey 2000). In qualitative interviewing, statements made by participants may appear in public documents, and as such precautions are required to protect the privacy of the participant (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). While the majority of men in this research were not concerned with being named in public documents, the decision was never the less made to protect their privacy. As such participants' names have not been, nor will they be, printed in this thesis, reports, journal articles, or conference presentations and proceedings resulting from this research.

The consequences of a study or the need to protect participants from harm should also be addressed (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Fontana & Frey 2000). The openness and intimacy that can result from qualitative research can lead

participants to later regret statements they have made during the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). The men in this research were provided with a copy of their interview transcript, and were invited to review their statements and inform the researcher of their consent to use the data. In this way any statements participants later regretted could be disregarded or clarified upon request. No participants, however, requested any interview data be disregarded. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) suggest that in some cases the ability of the researcher to listen attentively can lead to quasi-therapeutic relationships, for which they are not trained; in accordance with ethical guidelines, the researcher had the phone numbers of trained professionals should any participant appear distressed and in need of further counselling. Phone numbers included the Men's Help Line and Beyond Blue.

The written data and audio recordings will be stored in a locked storage cabinet at Flinders University, as required by the Flinders University Ethics committee, for a period of seven years, after which it will be destroyed. The written data will not be made available to anyone besides the PhD candidate and supervisory team.

The Flinders University Ethics Committee granted approval for this research in March 2009.

Semi-structured interviews

Qualitative interviewing aims to understand and describe the lives of the participants and the constructs that form the basis for people's opinions and beliefs (Damon & Holloway 2002; Patton 1990). Descriptive interviews seek to

provide an accurate presentation of participants' experiences, feelings and actions. The focus is "on nuanced descriptions that depict the qualitative diversity, the many differences and varieties of a phenomenon, rather than on ending up with fixed categorisations" (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009 p. 30). Johnson (2002) suggests that the deep understanding sought by interviewers through in-depth interviewing has several meanings. Participants hold deep meanings and understandings of their experiences, and interviewers seek to achieve the same level of knowledge as the interviewees. In addition, an in-depth understanding goes beyond simply commonsense explanations, but expands upon these perceptions and explanations in order to develop a more extensive understanding of the experience. In-depth interviewing can also highlight how people's commonsense explanations and routines partly comprise their interests and how they understand them (Johnson 2002). Finally, the multiple meanings of people's experiences can be discovered through in-depth interviews. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that other people's perspectives are meaningful, knowledgeable and able to be made explicit (Patton 2002 p. 341).

Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2002) state that interviewing men presents both an opportunity and a threat to male participants. Agreeing to be interviewed relinquishes some control and opens the participant up to 'interrogation', thereby making them somewhat vulnerable and potentially putting their masculinity at risk, as taking control is fundamental to masculine identity (Schwalbe & Wolkomir 2002). Allowing the participant to suggest a time and place for the interview allows the men to retain some control, and can assist in making them feel at ease (Schwalbe & Wolkomir 2002). Seminal work by Sattel (1976) stated that the inexpressiveness of men is also a key concept of hegemonic masculinity.

This can become an issue during interviews if men are required to talk about their feelings and emotions. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2002) suggest framing interview questions in an indirect manner to obtain the desired data on emotions, if participants appear to be having difficulty answering them. In the light of these recommendations, the researcher as the instrument is crucial to successfully interviewing men: the skill, competence, and rigour of the researcher are paramount to conducting reliable qualitative research (Patton 2002).

This research utilised individual, in-depth interviews. Smith and Stewart (1995) argue that a quantitative approach that obtained data through questionnaires and scaled responses would not encourage the deeper aspects of culture within a sport to arise. Instead, they determined that a comprehensive investigation through in-depth interviews would be more appropriate to draw out the underlying cultural aspects that are often submerged. Topics for the interview guide (Appendix C) were based on the issues arising from previous research with SANFL footballers (Agnew 2007) that warranted further investigation. An interview guide assists with making interviewing numerous participants more systematic by determining topics to be explored (Patton 2002). The main topics covered in this study were the fans and crowd participation, the media, the football subculture, the AFL draft, pain, the male body, masculinity, identity and retirement.

The interview guide is a central tool in a semi-structured interview, employed in this research, and a commonly used data collection technique in qualitative studies (Sandelowski 2000). The general interview guide is one of three basic approaches to qualitative interviewing (Patton 1990). The interview guide allows a set of issues, rather than standardised questions, to be explored with each participant. Further, it allows for the important topics to be covered in each

interview, while allowing for the order of questions, as well as the wording, to be adapted as appropriate for each participant (Patton 1990). Therefore, while this approach allows for topics to be expanded upon depending on responses from participants, it does ensure similar information is gained from each participant. The added value of an interview guide is that it also assists the researcher in carefully deciding how to utilise the limited time available during an interview (Patton 2002).

Data collection

There are relatively few recommendations on sample size for qualitative inquiry (Guest et al. 2006). Kuzel (1992) suggests that for a homogenous group 6-8 qualitative interviews are sufficient, while 12-20 are required if attempting to achieve maximum variation. Guest et al. (2006) suggests that when investigating the common experiences of a group, 12 interviews should suffice. Sandelowski (2001) argued that a qualitative study of 10 participants interviewed once only could produce 250 pages of raw data, thus highlighting the complex nature of qualitative inquiry. For the current research, 20 individual interviews were conducted with retired AFL footballers.

Herzog (2005) argues that the interview location can influence the construction of reality. The interview location should be familiar and comfortable for the participant. Ensuring the conversation is kept private, without the opportunity for others to overhear and interrupt is also important (Seidman 2006). Interviews for this study took place at a time and place that was convenient for each participant. Interview locations took place in local Adelaide cafés, participants' homes,

football clubs and in participants' places of employment. Each interview lasted for between 35 and 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Following transcription of the interviews, a copy of the written transcript was emailed back to the participant, who was asked to review the data and advise the researcher of their permission to use their stories.

Analysis

The data was utilised through a latent approach to thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method that analyses data to identify patterns and leads to organisation of the data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke 2006). Given that experiences and meanings are produced and reproduced through social interactions, thematic analysis through a constructionist perspective aims to interpret meanings in a socio-cultural context (Braun & Clarke 2006). Rather than developing themes and meanings at the surface level in the data, a latent approach to thematic analysis seeks to determine and interpret themes and meanings at a deeper, underlying level. Research utilising a constructionist perspective often follows this latent approach to analysis through an interpretative analysis of the data (Boyatzis 1998; Braun & Clarke 2006). This research utilised the Braun & Clarke (2006) analysis model, which consists of six steps. These will be outlined below in relation to the data collected in this research.

Step 1: Familiarise yourself with the data

Once the data had been obtained through interviews the researcher manually transcribed the data verbatim. This allowed her to become familiar with the

transcripts. In addition to transcribing, initial ideas are developed through reading and rereading the data.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

Step two involves the generation of initial codes that arise from the data and are points of interest or importance. These codes are then analysed to describe the meanings in relation to the people being studied. The codes that are identified in the data are not the same as the themes, which are the collaboration of codes into groups of similar data sets. However, the development of the codes is dependent on whether the themes (which are formed in the next stage) are to be data-driven or theory-driven. For the purpose of this study, the themes will be data-driven. Data can be coded manually or through a software package such as NVivo. The data in this research was coded manually in order for the researcher to become more familiar with it. Coding involves working systematically through the entire collection of data, labelling sections. Once all the data had been coded it was then collaborated into similar sets of data, thus developing themes.

Step 3: Searching for themes

Following the coding of the data, initial themes were identified. One method Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest to firm initial candidate themes is to write the name of each code with a brief description on a separate piece of paper and begin organising them into theme piles. The relationship between codes, themes and different levels of themes were considered. In this research, 34 codes were analysed and organised into 11 initial themes. Through this process, both themes and sub-themes were developed.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

Braun and Clarke (2006 p. 89) suggest data should 'cohere together meaningfully,' thus once the candidate themes were organised the entire data set was reviewed again in order to ascertain whether the themes accurately represented the data. No new themes were generated during this analysis, however, 2 candidate themes were collapsed into other themes as there was not enough data to sustain a theme on their own. Reviewing and refining themes allowed an accurate representation of the data as a whole to be developed. Braun and Clarke (2006) warn that coding, searching for and analysing themes can go on ad infinitum, therefore once no new themes were identified, the themes were then defined and named according to the 'essence' of what each theme was about. This phase led to an in-depth understanding of the themes and how they fit together to develop an overall picture of the data.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

Defining the themes involves recognising the meaning of what each theme entails and which part of the data is represented by each theme and describing it (Braun & Clarke 2006). In addition, this process involves identifying both the essence of each theme, as well as how it fits into the overall description of the data in relation to the research questions.

Step 6: Producing the report

The final stage of the thematic analysis involves writing a report to describe the themes in detail. This is achieved through providing examples in a narrative form,

while making an argument relating to the research questions (Braun & Clarke 2006).

Bias

In relation to the voice of the researcher, Patton (2002 p. 65) argues that a "credible, authoritative, authentic and trustworthy voice engaged the reader through rich description, thoughtful sequencing, appropriate use of quotes, and contextual clarity." In addition, Patton (2002) introduces the notion of reflexivity: a process through which the researcher continually examines their own perspectives in relation to cultural, political, social, linguistic and sociological origins. This is a continual process throughout the research project, achieved through asking the following questions:

What do I know?

How do I know what I know?

What shapes and has shaped my perspective?

With what voice do I share my perspective?

What do I do with what I have found?

Through asking the above questions continually throughout the research project and through utilising other rigorous methods, which will be outlined below, bias can be minimised (Patton 2002).

As I work in a football club and I have already conducted an honours project investigating the attitudes of SANFL footballers towards playing in pain and injury, I will have some personal understandings of the issues to be covered in the current research. However, I am neither male nor a retired footballer, and

therefore do not have an intrinsic understanding of what it is like to be a retired male Australian Rules footballer, the focus of this research.

Rigour

Validity and reliability of qualitative research is often referred to as rigour (Twycross & Shields 2005). One of the ways rigour can be enhanced is through member checking (Twycross & Shields 2005). Member checking is the process by which the interview transcripts are returned to participants to check their accuracy (Sandelowski 1993). Member checks provide the opportunity for participants to correct errors and express their concerns regarding perceived wrong interpretations, while also allowing them to confirm their responses and volunteer additional information not stated in the initial interview (Guba & Lincoln 1981). Following transcription of the interviews, a copy of the written data was returned to each participant via email. Participants were asked to review the transcript and inform the researcher of their satisfaction with the accuracy. Permission to use the written interview transcripts was included in the consent form, although many participants gave permission via email after the interview had been conducted and the transcripts had been returned to them.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) describe trustworthiness and authenticity as replacement terms for validity and reliability of qualitative research. Mishler (1990 p. 419) states "the essential criterion for such judgements is the degree to which we can rely on the concepts, methods, and inferences of a study, or tradition of inquiry, as the basis for our own theorising and empirical research." Through focussing on trustworthiness rather than truth, research validation is

moved from an objective, nonreactive and neutral reality to a socially constructed world (Mishler 1990). Given that constructivist research focuses on relativism and transactional knowledge, trustworthiness is an important concept that allows the formation of reconstructed understandings of the social world (Denzin & Lincoln 2000).

In quantitative research, validity is dependent on the instrument to ensure it measures accurately. In qualitative research the researcher *is* the instrument, and as such the quality of the research is dependent on the skill, competence and rigour of the person conducting the study (Patton 2002). Harris (1990 p. 65) argues, "the qualitative researcher seeks to enter the world of the participants and to some degree regards himself or herself as a vessel through which the participant makes known an intricate story." There are several ways in which the credibility of the researcher as instruments can be enhanced. These include appropriateness, authenticity, credibility, intuitiveness, receptivity, reciprocity and sensitivity (Rew et al. 1993).

Appropriateness refers to the researcher being clear about the data collection and minimising the potential for misinterpretations (Rew et al. 1993). The use of a semi-structured interview guide allowed for the interviews to have a direction and for similar types of data to be collected from the participants.

Authenticity is the congruence of the researcher's behaviour with their personal values, beliefs and attitudes. Caring about the experiences and reflections of the participants enhances the authenticity of the researcher (Rew et al. 1993).

Credibility refers to the presentation of the researcher. If the researcher conducts themself in a professional and appropriate manner, trust and rapport can be

established with the participant, thereby enhancing the credibility of the study. Intuitiveness is the "ability of the researcher to synthesise the experience of the informant through immediate contact and empathy" (Rew et al. 1993 p. 301). This is an important process of reflection when making sense of the meanings participants give to their experiences.

Receptivity refers to the willingness of the researcher to be open and receptive to the experiences of the group being studied (Rew et al. 1993).

Reciprocity allows for the participants and researcher to have equal standings, rather than the researcher establishing power in order for the researcher to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences.

Finally, sensitivity is the "researcher's perception of phenomena as experienced by research participants," and includes the "ability to see and hear accurately what is reported as data" (Rew et al. 1993 p. 301).

Understanding these characteristics can assist the qualitative researcher in assuring credibility as the research instrument by which data is collected (Rew et al. 1993).

Maxwell (1992) outlines five areas through which the credibility of a qualitative study can be enhanced: descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalisability and evaluative validity. Descriptive validity refers to the accuracy of participants' accounts, and that they have not been imprecisely reported. Descriptive validity refers to specific events and situations and does not encounter problems with generalisability or representiveness (Maxwell 1992).

This can be achieved through audio recording interviews and transcribing them verbatim, as was the case in this research.

Interpretive validity refers to the meanings participants give to their experiences as opposed to merely describing them. Interpretive validity relies inherently on the words and actions of the group being studied. As Maxwell (1992 p. 290) states "accounts of participants' meanings are never a matter of direct access, but are always *constructed* by the researcher(s) on the basis of participants' accounts and other evidence." Interpretive validity includes the unconscious values, beliefs and concepts of participants as well as the conscious ones, thus an interpretation that respect the perspectives of the participants is more valid that one that does not (Maxwell 1992).

Theoretical validity refers to "an account's validity as a *theory* of some phenomenon" (Maxwell 1992 p. 291). The foundation on which the researcher builds their research and how it applies to the issues being studied, as well as how the theory fits together with the group being studied, are important concepts in establishing theoretical validity (Maxwell 1992). Establishing theoretical validity depends on whether or not there is consensus within the group of people concerned with the research about the terms used to classify the phenomena and the authenticity of the application of theories or facts (Maxwell 1992).

The generalisability of a study is the ability to apply the findings of one group to other situations (Maxwell 1992). Qualitative research does not commonly allow systematic generalisations to the wider population. However, the development of a theory or concept may not only give meaning to the group in question, but can also lead to an understanding of similar groups or situations (Maxwell 1992). In

qualitative research Maxwell (1992) argues there are two types of generalisability: internal, or generalisations within the group being studied, and external, or generalisations to other groups, persons or events. This research obtains an in-depth understanding of the meaning of masculinity in the lives of retired elite Australian Rules footballers that can be applied to other highly masculinised settings, as well as to men in general.

Maxwell (1992) argues evaluative validity is not a key concept in establishing rigour in qualitative research, as issues of whether an action or concept is justified or legitimate are not reliant on the processes undertaken in order to obtain the data. However, the descriptions, interpretations and theories are central to establishing valid evaluations of the data. Maxwell (1992) rejects the traditional concepts surrounding validity and reliability in qualitative research, instead using the above the concepts to develop an overall 'understanding', a term Maxwell determines is fitting when assessing the quality of a qualitative study.

Limitations

One of the major criticisms of life history interviewing is the difficulty in generalisability (Marshall & Rossman 1999). Guba and Lincoln (1981) argue the notion of 'fittingness' is a more appropriate term when assessing the generalisability of a qualitative study. That is, how does this study relate to similar situations to the one being studied? In Australia, where sport has great significance in many people's lives, particularly many men's lives, this research is important in assisting the understanding of how as Australians, masculinity is constructed, and how this changes following retirement.

The findings of this research into retirement and masculinity among elite Australian Rules footballers can not only assist in the understanding of the social construction of men and masculinities in society, but also in other largely masculinised settings. In addition, understanding the changes that occur to perceptions of masculinity after retirement from sport can assist in understanding the issues faced by all men when approaching retirement and life after work. Finally, while it is arguable that men in non-athletic careers do not receive the same accolades as AFL footballers, given that elite sportsmen often retire at a younger age than men in traditional occupations, the findings of this research may assist in understanding the transitional phase from work to retirement, particularly if retirement through job loss is unplanned and involuntary. Through studying this group of men in a specialised masculinised setting insights into the broader constructions of masculinity can be gained. Further, Tedlock (2003) states that life histories were developed to illustrate cultural, historical and social facts, rather than just individual lives and personality traits. Therefore, the life history approach employed for this research can facilitate illustration of the cultural and social aspects of Australian masculinities.

Another limitation in this study is the social construction perspective. Gergen (1999) argues that what may be true for one group may not be real for another. Further, if everything we consider to be 'real' is socially constructed, then nothing is real unless people agree it is. Gergen (2009) stated that when addressing issues through a social constructionist perspective it is crucial to remember that whenever reality is defined, it is from a particular standpoint. For example, if a person states their grandfather has died, this is usually from a biological standpoint, whereas other perspectives include that he has gone to

heaven or 'lives' on in family memories (Gergen 2009). In this way social construction invites a continual invitation for deconstruction, self-reflection and evaluation. Further, critique questions whether individual experience is therefore non-existent if reality is socially constructed. The individual as separate to society is a difficult concept for social constructionists to accept. If the individual pre-exists society then society becomes a collaboration of all the individuals living in it. However, if society pre-exists the individual, the individual becomes a product of the particular society into which they are born, and all decisions made by the individual are influenced by societal culture and values (Burr 2003). Gergen (1999) however, argues that it is in this paradigm that multiple competing realities can be explored. Further, Berger and Luckmann (1967) maintain that the individual and society exist together in a two directional mode. Individuals continually construct the world in which they live and respond to the reality that is formed. Given that individuals are born into an already constructed world by their predecessors, they are not able to construct reality in any form they wish, but are socialised into understanding the meanings, words, signs and processes already determined by society in order to participate in meaningful interaction with others (Burr 2003). In this way, footballers entering the AFL system are socialised into creating reality through the current practices, cultures and values of those already participating, and they must choose their response to these practices. Thus, while footballers construct the environment in which they participate, they are also continually shaped by it. Both of these movements are explained in this research.

Chapter 5

Themes

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the important information that arose from the 20 footballers involved in this research.

The footballers aged in range from 21 to 44 and all played Australian Rules football at the national level. Participants played for AFL clubs throughout Australia, some remaining with the same club for the entirety of their career, and others changing clubs mid-way through their career, either voluntarily or involuntarily. For most of the men, involvement in football began at an early age, with many being introduced to the game by family members, in particular their fathers. A common response from participants was that sport, and in particular football, was just something they did, many reminiscing about always having footballs present in the house or in the backyard. This reinforces the culturally endorsed notion that young boys 'should' be interested in sport, and are 'naturally' good at it. The following comment epitomises the involvement in football as children:

> I don't think it's one of those things that you get into, it just happens. I just remember having a plastic footy from the time I can remember anything and just walking around with it, kicking socks up and down the passage, balloons, plastic footies, you name it ... I don't remember saying I'm going to play football, you just sort of grow into it.

Some participants stated almost naively that football was "in their blood," again reinforcing the perception that sport comes naturally to young boys. This was

particularly so if the men had family members who also played sport, indicating that family influence leading to participation in sport is significant. As put by one participant:

> It was probably just in our blood … from a young age we're exposed to footy clubs, and the surrounding environment of the footy clubs. We used to go along and watch dad all the time … so I think we were probably perhaps destined to play footy, but I guess once we started playing we enjoyed it and that kept us going.

Other participants became involved in football through Auskick; the Australian Rules football introductory program for primary school aged children. One participant became involved in football at a later age in high school through friends. Many of the men also excelled at other sports, such as cricket and tennis, and were forced to make a choice to concentrate on one sport early on in their careers. Selection for a national AFL team was through either the current draft system, in which footballers are drafted to an AFL club in the national AFL draft and rookie draft, or prior to the implementation of this system, players were approached by an AFL club.

All participants fondly recalled their first AFL game in the national competition, regardless of the result. This first step in achieving their goal of being an AFL footballer was described as being an "incredible feeling", "nerve racking" and "surreal". Many were able to recall the specific instances surrounding their first game, the ground, the opposing team and the result, signifying the importance to these men of their first game of AFL football as the realisation of a childhood dream.

Nine themes arose from the data collected in the interviews. These were orthodox/hegemonic masculinity; society and culture; the 'perfect life;' always a footballer; distrust of the media; staying in shape; the denial of pain; moving on; and life is brilliant. Each theme has several sub-themes. This chapter introduces the most pertinent points that arose from the interview data.

Orthodox/hegemonic masculinity

The fundamental aspects of hegemonic masculinity include risk taking behaviour, homophobia, self-sacrifice, the marginalisation of others, a willingness to inflict bodily damage, and the acceptance of pain and injury (Anderson 2008 p. 5). Participation in sports allows young men a passage into the world of masculine values, relationships and rituals (Messner 1992). Drummond (2005) identified that men often have difficulty describing what it means to be masculine, or what it means to be a man. In addition, multiple masculinities are often not considered. For the men in the current research, the concept of masculinity proved to be a difficult one, as it was not a concept they had previously considered. Common responses included:

It's not something I think about hardly at all and probably never even talked about it really … never even been asked to describe it … I guess just being a man,

and:

Oh gee that's a good question … I suppose being strong; trying to be strong physically, mentally and emotionally … all those things come to mind.

After initially responding "I don't know," further reflection from participants listed common masculine traits as being mentally and physically strong, aggressive, courageous, and confident. One participant stated:

> I suppose the traditional thing is the Aussie male. It's enjoying the things that males like, playing sport, socialising with your mates … having a beer with your mates and being part of a good strong group of guys … it's being physically fit, physically in good shape and being competitive and not taking crap from anyone … that's pretty much it.

A strong thread between responses was that of 'doing' masculinity rather than 'being' masculine. For many, sport is an important aspect in young boys' lives as they are initiated into manhood. Playing sport was linked to 'doing' masculinity, and if a young boy grew up playing sport he was perceived as being masculine. One participant stated:

> How I was brought up, if you played sport you're masculine.

Given the gendered nature of sports (Koivula 1995; 2001), it is arguable that the participation in perceived feminine sports, through which visual attractiveness and beauty are displayed, would not lead to a young man being considered masculine. Rather, participation in perceived masculine sports such as football and Rugby is viewed as more masculine than participation in feminised sports. Therefore, the men in this research who claimed that participation in sport is linked with masculinity are arguably referring specifically to sports that are perceived as masculine.

Those children who were not interested in participating in sport were perceived being less manly than those who did. This reinforces the notion that all young boys should be interested in playing sport because it is 'normal'. The socialisation

of young boys into men starts early in life, as boys learn what is acceptable behaviour for men. One participant declared:

I suppose the kids at school who were into art and music we used to think they're not manly and maybe that's come from my parents but that's what I used to think.

For some, having the courage to participate in non-traditional activities for boys, such as music and art, was perceived as masculine:

I have this picture of what you think being masculine is, in the end it's the guys that have the courage to be who they are. I always respected the guys in footy clubs who are reading something that's different to everyone else and had the courage to do that. And other guys who would have an outside passion like music or they had the courage to be different.

Interestingly, while this participant highlighted the need to have courage to participate in these activities outside of sport, the men continue their involvement in a highly masculinised sport, thus maintaining the link between sport and the construction of masculinity.

For some, masculinity was described in relation to femininity. That is, to be masculine is to *not* portray feminine characteristics. In particular, wearing women's clothing and showing emotions were common behaviours linked with femininity, and therefore were considered not masculine. Further, many participants perceived being courageous as particularly masculine; therefore to not be courageous was argued as not being masculine. For the majority of participants masculinity included:

Someone who is emotionally resilient and the only reason I say that is my girlfriend's not masculine and she's emotionally all over the place half the time … Can work through problems, … There has to be an element of

physical masculinity so it's difficult to be masculine if you're effeminate with your movements or demeanour but yet a lot of masculinity's tied up with non-physical stuff. … All the people I think are masculine can perform under pressure.

Further:

I was heading down the track of being a coward and not sticking up for yourself and whatever but I'm not saying that's what females do I'm just saying that wouldn't be masculine.

In addition, although participants voiced their acceptance of gay men, being gay was perceived as not being masculine. The men outlined stereotypical perceptions in terms of what gay men wear, thus linking being gay with being effeminate, and therefore, not masculine.

Characteristics that aren't masculine, oh just when you start talking about the other side, like gay men I suppose or just what they wear.

The perception that gay men are not masculine created confusion for some of the men with regard to Rugby player Ian Roberts coming out as gay. For many men muscles are the sign of masculinity (Drummond 1996; Agnew 2007), and given that, like AFL footballers, Rugby players often have a muscular physique, they are thereby perceived as masculine. Given Ian Roberts' muscularity, and his reputation as being a 'tough' Rugby player, it was almost inconceivable that he could be gay, thus reinforcing the preferred perspective that gay men cannot be masculine:

I guess if I was to wear women's clothes it wouldn't be masculine. Ian Roberts is probably one that springs to mind: 6 foot 4, massive, strongly built … he came out and said that he was gay and plays rugby league and was one of the hardest players in the competition, who would've thought? You never know

but they say 1 in 10 either men or female are gay and there's 20 blokes in a footy club – are there 4 blokes down there that are gay?

While for many of the men in this research, *doing* masculinity through playing highly masculinised sports had a significant influence on their perception of masculinity, participants also attributed big muscles with being masculine, thus demonstrating that *being* masculine is also important. A common perception in contemporary society is that men should occupy space (Drummond 1996), therefore, the more muscle one had the more physical presence and strength they were perceived to have, thereby demonstrating masculinity. The men suggested that a 'skinny' man would be perceived as being less masculine than a man who had a large amount of musculature. Footballers are often argued to be exemplars of masculinity (Pringle 2005), and for the men in this research, the footballers' muscular physique reinforces the link between muscles and masculinity:

From a physical masculinity point of view obviously the way the footballers are these days. … The first thing that jumps into my mind is the physical masculinity and the look of someone and the size of their muscles.

For those who did not perceive themselves as being masculine, it was the size of their muscles that led to this perception, again demonstrating this notion of muscles as a sign of masculinity:

Well because to me masculinity is the big muscles and the bulging muscles and I didn't have those when I was playing so I wouldn't have thought I was.

Another element in the traditional perceptions of masculinity is the male as the main financial provider of the family (Connell 2005; Lewis 2001). This is due to men providing an income while women gave up work in order to have children (Lewis 2001). A common response from participants in this research was that

being masculine meant providing for one's family; being a strong head of the family as well as being the main breadwinner. The men maintained that a man should look after himself as well as his partner and family, thus identifying the importance of the male protector role. If a man was not fit, strong and able to provide for his family, he was thought to be less masculine. One of the more significant ways through which a man can provide for his family is financially. With the increase in women in the workforce, the notion of the male breadwinner role is thought to be in decline (Lewis 2001). However, this is largely not supported by the men in the current research, for whom the role of the main breadwinner remains a major part of their masculine identity. Financially providing for one's family was argued as being responsible, highlighting the link between responsibility and masculinity:

> Providing for your family, taking responsibility and looking after my family, obviously it's my responsibility to make sure they've got a good environment to live in.

This participant went on to add:

> in other ways masculinity is being strong, not showing too much vulnerability, probably and certainly to your family that'd be alright but you know being strong.

Many of the men in this research argued that the concept of masculinity is changing and is no longer solely linked to being tough and strong. For example, traditionally interest in academics at the expense of sport has been perceived as not masculine, however in recent years it has become more acceptable for men to pursue intellectual careers. This extends to footballers, who are now encouraged to study part time at university in order to obtain tertiary qualifications. It was

argued that the image of the football 'tradie' is no longer applicable, demonstrating that masculinities are not a fixed concept, but rather are constantly changing:

> There's no way it can't change because everything changes. It's more the complicated nature with what is expected of a man … it's really difficult for guys at the moment because now there's an expectation that there should be an element of masculinity, an element of sensitivity, an element of intelligence, an element of taking care of the way you look … men are expected to be all things. I think that's really difficult. The look of guys has changed completely, the look of footballers used to be tradies you know in the 80s. What did they do? They were men, masculine men. Footballers these days aren't like that. Footballers these days are rock stars. You go through the lockers and guys have IPL, guys have waxing, guys are opening up, Bodey opens up a men's health store, guys have gel, guys have eyebrows waxed. … They put on every lotion and potion under the sun so that's how footballers have changed. They're, Ben Cousins now. They're not Stuart Lowe or Nathan Burke or Brodie Atkinson. They're Lance Franklin, they're the next pop star so I don't think footballers are required to be masculine in that sense.

In addition, contrary to the hegemonic masculine ideal of being interested in sexual conquests, the image of the father figure as being masculine was prominent in the lives of the men in this research. One participant stated:

> What does it mean to be a man? I would say I think it's being a father … at the moment. It's probably the most important thing in my life.

Laws (2009) found that men are increasingly developing a range of parenting practices that greatly differ from their forefathers. This is supported somewhat by the fathers in the current research, who placed high importance on their role as father to who they are as men. However, as discussed above, the significance of the man being the protector and primary financial provider does still remain

essential to these men's sense of masculinity. This is consistent with Williams (2008), who contended that to be the financial provider of the family is central both to the construction of masculinity, as well as to what it means to be a father.

Aggression

One of the defining characteristics of hegemonic masculinity is argued to be aggression (Connell 1995). A common perception is that men are inherently aggressive, and that sports provide an opportunity for men to play out this 'natural' aggression in a controlled environment (Grange & Kerr 2010).

All but one participant agreed that football is an aggressive game. The sole participant who disagreed, argued that football is more a game of strength than aggression:

> I wouldn't say aggressive … it's certainly strength, there's a lot of strength involved.

The reluctance to label football as an aggressive game may be a result of the negative perception of those who are aggressive off the field and are presented unfavourably in the media.

However, for most of the men, aggression on the football field was not perceived as a negative trait, but rather was closely linked with success. Some participants went as far as to state that aggression is a pre-requisite for being successful. In addition, aggression was perceived as being a natural part of the game. To not be aggressive was linked with being 'airy fairy,' and therefore not masculine. This reinforces the notion that men are inherently aggressive and that this contributes

to success on the sporting field as a rewarded behaviour within sport. As such, those who are not prepared to be aggressive were argued to have shorter careers than those who were.

> The before the game build up is to get yourself into almost like a frenzy state so you go out there and you want to be aggressive and then with the ball in between two people it's, who wants it more basically … testing your opponent by being aggressive toward them and … see if he can be aggressive back and if he can't you win … … part of the thing that makes AFL players successful is they need to have that aggression … being aggressive is certainly … a pre-requisite I'd say. There are more aggressive players in the AFL than there are non-aggressive players.

While it was acknowledged that aggression is not unique to AFL football, but is a common trait in many sports – "pole vaulters … slap themselves around on the face before they go and do a pole vault ... getting angry … getting aggressive" – such is the widespread perception that aggression in football is rewarded, it is arguable that the AFL culture reinforces these traits in men.

While participants recognised all types of players are needed for a team to be successful at football, those players who are perceived as being tough and aggressive are held in higher esteem than those who are not. This sentiment was frequently expressed:

> Guys that put their head over the ball, put their body on the line get a lot more respect … they mightn't get the accolades, mightn't get as many possessions, but I think doing that is just as important if not more than getting the footy. If you've got both, if you can do a bit of both, get the footy and put your head over the ball, then you'll be regarded in even higher esteem.

Going in hard at the ball and at players was argued to lead to recognition and legend status, as players are remembered for being tough, while those who are not get forgotten. Common responses included:

> There's been some … players … who have … done it consistently all the time and you know blokes like Glenn Archer and Mark Ricciuto and Michael Voss and they've become sort of legendary because of it … normally there's one or two blokes in the team that seek it, they go looking for it and, and that makes them really well liked among the group.

When discussing whether the aggression on the football field can be transferred off the field into daily life, participants were divided in their responses. Some claimed that some people have a naturally aggressive personality, and this is not dependent on being a sportsman. One participant argued:

> I'm a big believer that you are who you are and there's people, whether they play football or not that get out on the piss and just want to look for fights anyway … I think it's wrong in saying it's sportspeople, because it's everyone in general … I don't think we're over aggressive, sportsmen.

However, others stated the skills and characteristics football teaches young men makes it difficult for them to differentiate between what needs to stay on the football field and what skills can be applied to daily living. Football shapes masculine identity in many ways, as young men are taught to be resilient and participate in aggressive competition on the field, which can lead to aggressive personalities off the field as well. One participant claimed:

> I certainly think there's positives in football by having males come in and toughen them up and work as a team, understand how we operate and all that, but I guess on the other hand it can also create an environment where an individual can become violent or take it too far; or behaviour that might be ok in a football team might not be ok in a home environment, for instance.

In addition, young men enter elite football culture at a time in life when they are still developing their own sense of identity, and are often perceived as being in a high-risk category with regard to their behaviour. Participants contended that young men often perceive themselves as "bullet proof," which can lead to poor decision-making when confronted by members of the public outside of sport. This demonstrates that two defining characteristics of masculinity, particularly for young men, are risk-taking and aggression. One of the men in this research suggested:

> There's certain personality traits that, give you a really good chance of being a good footballer are the same personality traits that may make you more susceptible to getting off the field so we're talking about blokes who are risk-takers, we're talking about being aggressive, we're talking about them being super fit and strong … The other thing is there's the age in which you're successful in AFL is … 18-30 … if you took a snapshot of who are the highest risk people of violence on a Saturday night it's 18-30 year old young males … so they're in a really high risk category full stop.

A common response was that men are inherently physical and aggressive and that sport and football provide good outlets to play out this natural aggression in a controlled setting:

> I think everyone needs an outlet and I think if more people sort of had an outlet I don't think we'd have the social problems that we have whether that be sport, whether that be religion or whatever, but I think that everyone needs some sort of outlet to get away from daily life and that's what footy does for you.

Participants maintained that without an outlet such as sport, men are at risk of suppressing their emotions, which potentially leads to situations where frustrations and emotions are expressed inappropriately:

> I think the great thing about football is it is a chance for people to vent their aggression and their anger in a controlled environment so you know there's probably some men that are able to let their anger out in that type of environment which then stops them from doing it say at home.

These comments indicate that aggression is perceived as being a character trait all men naturally possess. Participants argued that sport is an important avenue through which men can play out this natural aggression, negating the need to express this emotion to the family at home.

Emotion

One of the fundamental characteristics of hegemonic masculinity is the ability to maintain control and suppress emotion. Founding researchers on masculinity, Brannon and David (1976), stated that a key concept in masculinity is to "be a sturdy oak," characterised by keeping an emotional distance, in order to be reliable and dependable. Similarly, participants in previous research by Agnew (2007) described "keeping emotions in check" as what it means to be masculine. Bennett (2007), drawing on David and Brannon's influential work, argued that those who suppress their emotions are endorsing the dominant masculine ideals of 'be a sturdy oak' and 'no sissy stuff.'

The men in this research described Australian Rules football as an emotional game. Those who participate are passionate about football. For elite sportsmen their sport is important to them and with that comes a deep emotional attachment to the game.

The fact that you've got to keep preparing, you've got to keep coming up and you've got to keep challenging yourself and you've got to keep wanting to win and prepare and become better weekend, day in, day out, week in, week out. …. It's very emotionally draining at times, but when you're winning and there's a great feeling within the group it's one of the most emotionally rewarding places to be.

Another participant stated:

In this day professional sport does really encompass your whole life … you spend so much time doing it … when you win, things going well feel like the top of the world, when you're losing and it might be a run of 4 or 5 losses you think the world's all ending you know.

Although traditional perceptions of masculinity encourage men to suppress their emotions (Bennett 2007), many participants argued that those who feel the emotion of the game will be more successful than those who do not:

if you … don't feel the emotion out of it I doubt whether you can be very good at it. You need to be passionate about it; if you're passionate about something you're going to be emotional about it. You need to be able to feel the hurt if you don't perform and you need to understand why you succeeded or why you didn't succeed and with that comes emotion.

Some of the men in this research argued that in Western society today it is acceptable for men to display emotions such as crying, pain and affection. Particularly within Australian Rules football, displaying emotions was described as being acceptable, because it is a passionate game:

I think it's very acceptable, I've done it myself plenty of times … people have got different ways of showing their emotions, some people cry, some people hold it in and some people don't want to cry in front of others, but yeah grand finals or the game that you get knocked out for the year or just very important games I can understand it or when you retire there's absolutely no doubt as we

said before if you're passionate about something and it means something to you there's nothing wrong with showing your emotions.

However, others maintained that men should not show emotions in public, and in particular men should not cry, as this makes them uncomfortable. One participant stated:

> Oh I don't like crying, I don't necessarily like seeing other people cry either so look if people are emotional that way well that's up to them. I was one for you know being disappointed, looking at why you might have lost but I've never personally got to the point where I've cried over a game of footy.

Others argued that it is more acceptable for men to show their emotions in public in recent years. Some expressed they were comfortable with hugging their friends on the street and crying in public, both of which have traditionally been linked to effeminate behaviour. It is interesting to note that the men described common emotional behaviour as being crying and hugging. These are traditionally viewed as behaviours women display. Aggression was not linked with being 'emotional', suggesting that the participants held traditional perceptions towards emotions as being feminine. One of the men argued:

> The way I see it, I'm not scared to show affection in public, not scared to cry when I have to, I'm not scared to vacuum floors and do the washing and I think it's knowing who you are. I would say I'm a masculine sort of person, I'm certainly not effeminate but I will openly show emotion and all that sort of stuff, not probably like my father and his father before that where it was all a closed book, I think as men we've come a fair way. I've had my own health dramas, in the past and I put that out there for everyone. I've had a bout of cancer and fought that off and did that very openly, I think that's being masculine, that's laying it all on the table.

These sentiments suggest that, while it is more acceptable in Western society for men to express their emotions, it is still seen as a feminine trait that men are becoming more comfortable with possessing or expressing. In addition, these perceptions indicate that gender divisions are maintained through the men being willing to vacuum and do the washing; traditionally perceived female tasks.

Responses revealed a situational acceptance of men showing their emotions in football. Very specific situations, such as losing a grand final or retiring from the game, were deemed appropriate for men to cry by many of the men in this research. In addition, certain types of emotions are portrayed as acceptable, while others are not. Importantly, within the sport of Australian Rules football, some emotions, such as being angry and aggressive, are required and even encouraged, while others, such as crying, are often suppressed. The men stated that there had to be an appropriate reason for emotional displays such as crying. Such situations included retiring or sustaining a significant injury, while being homesick or upset over a relationship break up were argued to be unacceptable circumstances to warrant displaying emotion. This indicates that an important part of being an AFL footballer is being emotionally resilient. Given that football demands require the subordination of all other demands, emotions pertaining to issues other than football are to be suppressed if masculinity is to be maintained:

> I reckon there's instances in footy, very specific instances where you are allowed to be emotional, absolutely acceptable, grand final's one of them, retiring maybe if you're horridly injured and you're getting carried off so I think in those instances … of course you're allowed to be emotional, because there's a reason. I think where I really struggled in my first four years at [club] was that emotion to feel unhappy or you were homesick or anything like that was deemed as a weakness. You were conditioned to deal with it yourself and

suppress it and not expose it so absolutely that football dictates that you're not supposed to be emotional...

Most of the participants agreed that the acceptability of men displaying perceived feminine emotional behaviour such as affection and crying is changing so that displaying these emotions is more acceptable in today's society than twenty years ago:

> Oh definitely I think things have changed now, everyone seems to cry, but back when I was playing it was seen as big boys don't cry and you didn't show hurt … you don't get carried off on a stretcher, you get up, hobble off.

Traditionally men, particularly sportsmen, were expected to suppress emotions, including feelings of pain. It was evident through the participants' responses that those who played at the beginning of the national AFL competition were encouraged to deny pain and emotions, but perceived the current competition as being more accepting of men displaying emotions.

Sex Symbols

The status of AFL footballers in Australian society leads to public adulation, particularly female adulation. Mewett and Toffoleti (2008) describe the women who actively seek out football activity in order to meet the players they idolise, obtain an autograph or even go to pubs and clubs in an attempt to 'pick up' footballers, as 'groupies'. While not all female football fans pursue footballers with the intent of having sex with them, there are a select group of women who do. Ironically, as hegemonic masculinity assumes heterosexual sexual conquest (Connell 1995), these women are sexually objectifying the footballers. Many of

the men in this research were embarrassed about being labelled 'sex symbols' for Australian women, stating:

I honestly I am deadly serious I don't think I ever had to worry about that.

However, there were some who admitted to enjoying the attention. It was argued that it is 'normal' for men to enjoy the female attention:

Oh you do at the time yeah I don't mind that, what man wouldn't?

Similarly:

I think it's a good thing to get attention from well your close friends, family, your teammates, we all feel comfortable a lot of the time with that depending on who it is. I was a man, I liked ladies, it's an interesting one. I mean I know there's an attraction in that regard, I think the physical aspect sort of comes with the territory.

Receiving female attention enhanced some of the men's confidence, and in this way can be seen to be a positive reinforcer of masculine identity. Even if they were in a relationship, many men still confessed to being flattered by the responses from female fans:

I suppose it's a good confidence booster for anyone to feel good about themselves, but I never really thought about it that much purely because I had a girlfriend.

Another concurred:

I was engaged at 20. I always found that was good. I've got a pretty steady relationship and that sort of stuff but it was certainly flattering to know that other people thought you were attractive or a bit of alright.

The majority of participants attributed the extra female attention to the appreciation of the footballer's physique. This was perceived as being a reward for the hard work and discipline that is required to obtain a muscular physique, and the sacrifices they make in order to play AFL football. One of the men claimed:

> If you really want to play AFL your body naturally will, with the hard work, get to the point where you're not carrying any fat and you're quite muscular so it might look good for the girls I suppose.

Many of the men recognised the reasons behind the female attraction and so did not enjoy the attention. Some argued the media has a role to play in portraying footballers in a positive way in terms of their muscular bodies, as well as their financial status, which may lead certain women to find them attractive. Connell (1995) argued that for a particular form of masculinity to be hegemonic it requires culturally exalted exemplars who are celebrated as heroes. Due to the publicity of the game, footballers are often attributed 'celebrity' status. This attention early on in young men's careers affirms their status as footballers, and indeed men, and leads to a heightened sense of masculinity:

> I suppose being a profile sportsman you were always going to be I suppose more attractive to the opposite sex. You've got the perception that you're fit, if you're half good looking and you've got an average pay packet which is higher than most young blokes. So if I was a woman, young girl, I would probably find that pretty attractive and well if you've got a choice or if you've got the opportunity yeah it's all part of it I suppose. It's like movie stars and that these days.

And:

> It's difficult because it can be a bit of a predatory environment. You'd be lying if you said at different stages you didn't enjoy the attention, because I think most people going through that age and that phase of life would say that they liked getting attention sometimes, but … I always realised that it was more to do with the playing or the position than it was to do with me.

The 'celebrity' status attributed to sportsmen leads to the objectification of male footballers as sexual objects for women. Participants recognised that women who pursue footballers with the intent of having sex with them are not romantically interested in them, rather are more interested in the sexual conquest of a footballer due to their status in society. One of the men stated:

> I never saw the girls wanting to be with you because you're good looking or you're a good bloke, but simply just because it was part of their strategy to advance themselves on "I was a with an AFL footballer" or "I'm more important because I've been with a footballer." Not all the girls are like that, but you kind of become pretty wary that they are.

Some of the men argued that there are certain types of women that are associated with AFL footballers, and that if men wanted to, they knew where to go in order to attract these women. It was contended that if footballers had the appropriate character they would stay away from the places these female frequent. One of the men claimed:

> Obviously there are certain types of females out there that are associated with AFL footballers and want to be associated with AFL footballers, but it comes down to character. If you're any sort of person you don't have anything to do with those girls, so you know leave them to the blokes that have got no idea.

Another stated:

> You only get it when you go into certain places where you think it's going to
> happen, so if you want to get extra female attention you know where to go to
> get it.

Several participants questioned the character of the men who chase the female
adulation of fans, implying that it is actually more masculine to *not* be associated
with female fans that give footballers hero status:

> Certain individuals … would say, "what do you do," wanting a response to
> from a girl to say "oh what do you do?" and they say, "Oh I'm a footballer."
> But what kind of girl are you after if you want them just because they want
> you just because you're a footballer … you want people to like you for who
> you are and not what you do.

Some of the men also argued that it is not just extra female attention that
footballers contend with, but also extra male attention. The extra male attention
was not perceived to be of a sexual manner, but with the adulation of sporting
stars all people want to have a conversation with and spend time with them. It
was recognised that fans have an opinion on both the footballers and the sport.
Therefore elite AFL players are constantly scrutinised according to their body and
performance on the football field as individuals and as a team. This leads to extra
attention being given to elite sportsmen, creating celebrity status. The attention
does not necessarily cease in retirement, depending on the profile of the
footballer. One participant acknowledged:

> There's no doubt that you do … still do now, whether that's good or bad or
> whether you like it or not is up to the individual. Everyone who follows the
> game wants to talk to you and be connected to you … people want to hang
> around successful people or want to talk to people or meet them … they might

not want to be sexually committed, but they still might want to say G'day or shake your hand or talk to you and see what you're like.

Society and culture

Becoming a 'star'

One of the most important turning points in the construction of male identity in young footballers is the national AFL draft. For many 17 and 18 year olds being drafted means moving interstate without family and friends. Many participants remembered being excited about being drafted because it was the realisation of a childhood dream, while also being scared at having to move interstate and quickly learn to be independent. One of the men recalled:

> Excitement at first, but more scared when you get over there and you go hang on a minute, different state, parents aren't here, family, friends aren't here, what do you do? So I had that at the age of 17 and I was living on my own over there actually, so had to learn how to do all the housework all that sort of stuff as well by myself … that's probably a positive out of it but you do get scared, get homesick.

For some the scrutiny to which Australian Rules footballers are subjected began early in their careers. This public adulation given to footballers creates a hierarchy in which footballers are, in some cases, attributed special attention and treated differently to the general public. This has a powerful influence on masculine identity, as it can lead to increased confidence; however, it can also lead to external pressures being placed on the footballers, as the public has expectations of what should be appropriate behaviours for men to display. This increases the commodification of footballers, as to some extent they become

public property, with the many different demands people make on them. One of the men stated:

> You instantly become known, I wouldn't say famous, but you do become known and you are treated a little bit differently. I do think to the outside, well yes, your identity does change. You become public property to an extent and they make or form opinions of you by purely either the way you walk or you don't say hello or you don't sign that autograph, you know you may very well be having a bad day, but they don't realise that. That becomes rumour; that becomes your profile.

The notoriety and social acclaim associated with being an AFL footballer can lead to special privileges when footballers go out on weekends. This is particularly so for the men who played in the early stages of the national AFL competition. Participants recalled being given drink cards at the local pubs due to their star status, and free entry into clubs.

> I admit it was pretty good, when we were younger we used to get drink cards at clubs and bars like they'd be free drinks and there was a ton of nightclubs and we used to walk straight in with free drink cards, but back in those days we only trained 3 days a week, it was just on the brink of going professional.

The public adulation and subsequent privileges given to footballers enhances their confidence and self-esteem, which in turn reinforces their status as footballers, and also as men.

However, not all participants agreed that the privileges given to young AFL footballers are a positive aspect of the sport. One recalled the drink cards and free entry to clubs as being a negative influence on his football career, because being widely recognised in society became more important than playing football well:

I stopped setting goals, I got comfortable with what I was doing, thought that it was important that you're recognised going out partying and getting a drink card, I thought that was cool, and at the end of the day it's a load of rubbish.

This meant that his identity as a footballer became vulnerable. Being a footballer comprised much of the men's identity and as such, the threat of their football career ending can cause their identity to become vulnerable. As a result of his experience this man perceives his new role as an opportunity to warn young footballers about the dangers of being subjected to the adulation of sporting stars in society:

You warn them of all the pitfalls and you tell them from personal experience this is the trap that I fell into … be really good at what you're doing, you might not get the second chance that I got. Footy's more ruthless now: you might not get a third year of your contract.

Some participants argued that being drafted to an AFL club does not change you as a person, but it does encourage young footballers to develop certain character traits, such as being dedicated and committed:

No I don't think your perceptions change. The amount of commitment and work rate and work ethic that you're going to have to put in to be successful in this career, I think that sort of changes.

These characteristics are fundamental traits of masculinity, and as such football becomes highly influential in constructing the masculine identity of boys who enter the AFL system at a young age. Interestingly, some of the men in this research claimed that football also teaches men to be more respectful, due to some negative circumstances they observed:

It makes you respect life a little bit more, and respect people with the way that I was, what I saw about how people were getting treated and so forth … went

a long way to me being the person that I am now with having everyone involved and making it all a team in the club; and we don't want outsiders, we want everyone to be one group, because that's one thing that was missing. The time I didn't enjoy my football was the time when that wasn't happening.

Berger and Luckmann (1967) argued that individuals are socialised into society though actively participating in social process. This notion was reiterated by some of the men in this research, who acknowledged that people are constructed by the environment around them, and as such when a young man enters an AFL team with older teammates, he experiences one of the most influential reinforcements of masculine identity. In order to be accepted as a teammate and be respected, young men quickly learn the social processes that are deemed acceptable within the football culture. As one of the men stated:

> I think we're all products of our environment, so the environment in which AFL footballers live in is one that's really dependant, demanding, it's an elite program so for example a young lad who might be drafted at 17, just finished his year 12 and never worked before and the only routine he's known is school life, and then to be put into a system that is really demanding and physical … he might be at that experimental phase in terms of drinking and not being able to handle drinking … hanging around with people who are 23/24 who have had a lot more experience in that regard … and same with attention from the opposite sex … to a child or a young man to come into that and not be changed is hard.

The media have a powerful influence on the construction of male footballers. From the moment young boys are drafted, they are scrutinised by the public and by the media. Some of the participants indicated that this led to difficulties in family life, relationships and themselves as individuals, as they struggled not to conform to the expectations of those around them. As one of the men stated:

I was one that played country football in '95 and virtually 12 months later I was on an AFL list. It's a bit of a ride, but you really do try and be the same person, but … the media … especially in the first year or two … put a lot of stress on myself and my family because of all the attention … as a person you try not to change, but it is very difficult.

However, despite experiencing some difficulties, the majority of men described being drafted as a positive experience that has influenced their identity today. Becoming an AFL footballer is an aspiration of many young boys, though very few achieve this goal. Being drafted to an AFL team signifies successfully achieving a childhood goal, and can contribute to the hierarchy of men. In addition, given that men rarely admit weaknesses or vulnerability, and the importance of sport in many men's lives, being able to participate in sport at the highest level reinforces the athlete's status as men. To not be drafted to an AFL team could lead to the men perceiving themselves as failing, and as such identity could become vulnerable. Therefore, it is not surprising that the men in this research described being an AFL footballer as a positive influence on their identity.

Relationships

Many of the participants declared that becoming an AFL footballer should not affect their relationships with family and friends. However, at times relationships were affected. For some young men being drafted to an AFL club requires moving to another state away from family and friends, and an inevitable change in relationships occurs. For many men being self-reliant is a fundamental aspect of masculinity (Courtenay 2000); however, being drafted causes young men to

appreciate the relationships they do have. In this way, relationships can change in a positive manner. One of the men stated:

> For me the result of getting drafted was I moved away from Adelaide, away from all my family, so your relationship does change; and we're still a very close family, but yeah … the dynamics of your relationship change you appreciate what your family does mean to you.

For others, the demands of being a footballer caused negative changes in relationships, due to the little amount of time football allows for socialising. As stated by one participant:

> When you're in an AFL system you spend so much time at the footy club. For example the guys in pre-season will be there from 8.30 in the morning til 5 or 6 at night … 4 to 5 days a week they train and then Saturday morning for half a day as well so the ability to maintain your circle of friends is difficult and … your friends, they're all getting on with their lives … they might have got a job or studying, so their time frame doesn't always fit in with yours … and also because you spend … 50 or 60 hours a week with these guys you come really closely bonded, and because your timeframe fits in with theirs you tend to spend all your time together and become a really close knit group, which makes it harder to catch up with your other friends. The family's probably a little bit different, I think you tend to work harder to maintain your family structures, so my family life wasn't really affected much, but certainly my circle of friends was.

One of the major reasons for changes in relationships was the change in perception of young men of how they should behave as young footballers. This demonstrates the social construction of masculinity, as some participants recalled being affected by the increased scrutiny given to athletes, and that this had an impact on their relationships with partners. One of the men admitted:

> Me and my wife went through a rough patch because of all the attention, and … as a person you try not to change but it is very difficult. … I think now you know I did let it get to me but for me and my wife … it's made us stronger.

Others agreed that their perceptions of women changed through being an AFL footballer. This is linked to the football culture and the perception of women as sexual objects for men. The increased attention given to footballers heightens this perception that women should be interested in footballers. One of the men stated:

> I guess the only way it impacts on your relationships is that you might have a perception of what you should be as a young male in an AFL system … and that can impact on your relationships … particularly with women, but once you work out well this is who I am not who I should be then you're ok. It takes some people lots of time some people never work out just to be themselves rather than prove themselves to someone else.

The objectification of women as sexual objects for men, particularly in the football culture leads to a perception that young men should not be in a committed relationship, but should be enjoying the attention of female fans. One participant commented:

> I just found that by the time I was 21/22 that … I didn't enjoy the whole female side of it, because I kind of felt that I shouldn't have a girlfriend, I should be playing the field, because that's drilled into you from everyone around you, and there's not one bit of the football side when you're younger that's designed to make you want a girlfriend.

Hard work and discipline

The majority of men in this research stated that respect from teammates had to be earned, and this required hard work, discipline and not being afraid of a physical contest. To not be willing to put one's 'body on the line' for the team was argued

to be 'soft', and therefore not masculine. With regard to not being able to withstand a physical contest, one participant claimed:

> If you … were soft, scared, certainly not the image the footy club would be trying to portray … you always won respect by doing the hard things. A player that was prepared to win the hard ball was always seen as the way to go.

Another concurred:

> Hard work and discipline. That's how I see it. I mean we talk about as footballers you've got to do, obviously, the hard work in pre-season, you earn respect there, but you've got to earn respect on the footy field as well. So if you're a talker and you say "I'm going to put my head over the ball" and you don't put your head over ball, you're not going to get respect so it's all about your actions and how you go about it.

The ability to consistently perform on the football field was another perceived way to earn respect from teammates and coaching staff. This is linked to the notion of 'doing' masculinity rather than 'being' masculine (Drummond 1996), as performing on the football field requires discipline and hard work in training and sacrifices in daily life to succeed at the highest level. One participant reflected:

> You earn your respect with your teammates purely through hard work and the ability to consistently perform on the field enough to commit to the team.

Many participants recognised that the media has a significant role in the public perception of footballers. This extends to the glorification of players who are particularly physical and are portrayed as tough. The men also realised that in order to be a successful team all different types of players are required, although this is not always the image presented through the media. As put by one:

> There's all different sort … players … there's the tough ones, the media love the tough ones … the media perceive Glenn Archer as the toughest bloke, but

then someone else is the best finisher, so how do you judge them? They're two different players, so … its more about making sure that you work hard to how you want to be perceived as a person, so I'm sure that everyone is just as equal.

Similarly:

From a team sport point of view, you need a balance of all players. …You're going to have players … are in and under, and players that play more of an outside role, that's just a balance of any team; you're not going to have 20, 22 Chris Judds, you're not going to have 22 Buddy Franklins – you need a balance of all types of players … I suppose supporters do love those in and under tough players who are always around the ball, doing courageous acts.

Many participants stated that to earn respect young footballers should give respect to the experienced members of the team. Being drafted to an AFL team can increase a young man's confidence and ego, and a heightened sense of masculinity. It is unlikely that young footballers will gain the respect of their teammates if they do not first give respect. One participant said, on earning respect, it was:

how hard you train, put your body on the line, how hard you work with your running in the pre-seasons and stuff like that, and I think if you go in there with the right attitude as well and if you're respectful. A lot of players in the AFL, the young ones went in there thinking they were the big dogs straight away … I tried to go in there with the approach to try and listen and learn and watch and be respectful of the guys and get the respect that way.

It was acknowledged that some young footballers do not understand the culture of which they have become a part, and that it takes time to acclimatise to their surroundings. This becomes part of the socialisation of young boys into men:

I probably didn't really understand that for my first two years, I was trying to be respected as a good person and a good bloke and a likeable character, and I think a lot of kids run through this then come to this hurdle, and some of the kids that come in and are just a little bit immature I think. … You earn respect purely through hard work, and if you're a good person to go along with it, well that's good and well, but if you're a prick of a person you've still got a place in the side. If you haven't got respect on the field and you're a great person, well you probably haven't got a position in the side.

Other ways to earn the respect of their teammates are to adhere to the team values that the footballers develop themselves. These values form a set of appropriate behaviours for men to display, and abiding by these behaviours constructs masculine identity. These sentiments identify the attitude of prioritising football first and being a 'good' man second, once again reinforcing the importance of sport in the lives of these men. This encourages young sportsmen to strongly identify with their athletic identity, which can lead to difficulties redefining who they are when transitioning out of elite sport (Grove et al. 1997). One of the participants stated:

One of the things at the club now is this Leading Teams philosophy that we have. The guys come up with a set of values which they want to live by and by which they want to be recognised. Things like integrity and courage and resilience … so in terms of earning your stripes, I think it's the people who live that set of values and that's what earns people to respect … we had the situation this year where a couple of guys got delisted and one of them hadn't actually played an AFL game, but in terms of living the values … he was very much the perfect role model … so he still earned his stripes and was a respected member, even though he didn't play a game.

The 'perfect' life

Life as an AFL footballer was described by the majority of participants as being fantastic fun, the perfect life and enjoyable. However, being an elite athlete was also described as being very demanding, requiring a significant commitment that often involved sacrifice. Some of the men involved in this research played football at the beginning of the national AFL competition when it was still a semi-professional sport, holding down part-time employment in addition to football commitments.

As discussed already, many men demonstrate their masculinity by 'doing' and not 'being' (Drummond 1996), and so participants who had many injuries during their careers, described their frustration with their diminishing ability to challenge and push their bodies. The male body is a significant factor in the development of masculine identity, and as such, sustaining an injury that limits function can often lead to men feeling betrayed by bodies that have failed them. As one man stated:

> It's a massive grind. … I battled my body so much: you play on a Saturday, you just can't walk on a Sunday … So in-season … was this feeling of constantly being sore and not being able to control your body and putting so much emphasis on it … or you're doing stuff to make it better or you're doing treatment and then you get to … your main training session … once I got past that it was like "oh good I get a day off" … towards the end … there was no pleasure in any of it. No pleasure in training, no pleasure in the game because you constantly felt you weren't achieving what you wanted to, either through form or through your body limiting you.

A number of participants claimed that the general public does not understand how hard being an AFL footballer is, in terms of commitment and discipline and

constantly challenging their bodies. Several stated that being an AFL footballer is not as glamorous as people perceive it to be:

> Being in a high profile sport you get a lot of attention I suppose around the places where you go, but at the end of the day it's just a job, it's just a hard working environment. It's heads down bum up, it's not all glamorous like people might think. You have to do an awful lot of training, you know, day in day out, lot of rehab, lot of meetings, sponsors nights. It's pretty full on lifestyle. Not much time for a social life.

Another described the lifestyle as boring, due to its structured nature:

> It's a lot more boring than people think playing AFL football … I would have liked to have been stimulated in more areas than just playing AFL football and just the constant preparation. I think football would be a great game if it was played every second week, but to play every week it just catches up with you.

Being a professional footballer requires considerable sacrifice: participants recalled missing important family events such as birthdays, weddings and anniversaries. Being willing to miss these events is considered a necessity in pursuit of success on the football field, and one that the footballers were prepared to accept. One of the men recalled:

> You have to sacrifice a lot of your social life, and definitely over the years you miss out on weddings, parties or if you're able to go you'd only be able to go for an hour or so because you had to go home and get some sleep for the next game, stuff like that so you had to miss out on a fair bit, and over Christmas time you didn't have the opportunity to travel because training is just round the corner.

Another agreed:

> I had to change my lifestyle and you know I wasn't just out partying and I couldn't do things that a normal 17/18 year old could do… Mum and dad were

very supportive and they came over regularly to Melbourne and I think the old man was just happy for me to be playing football wherever it was, didn't matter where and how, but you know I think they understood the sacrifices as well. I missed birthday parties, 50ths, 40ths, weddings because football might have been on the day and very rarely would I say that I can't play, or you didn't say that.

Being an AFL footballer also requires sacrifice in terms of diet and routine in order to achieve at the highest level. One participant described this as being somewhat selfish, because he had to focus on eating the right foods and doing the training in order to succeed at the highest level. He stated:

Daily routine was pretty selfish, it was about myself, getting the body right, eating habits, food and drink and fluids and the right stuff and training, and it would change, but throughout the week you'd train probably twice a day. You'd have a meeting and then you'd be home to relax and that's pretty much how your days went. It … put a lot of focus on individuals, and I guess to a certain extent a bit of selfishness to make sure you're looking after yourself, making sure you're right.

Selfishness was described as being an almost necessary part of being an AFL footballer, because if football was not the number one priority, it would be difficult to succeed. Several participants admitted to 'living and breathing' football, and that this was crucial to succeeding in a football career. One man claimed:

I mean you think about footy probably when you wake up and when you're going to sleep at night. It was your number one passion, and if you didn't live and breathe it you're not going to be good at it, because AFL football is the toughest competition in Australia, and probably one of the toughest games in the world – if not the toughest – in terms of how good you need to be at it and how dedicated you need be in discipline, sacrifice, all those things, the amount of skills that you need to be a good AFL footballer.

Part of the selfishness required to be successful at football includes competition with teammates for positions in the team. The natural competitiveness of young men for these positions was argued to be 'a good thing', challenging footballers to be the best they can be:

> There's definitely competition, that's sometimes pretty healthy if you've got a side that's going really well: you want those young kids that are coming up to really drive those core players or the senior players to be performing each week ... There's a lot of guys during pre-season that do like to beat each other at different things, different runs and that sort of stuff to push each other along … we had a guy who used to make sure he always ran with our elite runner who was the best trainer at our club at that stage, so he was trying to compete with him.

Living and breathing football, however, was also argued to be detrimental to other areas of one's life. One man stated:

> I longed to not be a footballer. I longed to do lots of things that you could do if you didn't play football and I think that was part of my battle. … I used to do my head in a little bit, but I was a pretty conscientious sort of footballer, so I knew I had to do lots of things right because of my body … playing AFL it's incredibly rigid, inflexible, doesn't matter who's birthday, engagement whatever, if you're playing away, you're playing away, that comes first, and I think probably to the detriment of relationships and your own health. Like I didn't manage to find a good balance between doing my own thing and playing footy, it's sort of all or nothing.

As young boys are drafted at age 17 and 18, one participant argued that professional footballers are required to sacrifice some of their teenage years, as they are required to 'grow up' quickly in terms of discipline and attitude. Thus, football is an important initiation into manhood. However, the discipline required

to be a footballer can mean not being able to go out with friends their own age, thereby alienating some players. One of the men claimed:

> When you're younger you've got to sacrifice a lot, and I still reckon kids today get drafted too young because of direction, I still didn't know what direction I was going to go in, it was just like a big rollercoaster, they said this is what everyone wants … so you think you're doing the right thing, so you just did what everyone told you to do.

However, other men disagreed that footballers are required to sacrifice a lot to play professional sport:

> My first five years I didn't sacrifice too much, I still got out with the guys on the weekends so in terms of not drinking, what did I sacrifice, spending long periods of time away from your mates and family, I suppose that's the biggest sacrifice. I suppose the discipline of not having weekends, but that's hardly a sacrifice. In my later career, probably the sacrifice was spending time away from the kids, but at the same time I was there when they woke up and I was there when they had to go to bed each night, I was home by sort of 4.30 most nights, so I suppose it depends how you describe sacrifice, when you … dissect it like that, I probably didn't sacrifice too much to tell you the truth, that's probably one of the misgivings in AFL football, they say you sacrifice so much, but it's probably crap actually, now I think of it.

This indicates that the societal perception that AFL footballers sacrifice a lot in order to be successful at the highest level may be misguided. Particularly early in their careers, some of the men admitted to not having to sacrifice too much, however later in careers, their commitment to football increased. Young men often view themselves as being invincible (Hall et al. 2007; Wetherill & Fromme 2007; Slesaransky-Poe & Garcia 2009), and, this could lead to the perception that they do not have to sacrifice much to be successful as an elite sportsman.

During their football careers, some of the men in this research received individual honours such as life membership at football clubs, All Australian team selection and Brownlow medals. Participants argued that while individual honours are satisfying, given that AFL is a team sport, the team efforts in winning premierships are more gratifying than individual achievements. One participant claimed:

> Personally they are, I think not so much the Brownlow because that's obviously a great thing, but the premierships and ok, the All Australian teams is probably something you aim to be in and they're pretty special for your own personal goals. I think if you set high personal goals for yourself, I think that's only going to help the team because you'll be playing good footy yourself but … at the end of the day it's all about team work and the teams that win premierships are the ones that play as a team not as individuals.

This man describes the honour of life achievement:

> On and off I was there for 12 years, so I put a lot of effort into that footy club, so to get rewarded with a life membership is fantastic and a big achievement … at the age of 28, life member at a footy club… most people have to wait until they're 40/50 to get life membership at a club, so I'm lucky and I'm thankful.

To be awarded life membership is a significant achievement, and is valued by the footballers because of all the sacrifices and commitment the men give to their clubs, so they do appreciate the recognition for their achievements. In addition, individual honours can be a powerful reinforcer of their masculinity and status as men, as they signify success, which is an important characteristic in the construction of masculine identity.

The men admitted they are still recognised by the general public, and that they appreciate people wanting to reminisce about their playing days, even if it is at the urinal in the men's room, as happened to one of the men:

> Maybe over Christmas someone will come up and go "oh you used to play for [club]" or blokes in urinals. That's great. That's a great one. Well, not autographs, but say "you used to play football didn't ya?," … and there's a bit of a manly exchange, but you don't look at them, you sort of look around "yes" and that's about it.

All of the men recognised that the skills they learnt through football could be transferred into other areas of their lives, including their careers after football. Many linked the traits of successful sports people to successful business people, observing that often the same skills are required. One of the men argued:

> I think there's a lot of common traits between successful sports people and successful business people, such as a belief in yourself, resilience … you'll come against hurdles you've got to work your way through, work ethics, really successful people in sport and business work really hard, there's no shortcuts. … In business you surround yourself with really smart people that understand what you're doing, what they're doing, and they'll help you become better; same at footy, if you hang around with guys that are going somewhere, motivated, proactive in looking after themselves, preparing, you'll get the same traits and you'll be good.

Similarly:

> As a player you probably panic a bit that all of a sudden you're not going to be able to use 98% of the things that you learnt through football, but that's not true. Most of the important similarities between successful businessmen and successful sportsmen are the same, and you can definitely use them in business or in life, whether it's leadership, whether it's time management,

whether it's discipline or work ethic, communication skills, all those things are critical in life and in business and in sport.

The most common traits participants perceived as being transferrable from football to daily life were physical and mental strength, resilience, discipline, confidence, the ability to work as a team and communication skills. Other responses included:

I think being mentally strong is having discipline. I think that it's all about discipline and … footy definitely teaches you discipline and mental strength for sure.

And:

Oh, definitely footy teaches you a lot, especially when you're involved in footy clubs for so long at a young age, you learn how to communicate with people, you learn respect, you learn hard work, discipline, social skills, all these things I think you can transfer into any other career.

Participants recognised that young footballers can learn how to 'be a man' through being involved in the sport. This is particularly so for contact sports, as the physicality of sports such as football requires being willing to accept brutal force, which for some translated into proving their manhood. Given that boys are drafted at a relatively young age, and that there is a perception about how footballers should behave, from teammates and also the general public, the early stages of a young man's AFL career are significant in the development of his masculine identity. One participant stated:

Sometimes you can show that you're a man, your manhood and that sort of stuff … it's a physical game and it's the way you attack the footy … I definitely think there's a stigma there that playing footy can definitely increase your manhood.

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Ironically, some of the men argued that perceptions about which behaviours are acceptable for men in contemporary society are changing, but that through playing a contact sport such as football the traditional views are still maintained. In Western society today, it is more acceptable for men to care about their appearance, however as one man recognised, wanting to annihilate your sporting opponent maintains the perception of being tough and strong, and therefore still masculine. This indicates the changing nature of masculinities with regard to some behaviour, while also reinforcing traditional perceptions of hegemonic masculinity through participation in contact sports. Participants recognised the conflicting views through such comments as:

> I think it's all perception again, but not too many blokes are all the same. It's dying your hair, waxing your legs, then you go out and you beat the crap out of someone on a Saturday afternoon and putting that on the footy field.

While all of the men in this research described their football careers as being extremely positive and that through football they have learnt many skills that can be transferred to other areas of their life post football, some recognised that having interests outside of football is beneficial to men's self esteem, particularly when life as a footballer is difficult. Much of the difficult times stem from losses, thus identifying the importance of winning and success to masculine identity. Encouraging footballers to have experiences outside of football is crucial in maintaining positive self-esteem. One participant stated:

> As much as coaches think that it's really important to be in a special meeting or to have a special training session, the player's own development as a person and their own self-esteem with outside things – to allow some time each week for footballers to do that I think is brilliant. Makes them feel better about who

they are, because if they don't play well on the weekend, at least they're doing this other good thing outside of sport that they can think about.

All of the participants described football as a positive experience, and would recommend the sport to anyone who would like to play. The following quote epitomises their comments:

Yeah it was definitely a positive experience, and I would say to anyone who wants to play footy to definitely have a go at it. … a goal that I always wanted to do was to play footy, and that's what I'd say to most people if they want to do something then definitely set some goals to achieving that goal and making sure that you do it to the best of your ability and don't let anything stop you … and although I did have a lot of disappointments I can still walk away knowing that I gave everything and had a really positive experience and a sense of achievement for the things that I did.

Sense of belonging

Another fundamental characteristic of hegemonic masculinity is self-reliance (Williams & Best 1990). Men are less likely than women to form close relationships in which they discuss sensitive issues (Walker 2004). However, for men involved in a team sport such as football, an opportunity exists to develop close bonds with their teammates. The team bonding, camaraderie and friendships that are formed through sport are some of the most significant things that the participants miss in retirement. When describing what it means to be part of a team, one stated:

Ooh I could get very deep here, it's brilliant. It's brilliant and frustrating, but I think a lot of what drives footballers is that sense of belonging. I think that's what helps to shape good teams … that period when you're icing down and you've won and sometimes it's really jovial and stuff and then other times if

it's a really good win you just look at each other and there'd just be this look and you both knew exactly what happened out there … and you're kind of both going "yep", but you don't need to say anything because you spend so much time with them, and so I think to be able to share that with them is, I just couldn't imagine doing an individual sport, like train by yourself … big part of the way you play footy. Huge part.

Another said:

It's probably the thing that you miss the most when you finish up actually, is the camaraderie in the locker room and the half an hour after you have a win, just the bonding and the sharing of an achievement or an accomplishment as a group … it's probably one of the top two or three things about playing footy is just the bonding and the camaraderie that you get with your mates, and it can be pretty special.

One participant argued that men form superficial friendships, and that sport can provide an avenue through which acceptance in a group is gained. He stated:

Like in any new job and there's that time getting to know people and with any male group it can be a little bit easier like that because men tend to make superficial friendships easier, so it's a lot easier for us to go into a group, strike up a conversation about something that happened and go from there, and some men call that friendship, so is it? No. But it's the first basic friendship, and as guys build and get closer they can they talk about real things together and how they feel and what's behind it, and like any workplace you've got a couple, 2 to 3 people, that you can talk to about real things, and then rest of the guys you have those more superficial relationships.

The close bonds teammates form and a sense of achieving something together is one way the group performs masculinity. If the team succeeds together, this can reinforce individual masculinity, in which success is an important aspect. One participant commented:

It's completely different to being part of an economic team … not only do you have a pre-season where you're working together day in day out in becoming the fittest, mentally toughest football team that you can possibly become, but then you have a commitment to each other in winning a game every week of the year … and then finals, so build up a greater degree of camaraderie, a great amount of trust, you've got intuitive understanding of your teammates who understand your personality probably better than you girlfriends do, because you're training in high pressure environments day in day out, so what's it mean being in a team? Well a sense of … achieving something together is the most satisfying thing.

For some, sporting teams are closer than working in a business team, suggesting that sport is masculine in the unique way it portrays and develops the fundamental masculine characteristics. One of the men argued:

It gives you different skills, it gives you skills like communicating, like trusting, like putting your trust in another player that they tell you the truth and they're going to put their body on the line for you and protect you, and there's nothing better than winning a big game or a premiership with your mates that you remember for life, that team bonding is very unique.

Such comments also point to a common link between sport and war; being involved in a team was also compared to being part of the army and making sacrifices for your teammates as soldiers in battle. Participants stated:

Individual sport is good, it's not really for me, I like the sacrifices that are involved in football for a mate, you can reward a mate very often, whether it be a shepherd, tackle or just giving him the ball and there's a certain level of courage and I guess bravado and soldier type thing when you go out to battle and your mates are alongside you.

In a team sport where positions in the side are limited, an inevitable hierarchy evolves between teammates. This extends from senior players on the team to

inexperienced players. The competition for positions was described as being a healthy aspect of sport, particularly as a competitive spirit is perceived as a trait men 'naturally' possess. Further, competing for positions provides extra motivation to train harder and push oneself to achieve, thus reinforcing their status as footballers. One participant commented:

> There's always a pecking order in anything in life. I was always of the opinion … that the worst player on the list is as important as the best player on the list, so even if he doesn't play, his role is as important. Without him the chamber links and the chains start to break and crack and fall apart.

Another stated:

> I think it's a bit of an ego thing as well, everyone wants to be the tall poppy and everyone wants to be on the big pay packet, that's as simple as it is. The teams like Geelong now probably iron out some of those areas, but they'd still have their cliquey little groups … the successful teams are the ones that join together and are good mates, but the ones that don't have success, you'll find that they've got cliquey groups.

One of the most significant aspects of being involved in a team for the footballers in this research was the acceptability of showing emotions with each other. As mentioned previously, one of the defining characteristics of masculinity is the suppression of emotions. In a team sport, when success or failure changes every week, emotions can vary greatly from week to week. In a team environment footballers experience these emotions together, and so where in general men are socially constructed to suppress their emotions, a team environment, as in the case of particular games or circumstances mentioned above, provides an opportunity for a situational acceptance of displaying emotions. One participant argued:

It's good you can show your emotions with them, the ups and downs, your success and when you're not so successful: you experience a lot of different emotions together. So you have those bonds there … an ultimate is the premiership, so that's something that you can share, it's about sharing I think, playing in a footy team, and if you can get to the pinnacle and win a grand final, that's what it's all about, that's something you never forget and you share it with them.

Similarly:

I love it and I wouldn't change playing a team sport for anything in the world, just to be able to know that if you're down at any stage someone's always going to be there to pick you up, and vice versa. It's a great atmosphere when you win, and you're a tight group when you lose, you just carry each other throughout the season to get each other by.

However, the behaviours that footballers are permitted to display together as a team are largely related to football issues, such as winning or losing games, protecting teammates both on and off the field and getting through hard pre-season training together. Some of the men recognised that it is not appropriate for footballers to display emotions that are perceived as being feminine, such as being upset over a relationship break up. Therefore, in the case of emotions, individual issues are suppressed, and team related issues are prioritised. As one of the men stated, if each individual displayed all of their emotions, the team would not function well together and would therefore not be successful:

You don't necessarily do it at the club, but there are avenues to release that emotion to be yourself, which is in some ways fair because if everyone is emotional and moody and negative and happy all the time the club wouldn't function. 44 people going through their own stuff, the amount of break ups and this and that that happen, you're not going to do well, so you have to put

your club face on and be resilient providing you are aware and you know what the avenues are that you need to explore to deal with whatever's going on.

Another participant commented that there is an element of care in a team environment, because teammates need to stick together in order to be successful. Even in a highly masculinised sport such as AFL, participants recognised the need to take care of each other. One of the men claimed:

> I suppose the caring side of the football teams the care for your teammates, you give them feedback about their performance instead of just going about your business … having a bit of care of what's going around, maybe help a mate, sit down go through the video tape, help you prepare better these young kids because there's plenty of you in the team, that's probably one of the stand out things that is new to the game the last few years.

It was contended that individuals who wanted to stand out from their teammates or who were unwilling to work as a team would not have a long career in football. Similarly, teams who did not work well together were argued to be unsuccessful in the pursuit of premiership glory. Common responses included:

> I can't describe that, it's something that you need to experience – some guys get it and some guys don't, and the ones that don't get it don't last long. It is being part of a team, it is having as much empathy for the bloke who's number 26 on the list as it is for the bloke who's the best player … being part of a team was what it was all about for me. … that's what I still enjoy, that's why we stay in it I think, because you're part of a club, part of a greater oneness, if that makes sense … you're all striving for one goal and that's for the team to do well, and whether that be the guy who mixes the drinks to the coach to the captain on the field, it's everyone trying to do the same thing and that's what's great about sport.

Some men stated that they "win together and we lose by ourselves," thus reinforcing the notion of being committed to the team and not aspiring to

individual honours. Without the team working together, the pursuit of premiership success was argued to be unattainable. In addition, being able to work well as a team can increase the camaraderie between teammates, and reinforces the importance of being able to communicate with each other, which becomes a transferrable skill the men can utilise in their careers following retirement from sport. This participant reinforced the importance of teamwork:

> In something like tennis you can … play Davis Cup where you're part of a team and you can say well that's good, I really enjoyed being part of a team, but at the same time I don't need it, I can go out and play and earn my own living – in terms of football you can't. If there's no team there's no game and you don't play, so it's really important, the fabric of that, the sense of belonging that you get from being part of the team, it's the camaraderie, it's the mateship, it's the way that when you have success there's a really strong bond that says it's the groups of players that form best as a team that have success … your really good grounding in terms of other stuff in life … being able to listen, to be able to stand up and present in front of other people, to be able to give and receive feedback, so there's a whole range of things that are good.

Importance of family

Part of the socialisation of young boys into men through football is the development of characteristics such as mental strength, resilience and independence. To survive a career in football, many of the men agreed that mental toughness is particularly important. However, while footballers are expected to portray these characteristics, the men in this research argued strongly that the significance of support from family, friends and partners can not be underestimated. The majority of participants claimed that support for footballers

can be the defining factor between being successful or not. One of the men declared:

> You cannot underestimate the roles that your support networks play when you play footy … when you're having girlfriend troubles and you're playing it is a nightmare, and … people will comment from afar "he's playing shit," but they might not have understood you might have broken up with your girlfriend and she's been on the phone for the last two nights crying and whatever and you've slept maybe a combined total of 4 hours and you can't make that up. … when someone is supportive and positive it's really conducive to you playing well.

Another concurred that as an athlete support is one of the most important factors:

> … probably more than anything else, because it's so demanding physically and mentally … very few people can do it on their own, and I would doubt whether they could be as good … when I talk about support, it can be someone to go fishing with, it can be someone to talk to … I think it's critically important.

Other responses included:

> It's enormous, absolutely enormous because … you need people to talk to, you need a sounding board, you need reassurance … you need people who are there to believe in you, you need that belief for that opportunity and get back in that right mindset.

Similarly:

> They're really, really important, … your wife and your family, it's really important they understand what you're doing, understand the highs and the lows, keep you grounded if you're getting ahead of yourself, try and boost you up if you're feeling down, just being your family regardless if you're playing good footy or not playing good footy. When you walk in the door when you've had a loss and you've got a baby or a son that just comes up and a smile on his face to see you, that makes you feel ah really, really good.

Interestingly, the role of a wife or girlfriend in the support network for footballers was identified as one of the most crucial. Despite some participants arguing it was almost frowned upon for footballers to have a long-term girlfriend, many participants maintained that without the support of a partner, it was difficult to be successful. This indicates a heteronormative perception from the men in this research that wives and girlfriends had crucial roles in supporting their partners. Common responses included:

> She's the one who dictates whether you're going to be good or bad, because if she's not happy about it you're very rarely going to be good. … it's underplayed a lot. It's probably the reason you can keep doing it. I know a lot of guys that have had to stop because their wives don't like them playing. … that's how important that side of it is. … these are AFL footballers that … retired four years too early because their wives are sick of it.

Participants perceived this support from partners, wives and girlfriends as particularly crucial in the retirement transition phase. Some of the men admitted that without the support of their wives, the transition out of elite sport would have been much more difficult. One of the men stated:

> You just need good people around you, and I pushed most of them away for a long time, but you know this standing rock of Gibraltar, which is my wife, she stuck it out and pulled me back into line ... definitely, I don't know where I'd be without her. Probably in a gutter somewhere. And there's a few guys that end up like that sadly enough. The AFL player's association now helps them out.

Others also mentioned the AFL Players' Association (AFLPA) as being crucial in supporting footballers throughout their career and into retirement. However, while the majority of participants described the Association as being 'fantastic',

they admitted that often footballers have to actively seek help from the AFLPA, rather than being contacted first. One of the men stated:

> The AFL players association is fantastic in terms of what if offers you … it's up to you to be able to seek it out or use it, but it'd be an absolute mistake for a player's friends to think the player would easily transfer from football to life after football … there's a two or three year period where every player would need to be watched closely before they're through the woods sort of thing, because there could be a lot of things that could happen in the period, just like anyone else.

In addition to the AFLPA, the men outlined the support that is available through individual clubs. Some of the men mentioned that clubs have staff to assist with performance on the field as well as mental preparation. Given that many of the men argued that mental strength is crucial to being successful at AFL football, as well as being an important element in the construction of masculinity, the staff within the football club who offer assistance for the development of mental strength techniques, also aid in the development of masculine identity. Comments included:

> At the club, we've got a psychologist, but then we've got a group of four or five different people that go through … you've got a clinical psychologist, you've got a guy that does performance based stuff, you've got a guy that does mental preparation, yoga teachers, relaxation teachers and all that sort of stuff, but the lady psychologist is run through the AFL players' association, so the boys can ring her at any time.

The men recognised that the development of the game has seen improvements in the support offered to players. Some of the men who played at the beginning of the national AFL competition recalled having very little support as a player. While there is more assistance being offered in the current form of the game,

participants agreed that footballers are not utilising these services enough. This indicates that players either do not know about the services that are offered by the AFLPA, or are reluctant to seek assistance for fear of showing a weakness.

> It's got better over the years. When they first started up they were only a small group of people and like everything, everything evolves over the years, and they've got a lot better at having a lot of support networks for all the players. I still think the players need to utilise it a little bit more, but they've got everything in place if anything comes up, whether it be they need to find work experience, they need to speak to a psychologist or anything, there's people … there that they can ring and get a hold of and they're definitely set up really well.

Another agreed:

> The resources available now through the AFL players association is just enormous, and probably the issue I have with that is that the generation coming through once they get it, understand it, they will use them up, but for the first three or four years they just want to play, and their expectations are far greater. But there was always I guess medical support through the AFLPA, through the collective bargaining agreement and your private health, and I guess their stands for the playing group to the AFL. Now it's far greater in terms of employment, study, real estate, anything really that you would like to get involved in, they can provide you with a link to that and an inroad, and then you can go from there, so it's just the players within that time frame understanding what is available.

Most, if not all, of the AFL clubs now hire player development officers to support footballers through their careers and to assist in planning for life after football. This is one area that has evolved over time throughout the AFL competition. Participants who played in the early stages of the national competition had less assistance from the AFL Players' Association, which was in its initial stages, or

from player welfare officers, because the clubs did not have them. As put by one of the men:

> It was a lot different … the staffing of footy clubs back then was probably you had a general manager of your footy club, probably had a team manager who was full time, you had one coach that would have been full time … everyone else was sort of part time … whereas the staffing of the footy club now and the resources … turning over $40 million … probably 40–50 full time staff now, now clubs have got player welfare officers, their sole job is to make sure the transition of you coming from interstate to settle is smooth and help you find a place and help you find a car and help you … what you're doing outside footy. You know footy's not going to last forever, let's look at some courses here, you don't like studying ok let's get you some work placement with – what's you interest… so that happens really well now. Nothing like that when I was playing, it was just come over, they probably help you find a place to rent and then you're left to your own devices to find a job, work play footy and no career planning after that at all.

Self-reliance has been mentioned above as one of the defining characteristics of masculinity (Williams & Best 1990). Asking for help in difficult circumstances can therefore often be perceived as being not masculine, and for this reason players may be reluctant to seek help. Some men were unaware of the services offered by the AFLPA, and so tried to work through their difficulties on their own. One man stated:

> I remember we had to ask for it … I heard they're pretty good but they … don't ring you unless you ring them. I think it was just started the first year I was at [club], so maybe I wasn't educated enough about it … I think if you've got depression and stuff like that they help you out, but in my time, I don't know many players who contacted them and said can you find me a job or whatever but … I sort of took it on myself.

Winning

Winning is a significant aspect in the reinforcement of masculine identity in footballers. Research by Messner (1992) and Drummond (1996) suggests that masculine identity centres on *doing* and *achieving;* winning is critical to teams *achieving* masculinity together. The majority of participants argued that winning encourages confidence, and is crucial to team morale and motivation in the following week. Even if the team only wins one or two games in the season, this was still argued to be important in maintaining the desire to continue. Success through winning was strongly linked with the player's enjoyment of the game. As many of the men linked confidence with being masculine, winning appears essential to maintaining masculinity. One participant stated:

> I think if you had no success it wouldn't be enjoyable, I think the success means you've got something to strive for and there has to be an element of success otherwise I don't think you'd enjoy it. … even if you only win a couple of games a year, there's that winning taste, and having that understanding what you're missing to win again is important.

Another participant reiterated:

> If you're winning you're just a little bit more confident and the coach is probably more confident in himself and gives you a bit more confidence and it just bounces off everyone; a winning environment breeds confidence for sure.

The participants argued that they did not play football to prove they were men, but because they enjoyed being successful in the sport, which in itself reinforces confidence and masculinity. In addition, given that football is a physical game, they claimed they needed to have a strong character to be able to handle the wins and the losses and the physical impact on the body. One of the men stated:

It's a pretty physical game and you've got to have a pretty strong character to play it, definitely, and it does come across like that, but you surely don't go out to play it just to prove you're a man, you go out to win and be involved in that team atmosphere.

Many of the men talked of the disappointment of losing games of football. For some, losing affected the enjoyment of their leisure time, while for others it aided the decision to retire from football altogether. This symbolises the importance of sport to men, in that a good result instils confidence and a heightened sense of masculinity, while losing can cause self-doubt and a lack of confidence. The men admitted that daily life is affected when the team loses, particularly if losing is a regular occurrence:

Well just hard to continue. You just get up the next day and do the next thing. It's not enjoyable, it's one of the reasons I'm not playing anymore, because I got sick of losing and we didn't lose that much the last two years, we won more than we lost, not much more, but I had had enough losses in my career really, so it was time to go. Yeah life's hard when on losing streaks and it's not much fun.

Another concurred:

At the end of the day I reckon if I win then I have a really good weekend, but if I lose I have a pretty poor weekend.

Some suggested that the appropriate attitude towards being a professional sportsman was to be dedicated towards winning. This reinforces the importance of being successful to masculine identity. To win is to be successful:

If you're serious about your footy losing is very disappointing and it's probably exactly the opposite of winning. Winning's so good and losing's so bad, so you can never get used to winning all the time. You know, you just get

hungry to keep winning. If you're hungry enough … you'll enjoy it every time.

Importance of sport

The importance of sport in the lives of the men in this research from an early age was evident throughout the interviews, as shown in responses so far. Many men detailed how being involved in Australian Rules football as a child made it a defining influence in who they are as men today.

For some participants football had become such a central feature of their lives that they perceived it to be a necessity they were unsure they could do without:

I haven't missed a season in a long time, won't say in how long, but a long time, so it's been a part of my life. I've got a very understanding wife that knows that my football is important to me, and also gives me time out away from the stresses of the world and something that I enjoy and am very passionate about so football is a huge part of my life. I don't think I'd do well without it.

Another participant reiterated:

Oh very important, it's been my whole life. Ever since I can remember as a kid from the day I saw football and put a football in my hand I don't think I've ever had a year off football. Even when I retired … the next year I was assistant coach so I've always just been involved in football and it's something that I've always thought about … wouldn't mind having a couple of years off and seeing what it's like, but I don't think I could. I think while the game's around and it was so good to me as a player that now as a coach I want to put something back into it. That's what footy is to me at the moment.

This becomes problematic after retirement when a replacement for football is sought, as men redefine their lives and their status as men through other means.

Some participants voiced the perception that after football there is 'nothing' and this takes time to readjust to. If so much of one's identity is related to being a footballer, when this career is over it can be difficult to adjust. As one participant stated:

It's been probably the most important aspect of my life. Everything was preparing for AFL football and there was after football and now there's nothing. It's been a pretty hard transition to something you focus on for eight years and you reach that and then you spend three years there and you're living it and then all of a sudden it's – well what am I going to do with my life now? And it's been a tough transition, but you know it's been an enjoyable challenge anyway.

While many of the men in this research admitted they are still searching for something to replace football, others argued that football had been an important part of their life, but since retiring had been ready to move on from it:

It's pretty much all I knew from an early age, so that's all I know really, so it's hard for me to say how important it was. If I didn't have footy who knows what I would have had, so I guess it was important for me to have something to do that I enjoyed for so long bar the last probably two years, I was getting sick of it by then, all the training and the body was sore but … it's something now that I'm ready to move on from.

This perception can be significantly influenced by the athlete's identification with the footballer identity. If the athlete had a strong identification with their role as a footballer, it can lead to difficulties after retiring. However, if there is not a strong identification with the athletic role, it is easier to relinquish their identity as a footballer.

The two most important features in the lives of the men in this research were football and family. For some football was the most important aspect in their

lives, which sometimes meant being unable to attend family events because of a game, but for others family came first and football second. Regardless, football held a central place for all of the participants. As one participant stated, football gives young men the opportunity to develop skills and characteristics that ultimately assist in constructing masculinity, as well as providing other opportunities, such as travel, that add to life experiences. The meanings the men give to these opportunities and experiences construct their reality:

> I think probably after family it's been the most important thing in terms of it's given me an opportunity to travel, most of my friends have all sort of come through football … in a lot of terms it's my identity today … I'm known as a former footballer, and now I'm involved in the football industry so it's my career … the last 20 years it's been a profession in one form or another, which is half my life. Lots of lessons in terms of discipline and persistence and team work … and a lot of that is goal setting all I have been able to achieve away from football is from the lessons you learn in football, so yeah it's been most important.

Adulation from fans

Some of the participants admitted to being affected by the crowd, dependent upon their reaction. Supporters were described as passionate, boosting footballers' self-esteem when they played well, but the crowd could also negatively affect self-esteem if they thought a player had made a mistake. Generally at the beginning of their football careers the crowd had more influence on the confidence of players, and towards the end of careers, the crowd was less of an influence. A common response was:

It's something in particular in the later stages of your career that's almost a sub-conscience thing, you're aware it's there and they're incredibly influential in terms of motivating you, but when you become an experienced player after five or six years in the game your concentration levels are so great you're able to focus on that particular point in the game, that particular play … you're able to sort of block that pressure out, and you don't actually give much thought to the crowd … I've probably got two significant moments in my career when I really remembered the atmosphere and the roar of the crowd, one was in the prelim final … at the MCG, I've never heard a roar like it, and then all the ANZAC day games … after the last post is played and after the national anthem the roar is something you just can't describe. So they're probably the instances where you think of the crowd, but during the course of the game it motivates you … but it's not something you think about … You never really hear those negative comments over the fence because you're so focussed.

For some participants the influence of the crowd was significant, and when they were screaming for them it made them feel "pretty good." Some admitted that the roar of the crowd is one of the aspects of life as a footballer that they missed in retirement. The crowd is an important aspect in affirming one's status as a footballer, and as such when the men are no longer playing elite football the adrenaline rush experienced through the crowd reaction is missed:

It gives you a buzz, there's no doubt about that. There's nothing better than having a big crowd there cheering you on, or cheering against you to be honest. So the crowd definitely give you an adrenaline rush, and I think it's the adrenaline rush that is a big part of why players love playing, and probably what they miss a bit afterwards as well.

Supporters are particularly influential when teams travel interstate, and can have an impact on the confidence of the visiting team; participants detailed how important it is to play well and neutralise the crowd support in such circumstances. One of the men argued:

I think having that crowd behind you really does give you a lift, and although you try and block it out when you're in opposition territory and you know they're screaming when they kick a goal … you've just got to try and block that out. And if you're playing away it's quite important that you get on the board early and try and quieten the crowd off, because they really do have an influence.

Other footballers tried to block out the noise of the crowd, and as such claimed not to notice supporters while on the ground, with the exception of playing in front of large crowds of 40 000 people or more, and during finals, which were described as being a huge adrenaline rush:

When you're playing, it's funny you know the crowd's watching, but you block yourself out when you're actually playing. You know there're people watching, but when the atmosphere's really loud it's an adrenaline rush. You can't really explain it to people.

Participants remembered being advised to absorb the affect of the crowd during the warm up in order to focus their concentration on playing well to have a successful outcome. Some of the men recalled being excited from the moment of arriving at the ground and seeing supporters wearing team colours entering the stadium. Others tried to appreciate the atmosphere when the team ran out onto the ground for the first time, then focussed their attention on the task ahead. This was typical of the responses:

I didn't take too much notice of the crowd, you get told to absorb everything as you do your warm up lap, when you first come out you do a run around the oval, so I always used to look around at the crowd and suck it all in I guess, and then from then on you very rarely look at the crowd or even think about the reactions of the crowd. It's all about the team, the 18, on the field. The crowd doesn't really come into it.

However, a few of the men admitted to 'playing to the crowd', using the crowd participation to motivate their performance. One stated:

> The crowd gives you a big buzz and just gets the adrenaline pumping through your body and it's weird, it's hard to describe, but it makes you want to try harder and you sort of play for the crowd I suppose to a certain degree. I just love hearing the crowd cheer and trying to impress the crowd.

The reaction of the crowd was argued to be performance-based, and therefore when footballers are playing well the crowd response can positively reinforce masculine identity. Messner (1992) argued that a male athlete's connection with the crowd is a significant factor in the construction and affirmation of his 'positional identity.' Therefore, a positive reaction from the crowd creates a necessity to play well and be successful all the time. The men in this research stated that if you had a 'pretty strong attitude and a good character' it should not affect footballers when the crowd is reacting negatively towards them. This reinforces the notion that footballers, as men, should be mentally strong. As participants also claimed that it is the responsibility of the supporters, as well as teammates to judge players according to their performance, a 'strong attitude and good character' protects against negative feedback, and a footballers' masculine identity is thereby affirmed:

> I think you were rated by your peers and by the people who come to the game, so that's where your performance is affected, so I don't think that has much to do with me as a person, but your performance is obviously judged by your supporters. That's their position, and if they are continually coming they can see your improvements, and they can also see when you're not performing as well as you should be, that's their obligation I would say, as a football club member, to be able to judge and appraise you.

All of the men in this research agreed that to still be asked for autographs by fans after retiring was a 'nice' feeling. Being asked for autographs provides recognition for their contribution to the game of football, and their role as role models for young children. A sense of pride accompanies being remembered as a footballer, and so even though the men did not recognise it as such, being asked for autographs affirms their masculine identity and their status as men through having played AFL at the elite level.

One participant stated:

> Still more than happy to oblige, and it's nice that people remember you from your playing days, but it doesn't happen too often, so you take it when it comes.

Many participants recalled practising their signatures as young children, and so the first autograph becomes a realisation of a dream, at least at first. As recalled by one participant:

> When I was a kid I used to sit down at home at night before I went to bed and I used to practise my autograph, as about an 8 or 9 year old, thinking how good it was, and the first time you sign one it's a buzz. I guess if you play for a long time there is a monotony about it … if a young fan genuinely comes up to you and says "can I please have your autograph?" then you really enjoy that; but sometimes the things I didn't enjoy about it is people that come up and say "here sign this" or … the other thing is after the grand final when we'd had some success, the fervour in which people chased guys to get autographs; there were times when there were 30 000 people at the ground for example and guys would go out to go to the toilet and they could sit there for 8 hours signing autographs because there were so many people so … they'd do it for half an hour and then want to go back into a roped off area and then when they did people got upset with the fact that they wouldn't stay there and

do it. But I think out of my experience of autographs 99% have been good and there's 1% of people that are a bit uppity or expect too much.

For others, the amount of autographs and demands on footballers led to the commodification of the athletes, with the constant requirement to sign guernseys and other items, particularly for charity, but also for supporters. The men recalled being required to sign multiple guernseys for charity, and as a result recognised the impact the corporatisation of AFL has had on player demands.

The way in which supporters asked for an autograph had an influence on whether the footballer perceived the experience to be positive or negative:

You know it really depends on the way the person presents and their motive, but a lot of people just get a signature because they want to fill up a hat. They don't necessarily give a shit if it's you or the other player, so usually the ones where they do interrupt you when you're minding your own business, they're the nice ones, the ones when you're in a group environment and you're just one of the mass and they're shoving stuff in your face saying "sign, sign, sign" and you know that deep down they don't really care if it's you, that shits you.

The desire of some of the men in this research to be perceived by the public as a 'good bloke' led to signing autographs despite not always wanting to do it. One of the men stated:

I think it does, and throughout my career I was a bit concerned about that. I wanted everyone to think I'm a good bloke and please everyone, so you say "yeah I'll sign it," and to a certain extent I still do, which I don't know if it's good or bad, but I think I'd rather them think I'm an ok bloke. There are occasions it's pushed and pushed and pushed you'll walk away or not sign or stop talking or tell them that's enough.

Almost all participants recalled being a young boy and wanting to get autographs themselves from their favourite sporting stars. This recollection reminded them to attempt to provide a positive experience for fans when signing autographs:

> Yeah I didn't mind it at all. I put myself back years when I was a little fella and we had SANFL players that came out to our school and we thought it was absolutely fantastic when we were primary school students, so I guess to move down the track and then be in a position when you can do that for little kids and people that perhaps get some enjoyment out of it, I have never had any problems.

This reinforces the notion of athletes as role models for young children, as well as underlining the adulation sporting stars receive.

Man's game

Many characteristics that are perceived as being masculine, such as physical and mental strength, aggression and competitiveness, are the same characteristics that led to the men in this research stating that football is a man's game. It was argued that these characteristics are needed to be successful at the game. Interestingly, while finesse is traditionally associated with perceived women's sports, for the men in this research it was described as being masculine. As one participant noted:

> It's more a man's game than any game. It's challenging in every aspect. It's every physical aspect, it's speed, it's endurance, it's decision making, it's collision, it's impact, it's aggression it's all of that. It's accuracy, it's finesse with kicking and handballing ... Definitely a man's game for somebody to get out there and challenge yourself week in week out or day in day out to prepare yourself.

The physicality of AFL football was argued to be one of the determining factors leading to the inability of women to compete at the same level as men. Many of the men claimed that women's bodies would not be able to withstand the physical nature of football. This reinforces the perception that men are stronger than women, and contributes to the reinforcement of hegemonic masculine ideals, and particularly the subordination of women. In addition to the physical strength required to be successful in AFL football, the men perceived mental strength to be a defining characteristic in the perception that AFL football is a 'man's game.' One of the men stated:

> There's no way a woman could play AFL football. In saying football's a man's game I don't think that that means that women can't play football, but to be successful at the AFL level you have to be mentally strong and not necessarily physically strong, but mentally strong, and that's what I would define as a man's game, to be able to push through injuries, push through negatives in life and be able to deal with it.

This statement indicates that one of the ways through which hegemonic masculinity is reinforced in sport is the perceived dominance of men over women. The perception that men have greater mental strength in addition to physical strength than women promotes the perception that men are superior over women. While the men did not suggest women can not play Australian Rules football, they indicated that women would not be able to compete at the same high level as men.

Participants were divided on whether females have an important role in football. Some stated that the growing involvement of women as CEOs, boundary and umpiring and commentating on the game was an important progression within the sport, thus contributing to a change in the perception that football is a 'man's

game.' The men recognised that men run the AFL, which contributes to football's nature as a masculine sport. However, they observed that this is starting to change through the inclusion of women as physiotherapists, nutritionists and physicians. These roles in which women are contributing to football are traditionally assigned female roles, and as such are deemed appropriate positions for women to hold. The participants were less likely to view an appropriate role for women in football as being an AFL commentator. This was due to their perception of the current female commentator as incompetent, thus reinforcing the importance of performance to men. This indicates that there are roles that are seen as appropriate for women and others that are inappropriate within the sport of football. This maintains a male dominated culture and limits women to traditionally perceived women's roles, such as administration and nurturing and supporter roles. Typical responses included:

> Not a problem at all if they're good enough and if they have the confidence to get out there and they're competent and they think they can contribute to the game and they're willing to cop a little bit of what's I suppose pretty much a man's culture, but it's forever changing. I have a little bit of an open perspective about it, but it's male dominated, it always will be, there's no problem with that, but you're finding nearly every AFL board, AFL club board has a woman on the board and you're finding that we have AFL goal umpires, AFL administrators where they are AFL commission, volunteers, staff members, over 70% of our staff are females, marketing department, sales team.

Another stated:

> I think it's really good, I think that football's supported by so many women you know 50/50 who goes to the footy so it's nearly 50/50 in the fan base, and probably all through my career I've had female physios that are involved in

the club that have been really good physios and trainers, and there's always been females in the footy club that I've been involved with, so I've no issues in that. From a commentary perspective whether it be female or male my main issue is the understanding of the game … whether it be female or male if they were talking rubbish I'd be annoyed, but the fact that there's a female commenting on it because she hasn't played it is not an issue for me same as it is to be for a male journalist that has never played at the highest level, that's not an issue, but if they're talking rubbish then I'll have a go at them.

Others argued football should remain a man's game, excluding women from involvement outside being supporters:

Oh it has to be and men and women should never compete on the same playing field ever and that's barbaric. Do I think women should play footy in their own league? Great. Go for it, yeah no problem and I've got a daughter who is really keen to play and I don't know if she will but that's fantastic … and I don't think women should be boundary and field umpires and I don't think they should be anything in footy. And that's chauvinistic? Maybe I just think it would be too hard for them. I see it in my work, we've just started to get a lot of females in the fire service, which is a male dominated area and they have all sorts of trouble. You know just little tiny things.

Females in football

As mentioned above, gender was not argued as being a significant factor for some of the men in this research in whether an individual should become involved in commentating and umpiring. Most participants agreed that competence in the role is the most important factor. If one's knowledge of football is well informed, the participants were in favour of them being an umpire or a commentator regardless of their gender. However, many perceived the current female commentators as ill

informed, suggesting she should therefore not be involved in the sport. With regard to women being commentators one participant stated:

I think if they're good they're good, I don't think it matters if they are male or female.

Another commented:

I know some male commentators I just completely don't like because of their knowledge of the game and the way they speak about the game, but if the female's knowledge of the game is good and the points that she brings across are warranted, then yeah, for sure, I don't see any problems with female commentators.

Some of the men argued that women being involved in the clubrooms could be a distraction for the footballers, and were therefore against the involvement of women in football at the clubroom level. Given that sexual objectification of women is an inherent aspect of hegemonic masculinity, having females involved within the clubrooms during the day was argued to be detrimental to the performance of the team. One participant stated:

At the end of the day the males, the players have got to be comfortable with who's down there and I know our coach has a certain opinion on that and I don't have a problem. He doesn't want any distraction for the players at crucial times off the ground.

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of women being involved in elite Australian Rules football. The men in this research generally perceived this as a positive move, but maintained that football remains a man's game. The roles into which women are moving throughout football are commonly goal umpiring, commentating and serving as board members. With respect to goal

umpiring, the men stated this was an acceptable role for women, as it is a job they "should be able to do." For example, one of them men argued:

> I'm not against it. I think it's going to be interesting to see what it's like. I know there's a female commentator and female umpires and to be honest … goal umpires never taken up more than 10 seconds at a time, so they should be able to do that. And female field umpires will be interesting if they ever get a role, but geez over the history of the game no one has ever been totally happy with male umpires, so maybe they will be good at it. I haven't heard enough of the girls that's doing it, but … probably just like any other commentator I'd listen to what they say and see if they know what they are talking about.

However, despite stating that the game is adapting to allow the participation of females, the positions and roles they perform remain within traditionally accepted areas of employment for women.

Given the centrality of the pursuit of heterosexual sexual conquest to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995), to have females involved in some areas on match day was argued to be detrimental to the team's chances of winning, which is the most important goal. In addition, while there is a women's football league, participants maintained that females have not played AFL with men and would therefore not be respected in a position such as senior coach.

Similarly, some of the men admitted to having problems with female commentators because they have not played the game at the elite level. This was perceived as being a crucial aspect to giving an informed opinion on the game:

> It's a bit odd, I don't mind female umpires, but female commentators I just can't seem to grasp it, I don't know why, it's not a sexist thing or anything like that, but it's just when they're talking about certain aspects of the game and they get excited you just think, "but you don't know what that feels like

because you haven't been there and done that," and I think that's where the respect comes into it. If they'd been female footballers who have played a lot of football and then they become commentators, they understand what that hit meant, what that tackle was, what that mark was, what that high mark was, that goal. I think we'll end up getting used to it, but it's just something that's just a bit hard at the moment.

Others maintained that experience playing football is not a necessity, as many male commentators have not played football either:

Nah, a lot of commentators haven't played footy, but I think you can tell when a person hasn't played football when they commentate because they don't pick up on the things that are important. She'll just call it as she's seeing it, where as she won't know why some things are happening … blokes are exactly the same.

Comments such as these suggest that, although societal views may be changing with regard to female involvement in football, there is still a strong perception of football as a game for men.

Regrets

Many of the participants reflected on regrets they may have since retiring from elite AFL football. Some argued they had been committed to achieving the best they could and therefore left the AFL system with no regrets. Others revealed they would have appreciated a longer career in football, or would have liked to have had fewer injuries. Those that retired voluntarily were more likely to leave football with no regrets, while those that were forced into retirement through delisting or injury often left with a feeling that they had not accomplished all they had wanted to during their career. For those that had regrets, lack of commitment

in the early years of their career was the most common response. One participant stated:

> Probably in the first few years I didn't really commit as well as I would have had to, you always say that because it was a different period of footy, it's a different period of AFL football back then, it was semi- part time or it was part time, and I just didn't take on that responsibility, didn't work hard enough, probably didn't respect my teammates enough or wasn't honest with myself enough … and then didn't realise the opportunity that I had at the time.

Similarly:

> The only ones would be that I probably wasted a couple of years where I didn't fully maximise what I could have done … I got caught up in all the hype and probably didn't work as hard as I should have.

Several participants mentioned getting "caught up in all the hype" in the early years of their career. Many observed, as discussed above, that there is a certain way footballers are expected to behave, and this led to them behaving in a manner that was against their nature. Being involved in a sporting club has a significant influence on the construction of young man's masculine identity, and some participants stated they regretted being influenced by the football culture. One participant declared:

> I probably regret not being me earlier, from being able to enjoy football life, I probably enjoyed it a bit more when I was more me, so if I could've done that earlier maybe.

Others argued that all of the experiences they had in their football career has influenced the person they are today, and so they would not change any of those experiences, including the negative ones:

All I can say is that I really enjoyed everything I did and I wouldn't change anything, because if I was to change anything, even the hard times, it would probably change the person that I am today, and I like the person that I am today and I like where I'm at.

Some men differentiated regrets from disappointments. Not winning a premiership for example was disappointing. However, this was not a regret for participants if they knew they had given their absolute best in each game. To have regrets was linked with being bitter upon the termination of their football career, and so disappointments were used to describe events that could have gone differently. One participant claimed:

I had no regrets, and I think if you have no regrets then you're not going to be bitter, I think there are disappointments and there's some things that the coach will tell you that you'll be disappointed with, but never bitter. If you just go into football with every intention to do well and you do your absolute best and have no regrets, I think you walk away from the game satisfied.

For those who had significant injuries during their career, some wondered if they could have done their rehab differently in order to recover sooner, and thereby play more games. One participant stated:

I love when people say "oh no regrets," I think that's bullshit. There's things I wish I had have done. I wonder if I did rehab enough … I don't regret that I didn't do enough, but I wonder, did I do everything? To get my body right and there's a question mark there, and if I had a regret it's that I could finish with no question marks. That I wish I dotted every 'i' and crossed every 't' in my playing career to get right … and absolutely if I could regret anything I regret playing 60 odd games, I'm proud of that … but if I had a choice, I'd play 260 games.

Another agreed:

Yeah my only regrets were just the couple of injuries that I copped at certain times which were bad timing … because I could have had a couple of extra ripper years.

For those who had been delisted, not playing more games of elite AFL football was also something they regretted:

Look playing 100 games would have been a great achievement … but to get to 50 was a good achievement … The only other thing I would have liked to do was to make it into a state of origin side, that would have topped it off as well.

Another participant stated:

Look there's always times where I go I wish I was still there and I wish I lived in Melbourne and I wish I was still an AFL footballer, it's a great lifestyle, but look I've really enjoyed being back so it hasn't been so hard.

Despite many of the men experiencing some regrets or disappointments in their careers, almost all argued that they should not focus on these regrets, but should move on and celebrate the achievements they did have. As one of the men stated:

I would have liked to have played better in certain games, but there's no point dwelling on things you can't control. Hindsight's a wonderful thing.

Life as a footballer was described as the 'perfect' life, and a very positive experience for the all of the men in this research. From the time they were young men drafted to an AFL club, football became a significant influence on the construction of their masculinity. Many of the men expressed the opinion that while there were aspects of their career they could have done differently, there is no point dwelling on the past, which highlights the importance of 'living in the now' for this group of men.

Staying in shape

Since retiring from elite AFL football most of the men in this research described their bodies as being in reasonable condition, although perhaps a little 'old'. The men who were still playing football at an amateur level were still training, and as such argued they were able to maintain a good physique, although not quite as conditioned as it was in elite competition. The discipline that was required to perform at the elite level was perceived to assist the men to stay in shape once they were no longer playing football. This indicates that in retirement from elite sport, maintaining a muscular physique remains an important factor in the construction of masculinity: those who had gained weight since retiring expressed disappointment at the change in body shape. Responses included:

> I'd say it's ok. I wouldn't say that it's been battered from AFL and I won't be, or I'd like to hope I won't be, in a wheelchair soon, but yeah I'd say it's come out ok.

And:

> It's getting old that's for sure. I'm pretty sort of fit. Most footballers are in reasonable condition, you know, you have to do a lot of work to compete at a high level, so I would say it's in pretty good condition.

However, some admitted that being an AFL footballer had caused deterioration in their bodies that may not have occurred if they had not been elite sportsmen. One participant declared:

> Probably worn out! Worn out a little bit, don't regret it, playing, but still my body feels like it's worn out, just had it probably, haven't got the vigour like I was 18/19, now it's just old age I suppose. I keep trim a fair bit, I do a bit of swimming to keep fit and occasionally run on the treadmill, which doesn't hurt my knees; it's a lot better on the treadmill.

Another affirmed:

> I would say that my body would be pretty similar if not a little bit worse than
> average for someone who was my age and active and participating in sports.

> Well I think probably age wise I'm 43 and probably feel like it's maybe 53
> perhaps I feel I'm maybe 10 years older than what I probably should be
> feeling to most guys my own age that haven't played footy, I just feel a bit
> older I reckon.

Similarly:

> My body now is not as fresh as if I hadn't played footy, but at the same time in
> lots of other ways it's better. I mean I still keep fit, I still train three or four
> times a week, and I have an understanding of what good eating and drinking is
> and looking after myself. I know my body like a nutritionist would, I've learnt
> how my body works, I've learnt a lot about it … I've got parts of my body
> which have long-term injuries in them, but my overall fitness would be better
> than 95% of the public.

Some of the men argued that there is an appropriate body shape required to play

AFL football, while others declared that anyone can play football no matter their

shape or size, because of the different positions on the field. A common statement

was:

> I reckon it varies, it changes every year really, or every couple of years that
> they say … you need to have a strong upper body, and then next year they
> change it and go you've got to work on core stability … but there's no set
> body types, you look at the range of guys that go through the AFL now,
> you've got tall, short, some guys are a bit chubbier than others, so there's no
> set standard.

However, other men argued that football clubs were very concerned with body fat

levels and conditioning in order to be a successful team. Some recalled being

required to maintain a target body weight and skin fold measurement during their

careers. Nutrition and weight training became integral parts of their daily routine. Such technocratic rationality, underpinned by professionalism, is prevalent throughout elite sport (Bryson 1990; Drummond 2010). Bryson (1990) contends that athletes are increasingly following "scientifically" devised training, with the sole goal of winning. This is evident in the training regimes of participants in this research, many of whom enjoyed the challenge to train their bodies in order to play elite Australian Rules football. Present in many sports is the perception that a 'real' sportsman cares about his body, and through being disciplined with regard to eating and training habits demonstrates his commitment to the sport (Loland 1999; Whannel 1999). The men in this research reinforced this perception, with responses such as this:

> There was always a fair bit of pressure … to your body fat content and what you carried … so you watched what you ate, weights were very much a part of what we did. During my time it was more about power and strength rather than being able … do a lot more with your own body weight for longer periods of the time, and the last four or five years I was standing guys that are bigger than I was physically, so I felt that I had to prepare myself accordingly in the gym. So I never really had a picture in my mind, maybe we all wanted to look like Anthony Koutoufides, but we were never going to.

Many participants had an idea of the body type they would like as an AFL footballer, even if they did not feel pressured to look a certain way. They recalled being young men looking at current AFL players and aspiring to obtain the 'strong, well built, masculine, muscular' physique. Some of the men described former Carlton footballer Anthony Koutifides as having the body they aspired to have. This was due to his high muscularity and low body fat, thus reinforcing the perception that to be masculine one must be muscular. As put by one of the men:

I suppose Anthony Koutifides probably had the body that you'd want if you were a footballer, because he was tall, carried not a lot of fat and was able to run pretty well, so yeah I think he would have had it for sure.

Some of the men argued that while body shape is influenced to a degree by genetics, the body can be developed through training and discipline, which reinforces masculine identity, as training the body requires discipline and hard work. One of the men claimed:

There's no doubt that genetics are important and they're helpful, but they're not everything, and you can improve your body with training, and you can improve what you can get through by being mentally stronger and pushing yourself harder and realising what you can actually achieve by working hard, and the most important thing in football is work ethic and the ability to be able to push yourself. There's no point having a good body if you can't push it or you don't know how to use it.

Previously identified is the strong link between sport and war, particularly with regard to the male body. Long-term injuries are often perceived as a normal career expectation and are treated as 'battle' wounds of which a player should be proud. Some men argued that few footballers end their careers without any damage having been done to their bodies:

I think I'm still in pretty good nick physically, I've got a few battle scars so to speak, but not too many AFL footballers get through unscathed and come out the other side without any so you've got to be pretty lucky to get through without having any serious injuries.

The main concern for retired footballers with regard to their bodies was the weight gain experienced since the reduction in training hours. Many participants stated they keep active in retirement, but not to the extent they did as an elite sportsman, and as a result had gained weight. Generally participants were

unhappy with this weight gain, and when others notice and comment this has an impact on their self-esteem. Given that muscles are a physical sign of masculinity (Drummond 2001; 2005), and that a muscular physique demonstrates *being* masculine, weight gain since retiring from football can have a negative impact on the men's masculinity. One of the men stated:

I'm feeling not happy with the difference in your physical make up, you get a lot of comments from a lot of people saying "jeez you've put on a couple of kilograms" and … I don't like that at all … it annoys me getting constant negative feedback from people, because I think sometimes they actually get a bit of a jolly out of doing it, that you were an elite athlete in really good shape, they never were and then the first opportunity they get to … give you a bit of a knock down they enjoy doing it, but … at the end of the day it's my choice whether I want to get into better shape.

When asked to describe his body currently, another participant responded:

At the moment? A typical post football career body. Few extra kilos are on, things hurt, but generally I'm reasonably happy with the way I have been able to hold myself together after playing. You see a lot of players like Billy Brownless and those sort of guys that have stacked on weight after playing, but I've tried to look after myself and do some riding and running and core exercises and that sort of stuff just to try and keep everything still working and moving. I'm ok with it, but I would like to drop a couple of kilos too.

Another claimed he did not perceive himself as being masculine, because he was overweight:

Oh because at the moment I'm overweight, I'm not that much overweight, I'm probably about 6 or 7 kilos heavier than I would like to be. My playing weight was about 89 kilos and I'm about 105 at the moment. I'd be happy with about 95-97 so I've got a little bit of work to do especially since I'm going to Hawaii later in the year, so I need to trim up for that.

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This indicates that the male body is an important factor in the construction of masculinity. In particular, a well-trained and fit male body is a positive reinforcer of masculinity. In retirement, then, masculine identity can be questioned with weight gain due to decreased training.

Gender roles

While some of the participants observed that traditional male and female roles are changing, the majority still held the view that the man should be the provider of the family, though also claiming to affirm equality between men and women.

> I think the male role certainly is a husband and father, you still have to be the strong force in the house, discipline should come to the father. I think the mother's got a lot of other stuff to do. I think it's still the father's job to keep order, not with the wife, obviously that doesn't happen, but with the kids, and also believe it's our job to be the main bread winner. That's not always the case, and if that's not the case that's great, but it certainly should start from there.

With the increasing costs of living and the need for a dual income family, most of the men voiced their support for women to enter the workforce full time. However, this did not lead to an equal distribution of labour in the home, with the women still being expected to perform traditionally female orientated tasks in addition to working full time. This unequal distribution of labour maintains a male patriarchal society. In response to discussions on the role of females in society, one participant stated:

> I think that's changed as well. Personally I think women are taking on a lot more than they used to, particularly my wife, I'm very lucky. I put it down to

women are able to do more than one thing at once, they can do two or three things at once, so let's take advantage of that boys and make them work, clean, look after us, look after the kids, everyone's happy.

Some of the men stated they shared the household duties with their partners or wives, and that they did not mind doing the washing and the cleaning. One participant stated:

Look, I know a few relationships where the woman brings in all the money and the father stays home, and I think that's fantastic. I've got that mindset that I try and go out and earn all the money, but my wife, I don't make her stay at home and do the dishes and cook the tea, she does all that, but she also gets out and earns her own dollar as well, and I help out with the kids, I make the beds and I put the washing out on the line and things like that, so I think it's all human and whatever works, you've just got to make your life work.

This suggests that while the men are performing more tasks around the home, these tasks are still perceived as being part of the female role. In addition, many men stated they did not force their partners to stay at home. This reinforces the notion of the male being the head of the household and the main decision maker. In addition, given that this participant only knows "a few relationships" where the female partner is the main breadwinner, this suggests that in contemporary Western society, the 'norm' remains for the man to be the primary financial provider for the family. For those women who do have employment, this is an additional, rather than a substitute role to the carer of the home.

However, while some men were comfortable assisting with perceived female tasks around the home, others admitted to still holding the traditional perception that the women should stay at home:

I think it's fine for them, I think I'm probably a bit old fashioned, there's no doubt about that, but at the same time I'd never stop anyone from doing anything they wanted to do ... I think males and females are better at some things than others traditionally, but I wouldn't say that you had to be like that, I think that everyone's different as well, and I'd let my daughter play football for instance or if the best person in my pub to be a manager was a female I'd let them be manager, but you wouldn't catch me at home doing the ironing and doing the dishes and cooking every day, but a bloke wouldn't be my mate if that's what he did either. I'm not stereotyped and blind, but I am probably more old fashioned than a metrosexual if that's the right word.

Another participant argued there are different roles for men and women, and that this is necessary:

I think that there are lots of people that would like to think there's not, but there is. There has to be. I mean we are different. We're not the same, we're different and there's certainly things men have to do and men can't have babies, so there's one straight away that's crossed off the list, and there's things that women have to do. I don't think you can ever change that. I'm certainly not going to try.

Commonly participants argued that biologically women and men are more suited to different roles, with men more suited to physical roles requiring strength, and women to less labour intensive roles. This was with particular regard to employment in the workforce and to childrearing. For example:

I wouldn't say different roles, but I would say more suited to different roles. I'd say that there'd be some females who wouldn't be suited to certain types of employment, and there would be some males who wouldn't be suited to some other types of employment.

Another participant stated:

I think that men and women as they have grown up did what they like to do, and I think in particular with my wife, she's really enjoyed the role of being the mother and I enjoy it too, that's the funny side, I enjoy being dad and looking after the kids and cooking dinner, and so I wouldn't put things in different boxes for males and females, it's come to an age where everyone can do pretty much everything. Obviously the difference is physical strength for some men over the women, and it may be hard for some women to be landscape gardeners or labourers because physically you've got to lift 300 bricks a day, but I think pretty much women can do as much as what men can do, and I do actually honestly believe that.

Traditionally women have been the primary caregivers to children, and the men in this research uphold this view. Many argued that men biologically cannot bear children, and as a consequence childrearing was a female role. A common perception was the while the father should participate in the upbringing of the children, the mother should remain at home to be the primary caregiver until the child goes to school. When discussing whether males and females have separate roles in society one participant stated:

Not really… I reckon girls should have their own independence, I think girls should work as well … I still reckon women should look after the kids until they go to school … But if she wants to work, with a baby … then someone can babysit. I'm not one of those blokes that says 'you can't do this you can't do that.'

Given the importance of employment to the men in this research and the perceived obligation to provide for their families, staying at home to care for children full time until school age was argued to be difficult. In addition, many of the footballers became fathers as they were transitioning out of the sport and so they expressed the need to keep busy with other employment rather than stay at home in order to cope with the transition process:

Not necessarily but if you ask me whether I could have stayed home in the first five years of my kids' life, well I probably couldn't have, and I'm not sure if that's the transition process that I'm going through at the moment. I've come to the end of my football career and I've got all these creative thoughts and ambitions around what I want to achieve. Whether I could have done that, I probably couldn't have because I don't know. I suppose I've got a right ahead of my wife to go out and be the breadwinner. We've got an understanding that she would be prepared for the first 5 years of her children's life ...

Always a footballer

During their AFL careers most of the men in this research would have described themselves as footballers. In retirement, being a footballer still influences their identity, but some of the men no longer described themselves as footballers. Even those who were still playing football in an amateur league often did not describe themselves as footballers. However, many conceded that their public profile as a footballer still leads them to be introduced as footballers, which therefore, still has an influence on their identity. One participant commented:

It's funny, when people say I'm a footballer I say I'm an ex-footballer, probably as a joke more than anything. I suppose once you're a footballer you're always a footballer, but I'm excited about this next stage of my career really, with forging a career separate to football, and it is a major challenge to be able to differentiate between the footballer and now … in a role that's more common, because it's easy for me to open doors, to get opportunities to speak with a lot of individuals … it's challenging me.

Footballers who had a higher public profile often identified more with their athletic identity. Some argued that being widely recognised in society led to a

public perception of who they were as individuals, and it was difficult for this not to have an effect on their identity. One of the men stated:

> It's hard, I actually see myself as being two different people, one's the person that played footy and the other's just me, but unfortunately people don't see me that way. I'm known as the AFL footballer so … that's something that I always have to deal with.

The greatest influence on identity was argued to be family, and in particular parents. Participants stated that behaviours are learnt through parents' decisions and actions. One of the men said this in response to a question about his greatest influence:

> Your upbringing, your guidance by your family, by your father and mother and then helping you making right decisions at the right times and encouraging you, especially when you're young and you don't know what the right or wrong decision is … and I suppose you put a lot of trust in your parents … that they will, through their experiences, push you in the right direction.

Another stated:

> My family is my biggest influence, my immediate family and my two kids. I think I'm an influence on them and they're an influence on me, particularly my wife, we just bounce off each other so well, understand each other's role within our relationship.

A few of the men argued that who we are is dependent upon life experiences, and that difficult times have the potential to make us stronger. This perception is consistent with the social construction of masculinity, in that people construct a reality based on their experiences and the meanings they give to those experiences. On what shapes identity, one of the footballers claimed:

I think it's everything, I think it's your upbringing I think it's the hard times that you go through, the good times that you go through, the people that you meet, the people that you're involved in, I think community, understanding community, understanding cultures and other people. I think … it's a mixture of your whole life experience that makes you the person that you are.

Football was described as being significant in the education of young men. Often young boys are socialised into manhood through sport, a process that begins early in life. As one of the men argued:

I think football and sport in general is a great education for everyone … you learn not to be an individual, but you learn to be an individual competitor, you learn to sacrifice, you learn about your body, you learn about self-pride you learn about the community, you learn how to act in the community and … you learn to be professional, so if you go into your own business and stuff you've got professional ways.

Another declared that football has impacted on everything, and that it shapes identity in a positive way:

Everywhere, footy impacts everything, who you are what you do … I'm a better person because of my long-term involvement in football.

However, some of the men recognised that being a footballer should not make up the entirety of one's masculine identity, due to the unpredictable nature of the game. While the team is consistently winning, masculine identity is reinforced, but if the team is losing this has the potential to negatively impact on identity. It is therefore important for footballers to have outside interests other than football, so that even when the team loses a footballer's identity is not vulnerable. When describing how being a footballer influences his identity one of the men stated:

It's what I do, it's my living now, whether that be a coach working in the SANFL, I write about football, so naturally it's part of who I am. The good

things that I did and the bad things that I did are part of who I am … but it's not who I am … I think it's important for footballers to understand that they can't have all their self-esteem come from football, because it's so up and down. If you have a great game you think that you're king of the world, but next week you're terrible and you're the worst person on earth, so you can't derive all your self-esteem from it as some do.

Being involved in sport is an important part of developing young men's masculinity (Messner 1989). Participants agreed that football shapes character through the important giving and receiving of feedback. Also, part of the initiation into sporting clubs can be 'bagging' teammates for their behaviours. Often young footballers have an image of how they would like to be perceived, but constant feedback and teasing may cause a change in behaviours from young men. One of the men commented:

Oh there's a lot of fantastic benefits of being a part of a team, … it carves your character, you're getting constant feedback, whether it's positive or negative from the players. … Sometimes it's in a serious feedback manner, sometimes … you're getting bagged and bit of shitload on you, but it's all about acknowledging it and saying 'oh yeah well ok I've got to do that and well I've been a dickhead in that area' and then you get moulded … and it's up to you … to work out the person you want to be.

The image that the men in this research wanted to portray included not being 'soft', linking being soft with not being masculine. A few of the men admitted they do have a 'softer' side; however, because of the physical presence they have as a footballer they argued they still portray a masculine image.

Oh you get a perception of yourself, you ask yourself how you want to be perceived by other people, so I believe I wasn't soft or anything like that … so I was tough to play on one-on-one.

One of the ways men can demonstrate their masculine identity is through 'doing' masculinity. The footballers argued that through playing sport they learnt to act on the emotions they were feeling. Early in careers the men alluded to being emotional and irrational, suggesting that being rational is an important characteristic in the construction of masculinity. As one footballer commented on the development of his character through football:

> Shy, I would have thought, probably introverted, certainly achievement-focussed and probably more emotional and irrational. I'm much more rational now and I'm quite happy with the results … I think certainly moving from the feeling stuff and acting on it to be able to now rationalising those feelings and then putting into action is the thing that is really valuable for myself.

In some instances the participants outlined policies currently in place where the players choose the top five footballers in their team who are setting a good example for the rest of the group. This then provides motivation to be named in that group, and assists in the construction of masculinity through teammates aspiring to be like the men who are named in the top five footballers within the club. Having this system was argued to give those who are not displaying the correct attitude an opportunity to learn and grow as a person, thereby contributing to the development of their masculine identity. One of the men stated:

> Ray McLean runs an organisation called Leading Teams, and it's leadership and it's more about peer support and having everyone being equal, so the guys have lots of meetings where they sit around and they talk about who are the best five players on the track, in terms of the best five trainers, and who are the worst five trainers, and everyone has to get up and say who they think their best five and who their worst five is, and what that does is it gives people who are the best five they hear their names read out by 40 people and people who are the worst five gives them a bit of a wakeup call in terms of they might not

realise they were the bottom five and gives them an opportunity to improve and get better.

Much of the participants' identity post-football is linked with their employment. Participants commonly described themselves in terms of their vocation since retiring from football:

I wouldn't know how I would describe myself now, probably someone who's got their own business now and moved away from football.

The male as breadwinner was an important reinforcer of masculinity. Many of the men recognised that it is important to provide a regular income for their families, which highlights the link between masculine identity and employment. One of the men stated:

I think I've got a pretty good balance that you sort of try and move in feasts, you try and live the perfect life, which is a great life, which is you try and spend as much time with your family and friends as you can, but still take into account that you've got to run your businesses and earn a wage and contribute to whatever you're involved with, and that for me is the board and the commentating and my work, both in the business and at head office.

Constructs of masculinities can change over time according to circumstance or experience, and for the men in this research a redefinition of masculinity came through fatherhood. Many of the men described themself as being a 'family man,' and husband. Those who retired from football and then became fathers described being a footballer as someone they were and being a father as who they now are. In addition, the men's children were argued to have a significant influence on who they are as men, as they prioritise their children over everything else. Some of the men admitted to perceiving themself as being invincible during their football career, which is a common perception in young men (Agnew 2007);

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however, in becoming a father, this changed, indicating the changing nature of masculinities at different stages of a man's life. One of the men stated:

> In my case I became a family man very quickly after footy, so you tend to look at yourself as a family person and not the strong invincible footballer that was playing.

As discussed, football requires significant commitment in terms of time and discipline, so that once careers are over a period of reconstruction of identity may be required. As stated above, footballers seek a replacement for football in the early stages of retirement. This can impact on their identity as men, due to the significance of football to who they are, or have been:

> I changed the way I live, as a person I probably haven't changed, I've changed what I'm doing, but … [I am] still the same underneath, still competitive, still passionate, probably looking for another thing to take the place of the passion you lose when you're not directly in at footy and competition … but there's other things you can do more, I can do more for charity, I can do more for other people, I can do more things for my family and have more fun.

However, the longer footballers have been retired, the less likely they were to view being a footballer as part of their identity. Influential work by Levinson (1986) suggested that a person's life structure has many components, with between one and three components forming a central focus in the structure. These components have great significance on the self, though during a person's life course, the components are subject to change. This concept is illustrated in the current research, as during their AFL careers, football was a central component of the participants' lives, forming a significant part of their identity; but in retirement, as football takes a less dominant role in their lives, it becomes a less significant part of who they are as men. One of the men stated:

I certainly don't describe myself as a footballer, and again it's not that I'm afraid of the image that portrays, but I've been out of it for 10 years – yeah I did play footy, I enjoyed it, loved it, great opportunities and wouldn't change anything about that, but I'm a hardworking person that has a beautiful family and enjoy life.

Success has been identified as an important component of masculine identity. Founding researchers on masculinity, Brannon and David (1976), described being a 'big wheel' as integral to masculinity, as masculinity is measured by power, success, wealth and status. Kimmel (2007) furthers this by stating that men should be capable, reliable and in control. Participants in this research supported this observation, identifying success as a defining characteristic in their identity. Many of the men described competing with others in order to achieve success as something they enjoyed, and part of who they are as men, linking competing and success with masculine identity. Striving to be 'number one' contributes to the hierarchy of men through which the successful are separated from the less successful. Therefore, the more successful a man is, the more masculine he is perceived to be:

Being successful is a big part of who I am; it drives me. I enjoy being successful, football as individual and team aspect, now in coaching … we set the goals to be the number one mid-field team in the competition … at the moment in clearances we're sitting 14th … that doesn't excite me, I want to be number one … so that's what I'm striving for now with the [new club]. I'm striving that we build ourselves up to be the powerhouse, and if we do that it will make me feel good about myself.

Another concurred:

I'm a very passionate person, I'm a very competitive person, I would like to think I'm an achiever, I love nothing more than helping others. I probably do that at the expense of myself and the immediate family too much.

The denial of pain

Playing with pain and injury in elite sport is a common occurrence (Young, White & McTeer 1994; Messner 1992; 2002; Hempill 2002). The socialisation of young men to accept pain and injury begins early in life, and often much adulation is given to those who overcome pain to continue competing (Roessler 2006). Early research into pain, injury and sport by Sabo (1994) outlined the 'pain principle', which socialises men to withstand pain and injury as a measure of how courageous and, therefore, how masculine one is. Messner (1992) stated that men are socially constructed not to show pain, a sentiment that is reinforced through the cultural practises in sport where pain is viewed as a weakness that can be exploited by the opposition (Agnew 2007).

The footballers in this research generally had difficulty describing pain. They recognised that there are different sorts of pain, such as physical and emotional. This was typical of the responses:

What sort of pain? I mean there's different sorts of pain. There's pain from injury, there's pain from losing, there's pain from emotionally being exhausted I suppose, so I don't know, which sort of pain?

And again:

I think there's physical pain and there's emotional pain. You know physical you deal with, emotional pain can be a lot harder to deal with I think.

Just as they wanted to differentiate between different types of pain – "there's physical pain and there's emotional pain" – the participants commonly differentiated between pain and injury: injury was described as something that prevented the footballers from performing a function, such as a broken leg or a torn hamstring muscle, whereas physical pain was often perceived as temporary, more a positive challenge that can be overcome. Responses included:

> Pain? Well it's really just a feeling I suppose; the more mature you become and the longer you last with AFL football the more you can put up with pain. Pain becomes a good friend really, because being able to cope with pain makes you get mentally tougher, and it also allows you to get physically tougher, allows you to push through pain barriers when you just think you can't get another litre of air in the lungs just keep pushing so pain is … like a drug in the end, especially during pre-season when you're really pushing yourself hard, you just really enjoy it and when you're finished there's an enormous amount of satisfaction that comes from really pushing through that pain barrier, which is almost addictive.

For some participants, pain was described as being a weakness. This was with particular regard to emotional pain, which was argued to be harder to overcome than physical pain. However, the men suggested that the more mentally strong a man is, the more likely he would be able to deal with emotional issues, again reinforcing the importance of mental strength to masculinity:

> Pain is weakness leaving the body. There you go, there's a quote for you … I remember when I snapped my leg and broke it in three places, that was rather uncomfortable, but that's obviously the physical pain, but then there's the emotional pain of losing close victories or retiring, and it's hard to describe, because the emotional side is just something you've got to deal with and it's not easy, because you probably think you can still do more and still play on or you should have done this to win the game, but you've got to be strong willed

or strong of mind to overcome that and learn from that and get better at it. The physical pain you can't do too much about, if it hurts it hurts.

The men argued that rather than being a negative aspect of Australian Rules football, pain is 'beautiful.' In addition, given the normalisation of the acceptance of pain in sport, some participants stated that if one was unable to withstand pain, they should not be involved in sport. Tolerance of pain was perceived to be an individual factor. Those that are more able to play with pain are often thought to be more successful than those who cannot:

> How do I describe pain? It's a beautiful thing, pain; I mean we wouldn't play this game if we didn't like pain. It's funny, no one likes pain, but hang on well then why do you play sport? Why do women have childbirth? That's pain. … if you don't like pain you shouldn't be doing what we're doing … people have thresholds of pain I understand that, but I think pain is a good thing and it's a bad thing. You can have pain in pre-season, which is hard running pain or you can be hurt and have pain, they're … the two ones that spring to mind. People can play with pain, some people can't, all depends on the individual.

Pain and injury often thought of as two separate but related entities (Howe 2004). This was a common perception in the current research with the men suggesting pain and injury are different. Pain was argued to be a 'good thing,' while injuries were described as being a loss of function, therefore unbearable. The men commonly claimed that pain could be overcome, illustrating the normalisation of the acceptance of pain in contact sports such as Australian Rules football. This response provides an apt summary:

> Pain's not bad, pain doesn't matter; injuries kill you, injuries feel like another person like this big person in the room, because it's long term. It's something you've got to deal with every day until it goes away, and then even if you've had a few injuries and then you've got none there's still that "I wonder when

the next one's going to open the door and walk in and sit there for a while."
Pain is extremely bearable because it's acute, like I hurt my ankle and it's
going to hurt today and tomorrow and it'll start to get well, it won't be there
soon, but everything involved with injury's just terrible.

The men in this research admitted to playing a considerable number of games
with some pain or discomfort. In the later stages of careers the number of games
played with pain increased. While the men recognised that there is a substantial
risk of sustaining a season ending injury in which one cannot continue to
compete, the general acceptance that playing in pain is something "you just deal
with" highlights the willingness of elite sportsmen to play in pain. This supports
the suggestion of Pringle and Markula (2005), that elite athletes are not passive
participants in accepting pain and injury as 'normal' in sport: the participants in
this research confessed that they would rarely go into games 100% fit. Common
responses included:

Oh probably 60-70% of the time, people talk about being 100%, well no
you're not, you're never 100%, because you've just done hard running for a
pre-season. You go into your first game you've got soreness somewhere in
your body and you hit someone's body and jeez that was a little bit sore but
that stays around with you for a couple of weeks, corkys, bit of bruising, might
get a broken nose, dislocated finger, these things just linger over the year and
then you pick up other little niggles. I mean there's the sad ones where people
do their knees and things like that, but at the end of the day I think everyone
plays with pain.

Interestingly, some of the men differentiated pain from discomfort, and as such
did not perceive themselves as playing with pain. One of the men argued:

I don't think I would have ever played with pain, but discomfort, I played with
discomfort probably a few times.

Many justifications were given for trying to push through pain and injury. Firstly, the footballers did not want to be perceived as being soft, and therefore letting the team down:

> Yep every time, let the team down, all that stuff. You had to keep telling yourself you're doing the right thing pulling out. ... See back in my time you didn't come off. There's no way you'd come off during a game. Now they'd come of what 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 times in a game. No way. You'd never come off if you were injured, unless you just couldn't walk.

And:

> You're not soft if you can't play with an injury that can't be played with, there's some that you can play with and some that you can't, and some people can play in more pain than others, and that's the difference between a soft player an average player and a hard player, so that's the way it is.

Footballers consistently withdrawing from training or games because of pain were perceived as not having the appropriate attitude to be an elite sportsman. Many of the men described pre-season as being the hardest and most painful experience as a footballer, and so it was argued that if players do not continually 'push' themselves then they would be perceived as being soft. It was also contended that those who could withstand the pain would have more successful careers than those who could not. Pushing though the pain is one of the more significant ways in which men can demonstrate their masculinity. Pain is often perceived as something that can be ignored, and those who are consistently perceived as being 'tough' players are heralded as heroes, particularly by the media. One of the men observed:

> There's all different sorts of pain: there's pain during a game, there's pain in pushing through big pre-season running sessions and you think when you're

legs are going to fall off and your lungs are going to pop out of your chest, there's that type of pain; there's pain in a game when you've just got to keep running to a contest, you get whacked on the back of the head and you almost get knocked out and you've got to get up again … players are considered soft if they can't put up with pain, and really that's what separates the players who play anywhere between one game and probably 50 games and 50 games and 250.

However, others maintained there was never a feeling of being 'soft' if one could not play because of pain or injury. One of the men stated:

It's just impossible to know, so the best person to make that decision whether they can play or not is the individual, and then of course if you want to be tough and say I've got a hamstring it'll be right I'll play and you go out there and in the first five minutes you snap the hamstring and you sit on the bench then we're playing one short for the game … I don't think there's ever any pressure on anyone to play in fear of being labelled soft, because it's just such a physical game that if you're not right and you're not 100% fit and you go out there and you're actually a burden to the team as opposed to being good.

One of the more common responses was that footballers consistently try and mask pain, particularly to the opposition. It was perceived that the opposition would try and exploit the injury and they would become a target for rough play. This provided substantial motivation to attempt to hide the pain:

Yeah you do, there's a big saying that you don't want your opposition to know you're hurt and that's probably more about maybe they'll attack an injury or if you're on your direct opponent and he thinks you've got a sore leg he may run even harder.

In addition, many of the men admitted to concealing the amount of pain they were experiencing to medical and training staff. The men argued that they would not have continued to play against the doctor's advice; however, they would

manipulate the truth and say an injury did not hurt as much as it did. Some of the participants argued that injured players get forgotten about, and that they tried to push through in order to maintain their status in the team:

> When you get injured no one wants to know you, that's the highs and lows in the AFL, when you're injured it can change really quickly, you can be on a high and doing really well and then you do a knee … then you have a knee operation and then all of a sudden you're off for seven or eight weeks and then no one really wants to know ya.

Competition for positions in the side is also a significant motivator to attempt to play through the pain. If players perceived that their position in the side was threatened, they were likely to try and push through the pain in order to keep their position. Some of the men admitted to attempting to push through the pain until the point where they could not run. A common response was that as elite sportsmen they just deal with it, suggesting denial of pain is another important factor in the construction of masculinity:

> If it's to the point where it's killing you and you can't really run around, well you stop. I mean everyone plays with injuries, I played with busted fingers, I have a shoulder injury there all from AFL, you've just got to go through it, … during the seniors you don't really want to lose your spot so you'll play no matter what, if you can run you'll play pretty much.

Despite advances in medicine, the average AFL career is becoming shorter (Hawthorne 2005). However, the men in this research argued that AFL clubs are more attentive to the management of injuries in the current form of the game. Playing or training with an injury was described as being detrimental to the team's pursuit of success, therefore, focussing more on maintaining the body through massage and physiotherapy was claimed to extent players' careers. As

such, some of the men suggested the notion of playing through pain is becoming less important in proving one's commitment to the team. However, despite this claim, the majority of men still admitted to playing a considerable number of games with pain or discomfort.

I think that there's a lot more smarts these days, clubs manage you a lot better, that whole idea of pushing through pain now. Your best players you don't want to do that, you, you need them out on the park, makes such a difference so you can't afford to be playing injured or training injured either, you just really need to do the maintenance stuff, the physio, the massage to keep yourself right and prepared for the next week.

Footballers' decisions to play with pain or injury were performance and function based. If players thought they could still perform well enough to not let the team down they would play. Further, if they could run, they generally perceived themselves as 'right' to play. As one of the men stated:

I made sure I wasn't soft or anyway that's what I was thinking. … the only way I would … come off in a game is if I couldn't run basically, and things that would stop me from running was hamstring injuries or maybe the odd calf, or I did a quad once … unless I could not run I wanted to be on that field … some players that I see even now might get a hit in the head and they want to come off, not in my day anyway, if you couldn't run then you'd come off, otherwise you'd just play the game.

The timing of the season, the perceived importance of the game and the type of injury were all factors considered when making the decision to either rest or to try and push through the pain. One of the men argued that footballers need to be smart with regard to playing with pain or injury, and therefore need to make an informed decision about whether to play or not. In addition, it was contended that players should not make the decision on their own, but consult their support

network, thus highlighting the importance of friends and family, as well as teammates and medical staff as support for elite sportsmen:

You've got to use your brain on that one, you can't be silly about it because you've got to take a lot of factors into consideration. Firstly if you're going to play you've got to be able to perform not just play, you've got to look at the type of injury and whether you can push through it, I mean you can push through certain injuries but you can't push through other injuries, or you can make injuries worse … you've got to be smart like that and depending on the time of the game and the type of game that it is, you've also got to take into consideration as well … if you can't make it yourself, you've got to speak to people you trust … and at the end of the day you go with your gut instinct.

Some of the men agreed that through standing up and accepting a physical contest one's manhood can be proved. If footballers were not prepared to take a physical hit during the game it could lead to the perception that they were 'soft' and letting the team down. However, given the significant risk for long-term injuries in a contact sport such as AFL football, one of the men recognised that footballers have a responsibility to be role models for young children, and this sometimes requires putting safety rather than physicality first. In addition, it was argued that the risk of being seriously hurt on the football field is small, despite the physical nature of the game. While the men did not perceive themself as proving his masculinity through the acceptance of hard physical contests, they did admit that being successful in these contests is the aim of playing football:

No not really, … you just want to win a contest and depending on what type of person you are, you might think about that, but that never really affected me. You can't get too hurt on the footy field either: you get knocked out, you have a headache and you play again next week or in a couple of weeks' time again and a lot of things can get fixed pretty quickly. I felt through my time there were probably only two players that could seriously hurt you; outside of that I

just played, had a bit of fun, played to win, played with your teammates and I never thought that I was more masculine than anybody else that I was playing with or against.

Challenging oneself, particularly in gruelling pre-seasons has an important role in the development of masculinity. Through continually pushing through pain barriers and succeeding footballers can increase their perceived limits. The conditioning of the body in hard pre-seasons not only develops a masculine body, but also improves both strength and mental toughness, reinforcing masculine characteristics. One of the men declared:

> I think it's surprising how you can push or force your mind to push through pain barriers that you wouldn't have thought, and that happens every year in pre-season; when you don't think you can be able to be as fit as what you can be, but your mind pushes you through, so the pain is basically only there in your mind for certain times.

The socialisation of men to push through pain barriers begins early in life. The men suggested that as young boys they learnt to get up after falling off their bike, and this was an important learning process about pain. The men's experiences as young boys thus taught them how to act in a particularly masculinised way through the denial of pain. Playing through pain on the football field was also perceived as being insignificant compared to people suffering from cancer, providing a justification to continually do it:

> No one's ever sat down and said, well this is how you get through pain, I think you work that out yourself. I mean from a young fella when you first fall off your bike and take bark off your elbows and your knees, from then I think you start learning … about pain and what it is and whether you can put up with it or whether you can't. I mean you can go to the degree of someone having cancer and going through chemotherapy and the amount of pain that they

endure and these blokes carry on like they go through that pain, well you know they're not even a percent of that pain, so it's just a thing of what you can and can't handle I think as a person.

Current players, as role models for young boys, reinforce the notion that playing through pain is an integral part of AFL football. The men in this research recalled observing players when they were growing up, who were portrayed as 'tough' and provided an example to follow, thereby teaching young footballers to attempt to push through pain barriers. One participant stated:

I learnt a lot growing up, Chris McDermott, Tony McGuinness were a big influence on me, particularly the way they played, particularly Chris, never got strapped, never got rubbed, broke bones, but just kept playing week in week out, and that was a real eye opener for me, so I feel my pain tolerance is pretty high. I guess injuries such as muscle ones say a hammy, calf, driver were always restrictive, but I played many games where I just got jabbed a lot of the time to play and if it didn't involve my brain, eyes or heart, it can be fixed at the end of the year and that was my approach and outlook when I was playing footy.

Many of the footballers described football as a passionate game, and with such emotions invested losing can cause emotional pain. Participants argued that emotional pain can be worse than physical pain, which may in part be due to the way many men suppress their emotions. One of the men declared:

The pain of losing is pretty hard to swallow … if you're passionate about it that's why you train harder and try and make sure you don't experience that pain next time … the emotional pain is something that you just have to deal with because you probably can't have an impact on it too much over losing, sometimes you lose and you play well so you've just got to be able to deal with it. At the end of my footy career I was stuffed physically as much mentally, I'd had enough of everything, football can be very tiring so in the end … I just probably had enough.

The emotional pain of losing, then, provides a powerful motivator to continue to train hard and be disciplined as an elite sportsman. This can reinforce masculinity, as the pursuit of success and the desire to win are important aspects in the social construction of masculinity.

All of the participants argued that despite the high risk of injury, their careers as elite AFL footballers were worth the frequent playing in pain. This response captures the sentiment:

> Oh definitely … for the fun that I've had and what I've achieved, definitely worth the pain, for sure.

Another reiterated:

> The memories that I've got out of football easily take over any pain that I've ever had … I'm lucky that I can say that … I never won a premiership, but I've still got great memories and great friends from playing football, and I know that it's taught me a lot about myself and about life, about having a family and how to respect and all that.

Masking the pain

The use of prescription medications is widespread in elite sport (Tscholl, Junge & Dvorak 2008; Orchard 2002). This includes the use of painkilling injections in order to allow athletes, which has many risks. These risks are often perceived as being acceptable to both athletes and medical staff (Orchard 2002). Some of the men in this research argued that due to the hard work, sacrifices and discipline that comes with being an AFL footballer, they just want to play, and so if a pain-killing injection could assist them to do that, the risks were acceptable:

I wanted to play … we spend our lives training for football, so you want to play, so if you can get something in your leg to help you get over the line then you'll do it … 99% of the AFL, SANFL players would do it.

Even though the men were made aware of the long-term effects of receiving regular injections, they were still prepared to have them in order to complete the season:

Yeah it's a tough one because they will get you through a game, but probably take you longer to recover, so you've got to make that decision. I've had to make that decision before and it's been tough, luckily it's been late in the season, so we've just had to get through.

Others claimed that despite having injections occasionally, they can mask the underlying causes and make the original injury worse, so it is dangerous to continually use them:

Looking back now I think there's a fair risk involved because … it's a bandaid solution to maybe a bigger problem that maybe needs some time off or some serious addressing of the injury. I had the odd one while I was playing, but not really to get through games … it might have been during the week just to settle something down … but I think long term you might be playing with fire a little bit if you're continually having them.

Some of the men made a distinction between having a pain-killing injection and taking anti-inflammatories or Panadine. It was argued that having regular injections was harmful to health, but taking anti-inflammatory tablets was acceptable:

I always thought if I had to have a pain killing injection you shouldn't play at all, where as I thought the pain was a good thing so I kept the pain to remind me and to sort of be the judge of it. Did I take anti-inflammatories and panadine-forte? Yeah, all the time.

Many participants admitted to having pain-killing injections early in their career, but then preferring not to towards the end. This suggests that as players mature and perhaps realise their career is nearing its end, they become more concerned about their health and the possible side effects of having regular injections. Young men in the early stages of their career may be less concerned about their health and more concerned with proving themselves as footballers and therefore agree to have more injections. The men commonly made such statements as this:

> Yeah I did that for a long time in my early years, and then stopped once I realised that they probably weren't doing my inner organs any good.

Living with pain

Pringle and Markula (2005) argued that such is the widespread normalisation of playing with pain or injury in sport, many athletes perceive themself as being 'lucky' or 'fortunate' with regard to injury throughout their careers, despite experiencing some long term pain in retirement. This perception was prominent among the participants of this current research. Generally the men perceived pain as something that could be ignored, and the possibility of joint replacement surgery was viewed as commonplace and a 'normal' part of an athletic career. One participant stated:

> I'm very lucky, for me it's just posture and my lower back … so it's just keeping my core ok, and I had an operation at the end of every year, but nothing major, no knees, but a shoulder reconstruction, finger, toe, two groins, two arthroscopes, two back operations … enough to be a hindrance and had to be repaired, but nothing long-term that's caused me any problems.

Another affirmed:

Luckily my knees were spared, but I still get sore groins and … I had four recos, three on my right, one on my left, and I'm really restricted with the amount of movement I have in my shoulder. I can still play sport, which is good, but in a limited capacity and they ache, the shoulders ache … the others I've done pretty well with.

For those who have experienced long-term pain since retiring from football, they argued that you 'just deal with it.' This perception is closely linked to the masculine ideals of being less concerned with major health issues. The perception that men are strong, tough and resilient can lead men to ignore health concerns, including long-term pain. This is a typical response:

Winter plays around with my shoulders a little bit and my knees, but I think I've probably got a little bit of arthritis – I've got a bit of arthritis in some of my fingers and I always get tightness in the back and … old injuries poke their heads up every now and then, but you deal with it, you don't have painkillers or anything like that you just deal with it. It's just part of life.

For the majority of participants, the risk of sustaining a long-term injury was not something they considered during their football careers, as the memories and benefits of playing AFL football was perceived to out-weigh the potential risks. The realisation that football careers cannot last forever encourages a 'live in the now and worry about the consequences later' attitude. This attitude is common, particularly among young men who often engage in risk-taking behaviours (Messerschmidt 1993), and is prominent throughout the football subculture (Agnew 2007). The men in the current research explained they would rather play football while they were able to, and if arthritis resulted as a consequence then they would worry about that if it happened later in life. There were many justifications for adopting this attitude, enjoyment of football being the main reason. This indicates that the 'live in the now' attitude is a significant aspect in

the construction of masculinity, and is manifested throughout the cultural

practises within the AFL system, particularly through the acceptance and

normalisation of the high risk of injury in football. The men commonly stated:

> No you go about football the way you go about it and you don't think about
> that contest that you're going to go for, you don't think about now what's
> going to happen out of this … I just win the football and it's a good contest, so
> you know if something like that happens and in 10 years time – my memories
> in football have outweighed everything.

Many of the men in this research differentiated long-term pain from discomfort.

While several men sustained significant injuries during their careers that have

caused long-term pain and impaired movement, others discussed discomfort that

means taking extra time to get out of bed in the mornings, but see this is a

'normal' part of the aging process:

> I've come out quite well. It usually takes me five or 10 minutes to get going in
> the morning, but overall I've been very lucky. I've never had a knee operation
> or an ankle operation or a shoulder operation so they're probably the most
> common forms of injury in AFL football, so from that point of view I've been
> absolutely blessed, very fortunate.

Concurring:

> No, not pain. I've just got tight and soreness, which comes from being older I
> suppose, a lot of people do have general stuff anyway on worn out bodies. My
> ankles are probably not as good as a normal 30 year old's and my back is
> probably like a 60 year old's, but that's just from numerous injuries in the
> same spot, so I don't have pain I just have soreness, are they the same?

A few of the men have long-term pain from injuries sustained through football

that are debilitating in their daily life. Others are expecting to have more surgery

in the future in order to repair degenerating bodies. This caused some concern for

the footballers, particularly if a loss of function is expected, which illustrates the importance of 'doing' masculinity for this group of men, as loss of function due to injury may limit their ability to 'do' masculinity. One of the footballers stated:

> I had a knee reconstruction so that's a considerable hindrance to my lifestyle now as far as I probably can't run … I've also had at the end of my career, this is why I gave up … I was getting injections in my back … so I've got issues with my back, I've got almost like a pinched nerve in my back, which seems to be ¾ of the year I seem to have this … discomfort. That'd be the two and probably ankles … ankles, knee and back – apart from that I'm not too bad. Every day, I'm in some sort of pain, like my knee will ache a little bit, but nothing too serious, it's nothing I can't handle at the moment, maybe in 10 years that might change … The knee worries me a bit because it might be going ok at the moment, but I think maybe 10 years … I might have to get some serious work done to it.

Another participant admitted:

> Most of my injuries are injuries that you can deal with, they don't restrict you. The only one that concerns me, and I still wouldn't have it any other way, is I've had concussion you know 10-15-20 times, and blurred vision probably 15-20 times, and I don't know what that's going to do to me in the future, that worries me a little bit, but if you ask me right now …. If I could go back to a 10 year old kid and not play footy anymore, I'd play footy every time, as long as I don't drop dead in the next few years.

This was typical of the overwhelming response: despite the risk of further complications in the future, or experiencing long-term pain, all of the men declared the risks were acceptable, and even if they could foresee pain in the future they would 'do it all again.'

> No regrets at all on that, that's just part of the price you pay, but would never think about not doing it again.

Distrust of the media

The media has been shown to have a powerful role in the construction of reality (McKay 1991). The men in this research generally expressed a distrust of the media, both during their careers and into retirement. While some stated the media had a powerful influence on their own self-perception, others had made a conscious decision to ignore articles written about them. However, many agreed that early on in their careers as young male footballers wanting to impress, the media did have more of an influence on their self-perception. Given that young men are impressionable and are still developing their masculine identity, the media has a powerful role in influencing how young footballers perceive themselves. A poor game resulting in a less than complimentary article had the potential to lessen feelings of self-worth. Alternatively, a well-played game and subsequent complimentary article can result in heightened self-worth. Footballers in the national Australian Rules competition are scrutinised for their every move. This can also affect their self-esteem as men. When asked if the media had any effect on how he felt as a person, one participant commented:

> Oh a little bit. With the media … when you do something wrong everyone knows about it, the papers, the TV, everyone'll know about it, so your privacy, because you're an AFL player, you can't keep things … quiet, everyone knows what Joe Blogg did on Saturday night if you played up, so that was a bit disappointing, but when you play well they'll put you on TV … so it's good for yourself.

However, others argued that negative media articles did not affect their self-esteem as a person, but they could affect their football self-esteem:

> Oh I think … probably as a person not so much, maybe as a footballer. I never really played enough games to be heavily scrutinised, but I couldn't imagine

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what it's like when you've got the front page of the paper if you slip up and you have a big night out and you get caught doing stuff that perhaps normal people would be able to get away with, and even just playing a bad game and you're a superstar, it's a highly scrutinised sport, so I think it probably can affect individuals.

This suggests that the strength of an individual's identification with their athletic identity is a determining factor in the extent to which the media affects self-esteem. More high-profile players are argued to have a strong identification with athletic identity, and thus may be more affected by negative media items.

From a young age, many boys who play football aspire to be successful AFL footballers, and the media has a powerful role in reinforcing their identity when these young men see their names in the paper early in their careers. One of the men admitted:

I think early on when you see your name in the paper in the best players or as you get a bit older if you become a better player then there's a feature articles done on you … if you're picking up the paper you're normally reading about other people and you see yourself in there, so I think from an ego point of view it's nice to see that. I never had any negative stuff written, but I can imagine that would be pretty hard to deal with.

However, late in their careers and in retirement, for those still working in football, often their perceptions about the media change. As put by one participant:

I'm … very distrustful of the media. I guess I've been around a long time now working in the industry, and you see the different agendas media have, which is not always in the best interest of the player or the club, so my attitude towards the media has probably changed a fair bit over the years.

Mental toughness is one characteristic associated with being masculine, and many participants stated that when the media is constantly scrutinising players,

particularly in a negative manner, this can impact their mental strength, and therefore masculine identity. The men admitted that reading negative articles about themself could affect their self-esteem and confidence as a footballer. Given that confidence is a fundamental characteristic of hegemonic masculinity (Whitson 1990; Agnew 2007), a negative media article can cause men to doubt their masculinity. However, the more mentally 'tough' a player was perceived to be the less likely the media was thought to negatively impact them, thus reinforcing mental strength as a key component of masculinity:

> I think certainly earlier on, unless you're comfortable with who you are, it can certainly impact you, and I also think that because you don't … want other people to think that way about you. If they're saying something that's negative but you understand who you are and what you're doing and that's part of their job, that's life.

The majority of participants accepted the role of the media as a career 'norm' and something that all AFL footballers have to deal with. Many argued it is up to the individual and the characteristics they posses as to whether the media would pose a problem during their careers. One participant stated:

> They could either really have a go at you negatively or they could have the ability to really pump you up in a positive way … that's life as an AFL footballer. The way you deal with that … is up to yourself, if you choose to read the papers … or have the confidence … that you know more than they do about it, that's a learning curve you go through, and after a while you should be able to handle it.

Others recognised that the media have an important role in AFL football, particularly in the promotion of the game, therefore being scrutinised as a footballer should be expected given the financial rewards for footballers:

I never ever worried about what journalist or what commentators thought because it was just irrelevant to me, and that's what they're paid to do, they're paid to comment on football, issues in football and players from time to time. You get the good with the bad, they pump you up when you're playing well, if you play a poor game well you're going to be open to scrutiny, that's the reality of the game, that's why we get paid big money, it's because we've got responsibility.

However, some of the men claimed that the role of the media is to create stories in order to sell papers, and as such stories are manipulated to suit their needs:

They're there to create stories and controversy and manipulate interviews to suit their stories.

The media are there to do a job to try and create some interest for the game, which is a good thing. I guess it gets a bit out of hand with the AFL, but they've got to give the fans what they want to hear, I suppose.

A common argument was that while there are journalists who report solely on football, it is difficult for them to have an insight into everything that happens within the club. If a negative article is written, the players themselves have a deeper understanding of the facts, and if they remember this, the articles are unlikely to affect their self-perception as men:

I think as a person you juggle two sides. The first side is a logical sort of pragmatic process that says this person doesn't know what's going on inside a club, they don't know everything. They don't know I've been playing with an injury, they don't know that I'm sore, I'm not going to listen to it, and that competes with this emotion that says you do get angry and it's not always a balance … I felt I was quite pragmatic … but every so often it would just piss you off big time … but you understand they've got to do a job and good luck to them.

Already noted is the powerful influence the media can have early in the AFL careers of young footballers. The men in this research admitted to being affected by the articles written about them in the paper. As young men still constructing their own identity, the influence of a negative article can be significant. Some of the men agreed that reading a negative article in the newspaper about themself led to difficult times as they struggled with self-esteem concerns. It was claimed that mental strength was the key to overcoming the negative articles written in the media, and as their football careers continued, their mental strength developed and as a result the media had less affect on their self esteem. One of the men stated:

> I used to get hung up with the media as most players do at the start … you read every article about yourself, and if they wrote something bad you'd be unhappy, but the longer it goes the more you realise two things, one is that they're doing a job so they've got to write a critique on the game and you know it's their opinion and you get to know all these guys as well … they're there at training every night … and secondly normally people don't write if there's no substance at all to it, so if they write that I'm not in great form and I'm not playing very well there's normally something to it, I'm normally not playing that well.

A few of the men argued that they are their harshest critic, and as such even if the media reports on the game negatively the player themself knows if he has had a poor game, and therefore, the media should have little influence on their self-perception. One of the men argued:

> I guess I was reasonably lucky because I was pretty harsh on myself that I always tried to play well, I had a lot of pride in my work … so every game counted for me, so no one was more disappointed if I played a bad game so if someone wrote anything it wouldn't be any worse than what I was thinking.

One of the men in this research argued that he did not become an AFL footballer in order to prove his masculinity. He recognised, however, that through the media promotion of the game, football is portrayed as a particularly masculine sport. He declared:

> I've never thought about it. It's funny because I'm trying to work out like when you say masculinity, I was never attempting to be masculine, but then I think about football and I think about the culture of football and invariably it's linked. … Although I used to get and I do still get hugely pissed off with the media and football shows that put on this masculine bravado, the boysy talk shows. The panels and the footy shows and Sam Newman and all that, because and this is the biggest joke of it all, masculinity and football is a group thing. Individually we're all emotional, sensitive people that need people to prop us up, but when you go to the club you put on this bravado, which is bullshit and something that I used to get really tired of … to have to walk into the club everyday … and put on this, maybe for some guys it's not, maybe for some guys it's genuinely who they are, but I don't think so… the guys that I liked playing footy with, that I always respected were usually the ones that were very much their own people, some would say eccentric … but the media definitely portray… the boysy side. It's just stupid.

This suggests that football is constructed through the media as being a highly masculinised sport, whereas those who participate in the sport do not necessarily display the same characteristics presented by the media. The expectation is that footballers are confident, macho men who suppress their emotions and because of this, footballers portray the masculine image, when in fact they are not trying to prove their masculinity. However, like other participants in this research, for this man, performance on the football field is still strongly linked to masculinity, reinforcing the notion that men 'do' masculinity.

Moving on

Retirement from elite Australian Rules football can be either voluntary, involuntary through delisting, or forced through injury. The men in this research agreed that voluntary retirement is the preferred option to end one's football career, but this does not always happen for the majority of footballers. The men in this research who were able to voluntarily retire cited mental fatigue and an unwillingness to commit 100% to the team, particularly in gruelling pre-seasons, as the most significant factor in the decision to retire. Such responses included:

> In my own mind I knew I was done. I just couldn't do the training and the mental preparation … so if I'd have been mid-way through my career, still really passionate about doing it and being told sorry you're not good enough that would have been much harder, and it's obviously happening to a lot of guys. The average footy career's three years. I was lucky enough to play 13. … there's a lot of guys that have played long careers you know 10-12, 13 years, they're finished and they won't admit it to themselves, everyone else can see it, but they won't walk. They're probably getting paid $400 000 a year, so it's hard to walk away from that and realise the ego of I'm still a star …. I was lucky enough in my own mind I knew it was time to go.

Those who were able to retire on their own terms described themselves as being fortunate or lucky to have that opportunity rather than be delisted or forced into retirement through injury:

> I was lucky enough that when I finished footy that I did it on my own terms, I didn't get delisted. I'd had a very good, long career, and for me that made the decision to finish up football and I was very comfortable with that and very lucky that was the case, that doesn't happen for a lot of footballers.

Even though some participants argued they were still playing good football and were still able to contribute to the team, many recognised that age is a factor in

making the decision to retire. With competition for positions in the side, it was perceived that some of the more experienced players should step aside in order to give the younger players a chance to develop their careers. This was a factor for one of the men, who stated:

> I knew pretty much coming into the year that it was going to be my last season. We had a good young kid coming through who's a terrific young kid, who was going to be an outstanding player… a lot of us older guys were told it was going to be a year where we had to blood some young kids and bring them through at some stage … We didn't want to get to the end of the season and haven't tried some of these young kids, so I knew it was coming. I was playing some very good football myself, was top five best and fairest at the time, and it was really hard to take because I knew I had some good footy left in me for the season, but I suppose for the good of the club and the good of the team the way I felt physically and probably mentally I don't want to go through another pre-season, so it was like just give me a chance to finish off the season, but then on the other hand we knew we had to bring these kids in to see if they were good enough to play.

For the footballers who were delisted from their AFL club, forced retirement was described as being disappointing because they were not in control of the termination of their career. This suggests that being in control is an important aspect in the construction of masculine identity, and without it a sense of disappointment is common. The men did not directly associate being delisted with feeling less masculine. However, many did admit to feeling less confident in their abilities, and as confidence is frequently associated with masculinity, being delisted from an AFL cub can thus impact masculinity.

One of the footballers commented:

I got delisted, I played every game in the first year, most games in the second year, my third year I only played 10 and I sensed I was starting to get out of favour with the coach and then in my fourth year I only played four games I think it was and the writing was on the wall, so it was relatively expected for me … but even saying that … when I did actually get told that you're no longer with an AFL club it was just devastating. It … hits you like a ton of bricks. It's probably … close to being the most disappointing time in my life.

Another reiterated:

I was sacked in the AFL, so out of my control, well sort of out of my control. I could have been playing better or I could have done this or I could have done that, but basically out of my control … one morning I got a phone call, next night come and see us and I was sacked.

The main understanding for players being delisted was linked with poor performance on the football field. Many of the men stated they had "had a bad year," or they had succumbed to injuries that meant they could not perform well as a footballer. Performance and success in elite sport are directly linked; performing poorly as a team can mean not playing in the finals, and as individuals, delisting. Some of the men understood the reasons behind their forced retirement, but argued if they had been given more opportunity to prove themselves they could have been more successful. One of the men claimed:

I didn't perform as well last year in the AFL when I had the opportunity. I will be admit the first to admit my form didn't warrant it, but I don't think that the coaches showed much faith in me from the time that they got there, which was my last year at [the club]. Despite playing well in the VFL I probably didn't get as many opportunities, but when I did get the opportunities I didn't take them, so probably didn't deserve to be there this year.

Poor performance led to increased pressure for some of the footballers to try and improve their football in order to be offered a new contract. Ironically, the

increased pressure had a negative effect on their performance, as they lost interest in playing football because the pressure of 'trying to be something' was too great. Thus, when they were eventually delisted from the team, they were relieved because the pressure to perform was relieved. It was not until weeks later that the reality their AFL career was over was realised and emotions were experienced. A common response was:

> It had a huge effect on my football last year because I knew that I was coming out of contract and I was under the pump. I was turning up to footy games last year not wanting to be there because I felt the pressure so much.

For a number of footballers retirement was forced through injury. The male body is a significant factor in the construction of masculinity, and when the body fails them, men can feel betrayed and feel a sense of loss. As an elite athlete, a career ending injury is particularly disappointing, because many perceive themselves as having more to contribute to their sport. This was true for some of the men in this research, one stating:

> The injuries that I had were obviously knees and to retire probably, I'm only 26 and I've still felt that I had a lot to give at AFL level, even though I played the games I did, I thought I could have played a lot more games when I wasn't injured, so to have those knee injuries stop you from probably getting the greatest potential out of your AFL career was probably one of the most disappointing things … it's definitely disappointing to not be able to … go out on top and to be able to say that I achieved as many goals as possible, played as many games as possible and to go out on your own terms.

These sentiments indicate the importance of performance and functionality to male athletes' constructions of masculinity. This mechanistic view of the body (Messner 1992; Drummond 2003; 2008; Magdalinski 2009) can lead to difficulties when a significant injury occurs, as long-term injuries lead to

frustration about not being able to perform. For these men, recognition that they were unable to perform at the elite level forced their retirement from football. As one of the men acknowledged:

> I had two years of injuries which I couldn't train, I couldn't perform at the level I wanted to, so I felt like I didn't want to be remembered like that and I had to make a decision, is it going to get any better? And next year would it be better? Couldn't guarantee that and unfortunately I was just worn down, I was sick of getting injections, I was sick of getting treatment and I just couldn't perform the way I wanted to so I asked … four people who I trusted who knew me as a footballer, knew me as a person, and when their decision was the same as mine that it might be a good time to retire, that's what I did.

Sustaining a long-term injury required significant mental strength in order to motivate oneself to rehabilitate the injury and return to elite competition. For some of the men who had experienced recurring long-term injuries, the denial of pain was prominent, as they did not want to admit they had sustained the same injury again. In addition, while some realised the continual recurrence of injury could signal the end of their AFL career, they were unsure of what to 'do' in life after football, and so were unprepared for retirement.

> Mentally going into my last year there was probably 20% of me that wanted to play, 80% well this is what I know, I got another contract, will I make as much money after this? What will I do after this? … I was in and out and played 60 games and the lustre had worn off a little bit going into my last season, probably last two seasons to be honest. I'd had this thing that I'd always said look if I pop this shoulder again that's it … I'd done a full pre-season and I'd had a good pre-season, and then the first few games, my groins just started to hurt and I just remember tweaking my shoulder a bit, but I didn't tell anyone because I … didn't want to face that … this is how bad my shoulder was, I stood the mark and the ball, it was a heavy ball, it was a wet day and I had my arms up and the ball cannoned into my arm and my shoulder dislocated and I

sort of bent over and I just sort of pulled it a bit and then it slips back in and just ran around for about 10 minutes going oh that's it, fuck this, I'm over this, I'm over this battle, I'm battling something that won't work for me and at what point am I going to listen to that? … so I walked off, I iced up, I think I said to [the trainer] "that's it."

Participants argued that when a career ending injury occurs it takes time to come to terms with this injury, but once they perceived themselves to have "mentally dealt with it," the decision to retire became easier. Participants still agreed, however, that there are a number of emotions that are associated with retirement, and that accepting that an injury has forced them into retirement did not ease the emotional side. One of the men claimed:

When I injured myself I realised yep ok I'll make a decision on my retirement, it's been lots of fun my career, I couldn't ask for more, no regrets, had a good balance between life, study, football throughout the period, got a lot of other things and it's time to move on and once I mentally got my head around that … it was quite easy. It was very emotional though, presenting to the players at the start in front of everyone else, that was always going to be hard, but as hard as that was to get through, I got through that and prepared for the finals and it was a bit of a bitter finish, but I was happy to get back … to the MCG and finish my career, albeit a disappointing game.

Retirement transition

Some of the men in this research stated that football clubs encourage outside interests, such as studying at university or personal development courses, in order to prepare for life after football. It was contended that this is one area the football clubs do well, particularly when compared to other sports, from which it was

perceived as being more difficult to transition into retirement. One of the participants stated:

> There's opportunities and we have a day off a week and the player welfare guys, what I like about it was generally people that come out the other end they come out better and they do ok for themselves. Now you don't meet too many players who are drunken old bitter footballers. You still see that in other sports, so I think football's well ahead of other sports in preparing players for the end of their career. Do they do it perfectly? No, but do they do it better than cricket, for example? Yes.

Whether retirement was voluntary or involuntary, all of the men in this research admitted to having a range of difficulties adjusting to retirement. Such difficulties ranged from perceived minor adjustments to quite severe issues. One of the more common challenges was that in leaving a football club, the structured life of a footballer in terms of routine is no longer present. The men often stated that upon leaving the football club they lose contact with their former teammates, and as a result lose that sense of belonging through being part of a team. This contributes to the challenges in making the transition out of elite sport. If the men had returned to a lower grade of football where they had many friends, this was argued to make the transition easier:

> It was a pretty big shock from getting something that you wanted, you'd trained for so long and then to have it taken away, it takes a fair while to just accept that you're not going to be playing AFL footy anymore. My career wasn't very long, but it definitely does take a while to realise what you've got, and I suppose I'm lucky because I had a very strong club to come back to with a lot of mates, so it was a bit easier for me.

A few participants argued that voluntarily retiring from football would make the transition into life after football easier, because many of those who have been

delisted still perceive themselves as being able to contribute to a team. One of the men who did retire voluntarily reflected on those who are not so fortunate:

Oh yeah absolutely, it would be hugely frustrating if you felt you were still capable and you could still play and had something to offer and that was taken away from you. I understand how that would feel, the incompleteness of that, but I was at the other end of the spectrum where I … felt as if I got a couple of extra years as opposed to a couple too short.

Another recognised that many footballers do not have the opportunity to determine the end of their football career, and as such there is a significant period of shock and disappointment. He stated:

If you're lucky enough to put your hand up and say "yeah I'm ready to go" good luck to you, because I think it doesn't happen too often, and those players fortunate enough to do it I think it would make it probably easier, but unless you make that decision it hits you like a ton of bricks, and I would think that even if you make that decision, you go home and you think no more footy, what do I do now? I'm sure players still need that time to adjust whether they make that decision or not.

The retirement transition process and subsequent difficulties for some was short-lived, but for others lasted for up to two years. The initial months following retirement were perceived as being the hardest, because players were more acutely aware that their former teammates were still training without them. Often, if the men had not prepared for life after football by doing personal development courses, studying at university or developing business interests, a period of self-reflection was common. During this period a loss of confidence was experienced, while the men reflected on what skills they might have outside of being a footballer. Given that confidence is an important aspect of masculine identity, the retirement transition process can also force a reconstruction of masculinity for

retired footballers. Many of the men expressed the perception that transitioning out of elite sport caused them to question what abilities they had and whether they could be successful at another career. This lead to a period of reconstruction in terms of 'who' the men are. The men all agreed that being a footballer contributes significantly to their identity as men and so when football is no longer prominent in their lives, redefining who they are is common.

> Probably the first six months were hard, especially the first two or three months … just to find yourself again and know what you're good for, you didn't know what you were good for anymore or what you're going to do, so it's pretty emotional. Even now when a weekend comes around you think well I normally play footy on the weekends, so it's not right out of my system. I'm a bit like a horse when it gets near a racecourse it starts to sweat up … when I hit the weekend it's like "that's right I don't play footy anymore I'm free," so it takes a long time to adjust.

Another player observed:

> You felt depressed because that was all you were good at and you just didn't know what to do with yourself anymore, so you didn't feel a part of anything, didn't know what you were good for anymore, so it's a pretty depressing feeling.

Many of the men, like this participant, admitted to going through a period where they were angry or depressed, and as a result regretted some of their actions. Some recognised that men often do not share what they are feeling and do not show emotions, which led to them trying to adjust to the end of their careers as footballers through other means. One of the men admitted:

> At the time you try and be 'gung ho' about it, but 'nah' it shook the crap out of me, made my life pretty ordinary for six months and looking back on it now I

should have seen someone because I had a really bad time for a good three or four months.

Interestingly, one of the aspects of football the participants described missing the most was the sense of belonging. Some of the men admitted to attempting to replace football through excessive alcohol consumption and having sex with numerous women. The men observed that 'losing the plot' is common in the transition period out of elite Australian Rules football, and that many footballers deny they are having a difficult transition. It is only later that men can admit they should have sought assistance during the retirement period. The retirement transition period was described as a painful process, and as admitting pain is often perceived as admitting weakness or vulnerability (Courtenay 2000), the men attempted to get through this period independently. In many cases, this lead to self-destructive behaviours, which the men later recognised as problematic:

> It felt really painful when they started training again and I was just getting drunk and I was mucking around a bit with [girls] and yeah it was really hard, and I think I knew that deep down I didn't want to face the football season being in Adelaide for the first time after seven years, … not doing it, so I think my instincts were really right to get away, run away, but that was healthy. … what I missed was the team aspect.

Some of the men had gained tertiary qualifications during their football career giving them an alternative career to begin soon after retiring. However, even those who had been preparing for life after football found the retirement transition period difficult. Often men had perceived themselves as being able to play football "forever", and so a feeling of loss is experienced when the end of a career comes. One of the men claimed:

I was probably like most other football players and wanting to just make it last forever, but that's not realistic … I was probably a bit more mature so I was able to deal with it reasonably well, but it was still hard. … it really was devastating, it was really quite difficult and being a fairly emotional player, I didn't cry or anything, but at the end of the day it was very disappointing and it can take a little while to deal with it.

A few of the men argued they did not experience depression. These men stated that confidence and belief in who they were contributed to their ability to transition out of football. However, they did admit to being angry for a time after leaving the AFL system, but they did not perceive themself as being depressed:

I don't reckon I did. I don't know, put it this way depression can be a couple of things, and one can be that you want to hurt yourself, right, but I never felt that way. I wanted to hurt someone else, but I don't think so, I think I was pretty good. I got on the wagon and just believed that … I was on the right path, I just had to bear with it. I don't think I had depression or got depressed.

Some perceived their retirement transition as relatively unproblematic because the end of their athletic career was relatively expected. This is particularly so for those who had not played elite football for a long period of time due to significant long-term injuries. The period of recovery from the injuries allowed them to remain around the club with their teammates, though they did not hold a position in the playing side; players argued that the retirement process was made easier because of this non-playing time with the team. One of the men argued:

It was an interesting one because I had two years off so I sort of stopped before I stopped. I had it on my mind for a fair way out that I didn't want to continue to put my body in that sort of pain, so it was a bit of a relief. I had two years where I was not really a footballer prior to retiring, so it wasn't really that difficult for me. I was pretty lucky.

All of the men stated that football was a very significant part of their life, but for some, particularly for those who were forced into retirement through delisting, the transition period was dominated by feelings of dissatisfaction with the AFL system and the end of their football careers. Some admitted to not being able to watch football for a period of time while they adjusted to not playing at the elite level anymore:

> Well you've just lost your dream, your dream's been taken away, you don't feel anything because you're numb, and you go through this state of mind that, well I did anyway, that you hate football, especially AFL, I didn't watch it for two years after I got delisted, because I just thought the system can't treat you that way when you've worked so hard at something, how can they take it from you? When I saw other players that weren't as good ability wise, but they were still on the list, or on another list, I lost all faith in AFL football because I thought well that's exactly wrong.

Another acknowledged:

> I was a bit bitter that's why I had a shocking four years and I just didn't enjoy football and I didn't want to watch AFL football and just didn't believe in the system, I suppose I was a bit bitter, but I was bitter at myself as well as bitter at the AFL system, but I wasn't bitter at football in general. I was bitter at the AFL system because I just thought it was a meat market.

Others had anticipated the possibility of delisting and had a realistic appraisal of the AFL system and the possible outcomes. This however, did not lessen the feeling of disappointment when delisting eventuated. Those who perhaps had expected they would be delisted argued they were slightly more prepared than those who were surprised to be delisted. An important aspect of masculinity is being in control, and as such, while the men could not control the timing of their retirement, they suggested through having goals and a plan for what they would

do *if* their contract was not renewed, they were more prepared, thus maintaining the feeling of being in control:

> Look I probably went through a bit of, not depression, but I was pretty upset obviously, but in saying that I probably saw the writing on the wall and I was a lot better prepared than some of the other players that have and will be delisted. I had goals and an action plan in place if it did happen, which it did, so I think I was in a lot better position than a lot of other people.

The majority of men alluded to the transition period lasting between several months to years. This reinforces Kelly and Hickey's (2010) notion that retiring from football should not be viewed as a single moment, but rather a process. Many of the men admitted to being depressed, angry and bitter at the cessation of their football careers; however they argued that the bitterness was not a lasting feeling, and that by through working through the difficult times they found a new perspective:

> For the first couple of years yeah definitely it felt bitter, thinking that you weren't given an opportunity or something just went wrong and you don't think you were done right by, but after a while after you start growing up a bit you can start to see reasons why it happened, and probably why you're still not playing AFL footy.

In order to successfully transition into retirement from AFL football, some of the participants suggested that one of the most important aspects was to have good support from family and friends to help them through the tough period. Courtenay (2000) stated that men are often reluctant to seek medical assistance, as it can be a threat to their masculinity to admit vulnerability. For a few of the men in the current research, seeking assistance from a sports psychologist was an important part in the transition out of Australian Rules football. Therefore, while the men

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recognised that many men do not discuss difficulties in their lives, talking to an unbiased person such as a psychologist was described as beneficial in the transition process:

> I found it very tough. Just speaking to people, that's what I had to do, I had to speak to people, you talk to your wife and family and that's great, I'm thankful for that, but I really thing speaking to someone unbiased in the situation was important, so having my sports psychologist, she was very good, because it's very easy to see everything that's wrong with it, but you need that reinforcement that there is life after footy and there's some positives, you got some good skills and you need to do this and how about doing this? It's just talking about it because you bottle it all in and it can be quite stressful, but talking to someone about that was important, especially about other options that you can do with your life after footy.

One of the fundamental characteristics of hegemonic masculinity is self-reliance (Courtenay 2000). While some of the men in this research argued that a good support network is crucial to making a successful transition out of elite Australian Rules football, others maintained that a support network is important. Ultimately, retiring footballers described the need to overcome the difficulties individually, reinforcing the importance of self-reliance to men. Responses included:

> Yeah it's pretty good, if you've got a good friend supporter base, that comes in handy definitely, but at the end of the day have got to be mentally strong to overcome it; you can only do it, I think, and be ready to move on.

Participants contended that if retiring footballers had a 'good' attitude and personality, they would more successfully make the transition out of elite sport than someone with a 'poor' attitude. Thus, characteristics that are fundamental to hegemonic masculinity, such as mental strength, self-reliance and confidence, are

the same that retiring footballers draw on in order to successfully make the transition out of elite sport. Participants asserted:

> Good people around you and just people believing in you and having a shoulder to cry on and just someone to talk to, just good family members and good friends and eventually you find your path. If you went in with a good attitude and a good personality you're always going to come out of it with the same, and I think eventually you find what you're looking for and you move in the right direction again.

Experience in other areas outside of football also made the transition into the workforce easier, again reinforcing the importance of developing skills away from football during one's football career. One participant observed:

> I think it was a combination of having some previous employment prior to that, so working in the formative years when it wasn't fully professional … that made it not as difficult.

Some of the men in this research played football in the early stages of the national AFL competition, which, as mentioned above, was when support networks such as the AFL Players' Association were still in development. For these men, then, retiring from football, particularly through delisting, was argued to be significantly more difficult than it is today. This is because players were not prepared for life after football in the same way that players are today. In that era, if a player was delisted their contract was not paid out, and financial difficulties were a common experience. The participants highlighted the importance of the AFL Player's Association, recognising in particular that there is now a retirement fund to assist retiring or delisted players financially in the transition out of football. When this player retired, financial assistance was not offered, making the transition period even more difficult:

> We basically had nothing. They didn't even pay out contracts back then they just, two year contract, six months in, sack you.

> It's a lot different to what it is now, and that's a good thing, because I never want to put anyone through what I did, that was horrible.

The instigators of retirement from AFL have been discussed above as they influence the ease of transition into retirement. These factors also appear to impact on footballers' continued association with the club and their teammates. If a player was delisted, it was contended that it would be more difficult to return to the club socially, as many harbour feelings of bitterness towards those they hold responsible for their delisting. One of the men stated:

> I think that it impacts to returning to that environment afterwards, and maybe that's why I stayed involved initially for a couple of years, but … some past players still don't want to come back to the club because there are some people there that were involved in their sacking or delisting … that's the mindset of some, but certainly not the mindset of myself.

Another participant recalled attending an event after retiring from football, and the changes that occur as new players come through:

> I just felt that I wanted to do something again, and you wanted to stay in touch with the club and through roles I had been able to, but there was probably one event one night that I was at, and it was just significant to me that I'd been out for a couple of years and things had moved on, so you just had to let that real close player relationship go.

Whether retirement from elite AFL football is forced or is voluntary players experience a significant period of adjustment. For some, this period is one of anticipation about what the future holds, but for others it can be an extremely difficult period, particularly if they still perceive themselves as still having an AFL career. During this period it is particularly important for retiring footballers

to have support groups around them to assist in the transition. For some this may
be family and friends, but for others professional assistance may be required.
While all of the footballers admitted to experiencing various challenges in the
initial stages of retirement from football, all also perceived these difficulties as
temporary while they redefined their lives away from football.

Employment

Although the male breadwinner role is said to be in decline (Lewis 2001), that is
not the case within this sample group. All participants outlined the importance of
having employment in order to provide for their families, suggesting that for men
it is still crucial to be the primary financial provider. The dedication of these men
towards their work was argued to be for the benefit of their family, highlighting
the significance of the male provider role:

> Oh definitely I think having a job's important, you need to do something
> during the day and have some sort of structure in your life, and you need to be
> able to earn money to provide for yourself and your family.

After retiring from elite sport the importance of a subsequent career path is
therefore significant for one's identity. One participant detailed the value of
maintaining a team environment after retiring from football:

> The most significant thing is … trying to replicate that team environment in a
> way. It will never be the same and I'm totally aware of that, but also the
> routine comes with … the ability to focus on a particular project or deadline
> … the rewards that comes with that, the ability to communicate with people …
> is obviously important so that's the most important thing to me in terms of a
> job and obviously … the financial rewards are very important as well.

In light of the importance these men place on employment, being delisted from an AFL club was particularly disappointing. Participants described the need to find another job quickly in order to support their families. One participant stated:

> I guess for me it was supporting my family … I needed to find another job … but … pretty quickly I found my feet … and was able to support my family well.

Since retiring from AFL football, all of the men in this research had entered a new vocation. When discussing the possibility of losing their current job participants had mixed responses. Some argued that because of their profile as an AFL footballer, they would not be concerned with not being able to find another job quickly. Many of the men expressed that the confidence they have in themselves would help them to regain employment quickly, reinforcing the notion that confidence is an important aspect in the construction of masculinity for this group of men. One participant stated:

> I'd feel confident enough in myself that I could get something else no worries. I've got a lot of confidence in myself that I'm doing a good job and I could get into something else pretty quickly. So I wouldn't take it mentally as a real kick that I'm not good and I'm useless and that sort of stuff. I've always had a lot of self-confidence, belief in myself, so it wouldn't be a big issue for me to do something else.

Others admitted that losing their current job would be devastating and would make them feel inadequate as a man, again highlighting the significance of employment to masculine identity. Participants stated that, as men they 'should' have employment; losing their job would be 'shattering.' Particularly in the current economic climate, the men declared it would be difficult to find another job.

In addition to the impact on confidence, participants argued that having employment creates a balance in one's life, and losing their job would upset this balance; they anticipated a difficult time as they tried to regain this balance. This suggests that employment is a significant way through which men can be in control, which, as discussed above, is an important characteristic in the construction of masculinity (Kimmel 2007). One of the men suggested:

> I think you would feel inadequate, I really do. You know … if you couldn't … keep your family … in what they're used to … I would certainly feel inadequate, no doubt. Is that being over masculine? … I certainly wouldn't want to experience it.

For many families a duel income is required. The perception held by the participants that men should be the primary financial provider of the family extends to attitudes about women earning more than their partners, which for some men directly impacts upon their masculinity. One of the men admitted:

> What would make me feel less masculine? Certainly if I had to rely on my wife to earn the money. I still think that comes back to that and that's an age old thing and it's probably old fashioned, but I think if I had to live … off my wife I would feel inadequate.

Kelan (2008) and Russell (1999) suggested that for many men their employment comprises much of their identity and as such, unemployment may lead to difficulties in constructing an alternate identity. Many of the men in the current research admitted to being defined by their job, and that work took priority in their lives. This indicates the importance both of the male breadwinner role, and of having employment for this group of men:

> Unfortunately I'm still … work first, which is football, and I say unfortunately, because I don't want it to be like that, and maybe I'm ready to

have some kids and do all that sort of stuff, who knows … I feel like I've sacrificed a lot for work … my work defines just about everything about me.

Thus, employment and masculinity are inextricably linked. Losing one's job would not only be devastating from a financial point of view, but also to one's masculinity. However, as some of the men have suggested, one of the characteristics developed by being an AFL footballer is confidence, and as such, the impact on one's masculinity was argued to be temporary, as would be unemployment itself:

Be devastating. … I don't think long term it would make much of a difference to me, but I think I'd be devastated because of what that meant for your pride and your performance.

For some of the men, being unemployed was linked with being lazy, suggesting that it is a natural expectation for men to work. One of the men stated:

I hate dole bludgers, I hate people that do nothing … my dad used to say … the harder you try the easier it gets, so it doesn't fall in your lap, that's my motto, so if you really want something go for it. I mean that's how I was brought up … don't make excuses and do something about it.

Another reiterated:

I've always been someone that's had more than one job, I've always kept myself busy working. I just find myself as someone that's a hard worker … so I think having a job is very important, and very important when you're playing sport as well … you've got to have that level of discipline put into your lifestyle that you can't just go and play football and so you can't sit at home all day and wait to go to training, I think that's a lazy lifestyle … you're not going to get a lot out of life when you get to 40/45 and all of a sudden you've got nothing because you weren't prepared to do the hard yards when you were young, so I think working is very important.

Some of the participants described being an AFL footballer as the 'perfect' job, and life after footballer has provided new challenges for participants who are striving for the same feelings AFL football gave them, in their new occupation. One man claimed:

> Ah look it's hard … it's like I've had the dream job for 10 years and now I've had to go back a way, but I think what's motivating me is to find a job or a role or a position that gets close to that, so in a way it's probably … pushing me to find something that I really will enjoy/love doing … so I probably won't stop trying to find that the next 20 or 30 years I suppose, because it was like a dream job.

Thus the new challenges were not perceived negatively, but rather as a motivating factor to find the replacement for life as a footballer:

> It's more of a challenge because I'm doing stuff that's not the perfect job or my dream job, so it's not challenge to get out of bed and get to work, it's just a challenge to me to think about what next.

Another participant viewed the employment challenges as a positive experience in life after football, because it is an opportunity to achieve new things and be successful. The career of an athlete is relatively short, and so footballers enter retirement at an earlier age than those in other occupations. As one footballer argued, being able to enter a new vocation allows an opportunity for football to not be the only thing they achieve in their lives. He stated:

> I don't want the best thing I ever did in my life to be over by the time I'm 31. I'd like to think the best thing is going to be somewhere down the track, so I'd hate to think that was it.

Life is brilliant

All of the footballers declared they are happy with their lives since retiring from football. While there are aspects of the sporting life they miss, such as the financial rewards, the huge crowds and their teammates, life after football has brought new pleasures, and as such all of the footballers described their lives as being 'great', 'brilliant' and 'sensational'. This was a typical response:

Life's brilliant, yeah … my life is brilliant … I love my life … not many down points in my life.

The demands of being an AFL footballer include abstaining from alcohol during the training week, and as such many of the men in this research admitted that being able enjoy a drink during the week was one of the benefits of life after football. As put by one participant:

It's brilliant, absolutely sensational. I still get so excited when I have a couple of beers on a Friday after work. I think what footy does is it teaches you to treasure the simple things that you can't do necessarily … you crave normality … I'm more happy now than I was when I was playing football by a mile. … I read. I go on holidays to different places … I drink when I want to drink …

Many described their lives after football as being as busy, or even busier than when they played AFL football. Many are in the process of setting up new businesses, completing tertiary qualifications or have young families. One participant stated:

It's really busy, I love it, it's probably sometimes too busy … I have two beautiful children, I love spending time with them, love spending time with my wife, enjoy catching up with friends, family … we enjoy going out, we

enjoy going to friends' house and sitting around and having dinner and drinking red wine.

Another concurred:

Life for me now is pretty good … the world's changed a lot in the last 12 months financially and that's put a bit of pressure on … but I've got two young kids who are fit and healthy and going well, got a beautiful wife … I'm very busy now that I've got lots of businesses and … I do a lot for charity, so I'm probably busier than I've ever been, but in different ways.

Many of the men in this research stated life after football has provided new challenges, and that their competitive spirit allows them to confront these challenges. One of these challenges is coming to terms with the end of their football career.

Well life's great, but you have your moments you know … I've finally come to terms with what are my overriding factors in retirement … it's hard to explain, you miss catching up with your best mates every day and you miss running out, running out in front of a hundred thousand people at the MCG, you miss the attention … it's like that saying you don't know how important something is until it's gone, no matter how much you appreciate it whether it's family or friends or, or football.

Another area that participants spoke about as a challenge to enjoy and apply their competitive spirit to was new business ventures:

I own my own business now, so I'm going to run that to the best of my ability … excited that … it is my challenge and knowing that it's my business.

Another confirmed:

It's challenging because of that fact that I keep putting myself in a position of having different businesses, juggling football, juggling family and friends. I feel like I'm a glutton for punishment, but in a funny way I do enjoy it … I do

enjoy the challenges … nothing makes me more happy than going out and getting another challenge.

Just as playing elite football was seen to be the perfect job, being an AFL footballer was described as the perfect life, and as such, one of the challenges of retirement for some of the men has been to find a replacement for the exciting life they experienced through sport. This is alluded to by one footballer, who stated:

Rather than just been thrown back into the world, I've been able to just ease myself back into it with different roles and different things … my life at the moment is good. I'm happy with what I'm doing … I'm still striving to find the one thing that will, not the one thing, there are probably a few things, that will get me to experience what I had already for 10 years.

Despite still searching for a replacement for football, most participants argued that their lives after football are 'brilliant', and they are enjoying their retirement. Some are still involved in football, either playing or coaching, however most do not dwell on their own playing days, but rather have moved onto new experiences. As put by one participant:

I love my job, great family, got a nice house, got everything I need, not rolling in it, but I don't want for anything. Would I change anything? Oh maybe, but maybe not too. I think everything that happens, happens for a reason, I've come out the other end OK.

Another stated:

I'm a lot happier 'cause AFL takes a bit of your life away at that time, but you do it at that time because you want to do it at that time. Now you can do a lot more with mates and family and all that sort of stuff, so yeah I'm … little bit happier now after I've done what I've done, so if I didn't do that I would be thinking what have I done in life, so least I can say I've done that, now my next chapter's this … which I'm happy about.

Future

All of the men in this research were optimistic about the future and life after football. Some declared they would like to stay involved in football, whether that be in a coaching role or through watching their children playing sport. One participant stated:

> I think I'd still be actively involved in sport, whether that's playing or just watching or … helping my kids, you know they're into basketball, Luke's into footy … more of the same for me I hope.

Another claimed:

> Oh I love footy and I will stay involved at some level, but I guess there probably will come a time where, I'm going to want to have a break, so we'll wait and see.

Life as a footballer has already been identified as a unique experience. Participants stated that even though current interests outside of football may lead them away from the game for a number of years, they anticipated a return to football in order to reclaim the lifestyle. This indicates the importance AFL football holds in the lives of this group of men. One of the men declared:

> I always said I'd go away for a couple of years and pursue certain opportunities and then maybe step back into AFL football, it's something to think about, because nothing compares to the cut and thrust of AFL football.

However, others thought they would prefer to stay away from football:

> I've had enough of footy, yeah don't want to be involved in footy, I want my weekends to myself for the rest of my life.

Many of the men perceive the future as being an opportunity to experience new things that were not possible whilst playing AFL football. Mostly, participants

were excited about the opportunities to travel to other countries to experience different cultures:

> The future will all be about opportunity. Opportunity with my family to travel and experience different destinations, to contribute to causes that I'm passionate about … spend a lot of time on family and friends and influence young people in a positive way through different mentoring opportunities … probably about balance, about doing the things that I love, that's the attitude.

Some of the men admitted to not planning too far in advance, preferring instead to wait and see what happens in the future, which was exciting for them. This suggests that for some men 'living in the now' continues to be an important aspect of their masculine identity. Not planning too far in advance means that the men are focussed on the current moment. The lack of planning provides excitement for the men, which can give their life meaning as they anticipate what comes next. As put by one participant:

> God only knows. I've just started up a new business venture … family couldn't be happier, and friends, I guess there's got to be a time where I just maybe pull the reigns back a little bit but … it's just exciting … I live for excitement so that's the way I am.

Another stated:

> I'm not a big planner, I don't really plan too far down the track … we've got some goals with this business that we've got for this next year … football wise I do enjoy coaching, and if an opportunity arises in that field I will probably take it and push on and do some more stuff with football and coaching … depending on the level it's at … but the future's my kids … my wife and whatever comes next I suppose.

Summary

The concept of masculinity is continually changing. However, the traditional perception of an Australian male including ruggedness, muscularity, strength and aggression, is personified in the image of the elite Australian male footballer. Through participation in contact sports such as football, one's masculinity is reaffirmed. The adulation from supporters for elite sportsmen creates a hierarchy by which to measure one's position within the team, and also in society. This perception however, is a social construction based upon the societal expectations of how men 'should' act. The footballers perceived as setting a good example for young boys are attributed hero status, reinforcing their position at the top of the hierarchy. This perception of masculinity, however, does not extend to male athletes competing in sports that are traditionally perceived as for females, such as gymnastics and diving. Due to the lack of contact force, male participants in these 'femininised' sports are not attributed the same masculine kudos as those who compete in perceived masculine sports such as Australian Rules football. The behaviours that are expected and rewarded within the sporting context, such as physical aggression, strength and the denial of pain, are a reflection of socially accepted masculine behaviours. Thus, a fundamental characteristic in the perception of masculinity in Australian Rules football and other masculinised sports is the ability to withstand and overcome pain. The denial of pain, therefore, is closely associated with success, as those who are able to overcome pain and injury and compete on the sporting field are argued to be more successful than those who cannot. When sporting careers are finished, the denial of pain remains a significant factor in the construction of masculinity. Such is the normalisation

of acceptance of pain and injury during athletic careers, in retirement the men continue to perceive pain as an expected part of daily living.

Success in post-sporting career employment is one of the fundamental ways through which masculinity is reaffirmed, suggesting the importance of a subsequent career path is crucial. This can be problematic for footballers who are delisted or forced into retirement through injury, as an alternative career has not yet been considered. The demands of being an elite Australian Rules footballer can subordinate all other demands, including further study or skill development and as such, those who are not prepared for life after football experience more difficult transitions into retirement. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding retirement from Australian Rules football, and despite the difficulties making the transition out of elite sport, after a period of time, a reconstruction of masculinity outside of the sporting context reveals the same underlying principles of traditional orthodox masculinity that are manifested through participation in sport, such as the denial of pain and the suppression of emotions. The socially endorsed and reinforced notion that life as an elite Australian Rules footballer constitutes the 'perfect' job is shared by the athletes. However, retirement from sport encourages new challenges and alternative pathways to success, continuing to reinforce hegemonic masculine ideals.

Chapter 6

Discussion

This chapter will discuss the themes arising from the data in relation to the relevant literature and themes. Australian Rules football is a masculinised domain, and as such this discussion focuses on developing an understanding of what masculinity means for men who have gone into retirement following a career in the AFL and the impact that this meaning has on their lives. It is important to note that many of the issues experienced by elite sportsmen, such as being willing to play in pain and with injury are not unique to masculinised sports, but may also be evident in the attitudes of female athletes. However, this is a study on men, and as such this discussion will identify the significance of sport to men and reflect the literature on men and sport. This research aims to understand the meaning of masculinity for these Australian Rules footballers in retirement and how their lives as elite sportsmen have influenced their construction of masculinity.

The footballers in this research all described sport as something "they just did." This reinforces the culturally endorsed notion that 'normal' boys like outdoor activities and sports, and that boys who do not enjoy sports may be ostracised (Whannel 2002; Welland 2002; Messner 1992). Further, Messner (1992) argues that ability or inability in sport becomes a crucial criterion by which boys are judged by their peers. Boys that do not display natural athletic abilities are often abused, marginalised and perceived as "not doing *boy* right" (Tischler & McCaughtry 2011 p. 41). Therefore, as Lilleaas (2007) concluded, through competitive sports young men do not merely learn a sport, they enter an

organisational institution that maintains hegemonic masculine ideals, and reinforces the notion that one can be a "better man" through training in contact sports. The progression then, into sport is encouraged by family members, and in particular by fathers and brothers, as the natural thing to do (Messner 1992). For participants in the current research, sport was described as being 'in their blood,' and something they did from an early age, thereby reinforcing the seeming naturalness of boys' involvement in sport. In addition, some of the men in the current research perceived masculinity as participating in sports, particularly those which are perceived as being masculine sports, reinforcing the notion that young boys and men are expected to be interested in, and even good at, sport. Burstyn (1999 p. 254) stated that sport is "the most powerful confirmation of masculinity that any male can attain in our culture," a view that is supported by the current research through the men's recollections of sport being affirmed as "natural" during childhood. However, Messner (1992) cautions that possessing the skills to become a successful athlete could just as easily be applied to other professions, and therefore questions the adoption of the 'natural' athlete attitude. Instead, Messner (1992) describes involvement in sport as a result of the interactions young men have with social institutions and other people. Regardless, the men in this research all outlined involvement in sport as an important part of their lives, and a significant contributor to their identity as men.

Perceptions of masculinity

The men in this research generally had difficulty describing what it means to be masculine. Many admitted they had not previously considered or talked about being masculine, and therefore did not know how to explain it. This is consistent

with Drummond (2005), who outlined the difficulties men have in describing masculinity. An important concept in the discussion of masculinities is the notion of *doing* masculinity rather than *being* masculine (Drummond 1996). For some of the men, playing and being successful at sports constituted what it means to be masculine, which demonstrates this notion of *doing* masculinity. The link between sport and the construction of masculinity is reinforced early in young boys' lives, as they learn the high value society places on being 'good' at sport. Participation and success in highly masculinised sports that emphasise power, aggression and violence, heightens the social acclaim received (Drummond 2008). Thus, boys are quickly socialised to attribute sports as an important initiation into manhood.

It is important to distinguish that *doing* masculinity through participation in sport is holds most true for involvement in perceived masculine sports, such as Australian Rules football and Rugby, rather than perceived feminine sports, such as diving and netball. The gendered nature of sports described by Koivula (2001) is based upon the characteristics of different sports, and is largely a social construction. Sports in which heavy body contact is common are perceived as being appropriate for men to participate in, while those that display visual attractiveness and gracefulness are portrayed as feminine sports (Koivula 1995; 2001). Therefore, it is arguable that in linking sports participation with masculinity, the men in the current research are referring to the participation in perceived masculine sports, rather than participation in *any* sport as being masculine. Koivula (2001) also states that a sport may be considered masculine if it reinforces the solidarity of men as being separate to women. The gendered nature of sports was confirmed by the men in the current research, who described

Australian Rules football as fundamentally a man's sport, due to the high incidence of body contact and the significant risk of injury. Many of the men questioned the physical ability of women to play AFL football, which perpetuates traditional societal perceptions of gender roles, in which men are perceived as being physically stronger than women. While it was recognised that there are roles within the AFL clubs in which females could participate, such as serving on the board of AFL clubs, as well as dieticians and psychologists, these roles are often perceived as belonging within a traditionally feminine domain. Therefore, even though there is a women's Australian Rules football league, and many women are becoming involved in the sport through umpiring, sports training and commentating, the AFL remains dominated by men, reinforcing cultural hegemonic masculine ideals. While participants acknowledged that many women participate in Australian Rules football through spectatorship and playing the game, they maintained that it would be difficult for women to compete at the same level as men, particularly with regard to the physicality of the game. The perception that Australian Rules football is a man's game reinforces the domination of men over women, and in particular physical dominance through the perception that women are weaker than men and are therefore unable to compete at the same elite level as men in the AFL.

While many men highlighted the importance of *doing* masculinity, one of the more common perceptions of masculinity attributed being muscular with masculinity, indicating that the concept of *being* masculine is also important. For these men, the more muscles a man had the more masculine he was perceived to be. This supports earlier work by Drummond (2001; 2005), suggesting that muscles are the sign of masculinity. In light of this perception, the male body

becomes central in the development of masculinity (Drummond 2005). Some of the men in this research recalled being required to maintain a certain body weight and shape in order to play AFL football. For some, the challenge to increase their muscle mass was something on which they thrived. Training one's body has been linked to masculinity, and in particular sportsmen, as a true sportsman is expected to care about his body (Bordo 1990). As Kelly and Hickey (2010) outline,

> The body of an AFL footballer presents itself, and what it can do, as something that can be objectively and scientifically defined, described and developed. It can be made stronger, repaired, trained, cared for, understood by the individual and by others whose job it is to get it out on the field each week (p 31).

For the men in the current research, training and developing their bodies provided an opportunity to challenge themselves in terms of what their bodies could do, thereby not only developing musculature, but also masculinity. Drummond (2002) outlines the construction of the archetypal male body as being muscularity, athleticism and youthfulness, and Kelly and Hickey (2010 p. 32) argue that the soul of a footballer relates to character, attitude, work ethic, courage, and moral judgement. The culture in which footballers are immersed rewards such behaviours, and thus encourages the development of these hegemonic ideals. Therefore, through being willing to develop and maintain their bodies to a certain weight and shape, which displays one's attitude and work ethic, masculine identity can be reinforced. Petersen (1998) outlined a mind/body dichotomy in which the body is viewed in terms of its functional capacity, as strengthening one's body is linked with strengthening one's mind, through the discipline required to develop a masculine physique. This perception is supported

by the current research, as the men described enjoying the challenge to gain muscle mass early in their careers.

Many athletes view their bodies as a machine, so that when their body fails them through pain or injury the athlete can feel betrayed (Messner 1992). In retirement, the men who were heavier than their playing weight expressed disappointment in being criticised by other people for the kilograms they had put on since retiring, as well as a desire to lose the gained weight. These views are consistent with Lilleaas (2007), who found that while male athletes expressed disappointment at gaining weight in retirement, weight reduction was perceived as being for women and not for men, thus reproducing the traditional socially constructed notion that men should occupy space, while women should not (Connell 1983). In retirement, the men are not training as often as when they were playing football, and as such they recognised that changes to their body would occur. These changes highlight the importance of *being* masculine for this group of men, and the perception that a lean male body is closely linked with masculinity. Interestingly, participants admitted to enjoying the relaxed discipline in retirement, in terms of eating and training habits, however, the disappointment over the resulting changes to their body shape remained.

Traditional perceptions attribute physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiersmanship and heterosexuality with masculinity (Trujillo 1991). This was largely supported by the current research, in that the male as breadwinner, the head of the family and involvement in contact sports were associated with masculine identity. While the men indicated that a cultural change in masculinities is occurring, with increased acceptability in current society for men to care about their appearance in terms of fashion and

putting products in their hair, playing contact sports such as Australian Rules football maintains their masculinity according to more traditionally held perceptions. This reinforces the notion that participating in perceived masculine sports is a key area in which young boys and men can demonstrate their masculinity. However, Clarkson (2005) maintains that the emergence of the 'metrosexual' image encourages the replacement of brute force with physical perfection. This can be achieved through sculpting the body to be aesthetically pleasing rather than for strength.

Participants also commonly described masculinity in contrast to femininity, through their attitudes towards the displaying of emotions, which supports previous research on masculinities (Whannel 2002; Connell 1995). Many of the men described being emotionally resilient as a masculine trait, while expressing emotions was perceived as being more feminine. However, the men in this research held clichéd perceptions of emotions, in that the most common emotional behaviours described were crying and hugging. Participants argued that within the football subculture there are certain instances in which crying and embracing teammates are perceived as acceptable behaviours, such as losing grand finals and retiring from football. Lilleaas (2007) found that within the handball sporting culture, men could express emotion to a certain extent. They are allowed to express grief when they lose a match, hold and touch other men's bodies, and they are permitted to be happy and display aggression on the court. However, amongst the sporting culture there is no place for the discussion of more serious circumstances, such as the death of a relative or a relationship break up. The suppression of emotions was found to begin early in boys' childhood, as family members discouraged the showing of feelings by boys. Concealing deep

emotional feelings is not unique therefore, to Australian Rules football, but is endorsed throughout the sporting culture, as a way of denying vulnerabilities in the pursuit of success. Seidler (1997) and Lilleaas (2007) claim that as children, boys learn that feelings are irrational and are encouraged instead to focus on success and achievement in order to preserve their masculine image. This perception is culturally endorsed throughout sport, as demonstrated by the current research, in which participants equated displaying emotions with femininity.

Interestingly, while being aggressive on the football field was perceived as being acceptable, even required in Australian Rules football, aggression was not linked with being emotional by the men in the current research. This is consistent with recent research by Grange and Kerr (2010), who found that aggression was typically linked with physical, rather than verbal aggression. Thus, the men held views on emotions that comply with early researchers Brannon and David's (1976) rule of 'no sissy stuff.' This indicates that perceptions in contemporary sport remain consistent with the early research in the area, reinforcing the relevance of Brannon and David's work today, as sportsmen are socialised to accept and abide by the rules they describe, which become important aspects in the development of their masculine identity. Demonstrating an understanding of masculinity as contrasted with femininity, participants described emotions as being typical behaviours culturally associated with women and not with men. Emotions such as showing pain were commonly denied throughout the men's football careers, and there were few occasions that were perceived as being acceptable times in which men could cry. Therefore, emotional resilience remains an important factor in demonstrating masculinity for the men in this research.

Hempill (2002) argued that within the sporting culture aggression and violence are central features, because winning and dominating one's opponent are crucial. This is reaffirmed through the majority of men in this research, who described football as an aggressive game. Some maintained that in order to be successful in sport, aggression is required. The men argued this is not a unique feature of Australian Rules football, but extends to other sports, such as pole-vaulting where athletes 'pump' themself up in order to compete. As success and aggression are invariably linked, and that these are defining characteristics of masculinity, masculine identity is reinforced through sport. Brannon and David's (1976) four rules representing hegemonic masculinity can still be identified throughout the sporting culture in contemporary society. The participants' perception that aggression is required in order to be successful illustrates the 'give 'em hell' and 'be a big wheel' rules that men should exude an aura of manly aggression and take risks, and success and status confer masculinity (Kimmel 2007; Hinojosa 2010). Many of the men in the current research argued that the sporting arena provides an opportunity to play out men's seemingly natural aggression in a 'safe' environment. This attitude supports earlier research by both Messner (1992) and Grange and Kerr (2010) that sporting rules control violence and aggression that is often viewed as naturally occurring. Grange and Kerr (2010) termed this natural aggression as 'sanctioned play aggression,' and support the current research in which participants outlined "controlled aggression" as an integral part of Australian Rules football. The footballers in Grange and Kerr's research (2010) argued that winning the ball in a challenge, being 'hard at the ball' and sanctioned player aggression (physical contact within the rules of the game) are prominent features of AFL football. Young footballers are socialised

through immersion in sport to accept these highly masculinised 'norms.' The men in the current research also outlined the importance of aggression to success in football, within the rules of the game. However, as Messner (2002) warns, this perception ultimately leads to athletes viewing their bodies as a weapon used to defeat an objectified opponent, and to violence against oneself.

Traditional perceptions of masculinity

While many participants expressed having difficulty describing what it means to be masculine, one of the more notable conceptualisations was that of the male as the breadwinner and provider for the family. The men consistently referred to the importance of having an occupation, demonstrating traditionally held perceptions of masculinity. This is consistent with the concept of the 'retributive man,' outlined by Edley and Wetherell (1997), which represents a more traditional male role, including the man as the primary source of income for the family. Recently there has been an increase in the number of single parent families, as well as the desire for dual income families, which has led to the perception that the male breadwinner role is in decline (Lewis 2001; Kelan 2008). However, for many men, the notion of the male as breadwinner is still significant, as demonstrated by the footballers in this research, who admitted that being unemployed would be devastating to who they are as men. Since retiring from the AFL, the prospect of losing their current employment led some men to state they would be "inadequate" as men, should they be forced to rely on their female partner's income. This reinforces research by both Russell (1999) and Kelan (2008), who argued that for many men, much of their identity is comprised by their

occupation, and should they be unemployed, they may find it difficult to construct and alternative identity. However, for other participants, while having a subsequent occupation following retirement from football was important to them as men, many stated they were completely comfortable with their female partners earning more money than them. This suggests that employment is the more significant factor in the construction of masculinity for some men, rather than the role of the main breadwinner. The socialisation of men to define themselves in terms of their employment begins early in life, as young men learn that they are what they do (Keen 1991). After retiring from Australian Rules football, success in subsequent employment and business interests provides an opportunity for the men to 'do' masculinity failing at business therefore has significant consequences, and participants recognised that it would have a major impact on who they are as men.

Many of the men described AFL football as being the "perfect" job, and all defined themselves as footballers throughout their careers. Kelly and Hickey (2008) stated that the retirement from Australian Rules football must be seen as a process rather than a single moment, in light of the time it can take to adjust to life after football. This extends to beginning a new career, as for many former athletes the problem does not exist in what they *can* do, but what they *want* to do. This perception is supported by the current research, as many of the men admitted that despite finding subsequent employment after retiring from football, they were still searching for a replacement for the 'perfect job' they had as a footballer. This illustrates the significance that sport has in the lives of many men, and in particular elite sportsmen.

Until recently, the workforce has traditionally been perceived as a male domain (Connell 2005). Immersion in the football subculture perpetuates the traditional societal perceptions towards gender roles, with the male as the primary financial provider and the female as caregiver. The participants frequently admitted that while many females are choosing to have careers as well as a family, they also maintain the traditionally assigned female role of caregiver. This was with particular regard to the first five years of a child's life, before going to school. The perception that men have a 'right' to a career ahead of women reinforces hegemonic masculine ideals, and contributes to the subordination of women by men. The increasing need for a dual income in many families, in addition to the changing structures of families has led to a perceived change in the family roles of the male as breadwinner and female as caregiver (Lewis 2008; Kelan 2008). However, for the men in the current research, while their female partners may choose to have a career, they maintain the role of caregiver as well. Thus, the change in family structure has led to an additional role for women as wage earner, while maintaining the family home as well. Many men argued the change in the traditional gender roles includes more men being willing to assist with household duties, such as doing the washing and cleaning. However, these duties are still perceived as female roles, and as such the men in this research demonstrated traditional perceptions of masculinity toward gender roles.

Inclusive masculinity

Emerging conceptualisations from Anderson (2002; 2005; 2008b) suggests the traditional dominance of hegemonic or orthodox masculinity, in which

aggression, homophobia, and misogynistic values are culturally exalted (Connell 1995), may be being challenged by a new inclusive style of masculinity, which is more accepting, open and tolerant. This inclusive masculinity has been evident in some soccer, fraternities and male cheerleading cultures, and may particularly be pertinent for young, white, middle class and educated men (Anderson 2005). Similarly, men in Agnew's research (2007) argued that it is becoming acceptable for men in contemporary Western society to be more concerned with personal grooming, such as wearing fashionable clothes or putting highlights in their hair, indicating the changing nature of masculinities. Further, participants' responses indicate that societal views may be evolving in relation to homosexuality, becoming more open and accepting of gay people than in previous eras (Anderson 2002; 2005; 2007).

While an inclusive style of masculinity is evident through Anderson's research within soccer, fraternities and male cheerleading cultures, and to some degree state level Australian Rules football (Agnew 2007), it is largely not supported by the current research within the elite Australian Rules football culture. Despite recognising the emergence of a metrosexual male image, the men still held traditional ideological values of masculinity. Particularly early in the young men's careers, a misogynistic perception of women was manifested through cultural practices within the AFL. Participants admitted that being single was almost mandatory, and those who were in committed relationships were not revered. This reinforces the hegemonic masculine notion that young men should be interested in heterosexual sexual conquests, as the men were encouraged by teammates to end relationships towards the end of the season in order to "have fun" throughout the off-season with women. Hegemonic masculinity is

constructed through compulsory heterosexuality (Connell 2005), and within the football subculture these socially constructed views are perpetuated within a patriarchal environment.

None of the footballers in this research identified as being gay, and some even stated that it would be extremely difficult for men to be openly gay within the football culture, despite homosexuality being more accepted in Western society. Given that there have not been many (if any) AFL footballers that openly identify as being gay within the Australian Rules football culture, this culture appears to produce and reproduce hegemonic masculinity through its perceived compulsory heterosexuality and subsequent subordination of homosexuality. This is in contrast to Anderson's concept of inclusive masculinities, and more supportive of traditional hegemonic masculine ideals. However, there is some evidence of the changing nature of masculinities within Australian Rules football over the course of an AFL career, as many of the men admitted to being willing participants in the sexual objectification of women early in their careers, but as they matured, both as men and footballers, they changed their perception on women and relationships.

A sense of belonging

It has been argued that while women form meaningful and lasting friendships with other women, men's friendships are often shallow and superficial (Messner 1992; Walker 2004). This perception was supported by some of the men in this research, who claimed that it is easier for men to form superficial relationships with other men than more meaningful ones. Siedler (1997) argues that the

difficulties men have in sharing intimate feelings with other men relate to the

perceived need to be self-reliant and independent in order to maintain images of

masculinity, and to avoid being vulnerable. However, participation through team

sports provides a sense of identity and belonging, with teammates often being

described as 'family', as these are often the closest bonds young men form

outside of their family (Messner 1992; Schrack-Walters et al. 2009; Llopis Goig

2008). In addition, Messner (1992) suggests that team sports allow men to

become close without the fear of intimacy, which can be a threat to masculinity.

However, Swain (1989) warns against the perception that men bond without

intimacy because their friendship is based upon 'doing' things together, rather

than spending time talking about intimate issues. Further, McLaughlin (2004)

describes an alternative style of intimacy between teammates, in terms of

performance. The culture of elite sport discourages talking about personal issues;

however, McLaughlin states that teammates *know* each other intimately as

players, which allows teams to have a strategic advantage over others. The

nonverbal bond between teammates, while impersonal, is extremely intimate and

leads to strong bonds and emotional fulfilment through the experiences of bodily

movement. The men in the current research support the notion that given the

amount of time spent within the football club, teammates become like family. The

combined team effort in the pursuit of success provides an opportunity for the

men to 'do' masculinity together. These views are consistent with Schrack-

Walters et al. (2009), who found that sportsmen construct friendships with

teammates based on the intensive nature of elite competition and the time spent

together. Messner (1992 p. 91), however, argues that the competitive nature of

sports "mediate men's relationships with each other in ways that allow them to

develop a powerful bond, while at the same time preventing the development of intimacy." The footballers in this research all described the friendships they have made through involvement in sport as having significant importance in their lives. It is important to note that close bonds are not formed with every team member, but as the men in this research argued, with two or three other men. The relationships with other teammates are of a more superficial nature within the sporting environment, as they work towards the common goal of a football premiership, 'doing' masculinity together.

Curry (1991) and Messner (1992) argue that the relationships formed within a sporting culture are highly romanticised in society, and can often become problematic as men compete for positions within the team. This contributes to the hierarchy of masculinities within the sporting environment, particularly when some members of the team are attributed 'star status.' The men in the current research described the closest friendships they had formed within the team as being with those who played in similar positions as them, as they often performed similar tasks together in training. This creates a tension between teammates as, while a close bond is formed between the men, they are also competing for the same position in the team. Societal perceptions of masculinity construct men as being more competitive than women (Schrack-Walters et al. 2009). These constructions of masculinity were presented in a positive manner in the current research, as the 'rivalry' between teammates was declared to be a healthy part of sport with the men pushing each other to achieve and improve. This reinforces the notion that men's friendships with other men are frequently based around doing activities together.

Hard work and discipline

Kelly and Hickey (2010 p. 77) stated that "a good attitude towards hard work, perseverance, courage, commitment to a team above the individual" are highly regarded traits within the AFL. The men in the current research supported this perception, suggesting that the way to be accepted by teammates is purely through one's attitude towards training and performance. If the footballers had a strong work ethic, were prepared to accept the substantial risk of injury on the field and were dedicated to the team, they were more likely to gain the respect of their teammates than if they had a poor attitude towards working hard. This view was also expressed through participants in Messner's research (1992), who agreed that new teammates are given respect, but that it has to be earned. This extends to younger team members giving appropriate respect to the more experienced team members by learning from them. Messner (1992) found that there is almost a ritual that dictates the appropriate regard that should be given to experienced team members by the younger men, who should not appear to be too 'cocky' (p. 89). Despite Messner's research being conducted twenty years prior, the current research still reflects similar attitudes, illustrating the relevance of Messner's findings for today's society. The men in the current research alluded to a heightened sense of masculinity when they were first drafted to an AFL team, but that unless these young men first gave respect, they would not earn it. It was acknowledged by some of the men that the significance of demonstrating hard work and discipline is often not understood early in young men's careers, and thus, over time as they become accustomed to the cultural practises within Australian Rules football, they are also socialised into men, through the acceptance of such values. The socially and culturally enacted perceptions on

masculinity place high importance on hard work, persistence and discipline. This is instilled in young boys through sport, which is portrayed as a training ground for the development of masculine identity (Coakley 2009). These values are reflected through Australian Rules football, as all of the participants agreed that above all else, hard work and discipline are the primary means of earning respect from other teammates. This indicates that 'doing' masculinity through training hard and performing on the football field is an important concept for this group of men.

The normalisation of pain and injury as an acceptable career expectation

Playing with pain and injury is a common occurrence in sport, and has a powerful influence on the construction of masculine identity (Young et al. 1994; Messner 1992; 2002; Hempill 2002). Young sportsmen are socialised early into accepting pain and injury, and failing to do so can lead to being ostracised (Roderick et al. 2000; Murphy & Waddington 2007). This perception is supported by the current research, as the footballers recalled idolising team members who had the reputation of being 'tough', and desiring to play in a similar way to their idols. Similarly, the men argued that playing through pain was just something that they did as sportsmen; reinforcing the perception that pain is a 'normal' career expectation. Accordingly, the majority of participants admitted to playing a significant number of games with pain, and that the number of games played in pain each season increased the longer the career.

The enjoyment gained through participating in sport leads to the denial of pain in order to keep one's position in the side. The men did not perceive themselves as being particularly masculine through denying pain in order to compete; they just

'wanted to play'. However, the construction of masculinity is reinforced through the acceptance of the 'pain principle' (Sabo 1980), which continues to be evident in elite competition today. To question the sacrifice of their bodies in pursuit of sporting success risks challenging one's masculinity, as the 'pain principle' socialises men to train their bodies to tolerate pain, and to perceive the endurance of pain as courageous and manly (Sabo 1980; Messner 1990; Fenton & Pitter 2010; Tannenbaum & Frank 2010). This is evident in the current research through descriptions of the adulation given to players who were perceived as being 'tough', and the desire to emulate their success. Other justifications for continually playing in pain included: competition for positions in the side, not wanting to be labelled 'soft', and not wanting to let the team down. These rationalisations are consistent with those in Agnew's research (2007), in which footballers in the South Australian National Football League (SANFL) justified playing in pain or with an injury. The men in this research agreed that one's manhood can be reaffirmed through the acceptance of hard physical contests. Not being prepared to withstand the physicality of contact sports such as football can lead to one's masculinity, as well as one's commitment to the team, coming into question. Nixon's (1992) 'culture of risk' concept extends to the acceptance of pain and injury 'for the good of the team', and is evident in the current research through the footballers' willingness to accept brutal force in the pursuit of team success.

Rossler (2006) determined that often distinctions are made between good and bad pain, and that pain is an acceptable part of competition. However, this is based on the condition that pain has nothing to do with injury. Throughout the men's responses in the current research, there was a clear distinction made between pain

and injury. For most, pain could be overcome, whereas injury was perceived as an unplayable body condition. This is consistent with research by White and Young (1999), Howe (2004) and Rossler (2006), in that pain and injury are often viewed as two separate yet related entities, with injury being a structural breakdown that results in loss of function (Howe 2004). In addition, Rossler (2006) outlined the difference between good pain and bad pain, with training and competition commonly perceived as causing good pain and injuries as causing bad pain. The current research supports this suggestion, as participants consistently referred to challenging oneself and overcoming pain barriers, particularly in gruelling pre-season training, as being a positive manner in which pain is endured. This also becomes a powerful reinforcement of hegemonic masculine ideals, as this conditioning not only assists in the development of a masculine physique and strength, but also encourages mental toughness. This strengthens the mind/body dichotomy outlined in Agnew's (2007) research, in which the body is viewed in terms of its functional capacity, and is a perception common to many athletes (Messner 1992). Demonstrating an indifference to the body's fate through mental toughness can be perceived as bravery (Jefferson 1998), and for the men in this research, being able to overcome physical pain barriers led to increased confidence and provided a challenge through which masculinity could be constructed.

Men are socially constructed to not show pain for fear of being perceived as effeminate (Messner 1992; Kaufman 1994; Courtenay 2000; Tannenbaum & Frank 2010). This attitude is particularly evident in sports, where pain and injury are tolerated as a normal career expectation in the pursuit of success. The willingness of an athlete to sacrifice his body, then, becomes a measure of his

masculinity (Messner 1992; Young et al. 1994). The men in the current research affirmed this attitude, and commonly discussed the widespread practice of remaining on the ground during a game, despite experiencing significant pain. Pioneering research from Nixon (1992) developed the notion of a 'culture of risk', in which accepting pain and injury is 'part of the game', and which socialises young men to withstand pain or ignore the risk of injury. Nixon (1992) argues that this risk culture leads to the perception that tolerating pain and injury is the only option in order to succeed at sport. The current research supports this concept of a 'culture of risk'; participants argued that footballers who could withstand pain the longest would have more successful careers than those who could not. A common attitude was that pain is the determining factor in playing 50 games or 250 games. Pain was commonly viewed as something that could be ignored, and pushing through pain barriers was a significant reinforcer of masculine identity: footballers who could withstand pain were perceived as being 'tough.' This perception is consistent with early research from Iso-Ahola and Hatfield (1986), who determined pain was arguably the determining factor between the successful and the unsuccessful in sports.

Pringle and Markula (2005) determined that the acceptance of pain and injury as a normal career expectation both normalises and problematises injury. This continues into retirement through concerns about pain, injury and health. The conformity to acceptance of pain and injury during sporting careers can often change in retirement, as men no longer have the motivation to prove their masculinity through painful contests that are a common occurrence in contact sports (Pringle & Markula 2005). However, given the dominance of the injury normalisation process in sport, retired sportsmen often regard themselves as

'lucky' to escape permanent injury (Pringle & Markula 2005). This was a very common perception in the current research as participants, despite often requiring corrective surgery as a result of injuries sustained during their careers, declared they had been fortunate with regard to the condition of their bodies. This is indicative of the mechanistic construction of the body held by many men that, "if it breaks down, then just fix it up again" (Drummond 2008). Many participants discussed loss of function in joints and the experience of some long-term pain, yet still regarded themselves as being in reasonable physical condition. Kaufman (1994) and Courtenay (2000) argue that the denial of pain and physical discomfort is deeply entrenched in hegemonic masculine ideals, as to acknowledge its existence is to admit weakness and vulnerability. In addition, Smith et al. (2006) determined that current stereotypes of men encourage delaying seeking help, as to seek help can challenge men's independence and self-reliance. The men in the current research do not deny the existence of their physical pain after retiring from elite sport; however, they do reject its severity claiming that they are 'lucky' to not have more serious ailments. This serves as a powerful reinforcer of their masculinity in retirement from elite sport, as they continue to regard their pain as something that can be ignored.

Pringle (2009) argues that athletes should not be perceived as being active participants in the acceptance of pain and injury as a normal career expectation, but as active participants in the pursuit of success who enjoy playing sport. For the men in the current research, the acceptance of pain and the possibility of sustaining a significant injury were viewed as an acceptable risk, given the benefits they attained through participation in elite sport. All of the men voiced the opinion that they would not hesitate to 'do it all again', as the enjoyment they

received from belonging to a team and the successes they had experienced far outweighed any physical discomfort in retirement.

One of the key characteristics in hegemonic masculinity is risk-taking (Courtenay 2009). The extent to which men embrace taking risks can be important in the construction of masculine identity. Courtenay (2009) stated that men demonstrate the dominant 'norms' of masculinity when they display risky behaviours. For footballers, this was perpetuated through their involvement in sport, viewing the risk of sustaining a significant long-term injury as small, and justifying participation in highly masculinised, contact sports by the benefits they received. This behaviour also supports Granito's (2002) argument that the 'here and now' attitude is rewarded, particularly within the sporting context; though this attitude can lead to long-term health being disregarded.

Pringle and Markula (2005) argue that as men age their perceptions of masculinity change, and they even challenge the hegemonic masculine ideals that were held as important in their teenage years. However, the current research demonstrates that denial of pain, and the normalisation of both pain and injury that is legitimised throughout elite sportsmen's careers, are still central features of the construction of masculinity in retirement. Even the few men who admitted their injuries were significant and caused concern, still described their bodies as being in 'reasonable condition,' given the demands of playing elite sport. In this way the men are reinforcing Nixon's 'culture of risk' concept, through which success in sport justifies the risk of pain and injury. Challenging cultural acceptance and normalisation of pain within sport may help to promote healthier behaviours in male athletes, in particular towards their bodies.

As evident in this research, a common experience in elite Australian Rules football is to lie about the severity of pain being experienced, or to mask it with painkilling injections. The participants did not describe consciously trying to conceal the amount of pain in order to demonstrate their masculinity; rather the pure enjoyment of the game was enough to justify masking the pain. Orchard (2002) stated that the use of painkilling injections in football is widespread, with on average 1.7 Australian Rules footballers per team playing with the assistance of a local anaesthetic each game. The use of anaesthetic to mask injury can allow a sportsman to return to play sooner than if rested until fully recovered. However, the procedures are not without risk. Orchard (2002) found that the complications arising from the administration of local anaesthetic included failed blocks, possible degenerative issues later in life, re-injury of the area or worsening the injury, and nerve blocks causing numbness. Despite these complications, both players and medical professionals often regard the risks of administering painkilling injections as acceptable. To a certain extent, the participants in this research upheld this perception. Risks were more likely to be deemed acceptable early in the footballers' careers, while towards the end of careers they were not. Embracing risk-taking behaviours for young men, therefore, is an important concept, as the construction of masculinity centres on such behaviours (Courtenay 2009); young men appear less concerned with their long-term health.

The problematic nature of sport as a business

The commercialisation of Australian Rules football has led to the sport becoming a multi-million dollar business, and not merely a sport. Kelly and Hickey (2010

p. 11) state that "the media profile and celebrity status of the AFL and its elite performers is a problematic reality in terms of expectations, perceptions and distinctions to be drawn between a public life and a private life." Sports stars have traditionally been portrayed in the media as either positive or negative role models, depending on their behaviour (Whannel 2002). The heavy scrutiny of AFL footballers has led to the necessary development of a professional identity, one that is not natural, but must be learnt (Kelly & Hickey 2005).

Participants commonly expressed a distrust of the media due to a perceived exaggeration of the truth in media articles. Further, the men argued a private life was often difficult to maintain as the media is continually scrutinising footballers in order to write stories. This can be both a positive and a negative for footballers, as they argued the media portray them favourably when they do something right, and portray them negatively when they make a mistake. Whannel (2002) argued that sports stars are praised as upstanding role models for the young or chastised as a poor example, and this is reflected in the current research. Participants described times they have been presented in a positive manner, such as when they played well, but sometimes negatively, as some had been caught drink driving, for example. Current constructions of sportsmen as role models present the image of the 'damaged hero' through the reporting of athletes' involvement in drunken exploits and 'boyish' behaviours (Lines 2001). Thus, the growing intrusion of the media in the lives of sportsmen has important connotations for the development of one's public profile as they are constructed as villains, fools or heroes (Lines 2001). AFL footballers are consistently portrayed as exemplars of hegemonic masculinity, therefore indiscretions such as a drink driving conviction causes much media and societal interest, which may not be afforded to non-famous men.

The men argued that had they not had a public profile from being an AFL footballer, the media would not take such an interest in a drink driving charge.

Feasey (2009) and Whannel (2002) stated that while a small percentage of athletes are successful at the elite level, the portrayal of male sports stars in the media as role models becomes a representation of how men should live, how to be a man, sporting masculinities and masculinity in general. Further, the media contributes to the hierarchy of masculinities, in that the most powerful, forceful and competitive sports televised are perceived as the pinnacle of contemporary manhood (Feasey 2009). Some of the men in the current research admitted that the media can have an impact on how they perceive themselves, particularly early in their careers. The first time they saw their name in the paper as young footballers created feelings associated with an increase in confidence and self-esteem, which led to a heightened sense of masculinity. However, as careers progressed, the footballers became wary of the media and recalled being affected by what was written about them in the newspaper, particularly if a negative article was printed. Despite admitting the media can negatively impact upon self-esteem, many of the men maintained that being mentally strong and having confidence in their own football abilities would minimise the impact of negative media articles. This reinforces the link between mental strength and masculinity. According to Jones (2002), mental toughness is one of the most used, but most misunderstood terms in sporting culture. The concept refers to having the 'natural or developed psychological edge,' which allows athletes to cope better with the demands of being an elite sportsperson and perform consistently under pressure (Jones 2002 p. 213). Further, Madill and Hooper (2007) found that mental toughness is the focus of the athlete in order to endure the pressure of elite sport.

Achieving 'mental toughness' is an integral part of the sporting culture, and an athlete's ability to develop a strong mind is perceived as crucial to succeeding in elite sport. Ground-breaking research by Cattell (1957) outlined the link between 'mental toughness' and masculinity through displaying characteristics such as self-reliance, practicality, maturity and having a tough temperament. This link is still relevant in society today, as evident in the current research, which found that the ability to overcome the negative articles printed in the media is dependent on 'mental toughness.' High value continues to be placed on developing one's 'mental toughness', and is often regarded as the difference between success and non-success. From very early in male athletes' careers, young men are socialised to prioritise the development of their mental strength, playing an important role in the construction of their masculine identity.

One of the more recognised roles of the media by the men in this research is the promotion of sport, and in particular Australian Rules football. The men recognised that the media promotion of AFL football contributes to the perception that football is a 'man's' game. Messner et al. stated that the portrayal of men's sports through the media leads to the perception that

> a real man is strong, tough, aggressive, and above all, a winner in what is still
> a man's world. To be a winner, he must be willing to compromise his own
> long-term health by showing guts in the face of danger, by fighting other men
> when necessary, and by 'playing hurt' when he's injured. He must avoid being
> 'soft'; he must be the aggressor, both on the 'battle fields' of sports and in his
> consumption choices. (1999 p. 390)

The men in the current research argued they did not play football in order to 'prove' their masculinity, but agreed that the portrayal of their sport by the media,

and in particular programs such as *The Footy Show,* is as a highly masculinised sport. Connell (2005) suggested that for a particular form of masculinity to be hegemonic it must be culturally exalted, and therefore have exemplars who are celebrated as heroes. Through media presentation, Australian Rules footballers are often heralded as heroes, reinforcing the dominant cultural views with regard to masculinity. Given this image is presented to young boys who often want to emulate their sporting heroes (Lines 2001; Swain 2000), the current media portrayal of Australian Rules football needs to be challenged in order to change the societal views of the elite athletes who participate in this sport.

The impact of retirement on perceptions of masculinity

Kelly and Hickey (2008) argue that from the beginning of their careers as AFL footballers, young men are encouraged to take steps to prepare for life after football, and that this can create tension between the AFL sporting industry and the meaning of a professional AFL footballer. This is due to football demands subordinating non-football demands, and has particular ramifications for early career footballers, who are yet to establish themselves in the AFL. Often, outside interests can be neglected while young players focus solely on football (Hickey & Kelly 2007). Despite the encouragement throughout their careers to consider life after football, many of the men in this research felt underprepared for retirement from elite sport. This was particularly so for those who were forced into retirement through injury or delisting. Fortunato and Marchant (1999) ascertained that the circumstances surrounding an athlete's retirement can lead to difficulties making the transition into life after sport. An athlete who has been forced into retirement through injury or delisting often experiences more difficulties

adjusting to life than an athlete who retires voluntarily (Lavalee, Grove & Gordon 1997; Gordon 1995; Fortunato & Gilbert 2003). This is supported by the current research, as those who retired voluntarily perceived themselves to be more prepared for life after AFL football than those who did not. The footballers who were delisted from their clubs often experienced periods of anger, bitterness, and in some cases depression. However, those who experienced depression often did not recognise it until after they had readjusted to life after sport. Some of the men admitted they should have sought professional assistance in order to work through their issues. Instead, these men attempted to work through their issues independently, which they later reflected on as the less desirable option. Courtenay (2000) argues that men are often reluctant to seek medical assistance in particular, as it can be a threat to their masculinity, and instead prefer to keep their issues to themselves. This perception was held by many of the men in this research, reinforcing the notion that men are expected to be strong and independent.

Being delisted from a football club was linked to poor performance during the past football season. Participation in sport provides an opportunity to display skill, strength, courage and aggression (McLaughlin 2004; Grange & Kerr 2010). These are fundamental characteristics of masculinity; to be delisted because of poor performance can be detrimental to one's masculine identity.

Many of the men in this research were aware that there are support systems in place to assist AFL footballers throughout their careers and into retirement. One of the more notable associations is the AFL Players' Association. The men recognised the contribution of this Association in providing support both during and after their careers. While Kelly and Hickey (2010) found that the

development of the AFL Players' Association had been an overwhelmingly positive inclusion in contemporary football, and is an important provider of support to Australian Rules footballers throughout their careers and in the transition out of elite sport, the men in the current research stated that they had to seek assistance if they wanted help, rather than it being offered. As such, this is a key area in which improvements can be made in order for the current cultural attitudes in health-seeking behaviours in men to be challenged, in favour of a more inclusive environment in which footballers are encouraged to utilise these services. In addition, early career players in Kelly and Hickey's research (2010) were aware of the professional development, education and training activities that are perceived as being important in the industry, as the Players' Association sanctions seminars and training. However, awareness of the importance of such sessions may not translate into putting these values into practice, given interests such as studying a university degree or completing a traineeship require considerable commitment in addition to football. Kelly and Hickey (2010) recommend that the willingness of players and club officials to talk about pursuing outside interests needs to "translate into practices and processes that support player involvement in and commitment to these activities" (p. 50). This is supported by the men in the current research, many of whom felt underprepared for the transition out of elite sport.

According to Courtenay (2000), men are socially constructed to be self-reliant. Often this leads to reluctance to seek support for sensitive issues. However, for the men in this research the importance of support, particularly from family members, was argued to be crucial in order to be a successful AFL footballer. As an elite sportsman, many successes and disappointments can be experienced, and

the men argued that without support, withdrawal from elite competition may happen earlier than with a good support network. Gender-role socialisation ideologies encourage men to be self-reliant and suppress emotions while under pressure in order to maintain masculine identity (Mansfield et al. 2003). While this ideology is largely reproduced in the attitudes of elite footballers, the importance of familial support is also recognised. Retirement from elite sport is a critical time through which support for the athlete is needed. Bird (1996) and Courtenay (2000) argue that in some circumstances the threat to a man's masculinity can be minimised. For example, in a heterosocial environment, the displaying of emotions can be more acceptable than in a homosocial environment. Thus, while within the culture of AFL football, behaviours such as discussing relationship issues or showing pain may be discouraged, men can fulfil this need in a family context. The subculture of team sports such as Australian Rules football promotes the suppression of individual needs in order to focus on team goals and requirements, which strengthens self-reliance for individual issues as an element in the construction of masculinity.

Mayocchi and Hanrahan (2000) describe transferable skills as the skills athletes develop though sport that can be applied to other areas of an athlete's life. These include organisational skills, dedication and perseverance, self-motivation and the ability to meet challenges and perform under pressure (Danish et al. 1993). But because from a young age athletes spend a considerable amount of time developing their sporting skills, other interests are often not pursued. This means that, when careers end, retiring athletes may not be aware that the skills developed throughout their careers are transferable (McKnight et al. 2009). However, all of the men in the current research recognised that the skills they

developed through football, such as resilience, overcoming difficulties, work ethic and confidence, could be transferred into subsequent employment. These skills, which are consolidated through participation in sport, perpetuate the current cultural enactment of hegemonic masculinity. Importantly, the participants argued that the skills that lead to success as a footballer are the same skills that result in business success. Two of the most common traits argued to be developed through football are mental strength and discipline, which are defining characteristics in the development of masculine identity (Connell 2005). Recognising that these skills can be transferred into subsequent employment can help maintain constructions of masculinity after retiring from elite sport.

Summary

Sport has been argued as one of the crucial arenas through which masculine identity is constructed. Young men typically enter the AFL system at a time when their masculine identity is at an important stage of its development. Through participation in elite Australian Rules football, fundamental characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, such as the denial of pain and emotions, the importance of winning and succeeding, work ethic, discipline and the objectification of women are taught and developed. In addition, the Australian Rules football subculture contributes to the marginalisation and stigmatisation of alternative masculinities, particularly gay masculinities, and the subordination of women.

Masculinity is not a static concept, but rather a fluid one (Connell 1995). How footballers define their masculinity early in their career often changes towards the end of their careers and beyond. Particularly early in their careers, young men, in

an attempt to prove their commitment to the team, demonstrate their masculinity through the denial of pain and injury. The perception that those who can withstand pain the longest are the more successful is instilled in young footballer's minds, and a 'live in the now' attitude is common. As careers draw to a close however, this view changes, with the men becoming more concerned with their long-term health, and therefore less willing to either play through pain or mask pain with a painkilling injection.

An inevitable part of elite competition is retirement. Whether an athlete makes a successful and positive transition out of elite Australian Rules football is dependent upon the circumstances surrounding their retirement. Those who are able to retire voluntarily experience a more positive transition than those who are forced into retirement through injury or delisting. In addition, those who recognise that the skills they have learnt through being an elite AFL footballer, such as organisational and communication skills, discipline and a strong work ethic, and the ability to withstand pressure, are able to be applied to a subsequent career, are more likely to perceive the transition out of elite sport as a positive one. However, despite those being able to voluntarily retire experiencing a smoother transition into life after sport, feelings of loss and sadness are still experienced and a period of adjustment is required.

All of the men in this research described their post-football lives in a positive light, indicating that there is 'life after football'. While there is a period of adjustment after retiring from elite sport, through which the men explored other career options, they have been able to make the transition out of elite sport successfully. The time required to successfully transition out of elite sport is

different for each athlete, supporting the claim that retirement from sport should not be viewed as a single event, but rather as a process (Hickey & Kelly 2010).

After retiring from AFL football participants primarily constructed their masculinity through their subsequent employment, thus maintaining the role of financial provider for their family. Through sustaining the role of breadwinner, traditionally held perceptions of the male role are reinforced, encouraging societal and cultural constructions of the female as the primary care-giver. These traditional perceptions of masculinity are maintained by the retired footballers in this research, and success in their subsequent careers after football provides validation of their masculinity. Therefore, this research confirms an important concept that for many men, they are what they do.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This chapter will provide an overview of the research and present the main conclusions from the data analysis. Utilising evidence from the results and discussion, the construction of masculinity in the lives of retired elite Australian Rules footballers will be outlined.

This research has investigated the meaning of masculinity in the lives of retired AFL footballers and the way in which participation in elite sport has influenced the construction, and possible de-construction, of masculinity in retirement. Sport is argued to be a reflection of dominant societal values; it is therefore possible that the findings of this research can be applied to men in general, as well as other masculinised sports.

A crucial criterion in the cultural exaltation of a particular masculinity as hegemonic is that is must have celebrated heroes (Connell 2000). The high profile nature of Australian Rules footballers lead to the men receiving hero status in Australian society, thus sports have a powerful role in shaping, producing and reproducing hegemonic masculine ideals. The cultural practices associated with Australian Rules football such as the denial of pain, the subordination of women and gay men and the importance of success are significant influences in the construction of masculinity and lead to a celebration of the gender order.

Young boys participate in sport for numerous reasons, including enjoyment, family and friend influence, and because it was 'what everybody did.' From a young age masculine identity is influenced by many factors, with sport a crucial avenue through which boys learn what it means 'to be a man.' Sport remains a

significant aspect of boys' lives throughout young adulthood as a highly desired characteristic of masculinity, with those not interested in sport being perceived as less masculine. Sport is important in the construction of masculine identity, as boys gain an understanding that social status among peers largely depends upon excelling at sport, particularly highly masculinised sports such as Australian Rules football that promote power aggression and violence, which are key aspects in hegemonic masculinity (Drummond 2008).

Participation in Australian Rules football that progresses to involvement at the elite level has a crucial influence on masculinity, as young men typically enter the AFL system at an important stage in the development of their identity as men. The men in this research all described being a 'footballer' as part of who they are as men. This does not change in retirement; being a footballer remains part of the men's identity, albeit in a somewhat modified manner. Though the importance of being a 'footballer' does hold less significance in retirement than it did when they were involved at the elite level of AFL football, it can never-the-less be concluded that one does not stop being a footballer simply because they have retired from the sport. One is always a footballer.

The acceptance and sense of belonging that men gain from being part of a sporting team has important connotations for the way they perceive themselves as men. Indeed, involvement in a team, as highlighted by this research, has had a significant influence on the development of masculine identity for this group of men. It can therefore be argued that sport becomes a significant avenue through which men can 'do' masculinity together. The culturally exalted expectations of the hegemonic form of masculinity encourage self-reliance in men and formation of friendships that avoid discussing sensitive issues. However, participation in

team sports does allow for the formation of close friendships in which displaying certain types of emotion, such as crying when losing an important finals game, are permitted. Upon retiring from elite sport, it is these close bonds with teammates that are among the most significant elements of sport for which the men yearn most. As evident by the importance the men in this research place on the bonds with teammates, participation in sport leads to a sense of belonging that can positively impact upon young men's self esteem and their masculine identity. While there are some indications of the changing nature of masculinities from a more orthodox to an inclusive style of masculinity within other areas such as soccer, male cheerleading and fraternities (Anderson 2002; 2005; 2008b), in the Australian Rules football subculture, traditional views of masculinity are still being produced and reproduced. For example, Australian Rules football remains a largely homophobic sport. To date there have not been any openly gay AFL footballers within the national competition, which illustrates the homophobic nature of AFL football. This is one area through which the hegemonic ideals demonstrated through highly masculinised sports need to be challenged.

An important confirmation from this research is that elite AFL footballers play a significant number of games with pain, discomfort or injury. The reasons for this are varied, however the most common justification for the men in this research was enjoyment of the game. Thus, this research complements prior research in New Zealand by Pringle and Markula (2005) that found that elite athletes are willing participants in the acceptance of pain and injury as a 'normal' career expectation. This is particularly so for young footballers, who display a desire to 'prove' themselves as committed members of the team, and so are more likely to continually try to push through pain. Attempting to push through pain and play

with injuries is more common early in young men's careers, while towards the end of careers men become more concerned with the functionality of their body after retiring from sport. However, while the men are more concerned with their long-term health in retirement, the denial of pain remains a significant contributing factor in the construction of masculinity for men in life after sport. Despite experiencing long-term pain or discomfort, the participants perceived themselves to be 'lucky' to escape permanent disability. This attitude is apparent even when the men have required numerous surgeries to correct injuries they have sustained during their football careers. In order to improve the quality of life for retired footballers, the perception that tolerance of pain and joint surgery are an expected part of elite sport, and that this is acceptable, needs to be challenged. Young footballers need to be further educated about the long term consequences of 'pushing through' pain or masking it with pain killing injections, so that while they may be willing participants in the normalisation of playing with pain and injury, they are also better informed about the choices they make.

Whether athletes are able to retire voluntarily or whether they are forced into retirement through injury or delisting, the transition period out of elite sport is often difficult. Despite some players being able to plan for retirement and explore alternative employment options towards the later stages of their football career, feelings of loss and sadness are still experienced. For footballers who are delisted from their club or who sustain a career ending injury, the difficulties are intensified, due to the lack of control over the ending of one's football career. These men often perceive themselves as having had more to contribute to the sport, heightening their sense of disappointment. The importance of support systems such as the AFL Players' Association cannot be underestimated in the

transition period out of AFL football. Given that retiring or delisted players are often unsure of what to 'do' once their football career is over, the Player's Association can provide crucial support during this time. However, the current research suggests that many players either do not know about or do not utilise the services offered by the AFLPA.

Since retiring from elite competition, for many of the men, identity is in large part comprised through their subsequent employment. Participants placed high importance on success, both on the football field and in employment after retiring from football. Following retirement from sport, being able to achieve and succeed in their alternative career equates to positive reinforcement of who they are as men, and is therefore significant to the construction of their masculine identity. As such, the importance of a subsequent career path after elite football is crucial. Footballers need to be encouraged to have outside interests other than football in order to be adequately prepared for life after football. The pursuit of outside interests can cause a tension for young men who, upon entering the AFL system, often find it difficult to manage the demands of elite AFL football. However, as the average AFL career is becoming shorter, the development of skills for a subsequent career is vital. Often footballers have difficulties understanding that the skills they learn and develop within football are transferable to other careers. A focus on transferable skills early in their careers is therefore an important area of education for young footballers in order to better prepare them for life after football.

The changing nature of masculinities was evident throughout this research. As men age, their perception of masculinity changes, confirming that the concept of masculinity is not static, but rather fluid, and changes throughout men's lives

(Connell 1995). At the beginning of young men's football careers, a crucial time in the development of their masculinities, men commonly display fundamental hegemonic masculine ideals, such as the sexual objectification of women, a 'live in the now' attitude and the denial of pain. Despite being required to participate in a seminar on the appropriate behaviour towards women at the beginning of their careers, many of the men admitted to disrespecting women as young men and being 'caught up' in the star status attributed to AFL footballers. This indicates that the current program regarding the appropriate treatment of women is not effective for all young men entering the AFL system, and as such may need restructuring.

Participation in Australian Rules football has a significant influence on a young man's masculine identity. Being a 'footballer' remains part of the men's identity, even in retirement, and thus holds great importance in their lives. The significant risk of injury in contact sports such as Australian Rules football can have negative connotations, in that pain is often viewed as the separating factor between the successful and the unsuccessful. However, being involved in elite sport also has many benefits for the men who are drafted, including the development of many transferrable skills such as communication, discipline, work ethic and teamwork. In addition, participation in team sports allows men to build close relationships with teammates as they collectively 'do' masculinity together, which may not occur if they were not involved in sport. The men in this research all described their involvement in elite sport as an enjoyable experience and a positive influence on who they are as men.

Recommendations for further research

The present study did not set out to explore homophobia within Australian Rules football; unexpectedly, this issue did emerge as a theme through data analysis, suggesting that further research is warranted. Prior to 2007 there have been few gay athletes competing at an elite level, (LeBlanc & Jackson 2007), indicating that homophobia may be a significant phenomenon in Australian Rules football.

The changing nature of masculinities was an important finding in this study. Early in AFL careers, young men develop a heightened sense of masculinity through the affirmation they experience when drafted to an AFL team. This is exacerbated through a 'live in the now' attitude, in particular an indifference to the substantial risk of pain and injury through playing football. In addition, despite attending compulsory seminars on appropriate behaviour toward women, young footballers often sexually objectify women, influenced by the cultural practises within the club. The current research was conducted with retired AFL footballers only; to further understand how the issues surrounding the changing nature of masculinities are playing out for AFL footballers today, the evidence from this research indicates that a comparative study with early and late career footballers, or a longitudinal study would clearly be beneficial.

The gendered nature of sports has been evident throughout the current research, as well as previous research (Koivula 1995; 2001). The production and reproduction of masculinity in a highly masculinised sport may differ from the construction of masculinity in perceived feminine sports, such as diving and gymnastics. Therefore, an important area for further research is an investigation

into the construction of masculinity in perceived feminine sports. Similarly, this research investigated one highly masculinised sport; research into other highly masculinised sports in order to further understand how masculinity is socially and culturally enacted throughout elite sporting careers and into retirement is warranted.

Australian Rules footballers are often portrayed as role models for aspiring young footballers. The commercialisation of AFL has led to it becoming a billion dollar business, and not solely a sport. The current research aimed to understand the construction of masculinity for retired AFL footballers. A recurring theme throughout the data was that AFL footballers do not perceive themselves as overly masculine, though they do recognise that football is presented as a highly masculinised sport. Participants commonly recognised that through the portrayal of footballers in the media as either good or bad role models for young men, societal perceptions are that footballers are hyper-masculine. Given this research was an investigation into the construction of masculinity for footballers, another important area for further research is to investigate the societal perceptions of AFL footballers from the perspective of the fans, aspiring young footballers and wider Australian society.

This research supported the claim that men are often defined by what they 'do', particularly together (Keen 1991). Further research into masculinities, sport and men could therefore investigate whether a sense of belonging gained through involvement in a sporting team provide similarities and differences to male-oriented workplaces. As contended by the men in this research, involvement in a

sporting team is somewhat different to traditional places of employment. However, the football environment provides a microcosm of society in which we can study groups of men, thus the possibility of analysing aspects of socialisation, camaraderie, teamwork and transition phases such as retirement could be beneficial for understanding men in retirement from work generally.

An important part of the retirement transition process is the support offered by the AFL Players' Association. It became apparent throughout the current research that while the footballers are aware of the Association, they are often not utilising the services that are offered. For the maximisation of the Association as a support mechanism for footballers, an important area for further research is an investigation into the attitudes of current AFL footballers towards the AFLPA and the services offered.

Summary of thesis

This thesis investigated the construction of masculinity following a career in elite Australian Rules football. AFL footballers who retired after the beginning of the national AFL competition in 1990 were interviewed and their responses analysed utilising an inductive thematic analysis model as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Nine themes emerged from this research; the reinforcement of orthodox/hegemonic masculinity; society and culture; the 'perfect' life; always a footballer; distrust of the media; staying in shape; the denial of pain; moving on; and life is brilliant. This research leads to a more in depth understanding of how retired AFL footballers construct masculinity following the cessation of their football careers.

The discussion of these themes is underpinned by social construction theory and life course theory, in order to develop an understanding of how this group of men construct masculinity in retirement from elite sport, and how their experiences as elite Australian Rules footballers have shaped their perceptions of masculinity. The recommendations for further research recognise the pertinent issues arising from the data analysis, and will lead to further understanding of how retired footballers construct their masculinity and how their experiences as a football influence the meaning of masculinity for this group of men. Understanding the construction of masculinity in a highly masculinised sport such as Australian Rules football can lead to an understanding of the construction of masculinity in general, as the cultural practises within highly masculinised settings are a representation of the dominant masculine ideals in society.

Chapter 8

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Appendix A

Life After Football
CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I …..

being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the

………………………………… for the research project on

……………………….

1. I have read the information provided.

2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.

3. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.

4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.

5. I understand that:

• I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.

• I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.

• While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.

• I may ask that the recording/observation be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.

6. I agree to the tape to the tape being transcribed by an external transcriber on condition that my identity is not revealed.

Participant's signature…………………………….Date…………………...

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name…………………………….………………..................

Researcher's signature………………………………..Date……………………

NB: Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Items 8 and 9, as appropriate.

7. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

Participant's signature…………………………………Date…………………...

8. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read the researcher's report and agree to the publication of my information as reported.

Participant's signature…………………………………Date…………………...

Appendix B

Dear (participant),

My name is Deb Agnew and I am a PhD candidate at Flinders University.
I also work at Sturt Football Club as the head trainer of the junior football teams.
It is through my work at Sturt that I became interested in research into AFL.

I was wondering if I could possibly interview you for my PhD about your experiences as an AFL footballer. My research is looking at what it is like to be an AFL footballer and the meaning football has in the lives of the people who participate in it at the elite level from the start of an AFL career and into retirement and life after football.

I would be looking to do the interview early next year around March at a time and place that is convenient for you. Participants will remain completely anonymous.

My research has been granted approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Flinders University.

If you could let me know if you would be willing to be interviewed I would really appreciate it. I thank you for taking the time to consider participation in my research project. Should you wish to be involved, you can contact me on (phone) or through email on (email address).

Thank you,

Deb Agnew

Appendix C

Interview Guide

How did you get into football?

What was your first game like?

What was your last game like?

Fans, Crowd Participation

How would you describe the crowd/fans that attend AFL games?

How do you feel when you are signing autographs?

How do you feel when the crowd roars?

How do you feel when the crowd yells out your name?

How do you feel not that you are not asked to sign as many autographs?

Media

How do you feel about the media?

How does the media influence your identity/how you feel about yourself?

How did your feelings about the media change after you stopped playing football?

How does the media influence your decision to play in pain/with an injury?

How do you feel when you read about yourself in the paper or see yourself on TV?

How does the media influence how you feel about yourself?

Football subculture

Can you describe your life as a footballer?

Are there any initiation rituals you go through when you first join a club?

Can you tell me about rituals or antics that go on at the club?

How does football impact other areas of your life?

What does it mean to be involved in a team?

How important has football been in your life?

How would you feel if you got injured and couldn't play for 12 months/anymore?

How would you feel if it was all taken away from you?

How did your life change once you stopped playing football?

How did that make you feel?

When you win what is it like in the change room after a game?

When you lost what is it like in the change room after a game?

What was the team bonding experience for you? Antics etc?

How emotional is the game of football?

How acceptable is it for men to show their emotions on the football field?

AFL draft

Can you tell me how you feel about the AFL draft system?

How did the draft influence your football decisions?

How did you feel when you got drafted?

How did getting drafted change your identity?

Does the position you were drafted impact your standing in your club?

How did your relationships/friendships change after you were drafted?

How did you perceive yourself before you got drafted?

How did that perception change after you got drafted?

Pain

How would you describe pain?

How does pain affect how you feel about yourself?

What is it like to be injured?

How to you learn to cope with injury?

Who teaches you how to cope with injuries?

How often would/did you play football while you are/were in pain?

What influences your decision to play in pain?

Since you retired, how often are you in pain?

Would this have changed your decision to play in pain if you had known about the consequences?

How do you feel about taking pain killers in order to play football?

Do you have any long-term health implications from playing football?

Are you aware of any long-term health implications form playing football?

Male Body

How would you describe your body?

How did your feelings towards your body change after you retired?

What do you like best about your body?

What do you like least about your body?

How do you think fans (in particular female fans) would describe your body?

How does that make you feel?

Masculinity

How would you describe masculinity?

Do you think of yourself as masculine?

Do you think there are certain characteristics that are manly/masculine?

Are there any characteristics that you think are not masculine?

What do you think influences what it means to be masculine in today's Western culture? (Explore in relation to media)

What do you think the male role in society is?

What do you think the female role in society is?

Who do you think is the most masculine footballer playing in the AFL?

What does the archetypal masculine man look like?

Is masculinity translated on and off the field? i.e. to the locker room, to restaurants?

Can you tell me if and how the fans impact on your feelings of masculinity?

Identity

How would you describe identity?

How would you describe yourself as a person?

How has this changed since you retired?

What influences your identity?

How does football create masculine identity?

How does football reinforce masculine identity?

How does pain and injury affect your masculinity?

Can you describe if and how the media impacts on your feelings of masculinity? (explore)

How did you feel when you retired?

How did your identity change after you retired?

What affects your self-esteem?

How to you think others would perceive you?

How do you perceive yourself as a person?

Retirement

What were the events leading up to your retirement?

How much control did you have over the timing of your retirement?

What difficulties did you face in adjusting to retirement?

How has your masculinity changed after retirement?

How has your body changed since retirement?

How does this make you feel?

What do you think your role is now that you have retired? (In relation to income, household duties, fatherhood)

How has playing football influenced your masculinity?

How has retirement changed your perception of your masculinity if at all?

What was it like retiring from sport for you?

How do you feel about your life now you have retired?

What do you do with your time now?