

Towards 50/50: A collaborative, interdisciplinary approach to doing gender equity work in sport

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During this time there has been a great deal of activity collecting data, writing policies, lobbying Politicians, developing strategies, conducting programs and committing large amounts of both public and private money to this case...

In my view, the result of all this work and money is that in the short term, the immediate outcomes create some interest and stimulate a certain amount of activity, but in the long run, nothing changes”



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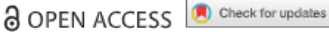
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In my view, the result of all this work and money is that in the short term, the immediate outcomes create some interest and stimulate a certain amount of activity, but in the long run, nothing changes” (Ey, 1991, p. 13)



We still need gender equity!

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It's Boom Time! (Again): Progress Narratives and Women's Sport in Australia

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ABSTRACT

Over the last three years (2015–2017), various media articles have pointed to an apparent “boom time” for women’s sport in Australia. Evidence for this boom is drawn from examples such as the introduction of the Women’s Australian Rules Football League, the television success of the Women’s Big Bash League (cricket), and the rise in interest in soccer due to the international achievement of the Matildas. Such media reports reflect and reinforce a narrative of progress that assumes that gender equality is becoming closer with every decade. This paper employs a critical historical method inspired by the work of Joan W. Scott to analyse articles that have declared or commented on a contemporary boom in women’s sport in Australia. The 120 contemporary articles are analysed alongside 400 historical articles that present similar arguments and themes. In identifying similarities between the historical and contemporary articles, this paper raises questions about the reality of the so-called moment of progress we are currently experiencing, and discusses the possible consequences for feminism and social change in sport.

KEYWORDS

Sport; women; gender; critical history



Article

Has It Never Been a Better Time to Play? Opportunity, Empowerment and Contested Terrains of Women's Grassroots Football in Australia

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Abstract: The introduction of the semi-professional Australian Rules Football League for Women (AFLW) in 2017 was indicative of a broader ‘boom’ for women and girls’ sport in Australia. The ‘boom’ promised not only newly created, or enhanced, professional pathways for elite women athletes but also a commensurate change in the community sport landscape, backed by a gender equality framework, that would offer women and girls new, and supported, opportunities to play sport. This paper investigates what happens when these opportunities are taken up by examining the experiences of a senior women’s football team in a community-level Australian Rules football club in Melbourne, Australia. Drawing on 11 semi-structured interviews with players, we consider the transformative potential, for these individuals and for gendered power relations, that might be generated from women’s participation in traditionally masculine sporting spaces. The findings reveal contradictory moments of both emancipation and empowerment on one hand with ambivalence and disempowerment on the other. Women’s participation in Australian Rules Football is a contested terrain that is simultaneously embodied, cultural, and social, and we note the experiences and strategies that women utilize to negotiate their engagement with football. We argue that increasing “opportunities” for women to play football is not enough for the transformative promise of the AFLW to be met, and as such, further highlight the ongoing contested terrain of women’s sport.

Keywords: gender; football; Australia; AFLW; feminism



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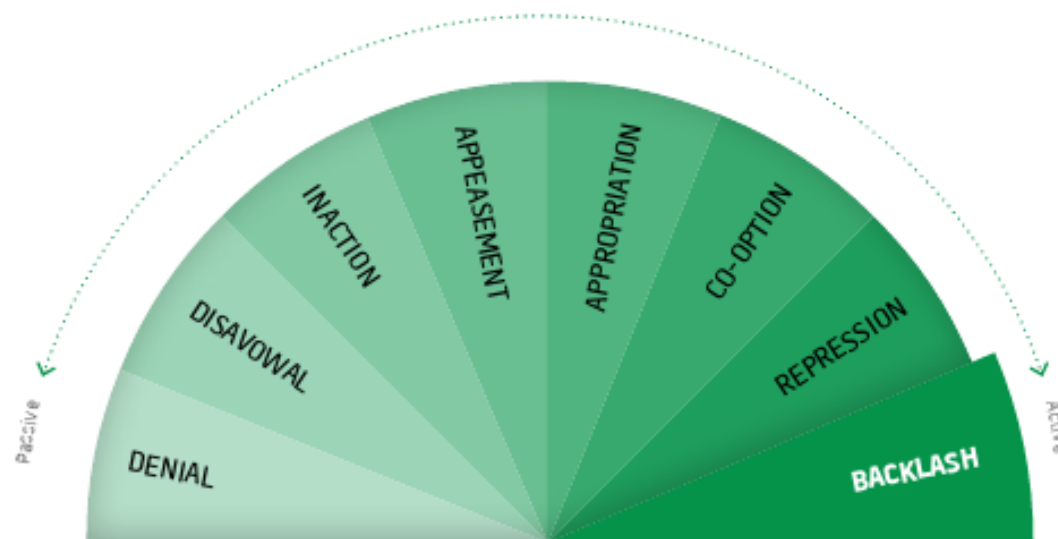
Revised: 24 January 2025

History...

Sociology...

40(+) years of resistance to gender equity

Forms of resistance



DENIAL

"There's no problem here."

Denial of the problem or the credibility of the case for change. Blame the victims.

DISAVOWAL

"It's not my job to do something about it."

Refusal to recognize responsibility.

INACTION

"It's not a priority right now."

Refusal to implement a change initiative.

APPEASEMENT

"Yes. Yes. We must do something (one day)."

Efforts to placate or pacify those advocating for change in order to limit its impact.

APPROPRIATION

"Of course we'd appoint more women, if only they were more experienced."

Simulating change while covertly undermining it.

CO-OPTION

"What about men's rights? Men are victims too, you know."

Using the language of progressive frameworks and goals for reactionary ends.

REPRESSION

"We tried that once and women didn't want to take up the promotion/training/opportunity."

Reversing or dismantling a change initiative.

BACKLASH

"These feminists deserve all the abuse they get."

Aggressive, attacking response.

Principles underpinning our approach to equity

1. Gender equity is a practice (a series of deliberate, interconnected, sustained actions) not just an intention.
2. Actions cannot be generated out of nothing—“the bringing about of an alteration by force”. Gender equity is *doing work*
3. Gender equity is about acknowledging historical injustice and supporting intent (50/50) with deliberate decisions about resources “Don’t tell me what you value, show me your budget, and I’ll tell you what you value.”—Joe Biden
4. There will be consequences (trade-offs) for equitable action
 - ◆ Giving something up – cultural change
 - ◆ Resistance – <https://safeandequal.org.au/working-in-family-violence/prevention/facing-resistance/#>

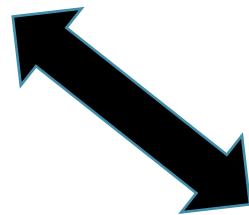
Change Makers: a collaborative model towards 50/50



- FV-funded Internal Change Makers program (2021)
- 13 departments completed climate assessments and gender equity action plans
- **Evaluation revealed individuals and teams needed more targeted support to move beyond good intentions**



- TMA funding for internal CoP – Men as Allies (2024-2025)
- FV funded 'leading for equity' (2024-2025)



- Change our Game (2020) and SRV (PVTS) (2022 – 2024) funding for Change Makers: Clubs
- Designed and delivered Change Makers program to over 100 clubs
- Ongoing support to clubs since 2020
- **Evaluation revealed persistent 'resistance' and clubs needed actions and support from FV**



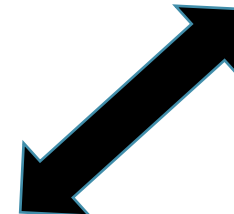
- PVTS funding (2024-2025) – to support Development coordinators in 'resistance training'

- Change Makers recruitment & attendance at presentations (2020 – 2024)
- Celebrating success
- Game Changer
- Development Coordinators
- Implementation of gender equity action plans

- **Evaluation revealed major problems with violence at NPL level**



- TMA funding for FV to support NPL coaches (2026-2027)



Our flagship programs – Safety and Wellbeing research group

Leading for equity

- ◆ 6 x 2-hour sessions with additional support and accountability check-ins over 12 months
- ◆ Structured, guided process to embed equity ‘work’ as BAU within an organisation to drive change internally and externally

A psychological safety framework for driving gender equity in community sport

- ◆ 4 x 2-hour sessions with staff with club-facing roles
- ◆ Practical activities focused on interpersonal skills, communicating for change and resistance training

Governance, leadership and gender equity - what’s history got to do with it?

- ◆ Pop-up exhibition and workshop (2- 4 hours) for leaders in sport
- ◆ Interact with historical materials to inspire reflexivity and pledge commitment to gender equity work

Resources

- ♦ Boom time (again) - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14443058.2019.1575262>
- ♦ Has it never been a better time? - <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/14/2/87>
- ♦ Sport and Recreation Victoria – Safe and Inclusive Sport - <https://sport.vic.gov.au/resources/safe-and-inclusive-sport-preventing-gender-based-violence>
- ♦ Change Makers Clubs Case Study (Regional) <https://www.regionalsportvictoria.org.au/collaboration-the-key-as-change-makers-step-up/>
- ♦ Encountering resistance – (VicHealth) <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Encountering-Resistance-Gender-Equality.pdf>
- ♦ Safe and Equal guide to resistance– <https://safeandequal.org.au/resources/overcoming-resistance-and-backlash-a-guide-for-primary-prevention-practitioners/>
- ♦ Our Watch resistance and backlash – <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resistance-and-backlash-in-primary-prevention>

Thank you

Questions?

