

MEDIA RELEASE



Tuesday, 30 September, 2008

**Embargoed until 5am Tuesday 30 September.
News Editors: Drs Toffoletti and Mewett are available for pre-interview
before this date.**

Female fans' support strong despite claims of player misconduct

Female football support remains strong, despite reports of player misconduct, Deakin University researchers have found.

The research, part of a larger study of female football fans in Australia and New Zealand, by Drs Peter Mewett and Kim Toffoletti from Deakin University's Faculty of Arts unusually looks at the perspectives of female football fans about claims of players' sexual misconduct.

"By looking at how women themselves speak about sexual misconduct by sportsmen such as AFL players we gain insights into how the wider community understand this behaviour," Dr Toffoletti explained. "This has implications for wider education initiatives aimed at tackling violence against women."

Dr Toffoletti said while the research was still in its early phase, it clearly demonstrated female fans held complex, often contradictory, views about sexual misconduct by footballers.

"Some of our interviewees blamed the women themselves," she said. "For instance some female fans were perceived as sexual predators, seeking out footballers with the intention of having sex with them."

"There is a clear distinction between consensual sex, rape and assault, but while our interviewees universally condemned sexual violence some reasoned if violence did occur it was the result of the women's activities and that they shouldn't put themselves in that position."

"There is a perception that certain women hang around trying to pick up football players, imposing on the players' freedom and making it difficult for them to say no. Indeed some interviewees thought some footballers were targeted because of their celebrity status. In their view a victim could be complicit in their own abuse."

Dr Toffoletti said the players were also seen as part of the problem.

"Footballers were perceived as sexually forward and confident with women, frequently making suggestive advances and expecting casual sex," she said.

"A number of reasons were put forward to explain this behaviour, namely that elite footballers believed they were entitled to women and could do what ever they liked."

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“Alcohol and team bonding was seen as cultivating this behaviour. “There was also a view that such behaviour was part of the man’s biological make up. In other words it is beyond their control, so what do you expect them to do?”

“Team pressure was also seen as an influence. It would be viewed as abnormal for a footballer to decline the advances of a woman who was seriously throwing herself at him. He would be perceived as weak, possibly homosexual.”

Fans believed that club culture also plays a part, suggesting that initiatives that address player attitudes toward women are a step in the right direction.

“Fans were very clear about the active role the AFL and clubs need to take to order to promote respect for women. Despite the AFL’s explicit and vocal condemnation of violence against women in the media, the code of conduct that gives the AFL power to sanction the players is yet to be fully tested.”

Media contact: Drs Toffoletti and Mewett are available for interview. Please call Sandra Kingston 0422 005 485 in the first instance.