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Geographies of football: why do men play football in the Bega Valley, NSW

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Geographies of football: why do men play football in the Bega Valley, NSW

Abstract
Previous studies have illustrated the central role of football in the cultural life of country towns in Western Australia and Victoria. Yet, little is known about the role of football in the country towns of New South Wales. The aim of this thesis is to provide a better understanding of why men play football in NSW country towns, through a case study of the Bega Valley. The empirical data is derived from twenty-one semi-structured interviews utilising a ‘topical life history’ approach, along with participant sketches of ‘what football means to them’. Football life history interviews were conducted during August and September 2011 with adult men who play first grade rugby league and AFL (Australian Rules Football) in the Bega Valley, NSW. Narrative analysis, along with discourse analysis, is employed to provide an interpretation of the football life histories and sketches. Football players’ narratives and sketches are analysed within a performative framework drawing upon the spatial concepts of ‘the spatial imperative of subjectivity’, a ‘progressive sense of place’ and the ‘intersectionality’ of social categories. Results are divided into three chapters. Each chapter analyses and discusses different football narratives to better understand why men play football in the Bega Valley, NSW. The first chapter examines narratives of family, friends, rurality and training. The second examines narratives of mateship. The final results chapter turns to explore narratives of winning, smallness and sustainability. The conclusion outlines how this study has contributed to better understanding why men play football and a more nuanced understanding of football and footballers in the cultural life of country towns in the Bega Valley, NSW.

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Geographies of football: why do men play football in the Bega Valley, NSW

David Clifton

This thesis is presented as fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Science Honours (Advanced)

4 April 2012
The information in this thesis is entirely the results of investigations conducted by the author, unless otherwise acknowledged, and has not been submitted in part, or otherwise, for any other degree or qualification.

Signed: David Clifton                                Dated: 4 April, 2012

(NOT SIGNED AS SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY)

Front cover image:

Brad McBain, coach and captain (for this match) leads the Tathra Sea Eagles team onto the field in the SCAFL semi-final against Bateman's Bay Seahawks at Hanging Rock Oval, Bateman's Bay on Saturday 27 August, 2011. Photograph by David Clifton
abstract

Previous studies have illustrated the central role of football in the cultural life of country towns in Western Australia and Victoria. Yet, little is known about the role of football in the country towns of New South Wales. The aim of this thesis is to provide a better understanding of why men play football in NSW country towns, through a case study of the Bega Valley. The empirical data is derived from twenty-one semi-structured interviews utilising a ‘topical life history’ approach, along with participant sketches of ‘what football means to them’. Football life history interviews were conducted during August and September 2011 with adult men who play first grade rugby league and AFL (Australian Rules Football) in the Bega Valley, NSW. Narrative analysis, along with discourse analysis, is employed to provide an interpretation of the football life histories and sketches. Football players’ narratives and sketches are analysed within a performative framework drawing upon the spatial concepts of ‘the spatial imperative of subjectivity’, a ‘progressive sense of place’ and the ‘intersectionality’ of social categories. Results are divided into three chapters. Each chapter analyses and discusses different football narratives to better understand why men play football in the Bega Valley, NSW. The first chapter examines narratives of family, friends, rurality and training. The second examines narratives of mateship. The final results chapter turns to explore narratives of winning, smallness and sustainability. The conclusion outlines how this study has contributed to better understanding why men play football and a more nuanced understanding of football and footballers in the cultural life of country towns in the Bega Valley, NSW.
This research is a collective project and reflects the many, many hours of effort put into it by the following people, who deserve public recognition for the time and help they provided me. I am eternally grateful for their assistance and input.

Primarily, I must thank my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Gordon Waitt. It was in Dr. Waitt’s first year human geography course that I first appreciated and then became passionate about this field of academia – he was a truly remarkable mentor throughout my undergraduate degree. As an honours supervisor, Dr. Waitt’s insight, knowledge and guidance was invaluable and always forthcoming. His endless patience and willingness to listen and then make suggestions was invaluable. Without his help (and insistence at times), this thesis would not be complete.

As well, I am grateful for the research grants of financial assistance I received from both ARC and UoW which were used primarily for living costs while staying in Tathra for three weeks while conducting the fieldwork for this thesis during late August/early September, 2011.

As with any research project, it is the participants who provide us researchers with the material upon which we base our thesis. Here, I must thank the players and volunteers of the many football clubs I met for their time and assistance with this research. Specifically, Kevin May of Tathra Sea Eagles AFL club and Garry Stevenson of Tathra Sea Eagles Rugby League club deserve particular mention. Both of these men opened the doors for me to have unrestricted access to all aspects of their clubs – at training, in changerooms and at games, including finals matches. Their assistance provided unique insights into the machinations of playing football in rural town environments.

Similarly, my family has put up with me being somewhat single-minded since last August. My wife Catherine has provided unbelievable support, love and encouragement over this time, and to her I owe a great debt of gratitude. I cannot thank her enough for tolerating our life in the way this project demanded. Likewise, my adult children, Emma and Matthew – who are also both studying at university – have assisted in many ways, mostly by leaving me to write this thesis.
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Chapter 1

introduction

Tathra Sea Eagles team join arms prior to the kick off in the SCAFL Seniors Grand Final against Bateman’s Bay Seahawks at Hanging Rock Oval, Bateman’s Bay, Saturday 10 September, 2011

Photograph by David Clifton
1.1 Aims and objectives of thesis

Tonts and Atherley argue that “popular Australian mythology holds that sport is a central component of rural life” (2010:381). This affirms the Victorian Parliament’s 2004 Report into Country Football which concluded that football clubs were the “glue” of rural communities. These publications posit football as contributing to personal and community health; establishing social networks and, sustaining both individual and place-identity. Football is positioned as a keystone for many men living in country towns.

Yet, with the notable exception of the recent work by Spaaij (2009), Topp and Nauright (2004), Tonts (2005), Atherley (2006) and Tonts and Atherley (2010), little is known about the role of football in the lives of men living in Australian country towns.

The thesis aim is to better understand why men play football in country towns by drawing on the Bega Valley, NSW as a case study. The Bega Valley is located 420 kilometres south of Sydney and 255 kilometres east of Canberra (see Figure 1.1). The population of the Bega Valley LGA is 31,060 people (ABS Census 2006). Crucial for this project are the demographics of the small towns within the Bega Valley. Bega is the regional administrative centre with the largest single population at 5,864, while Merimbula has a population of 3,849. There are five townships with a population close to or less than 3,000 persons (Bermagui, Eden, Pambula, Pambula Beach and Tura Beach). A further 12,000 persons reside in very small villages (such as Candelou, Wyndham or Cobargo), sparse rural or remote areas of the Bega Valley Shire (ABS Census 2006).

Many of these small towns in the Bega Valley have for men, or had, a mix of soccer, rugby union, rugby league or Australian Rules Football clubs. However, historically, rugby league is the football code that has enabled men to represent their town – over the longest period of time. A competitive Australian Rules Football league for men was only established in 1984. Importantly, much larger towns, such as Moruya (10,278), Narooma (8,312) and Bateman’s Bay (17,270) are administered by Eurobodalla Shire Council, and often form part of the competitive sport network for many football codes in the Bega Valley due to the small town populations in the Bega Valley.

Consequently, men who play football in the Bega Valley are required to drive very long distances to play football. Players travel up to 200 kilometres in each direction when playing ‘away’ from their home town. For example, AFL players from Bateman’s Bay travel to Eden, while rugby league players from Eden travel to Cooma (see Figure 1.6 which shows regional football coverage). This imposes significant temporal and transportation commitments onto footballers in country towns.
Figure 1.1 Bega Valley and study area (darker region)
towns that most urban players do not experience. This temporal commitment of up to 4 hours’ driving often turns football matches into all-day events.

The objective of the thesis is to build upon football literatures by providing a geographical explanation of why men play football in country towns. The project draws on feminist methods and spatial concepts to investigate why men play football in country towns. Hence, the thesis provides an analysis of football life narratives drawing on spatial concepts that understand place and subjectivities as co-constituted and as fluid, ongoing, relational, embodied, cultural, social and political. Football subjectivities are always spatially negotiated, multiple and forged at the intersections of age, fitness, rurality, ethnicity, class, familial relations and gender.


Consequently, the Bega Valley provides an interesting case study in which to explore the importance of football in the lives of men in sustaining hegemonic understandings of a ‘rural masculinity’. This is important given arguments of a ‘post-industrial countryside’ where industrial restructuring is working in the Bega Valley against the fashioning of masculinities constituted as heterosexual, tough, and hardy ‘salt-of-the-earth’ men – such as farmers, fishers, loggers or miners (Mangan and Walvin 1987, Brod and Kaufman 1993, Moore and Crotty 2007, Moore and Saunders 1998, Carrigan et al. 1985).

Furthermore, existing conventional understandings of rural masculinity in the Bega Valley have been challenged by an influx of migrants from Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra (Bega Valley Shire Council, Social Plan 2006-2011). The inflow of counter-culture groups in the 1980s, and so-called ‘sea-change’ or ‘tree-change’ migration from major metropolitan centres were characterised by a diversity of masculinities, ethnicities, sexualities, religions and wealth (Burnley and Murphy 2004, Kenway et al. 2006). Equally, the thesis provides opportunities to explore recent attempts to address sexism, drunkenness and violence in the fully-professional AFL (Australian Football League) and NRL (National Rugby League) (see Symons et al. 2010, Albury et al. 2011, Waterhouse-Watson 2009, Lumby 2005). Has the publicity surrounding codes of football player behaviour (see Appendix G) ‘trickled down’ to ‘country football’ players and clubs that represent country towns?
1.2 Background
Research projects have a history. This project is one component of a larger Australian Research Council project entitled ‘Cultural Sustainability in Australian Country Towns’. The aim of this larger project was to investigate how the everyday cultural experiences impacted upon a town’s viability or desirability as a place to live. In this larger project, ‘cultural sustainability’ is understood as the everyday practices, meanings and experiences that sustain the reciprocal relationships between people and place. Nambucca Heads, Swan Hill and Bega townships were the empirical focii of the ARC project.

In Bega, the larger project began in November 2009 by examining the cultural practice of ‘going out’, with community consultations around the theme of ‘Out and About in the Bega Valley’. The outcomes of this consultation were a number of sub-projects examining the cultural sustainability of community halls, art galleries, pubs and music venues. Missing from these sub-projects were insights about the importance of the role of sport in cultural sustainability, and particularly, contributions from men. Consequently, this thesis examines cultural sustainability in a country town through a focus on men who play football for clubs within the Bega Valley.

1.2.1 Football Codes in the Bega Valley
Competitive football in the Bega Valley is structured along the lines of codes, grades, gender and age. For ‘juniors’ (under 18s) and ‘seniors’ (over 18s) competitive football matches are organised by:

– the Country Rugby League (CRL);

– the Sapphire Coast Australian Football League (SCAFL);

– the South Coast Rugby Union which operates under the auspices of the ACT and Southern NSW Rugby Union, rather than NSW Rugby (with teams from Dalmeny, Bateman’s Bay, Bermagui-Cobargo, Ulladulla and Broulee. Source: South Coast Rugby website at http://www.sczone.rugbynet.com.au/default.asp); and

– the Far South Coast Football Association (soccer). Soccer is one of the larger sports in the region in terms of player numbers, with clubs in Bega, Bemboka, Eden, Mallacoota, Merimbula, Pambula, Tathra and Wolumla. Note that both Bega and Merimbula field multiple teams in some age groups (Source: Far South Coast Football Association at http://www.sportingpulse.com/assoc_page.cgi?c=1-7805-0-0-0).
For players aged 18 years and over, however, for both rugby union and soccer there is not the same level of professionalism, organisational structures, facilities or historical weight of discourses circulating about these codes in the region. For example, rugby league and AFL received greater reporting in the newspaper the Bega District News. This is based on a 12-month media content analysis on the various sports and football codes in the region (see Figure 1.2). In particular, rugby league and AFL dominate the reporting. Note that the figures are not mutually exclusive, and that Tathra Sea Eagles search includes both AFL and rugby league, and Bega Roosters is rugby league only. Likewise, league includes rugby league and Australian Football League.

For men in the Bega Valley, rugby league, AFL and soccer, first and reserve grades are the only two open-age (adult) divisions. Rugby union has only one grade for adult men. Due to small populations in towns, players as young as 16 years often supplement adult teams.

For adult women in the Bega Valley, competitive football matches in rugby league and soccer are organised by the

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Figure 1.2 - Media content analysis of Bega District News, 12 months to 28 October, 2011
same body that administers the men's competitions (the CRL and Far South Coast Football Association respectively). Note that for women, a rugby league competition was only introduced in this current season (2011), and is non-contact rugby league – known as league-tag (where players grab a velcro-attached tag rather than tackle other players physically).

1.3 Country Rugby League in the Bega Valley

Mirroring trends in England, rugby league originated as a ‘break-away’ from rugby union in New South Wales in 1907, some twelve years after the English split. In NSW, the first clubs formed in 1908 (Bloomfield 2003:21). Reasons for the break in England are contested.

On one hand, Jarvie (2006) advocates for class as an explanation of the split because rugby (union) was a bastion of the English upper-class public schools. For Jarvie (2006:55), rugby league occurred as a result of “the coming of the working class player to rugby in 1870s and 1880s and the reluctance of the rugby hierarchy to allow this participation to develop on an equal footing”. Rugby was already an entrenched training ground for classed and gendered masculinities and the northern England working class footballers were simply not welcome. On the other hand, Collins (2006a) advocates an amateur versus professional argument. Whatever the case, in New South Wales in 1907, Rugby League became ‘instantly professional’ by paying players to leave rugby union to play under the New South Wales Rugby Football League. Rugby league – somewhat paradoxically – became known as “the working man’s code” (Bloomfield 2003:21).

Prior to the 1920s, rugby league was played by men in formally organised competitions on the South Coast of NSW. The Country Rugby League (CRL) was established in 1934 as a sub-division of the New South Wales Rugby League. The CRL is the governing body for rugby league played in the Bega Valley. In 2012, this arrangement remains (despite an attempt in 1939 to separate).

Today, most men who play first-grade rugby league across NSW are paid both sign-on fees (payment to play) as well as match fees (for winning). It is now not uncommon for country town clubs to sign-up ex-players of the National Rugby League (NRL). Previously fully-professional players may extend their football career by playing country rugby league if they are no longer able to compete at the highest level of the NRL. For country football clubs, this strategy is expected to increase their ability to win competitions, attract crowds and increase sponsorship. These players are always paid a ‘salary’ as well as the ‘win bonus’ and their accommodation is usually subsidised by the club.

However, in the Bega Valley these salaried players are the exception rather than the rule. Frequently, these ‘salaried’ players still need to work at part-time jobs, as their football salary is insufficient to be their sole source of income. While all rugby league players in the Bega Valley are paid to play rugby league at all adult levels of
competition, this is a token payment rather than a salary. Most players receive around $80 to $100 per win. As well, most players in the Bega Valley receive no sign-on fee. Hence, the term: “bush footy”. Rugby league narratives in the Bega Valley are therefore less likely to be characterised by professional career choices than those in metropolitan centres.

The Country Rugby League (CRL) competition is divided into geographic-based Groups and graded-divisions throughout NSW, with Bega Valley teams situated in Group 16. The affiliated CRL clubs that comprise Group 16 Rugby League span a vast area of south-eastern NSW, being: Bega Roosters, Bermagui-Cobargo Eels, Bombala, Cooma Stallions, Eden Tigers, Merimbula-Pambula Bulldogs, Moruya Sharks, Narooma Devils, Snowy Rivers Bears and Tathra Sea Eagles. Until 2011, the CRL restricted the competitive league to men. But, in 2011, the CRL initiated a women’s a ‘tag football’ (i.e. no contact) rather than rugby league competition. Importantly, all clubs represent country towns, with home-grounds, team mascots, and club sponsorship often from town businesses. See Figure 1.6 for a map of the Group 16 Rugby League and SCAFL regional coverage.

Importantly, not all clubs field teams every year. It is not unusual for clubs to ‘come in and out’ of the competition as player numbers wax and wane. Figure 1.3 shows the 2011 clubs and teams participating in Group 16 rugby league – those clubs with zero (0) teams are still affiliated with the CRL, but do not field teams in the current season – but are hoped or expected to do so in future seasons. The club is kept ‘administratively alive’ by the CRL to ensure teams can readily re-enter the competition when clubs have sufficient player numbers. Fluctuations in player numbers undermine the viability of the sport in country towns. Problems marshaling a team in a country town may occur for myriad reasons at different times, such as small populations in towns, changing demographics within towns when young people leave to pursue education or career options, disidentification with their sport, dwindling facilities, ageing players and teams continually losing matches. For example, during the 2011 season, there were only five teams out of the ten CRL-affiliated clubs currently competing in first-grade Group 16 Rugby League (Bega, Cooma, Eden, Narooma and Tathra), only four in reserve-grade and six in the Under 18 competition.

Sponsorship is necessary to finance the CRL, the NSWRL, higher-grade players’ sign-on and game fees, and, ‘salaries’. The CRL and the NSWRL are sponsored by at least one beer brand – ironically enough – Victoria Bitter. The NSWRL is also sponsored by Bundaberg Rum. This sponsorship in part mirrors the close alignment in Australia of alcohol, sports and sporting masculinity (Jones et al 2006, Collins and Vamplew 2002, Bale and Cronin 2003). Indeed, as Jones et al. confirm, in Australia it is still difficult to have any involvement in sport without alcohol being inextricably linked (Jones et al. 2006).

Sponsorship of an entire football club in the Bega Valley is usually obtained from a hotel or RSL or bowling club affiliated with the town, and supplemented by
other businesses trading in close proximity. Alcohol is inextricably linked to football in the Bega Valley, either directly from alcohol-branded sponsorship (such as VB beer at the overarching body level - CRL) or from local establishments selling alcohol. RSL, bowling club or pub sponsorship is usually applied to all teams in the football club, while smaller local businesses—such as electricians, builders or even surfboard makers—may be sleeve or shorts sponsors or even sponsor individual players. For example, the Bega Roosters’ major sponsor is the Commercial Hotel, Bega, while Tathra Sea Eagles rugby league club’s major sponsor is Tathra Beach Bowling Club. Cobargo Eels are sponsored by the Cobargo Hotel, while Cooma Stallions are sponsored by the Cooma Ex-Services Club and Dodds Hotel, while Eden Tigers’s 1st grade are sponsored by the Great Southern Inn.

The relationship between football clubs
and hotels is a very long-standing one in Australia and along with it, the alcohol-sport nexus (see Collins and Vamplew 2002 for a contrasting relationship in England, where football was one of the last sports to be linked with pubs – after cricket, prizefighting, cockfighting, ratting and gambling). In the 1800s, games were played on open public fields and parks, and “there were no dressing rooms in these areas of public domain, so players would use nearby pubs and hotels for changing purposes” (Hess 2000:117).

There was also a symbiotic business relationship to be had as “the publican could stand to make a large sum of money by associating their name with football” (Topp and Nauright 2004:55). Pubs (and later, clubs) became and still are, venues for football meetings, relaxation after training and places for celebration or drowning of sorrows after a match – training grounds for other types of masculinities associated with alcohol consumption. Football is part of the alcohol brand’s advertising on the tiled walls in many pubs and hotels (see Rowe 1996:568), further reinforcing the link between alcohol and sporting prowess.

1.4 Australian Football League (AFL) in the Bega Valley

According to Hess (2008), the eleven simple rules of “Melbourne Rules” which became Australian Rules Football (now Australian Football League or AFL) was formally created by four men in the Parade Hotel in Melbourne in 1859. One of the original purposes of AFL was as a training

![Figure 1.4 - Original teams of the SCAFL when formed in 1984 - on display at Lawrence Oval, Tathra, in clubroom. Photograph by David Clifton.](image-url)
technique to keep cricketers fit in winter (Hess and Stewart 1998, Hess 2008, Marsh and Murray 2008). By the 1880s, AFL was played in the Riverina and Broken Hill districts of NSW and the New South Wales Football Association was formed to play under the Victorian Football Association rules.

Yet, despite Bega Valley’s bordering Victoria – proximity is often a determining factor in adopting AFL – the Sapphire Coast Australian Football League (SCAFL) was not established until as recently as 1984 (see Figure 1.4 - the inaugural teams of the SCAFL). A year earlier, Robert “Frog” Little – the then owner of the Tathra Hotel, who had recently moved up from Victoria – is attributed with organising the first social AFL game at Lawrence Oval, Tathra (see Figure 1.9) amongst “anyone and everyone”. Once again, this linked football with alcohol. Players comprising ex-pats from Victoria, rugby league and rugby union players and players new to football all showcased their AFL skills, or lack thereof. AFL had finally arrived in the Bega Valley despite complaints from an entrenched rugby league community – which called the Tathra Hotel their ‘local’.

Alcohol-selling venues continue to sponsor most of the clubs in the SCAFL, a club survival imperative, that closely aligns with the rugby league sponsorship. For instance, Merimbula RSL sponsor the SCAFL, while Tathra Sea Eagles AFL are sponsored by both the Tathra Hotel and the Tathra Beach Bowling Club. As shown in Figure 1.5, Bermagui Breakers AFL is sponsored by the Bermagui Country Club.
Figure 1.6: Geographic coverage of Group 16 Rugby League clubs – in BLUE and Sapphire Coast Australian Football League clubs – in RED – 2011 season
AFL is now played on the coastal strip, from Bateman's Bay to Eden, under the Sapphire Coast Australian Football League (SCAFL), aligning Australian Rules Football with NSW Tourism designation. Since founding the SCAFL in 1984, the ability of country towns on the South Coast to sustain a football club has fluctuated frequently.

To be affiliated with the SCAFL, a club must field at least a first-grade side. The foundation SCAFL clubs were: Eden Whalers, Merimbula Diggers, Narooma Lions, Pambula Panthers, Tathra Sea Eagles, Merimbula Marlins, Wyndham Wedgies and Bega Wolumla Wombats. Foundation SCAFL clubs that no longer exist (i.e. formally folded) are The Marlins, Wedgies and Wombats clubs. Similarly, SCAFL clubs that played in the league at various times, but do not currently exist are the: Mallacoota Tiger Sharks, Mallcoota/Cann River and Cooma. All these AFL clubs have formally folded. This is in contrast to rugby league, where clubs exist in principle on paper.

Some clubs, while currently fielding a team, have not been consistently able to secure enough players each year include the Bermagui Breakers and Bateman’s Bay Seahawks. In 2011, there were seven clubs in first grade (see Figure 1.7): Bermagui Breakers, Bateman’s Bay Seahawks, Eden

Figure 1.7: SCAFL clubs and teams in 2011 season - note that the total teams include seniors, reserve grade and all junior teams (source: http://www.sportingpulse.com/assoc_page.cgi?c=1-2304-0-0-0&a=CLUBS, accessed 20 March 2012)
Whalers, Merimbula Diggers, Narooma Lions, Pambula Panthers and Tathra Sea Eagles – with Tathra winning their eighth premiership flag. See Figure 1.8 which details the clubs and their SCAFL participation since 1984. SCAFL clubs only pay the first- and reserve-grade coaches, noting that some paid coaches are also players.

Since 1984, Lawrence Oval, Tathra (see Figure 1.9) – where the first social AFL ‘match’ was held. Lawrence Oval has been shared by both AFL and rugby league codes who train and play on alternate days, resulting in the oval getting used close to seven days per week in winter. For the 2012 season, plans are being developed to move the (adult) rugby league to the Tathra Beach Country Club’s grounds, and Tathra AFL to a new facility being developed at Kalaru – about 5 minutes drive from Tathra (near where the original official AFL ground was located).

1.5 Thesis outline

The overarching aim of this thesis is to better understand why men play football in the Bega Valley, NSW. The aim of the thesis is addressed over six chapters. Chapter 2 provides an overview of football academia to demonstrate how this project is positioned within, and contributes to, geographies of football.

Six strands of literature are identified that point to ways of understanding how football has been conceptualised: a cartographic approach, football and classed identities (drawing on Marxism), football as social capital (drawing on Bourdieu), football and masculinities (drawing on Connell), power and masculinity in football (drawing on Foucault), and football and the body (drawing on Butler). A framework is outlined to help conceptualise the subjectivities of footballers as always spatially negotiated by drawing on the ideas of Massey (1994), Probyn (2003)
and Valentine (2007). Chapter 3 initially outlines how project rigour was achieved by drawing upon a mixed-methods qualitative approach. Secondly, Chapter 3 outlines how discourse and narrative analysis are appropriate analysis methods for this project. The reasons men play football are told through stories about their own football experiences, negotiations and motivations in situ. That is, all football stories are spatially situated.

The next three chapters interpret participants' narratives and discourses to better understand why men play football in the Bega Valley. Chapter 4 begins by interpreting family and ‘rurality’ narratives. To many footballers, the weight of familial history that links families to certain codes in a country town cannot be understated. Further, some players see Bega Valley as a “rural idyll” and its imagined qualities forms why they play football. Chapter 4 then turns to narratives of training for fitness and team-work as ways of belonging in country town teams. Chapter 5 explores the narratives of mateship as a reason participants talk about playing football.

This chapter also considers how the laddish behaviour of mateship is spatially negotiated in and through spaces of country towns. Insights are given to how normative expectations of drunkenness and sexism that often frame football are understood as not always acceptable. Many participants attempt to distance themselves from laddish behaviours. Chapter 6 explores narratives of smallness and winning. Stories are retold of how winning helps sustain place-based attachments, how place-based rivalry surfaces amongst small towns and what are the outcomes for winning places.

Winning narratives are closely aligned with stories about the sustainability of football in country towns. However, the smallness of Bega Valley country town populations provides no guarantees of sustaining winning football teams. Finally, Chapter 7 returns to the aim of the thesis and summarises the key findings. This chapter suggests further areas for development in football and small town research in Australia. The next chapter reviews the football literature, with a particular focus on the contribution by geographers.
Tathra Sea Eagles rugby league team warm-up with physically-demanding exercises before the CRL Group 16 Semi-final against Cooma, at Cooma Showground, Sunday 21 August 2011
Photograph by David Clifton
2.1 Introduction
From a practical perspective, to review all sports literature is beyond the scope of this research. Sport is a research focus across a plethora of disciplines over many years – from anthropology to history to psychology to geography to economics. Indeed, Bale and Dejonghe (2008:157) suggest the earliest writing of “sports geography” was in 1879. Consequently, to narrow the field, this chapter concentrates on “football” – here used as a catch-all to include rugby union, rugby league, Australian Rules football and soccer. Literature specifically omitted from this thesis includes the medical literature on football, which includes injuries, treatment and prevention; football stadium design (see Brown 1998, Bale 1993, 2003, Stewart 2007, Jarvie 2006) and recent literature on football migration of elite professional footballers in the United States of America (USA) from high school to university (Rooney 1969, see also Rooney 1974 and 1980). Shortly after in Europe, Bale, along with Gowing, became the eminent sports geographers in Europe with Geography and Football: the use of ideas from football in the teaching of geography (Bale and Gowing 1976). Through Rooney’s influence on sports geography – but still with a specifically-American focus – quantitative and cartographic approaches pinnacled in 1992 with his co-authored amalgam of maps, statistics and tables in the Atlas of American Sport (Rooney and Pillsbury 1992). This publication complemented his establishment of the journal Sport and Place: An international journal of sports geography, which was published from 1987 until 2000.

From the 1960s, many “sports geographers” continued to be enamoured by the
quantitative spatial approach – what Bale refers to as “cartographic fetishism” (1992). For example, in Australia, Rimmer and Johnson (1967) examined the Victorian service areas of Australian Rules football teams. In the USA, Rosentraub and Nunn (1978) explored the intra- and inter-urban movement of American football teams in cities and suburban towns.

More recently, Ravenel (1997) mapped the relationship between total population and the number of football clubs in France, while Weylan and Snook (1990) provided an interesting cartographic analysis of the ‘centre of football success’ in English Football League, showing that between 1921 and 1987 the geographic focus of English football had shifted from Derby to Leicester. This study echoed the earlier work of Gaspar (1982) on the Portuguese Football League.

While acknowledging the possibilities of quantitative spatial approaches in identifying patterns and statistical relationships, this approach increasingly was critiqued for reducing people to numbers, and lacking consideration of the economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of football. Those that accepted the critique that quantitative approaches offered description rather than interpretation of football geographies embraced alternative approaches, informed by broader trends both within and outside geography.

2.3 Football and classed identities
In the 1970s and 1980s, class became a dominant theme that ran across discussions of football in the disciplines of history, geography, sociology and cultural studies. Conceptualising class through a Marxist lens of political economy frameworks meant social injustice and inequalities were conceived as created and reproduced through economic relations that underpinned sports such as football.

Operating with the binaries of work/leisure, leisure time became conceptualised as a resource for the urban elite to ‘control’ the working classes. For example, sociologists such as Hargreaves suggested that workers’ free time was not their own… “the dominant classes’ control over the working class peoples’ free time was manifested in sports” (1986:85). Braverman (1974) argued that time away from work becomes dependent on the capitalist market, and so both spectator and participant sport becomes part of the modes of production.

Following this logic, productivity was increased by keeping workers happy and/or fit. For Brohm, by definition, the commercial relations of all professional sports, including football, is no longer leisure, but work, and must be seen as such…‘spectator sport is a commodity sold along normal capitalist lines’ (Brohm 1978:51). Brohm also conceptualised sport as a means of governance by the urban elite. For Brohm, large sports events such as the Olympic Games or soccer’s World Cup could be conceived as means to keep the working classes happy, and retain the status quo, despite systemic social inequalities (Brohm 1978).

Cashman and McKernan (1979), Mangan (1986) and Poynting and Donaldson (2005) discussed the structural mechanism
underpinning classed divisions of sports – including education systems, ticket pricing and membership fees. Collins and Vamplew (2002:6) outlined how Australian Rules and rugby league became the “working man’s games”, enacted primarily through lower-income wage earners having access to drinking spaces, while the Australian elite played rugby union through access to private schools and clubs. Wealthier families also had, and still have, greater access to watch sport due to the cost of attending – the hierarchical cost of ticketing relative to viewing priority is a fundamental method of socio-spatial differentiation in all major sport venues.

Similarly in Britain, wealthier families often had greater opportunities to participate in rugby union because of the systemic class structure of the public school system (Mangan 1986, Kirk and Twigg 1995, Collins 1996, 2006a). In England, soccer hooliganism is often seen as a (violent) reaction to oppression through the classed divisions of football (see Baker 1983, Bale 1993, Dunning et al. 1988, Dunning 2000, Redhead 2004, and Maniglio 2007).

Another enduring strand of research draws on a political economy framework to explain why the spatial patterns of professional sports clubs tends to focus on particular large metropolitan centres (see Harvey 1982, Corbridge 1986, Corbridge and Harriss 2000). According to Bale (2003), professional football relies upon capitalism to exist in place... “those who stand to gain from the ‘embourgeoisement’ of football are the large, successful clubs in the bigger cities” (2003:102). This approach asserts that professional football spaces are completely in the hands of those who make decisions based on maximising revenues as professional sport has become fashioned within capitalist structures.

Hence, Bale (2003) argued that the resulting spatial pattern of professional football spaces has more to do with the institutionalised structures of the commodification of professional football than any other factor. This strand of literature argues that spatial distribution of professional football spaces is reliant upon relations of capitalism – including spectator gate receipts, television sale rights and sponsorships (Ingham and Hardy 1984, Noll 1974, Quirk 1973). Prior to fully-professional football, spatial relations of football were community-based and football spaces evolved around non-commercial relations such as place-based attachments.

Yet, these political economy approaches to football are not without their criticism. For example, in the late 1980s Morgan does not agree that sport is itself an institution, and criticises the ‘cavalier’ manner in which Brohm and Adorno ‘define’ sport (see Morgan 1983:27, Morgan 1988:813). A political economy approach to sport is open to criticism as being too restrictive by defining sport as an unchanging classed institution, and or focusing only on the commercial relations of elite professional sports. Arguments that fashion football through political economy frameworks of class divisions, institutional structures of sport and workings of capitalism tended to ignore the corporeal, performative, gendered, sexual and emotional dimensions of football. Sections 4 to 7 review the works that embraced the ideas of post-
structuralist thinkers that considers the cultural, embodied and social dimensions of football, alongside its classed and economic relations. The next section turns to the implications for studying football embracing the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu.

2.4 Pierre Bourdieu and Football
The work of French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu in *The Forms of Capital* (1986) is one of the most influential theorists helping geographers and leisure study scholars rethink the social relationships that comprise sports, and football, by paying more attention to the body and context. Bourdieu introduce three key concepts to re-conceptualise capital within a cultural economy framework:

1) **cultural capital** – Bourdieu defined as having three related parts: embodied cultural capital - the work of self-improvement that cannot be transferred; objectified cultural capital – in the forms of cultural goods such as paintings or writings; or institutionalised cultural capital in the conferring of institutional recognition;

2) **economic capital** – immediately convertible to money, such as property rights; and

3) **social capital** – Bourdieu defined as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu 1986:249).

Bourdieu conceptualises social capital as being an attribute of the collective community, and cultural capital as possessed by an individual (Bourdieu 1986). For instance, in social groups such as football clubs, it is the desire for collective group solidarity which makes social capital possible (Bourdieu 1986).

Bourdieu (1986) acknowledges that there is a formalised hierarchy that produces the nobles (‘people who are known’) within social groups. Hence, those who are invested with cultural capital through ‘institutional’ positions such as club president or secretary or the football club captain, will have greater access to, and participation in, the now valorised community resources or profits. Access to, and distribution of, social capital is uneven and hierarchical.

Recent research by Spaaij (2009), Tonts (2005), Atherley (2006) and Tonts and Atherley (2010) applied the work of Bourdieu to explore how football sustains communities and placed-based belonging in rural Victoria and Western Australia. This work transpired from the ongoing changes to many Australian rural communities’ economic and social infrastructure. Earlier, the Victorian government initiated a *Parliamentary Inquiry into Country Football* (2004) to determine the impact of football on life in rural Victoria. The research by Tonts (2005), Atherley (2006) and Tonts and Atherley (2010) underscored how local football clubs becomes vital in the production of, and access to, social capital in country towns. These studies found that football clubs opened up opportunities for people often not previously in a privileged position in country towns (such as players...
or ‘important’ officials – the nobiles), with some football clubs even helping overcome social disadvantage.

According to Cocklin and Alston (2003) and Sobels et al. (2001), positive social capital can help rural communities respond to the ‘rural malaise’ of reducing populations and the subsequent services withdrawal such as bank or post office closures. Football forms a “tight knit” community by bringing people together to have meaningful interaction (Tonts 2005:143) and so contributes in forming social capital. Football frames who they are, where they are, with social capital in place playing a large role in the claimed identity of rural football communities. This research concluded that rural football and netball clubs (which operate side-by-side in Victoria) become the “glue” of the rural communities (Spaaij 2010:1134, Parliament of Victoria 2004:50) by contributing significantly to rural communities’ identity and social cohesion though social capital development. Furthermore, this work drew attention to a ‘dark side’ of social capital (Jarvie 2006:334, Tonts 2005:146). The community social capital through football clubs potentially marginalises ‘Others’ – such as those who don’t play or follow football or may marginalise the essential work of those involved in off-field duties – such as canteen work that is frequently left to women. According to Tonts (2005), domestic labour often positions people as ‘auxiliary members’ of football spaces (see also Hess 2000). Nevertheless, the increase in social capital and overall expression of community derived through football clubs were argued, on balance, to have helped rural communities maintain, and perform, a particular understanding of a country town’s identity (Tonts 2005, Atherley 2006, Tonts and Atherley 2010).

2.5 Raewyn Connell, masculinities and football

Masculinity is a central theme to the football literature (see Cauldwell 2011, Collins 2006b, Giulianotti et al. 2005, Messner 2002, Whannel 1999, Lines 2001, Brown 1998 and many others). In the late 1980s/early 1990s sociologists such as Messner and Sabo (1990, 1994), Carrigan et al. (1985) and others drew attention to the structural dimensions of masculinities and how football institutions reproduced and naturalised the inequalities of a patriarchal society.

Working with a structural paradigm, Raewyn Connell’s concept of “hegemonic masculinity” is central to many publications exploring the intersection between masculinity, power and football (Wellard 2009, Hindley 2005, Clayton and Harris 2004, Prettyman and Lampman 2011 and others). Connell defined hegemonic masculinity as:

“the configuration of gender practice which embodied 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 1995:77).

Connell derived this concept from Gramsci’s analysis of class relations. Hence, power is conceptualised as being held by an individual who is already pre-configured within an existing gender.
order and the dualistic hierarchy of man/woman. Hegemonic masculinity was closely affiliated with representations of manliness associated with sets of ideas including rationality, risk-taking, hardness, fearlessness, toughness and competitiveness – ideas often associated with successful footballers. Those men who embodied these attributes could then sustain their social status over others within the gendered hierarchy, including all women, and men who do not have the capacity to exert the same level of authority.

Donaldson points to Gramsci’s hegemony as being “about the winning and holding of power and the formation (and destruction) of social groups in that process” (Donaldson 1993:644). Domination and exclusion is illustrated by whichever team wins the football trophy (Wellard 2009, Hindley 2005, Clayton and Harris 2004). The next section discusses how the work of Michel Foucault, and particularly his rethinking of power, was employed within the analysis of football.

2.6 Michel Foucault, power, masculinities and football

The work of French philosopher Michel Foucault is key to three intersecting strands of work that have reconceptualised the study of power, sport, masculinity and space. One strand builds on Foucault’s *Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) and *Power/Knowledge* (1980) and his concepts of discourse and discursive structures to help rethink the gendered identities of football bodies. The second strand draws on the arguments in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977). According to sociologists and educators Markula and Pringle (2006:73), this work is the most cited of Foucault’s texts in the sport academy. Foucault analysed eighteenth-century practices of discipline and punishment and how this translated into a form of social ‘power’, that disciplined what people choose to do in the process of becoming a member of a particular collective. A third strand employed Foucault’s ideas of discourse, discipline and power to rethink the politics of belongings through playing sports.

A concept running through these themes is how Foucault reconceptualised power. For Foucault, power is conceptualised as a productive and not repressive social force – the subject is therefore produced in relations of social power and related social practices. As Foucault argues:

> Power traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault 1980:119).

Foucault, in *Power/Knowledge* (1980), argued that power is always present in human relations and the body is the site in which the workings of power operated. Foucault (1978), when considering power relations, disagreed “that the sovereignty of the state, the form of the law, or the overall unity of domination are given at the outset” (1978:92). For Foucault, the effects of power produce “certain bodies”
(1980a:98) as well as the desires and experiences of those bodies. Foucault conceptualises the social relationships of power producing different experiences and in doing so, specific identities.

2.6.1 Foucault, gender and power

For Foucault, gender is not a ‘natural feature’ but constructed through experience with historical, cultural and social origins – and not biological origins. Following Foucault, the gendered identities of footballers are always negotiated through bodily experiences that are linked to discourse, power relations and disciplinary techniques. As Foucault argued:

> the individual is not a pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power. The individual, with his [sic] identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces (Foucault 1980:73-74).

Underpinned by Foucault’s work, Shogan (1999:51) advises that athletic bodies are not the result of ‘normal’ processes – “there is nothing normal about a body disciplined as masculine or feminine…masculinity and femininity, like sports skills, are acts or performances that must be learned”. This means that gender on the body, in the forms of masculinity or femininity, is a process of learning ‘how to do gender’. Gender is not inscribed nor fixed on the body, but is acquired through practice and training – just as any skill in a sport is acquired – with repetition of performance, ‘correction’ to the performance based on social norms, and learnt over time. Bodies learn how to perform gender. This strand is discussed further through the work of Judith Butler (see section 2.7) who built upon Foucault’s ideas of discursive regimes, performativity and gender.

2.6.2 Foucault, discipline and power

Foucault asserted in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) that power operated by fabricating individual bodies into a social order through disciplinary practices into ‘useful and docile’ bodies. That is, bodies are rendered by the practice of disciplinary actions (such as physical training) to conform and become ‘mechanically efficient’ (i.e. useful), and in so doing, become less willing and able to resist (by their conformity) to the existing social order (i.e. docile).

Foucault argued that these bodies are ideal in the institutionalised and regimented spaces of school classrooms, the military and factories – spaces of ritualistic conformity through a specific social order. In his thinking, Foucault draws an analogy with Jeremy Bentham’s 1791 architectural prison design – the Panopticon – which ‘enabled’ prisoners to be self-regulated because they felt they were being watched (by prison staff) at all times, due to the circular design of the building – a building which, incidentally, was never constructed (Bentham and Božović 2011). Consequently, Foucault labeled this self-disciplinary process “panopticism” (1980b).

Foucault’s concept of panopticism suggests that football players and spectators will “control themselves” for fear of being understood as being ‘non-conforming, abnormal or resisting’ – resulting in an exercise of power over those being watched (1980b). Accepting football’s codified rules
of the game as well as spectators’ codes of conduct ensures football matches progress in accordance with a pre-determined and accepted social order – for instance, the hierarchy of referees relative to players. The explicit (referees and officials) and implicit (spectators and community members) gaze of authority disciplines the players and spectators to reflect on their own behaviours to render them ‘docile’ – they ‘supervise’ themselves and behave in accordance with formalised and societal standards.

Hence, for Foucault, discipline is a mechanism of power that regulates the behaviour of individuals in the social football body. This is done by regulating space (football field lines of demarcation etc.), time (match and training schedules) and people’s activity and behaviour (training drills). It is enforced with the aid of systems of surveillance – some explicit, such as cameras, officials or police in football crowds, some ‘invisible’, like the painted lines on a football pitch. Foucault emphasises that power is not discipline. Rather, discipline is simply one way in which power can be exercised (Foucault 1980:106). As shown, power can be exercised in many ways, and discipline of the body such as in training, or discipline of people into a social order such as at football matches, are power being exercised through disciplinary practices.

Finnish sociologist Heikkala draws upon Foucault’s concept of ‘disciplinary actions’ to ‘produce’ a body along with an internalised desire of winning that results in a specific bodily performance – discipline proceeds from the controlled or coerced distribution of individuals in space. Heikkala showed that athletic bodies are normalised by the disciplinary techniques of modern sport and the logic of competition so that they develop ‘productive bodies’ and a ‘will to win’ (1993:397):

in sport, external control by authorities is only half of the story. Sport is not forced labour; it must and does include a strong voluntary flavour. Significantly, the will to do better must also carry a strong internalised feeling of a ‘need’ of discipline and conformity to the practices necessary for achieving the desired goal. The eye of an external authority is accompanied with an internalised ‘bad conscience’, which sounds an alarm whenever tasks are not properly executed or the columns of training diaries are not adequately filled... this bad conscience is a consequence of normalising techniques and is the instrument of control, internal or external (Heikkala 1993:401).

Importantly, discipline is a way of controlling the operations and positions of the body. For example, the ‘disciplined football body’ obeys the coach’s commands, follows the referee’s decisions about the rules, makes the maximum effort, joins in the team’s collective goal and doesn’t question the logic or sense of rigorous training in winter at night. The highly-disciplined football body is a much sought-after commodity in professional football spaces due to its performance and conformity.

Even well away from the fully-professional codes, the football body can still be conceptualised as ‘disciplined’. Football bodies are still disciplined through training,

coaching, team-building and mateship. Furthermore, this thesis remains alert to critiques of panopticism and Foucault’s key assumptions that human behaviour is fundamentally rational and that people are free to choose their own control techniques based on the gratification-punishment dichotomy (Foucault 1977). However, the emotions of football players at matches, coupled with the impairment of judgment due to alcohol by some spectators can render self-regulation inoperable and demand that state-controlled methods – such as the police – be brought in to reinstate social order if officials at matches cannot.

2.6.3 The politics of belonging in football

Who then has power and what has he [sic] in mind? What is the aim of someone who possesses power? (Foucault, Prison Talk, 1980:97).

This strand of work cuts across disciplines, codes of football and geographical scale. A unifying theme in this work is the concept of “imagined geography”. Imagined geography is a concept that draws on Foucault’s arguments of power/knowledge to argue how geographical boundaries are made and remade through sets of ideas about who belongs, and who is excluded.

As Bale (2003) argues, imagined geographies examines the political process of how the imagination constructs geography and how that imagination becomes normalised by production and reproduction through texts, photographs, movies and art (Bale 2003:166). For example, Cashman (1995) and Kell (2000) have explored the political process through which Australia has become imagined as a “paradise of sport” (Cashman 1995) and the “myth of the fair go” that operates to silence the racist, sexist and class-based exclusions in sport (see Saunders 1998, Thomson 2009). Kell (2000) argues convincingly how the ‘fair go’ that is so entrenched in Australian sports’ way of life, is in fact a myth produced by the classed effects of an ongoing racist society.

As Kell asserts, the “level playing field” in Australia is a fantasy (Kell 2000:155). Furthermore, “[T]o be bad at sport or to be uninterested in sport is considered to be distinctly “un-Australian” (Kell 2000:27, Tonts and Atherley 2010:384). Saunders (1998) argues that nationalism through sport has also moved onto the football field where the national team names incorporate Australian native animal identities, such as the Kangaroos (rugby league), the Wallabies (rugby union) and Socceroos (soccer) (see Collins 2005, 2006, Moore 2000, Noonan 2009).

Bale (2003) suggests football binds people to place. This binding of football, identity and place is often demonstrated when towns play in football finals – the streets and shops are ablaze with the town team’s colours. Working at the suburban scale of Australian Rules Football teams, Mynard et al. examined the politics of belonging through what they termed a “spirit of inclusion” (2009:270). Footballers don’t just represent their team, but their whole town. This is what Bale terms “representational sport” – where athletes represent their town, and spectators understand the athletes as representing them against other groups (Bale 2000:149). Football players in towns may compete against players
from other towns, to assert their belonging and superiority. Bale (2000) argues that this pride-of-place-attachment fluoresces between towns, where a town’s imagined geography and identity is often formed through its football team and its success on the field, and, when winning, assert ‘bragging rights’ over other towns as a form of place-dominance and belonging. Indeed, Atherley (2006) found that rural communities position sporting clubs as the “heart of the community” and contributing to a particular sense of identity and belonging (2006:348).

Football helps not only reconfigure the imagined boundaries between nations and towns, but in Australia also helps forge the social bonds within a team through discourses of mateship (Mynard et al. 2009). The social bonds of mateship was a key result in Mynard et al.’s (2009) ethnographic study of what players spoke about as being the benefits of playing in a suburban football team in outer Melbourne, Victoria. In this study, football competition was understood as “playing to win for my mates”. These results echoed Sabo’s (1986) and Young et al.’s (1994) suggestion that a male athlete’s performance of masculinity is troubled if they cannot perform as fearless when there is a real or perceived corporeal risk. The ability and (almost) unquestionable willingness of these footballers to put themselves at risk of injury for their team mates to win, brings into existence a particular understanding of “mateship”.

Thompson (1994) suggests that homosociality (read mateship) amongst Australian men was the product of a deep antipathy towards women – from long-standing same-sex social relationships due to, primarily, an absence of (white) women in the ‘hostile’ Australian ‘bush’ (Ward 1965). Thompson (2009) and Moore and Crotty (2007:32) discuss mateship as an ideology in Australia to have been fully realised and forged as part of the ANZAC legend – where mates were prepared to die for one another to ‘prove’ their mateship. Murrie (2007:400) and Thompson (2009) discuss how mateship is at the core of Australia’s identity.

Hence, mateship is frequently officially positioned as the cornerstone of ‘being Australian’ – raceless, classless and genderless – and part of the ‘fair go’ for all (see Aust. Govt. 2007:19, 31) However, Thompson (2009), Moore and Crotty (2007) and Murrie (2007) discuss how for mates to belong requires the exclusion of others. Conventionally, mateship is understood as strengthening homosocial relationships between men amongst those who are in the ‘fraternal club’, while those who are not in the ‘club of men’, are excluded and consequently Othered (such as women or same-sex attracted men). In short, the social bonds of mateship have important political implications that help configure who belongs where at particular geographical scales.

2.7 Judith Butler and Football

During the 2000s, post-structural feminists’ rethinking of bodies became one of the key foci of leisure studies and geographical thinking. Rather than starting with the ontological assumptions of the biological body, feminist scholars
have re-thought the body in cultural and spatial terms. In leisure studies and geography, scholars such as Aitchison (2000), Longhurst (2000b, 2005), Bell et al. (1994) and Pringle (2005), have drawn on a number of feminists including Kristeva (1982), Bordo (2000), Grosz (1994) Probyn (2000a) and Butler (1990). These works often built on the ideas of Foucault, and foreground the body in ways of Western dualist thinking... mind/body, man/woman, gender/sex, rationality/passion and culture/nature (Rose 1995:546).

In particular, the work of Judith Butler is important – how she troubled dualistic and fixed understandings of gender is helpful to rethink sports bodies (Cauldwell 2006, Wellard 2007 and 2009, Crabbe and Blackshaw 2004, Roth and Basow 2004, Hargreaves 1994, Nelson 1994, Oglesby et al. 1998, Davis and Weaving 2010). Butler (1990:25) argues, first, that gender is “a corporeal style, or an ‘act’ underpinned by sets of norms. As Butler pointed out:

> The bodies that we become are facilitated by that set of norms: they precede us with their enabling and disabling power, but they do not determine us in advance (Butler 1998).

Butler suggested it is “within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible” (Butler 1997:5). For example, for a footballer, this brings into existence bodies-from-texts such as “fit”, “tough”, “strong”, “scarred” or “injured” bodily forms – language that establishes norms of masculininity, albeit fluid in their interpretation. According to Butler (1990:25): “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender... identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results”. Secondly, for Butler, the repetition of expected performances temporally ‘fixes’ identities, but there are always possibilities of slippage in the repetition. Hence, Butler discussed the ‘fluid norms’ of gendered identity (1990). Applying these ideas to the athlete Butler explained that:

> When we think of the athlete’s body, we are drawn to the image of a muscular sort of being; it is a body that we see or, rather, imagine, a body with a set of contours – a lengthened or compacted muscularity, a body whose contours bear the marks of a certain achievement (Butler 1998).

Here, Judith Butler points to the possibilities of the athlete’s body as a fluid, ‘imagined something’ that is not fixed but changes constantly and may exceed, or fall short, of the imagined athletic body. Importantly, it is what Butler calls “athletic morphogenesis” – the becoming of an athlete’s body, through the imposition of culturally-imposed norms – that make the formation of the athlete’s body possible and be a body in the social relations or milieu that comprise the world of sports (Butler 1998).

Crucially, Butler asserts the athletes’ body “is always in motion” and never finished or complete in its accomplishment. So, the masculine footballer’s body is the “laboured effect of a ritualistic exercise”, being stabilised over time as the result of repetition or acting-out of particular masculine social norms (Butler 1998). For example, in the case of football bodies, it is repetition of training and the rules
and regulation of matches that reproduce what it means to ‘be a footballer’. In other words, the gendered, sexed and classed identities of a footballer, in Butlers’ terms, is ‘performative’ and stabilised through repetitive actions that constitute and construct a(n unfixed) masculinity.

Furthermore, Butler’s approach suggests that to construct masculinity does not pre-suppose a male sexed body (Butler references the problems in ‘classification’ and ‘testing’ professional tennis players Martina Navratilova and cross-gendered Renee Richards to prove this point). Butler disrupts earlier socialist thinking that locked in gender (masculinity and femininity) with particular sexed bodies (male and female).

While originally drawing her ideas about sexuality from Foucault (see section 2.6), Butler argues that compulsory pronunciation of heterosexuality by institutions like the state or sports organisations as the ‘natural’, ‘sane’, and ‘legal’ norm was predetermined by the existence of (only) two complementary genders: masculine and feminine. Drawing on Butler, Emig and Rowland (2010:4) have explored how institutional structures naturalise and safeguard heterosexuality. Albury et al (2011:342) discuss how, for the Australian National Rugby League, this process of naturalisation sustains spaces of compulsory heterosexuality.

Interestingly, one of the earliest critiques of Butler’s work was the lack of attention to the spatial. For example, Gillian Rose argued that: “Butler is just about the only major social theorist writing at the moment who has virtually nothing to say about space” (Rose 1995:546). This critique echoed the words of Elspeth Probyn (1995) and Bell and Binnie et al. (1994) in their benchmark papers exploring the necessity of thinking spatially to sustaining a sense of self. That is, rather than gender being pre-given or fixed-at-birth, gender draws on sets of ideas and is always performed through repetitive actions somewhere.

Building upon these critiques, in her later work, Butler (1998) encouraged scholars to rethink bodies in relational and spatial terms. Hence, she argues it is not just the individual body, but the collective body that performs and re-forms. As Butler argues, this idea has particular relevance in team sports…

In competitive sports, the collective action is such that whatever the athletic goal—whether it is completing the play or winning the game—is still a situation in which bodies are being made, in which the tacit sculpting of bodies takes place dramatically and in concert. It may or may not be the conscious purpose of the action, but one of the consequences of playing together is that the physiology of the body is transformed through the process of that collective action. The bodies that begin the game are not the same bodies that end the game. As they are made, established, sculpted, contoured, in relation to one another, they are established in a space that is neither fully or exclusively individual nor fully or exclusively collective (Butler 1998).

Butler points to the impossibility of separating the individual body from the collective body. She notes how individual and collective bodies are in a constant process of transformation through training
and playing together. Finally, she points to the importance of remembering how the physiology of the body changes through the emotional highs and lows of playing competitive sports. Football masculinity is conceived as not only a repetitive performance of what you do at particular times and places, rather than a universal who you are – but that you are also physiologically transformed. According to Butler (1990), there is material, cultural and social dimensions to footballers’ bodies.

Judith Butler’s ideas have also been very productive in exploring how heterosexuality is produced, reproduced and challenged through applying the concepts of performativity and heteronormativity and are especially relevant in queer theory (Cauldwell 2011 and 2006, Geller and Stockett 2006, Atkinson and DePalma 2008, Yep et al. 2003, Chambers 2007 and many others). However, less attention has been given in cultural geography in regards to exploring how masculinity is performed within the social context of football teams and rural towns.

2.8 Conceptual Framework
This section sets out a spatial conceptual framework to explore what it means to ‘become a footballer’ in the Bega Valley, NSW. This conceptual framework is underpinned by scholars who acknowledge the fluidity, spatiality and multiplicities of subjectivities to think about what it may mean to become a footballer. To better understand what it may mean for men who play football, this project draws together three strands of post-structuralist feminist thinking outlined in the literature review.

Firstly, Doreen Massey argued that that space is never fixed, but always unfolding and forged by a constellation of social relationships – what she termed a “progressive sense of place” (Massey 1994:135-142). This concept ensures space is never finalised, fixed or closed – a critique of earlier essentialist conceptions of space.

Instead, space is envisaged as an ongoing constellation of past and present events, both human and non-human. Space is always in the process of being made and re-made. Hence, football pitches and country towns are not conceptualised as fixed entities where pre-configured identities play out. Instead, football becomes one way that understandings of how the political and geographical boundaries of a country town are made and re-made, in terms of the people who belong and those who are excluded.

Building on this concept of a progressive sense of place, the second strand is Elspeth Probyn’s (2003) concept of the “spatial imperative of subjectivity”. That is, “the ways in which we are positioned in regard to ourselves as subjects, in terms of both space and time” (2003:290). She argues that space and subjectivity are co-constituted: “the place and space we inhabit produces us” (Probyn 2003:294). We produce space and space produces us. That is, space presses against our bodies and also our subjectivities. It is the embodiment of our subjectivities in space, that determine if we belong in that space. People who do not belong in a space
will be made to feel their subjectivities – such as gender, sexuality, homophobia, racism etc. – by those who claim they do belong. Probyn (2003:290) suggests that in the body we find the knowledge about the workings of our subjectivities – so that the body becomes a site “for the production of knowledge, feelings, emotions and history, all of which are central to subjectivity”. That is, everyone has ‘embodied histories’ that help form and shape their subjectivities. Consequently, gender is not conceived as a pre-given entity, but is constituted as discursive, embodied, performative and spatial.

The third and final complementary strand follows Gill Valentine’s (2007) concept of “intersectionality” – where our subjectivities are not pre-ordered or discrete categories, but are situated at the nexus or intersection of many things, including age, sexuality, ethnicity, masculinity and class. Valentine states this ‘cross-fertilisation’ approach has been used occasionally in geographical research (see Peake 1993, Kobayashi 1994, Pratt 1999, 2002) but its use, although widely acknowledged, is sadly lacking in feminist geography. Valentine acknowledges the original concept of intersectionality is attributed to critical race theorists who rejected notions of race, gender, ethnicity and class, and used intersectionality to describe the interconnections and interdependence of race with other social categories (emphasis in original, Valentine 2007:12). In other words, football players’ identities, like any individual, stands at the crossroads of multiple social categories that become relevant/irrelevant in different social contexts.

However, she does criticise the lack of empirical work in intersectionality (2007:14) in feminist geography academia with studies ‘only’ looking at class together with gender, rather than the ‘full’ implications of multiple and multiplied intersections. Gill Valentine’s work is imperative to this thesis, in that she points to the need to examine the intersectionality of lived experiences. What it means to become a footballer is therefore conceptualised to occur at the intersections of multiple categories – such as a son, father, husband and mate. As Valentine argues, categories can no longer be considered in isolation or selectively – categories are simultaneous, multiple and have multiplying effects. These spatial concepts and how they are inter-related through multiplicities of subjectivities are diagrammatically illustrated in Fig 2.1

One of very few papers to bring this experiential and intersectional bodily approach to football is the work of the sociologists Markula and Pringle (2006). They examined non-professional rugby in New Zealand through the lived and felt experiences of the body and the discursive construction of gendered identities for both male and female rugby players. They argued “sport does not unambiguously produce culturally dominant conceptions of masculinities” (emphasis added, Markula and Pringle 2006:131).

That is, for Markula and Pringle, sport does not (re)produce simple, clear-cut ideas of hegemonic masculinities, but sport is a site of multiple, nuanced, personal and infinitely variable experiences of what it means to become a female or male footballer. Such thinking ensures a “complexity and fluidity in the way [individual] identities are made
Figure 2.1 Diagrammatic representation of the conceptual framework.

Individuals are not conceived in this project as contained entities. Rather, people are conceived of as being in constant contact with others and changing material contexts through what they do, think and feel within social relations and structures of power that comprise different spaces – such as homes, schools, pubs or sports fields (Waitt and Gorman-Murray 2011:1383).

In other words, men do not turn up to football pitches with their subjectivities already intact. Instead, men become football players through their connections with others on and off the field as fathers, sons, mates and team members. The next chapter outlines the methodology, followed by a discussion of the results.
Rocky Laguana, one of the players interviewed for this project, after the SCAFL Reserve Grade Grand Final between Bermagui Breakers and Bateman's Bay Seahawks at Hanging Rock Oval, Bateman's Bay, Saturday 10 September, 2011

Photograph by David Clifton
3.1 Introduction
This purpose of this chapter is threefold. Firstly, to demonstrate how methodological rigour according to Baxter and Eyles (1997:512) and Hay (2005:74), and ethical procedures were achieved in this project through the use of feminist qualitative research methods. The second aim is to highlight the myriad methodological and ethical challenges of conducting fieldwork over 400km away in the Bega Valley, NSW. The third aim is to provide further insight in how to research men from a post-structural feminist perspective. By using the body as a research tool and employing a mixed-methods approach, the research attempts to overcome some feminist geographers’ concerns that fieldwork is a masculinist tradition (Rose 1993) as well as not simply reproducing the qualitative or quantitative research binary (Sharp 2005).

The first section addresses rigour and ethics, and in particular the techniques of feminist critical reflexivity and positionality. The second section considers how recruitment and sampling was conducted for this project, including the limitations of football codes and clubs included in the research. The third section provides the detail of the media archive assembled on football in the Bega Valley region upon which to base discourse analysis. The fourth section discusses the methodologies of football life histories as told by footballers, including the use of semi-structured interviews, sketches and artefacts as a means of co-constituting (feminist) football knowledge. Finally, the last two sections on discourse analysis and narrative analysis discuss how these two methodologically contrasting (i.e. ‘themes’ compared to ‘stories’), but complementary forms of textual interpretation and analysis were employed to provide different types and levels of meanings from the interview transcripts, sketches and media archive. This demonstrates the importance of place in ubere stories were told as well as considering how stories were told by participants.

3.2 Ethics, Reflexivity and (Re)Positionality: achieving rigour and conducting ethical feminist qualitative research

3.2.1 Rigour in feminist research
This section will demonstrate how methodological rigour was achieved in this feminist project by drawing on the seminal works of Lincoln and Guba (1981), Baxter and Eyles (1997:512) and Hay (2005:74). Ensuring rigour in qualitative research establishes trustworthiness through the process of “doing” research (Bailey et al., 1999a, 1999b, Baxter and Eyles, 1999a, 1999b). According to Baxter and Eyles (1997), there are four dimensions of rigour: credibility, transferability, dependability
These dimensions of rigour illustrate how qualitative research prioritises the processes of making meanings rather than measurements (Holloway and Biley, 2011) or, context rather than counting. A feminist approach embraces the general principles of qualitative research outlined by Baxter and Eyles (1997:505), that is to embody: “the richness of context-dependent sites and situations rather than following standardised procedures that characterise quantitative research”. Baxter and Eyles (1997) suggest utilising a ‘rigour matrix’ to facilitate methodological transparency, validity and reliability. On one hand, Hilary Winchester (1999:63) questions the value of a rigour matrix – that is, obtaining data from a number of different sources to ensure the data produced is consistent, reliable and accurate. She suggests that the complementary may be illusory and that rigour is equated with a ‘verificational realism’ (Rennie, 1998:109) of Enlightenment or positivist thinking. On the other hand, Mike Crang (2002:652) accepts the rigour matrix. Alert to these debates, the research strategies utilised to work towards rigour in this project are shown in Table 3.1. This table forms the basis of discussion outlined in this chapter.

### 3.2.2 Ethics

Bradshaw and Stratford suggest ethics is essential to geographical research because “it is no frivolous thing to share, interpret and represent their [participants’] experiences” (in Hay 2005:73). Drawing on a feminist approach, “doing ethics” in this project became a process of negotiating both formalised procedure and personal practice. The formal process of project evaluation (and approval) ensures the project met the guidelines and policy imperatives of the University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Feminist geographers also appreciate ethics as an on-going negotiation of personalised and place-specific interactions between researcher and the researched, that demand constant personal assessment and re-assessment by being reflexive. Particularly relevant to this thesis is how a feminist approach is alert to the importance of not reproducing ideologies that silence and oppress, including sexism and racism. This section explores these two inter-related dimensions of ethics.

### The Human Research Ethics Committee

All research at the University of Wollongong involving humans requires formal approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Formal HREC approval for this project was granted on 5 August, 2011 under approval number HE11/329 (Appendix A). The formal approval process required identifying and addressing the primary ethical considerations. Listed, these included:

1. informed written consent of participants;
2. confidentiality and transparency of interviews, recorded data and transcripts (i.e. recordings and transcripts made available to interviewees for editing or withdrawal); and
3. the overall “community benefit” of the project.

Each of these is subsequently explored.
### Strategies and practices used to satisfy criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credibility</th>
<th>Transferability</th>
<th>Dependability</th>
<th>Confirmability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authentic representations of experience</td>
<td>Fit within contexts outside the study situation</td>
<td>Minimization of idiosyncrasies in interpretation. Variability tracked to identifiable sources</td>
<td>Extent to which biases, motivations, interests or perspectives of the inquirer influence interpretations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Literature Review | | | |
| review relevant literature to ensure project in context | | | |

| Purposeful Sampling | | | |
| aim to acquire rich information in a (relatively) short period of time | | | |

| Targeted Sampling | | | |
| aim to recruit a diversity of players from a diversity of football codes | | | |

| Formal Ethical Approval | | | |
| submit formal ethic application to UoW Human Research Ethics Committee | | | |

| Ethical Considerations | | | |
| monitor and review ethical implications for both participants and researcher | | | |

| Research Diary & Thick Description | | | |
| description of project context and development of constructs through research process | | | |

| Reflexivity | | | |
| continual assessment of how the researcher is positioned within the research | | | |

| Persistent Observation | | | |
| focusing on the ‘things that count’ in questioning, reviewing questions - provides depth | | | |

| Prolonged Engagement | | | |
| spending sufficient time in field to build trust, ‘go native’ may be good or bad - provides scope | | | |

| Triangulation of data | | | |
| use multiple sources for similar findings as well as methods - interviews, participant observation, sketches, informal conversations, local media | | | |

| Inter-textuality of data | | | |
| identify links between meanings and discourses surrounding football | | | |

| Member checking | | | |
| interpretations from interviews checked with participants | | | |

| Mechanically recorded data | | | |
| interviews recorded, transcribed and backed up | | | |

Table 3.1: Rigour matrix table, based on Baxter and Eyles (1997:512) and Hay (2005:74).
Informed consent is a much stricter explicit approval than: “Yes, you can interview me”. Participants must know and understand exactly to what they are both consenting and volunteering. Participants must be advised of what the project is about, what are their expectations and what time will they be required to give (Dowling, in Hay 2005:21, Israel and Hay 2006:61). In order to achieve informed consent, the project employed a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) (Appendix B) with a Briefing Sheet (Appendix C). The PIS and Briefing Sheet contained information on:

1. research aims;
2. types of questions to be asked in the research;
3. the purpose of the research; and
4. participant requirements and ethical considerations.

The PIS was emailed to some participants up to two weeks prior to interviews being conducted, allowing time for questions and concerns to be raised. Every participant was given the PIS form to read prior to any interviewing being conducted. Participants were given the Informed Consent Form (Appendix D) to sign, providing they understood:

1. their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time;
2. they could stop the interview at any time;
3. they may still, and probably would, be identifiable by some people in the Bega Valley even if they used a pseudonym because of the small total population; and
4. their transcripts would be provided to their club and to the Bega Valley Library unless they advised on the Informed Consent Form that they chose not to have their interviews included.

Only then would an interview be commenced. The Informed Consent Form – a legal document – gives the researcher permission to use materials under the conditions outlined within the form. Participants had until 31 December, 2011 to withdraw their data from the project.

Confidentiality is the protection of an individual’s privacy by not releasing any of their personal details into the public domain, and, that participants cannot be identified from their participation in the research. When conducting qualitative research, there is the possibility that personal and private interactions will be told to, or witnessed by, the researcher.

All participants were offered the use of a pseudonym in an attempt to ‘ensure’ confidentiality in the interview process. However, the consent form outlined that confidentiality could not be guaranteed to any participant due to: the relatively small size of the population in the Bega Valley; the ability for team members to identify them through the participant’s playing position or achievements; and, the likelihood of storytelling involving others would assist in identifying participants. As advised by Wiles et al. (2006), not all participants wish to remain anonymous. Indeed, only two interviewees requested a pseudonym. Both provided details (where they came from, place of work,
their team or wife’s details) that would clearly identify them even if names such as theirs, their wife’s or employer’s name were removed from the transcripts. This was pointed out to participants at the time of interview, as was their right to withdraw immediately, as their identity would be readily revealed – so as to ensure a transparent ethical methodology. These participants both elected to continue in the project. In the results chapters, all participants were allocated pseudonyms whether they requested a pseudonym or not. Furthermore, all but one participant gave their consent to have their stories as part of club records, while all consented to their stories being provided to the Bega District Library.

Community benefit from university research can sometimes be difficult to determine or quantify. Feminist researchers remain acutely aware of the potential for what Kearns calls “possibly unintended traffic of knowledge being one-way from the field to the academy” (Kearns 2005:204). Research can be very readily posited as ‘one way’, in that the researcher takes the information garnered from the participants and processes it – with little regard for the participants – once the research is ‘captured’ (see England 1994:82).

Mindful of such critiques, the researcher implemented several techniques to facilitate a two-way collaborative approach between participants and the researcher. First, co-operation was achieved by offering copies of the verbatim audio recordings on CD to participants the day after their interview was conducted. Three interviewees requested and were provided copies. Second, participants were offered copies of the transcripts to comment upon prior to final analysis. None requested a copy. The typical response to this offer was: “Nah, I don’t care – I’ve said what I wanted to say”. Thirdly, photographs taken by the researcher at football training and matches were supplied by the researcher as a way of ‘giving back’ to the club. Finally, the research took on a collaborative club and wider ‘community’ dimension by seeking permission from participants for their football stories to be kept as part of their club records, as well as become a Bega Valley Library resource. Indeed, one of the AFL club stalwarts interviewed mentioned his plans to use his interview audio recording as the basis for his future autobiography about country football.

3.2.3 Reflexivity and negotiating ethics in the field

Reflexivity is central to feminist scholarship because data is understood as collaboratively produced between the researcher and participants. It is this collaborative production which results in many things changing during the research – which sometimes requires ethical (re) consideration – such as decisions made about the research, which was enabled by being reflexive when doing the research.

Mansvelt and Berg: “knowledge does not exist independently of the people who created it – knowledges are partial and temporarily located” (Mansvelt and Berg 2005:257). Consequently, as Holloway and Biley go on to argue: “reflexivity is about the researcher’s own reactions to the study, their position and location in the study, and the relationships encountered, which are reciprocal” (Holloway and Biley 2011:971).

A research diary is one technique suggested by Falconer Al-Hindi (2002:109) to remain reflexive. While conducting fieldwork, a research diary was utilised on a daily basis for a number of interrelated reasons:

1. to capture practices, thoughts and emotions – the personal introspection of what happened and what was felt during the day and night;

2. to record observations made about the discursive, performative and emotional dimensions of masculinities; and

3. to record how ethics were negotiated in the field.

Three different dimensions of reflexivity are present in the research diary: the personal; the social-spatial context of a research event; and, the bodily.

The Personal

Rose (1997:312) warned feminist researchers of positioning themselves as “knowing analyst” and critiqued feminists for reproducing an all-knowing geographical knowledge – akin to a positivist scientist. Positionality is one strategy advocated by feminist geographers to remain alert to how knowledge is socially produced. That is, “the researcher’s understanding of their position in time and place, their standpoint and their partiality from that perspective” (Mansvelt and Berg, 2005:257). Alert to the concept of positionality, researchers must critically reflect on how uneven social relations play out during research encounters or events through the intersections of different social categories (class, race, gender, sexuality and bodily ability) (Valentine 2007, Sharp 2005). As Robyn Dowling argues: “Power and subjectivity are the two most important criteria to consider when being reflexive” (Dowling 2005:23). Researchers must be acutely aware of the uneven social relationships and remain alert to potentially exploitative relations (England 1994:82).

In this project, the researcher arrived in Bega with a background in competitive sport in New South Wales – both as a past rugby league, rugby union and soccer player, and as a present administrator (Sydney grade cricket), as well as still participating in social sport. The researcher was familiar with the temporal commitment and physical demands of playing competitive sport as well as the myths and social norms that inform the ‘doing’ of a sporting masculinity – especially with high-level cricketers. There is a way of dressing, a way of talking (including sport-specific language) and a way of approaching people in certain spaces that demands individual-site-protocols.

Equally, it was important to acknowledge how the researcher positioned country football players along stereotyped lines of the “sexually-charged drunken boofhead”. This understanding arose in part from the researcher’s own experiences when playing football and subsequent disgust
resulting in ceasing of playing any code of football. This stereotype of a footballer appeared to be confirmed by mainstream media in New South Wales (rugby league) and Victoria (AFL) media headlines that portrayed professional players as sexist and violent, such as: “League star kicked partner’s head” (SMH 23/11/11), “Todd Payten avoids conviction for urinating on Hyde Park memorial” (SMH 8/11/11), “AFL insists Kangaroos weren’t members of offensive Facebook group” (SMH 19/5/11), “Tortured teen in a bloke’s world: Wild claims as girl lashes those she feels betrayed her” (Herald-Sun 22/12/10) and “AFL sex scandal pair go to ground” (AAP Bulletins 6/3/11). See Box A for a negotiated ethical dilemma that required explicit confidentiality and silencing. Also, please refer Appendix F for the series of self-reflexive boxes.

The positionality of the researcher is never fixed. Both Rose (1997:305) and Baxter and Eyles (1997:505) assert it is essential that the changing position of the researcher – within the research itself – be known, by using a positionality statement. Figure 3.1 shows how the researcher was positioned by different football clubs at various times in the research, while Boxes B and C illustrate the unfolding reciprocal relationship between the project and the personal over the three weeks of fieldwork. Conducting the fieldwork, the researcher was variously positioned and repositioned in the Bega Valley through intersections of age, fitness, masculinity as an ex-footballer or sport administrator and photographer. The researcher never felt empowered or in a position of dominance or control. Falconer Al-Hindi’s (2002:108) assumption of a “traditional hierarchy”, which socially positions the researcher somehow ‘above’ the participant, was never the case. Instead, the researcher was variously positioned, depending on the codes of football and if participants were players or officials.

Reciprocal or symmetrical relationships, due to the accurate understanding of rugby league terminology from having been a past player, were immediate with most rugby league players and club officials (administrative volunteers). Commonality and rapport with rugby league players was further enhanced by: attending football training three times a week for approximately three (3) hours each evening (4pm to 7pm) on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; attending all matches on Sundays; and, socialising with the team at local clubs after matches or at coffee shops. However, with AFL players, the researcher was normally disempowered and positioned as being from ‘somewhere else’, a blow-in, not-from-this-place – a non-local. “You’re not from around here and you haven’t played AFL, have you?” was asked by AFL players more than once. In part, this was due to the initial inability to speak AFL-specific language.

Exacerbating this disempowerment was the researcher’s ignorance of the finer points of AFL match practices – which was initially problematic with some participants. Participants made the researcher aware of this ignorance through comments and body language that reproduced social hierarchies of football. One example was when a player said: “I thought you must have been a talent scout” – asserting
that due to intersections of my age, fitness and look there could have been no other explanation for my ongoing presence. Overcoming this 'lack of knowledge' and moving towards 'acceptance' as a 'legitimate' AFL researcher was achieved by: attending AFL training twice a week for approximately three (3) hours each evening (4pm to 7pm) on Tuesdays and Thursdays and one extra pre-final training session on a Saturday morning; attending all matches on Saturdays; and, socialising with the team after matches, usually at their home-base licensed club (even after ‘away’ games).
In both codes of football, the researcher was variously positioned initially as a ‘researcher’, ‘talent scout’ and ‘threat’, then later as a ‘motivator’, ‘photographer’ and eventually ‘club official’. Crucial to conducting football life-narratives was being repositioned as ‘club photographer’, which gave the research a specific role within the club. The position of club photographer was in part accidental, rather than an intentional research strategy. It was the outcome of the researcher regularly turning up with a DSLR camera over a three week period to the routines and rituals of training and matches. Offering to take photographs and ‘hanging-out’ with the players and the clubs, chatting at training or at games, attending after training dinners and having coffee together at the local cafe, the frequency and duration of time spent with players outside of ‘formal’ research situations helped significantly work towards commonality and the repositioning of the researcher from ‘researcher’ to ‘club associate’. In working towards commonality, the researcher’s positionality constantly changed in order to negotiate and re-negotiate social relationships and space. As indicated in reflexive Box B, by the end of the project, the researcher had become ‘sufficiently local’ and embedded in the football community – being asked to come back and be part of the community. “You’ll be back” said local Tathra legend Robert ‘Frog’ Little.

This section has illustrated how the social relationships of research are very fluid, along with the value of remaining constantly reflexive about how the researcher is differently positioned when considering how football narratives were told. That is, some narratives were told while the researcher was positioned as an administrator, others while as club photographer and then some while part of the team. All these differing positionalities will be reflected in the different narratives told, as narratives are both co-constituted and subjective in their production of football knowledge.

The Social-Spatial Context

Where a story is told impacts upon what is told and what is left out, how it is told and what social power relationships are negotiated, formed and felt. Values, meanings, practices and performativities of masculinity are all realised in places and contexts (Hopkins and Noble 2009:813). ‘Masculinities, then, are highly contingent, unstable, contested spaces within gender relations’ (Berg and Longhurst 2003:352). That is, unstable and contested spaces of performed multiple masculinities form where knowledge is constructed through power in fluid social relationships and so affect what knowledge is constructed.

Stories of football were told in a number of spaces that significantly impacted the social dynamics of power relations in this project – and consequently the version of events. For instance, one interview was conducted in the researcher’s (temporary) apartment, placing the researcher in (initial) control of the entire process. The interviewee, while being made to feel as ‘comfortable’ as possible, had only just met the researcher, was not in a familiar space and did not leave his seat during the lengthy interview.
The participant was provided with cheese and biscuits along with a drink (of water) to help build rapport in a space effectively foreign to both researcher and participant. The feeling of ‘being in a temporary space that isn’t my own’ helped even up the power relationship, as the space simply could not be treated as, or even felt like, it was ‘home’.

Multiple felt effects were experienced during interviews conducted in participant’s homes. On one hand, it was a place unfamiliar and sometimes threatening as the researcher was again placed in a ‘foreign’ space with very little control – the opposite to the example above. One participant’s house had football artefacts and possessions covering the wall in the (open plan) office area and these were frequently referred to during the interview as prompts, examples or to point out someone of significance (see Gorman-Murray 2007). These artefacts both validated and represented his own multiple masculinities – as a successful coach, as a past player and as a current football administrator, and were referred to frequently in the interview. Participants placed ample trust in myself as researcher to invite me into their home spaces – which happened on five (5) occasions.

Similarly, four (4) interviews took place at the participant’s workplace, but these always had a foreboding ‘clock-watching’ felt dynamic – being constantly aware that the interview could, and would likely, be terminated at any moment. Fortunately, this did not happen, although one interview was relatively short (but done with previous advice of a strict time limit).

But, the felt threat of this ‘timed’ interview made probing answers difficult and some questions were skipped altogether. With such control over the research, this usually placed participants in an asymmetrical power relationship (Dowling 2005).

Asymmetrical power relationships also played out in this research in the process of negotiating the Tathra Sea Eagles’ change-room space (for both AFL and Rugby League). On ‘game day’, the change-room is a policed space, and only official invitees have access. The change-room is where the team is briefed and bonded by the coach and captain. Before the match, the coach has authority and must be listened to at all times – no one can speak while the coach is speaking. There is to be no idle talking – talk only of the match or what you as a player will do; there is only talk of winning, losers are not welcome.

Gaining access to the Tathra Sea Eagles’ change-room required negotiating the hierarchical social relations of the change-room. Box D, Territorialisation of Space: Secret Men’s Spaces discusses how these spaces were negotiated and successfully accessed. By being allowed and welcomed into these spaces, the team had reconstituted the researcher as part of the team.

The Bodily

The body is being advocated by many feminist researchers such as Longhurst et al. (2009) and Longhurst (2000b), Johnston (2005), Nast (1994, 1998), Moss (2002b), Butler (1993) and Hayes-Conroy (2010) as a research tool. Those geographers turning to the body as a research tool have argued
benefits arise from being aware of how the researcher’s body is affected by, and reacts to, being part of the research itself. That is, being alert to the body as a research tool in the collaborative production of knowledge between the researcher and interviewee operates at an affective and emotional level, as well as at a discursive level.

In this project the body was deployed to “fit in” and be “part of football culture”. Being aware of the researcher’s body is important in terms of how it is dressed for research, how the body sometimes responds in involuntary ways, and how the body is used to communicate in non-verbal ways (Longhurst 2000b, Johnston 2005). The felt body draws attention to deep and complex feelings and emotions that usually only surface – and so are only able to be appreciated or understood – by being in the change-room, or being part of the team when they win a historic premiership. The bonds of football mateship go beyond the sets of circulating ideas through texts that construct reality (Foucault 1972) (ie. discursive structures) – and are felt and emotive because of the experiences shared between playing men who are mates (akin to a soldier’s emotive affects of his mate on the battlefield). It is much more than just “men’s friendship” (Butera 2008:266) and is a prime motivator for why men play football, especially when ‘older’ (Markula and Pringle 2006:117). The bodily affects of the bonds of mateship approach what Clifton Evers refers to as the “stoke” in surfing – a feeling that is difficult to describe – and often beyond words – yet refers to an “embodied feeling of satisfaction, joy and pride” (Evers 2009:894). Like surfing, the felt emotion and shared experiences of masculinity in football are layered upon and between bodies of men – such as when a team scores a try or when they have triumphed in a particularly hard and close-fought match. They celebrate or commiserate together and bond through shared triumph or defeat. Equally, there is the potential for collapse of these football masculinities when a game is lost or a crucial mistake is made. The relationships between men (and also between the researcher and the players) extend from the social into the affective and felt emotions of being part of the team.

One way the researcher became part of both the Tathra Sea Eagles Rugby League and AFL teams was through the affective and emotional connections of being in the change-room, which bombarded the researcher’s senses with sounds, sights, smells and touch. The configuration in the confined space made up of lockers, discarded civilian clothes, sports-clothes and shoes, semi-naked men dressing for football, the coach giving instructions, and the pungent liniment – all created an intensely-charged and physically-felt atmosphere. The rituals and routines of players and coaches in the context of the change-room are integral to the performance of a football team. Furthermore, the tone of the change-room also registers through the sensing body while also remaining in the air. Non-verbal communication that sustained the affective atmosphere of the change-room was important in forging the bodies of players
as a unified team. The point emphasised in Box H, The Visceral Affects: Smelling, Hearing and Feeling – alongside the performance of football masculinities in the change-room that forged the more-than-social bonds of mateship, was how the team-building affective atmosphere in a change-room was physically sensed on and through the body – culminating in the bodies of players running onto the field together as one.

3.3 Recruitment and Sampling
This section discusses recruitment, sampling and partiality – which is essential to ensure meeting the criteria of transferability and credibility (as highlighted in Table 3.1). As researchers, “we must make decisions about what/who to include and what/who to exclude from our study” (Bradshaw and Stratford 2005:73). The target social group were men who played football of any code. Football was the targeted sport because the project sought to engage with men through a sporting practice that is conventionally understood as central to the leisure practices of country towns and a training ground for particular masculinities that privileges strength and the oppression of femininity and homosexuality. There were three relatively broad criteria for participation:

a) men aged over 18 years;

b) playing, or have very recently played football, of any code – AFL, rugby league, soccer or rugby union; and

c) be residing in the Bega Valley, NSW.

Figure 3.2 illustrates how recruitment and sampling occurred through a four-stage process. Two sampling methods were employed: targeted sampling and purposeful snowball (or chain) sampling. Targeted sampling was where the researcher made multiple attempted contacts via telephone and email to football clubs in the Bega Valley. This was a labour intensive process because a comprehensive and up-to-date listing of football clubs and contacts was absent on the internet or through state-sports-
body-controlled websites. Furthermore, on the internet there was much outdated information, or the club only had contacts for juniors rather than seniors. One website insisted on registering with the umbrella regional organisation. The sampling process highlighted that the organisation of football in the Bega Valley is not reliant upon the internet. This may be because the internet is often considered too slow or unreliable, and not everyone in the Bega Valley has internet access or is computer literate.

Having secured the contact details of eleven club presidents and secretaries of football clubs in the Bega Valley, a phone call was made to each soccer (n=2), rugby league (n=5) and Australian Rules (n=4) club. During the first week of fieldwork, the local newspaper was contacted, successfully heightening awareness and interest in the project. Figure 3.3 shows the newspaper article from the *Bega District News* of 26 August, 2011. In total, seven (7) clubs expressed disinterest and their reasons for declining participation included the club coach not wanting any players to be distracted from the finals, or, not having senior (i.e. over 18) players. Five (5) clubs did not return calls after two or more telephone calls and follow-up emails (see Table 3.2). Four (4) clubs expressed an interest in participating: Tathra Sea Eagles AFL, Tathra Sea Eagles Rugby League, Bermagui Breakers AFL and Bega Roosters Rugby League clubs. The next stage involved giving short presentations about the aims and objectives of the project to team members and club officials, usually at training sessions. Players then provided their consent. Having participated, footballers often identified who they thought as a relevant participant, generating what Patton (1980: 1992) terms a snowball or chain sampling method.
Table 3.2: Targeted Sampling of Football Clubs in Bega Valley, NSW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLUB (green = interview/s, red = no result)</th>
<th>Code of football</th>
<th>1st contact &amp; response</th>
<th>2nd contact &amp; response</th>
<th>3rd contact &amp; response</th>
<th>4th contact &amp; response</th>
<th>5th contact &amp; response</th>
<th>6th contact &amp; response</th>
<th>Number of participants in study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tathra Sea Eagles Rugby League</td>
<td>PHONE: Only does juniors, gave me contact for seniors</td>
<td>PHONE: positive</td>
<td>EMAIL: positive</td>
<td>PHONE: briefing and introduction, then arranged meeting at training</td>
<td>PHONE: spoke to coach, originally positive, but then refused to let me speak to players with finals coming up on following weekend. ‘Allowed’ me to talk to ex-player in his office.</td>
<td>PHONE: Spoke to ex-player and arranged interview</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bega Roosters Rugby League</td>
<td>PHONE: positive, call back (as at a course)</td>
<td>PHONE: positive, but was only for juniors, gave number for seniors</td>
<td>PHONE: person absent, left message</td>
<td>PHONE: Keen, arranged meeting. Didn’t show up - twice!</td>
<td>PHONE: positive</td>
<td>EMAIL: positive</td>
<td>PHONE: briefing and introduction, then arranged meeting at training</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bermagui-Cobargo Eels Rugby League</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>EMAIL: juniors only, but passed on my details to seniors officials</td>
<td>PHONE: positive</td>
<td>EMAIL: positive</td>
<td>PHONE: briefing and introduction, then arranged meeting at training</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eden Tigers Rugby League</td>
<td>PHONE: Need to call back</td>
<td>PHONE: Only juniors, gave contact for seniors</td>
<td>PHONE: Left message</td>
<td>PHONE: positive</td>
<td>EMAIL: positive</td>
<td>PHONE: briefing and introduction, then arranged meeting at training</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merimbula-Pambula Bulldogs Rugby League</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>EMAIL: sent information &amp; PIS</td>
<td>PHONE: positive</td>
<td>EMAIL: positive</td>
<td>PHONE: briefing and introduction, then arranged meeting at training</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tathra Sea Eagles AFL</td>
<td>PHONE: very positive</td>
<td>EMAIL: positive</td>
<td>EMAIL: sent PIS</td>
<td>PHONE: meeting at training</td>
<td>PHONE: briefing and introduction, then arranged meeting at training</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merimbula Marlins AFL</td>
<td>PHONE: no longer on committee, gave me other number</td>
<td>PHONE: Left message, to call back</td>
<td>PHONE: Left message, to call back</td>
<td>PHONE: positive</td>
<td>EMAIL: sent information &amp; PIS</td>
<td>PHONE: briefing and introduction, then arranged meeting at training</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bermagui Breakers AFL</td>
<td>PHONE: positive</td>
<td>EMAIL: sent information &amp; PIS</td>
<td>PHONE: meeting and interview, arranged others</td>
<td>PHONE: positive</td>
<td>EMAIL: sent information &amp; PIS</td>
<td>PHONE: briefing and introduction, then arranged meeting at training</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eden AFL</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>EMAIL: sent information &amp; PIS</td>
<td>PHONE: Left message</td>
<td>PHONE: positive</td>
<td>EMAIL: positive</td>
<td>PHONE: briefing and introduction, then arranged meeting at training</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bega Soccer</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bemboka Soccer</td>
<td>PHONE: positive</td>
<td>EMAIL: sent information &amp; PIS</td>
<td>PHONE: Spoke to person &amp; checked information received - will speak to players and get back to me</td>
<td>PHONE: Left message</td>
<td>PHONE: Left message</td>
<td>PHONE: Left message</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolumla Soccer</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merimbula Soccer</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>PHONE: To call back</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of twenty-one (21) semi-structured interviews were conducted between 16 August 2011 and 3 September 2011 in venues convenient to participants including: the Tathra football ground (both inside and outside the clubroom); players’ homes; the researcher’s accommodation; players’ place of business; in cafes; and, in clubs and pubs. Those interviews conducted at work venues were interrupted and fragmented far more than at other interview venues. Interviews at players’ homes were also interrupted sometimes (from telephone calls, partners or children), but the afforded quiet and privacy and having no explicit time limit usually overcame these issues. All interviews were recorded on digital recorders and then transferred to a laptop computer as mp3 digital audio files. Verbatim transcripts augment research credibility and dependability, and verification and familiarisation required reading these transcriptions while listening to the audio recording. Interview transcription followed the format outlined by Dunn (2005).

The age range of participants was from 19 to 67 years of age: four players aged under 25; nine aged late 20s to early 30s; and the remaining eight being late 30s to 67, some of whom were still playing in the highest grade. Those aged over 40 were ex-players. Fifteen (15) of the twenty-one (21) interviewees were in heterosexual relationships and of those, thirteen (13) had children, but not all children were from that particular relationship. Two of the participants were salaried staff - either as player/coach or as coach. All rugby league players received payments for winning matches. No AFL players received remuneration for playing - only AFL coaches are paid. See Table 3.3 - Summary of Interview Participants for details on each participant.

Hence, feminist researchers are increasingly mindful of the personal social context within which research unfolds and events occur. One research strategy - as a goal of feminist researchers and suggested by Falconer Al-Hindi (2002), England (1994) and Nast (1998) is to work towards achieving commonality when interviewing. In other words, feminist scholars urge finding points of connection between the researcher and the researched to develop equity, empathy, rapport, trust and understanding.

Falconer Al-Hindi considers this limiting and that for a truly reciprocal and reflexive relationship, “the researcher must reflect back to the participant the researcher's understanding of the participant's thoughts” (Falconer Al-Hindi 2002:108). During interviews, clarification was always sought by paraphrasing and “telling back” to participants what was said (in the researcher’s own words), to confirm the researcher’s understanding was as participants intended.

Occasionally, issues were discussed and further clarified when next in contact with participants – always within 48 hours of the interview (if not the next day), ensuring the interview was still fresh in both the researcher’s and participant’s minds. Acknowledging that commonality is never possible – ‘I cannot completely know how you feel and you cannot completely know how I feel’ – it was imperative footballers’
Table 3.3: Summary of interview participants, sorted by date of interview. Note that all names are pseudonyms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Interview Date/s</th>
<th>Interview Venue</th>
<th>Football code</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glen</td>
<td>16 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>late 30s</td>
<td>Married w/children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>16 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Tathra Clubroom</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>mid 20s</td>
<td>Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>17 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Researcher's apartment</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Partner w/children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mick</td>
<td>18 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>Rugby League</td>
<td>late 30s</td>
<td>Married w/children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan - salaried player</td>
<td>19 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Tathra Clubroom</td>
<td>Rugby League</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Married (wife in Sydney)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron - salaried coach &amp; player</td>
<td>21 &amp; 24 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Tathra Clubroom / Home</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>early 30s</td>
<td>Married w/children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>23 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>Rugby League</td>
<td>early 30s</td>
<td>Married w/children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>23 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Tathra Clubroom</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Married w/ adult children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon</td>
<td>24 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Tathra Clubroom</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>25 &amp; 29 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Tathra Clubroom</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>late 20s</td>
<td>Partner w/children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave</td>
<td>25 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Tathra Clubroom</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>early 20s</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>26 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Tathra Clubroom</td>
<td>Rugby League</td>
<td>late 20s</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allan</td>
<td>29 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Tathra Pub</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>30 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>late 40s</td>
<td>Separated w/ adult children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damian</td>
<td>31 Aug 2011</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Rugby League</td>
<td>early 40s</td>
<td>Married w/ adult children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>1 Sept 2011</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>1 Sept 2011</td>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>early 30s</td>
<td>Married w/children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrell</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2 Sept 2011</td>
<td>Home (both times)</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>mid 40s</td>
<td>Married w/ adult children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
<td>2 Sept 2011</td>
<td>Bermagui Country Club</td>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>late 30s</td>
<td>Married w/children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>2 Sept 2011</td>
<td>Tathra Clubroom</td>
<td>Rugby League</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Married w/children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarrad</td>
<td>3 Sept 2011</td>
<td>Cafe</td>
<td>Rugby League</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

thoughts be understood how they intended them to be comprehended.

Importantly, as this project was focussed on current (or very recent) football playing experiences, four (4) interviews conducted were not included in the analysis as the participants had not played football for over 10 years or were club officials. However, their narratives were used as part of the background to football in the Bega Valley (in Chapter 1), as these people were integral in establishing or expanding football over many years.
3.4 A football media archive

An archive is a technique often deployed to work towards rigour in qualitative research, and usually contains different types of ‘texts’ such as newspapers, government reports, brochures or films. The purpose of an archive is to collect texts through which ideas about the research topic are produced and circulated. The texts can be interpreted through content or discourse analysis. For this project, a media archive was created to provide an insight through discourse analysis as to the how articles in the Bega District News and matchday publications produced and sustained particular ideas of AFL and Rugby League.

The Bega District News was appropriate because it is the only newspaper specifically reporting on news in the Bega Valley. Published since 1864, the Bega District News was previously known by or incorporated the Bega Budget, Southern Star and Bega Standard. The Bega District News is printed twice-weekly on Tuesdays and Fridays. Currently the Bega District News sells an average of 6,200 copies per edition, reaching nearly 20,500 readers covering an area bounded by Eden to the south, Bemboka to the west and Cobargo and Bermagui to the north (Bega District News Rate Card, July 2011-June 2012). The newspaper office is located in Bega.
This archive was generated through football-related searches using the Factiva newspaper database of newspaper articles published over the 12-month period from October 2010 to October 2011. This period ensured the entire 2011 football season and pre-season were included. Articles included editorials, letters and photographs, as well as the AFL and Rugby League match-day publications. This inclusive approach enabled inclusion of the voices of reporters, team-players, club-officials and ‘fans’. Table 3.4 shows the search terms and number of articles in the Bega District News. The total number of articles is not from mutually exclusive search terms. The articles were then subject to discourse analysis to identify the dominant representations circulating in the Bega District News of the sport, teams, players and locations.

Copies of match-day publications were obtained for all AFL and Rugby League matches attended. These publications are provided as part of the $8 or $10 entry fee to each game. An example of AFL and Rugby League programs is shown in Figure 3.4. There are substantial differences between the documents and these were also subject to discourse analysis, the results of which are discussed in the Results Chapters. It is through the Bega District News and the match-day publications that discourses of hegemonic football masculinities are (re) produced or challenged.
3.5 Football life histories

Topical life histories are one example of recounting football experiences through storytelling, alongside life histories, oral histories and autobiographies and are valuable methods for generating place-based stories (Andrews et al. 2006, Gorman-Murray 2007, Moss 2002b, Pile 1991). Whereas life histories, oral histories or autobiographies generally extend over the life of the participant, a topical life history covers one specific aspect of a person’s life (Riley and Harvey 2007:393) – such as their football memories and experiences – which occurred somewhere.

Topical life histories – rather than say, focus groups – are appropriate for this project because, as argued by Riley and Harvey (2007), when participants are telling a story they are describing events that are important to them, and, in turn, how these events are narrated reveal insights to how their sense of self is framed in and through place. As Meth & McClymont (2009) discuss, conducting focus groups with men shapes the type of stories told by participants. Focus groups comprised of footballers telling football stories may lead to participants trying to “outdo” one another or raise “socially unacceptable” memories as a way of exerting masculinity within a group or even purposely not raise memories of socially unacceptable behaviour, despite their importance to the participant. As Vanderbeck (2005:391) reminds us “masculinities are continually negotiated and contested in interaction and individuals and groups interpret particular forms of self-presentation and behaviour differently”. Hence, this project did not utilise focus groups so that the exaggeration of achievements or the silencing of socially unacceptable memories was minimised.

Furthermore, the value of life histories to this project is not based on claims of objectivity. As Portelli asserts, oral sources are “artificial, variable and partial” (Portelli 2009:38, emphasis in original). Indeed, as Portelli (2009: 33) reminds us, what truly sets this data source apart is the subjectivity of the speaker. According to Portelli, oral sources tell us “not just what people did, but they wanted to do, and what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (Portelli 2009:36).

Recollections of subjectivity within football spaces are the outcome of particular masculine practices of the socio-spatial research context on and off the field. As Jones (2005) suggests, memories are intertwined with emotion, the self, and place. Memories are always recalled in a spatial context. Further, Thomson, exploring “interactions between Anzac legend stereotypes and individual soldiers’ identities” (Thomson 2009:244), suggests memories told, or memories selected to be shared, are dependent on their social acceptability at the present time. Memories not socially acceptable are usually suppressed in an effort to conceal painful emotions, or those that may negatively impact upon current subjectivities – for example, inappropriate behaviour or sexual misconduct by footballers.

However, interviewees do tell the ‘truth’ as they understand it, but it is still a partial and situated knowledge they are divulging.
(Rose 1993, Haraway 1991), acknowledging that remembering and forgetting are highly selective processes. There are no ‘absolute truths’ (Foucault 1997) and embodiment and partiality are the conditions under which knowledge is acquired. It is not objective data but subjective knowledge production that is spatially situated. Haraway (1991:195) writes: ‘feminist embodiment….is not about fixed location in a reified body…but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for differences in material-semiotic fields of meaning’. Embodiment is both fluid and collective and not singular. It is the footballer’s subjectivities that define the identity of what a footballer is, what he does and where he does it – the making of and recalling football memories is a highly corporeal, social and spatial process. That is, where the stories are told will influence what particular version of the story is told (see Table 3.4 for details on location for each interview). Reflecting on the differences between these locations, Box I, Storytelling in Place, demonstrates how storytelling-in-place dramatically influences what stories of masculinities are re-told. That is, where stories are told determines which particular version of the story is told.

In addition to location and relation with the researcher, central to the topical life histories told were the semi-structured interview questions, sketches and football artefacts. To help participants tell their football life histories each participant was asked a similar set of open questions. This strategy allowed flexibility within the interview while enabling guiding themes to be discussed, therefore aiding research credibility (Dunn 2005). Participants were always asked about:

1. past and present football experiences;
2. the meaning of football in their life (usually expressed by a personal sketch (following Nairn 2002));
3. balancing football with other responsibilities and how the body works in with these (family, work, fitness, training etc);
4. football rituals and friendships; and
5. social relationships off the field.

Please see Appendix E for the Schedule of Interview Questions.

This provided an ideal conduit through which to elicit football topical life histories as they are sufficiently structured to obtain necessary information from respondents. But, far more importantly, semi-structured interviews allow the flexibility of direction essential in storytelling. Open questions actively encourage exploration by the participant in an area of obvious importance to the participant.

Football artefacts – including jerseys, trophies, team photos, premiership and office-bearer lists, flags and shields – also became important prompts during the interviews, sparking important stories about place-specific experiences of events (see Riley and Harvey 2007:396, Gorman-Murray 2007:206). Football artefacts became significant in the lives of footballers across different geographical scales from the body, the house, the club, the town and the region. For instance, surrounded
by club trophies, the design of a football jersey became central to Luke’s narrative of pride in representing Tathra (Figure 3.5).

3.6 Discourse analysis: revealing the social norms and change

Discourse, following Gregory et al. (2009:166), is “a specific series of representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible”. This understanding of discourse draws on the work of French philosopher, Michel Foucault. Foucault (1972) understands discourse in terms of the effects of language in constituting social worlds. Dominant discourses govern what society considers ‘normalised’ or ‘true’. Foucault (1980) recognises the existence of multiple discourses or ‘truths’ at any one point in time and multiple discourses compete for dominant or hegemonic status, with the effect of language shaping meanings, attitudes and practices. What becomes accepted as ‘truth’ demands thinking about how that knowledge is
produced, its intended audience, and who endorses these sets of ‘truth-forming’ ideas. In Foucault’s ‘regime of truth’ he argues how knowledge and power are mutually constituted:

…that power produced knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault 1977:27).

Discourse “stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface” (Butler 1993:9). Discourse becomes the confirmed and embedded social performative norms. Discourse analysis is characterised by a multiplicity of approaches (see Fairclough 2003, van Dijik 1997, Lakoff and Johnson 2003, Kerkin 2004) that result in the establishment or revealing of ‘discursive structures’ – that is, sets of circulating ideas through texts that construct reality or the social worlds (Foucault 1972).

Discourse analysis is as important methodology for the study of ‘texts’ – including pictures (Rose 2001), spoken or written texts. In this project, Foucauldian discourse analysis was used to interpret transcripts of the footballer’s semi-structured interviews, sketches and the media archive. Foucauldian discourse analysis requires remaining alert to the text’s ‘production, social context and intended audience’ (Waitt 2005:166). Foucauldian discourse analysis is employed to:

“demonstrate how the mutual relationships between a group of statements within different cultural texts generate the meaning of a specific item that is understood to construct ‘truths’ about the social and material worlds and to inform practices” (Waitt 2005:170).

Equally, discourse analysis requires remaining alert to how dominant and subversive discourses are interwoven in cultural texts (Gorman-Murray 2007:200). As Gorman-Murray points out, it is possible that ‘counter-discourses’ emerge (2007:200), which, in this project, may confound the dominant discourses in place about football in the Bega Valley. Discourse analysis is an appropriate technique given the project explores football talk for: meanings, experiences, attitudes and practices; how football players’ social worlds are constructed; and, what, if any, dominant or alternate discursive structures are revealed (Foucault 1972). In practical terms, discourse analysis was conducted following Rose’s (2001) seven (7) strategies, as adapted by Waitt (2005:180), and are outlined in Table 3.5.

Discourse analysis about footballers in the Bega Valley could confirm and or challenge existing heteronormative ‘truths’ as portrayed in mainstream media (such as being accused of pack rape, drinking before matches, going ‘missing’, being late on game days, violence to other players and the public etc). Acknowledging Foucault that there are no ‘universal truths’, a discourse analysis of interviews, sketches and local media enables insights as to how footballers may simply reproduce football norms or at the same time, produce counter-discourses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>METHOD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suspension of text preconception</td>
<td>requires approaching the text with ‘fresh eyes and ears’ (Rose 2001 and Waitt 2005) to avoid influencing the analysis with preconceived assumptions (or subjectivities). Positionality statements and critical reflexivity are fundamental to this early strategy, and these have been covered previously in this chapter. The researcher’s preconceived understanding of footballers, rural communities and certain (unfamiliar) sports had to be cast aside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarisation</td>
<td>requires the researcher to gain greater understanding of the data by reviewing the ‘texts’ (ie transcriptions of interviews). This is when key issues, concepts and themes begin to be divulged (Ritchie and Spencer 1994).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying key themes or frameworks</td>
<td>with specific attention given to recurring meanings, attitudes and practices, and then coding texts for these dominant themes (for example: volunteerism, violence or bodily fitness). Sections of transcripts can be representative of many themes as they relate to multiple assemblages of key places, attitudes or meanings and practices, with the practice of using verbatim quotations to demonstrate recurrent themes (Ritchie and Spencer 1994).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>questions how does the text produce the effects of ‘truth’ and examines the basis upon which participants believe their contributions as being ‘true’. That is, how is ‘discourse considered to have both validity and worth’ (Rose 2001, Waitt 2005:182). Persuasion identifies meanings, attitudes and practices denoted as ‘common sense’ or natural-in-the-social-world, providing a basis upon which to judge unconventional or unacceptable thoughts or behaviours (Waitt 2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexities and contradictions</td>
<td>attempts to recognise inconsistencies within the textual discursive structures. While all discourses provide limits to their structure or formations, discourses do not necessarily demand logical thought processes, particularly as they are compositions of various contributions (Rose 2001, Waitt 2005). This strategy identifies competing discourses by making discursive themes more consistent by eliminating extraneous language. The dominant discourses that operate to confirm the heteronormative footballer identity may also be contradicted by competing discourses that unsettle the hegemony, i.e. ‘counter-discourses’ (Gorman-Murray 2007:200).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silences</td>
<td>are not by definition meaningless as Rose (2001:157) states “invisibility can have just as powerful effects as visibility”. Silences can underscore power in social relationships, especially by silencing gender, ethnicity, sexuality or physical ability. Silences also help sustain what are ‘natural’, ‘true’ and ‘common sense’ understandings by keeping alternate understandings absent. In football, for instance, silences speak volumes as gay footballers continually negotiate their masculinities in and through the NRL. Silences also highlight how social differences, including different abilities or different ethnicity in the case of Indigenous footballers, can be eliminated by simply not mentioning them (see Rose 1997, also Waitt and Head 2002 on how the ‘frontier’ erases Indigenous peoples). Being critically aware of silences demands reflection on what narratives are omitted, as they (currently) exist outside of the rule-boundaries of a particular set of discursive structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention to detail</td>
<td>Stressing the importance of attention to detail, Rose and Waitt both also remind us these strategies are to be applied flexibly, and not followed as a strict prescriptive sequence (Rose 2001 and Waitt 2005).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5: Rose’s (2001) seven discourse analysis strategies as adapted by Waitt (2005:180)
3.7 Narrative analysis

“Narratives point to the way that spaces and social relations are reproduced through talk” (Wiles et al., 2005:91).

When people talk of their experiences, they attach both meaning and place – which shapes their world along with themselves – as well as how they make sense of their self and their social worlds. Acknowledging Bailey et al.’s call for “more openness to *re-presenting* messy, creative, fragmented and complex notions of reality” (1999a:172, emphasis in original), narrative analysis is a valuable method to evaluate words outside of thematic coding (Wiles et al. 2005).

Further, Wiles et al. suggest that narrative analysis can be used to “access the nuances of interview talk, especially in situations where participants are exploring ideas that are characterised by complexity or charged with emotion” (2005:89). That is, narrative analysis should assist in firstly uncovering, and then interpreting, the layers of meaning within interviews and the connections between these layers. Narrative analysis is an ideal method with which to analyse football players’ talk because it is attentive to how emotions are conceived as socio-spatially constituted through how people recall particular events – not just the words spoken, but also where they were spoken, as well as through elements such as pace, talk tone and participant’s bodily language. Remembering and retelling football stories *in and through spaces* such as the club house, change-room, on the field, after the match and even at training are all charged with emotion.

Narrative analysis (of narratives) is characterised by a number of approaches, including Labov’s (1972) pioneering structural narrative analysis, where narratives have formal properties and a function. Others, such as Gee (1986) utilise a linguistic approach and break down talk into prose-like stanzas, emphasising both the aural and oral nature of narrative. This project will focus on Butler’s (1997) feminist performative approach to interviews, where both interviewee and interviewer shapes what is discussed through shared values – along with *how* it is discussed. Consequently, narrative analysis demands participants being as important as the researcher in interpreting events (Wiles et al. 2005:92). That is, the participants’ own understanding of events and how they frame and socio-spatially constitute their worlds is as important as how the researcher interprets their stories.

Narrative analysis acknowledges that there is more in interview transcript texts than “just” words or discourse. Discourse analysis plays particular attention to what stories are told and how particular versions of stories are framed for particular audiences by participants. Discourse analysis is mindful of how remembering can be played out in the conscious selection of words used, or words silenced. Following Borland, as feminist researchers, there is an obligation to acknowledge that what was said does not necessarily directly transfer to what is written (Borland 2009:317). She argues that it is imperative to understand *how* words were spoken by recording these “non-word” elements of talk at the time of the interview.
To assist with recording participant’s talk as it was intended along with the myriad “non-word” clues, interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were not ‘tidied up’ (see Portelli 2009, Borland 2009) except to ensure missing or unclear information was corrected by the researcher (such as clarification of unfamiliar town or place names) or by confirming details with the participant. How a story was told can provide clues to particular socio-spatially remembered and constituted emotions. For example, the tone, volume and pace of voice help convey emotion, as does non-verbal expressions such as the rhythms of sentences and pauses. It is impossible to comprehend the emotions conveyed in the written words: “We won the competition”. These are all part of the emotive messiness of interviews and form an integral part of the storytelling process.

3.8 Conclusions
This detailed feminist methodological discussion ensures football stories were heard and understood as footballers intended them to be understood. Particular attention was paid to the data collection techniques – focusing on narratives and sketches collaboratively produced through semi-structured interviews and sketches. Particular attention was given to the role of the researcher and how the positionality of the researcher changed frequently over time and amongst different social groups by becoming embedded in some, and rejected by others, at the football clubs. This positionality was brought into existence by being critically reflexive through a research diary. Using mixed-methods and remaining alert to the need for the research methodology to be rigorous, this project also highlighted the myriad difficulties and temporal demands of conducting remote research.

Adopting a spatial lens of analysis, the aim of the following three results chapters is to explore why men play football in the Bega Valley. The first chapter explores the relationships between footballers, their families, friends, rurality and training. Attention is given to how sets of ideas about family, friends and training for ‘fitness’ shape choices and identities and subsequent belonging in football spaces. Similarly, the positing of Bega Valley football as forming a “rural idyll” is explored. The second chapter examines why men play football in terms of how the social bonds of mateship are produced, reproduced and challenged. The third and final results chapter considers why men play football in the context of the smallness of places and the frailty of football in small country towns. How does winning becomes integral to momentarily differentiating between country towns competing in football leagues as well as aiding the sustainability of football in small towns?
Chapter 4

why do men play football in the Bega Valley: families, friends, rurality and training

Tathra Sea Eagles rugby league team in their change-room before the CRL Group 16 Final against Bega Roosters, at Bega Recreational Ground, Sunday 4 September, 2011. The coach, Garry Stevenson, is at front right (in t-shirt) and was interviewed for this project. Photograph by David Clifton
families, friends, rurality and training

4.1 Introduction
The aim of this chapter is to better understand players’ narratives of familial relationships, friends, rurality and training as being some of the reasons why Bega Valley men play football. How do men see their family ties and friendships as part of why they play football? How and where do footballers imagine the “rural idyll”? How does being ‘fit’ through training help players belong? To explore these questions, this chapter draws on Probyn’s (2003) spatial imperative of subjectivity to explore ways that footballers negotiate their belonging through the sets of ideas layered over families, spaces and playing football in a country town.

In the first section, the concept of intersectionality is important because why men play football is understood at the intersection between becoming a footballer, grandson, son, father, and/or friend (Valentine 2007). That is, in a country town participants spoke about how they are often “hailed into existence” (Probyn 2003:292) as footballers - their spatially-situated subjectivities - at the intersection of becoming a footballer/son or footballer/friend. Playing football is also about making memories that sustain family attachments to country towns. Narratives about the ‘saviour-like’ qualities of rural spaces are explored. The second section turns to examine participants’ narratives of training for fitness, teamwork and identity. It analyses how through ‘performing’ or doing fitness (Butler 1993), this can generate a sense of belonging-in-place by becoming acknowledged as ‘fit’ and ‘strong’. Results of this chapter are presented as but part of why men play football in country NSW.

4.2 Family, friends and rurality
For some participants, why people play football in country towns is closely aligned to sustaining place-based belongings as a means of identifying with family and friendship networks (Bale 2003). In this study, many participants started playing football at 8 or 9 years of age. Familial contacts were often crucial to their introduction to football at this age, with often a brother, father or sometimes a grandfather playing a particular football code. Why participants in this project play football was therefore often narrated in terms of a ‘family tradition for men’. One example of the unquestioned assumption that men of the family play a particular code of football in a country town is the Tathra Sea Eagles AFL team. In 2010, the Tathra Sea Eagles AFL team had nine members of the one family (brothers and cousins) in the one first grade team – out of a total of 18 players.
Jackson spoke about the importance of family. His family is fourth generation in the Bega Valley and his father and grandfather both played rugby league. Similarly, Jackson plays rugby league, positioned in the front-row for the Tathra Sea Eagles. At the age of 36, the 2011 season was supposedly his last year of football (fitness, desire and ‘family-approval’ pending) – as Jackson spoke of how he frequently is knocked unconscious playing football. Central to why he plays is the pivotal role particular families have in sustaining particular football codes in country towns. Jackson spoke about playing rugby league because his brother played, and his father had played and was actively involved in the club. Furthermore, his uncles and grandfathers had all played for various clubs in the Bega Valley. While interviewing Jackson in the clubroom, he reflected on “how deep” his family past is woven into the present:

My Dad, my family, and if you look at the photos around [the clubroom where the interview was conducted], they’re all in there [his family members in the photos]…grandfather, my Dad, my uncle, my… great uncle… umm… there’s heaps of them, so for me… to be playing again now… and to have my uncle and my grandmother and all of ‘em going: “It’s great to see you play” you know, like…

Interviewer: so it’s been a family tradition, then

It has. Yeah, they mean a lot to me. Well, in nine... under 18s won a couple of years ago, prior to that, the last under 18 premiership... was won two-nil, and my Dad kicked the goal! like… that’s how deep [emphasis by interviewee] it goes... you know, so it goes a fair way back...

and they all talk about that! [both laugh]... and hopefully in years to come they’ll all talk about our grand final, you know

Here Jackson points to Doreen Massey’s concept of how space may be conceptualised as a constellation of past and present events. For Jackson, the football pitch becomes a site of family belonging, where family playing histories of past victories are retold to reconnect Jackson to the town. Equally, Foucault’s ideas of self-control techniques (1977) perhaps help explain why it is ‘natural’ within his family for him to play rugby league. While Jackson has a choice on whether to become part of a particular collective (Foucault 1977) he does not want to be the one to either break a family tradition or be seen as letting the family down by not playing. Jackson tells how he confirmed family expectations of him: “It’s great to see you play”.

Similarly, Anthony, aged 31 years of age and who has only been playing any form of adult football for the past three years, speaks of the importance of family in why he only started playing AFL in his late-twenties. Anthony spoke about how AFL was excluded in his parental home on the Central Coast of New South Wales:

I grew up in a house where AFL was taboo, Aussie Rules was taboo. You didn’t talk about it, you didn’t play it.

Even mum and dad you know, as a kid, growing up, yeah dad was a rugby league man and that was it. You know, we weren’t allowed to watch AFL, and I knew nothing about the game. And, where I lived, the game wasn’t played, it was either soccer or rugby league. Um, and that
was it. But um, my brother played rugby union, he was a gun [ie very good] union player. Up in [the] Central Coast, it was Union, Rugby League, or soccer. Or you surfed. And, at that stage, the rugby league culture was quite big.

Anthony outlines how to belong as a young man growing up on the Central Coast of NSW, you played rugby league, rugby union or surfed. The positioning of AFL as taboo illustrates Foucault’s argument of power/knowledge (1980:119). In the world created by Anthony’s parents, playing AFL was not a respected or permitted style of masculinity.

Finally, Glen, is in his late 30s and describes himself as a “veteran footballer” as well as being a life-long fisherman at Bermagui (both his father and grandfather were fishermen in Italy). Glen plays Australian Rules Football for Bermagui Breakers AFL club, usually in reserve grade (his choice).

In Glen’s sketch of football (Figure 4.1), he illustrates how for some participants, why men play football is to foster closer familial relationships, particularly with their sons. Glen illustrated playing football as a way of introducing his sons to their father’s football code - embedding his own version of football knowledge and training at the intersection of football masculinity and parenthood. For Glen, the pleasures of football are now primarily derived from watching his son play:

That’s what I think. That’s what it [football] means to me. Somewhere where I can bring my kid down and play football, and I enjoy watching him play. I get more of a thrill watching him play than playing meself [sic] actually.

Interviewer: Is that because of your vintage, or is that… [laughs]

I don’t know, I just think that, I think me kids are on borrowed time and like they’re 18, 19, they all move on, and they all want to do what they, they’ve all got their own lives to lead then, and I just think that you’ve just gotta take and, enjoy your kids’ sport, and they’re memories. I just think they’re memories. That’s what it [football] means to me. I get more, I’m involved mainly because my kids play now, and that’s why I stay around because my two boys play AFL.

For Glen, football sustains the relationship between father and son. For Glen, building a reserve of football family memories will sustain his son’s connections to the Bega Valley even after they leave. Football narratives illustrate how space is a constellation of past and present events that help to sustain an individual and collective sense of identity in place.
Family tradition works to naturalise sons playing particular codes of football in country towns. Football is narrated as a naturalised tradition for men, re-affirming the role of football as a training ground in a particular heterosexual masculinity in country towns (see Cauldwell 2011, Collins 2006a, Giulianotti et al. 2005 for examples of how men are trained in certain versions of heterosexual masculinities by playing football). The narratives of men in this study who play football in country towns hint at some of the naturalised assumptions around women who play football. For example, Mick talked about how his pre-teen daughter played football in the Bega Valley:

So, my wife’ll take my daughter, usually, to do that something different...ah well, she does karate. She does lots of different things. She’s played football. Yeah. She’s had a couple of years at football. So you know, but once upon a time we used to all go to the footy. But now that, now that she’s getting, you know she’s ten now, so she’s getting a bit older, to do her own, and I like her to do the things that girls do, you know what I mean? So, where I got the rest of me boys, one’s playing senior league now, he’s in the under 18s, he’s moved up, and I’ve got two that still play junior league. So, but one’s 8, and one’s, you know, plays in 16s, so he’s 15, so you’re at the footy all day anyway.

Mick illustrates the heteronormative assumptions that still surround his version of football in country towns, stating: “I like her to do the things that girls do” – which at age 10 to Mick, is no longer playing football. Mick frames karate as an acceptable ‘girls’ sport’ for his daughter. At the same time, Mick talks of how all the boys (and men) in the family spend ‘all day at the football’ playing or watching each other play football – learning how to ‘do football in the family’. The importance of familial influences cannot be understated in country towns. Families shape and are shaped by the highly gendered understandings of sport. In country towns, families help sustain the unquestioned assumptions around gender in and through particular football codes.

Alongside families, social differentiation and identification are important in country towns to explain why certain men play football. For instance, Andrew talks about the importance of football for young men growing up in country towns to secure a sense of self and belonging:

Yeah, look growing up it was, you know, it was pretty much, that was how you identified yourself. You know: ‘I play footy’.

Interviewer: As opposed to other ways of identifying yourself?

Yeah that’s right, like it was a real, you know, you’d wear your [Bega] Rooster shirt to school and you know, that’s how you saw yourself and how other people would have seen you: ‘He plays footy’.

Interviewer: So you were proud to be...

Very much so. Yeah, very much so

Interviewer: Did that give you an elevated status at the school? Or in your social life?

Yeah, possibly did. Yeah, like I don’t know what I would have done if I wasn’t playing football. That’s the other thing too though, you know. [playing football] Probably kept me out of a bit of trouble as well.
Andrew’s narrative illustrates how being identified as a young footballer provided him with a sense of having an elevated social status in Bega. His narrative implies a gendered hierarchy that privileged rugby league football players as belonging. As Andrew’s narrative suggests, being readily identifiable as a football player meant he sometimes made different choices that kept him “out of trouble” in rural spaces. Furthermore, he suggests that without football, there was a limited choice of alternative leisure activities.

With a similar narrative of ‘staying out of trouble’, and emphasising the spatial imperative of subjectivity, Nathan draws upon the oft-romanticised “rural idyll” by playing football in the Bega Valley. Nathan positions the Bega Valley as a country place ‘devoid of temptation’ compared to playing football in Sydney – where he got into trouble with the police “doing stupid things”. To Nathan, ‘it’s quieter’ in the Bega Valley… and so Nathan relocated his football career from Sydney:

yeah it was sort of... it’s not bad... bit quieter ‘cos we were sort of looking to... we were going a bit silly in Sydney... got into a bit of trouble and stuff, but... we sort of needed to...

Interviewer: Behave a bit for a while

yeah... so it’s worked out pretty good... ‘cos [I was] getting into a bit of trouble down there, so...

Interviewer: Are you behaving yourself here?

Yeah! [both laugh]

Interviewer: What were you getting in trouble for?

Oh, it was sort of... just... just, oh you know, just... [didn’t want to elaborate]... doing stupid things... where we got unnn... me and my mate got done drink driving, so... we lost our licences...

So that was hard

Interviewer: How do you survive here without a licence? Have you got your licence back?

No. But that sort of works out alright... ‘cos we’re unnn... country town... it’s a lot easier to get places, you know

Interviewer: oh, is it really?

oh, like you can get picked up like...

Nathan appreciates that rural places offer him a ‘saviour-like quality’ away from temptation in Sydney where he lost his licence due to drink-driving. For him, rural life is simpler and easier and far less tempting than city life – this is Nathan’s version of rurality and football. Not having a licence in a remote rural area would seem disadvantageous due to significant distances people are required to travel for work or recreation, but Nathan finds transport easy – people in the country will ‘pick him up’ whenever he needs transport... ‘We’re in a country town and it’s a lot easier to get to places’.

To Nathan, the country towns of the Bega Valley are fashioned as having idyllic and ‘saviour-like’ qualities he cannot find in Sydney. Country towns helps prevent Nathan from getting in trouble by not providing him with temptation as well as enabling his transportation – confirming his imagination of the “rural idyll” in the Bega Valley.
4.3 Narratives about training: looking fit, feeling wrecked

Why participants in this study played football was also entangled within narratives of training and discourses of fitness, team-work and belonging. Training may be conceptualised as an “athletic morphogenesis” (Butler 1998). As argued by Butler, athletic training produces “a body with a set of contours – a lengthened or compacted muscularity, a body whose contours bear the marks of a certain achievement” (Butler 1998). In this thesis, participants’ talk about training illustrates how bodies ‘become’ that of a footballer. For instance, Aaron, as coach and player at Tathra Sea Eagles AFL club and in his early 30s, enjoys many aspects of training, especially ‘being part of something somewhere’. In Aaron’s words:

I enjoy training, I really do enjoy training and I enjoy being somewhere and being a part of something. And it’s not just... it’s not just you... to be successful you’ve got to rely on a group of other people

Aaron reflects on the individual and collective benefits of training - reinforcing Butler’s (1998) notion of the co-constituted simultaneous individual and collective bodies. There is a mutual reliance to perform ‘successfully’, which cannot be achieved individually or without training. Aaron trains his body to become something (a footballer) and to belong to a team. Furthermore, Aaron talks about the social norms and hierarchies of training. In order to be respected as coach, he talks about the imperative of being one of the “fittest bloke[s]”:

Aaron is aware of how bodies are categorised during training as either ‘fit’ or ‘unfit’ blokes (men). Aaron’s investment into the identity of paid coach ensures he maintains a personal level of fitness that is “up there” with the fittest in the squad. As coach, he demands others to be as ‘fit’ as himself to represent the town, while accepting that (his own) age will ensure some younger players may be fitter. Aaron’s words confirms Wellard’s (2009:42) argument that the “the gendered body becomes a central factor in not only constructing ones ‘position’ in relation to it but also further successful participation.”

Robert is a single, 19-year old high-level AFL player who is currently ‘sidelined’ on crutches (unable to play or train) because of a serious football injury. Similarly, his narrative of training taps into discourses of personal fitness. Yet, that is not the only reason he trains:

I don’t play footy for the personal, well you do, because there’s some personal benefits like the fitness and I guess the recognition, when you play a good game it’s always good to have the recognition. But I just play it [football] because my friends are there and it’s something I love doing is playing footy, like being fit and running around.
For Robert, training is a mechanism through which he becomes witnessed as a successful footballer by friends. Training is also about being seen and becoming positioned within the social fabric of a country town. Similarly, Allan’s (twenty year-old, who plays AFL for Tathra Sea Eagles) narrative frames training in terms of how bodies are visibly transformed through training:

you know, a couple of years ago I was pretty small and still playing seniors so I was getting thrown around like a ragdoll. I wanted to improve myself but, yeah, just for personal reasons as well. You want to be fit and you want to look fit, I guess and yeah, it helps if, I definitely probably worked on my core this year more than anything else just because I want to be strong in that area, especially on the footy field, so yeah, that’s probably a major [reason] outside of training. I guess it’s the same thing, like it makes me get up and do stuff a lot, like a fair bit, which is a good thing and I like to feel pretty wrecked at the end of training because I don’t want to go there and like, I might whinge in my head about, oh, I can’t be stuffed doing this or we’ve got to run hundreds or something like that, but I’d rather feel wrecked at the end of footy training rather than…knowing that you’ve done something and then you will get out, you know, you’ll benefit from it on the weekend

When it comes to footy I just know I’ve got to, I don’t want to go to footy and put in a half effort when someone else is putting in 100 percent of an effort, so I basically, yeah, that’s the mindset I get into. But yeah, I’ve just got to put myself in it.

For Allan, training is, on one hand, about having a body that is ‘strong’ enough for the physical demands of football. For Allan there is no physical gain without pain. Hence, training is about fashioning a body that “looks fit” and “feels wrecked” from training. Through training, Allan understands he is crafting a body that is masculine. Training enables Allan to execute postures and moves in ways understood as masculine – this is what Wellard (2009:46) terms “expected sporting masculinity”. Consequently, Allan trains his body to conform to a set of football norms and expectations. The bodily contours of muscularity provide Allan with the ‘proof’ of being both fit and masculine. Allan's body, through his training, displays a football version of masculinity based on strength, fitness, physical power and assertiveness. However, following Butler, Allan’s body is never ‘fully fit’… as the body is always in motion and never finalised (Butler 1998). That is, Allan's fitness nor masculinity is never completed but is in effect, an infinite process of body-change.

Narratives of training suggest the reproduction of a normative country town masculinity that draw on the historical weight of rural Australia myths that sustain definitions of what it means to be a man in country towns through acts of physical strength. Yet, unlike myths of country masculinity that are reliant on the unquestioned consumption of drinking beer and eating meat, training to become a footballer for some participants also highlighted the importance of diet. Hence, participants evoked discourses of the ‘body as a temple’. For example, on one hand, Anthony also talked of why
he played football in terms of training to become fit and strong. On the other hand, Anthony explained the transformations to his diet since starting to play football:

This year, stepping up to seniors, I’ve really realised the fact that it’s about preparation and recovery, are just as important as game day. Yeah, your preparation has to be there, that’s the biggest one, definitely, like you know, you won’t catch me eating shitty greasy hamburgers any more. Or, or things like that, ‘cause I know it’ll catch up with me on game day.

Interviewer: You’ve obviously given up the ciggies [cigarettes]

Yeah, oh yeah. Because it’ll catch up with you on game day, you know, and, you know, it feels good to be fit and strong. And I find the fitter I get, the less injuries and the less soreness I get. And I can sort of wake up on a Sunday and chop firewood if I have to, and run around with the kids without walking like an 80 year old. And after training two nights a week and playing a Saturday, if you miss a week of training, your body tells you straight away, it’s amazing.

Anthony’s words illustrate Connell’s argument that masculinity is not only performative but experienced through the body. Drawing on Connell (1995:53):

“masculine gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex. Bodily experience is often central in the memories of our own lives, and thus our understanding of who and what we are.”

Anthony’s bodily experiences of playing football are central to his narrative. For Anthony, training is integral to belong on a football pitch. Training and closely monitoring his drink and food consumption enables Anthony to belong seamlessly on the football pitch as strong and fit, and at the same time, perform his household responsibilities. Similarly, the social norms surrounding alcohol consumption sat uneasily with some other players. For example, Robert spoke of being mindful how much he drank at weekends.

Like, I don’t like to drink every single weekend. I haven’t drank for 5 or 6 weekends now mainly due to my injury because alcohol would, you know...with the drugs [from his recent surgery] and stuff...but it aggravates it a little bit. It causes the swelling to come up and it just slows me down, slow my rehab down so I don’t really want to do it [drink alcohol].

Robert implies that drinking is an integral part of playing football. Further, Robert points towards the contradiction between rehabilitation from a football injury and consuming alcohol. Aaron also talked of the contradictions between training and alcohol consumption:

I was running a lot and doing as much as I could...so, yeah I... look...more often than not I really enjoy it, I enjoy being fit, feeling fit. And everything else, so I know when I line up for footy on a weekend and some bloke comes next to me with a beer gut or something, I just smile and think to myself: “I know I can beat this bloke”

For Aaron, those players with beer guts forms them as a ‘less fit’ player than Aaron. Aaron’s words illustrate how social hierarchies are sustained within football culture. Similarly, Daniel – who played senior AFL football in Victoria before
moving to the Bega Valley, is in his mid 20s and has two small children with his partner – talked of how drinking and smoking are an integral part of the social fabric of most football ‘bush leagues’. Daniel explained how the focus on drinking rather than playing football was one of the reasons he changed leagues:

I was playing in the Shepparton league and the last year I played I went to like a bush league and, you know, they drink [alcohol] half an hour before the game and things like that and, you know, smoke at half time and things and it was just, it just wasn’t the life that I really wanted to be involved in, so you know, that was the main reason why I moved.

Daniel points to how smoking and drinking remain an integral part of football culture in some country leagues. He switched locations and leagues, given his priority for playing football over the before- and post-match drinking scenes.

4.4 Conclusions

Narratives of family and training provide important insights to why men play football in country towns. Narratives of family illustrate one way that playing a certain football code is naturalised in country towns. Through family histories, men learn to ‘do football’ from fathers, brothers or cousins, such that playing “the family’s football code” often becomes unquestioned and naturalised. This naturalisation re-affirms the role of football as a training ground for particular heterosexual masculinities in country towns. The football pitch becomes a site of masculine family belonging, where family playing histories of past victories reconnect players to their town (Massey 1994). Further, as they run out onto the field, these past and present events merge as one, to fashion them as footballers with their embodied and place-based attachment to the town (Bale 2000).

Some participants’ framing of rural football draws upon the concept of the “rural idyll”, where life appears simpler and easier to negotiate. To them, it is far easier to ‘stay out of trouble’ by playing football in a rural place. In cities such as Sydney, players find themselves tempted and end up in trouble with the police – confirming the imaginary binary division of city / country spaces – and where the ‘rural’ is devoid of the temptations found in the ‘big city’. Because of this ‘imagined rurality’, some footballers purposely move to the Bega Valley to ‘stay out of trouble’. To them, rural space is posited as ‘saviour-like’ and so choose to play football in the Bega Valley.

Narratives of training illustrate how certain players wove playing football into discourses of fitness, team-work and belonging. It was important for some participants to train as part of the team expectation as well as for their own benefit. That is, players train their bodies together to conform to a set of football norms and expectations that position their body as ‘fit’, and, so belong in football space. Those participants in this study that emphasised training confirmed Butler’s (1998) argument that training co-constitutes players’ bodies as both individuals and as a collective team unit. Hence, these participants were most committed to
training as a fundamental body-change process (the “athletic morphogensis”) by which they were better able to negotiate football spaces. Central to their narratives was how the ‘proof of fitness’ from training surfaced as muscularity or ‘looking fit’ – fashioning what they understood as fit, masculine body contours. These participants also spoke about training as a mechanism to categorise football bodies as either ‘fit’ or ‘unfit’, creating a social hierarchy of players. The unit bodies were categorised as those with beer guts or those that ached after the match. Hence, for some participants, football training was a mechanism to ‘improve’ not only their physique, but also their everyday life.

Footballers’ bodies do not exist on their own nor are they fixed, but are hailed into existence (Probyn 2003) by negotiating an amalgam of multiple, intersecting categories and social relationships such as family, friends, rurality, fitness, commitment and age (Valentine 2007).

That is, men negotiate space co-constituted with multiple subjectivities of (for example) father/player, brother/player, footballer/friend, footballer/fitness and so on. All these have different meanings and importance for different men as to why they play football. Becoming fit and training with other football men forms homosocial friendships and social relationships in the football club. These help ensure players “belong” in the team or on the field – and all social relationships are spatially situated. These relationships in football often become narrated as “mateship”. The importance of mateship in why men play football in country towns is discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5
why do men play football in the Bega Valley: mateship and laddish behaviours

Half-time as the Tathra Sea Eagles team walk off to the changeroom in the SCAFL Seniors Semi-Final against Bateman’s Bay Seahawks at Hanging Rock Oval, Bateman’s Bay, Saturday 27 August, 2011. Photograph by David Clifton.
5.1 Introduction
The aim of this chapter is better understanding the importance of mateship in why men play football. How do men talk about mateship as a reason for playing football? How and where is mateship ‘performed’ amongst football men. To explore these questions, this chapter draws on Probyn’s (2003) concept of the spatial imperative of subjectivity to conceptualise ‘mateship’ as always spatially negotiated. The chapter is in two parts. The first section identifies the social norms of mateship in participants’ narratives. Some player’s narratives affirm the central role of mateship and with it conventional masculine discourses of strength, excess alcohol consumption and sexualisation of women – all termed ‘laddish behaviours’. Attention is given to how that ‘mates becoming lads’ is always spatially contingent. The second section identifies self-reflexive moments in some participant’s narratives that challenge these normative ideas of what it takes to join the ‘mateship circle’ and earn respect through becoming a lad. Narratives of Bega Valley footballers complicate normative understandings of mateship.

5.2 Mateship
The homosocial bond of mateship was a recurrent theme amongst many participants’ narratives. This result confirms Mynard et al.’s (2009) findings that men play football to ‘win for their mates’. This is particularly important in country towns where football clubs are often reliant upon friendship circles to establish and maintain viable teams. For example, Glen spoke proudly of how his friendship network re-established the Bermagui Breakers AFL club in 2009. Consequently, Glen expressed the importance of mates to him:

I probably wouldn’t play [football] if I didn’t have a lot of mates playing too you know? And, I’ll be honest, we get there and we train on Tuesday night, train on Thursday night, we have a bit of a ‘get the drinks’ after training on the Thursday. And we probably don’t even talk about the game on Saturday, we just talk about everything…Just bag each other out all night. And then Saturday, you’re playing with your mates, and you know, you, I think it’s, it’s pretty good, it’s special to play with your mates too. Yeah, no, I think, if me mates didn’t play, I probably wouldn’t play. In saying that, I would play to keep it going, I don’t know. I don’t know. It’s a hard one. I think they play a big part of it.

Glen’s football identity is naturalised and regulated by the disciplinary actions not only of training, but also of ‘mateship’ (Foucault, 1980). To Glen, playing football with his mates is narrated as “special”. On one hand, he suggests it becomes “special” because it provides an opportunity for men
to socialise together within training and drinking places – which forge conventional notions of masculinity through ideas of fitness, toughness, strength and alcohol. On the other hand, Glen’s narrative also suggests that men socialising after playing football together provide opportunities to speak about “everything”. Furthermore, Glen’s narrative suggests the importance of the pride/shame nexus (Probyn 2005, 2000). Belonging on the football pitch plays out through how shame is deployed within his mateship networks. In his words, mates “Just bag each other out all night”. Indeed, Glen went on to tell how shame is employed to ensure mates, regardless of their age, keep playing to make the team viable:

Two of me best friends are playing football with me so yeah, definitely friends before we started. Yeah, yeah. And I think that’s why we all still play, because if one says I’m not playing next year, the other two bag him out, or, whatever

‘Playing for mates’ evokes a sense of expected levels of commitment through how the dynamics of pride/shame operate within the social bonds of mateship both on and off the field.

Similarly, Daniel also spoke about football in terms of mateship. Daniel’s sketch of what football means to him (see Figure 5.1) illustrates the centrality of competition and mateship. Daniel’s image draws upon Butler’s (1998) assertion that it is impossible to separate the individual from the collective body – here Daniel imagines

Figure 5.1 Daniel’s sketch of what football means to him - mates-as-one and winning the competition
the football team as both individual and collective, yet neither exclusively so – they are both co-constituted. In his words,

It’s [football] a bit of me time, if you like, away from the family to come down and have a kick around with the boys.

Furthermore, Daniel spoke about the importance of commitment and the dynamics of pride/shame in forging the bonds of mateship. In his words:

I think it’s important to show your commitment. As well it’s helping me out getting to that fit stage and it’s showing to your team mates your dedication to wanting to succeed.

Daniel explains the importance of committing time to become fit enough to succeed and belonging in the spaces of football as a ‘mate’. Furthermore, Daniel explains this commitment extends beyond the conventional spaces of the clubroom, pitch and training grounds:

I think it’s important to interact with each other outside of the football, you know, getting to know them outside I think reflects on the field as well. I mean of course everyone’s got different friends and things like that. You’ve got your own little groups here, there and everywhere but once you get on that field you’re a unit, you’re one, so yeah, you know, like, a group of people taking it seriously in a good way, like I mean everyone makes mistakes. The best thing is to run over and let him know it’s all right, you know, next one or something you know.

Daniel reflects on how mateship helps form a ‘single unit’ on the field. But, “once you get on the field” there are expectations of social conformity to a collective singular body – “you’re one”. However, as Daniel suggests, it is not an infallible team-body-unit. Recurrent mistakes bring into existence “shamed bodies” that may inspire training to conform, or results in players giving up.

Finally, Anthony also illustrates the importance of mateship and achievement in why men play football in country towns. Anthony is 31, with a young family, and has only been playing football for three years. Anthony’s sketch of football (see Figure 5.2) emphasises how football enables a collective body to fluoresce through mateship on the football field - all players are joined together and holding hands in unity.
Anthony, in his football narrative, explained mateship by drawing upon metaphors of war:

Because it starts on the field. It's like when you're in the army. The soldiers who have been to war. You know, and are in the trenches with each other, that's where, you know, the spirit of the ANZAC come[s] from, the spirit of the digger come[s] from, that's where you really start to bond, you know. And you can train all you like, you know, like a soldier can train here in a training camp and boot camp all they like, you know, and it'll bring 'em closer together, but it's nothin' like putting soldiers in a trench, with live bullets flying over their head. That's when they will really start to lean on each other.

Anthony draws upon the Australian military analogy of mateship (see Thompson 2009, Moore and Crotty 2007). Anthony suggests that on-field football spirit and mateship is somewhat like fighting in the ANZAC trenches. Men who play football can readily draw upon discourses of war because of the synergies of training, competition, battle, tactics and field. Anthony’s narrative therefore confirms playing football as the performance of a particular type of heroic masculinity. This result aligns with both Sabo’s (1986) and Young et al.’s (1994) findings of male athletes — they must perform as fearless, despite corporeal risk.

5.3 Becoming lads and silencing
Narratives of why men play football are closely aligned to the possibilities for laddish behaviours amongst men who play football together — including drunkenness and (hetero)sexism (Lines 2001, Whannel 1995, 2000, Wheaton 2000, Brown 1998, Skelton 1998, Gill 2004). Some participants talked about past events that included drinking and drunkenness as “legendary”. However, recounting narratives of laddish behaviour are what helps sustain the intimate spaces of mateship-circles. Hence, there was a hesitancy to share these narratives with the researcher. For instance, when Mick’s work colleague — an amateur cartoonist — drew what he thought football meant to Mick, he initially drew a naked woman (as central to the sketch), along with drinking, gambling, camping together and playing football. He explained the naked woman represented the potential sexual encounters opened to men that play football in a country town.

However, Mick asked Johnno to re-draw the picture and “Maybe leave out the woman”, as shown in Figure 5.3. Mick’s action demonstrates retelling narratives of sexual encounters of footballers are integral to becoming mates. Silencing the laddish heterosexuality of footballers Mick foregrounds the often unacknowledged role of women in football as mothers and supporters. Mick provides insights to how football masculinities are negotiated in and through different spaces — at the bar, on the field, at home and at camp sites. To become a footballer in a country town is a complex process of being ‘one of the boys’ — that is, a mate, being a partner and being a father.

Anthony also discusses how becoming a footballer is negotiated in and through different spaces. Anthony talks of the attributes he respects amongst men who play football together. Anthony tells of respectable football masculinities in
different spatially-situated contexts:

But it’s the older experienced guys who have been around, like Bruiser you spoke to the other night, Darren, it’s those type of guys that you need around a footy club, guys who’ve been in the trenches, and been with footy clubs, and know how they work, and know how to get the best out of people, you know, and, especially for the young guys, being able to give them… ‘cause it does start to affect you off the field too you know, like, I know a lot of the senior guys like you know, five years ago, wouldn’t have bothered about going to the pub and getting shitfaced, or, or doing something stupid in front of the kids, but I know now, like I’ve even seen senior players, with my own eyes, who, you know, some of ‘em smoke cigarettes, I’ve seen ‘em actually walk around the back of the building or turn away, when, like the under 17s are walking in or something

For Anthony, he draws upon normative ideas that frame respectable footballers on the football pitch in terms of a heroic masculinity of having “been in the trenches”. In the past, Anthony suggests that normative practices of respectable football masculinities included drinking to become drunk, by ‘drinking ten beers’. According to Anthony, those men he mosts respects today in his club choose to break the alignment of football masculinities with drinking and smoking. Anthony talks about Bruiser as a ‘leader’ because of how he drinks responsibly in the pub in front

Figure 5.3 Mick’s self-reflexive and ‘politically-correct’ drawing of what football means to him
of younger players.

Oh but see, that’s why Bruiser’s a leader. That’s why he’s a leader, on and off the field. You know, he’s not one of those mad men who drinks, who drink ten beers because he’s leading the way, but he’s a great role model Bruiser, and I hope he stays with our club for a long time.

For Anthony, Darren is framed as a leader on and off the football field because he does not follow the normative conventions of country football masculinities that Anthony closely aligns with laddish off-field behaviours of excessive consumption of alcohol and drunkenness.

Similarly, Anthony employed strategies to distance himself from the laddish behaviours of the past and behave as a responsible footballer in front of juniors, mum and dads. Anthony said:

Oh yeah, well, you know, there’s been some legendary stories out of that Bateman’s Bay to Tathra bus trip. Yeah there’s been some legendary stories, but um, yeah, it happens, but um, you’ve also got to watch yourself too, ‘cause it’s not only the senior players who go up on that bus, you know, there could be juniors, there could be mums and dads and… Yeah so, you can’t be, can’t be too stupid.

For Anthony, the retelling of the story of the ‘legendary’ Tathra bus trip is restricted to the mateship-circle of the Tathra football club. Similarly, Aaron – as paid coach – also distances himself from the laddish behaviour of a previous football coach and player:

on a Saturday night, he’d be the bloke with his shirt off on the dance floor, you know, doing backflips and slapping the barmaid on the arse and all the rest of it, … so we’re out there on the track Saturday night, you know, six hours earlier we’re running around jumping off the wharf nude all of a sudden we’re up here at training.

Aaron distances himself from laddish behaviour off the football pitch in the physicality of slapping – what Brooks calls essentialised masculinity in action (Brooks 2000:32) – as being undesirable. For Aaron, negotiation of football masculinities is felt through the intersection of becoming both a respected paid coach and a player.

5.4 Conclusions

The aim of this chapter is to better understand narratives surrounding mateship as one of the fundamental reasons why many men play football in the Bega Valley, NSW. Particularly, how do men talk about mateship as a reason why they play football? Participants in this study spoke of mateship by drawing on conventional metaphors of war that closely align the homosocial bonds of sport with battle. This enables men who play football to cast themselves in the role of the heroic player. Drawing on Probyn’s (2003) spatial imperative of subjectivity, results in this chapter illustrate how becoming a mate is always spatially negotiated. In other words, mates shape space and space shapes mates.

An implication of the performance of mateship that fluoresces, is that ‘mateships’ are contingent on uhere relationships are played out (pubs, clubs, camps sites, on the field or at training) as well as who is present (mates, children, parents). That is,
mateship is spatially negotiated *in situ*. In some contexts, like on bus trips or camping trips, laddish behaviour was narrated by most participants as both expected and respected in forming homosocial bonds of mateship. In other contexts, laddish behaviour was spoken of as undesirable where the presence of strangers and/or young players fashioned the place as public. Different discourses of respect are central to how the social bonds of mateship are spatially negotiated. Participants tap into discourses of respect forged through metaphors of war when discussing on-field behaviours of players with each other. In contrast, other participants tap into discourses of respect for players who distance themselves from reproducing laddish behaviours of drunkenness and sexism when narrating stories of off-field behaviours.

Yet, it would be naïve to think Bega Valley footballers do not drink to excess or behave as lads. Narratives of drunkenness and sexism are positioned as ‘legendary’, and only to be retold to refashion intimate social bonds between players – and in the private spaces of mateship circles. That is, many of the performances in the ‘spaces of mates’ becomes privileged. But there is no such thing as private space. It is the retelling of these laddish stories that creates private, intimate and exclusive spaces that forges lads and mates. Private space becomes an outcome of drinking and mateship. The repetition of these ‘legendary’ stories re-confirms particular normative understandings of masculinities.

The positionality of the researcher must be acknowledged in the silencing of laddish stories. One participant at his office desk started to tell a sexist, laddish story. However, this participant reflected that the researcher was not the correct person to whom he should retell this story. There was a purposeful and determined silencing of stories involving heterosexual encounters. In this research context, participants in this study frequently positioned themselves as distanced from laddish behaviours... ‘it was somebody else’ or ‘in the past’ or ‘somewhere else’. Stories of inappropriate sexual encounters were framed by their silencing as ‘no longer happening’ in the Bega Valley. The publicity surrounding the national football codes about laddish behaviour (see Appendix G) was not referred to by participants, suggesting a further and explicit silencing of ‘undesirable lads’. The laddish stories of footballers in the Bega Valley must be kept private and ‘invisible’, further emphasising the spatial imperative of subjectivity. The next chapter explores how participants in this study talked of why they played football in terms of winning and sustainability.
Tathra Sea Eagles rugby league team walk off victorious in the CRL Group 16 Semi-final after defeating Cooma, at Cooma Showground, Sunday 21 August 2011
Photograph by David Clifton

Chapter 6

why do men play football in the Bega Valley: sustainability and winning places
6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore why participants talked about playing football in terms of winning and sustainability. The small total population of country towns presents particular challenges for organizing and sustaining football competitions. Many country towns have no football teams, while some teams are amalgamated to help ensure viability. For example, in rugby league, Merimbula (the second largest town in the Bega Valley) has combined with Pambula to form the Merimbula-Pambula Bulldogs. Bega (the largest town) does not have an adult AFL team. It is increasingly unusual for a small town to have their “own” football team, and there is usually one senior adult club per football code. For instance, Merimbula previously had two AFL teams, but now only one survives. Yet, Tathra, which is one of the smaller coastal townships with a population of approximately 1600 people, has both successful first grade AFL and rugby league teams.

This chapter begins by understanding how the ebb and flow of small numbers of football players in country towns produces a particular understanding of football. How do men that play football narrate stories about winning? To many participants in this study, football is talked about as winning “for their town”. Why men play football is often tied to narratives of place-based rivalry and how winning fashions small country towns as “amazing” places. Winning is a way of sustaining what it means to belong in a country town, specifically “their” town. This foregrounds place-based rivalry between towns as many footballers saw themselves, the team and the town as one single, competitive entity – the football team is the community. Pride-in-place is a vital motivator for many Bega Valley footballers in these small towns. These results confirm Bale’s argument that football binds people to place through what he terms “representational sport” (Bale 2000:149).

Threaded through stories about winning is a narrative of sustainability of football in towns with small player numbers. These participants point out that a continually-losing team may result in the loss of football altogether from a country town. These narratives highlight two very important and inter-related issues of smallness in Bega Valley football: firstly, the inherent frailty of adult football teams in the Bega Valley; and secondly, that teams representing towns often have significant differences in football abilities. Teams and town spaces are euphoric after winning a competition – places “buzz” and have team streamers and flags on display in the towns in home windows, on shopfronts or on cars. But, this is often short-lived and not always sufficient to ensure a team survives over
time. The outcomes of winning in small country towns are never predictable. Winning helps teams survive, but does not guarantee it.

6.2 ‘Bush footy’ as the only game for men in a country town

Why men play football may, in part, be due to a lack of other team-based sport options in country towns. In the far South Coast of NSW, most country towns have less than 3,000 people, and only the major townships of Merimbula and Bega have populations of more than 3,800 (ABS 2006). As Richard, who owns a cafe at Bermagui and is captain of the Bermagui Breakers AFL team, explains, the options in adult male sports are severely limited:

Interviewer: How important is do you think football is to Bermagui?
Richard: Huge. Huge!
Interviewer: yeah, why’s that?
Richard: Well, there’s no senior cricket team here now, the closest rugby team is Cobargo... there’s no basketball, there’s half a girls netball comp...
Interviewer: Is there rugby league here?
Richard: No.
Interviewer: AFL’s the only winter code?
Richard: Yep.
Interviewer: No hockey?
Richard: Nuh... Cobargo have like a soccer comp for kids, but not seniors... yeah, so like as far as senior sports go... the only one in Bermagui itself is AFL

AFL is the only senior sport presently available which enables men to represent Bermagui. Furthermore, participants spoke about football in country towns as producing a particular version of the sport that they called ‘bush footy’. Small total populations, combined with a transient young adult population on the far South Coast of New South Wales, fashioned a particular understanding of football. As more than one participant quipped: “This is bush footy, mate”. Participants spoke about the differential qualities of ‘bush footy’ that are often attributed to comparisons with leagues and teams in other places, or in the past. These comparisons draw attention to how the small pool of players for football clubs in the Bega Valley plays out. For example, Jarrad – who is 19 years old and plays centre for Tathra Sea Eagles Rugby League team – talked of how competitions were ‘bigger and better in the past’:

I don’t know the word to say, but... it’s not as... this comp’s not as good as it used to be, like... years ago when I used to watch there was bloody... Bombala, Eden, Bega, Narooma, Tathra... Moruya... there was sort of eight or nine [first grade clubs]... like Cooma, there... like about nine teams in the comp, but umm... now it’s only, what five... and Narooma didn’t have much of a side this year, like they won the comp a few years ago and they had a very similar side to us, we were just... like they were all real small, we went to the umm major semi with ‘em... and lost by a goal, but a kick...one of our kicks missed... and they won by two points... yeah, no I don’t... I think it’s definitely not as competitive as it used to be for sure. I don’t know why... it’s sort of just losing like...

Jarrad reflects on how smallness has implications for not only each football club securing enough members to field a team each week, but also for annual variations in competition levels. For Jarrad, even teams such as Narooma winning the competition
a “few years ago” no longer ensure the success of a club. In his words, Narooma “didn’t have much of a side this year”.

Daniel contrasts the demands of AFL training between his experiences in Victoria to that of the Bega Valley, where clubs have little ability to exert a desired social order through training spaces:

I mean where I come from if you didn’t train you give notice, everything like that, you know, it just wasn’t really on and it’s hard in a country town to actually say if you don’t train you don’t play because numbers are sort of limited, so it is a bit different.

In the Bega Valley, Daniel posits that training regimes cannot be enforced by coaches. Players can choose to train or not, and still represent the club at weekends. Daniel points to how the limited pool of players in the Bega Valley works against the possibility of enforcing formal rules surrounding training and playing for a team. Some participants expressed this inability of football clubs to enforce training and playing rules in terms of ‘professionalism’ relative to ‘bush footy’. For example, Mick characterised ‘bush footy’ in terms of individual players’ commitment to football:

Interviewer: Do you reckon you need to be fitter and faster [to play football] than in the past?

Mick: No I don’t think so, not in the bush. Just depends how professional your club is. And how committed the players are. So like, it’s hard to relate NRL to bush footy because when you get the boys get a bit older, they got jobs, they got families, you know probably training two days a week’s their…they’re maxin’ out with that. And playing on Sundays.

For Mick, ‘bush footy’ is differentiated by: the commitment of players; less time made available to train; the older age of players; and, players’ ability to juggle family and work life with football training. Similarly, Jackson evokes the idea of ‘country rugby league’ as being somewhat ‘less than’ leagues played elsewhere.

Interviewer: So how fit do you need to be to play?

Jackson: Fitter than what I am! [both laugh] I mean, well... country rugby league... down here, if you’ve got a good enough bench [ie. substitutes]. I mean, I go fifteen twenty minutes and then they drag me off and bring someone else [on] to give me a breather - but in saying that, I’m an exercise-induced asthmatic, too, so that doesn’t help

Jackson talked of a self-deprecating ‘bush’ standard resulting in less body effort and physical demands (not withstanding Jackson’s asthma), which require little or no training.

In summary, the imperative of smallness for a country town running a competitive football team of any code annually are not lost on players. Amongst participants in this study, there was a discourse of country football that positioned their sport as somehow a ‘lesser’ competition than leagues elsewhere. Participants’ understandings of ‘bush footy’ were often framed in terms of how the smallness of clubs and towns worked against professionalism found elsewhere. The small pool of players and clubs in country towns means players can make less effort and still belong in the team and on the field – most clubs simply don’t have replacements available. Players spoke
of how country football clubs have little choice if players don’t attend training and that the level of fitness required is not that high to play in the highest grade – again, usually due to the lack of player numbers. Training is not generally pursued as a method to stay selected in the team. So, football-body-training became optional or perhaps even irrelevant – further emphasising the smallness of clubs and how, at times, players and clubs have very few options.

### 6.3 Winning narratives and place-based attachments

Participants in this study confirmed findings of previous studies that emphasise the spatial impact of winning in terms of forging connections with places, often expressed as ‘community’ (Bale 2003). For example, when Allan was asked to sketch his understanding of football, he conveyed ideas about personal and collective goals, team work, winning and making football history in his town - by Tathra winning their first back-to-back premiership in both 2010 and 2011 seasons (see Figure 6.1).

Allan then talked about the importance of winning, and particularly how winning sustains a collective identity that calls on ‘community’. There is a place-based making and attachment to Allan’s football narrative (Bale 2003):

> Amongst other things it’s [winning] pretty important but like, I mean I’m not one of those people who just needs to win everything but you want to win for other people as much as you want to win for yourself.

Interviewer: When you say other people is that just your team mates or is that for the football community or the families or the whole thing?

The community, **Tathra’s a community**. I mean last year, when we were winning and we knew we were going to do well, and we ended up coming home with the goods, like the whole town was buzzing, and even on Saturday night when I went to the country club, everyone was
buzzing because we had a win, so yeah, it was really good like that. And even this year it’s pretty good because we’ve got a pretty good chance to go back to back, and it’s never been done at the club, so I guess that’s another motivation for me.

Allan understands the effects of winning the competition as an event extending beyond the football field and across Tathra: “the whole town was buzzing”. This is one example of how Massey (1994) conceptualises space as a progressive process of past (the football win) and present (the town ‘buzzing’); here and elsewhere - in the Tathra football club, the Tathra country club, shops and houses. Why Allan plays football is closely aligned to how his team can become an integral part of making Tathra AFL history, generating felt excitement and fashioning Tathra as a winning place.

Dave echoed this sentiment as he talked of playing to win the competition:

I suppose the only thing I can think of is... number 1... really, you play to win... you know, we’ve pretty been pretty lucky here at this club [Tathra], we’ve had good teams for the last few years so we have been on top a bit and...you know, when we do lose, it’s umm... yeah, it’s shit [both laugh]... you play to play this time of year now, coming into finals and you want to be, you want be at the last day in September... or whenever it is we play, so...that’s the way I look at it, anyway.

Dave’s narrative illustrates two points. Firstly, to win the competition requires what Foucault terms ‘disciplinary actions’ (see Foucault 1980). In football, this requires a relatively high level of commitment demonstrated by playing and training all year. That is, Dave (in Foucault’s words), ‘disciplines’ or trains his body-form into a productive (‘mechanically efficient’) body physically and mentally capable of winning the competition. Secondly, Dave draws our attention to the consequences of Tathra losing: “it’s shit”. Here, Dave feels the emotional corporeality of a football loss that doesn’t live up to his expectations. His statement highlights Probyn’s (2005) pride/shame nexus. Dave talks of being proud when his Tathra club is ‘number 1’. In contrast, he talks of feeling ‘shit’ when losing.

Richard reflected on the importance of winning the SCAFL Reserves competition in the 2009 season. His narrative illustrates how winning a competition helped forge his sense of belonging in Bermagui. In the context of having recently moved from Victoria and Merimbula, Richard recalled that:

Ten years of senior footy in Victoria, and obviously in Merimbula and that, and never played in a final up until last year, so, it was a pretty big, pretty special moment for me last year, when we won

Interviewer: I think people that don’t play competitive sports, don’t realise how important a comp a win is, you may never get one

Oh exactly, that’s it, and I was getting to the stage, I was starting to think fuckin’ hell, I’ve never played in a final, let alone win one, and then I came here and then we won the first final and went straight in the grand final, and then we won the grand final, and yeah, it was pretty surreal. So it was, it was a good couple of days.
Richard talked of ‘never having played in a final’ until he played for Bermagui, and was expressing his frustration at possibly never winning a competition. He then expressed how “special” it was to play in a final and then “surreal” to win a grand final in his first season at Bermagui. Richard’s story illustrates how winning an AFL competition is central to how people retell their personal histories, and may come to belong in a particular place through winning a grand final. This confirms Atherley’s (2006) and Tonts and Atherley’s (2010) findings of the construction of place-based identity of towns from football clubs. In Bermagui, AFL football has become critical for the town’s identity through place-based attachment and rivalry.

6.4 Winning and sustainability narratives

Narratives of participants also confirm previous research that argues how sport can refashion understandings of places as ‘winning places’ (see Waitt 1999). However, in the Bega Valley, the winning narrative is often refashioned in terms of ‘small’ country towns playing against much ‘larger’ regional centres. Larger centres are assumed to have a much larger pool of players, and therefore the possibility to field more competitive teams. For example, Aaron suggested that Tathra is an “amazing place” in his narrative of the SCAFL competition between the 1600 people of Tathra and the 16,000 people of Bateman’s Bay:

> You know, as far as football goes on the coast, it has potential to you know, be really, really enjoyable. I mean, there’s a hard work that has to go into it, a lot of people don’t like putting the hard work...unfortunately this year for Tathra it’s been the players...but, I think that’ll change, I think it kinda swings...and goes...sixteen hundred people in Tathra and they take on Bateman’s Bay with sixteen thousand, you know and win, so there is... it’s an amazing place

Aaron’s sketch of what football means to him signifies the importance of small teams defeating teams from larger towns (Figure 6.2). Here, Aaron sketches his
The idea of football is always framed as the goal of ‘beating Bateman’s Bay’. To Aaron, the most important aspects of football are family, supporters and teammates — provided they always beat Bateman’s Bay. Aaron emphasises the point that football in the Bega Valley is ‘place versus place’ rather than ‘team versus team’. For Aaron, Tathra, with 10% of the population of its opponents, becomes an ‘amazing place’ because they win. (Tathra won the 2010 SCAFL competition and shortly after these interviews, also won the 2011 premiership — ie. back-to-back for the first time ever in the club’s history. Both were against Bateman’s Bay).

Discourses that sustain place-based rivalry and winning places are (re)produced in the Bega District News. For example, in the Friday 2nd September, 2011 edition, the rugby league final between Tathra Sea Eagles and Bega Roosters to be played Saturday 3rd September, 2011, is headlined as “more than a game” (see Figure 6.3).

This article (re)circulates a discourse of rivalry-in-place, ensuring footballers are reminded that the importance of winning is not just for themselves or their team, but that their whole town community depends on them winning this one match. This rugby league match has “rivals clashing” in a “winner-take-all battle”. Such articles may reinforces people’s attachment to place, as readers are ‘forced’ or expected to take sides by choosing who they want to ‘win the epic battle’.

Figure 6.3 - Bega District News back page, 2 September 2011 - the day before a knock-out final in rugby league between Bega and Tathra.
Daniel also discussed the place-based rivalry against Bateman’s Bay that fluoresces in clubs other than his own:

Interviewer: And what did you reckon of Bermagui giving you guys the archway? [see Figure 6.4]

Daniel: What do you mean by that?

Interviewer: When you ran out?

Daniel: Oh right, yeah. The sportsmanship, to me it sounds like every team I’ve played, you know, at the back of the rooms the coach or the president of the opposing club always comes out and says, we hope you give it to the Bateman’s Bay. You know, but that definitely lifts you up again knowing that there’s another team there watching in your support

Here Daniel demonstrates how players from smaller towns will band together to support anyone playing against the ‘Goliath’ that is Bateman’s Bay. Even the ‘opposing clubs’ – that is, officials from clubs other than Daniel’s – hope they defeat Bateman’s Bay. In Daniel’s words: “give it” to Bateman’s Bay. An example of this ‘support against Goliath’ is shown in Figure 6.3, where Bermagui AFL Reserve grade team (who had just played their own match), provide an ‘archway’ through which the Tathra AFL team run onto the field. For another team to provide such an archway is a public and explicit demonstration of small town teams supporting each other against the larger town of Bateman’s Bay.

Daniel goes on to say how winning ‘puts places on the map’:

Well when you put it [winning] like that I think it’ll only, well what would you say, put Tathra on the map… You’re a successful club, it might bring in a few more players which would be
great, more numbers. Make that competition a bit harder.

Daniel confirms the idea that winning will help raise the profile of Tathra - in football and generally. For Daniel, winning brings benefits of more and better-quality players, which in turn he argues, will be great as it will improve the competition.

Winning narratives in the Bega Valley are also about sustaining football in particular country towns. For example, Robert talked of how Bermagui AFL club folded temporarily, and that winning becomes a motivation for their existence and future, to get them “back to where they were”. That is, successful:

Well, as the [SCAFL] competition gets older, this competition that we’re playing gets older, it does get more competitive because the win/loss ratio to individual clubs sort of can get out of hand and there’s a lot of proud teams in the area. Like Bermagui, they might have folded for a year but they’re really determined in getting back to where they were. I mean Pambula, they lost 3 years ago, they were in the grand final every grade, in the grand final and they lost them all. So that’s been a key point for them. They lost a few players after that but that incident sort of gave them a little bit of fighting power.

The shame of losing three grand finals is referred to as an ‘incident’, as Robert reflects on the shame it brought to the town as well as the resulting loss of players – again highlighting the frailty of football survival due to the small population numbers of Pambula. However, this ‘incident’ has, to Robert, motivated Pambula to survive and succeed with what Robert calls their “fighting power” – a small town’s determination, and arguably a necessity, to be a winning team. How Robert talked of a “lot of proud teams” in the SCAFL illustrates how Probyn’s (2005) arguments about the dynamics of pride / shame operate in and through sports. Robert believes if the win/loss ratio gets ‘out of hand’ (ie. teams lose too much), it jeopardises the town pride and the team’s viability. Likewise, Dave talked of playing to win as essential to maintain the presence of an AFL club in his country town. For Dave, winning helps counter the relatively short history of AFL in the Bega Valley. Dave highlights how a winning AFL team provides some temporal stability for the sport – at least until next season.

in this area where AFL isn’t super-duper popular in comparison to the rugby league, winning is a huge kind of stabiliser for the club. Like, once, if you go a whole season without winning a game and if people don’t come to watch you anymore and players start not turning up to training because they’re not going to win or, you know, there’s no hope.

For AFL teams in the Bega Valley, historical geographies matter because there is no substantive local tradition to call upon if a team loses regularly. According to Dave, winning is essential for retaining interest in training and playing AFL in the Bega Valley. Similarly, Anthony echoes the sentiment of the winning imperative:

You know, no-one wants a club or a team that’s getting walloped and losing all the time, you know, yeah, definitely.

As well, Glen’s narrative also confirms that small and transient population numbers work against the viability of football in
some country towns, especially towns such as Eden with both rugby league and AFL teams (at present). Further, Glen reiterates that there is little pleasure in losing regularly:

I play for fun, but if I was losing every week, I’d start to think about, why am I feeling like this… and… um, you look at Eden at the moment, down at the coast, and they’re running last the last two years, can’t get numbers. You know. Bigger town than Bermagui, but they’re competing against the Rugby League code in that town, that’s huge.

Glen narrates the sense of achievement and pride when small country towns like Bermagui are able to compete in the SCAFL against larger towns, and contrasts this with the difficulty of sustainability in towns with more than one adult football code.

6.5 Conclusions

Why some men play football in the Bega Valley is closely aligned to narratives of smallness-of-place and its subsequent lack of sports choice. As well, winning at football is another reason many men play because winning forges place-based attachments – which to players, creates a ‘successful community’. The results in this chapter confirm previous research that argues how playing to win help sustain place-based attachments as well as helping refashion places as ‘winning places’. The results in this chapter confirm previous research that argues how playing to win help sustain place-based attachments as well as helping refashion places as ‘winning places’. Football becomes a vital part of a town’s identity in the Bega Valley, closely aligning with the results of work by Tonts (2005), Atherley (2006), Tonts and Atherley (2010) and Spaaij (2009). Participants re-tell their winning football stories as place-based narratives as making places, or, fashioning winning and amazing places. As one participant commented, ‘winning puts places on the map’. Yet another participant spoke of ‘making history’ for his country town when the Tathra Sea Eagles AFL team won back-to-back premierships in September 2011 for the first time in the club’s existence.

This project extends understandings of winning in country towns because of how winning is closely aligned to narratives of sustaining the viability of football in country towns. Questions of sustainability are closely aligned to the small pool of football players that result in a particular version of sport in country towns that many participants dubbed ‘bush footy’.

This pervading imperative of population smallness ensures the frailty and fluctuation of football spatial relationships along with the teams and clubs that produce them. Winning takes on particular significance for small country towns because of limited number of players and questions over the viability of the sport each year. But, the outcomes of winning are never predictable - some clubs succeed while others fold, despite winning. In the Bega Valley, men do play football to win, but they are also often playing to sustain the viability of a club or because there isn’t any other choice.
Chapter 7

The scoreboard at George Brown Memorial Oval, Eden. This is Eden’s home ground for rugby league, taken at Cobargo Eels v Eden Tigers reserve grade match, Sunday 28 August, 2011

Photograph by David Clifton
This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section returns to the over-arching single aim of the thesis – why do men play football in the Bega Valley, NSW. An evaluation is provided of how effectively the aim was addressed. The second section presents the key findings of the research. Finally, future research directions and additional methodologies are presented in the third section.

7.1 Why do men play football in the Bega Valley, NSW

The aim of this thesis was to better understand why men play football in the Bega Valley, NSW. Football was theoretically conceptualised as the performance of multiple situated subjectivities that are constructed and negotiated in and through space. This drew upon three spatial concepts: Elspeth Probyn’s ‘the spatial imperative of subjectivity’, Doreen Massey’s ‘progressive sense of place’ and Gill Valentine’s ‘intersectionality’ of social categories. This enabled thinking about football spaces as forging the situated masculine subjectivities of footballers – as mates, friends, sons, fathers, cousins and opponents, to name but a few. Importantly, these are not mutually exclusive subjectivities. They can be, and frequently are, co-constituted in spaces. Situated subjectivities of footballers-in-place produced myriad geographies of football – enabled through negotiated inclusions and exclusions in spaces such as in teams, friendships, mateship circles, at training or on the field and other spatially-situated social relationships. That is, a performative framework ensures thinking of how space is constructed and how people inhabit space. In Probyn’s words “we inhabit space, and space inhabits us” (2005:294). Space is produced by those who occupy it. Football spaces are produced by performing “expected football masculinities” (Wellard 2009:46). At the same time, footballers become produced by space.

The works of Michel Foucault (1977, 1980), Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 1998), Elspeth Probyn (2003, 2005), Raewyn Connell (1995, 2005) and John Bale (2000, 2003) were central to interpreting the geographies of football narratives and sketches of players in the Bega Valley, NSW. These highlighted that football is not a simple process of ‘playing a physical game’, but a complex bodily performance of felt responses as a way of maintaining familial ties, friendships, mateships, belonging, winning and sustainability.

To men of the Bega Valley, NSW, football is constituted as having myriad reasons and purposes for playing – all of which are both spatially situated and negotiated. Further, these reasons for playing are multiple and multiplied – there is no hegemonic reason why men play football in the Bega Valley, NSW.
7.2 Key findings

Key findings of why men play football in the Bega Valley, NSW were presented in three results chapters. Chapter 4 discussed four themes of football narratives: families, friends, rurality and training. In this study, family narratives were among the most commonly recited. The importance of familial relationships cannot be understated in why and what football code men play. Football is often spoken about as a ‘family tradition for men’. Familial networks may have great influence over which code they play. Many participants spoke how when playing a particular code of football for a country team they were following in their father’s, brother’s, cousin’s, uncle’s and even grandfather’s footsteps. That is, many men play football to sustain familial place-based belongings. For these participants, playing football is unquestioned. These results confirmed previous studies of football that illustrate the importance of playing football for men in sustaining place-based attachments in country towns. In addition, the results illustrate how football re-affirms the role of football as a training ground for particular heterosexual masculinities in country towns as a naturalised version of “the family’s football code”.

Training narratives were equally important in why some men in this study played football. Training bodies to be and ‘look’ fit was often a reason some men played football, particularly for younger or highly competitive players. These participants drew on discourses of fitness, team-work and team-belonging. Those participants who trained to help forge a competitive team conformed to expected football norms of fitness and strength. Training was illustrated to be paradoxical. On one hand, training narratives demonstrate the transformative qualities of football by generating choices (as in having something to do) as well as sustaining a sense of belonging and becoming ‘fit’. On the other hand, training the body to become fit is about conforming to hegemonic masculine ideals of physical strength, enduring pain and fashioning hard bodies. In contrast, equally important are the narratives of other players who spoke of how training was not a priority. Older players generally did not prioritise training. In the Bega Valley, given the small pool of players, training is not necessary to earn a spot in the team.

Chapter 5 turned to narratives of mateship. Mateship was always narrated as spatially negotiated. On the pitch, football players became narrated as heroic, which drew upon military discourses. Off the pitch, evoking stories that retell ‘legendary’ sexist and drunken behaviours of footballers is integral to sustaining the intimate and private spaces of mateship in pubs, cafes and clubs. Yet, at the same time, narrating respectable country football masculinities that distances footballers from sexist and drunken behaviour is equally important in clubs, pubs and cafes where parents and junior players are present. Many players distanced themselves from laddish behaviours, positioning them as: in the past, performed by someone else, having occurred somewhere else, or, as threatening their professional (coaching) status. Chapter 5 also raised an important methodological point surrounding the
role of storytelling in football culture in sustaining mateships. Sharing the intimate
details of stories of legendary drunken behavior is restricted to members of
friendship-circles.

Chapter 6 explored narratives of bush football, winning and sustainability. Participants’ differentiated football played in country towns as “bush footy”. Bush football is differentiated by drawing on comparisons with other leagues or “the past” as usually being “better” or “stronger”. The lower expectations surrounding “bush footy” was part of why participants enjoyed playing football in country towns. Anticipating a less-competitive field than metropolitan leagues, “bush footy” did not require as rigorous training and extended football careers over a longer period. That is, “bush footy” imposed fewer demands of commitment on players, enabling them to juggle their family and work lives with football training.

Winning narratives foregrounded place-based rivalry between towns in understanding why men play football. Many footballers spoke about themselves, the team and their town as the one single competitive entity – the football team came to represent the community. Pride-in-place is a vital motivator for many Bega Valley footbalers. As a “representational sport” football binds people to place. Small towns like Tathra and Bermagui take great town-pride in beating the much larger town of Bateman’s Bay. So, football matches become place versus place, rather than team versus team. Winning football teams, to many Bega Valley footballers, “puts [small] places on the map”.

Narratives of sustainability explored the inherent frailty of football in many country towns in the Bega Valley – primarily due to small populations of men who play football. While winning helps sustain teams and clubs by attracting players, sponsors, media coverage and public interest, the outcomes of winning are never predictable. Nor does winning ever guarantee football survival in country towns.

Consequently, this study highlighted the imperative of population smallness as why some men play football in country towns. Smallness meant adult men often have little choice of what code of football to play in their town. Coaches cannot exert the same rules over the players because of the small numbers of players – such as turning-up to training. Instead, many men played to help ensure the viability of their game. Limited player numbers jeopardise the ongoing sustainability of teams, clubs and codes in a country town. There is an inherent frailty in country football, and many men play in an attempt to, at least temporarily, ensure their team survives.

• To summarise, there are many reasons why participants in this study play football in the Bega Valley:

• For those growing-up in the Bega Valley, a masculine family tradition for men that fashions normalised types of football in a country town;

• For those moving to the Bega Valley, understandings of rurality and the imagined “rural idyll”;

• Narratives of training fashioned by ideas of fitness and team-building;
• Narratives of mateship, that is spatially negotiated and that reproduce and challenge the gendered social hierarchies of football masculinities;

• Narratives of sustainability that draw on population smallness and ‘bush footy’; and

• Narratives of winning for small country towns.

By taking a feminist approach in examining football spatially in and through the Bega Valley, NSW and drawing upon narrative and discourse analysis, the insights provided in this thesis suggests there is no one hegemonic reason, but indeed simultaneous multiplicities of reasons, why men play football in the Bega Valley, NSW.

7.3 Future research
This section discusses four strands of further research or methodological considerations arising from this thesis. Future research may seek to explore why men play football in country towns in other regions of New South Wales, or other states, building upon the football life narratives approach. If so, future research may consider spending more time strengthening relationships with participants. Spending more than the three weeks invested by the researcher by living in the Bega Valley may produce other, not yet considered themes and reasons for playing football. Furthermore, more time-in-place may help relax some of the exclusionary and precautionary practices, and so allow silenced stories of mates to be told to the researcher, as commonality and familiarity increase. This may elicit details of the now-silenced ‘legendary’ stories of the past to surface and be re-told outside of exclusive mateship circles.

Alternatively, future research may seek to go beyond football life narrative approaches to examining football in the lives of players. That is, other techniques such as personal diaries, videos, focus groups, community discussions and social media interactions are all ways that the methodology could be extended beyond the semi-structured interview process.

Personal diaries would allow elicitation of thoughts and ideas that may never surface in face-to-face interviews. But these may also suffer from a decline in effort over time. For example, some footballers may embrace the opportunity to express their thoughts and reactions away from both the researcher and their peers – which might ‘free-up’ their personal expression. Conversely, the ‘risk’ of having their thoughts and feelings on paper may prove too much for footballers who would not want their feelings exposed – hence drawing upon heteronormative masculinities. Further, it is likely there would be significant difficulties in recruitment (due to the time commitment required) and sustaining interest of the footballers (due to the ‘longevity’ in keeping a diary) when using personal diaries.

Focus groups for footballers, as noted in other research, can become a technique used by participants to “outdo” one another. Organising focus groups with participants from differing clubs or even differing codes of football may help prevent this ‘chest beating’. Of most promise for future
research is the use of personal videos, YouTube and Facebook-style interactions – particularly as follow-up methods or for conducting research over a much longer timeline. This would also allow the number of participants to be greatly increased and still be manageable. Participants could be interviewed and recorded using technology such as Skype a few times a week by being asked more-focused questions relating primarily to what they had been doing - such as before or after training, or after a game. Participants could also upload their own videos - acknowledging the potential for footballers to lapse into lads may only need slight encouragement such as being on public videos. Decisions would need to be made as to whether they would upload to a public-style domain such as Facebook or onto a restricted server. It may be wise to let the participants decide where they would want their videos. A videographic series over time (i.e. over years) of the geographies of football (or indeed any sport) in rural or urban spaces would be both innovative and novel - for both researchers and participants.

Future research may seek to explore the role of women in sustaining football cultures of country towns. Insights from this thesis suggests women in rural football are often posited as either helpers - such as supports, wives, volunteers in canteens, or, sexualised as objects of heterosexual desire. Critically exploring the labour and roles of women in sustaining football in country towns may prove valuable. Research could conduct a comparison of normative attitudes and behaviours across different football codes. How do women understand and negotiate their sense of self in and through football spaces? Furthermore, women also play football in country towns. Research needs to be conducted to explore the questions “why do women play football”; what are the constraints for women playing football?

Equally, Indigenous footballers were not specifically part of this research, even though the researcher had informal discussions with some local indigenous people at football matches at Eden and Pambula. Other informal conversations in the football clubs and with some interviewees reproduced the still-existing attitude of the ‘natural athletic ability’ of Indigenous footballers. Consequently, future research may explore the importance of sport in the lives of Indigenous people living in country towns. Which sports are important to Indigenous people and why? How have sports transformed their lives, if at all? How do Indigenous people negotiate football or sport spaces as part of belonging in a team or a town?

Finally, future research on sport in country towns may seek to move beyond that of football. Is football the only sport that generates town-based social “glue”? For example, nearby coastal towns such as Broulee may posit surfing as the sport that puts them “on the map”, while Bowral is understood as the ‘home’ of cricket because of its link to Sir Donald Bradman. Is the Australian fetish with sport waning? If so, where and why?

Consequently, for geographers, there seems a necessity based on both the popularity and inherent frailty of football
in rural areas to study other rural regions in New South Wales (and other states) to explore whether or not these findings apply elsewhere. This should also produce a body knowledge about any inequities created and sustained through football and sporting spaces.
A player from Bermagui Breakers, kicking in the Reserves Grand Final, against Bateman’s Bay Seahawks at Hanging Rock Oval, Bateman’s Bay, Saturday 10 September, 2011
Photograph by David Clifton


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Kicking to convert a try, Cobargo Eels v Eden Tigers in CRL Group 16 match at George Brown Memorial Oval, Eden, Sunday 28 August, 2011
Photograph by David Clifton
APPENDIX A: UoW Human Research Ethics Committee approval

Dear Associate Professor Waitt,

I am pleased to advise that the Human Research Ethics application referred to below has been approved.

Ethics Number: HE11/329
Project Title: The importance of football in the lives of men living in the Bega Valley, New South Wales
Researchers: A/Prof Gordon Waitt, Mr David Clifton
Approval Date: 4 August 2011
Expiry Date: 3 August 2012

The University of Wollongong/Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District Social Sciences HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. The HREC has reviewed the research proposal for compliance with the National Statement and approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with this document.

A condition of approval by the HREC is the submission of a progress report annually and a final report on completion of your project. The progress report template is available at http://www.uow.edu.au/research/rso/ethics/UOW009385.html. This report must be completed, signed by the appropriate Head of School, and returned to the Research Services Office prior to the expiry date.

As evidence of continuing compliance, the Human Research Ethics Committee also requires that researchers immediately report:

- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

Please note that approvals are granted for a twelve month period. Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date.

If you have any queries regarding the HREC review process, please contact the Ethics Unit on phone 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

A/Prof Garry Hoban
Chair, Social Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee

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Participant Information Sheet

The importance of football in the lives of men living in the Bega Valley, New South Wales

Hi, my name is David Clifton. I am student at the University of Wollongong. I am researching football in the Bega Valley for my Honours project. The key question of my project is: What does football mean to the players who live in the Bega Valley? The project’s aim is to better understand the importance of football in lives of men living in the Bega Valley - the physicality, the emotion, the attachment to clubs, the attachment to place/s, the time demands and the forging of friendships on and off the field. The project will produce oral histories of football players’ experiences that will, with your permission become lodged with your club and the Bega Library.

What you will be asked to do: Participating in this project involves sharing your football stories:
1. a 20 to 60-minute conversation-style interview on various aspects of football and your involvement in the game that will be audiotaped (digital recorder) and later transcribed; and
2. quickly sketching what football means to you (in the Bega Valley);

You are invited to request a copy of the transcript, and to submit edits/revisions. You will also be asked if you wish to be given a pseudonym as direct quotations from the interview and your sketch may be used in scholarly publications.

Confidentiality will be maintained in all publications and presentations on the research, unless you indicate in the Consent Form that you are willing to be identified. However, given the small size of social networks in the Bega Valley confidentiality can not be guaranteed. Participants are reminded you may still be identifiable from your football stories by someone living within the Bega Valley, even with the use of a pseudonym.

Further, if during the project participants disclose facts about illegal activities then the researcher’s duty of confidentiality is overridden by the public duty to disclose to the police the facts about felonies.

Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation and any data that you have provided within a reasonable time frame for the project. This would normally be around two months after the transcription of the interview (on or before December 31, 2011). Withdrawal from the project will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong.

The Project Organiser: This project is funded by Federal Government through the Australian Research Council as a Discovery Project. If you have any enquiries about the research please contact: Assoc. Prof. Gordon Waitt (02 4221 3684; gwaitt@uow.edu.au) or David Clifton (0418 529 914 or 0417 679 169; dc985@uowmail.edu.au). This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Social Science, Humanities and Behavioural Science) of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns regarding how this research is being conducted, you can contact the UoW Ethics Officer on (02) 4221 4457.

Thank you for your interest in and assistance with this study.
APPENDIX C: Participant Briefing Sheet

Briefing Information

The importance of football in the lives of men living in the Bega Valley, New South Wales

Hi, my name is David Clifton and I am student at the University of Wollongong. I am researching football in the Bega Valley for my Honours project. In other words, my project hopes to find out what football means to the players who live or play in the Bega Valley.

I chose the Bega Valley because of the history, depth and variety of football codes played here.

The purpose of this project is to better understand the importance of football in the lives of players - the physicality, the emotion, the attachment to clubs, the attachment to place/s, the time demands and the importance of friendships forged off and on the field.

Participating in this project involves telling your football narrative story…

This occurs through a 20 to 60-minute conversation-style interview that will be audiotaped (on digital recorder) and later transcribed.

You will also be asked to draw a quick sketch of what football means to you. Of course, you are under no pressure to draw – and can just talk if you prefer;

You can request a copy of the transcript, and to submit edits/revisions.

You will be asked if you wish to be given a pseudonym if you wish to keep your identity private.

Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation and any data that you have provided within a reasonable time frame for the project (on or before December 31, 2011)

What happens to your stories?

You will also be asked to give permission to for your stories to appear in my thesis, in scholarly publications that help explain the importance of football to country towns; and if you are happy for your football stories to be kept as part of your club’s records and the Bega Library local library collection.

Given that this is the first time the stories of footballers have been recorded in the Bega Valley, with your permission a bound copy of all the football oral history recorded for this club will be presented to president for the club’s records and for the Bega library local collection.

What to do if you would like to tell your football history?

Contact David Clifton (0417 679 169) : dc985@uowmail.edu.au to organise a convenient time and place to share your football insights.

Thank you for your time today and I look forward to listening to your
APPENDIX D: Informed Consent Form

Consent Form

The importance of football in the lives of men living in the Bega Valley New South Wales

David Clifton, Assoc. Prof. Gordon Waitt
School of Earth & Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Science

I have been given information about ‘The importance of football in the lives of men living in the Bega Valley New South Wales’. I have had an opportunity to discuss this project with David Clifton from the School of Earth & Environmental Sciences, University of Wollongong. At this time I have asked any questions I may have about the research and my participation.

I have been advised of the potential risks and burdens associated with this research. I understand that participating begins with a conversation-style interview of around 20 to 60 minutes.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from this research within the timeline of the project. I understand that should I withdraw from the project, this will not affect my relationship with the University of Wollongong.

If I have any enquiries about this research, I can contact Assoc. Prof. Gordon Waitt on 02 4221 3684; gwaitt@uow.edu.au. If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on 02 4221 4457.

By ticking the following box/es I indicate my consent for:

- My football stories to be bound with other players’ interviews and kept as a club record by your club

- My football stories to be bound with other players’ interviews and kept in the Bega Valley Shire Council Library.

(continued next page)
APPENDIX D: Informed Consent Form (reverse side)

By crossing out one of the following options I indicate my consent to:

Be directly quoted in publications with the use of my given name

OR

Be directly quoted in publications with the use of a pseudonym (i.e., your identity is anonymous to people living beyond the Bega Valley).

By signing below I am indicating my consent:

1. To participate in a conversation-style interview of 20 to 60 minutes held in a convenient place to be audio-taped (digital recorder) by the researcher for later transcription and analysis;

2. To be provided with a copy of the transcript of my conversation for checking if required (Please advise if you do require a copy and this will be provided to you after being transcribed); and

3. I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for an Honours thesis, scholarly publications, conference presentations and reports, and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

Please print your name

....................................................................................

Signed       Date

.......................................................................  .........../.........../...........

Other information:
I understand that my personal particulars will be stored by Assoc. Prof Gordon Waitt, University of Wollongong, for a minimum of five years for record keeping and administrative purposes only and will not be supplied to any other person or organisation for any other purpose.
APPENDIX E: Schedule of Interview Questions

Football in the Bega Valley

1. Your football past
   Tell me about your experiences of growing-up and playing football?
   Have you always played football?
   Have you always played for the same team?
   Have you always played the same code?
   Did anyone else in your family play football?
   Did your family encourage you to play football?
   Did you play in the same team as other family members?
   Did family members come along and watch you play?

2. The meaning of football in your life
   Often it is hard to explain in words what sport means to a person. A sketch can often help articulate
   these meanings. Can you please sketch what football means to you.

3. Your current team, training and playing experiences
   How long have you played for your current team (which is ....)?
   What position do you play?
   What do you enjoy most about playing football?
   What do you enjoy least about playing football?
   What does your team mean to you and why?
   What is the club logo/mascot?
   What does the club mascot/logo/slogan mean to you and why?
   Have you ever considered having a club tattoo?
   For you, how important is playing in a competitive league?
   Do you ever play matches just for fun?
   How regularly do you train?
   What do you like/dislike about training?
   How fit do you need to be to play?
   How tough do you need to be to play?
   Drawing on your playing experience, do you need to be fitter/faster than in the past?
   Explain how
   Drawing on your playing experience, is the game today more physical than in the past?
   Explain how
   Drawing on your playing experiences, is the game today more competitive than in the past?
   Explain how
   Drawing on your playing experiences, does the game require more skills than in the past?
   Explain how
APPENDIX E: Schedule of Interview Questions - continued

Drawing on your playing experiences, is the game more or less physically violent than in the past?

Drawing on your playing experiences, is the game more or less verbally abusive than in the past?

4. Balancing football with other responsibilities
Roughly, how much time does football occupy each week?
(also compare on-season to off-season as well)
training / playing / recovery or treatment / other

How difficult is it for you to balance playing football with your work commitments?

How difficult is it for you to balance playing football with your family commitments?
What do family members feel about the time you dedicate to football?
Do family members come along and watch?
Do other family members travel with the team?
Do other family members play in the team?

5. Football rituals and mateship
According to the literature, rituals are integral part of sport – from wearing a favorite jersey, to following a similar routine before a match, to post-match drinking games.
In your experiences, are rituals important in playing football?

Trust, teamwork and mateship are an integral part of successful football clubs.
In your experience, how is mateship fostered in this club?
- training
- what happens in the change rooms before and after games
- is what happens the same for home vs away games, or win vs loss
- what happens when you play away - on bus trips/staying overnight

6. Off the field
In percentage terms, roughly how much of your social life involves football?

Are any of your teammates what you would consider close friends?
How did football establish or contribute to these friendships?

Off the field, where do you go in the Bega Valley to socialise with football friends?
What do you normally do when socialising with friends made from football?
Is conversation restricted to sport with these friends?

Do you have a friendship network beyond football players?
Is this friendship network quite separate in terms of where you meet and what you do?

7. Overview
We have talked about the importance to you of football and social life in the Bega Valley. We have covered a number of themes:
1. your football past; 2. the meaning of football in your life; 3. your current team, training and playing; 4. balancing football with other responsibilities; 5. football ritual and friendships; and 6. off the field

Before finishing the interview is there anything else you would like to add?
BOX A: NEGOTIATING ETHICS IN THE FIELD
OPPORTUNITY OR ETHICS - A PERSONAL DILEMMA

When conducting research, “opportunities” arise that challenge the formal ethical approach. Occasionally I was told things about others – usually other teams or people – that would not necessarily be appropriate to share or even repeat to anyone else. But, it is information that would add significantly to the depth of the research. For example, in the interview I ask about ‘away’ bus trips – to see if any heteronormative football behaviour took place in the Bega Valley (as is the frequent public media discourse in Sydney).

There was a bus trip in 2009 or 2010 that caused a lot of relationship problems in the town. There were allegations of sexual misconduct between male and female footballers on the trip. I was told this in confidence and I was given no further details “just in case” and it was still a very sore point in town. The person who told me was accused by his wife of infidelity on this bus trip, as were many other married men. Apparently, some had breached their fidelity. Some were under 18. While it is known around town about the trip and “what happened”, bus trips are no longer a mode of transport to away games – but they usually quote cost or inconvenience as the reason for not using a bus rather than the likelihood of sexual misbehaviour. They now take a preventative and distancing approach.

Ethically, I was obliged not to pursue this with any other interviewees as it was told in confidence and would open up a very sensitive subject in the small town. On the other hand, the depth of information on the ‘hidden’ rites and performances of males and females on a football trip would have been invaluable to this research.
BOX B : THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE RESEARCH AND THE PROJECT: ON BEING EMBEDDED AND THE CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

With my own subjectivities brought into this project, comes influence and subsequently, change. Originally arriving as an “outsider” I quickly became immersed in all things local and football at Tathra – attending all training sessions, going to games, being in the changerooms, being part of team warm-ups, being part of team celebrations after a win, and going to the pub or club after matches to be involved in the social aspects. Some of these spaces are considered sacrosanct in sport, so it was a real honour and privilege to be allowed in. I always sought permission from the coach or club officials when I was trying to access such spaces, and it was always granted. The importance of the welcome shown could not be underestimated (for a contrast, see Box E, I Don’t Want to Play With You).

After time, this meant that players approached me to be interviewed, and this had generated a level of ‘trust’ about me and the project. I didn’t just fly in, get what I want and fly out again. They could see I had made a commitment to the project that meant being in their space for many weeks. This also meant that they had to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to be interviewed - they couldn’t really make excuses such as “I don’t have time” as I was in the region for such a (relatively) long time.

Because I had spent so much time at specific football clubs, I had become accepted into their world. I had breakfast quite a few times with players just as a social occasion, where we talked ‘no business’ (ie had no formal agenda) but we did talk plenty of football and I sometimes got more details about who they are and what they are about. As well, I often attended training or the club with nothing planned other than socialising with the group. As part of my bodily preparation, I usually wore what I considered to be ‘sports’ style clothing, without appearing to be a footballer. Clothing that a sports administrator or club official would typically wear. This also built trust and empathy as I looked like I belonged around football. By now, people in the street were saying hello to me. I was local enough to be recognised because I had become embedded in the (successful) football codes of the area.

During the final week of research I was asked what type of house I preferred and what location would suit me best - near the beach or the river – as they had half-jokingly suggested I would be back to live with my family and they were nominating me for a committee role for next season. I was truly embedded and part of the AFL club. Coming down a week later for the AFL grand final, I was met with both surprise and welcome. They didn’t think I would come down to Bateman’s Bay to watch their Grand Final, but were pleased to see me there and made me very welcome again. Tathra AFL club made history that day by winning the competition back-to-back for the first time ever in the club’s history. I hope that my research helped them gain any edge they needed to win.
BOX C: POSITIONALITY IN ACTION: REVEALING UNEXPECTED SOCIAL POWER RELATIONS

As a researcher, you expect to have to negotiate with participants as to how the research will be conducted to suit everyone’s needs. However, when you are welcomed with open arms – as was the case with Tathra Sea Eagles AFL club – it is initially off-putting. I had prepared all sorts of briefings and answers to likely questions as I was expecting to have to “sell” why I was there and why they should participate.

The Tathra Sea Eagles AFL club officials had responded very positively when initially approached some weeks prior to my arriving. What was very surprising was that they had seen my visit as a motivational opportunity to get their players thinking and talking about football and the club. Semi finals were approaching and they saw any opportunity to have an “outsider with credentials” (ie being for university research) reminding them, in their words during interviews, of the importance of football and their club would only help their mental approach. This was not explicitly passed on to players (only the coach and officials knew), however, one of the younger mentioned to me “I knew Darell would do this to get us thinking about football when I heard about it” (Darell is one of the club officials and who acted as my facilitator for this club).

This turned my research into an unexpected tool for football motivation. I was using them for my project and they were using my project for mental preparation and focus. This meant I was given free access around the club and players at any time – including access to changerooms during finals. This relationship continued to develop over the project as my ‘usefulness’ to them became more apparent.
BOX D: TERRITORIALISATION OF SPACE: SECRET MEN’S SPACES

As a researcher, there were some spaces that I needed explicit permission to enter – such as the team change-room during a game. These are considered sacrosanct spaces for the football people who matter – players, coach and supporting staff. Generally, no one else is allowed in to this special space. These spaces are where asymmetrical power relations are the social norm. It meant, as a researcher, seeking official permission to go in a listen and observe from team officials and the coach.

Both Tathra AFL and Rugby League teams gave me explicit permission to go where I wanted, but on match days such as the finals, I felt it was both respectful and imperative to double check. People do change their mind under pressure. Entering the space I tread very warily, as there are still places within this space I feel I cannot go. I find a corner that appears innocuous and stand silently. A few players nod hello, but no more. The players are in a very different physical and mental place compared to when I last spoke to them.

Watching the coach minister to his players individually and as a group was enlightening – some needed physical pushing, others needed quiet words, others needed swearing and yelling at. They were reminded of how this team (their opponents) had spoken of them in the local newspaper. “They called us fucking reserve graders - how do you feel about that?” This insult to their masculinity was taken as a motivating affront.
BOX E : THE FRUSTRATIONS OF “DOING” RESEARCH: 
I DON’T WANT TO PLAY WITH YOU

There are myriad frustrations when conducting remote qualitative research and especially when organising interviews. The time it takes to recruit participants is not widely appreciated – except by those who have done this research. However, a few players commented to me that “it must take ages to do this – you know, get it all organised and then do it”. So, some were aware of the temporal demands on the researcher.

A perfect example of negotiating power hierarchies is when I contacted the Bega Roosters Rugby League coach. The coach of Bega Roosters initially agreed to participate (after finally getting hold of him on the phone after quite a few attempts), and after we had arranged meetings at his office in Bega. However, as the conversation went on, he refused me any access to his players. His words “I don’t want them talking to you when they have finals coming up - I want them to focus on their football.” Apparently for this club, the finals bring with it restrictions that are policed by the coach. Perhaps he would have been co-operative if his team wasn’t in the finals. After numerous phone calls and visits to his office, and him never actually meeting me despite him arranging two formal meeting times, I was ‘allowed’ to interview one of his staff who was a former player. Some people in town were not surprised this happened. Apparently he (the coach) was known around town as being very difficult to get on with at times. While there was nothing legally he could do to stop me interviewing his players per se, he acted as the police to control access and refused to ‘allow’ me to come to training or talk to “his players”.

Being cynically reflexive, the team that encouraged me to join in their club activities won the competition and set a club record in doing so. The team that refused access didn’t win anything.
APPENDIX F: Reflexive Methodology Boxes

BOX F: THE FRUSTRATIONS OF “DOING” RESEARCH

The frustration of driving for 45 minutes for an interview and then not have the interviewee turn up, and then not be able to contact them to find out why (I rang my contact at that club, but he didn’t have this person’s details with him), simply cannot be expressed! I called someone else from the club, but he couldn’t help find my participant. Then, I had to wait two hours for my next interview as it was at the same venue. Because of the distance from my base, it would have taken most of those 2 hours to turn around and drive back then return. Anger (relatively) quickly turns to “oh, well, this is what happens in research”. I did some grocery shopping, read and walked around to pass the time. As a researcher, we are truly at the mercy of the researched, despite many academics suggesting the opposite. This is what happens in remote research.

BOX G: ON BEING DISPLACED DUE TO DISTANCE: HOW FAR IS TOO FAR?

The distance and time away from both home and university spaces meant that I was in a “foreign place” – six hours’ drive from my comfort zone of familiarity and security, and for the first time in my adult life. I knew no-one, was not with my family at all for three weeks and was unsure of how, and even if, the project would succeed at all. Being totally displaced by the distance from home and feeling alienated by being “alone” brought with it new sensations – that were not all pleasant. Confusion, self-doubt, questioning of identity and purpose to name a few.

The project, for now at least, brought by body into being as an “outsider”. Being acutely aware of my ‘outsiderness’ I had to ensure I met as many people related to the project as quickly as possible. The only thing in my favour was the time of year – being winter, there were not too many tourists at all, so they (locals and shopowners) appeared to be and behaved more tolerant – and they told me so! “It’s OK at the moment, we aren’t invaded like summer”. Despite the fact that communities in the area rely heavily on the summer holiday trade (some shops close for winter), they have a blatant disregard for non-locals, especially in summer. “You have to queue for bread in summer. That’s bullshit”. The quicker I became accepted, the better. I had to supplicant myself in their space and everyday worlds as soon as possible, but would always remain “between worlds”. They are the researched and I the researcher. Embedded in that relationship are myriad power relationships that were negotiated and developed over the course of the fieldwork.
BOX H: THE VISCERAL AFFECTS: SMELLING, HEARING AND FEELING

Both Longhurst et al (2009) and Hayes-Conroy (2010) suggest visceral affects are missing from much geographical research and which must be considered as part of the affective relations with place. In the changerooms, while observing participants before the final and during half time, the visceral affects of smelly sweat, the pungent rubbing liniment, the felt body heat, the mist of a hot shower, the sweet smell of gatorade, the sounds of tape being torn off skin or muscles being rubbed hard and the din of football players talking loudly and swearing – as a masculine way to motivate each other – all pressed upon, and in fact, bombarded, my body.

The football space is doing something to my body that I don’t normally experience. It wasn’t threatening, just a initially overwhelming cacophony of smells and sounds. It would go from silence while players contemplated their game ahead in privacy, to an explosion of “fucking get them” or “how bad do you want to take the flag back to Tathra” from the coach – reinforcing the need to perform a physical and dominant masculinity. The smells were a mix of pungent rubbing liniment to warm up players and help with minor injuries, the sweat of footballers in a small room, the sweet smell of preparing the gatorade drink…all competing for my senses.

These ‘attacks’ on my senses made me feel part of the team – I was experiencing some of what they were experiencing – and perhaps take for granted – in their sacred space and at a special time – but I could never fully appreciate how they felt. But I knew how I felt and it was important as it placed me in the changeroom at that time with those bodily affects.
BOX I: STORYTELLING IN PLACE

Where stories were told dramatically affected what story was told. That is, in the clubhouse, in people's homes or even their offices where there was a relatively large amount of football 'memorabilia', stories were enriched with detail and many, many examples. Artefacts were also used to make sure they provided the 'whole' story as they saw it, not just what they could remember. Football artefacts were constantly used as memory aids. People were referred to in photos to demonstrate the point they were making or to verify what I had been told. In many cases, it was their relatives they showed me - brothers, cousins, uncles and fathers.

Nearly half of all interviews were conducted at the shared Tathra AFL and rugby league clubhouse at Lawrence Oval, Tathra. This building made many football masculinities shine, as memories of past glories were re-told to me during interviews and even to others – especially when socialising after training or after matches. I was frequently asked to “have a look, here” to see what interviewees were meaning or referring to. Visual aids added significantly to their story - for them and for me. They also provided a graphical history of this place.

This was very similar to what happened in some people's homes or work place where they had a lot of football memories on display. They were proud of their achievements and wanted them on display. It proved what they had done. It verified their football masculinities. It gave them a spatially-situated football history. They were in place for others to see and for them to remember or re-live a situated event.

In contrast, in other places such as the club, cafe or at other work places where no football artefacts were on display, there was a ‘thinner’ story told. It was impossible to point to a photo or flag and say “that’s when we the comp!” While participants re-told stories to the best of their ability, these stories told in spaces without football memories had less of a ‘passionate ownership’ of the story - in that interviewees just didn’t get as emotive or excited as others in spaces dripping with football masculinities. One interview was conducted in the middle of the interviewee's cafe – when he was on duty! This resulted in stilted responses, as he always (justifiably, of course!) had his eye on the shop. This made it much harder for me to probe for deeper answers. Yet, this interview provided some strong personal opinions as he tended to respond quickly and somewhat instinctively - without deliberating (as many others did) or even trying to provide a ‘correct’ answer. He said what he immediately felt. Did these changes in place make any stories less valuable or valid? No, it just highlighted that where will affect what story interviewees provide, at that time.
Thursday nights at AFL training were a revelation to me. Every player received a home-cooked meal after training at the training ground. Club supporters and volunteers – both male and female – worked in the canteen while the players trained. Players were charged $5 for a large plate of a meal and a drink (soft drink or a beer). Those who were known to be doing it tough financially were not charged. This was something I had never seen before as was brought up form Victorian AFL clubs. It generated a very good club atmosphere and made sure people ate very well after training.
Former National Rugby League player Anthony Watts says he wants to return to playing football, after an assault charge against him was dropped.

The ex-Roosters hooker briefly appeared in Waverley Local Court today, expecting to face a hearing over an alleged incident with his partner Shannon Kiss four months ago.

But police dropped the case against him and the magistrate Robert Williams withdrew and dismissed the charge, as well as a related apprehended violence order.

The 24-year-old, who had lived in Coogee, pleaded not guilty to assaulting Ms Kiss and occasioning her actual bodily harm in the early hours of April 17.

Previously, Watts’s lawyer Stephen Alexander told the court that evidence indicated Ms Kiss had refused to give a statement to police or allow them to photograph her injuries.

The court was also told that a witness may have heard but not seen the alleged incident, and would only give a statement if the complainant made one.

Outside court today, Mr Alexander said the legal proceedings had been very difficult for his client, who had lost his employment.

"He is relieved it's all over today and he will get on with his life," Mr Alexander said.

"He just wants to get back to playing football."

Asked why the charge was withdrawn, Mr Alexander said: "The evidence speaks for itself.

"I think the police looked at it realistically and professionally and came to the conclusion that they did."
Guilty, and Tandy realised that his playing days could be over

Greg Prichard
October 7, 2011

RYAN TANDY sat forward in his chair and dipped his head when it became clear which way magistrate Janet Wahlquist's verdict on his alleged involvement in the NRL spot-fixing scandal had gone.

Amid the dry nature of court at the Downing Centre, it appeared to be the immediate realisation that if the conviction was to stick, it would mean the end of his playing career.

The former Canterbury player was found guilty of attempting to manipulate the first scoring play of a game in August last year to dishonestly obtain a financial advantage for Sam Ayoub, John Elias and others to the balance of $113,345 from Tabcorp.

Tandy had to wait an hour before returning to the court for sentencing. The magistrate had considered the option of community service, but since Tandy was on crutches as the result of a recent knee operation and was obviously going to have trouble getting around for a while, she opted for a 12-month good-behaviour bond and a $4000 fine.

The 30-year-old prop's lawyer, Anthony Bellanto QC, announced outside the court that the conviction would be appealed. That hearing will begin with a mention in a district court on November 3.

Tandy looked optimistic entering the court to hear the decision and the magistrate's reasons for it read out.

The penalty has prompted debate about whether Tandy got off lightly, but he has chosen to fight the conviction anyway, and he still has to return to court for the different matter of facing three charges of providing false or misleading evidence to a NSW Crime Commission hearing.

Three other men - Tandy's agent, Sam Ayoub, controversial ex-player John Elias and a property manager for a Maroubra real estate agency, Greg Tait, will face hearings in coming months over charges of attempting to obtain a financial advantage by deception. Tandy, Ayoub, Elias and Tait are all pleading not guilty.

Wahlquist said there was no direct evidence against Tandy, and that the police prosecution case had relied on "circumstantial evidence that they say leads to the only rational conclusion being that Mr Tandy is guilty".

The question was whether the magistrate thought the circumstantial evidence was enough to prove the charge against Tandy. She believed it did, and listed eight elements of the evidence she considered had supported the charge.

They included the the evidence of "a marked betting 'plunge' for this particular bet" - North Queensland to open the scoring with a penalty goal in the game against the Bulldogs at Dairy Farmers Stadium in Townsville.

She also listed evidence of Ayoub "telling various people 'the bet' was a sure thing in circumstances where there is strong evidence that he was not passing on a rumour".

Her reasoning continued with references to evidence Ayoub and Tandy had "had a number of telephone contacts" leading up to the match and even more in the hours afterwards.

There was also the evidence Tandy had phone contact "with Hassan Saleh and Michael Cook", who had both placed bets and contacted others by phone who placed bets. The magistrate said investigations had shown no other player who took part in the match had engaged in phone contact with any of the punters who placed bets, and that Tandy "had debts of $75,000" which included "$30,000 in gambling debts".
League star 'kicked partner's head'
Adrian Proszenko and Eamonn Duff
October 23, 2011

NRL player Robert Lui repeatedly kicked his partner in the head after Mad Monday celebrations, police will allege when the Wests Tigers halfback fronts court this week.

The Sun-Herald has obtained the apprehended violence order issued against Lui after an incident involving Taleah Rae Backo at the couple's North Strathfield apartment on September 19.

According to the document, police allege Lui kicked Backo "to the left temple area a number of times causing pain, bruising and swelling".

Lui allegedly scaled the balcony of the second-floor unit at 7pm and knocked on the glass sliding door. Backo hid around the side of the door.

When she opened the door, Lui pushed her in the chest, causing her to fall backwards. Police allege the Tigers playmaker then pulled her hair, causing a small amount of hair to be removed along with a hair pin causing "pain to the head area".

It is alleged Lui then kicked Backo while she was on the ground, accusing her of sleeping with his cousin. Lui then dragged her towards the front door of the unit and told her to get out, the document alleges.

After walking outside to an area below the balcony, Backo called up for her wallet. After Lui refused, she called police.

When police arrived shortly afterwards, Lui was still on the balcony shouting abuse at Backo. When police asked to access the unit, they were told: "No, f--- off."

Police allege Lui changed his mind shortly afterwards and was arrested. When the allegation was put to him, Lui said: "I didn't kick her, I headbutted her."

Backo agreed to give police a video statement and to have her injuries photographed, which included bruising and swelling around the temple, approximately five by eight centimetres.

Lui stated he had consumed two cases of Vodka Cruisers - each containing 24 x 375ml bottles with an alcohol content of 4.8 per cent each - since Friday, September 16, after the Tigers were eliminated from the premiership race by the Warriors.

Lui was charged with assault occasioning actual bodily harm and granted bail. He agreed to the terms of the AVO, which prevents any contact between the pair without prior agreement through legal representatives.

The matter is set to return to Burwood Local Court on Thursday.

The Sun-Herald contacted Lui's manager, Mark Stewart, yesterday, but he did not return calls. The Tigers have stood down the halfback from all club duties pending the outcome of court proceedings.

Last year, Backo reported a domestic assault and Lui was charged. The matter was dismissed in court after Backo changed her story.

In August, there was a report of a verbal argument between the two, but no offence was handed down.
APPENDIX G: Media reports of footballers in Sydney

Todd Payten avoids conviction for urinating on Hyde Park memorial

Paul Bibby
November 8, 2011 - 4:13PM

Former rugby league representative star Todd Payten has today avoided a conviction for urinating on the Hyde Park War Memorial.

The incident took place at 12.30am on September 18 after Payten, 32, went on a night out on the town with friends.

Downing Centre Local Court heard that the former prop was so intoxicated that he was unable to answer questions from police.

Payten, who retired recently, appeared in court today charged with committing an indecent and offensive act on a war memorial.

The incident was not revealed to the public by the National Rugby League.

The court heard that Payten, 32, had pleaded guilty but did not bring any character references with him because he was too embarrassed to tell anyone what had happened.

Magistrate Graeme Curram accepted Payten's claim that he was not aware that he was urinating on the war memorial and had not intended to "desecrate what to many is a site of great significance".

He elected not to record a conviction against Payten but placed him on a six-month good behaviour bond.

Through his lawyer, Payten said that he was embarrassed and humiliated over the incident and had contacted the NSW Returned Services League to apologise for what he had done.

The former Sydney Roosters, Canberra Raiders and Wests Tigers star announced in June that 2011 would be his last season.

Payten is one of an elite few players to have amassed more than 250 games in the NRL.
ANTHONY WATMOUGH has credited his partner, Elle, and a new dog with the turnaround in his attitude on and off the field.

Watmough started the season offside with Sea Eagles officials, including coach Des Hasler, after losing his licence for driving 53 kilometres over the speed limit in February and then being stood down two months later for urinating on a Manly shopfront following a drinking session.

It is understood that the wayward forward was warned that he faced the sack if involved in another incident and since then Watmough has kept a low profile, refusing all media interviews.

But he was happy to talk yesterday on the eve of his third grand final appearance in five years and revealed that a more settled life off the field had led to him being more disciplined on it.

"It has been good, just relaxing with the family and missus and now the dog," said Watmough, who was accompanied to the Sea Eagles media day by his 11-year-old daughter Claudia and 10-month-old pet Siberian husky named Misty. "It is something different. I have always sort of gone out and that, but I really enjoy going to bed early and getting up early and just living the quieter life.

"I go to bed pretty early these days. I am in bed by 9.30pm or 10pm every [day] but I am up at 6am with the dog barking and taking her for a walk. I am really enjoying that at the moment and hopefully I can stick to that.

"Life is really, really good at the moment. There is no issues, there is no dramas and everything is just easy. I have never really had a life where relationships were easy, they are tough work but Elle, my girl now, she is just so casual and so cruisy, and I think that is the way I like to live life now.

"There is just no dramas, no fights - it is just easy street for me now. When you don't have negative things around you and you just have good people that goes a long way to helping. I don't have to try to do anything special, everything we do is just appreciated so that is easy."

As one of the senior players in the Sea Eagles team, 28-year-old Watmough said he would speak to star rookies Daly Cherry-Evans, Keiran Foran and Will Hopoate about what to expect in grand final week but he was reluctant to give them advice off the field.

"I am just more along the lines of have fun with what you do but there are always people watching and that is one thing - I didn't really care that there were people watching," Watmough said. "I just enjoyed having fun with my mates and I know I wasn't hurting anyone or doing anything wrong but I attracted too much heat for having fun.

"I enjoyed myself ... But there is a certain amount of fun you can have without getting into trouble, it is a fine line and I just tell them to be careful."

There have been suggestions that his off-field misdemeanours may cost him a place in the Australian team for the upcoming Four Nations tournament, but a philosophical Watmough said he was unconcerned for the moment.

"I'm not worrying about that yet, I am just worrying about this week and if my footy is going good then that will all take care of itself," he said.