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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Drinking like a guy? Women and sport-related drinking

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This paper introduces an under-researched area in analyses of contemporary sporting practices: women and sport-related drinking. While the role that alcohol plays in creating particular cultural identities in sport has been well documented, this has been done, almost exclusively, in relation to men. Drawing on empirical research with female supporters of Australian Rules football, this paper offers a preliminary analysis of the role of alcohol in constructing and maintaining personal and social identities for women in a particular sporting setting. In examining the behaviours, practices and attitudes of these women towards their own and others' alcohol consumption, the paper argues for a need to extend our conceptual, theoretical and empirical frameworks for thinking about sports-associated drinking. It posits a need to rethink dominant theoretical tropes such as 'hegemonic masculinity' which often orient studies of sport-related drinking and argues instead for alternative analytical frameworks that may advance critical scholarship on the under-researched relationship between women, sport and alcohol consumption.

**Keywords:** women; Australian Rules football; alcohol; masculinity; hegemonic drinking

#### Introduction

Popular conceptions of sport include images of men dressed as superheroes, nuns or nurses at end-of-season celebrations; men bonding over drinking games and initiations and male athletes implicated in accounts of sexual violence against women (Light and Kirk 2000, De Visser *et al.* 2005, Messner 2005, Wait *et al.* 2011). While not disputing that these activities occur, such images of 'boys behaving badly' serve to highlight a gap in how we think and write, sociologically, about drinking and sport; notably the absence of women's experiences of sport-related drinking. Persistent narratives of male drinking in sport have dominated the discourse and led to something of a theoretical predilection with notions of masculinity, particularly Connell's formulation of 'hegemonic masculinity' (1987, 1995). It is this over-riding emphasis on male drinking and sport that this paper seeks to redress.

Drawing on empirical research with female fans and supporters of Australian Rules football, I present a preliminary analysis of drinking behaviours among women in a particular sporting context. Taking women's articulations of alcohol and their experiences of sport-related drinking as its point of departure, I argue for a need to widen the empirical, conceptual and theoretical base of analyses of sport-related drinking. In particular, I posit that women's relationships with sport-related drinking are complex and contradictory, with narratives of responsibility, restraint, pleasure and enjoyment all being part of a

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collective discourse of ‘hegemonic drinking’ in which certain drinking practices occupy positions of social and symbolic pre-eminence. Rather than seeing sport-related drinking as an enactment of masculinity or a transgression of femininity (the ‘go-to’ explanations for drinking by men and women), I argue that to explain drinking practices simply in terms of conformity and resistance to gender role socialisation is to obscure the varied ways in which women ‘do drinking’ and the contributions this may make to studies of sports-related drinking, the sociality of alcohol consumption and the sociology of sport and gender studies more broadly.

The paper begins by considering the existing research on sport, alcohol and gender, as well as the broader research on women and drinking, in which women are implicated in a discourse of problematic ‘binge’ drinking, risk and regulation. Here, three gaps are underscored: (i) the relative absence of discussion on *women* in the literature on sport, alcohol and gender, (ii) the relative absence of *drinking* when considering female sporting identities and practices and (iii) the relative absence of *sport* in a discussion of female drinking in a broader social context. Although ‘the relationship between gender and drug use remains the big neglected question in the field of substance use’ (Measham 2003, p. 22), the omission is not gender *per se* – men’s relationship with and experiences of alcohol are well documented – but the relative absence of women in this literature as it relates, particularly, to sport.

### Gender and alcohol

Despite the complex and contradictory relationship between gender and alcohol, previous studies have tended to focus on dichotomous differences between male and female drinking, particularly in terms of quantity and consequences, socio-demographic characteristics and self-reported alcohol use (Gill 2002, Ford 2007, Peralta and Steele 2009, Peralta *et al.* 2010, Maggs *et al.* 2011, Atkinson *et al.* 2012). The consistent finding is that men are more likely to drink, and drink at high levels, than their female counterparts (Peralta *et al.* 2010, Peralta and Jauk 2011). Both men and women, however, report a range of negative consequences of their drinking such as drunk driving, injuries and fatalities, encounters with the legal system and sexual and physical violence, as well as benefits such as camaraderie and social networks accrued by participating in drinking games and related activities (Caparo 2000, Young *et al.* 2005). While it is an issue to which I return, the point to note from such comparative studies of male and female drinking is that studies of *all female* drinking groups – in sport or elsewhere – are rare, and it is this gap in the literature to which this paper responds.

Alongside the quantitative data which present patterns of difference between men’s and women’s drinking among discrete population cohorts (such as college students), several qualitative studies highlight how alcohol is significant in young people’s constructions of social identity, where peer drinking is an immensely pleasurable (albeit problematic) pastime. As an informant in Tutenges and Rod’s study of Danish youth put it, ‘we got incredibly drunk ... it was damned fun’ (2009). Similarly, Griffin *et al.*’s (2009) research with young people in Britain suggests that the ‘passing out stories’ following a weekend spent drinking serve as a ritualised means of bonding among peers which is highly valued by the drinkers involved.

Importantly for this paper, many of these tales of passing out, having fun and losing control have been ‘condoned and encouraged within the strictures of hegemonic masculinity’ (Peralta 2007, Thurnell-Read 2011, p. 978). Much of the research on the masculine nature of drinking (and sport) owes its intellectual legacy to the Australian

sociologist Connell (1987, 1995), in which the notion of hegemonic masculinity remains the dominant paradigm for understanding and theorising men's attitudes, behaviours and practices when drinking in sporting contexts and elsewhere (Anderson 2009, Pringle 2011, Clayton 2012, Thurnell-Read 2013).

While hegemonic masculinity continues to have considerable theoretical traction, scholars are increasingly recognising that masculinities (plural) are a contested concept (McKay *et al.* 2000, Flood 2002, 2008, Pringle 2005, Anderson *et al.* 2012). Anderson (2005, 2009), for example, distinguishes hegemonic masculinity from *orthodox* masculinity, arguing that 'scholars frequently confuse Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity as a social process with the archetype described as maintaining social dominance' and that it is the 'presentation of the archetype that is esteemed in sporting cultures as orthodox masculinity' (Adams *et al.* 2010, p. 280).

Similarly, Seidler (2006) and Thorpe (2010) suggest that hegemonic masculinity is a blunt theoretical tool that has not kept pace with the fluidity of gender relations and identities in sport and elsewhere. While Seidler (2006) is critical of the a-historical use of hegemonic masculinity, others (Connell included) have attempted to rework the concept so as to acknowledge hegemonic masculinities and the intersectoral relationships between gender and race, class and ethnicity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, Schippers 2007, Beasley 2008).

Such recognition of the complexity of masculinities, however, only serves to underscore the limitations with which *sport-related drinking* has been considered. While a growing sensitivity to the plurality and complexity of men and their relationships *vis-à-vis* sport (or alcohol) is important, it only serves to highlight the theoretical orthodoxy of hegemonic masculinity in analyses of sport-related drinking and more importantly, the almost total absence of literature on women, sport and alcohol.

### Women and alcohol

Although men, statistically, consume greater quantities of alcohol than women, there has 'in recent years been a marked increase in alcohol consumption by young women in Western countries' (Lyons and Willott 2008, p. 694). Such changes in drinking patterns have led to a wider social anxiety, whereby female drinkers are frequently portrayed as problematic, particularly in the news media (Measham and Østergaard 2009), where the 'young drunken woman has become an archetypal symbol of the "binge drinking" problem' (Atkinson *et al.* 2012, p. 5).

At the same time, while often portrayed as 'at risk' from predatory men, female drinkers are frequently depicted as lacking in femininity (Jackson and Tinkler 2007, Griffin *et al.* 2009) or, conversely, as sexually promiscuous or enacting an 'emphasized femininity' (Connell 1987), in which they dress and act to accommodate male interests. In her studies of Hen's Nights in Britain, Skeggs (1997, 2005) notes that the women involved exhibit a preoccupation with beauty, flirtatiousness and sexual availability that re-inscribes heteronormativity in very particular, very public ways.

As I address in what follows however, while women who drink publicly may be subject to a particular kind of (class-based) moral scrutiny far more readily than men who are 'off the leash and out of control' (Thurnell-Read 2011), for the female followers of Australian Rules football whose experiences of drinking inform this paper, such practices are seen as legitimate ways in which their identities as sporting fans and supporters are expressed. Relative to the work done on male drinking, in sport or elsewhere, very few studies have examined the meanings and social contexts of women's drinking in sport by the women themselves.

Given the wider discursive construction of female drinking as problematic, it is perhaps not surprising that women's drinking has rarely been regarded as pleasurable, but, instead, almost exclusively, in wholly negative terms. Arguing that research on 'alcohol-use from sociological and criminological perspectives has in part been guided by elements of gender construction theory' (2011, p. 833), Peralta and Jauk suggest that social structure, gender and substance use are interwoven in ways that emphasise 'dominant, idealized notions of sexual character and gender appropriate behaviour/expression in society' (*ibid.*). Following such observations, Measham notes that

the broad characterization [of women's drinking] unfolds in one of two ways: women's lives are worse than men's and therefore they take drugs and use alcohol to make their lives better or, for younger women in particular recreational/celebratory that is bound up in a discourse of risk taking. (2003, p. 22)

While the latter certainly has some relevance for women and sport-related drinking, the formulation of problematic alcohol usage in which women self-medicate for relief from a myriad of social and personal problems was not evidenced in the research. This is not to suggest that sports women do not experience problematic relationships with alcohol – biographical accounts from several high profile sports women who have battled with alcohol addictions tell a different story<sup>1</sup> – however, the experiences reported in this paper suggest a more nuanced relationship with alcohol and sport than the blunt theoretical tools have hitherto allowed.

### **What about sport?**

To return now to sport-related drinking, it is noteworthy that studies of alcohol and sport have mirrored the emphases and omissions in accounts of gender and alcohol more broadly. Men have been the emphasis, and hegemonic masculinity is deployed as the dominant theoretical paradigm. Curry's (1998, 2000) descriptive work on team dynamics within American college athletic teams, for example, identifies a strong, normative culture of heavy drinking among male athletes. The role of alcohol in football-related disorder has also been noted (Williams *et al.* 1989, King 1997), and parallels can be drawn with other boisterous spectator groups such as the 'Barmy Army' (Parry and Malcolm 2004).<sup>2</sup>

Palmer's work on 'the Grog Squad' (Palmer and Thompson 2007, Palmer 2009) or Clayton and Harris' (2008) discussion of 'our friend Jack' provides further empirical evidence of the masculine nature of drinking and sport. Key to Clayton and Harris's (2008) work was an analysis of the ritual practices of initiation among a male university rugby team in the south of England, while Palmer's (2009, Palmer and Thompson 2007) work explored the drinking-based behaviours, practices and interactions of an exclusively male Australian Rules football supporter group where 'belonging, identity and social status revolved around spectacularly high levels of alcohol consumption' (Palmer and Thompson 2007, p. 188). Far fewer tales of the sociality of sport-related drinking, however, have been told by women, and it is an account of the social context in which drinking by female sports supporters can occur that is explored in the following pages.

The lack of research on female drinking and sport is both striking and surprising, given ongoing concerns with female drinking more widely, and its location within a discourse of risk, responsibility and 'appropriate' female behaviours when drinking, particularly drinking in public, as this tends to be the space in which sport-related drinking occurs – at sporting grounds, venues, pubs and clubs and the like. To offer something of a counter to the limitations sketched so far, the paper turns now to the empirical data.

## **Methodology**

The data and initial impetus for this paper came from a period of ethnographic fieldwork undertaken throughout the 2005 season of the South Australian National Football League (SANFL) as part of a broader project on the social meanings of alcohol in Australian football. Data were collected from participant observation undertaken in metropolitan Adelaide (the capital of South Australia and the 5th largest Australian capital city) between March and October. Fieldwork was conducted with nine football clubs at 25 games over the season including the preliminary and grand finals. Two female researchers attended football matches, visiting football grounds, clubrooms, bistros and bars and a variety of social functions such as pre-game sponsors' lunches, after game presentations, bingo days, 'Claret and Stout' lunches and members' happy hours.<sup>3</sup>

To contextualise the findings from the participant observation, semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with 93 participants: 67 men and 26 women from across the nine SANFL clubs whose membership represented the broad demographic base of suburban Adelaide. It is the interviews with the women that provide the data for this paper.<sup>4</sup>

## **Participants**

Twenty-six women aged 25–86 years were interviewed, from across the nine clubs. The women were recruited for voluntary participation using flyers distributed at football grounds and through club-based newsletters, and all were unknown to the researchers. Participants were all White, Anglo Australian, and all were in heterosexual relationships. Eighteen of the women were mothers, two were grandmothers and the women held a range of professional occupations, including teachers, nurses, lawyers, an academic and tertiary students, as well as three retirees.

As self-defined 'fans' of any one of the teams who played in the SANFL, the women interviewed were frequent, visible and vocal fixtures at each week's game, and many had long associations with a club, having supported their team since their childhood.<sup>5</sup> Fourteen of the women occupied some kind of volunteer role within their club, serving as club secretary, treasurer, 'uniforms officer', 'strapper', 'chief bar maid' or 'head of the canteen', among others.

## **Procedures**

The interviews, which lasted for approximately 45–60 minutes, were conducted in respondents' own homes. As well as helping to triangulate the data collected at football grounds and venues, the interviews provided first-hand accounts of the women's experiences and understandings of their own and others' alcohol consumption in particular sporting settings. While the topic of discussion was sport-related drinking, alcohol was not consumed by the participants or researchers during the interviews, although all the women indicated that they consumed alcohol as part of their routine experiences of following the sport.<sup>6</sup>

The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and coded independently by two female researchers using an agreed upon template to ensure consistency of data recording across the project. As noted elsewhere, 'having two researchers enabled us to triangulate key themes emerging from the data and to double check any gaps in our field notes, ensuring rigour in the write up and subsequent analysis of this material' (Palmer and Thompson 2007, p. 191). The interview data were thematically analysed with the

assistance of the NVIVO software package, using a ‘constant-comparative’ method of emerging themes similarly employed by Anderson *et al.* (2012). The research was conducted in compliance with the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council’s Ethical Guidelines, in which informed consent was obtained prior to participation in the interviews, the right to withdraw from the research was respected and the identities of research participants were protected, with pseudonyms adopted for the reporting of data.

### Responsibility and restraint

The long-standing association that participants had with a football club mediated their relationship with alcohol and shaped it in particular ways. As mentioned earlier, many women held volunteer positions within a club, and these unpaid roles meant that they often had a position of responsibility with regard to the serving of alcohol and the monitoring of its use, both formally and informally. The longevity of involvement with a football club meant that these women frequently ‘knew everyone’, and this had a moderating influence on the alcohol-related behaviours of others, particularly under-age drinkers.

Several of the older women interviewed took responsibility for the management of drinking within a club, offering food, asking for proof of age, confiscating car keys or calling a taxi for those drinkers who were obviously inebriated.

‘Cos I know everyone, I can keep an eye on things. If anyone’s being a tool [an idiot], I’ll try and have a word with them. Tell ‘em to have a softie or some food. (Jackie, 65, North Tigers supporter)

When I’m on the bar, it’s easy to see people who’ve had too much. We’re on quite a busy road and there are often breathos [police random breath testing units], so we spread the word about that and call a cab if we need to. (Erica, 56, Western Bullets supporter)

This focus on safety and minimising consequences was particularly the case in which under-age drinkers were involved. One mother of several junior players notes that:

I’m often on the door [at club functions], and I run a pretty tight ship. Most of these kids are my son’s age, so I know who’s old enough to drink. Otherwise, you have to show ID, and you get a stamp to get in. (Anne, 44, Southern Stars, supporter)

Following on from this, one woman reflected on the broader social networks that were often shared by members of the club, and the way in which these then determined and reflected their own attitude to drinking by minors in a sporting setting:

Yeah, our kids all went to school together. We’ve had dinner at their place. They’ve come to ours. They’re pretty relaxed about their kids drinking. I mean they don’t want to see them blotto, but if they’re at the club, they’re happy for their kids to have a couple of beers with them as well. I guess we’re pretty responsible about it. (Jackie, 65, North Tigers supporter)

The qualitative data indicated that although the women interviewed were happy to refuse or regulate service to minors or to implement strategies such as calling a taxi or suggesting that someone ‘slows down a bit’, on occasions when male drinkers were excessively boisterous or intimidating, the women drew on the services of male bouncers and security guards when present at a club, or their own husbands or male partners to evict an inebriated drinker.

If a bloke’s getting a bit loud, I might have a word with one of the fellas on the door, and he’ll see if he can get him to settle down. (Candice, 27, North Tigers supporter)



It's only happened once, but there was one bloke who was a bit scary. Steve [husband] tried to talk to him, but we ended up calling the cops. It was pretty full on. (Louise, 45, Southern Stars supporter)

As such accounts suggest, the football club provided a place where couples and families could come together to socialise and the women were central in organising and managing many of the activities that inevitably involved the service and consumption of alcohol. These 'few good women' (Kelly *et al.* 2011) could be characterised as providing a 'civilizing influence' that 'moderated the excesses of male space and made it more attractive for families to encourage their kids to participate' (Kelly *et al.* 2011, p. 481).

### Enforcing morality

While women played an important role in managing the service and consumption of alcohol, this often extended to managing the *moral* dimensions of drinking, particularly that of other women in the club. Although the women interviewed saw excessive drinking as 'just a part of the club' or 'part of the culture', such acceptance of 'unrestrained, hedonistic and boisterous' (Thurnell-Read 2011, p. 978) behaviour was rarely extended to female drinkers outside of or beyond their own social network:

Well on Saturday like, Jezza's [a player] other half and her friend, when they get together they're bloody shockers ... they're just, yeah they just sit in the bar and just drink ... that's all I know, but ... it's not a good look. (Mandy, 32, Eastern Magpies supporter)

Extending this notion of good women as 'moral enforcers', the women interviewed were especially critical of other women who displayed behaviour that was overtly flirtatious or sexual in nature. Discussing a group of women known as 'the Dizzies', the women were particularly disparaging:

We've got this group of girls who sort of hang around, we call them 'The Dizzies'. Most of them are overweight footy groupies but they tend to drink, well they do, they drink out of control. But I think sometimes they drink to try and impress as well. You can tell what they're out for. (Candice, 27, North Tigers supporter)

Here, the women interviewed were critical of drinking displays that were intended to impress or appeal sexually to the men around them. Critically for this narrative, the women interviewed were keen to position groups like the Dizzies as entirely separate from their own drinking activities:

We just call them The Dizzies because they're, you know, ditzy dizzies. The women, the wives and girlfriends, we don't mix with them. It's a social thing. They drink like a guy. They need to get a hold of themselves. (Deborah, 37, North Tigers supporter)

While the Dizzies' drinking was defined and measured according to men's drinking, and certain limitations were placed on such drinking performances, when reflecting on their *own* drinking, the women interviewed did not subject drinking to excess to the same kind of moral scrutiny, a point to which I will return. Indeed, there was something of a 'double standard discourse' (Lyons and Willott 2008) in which older women, particularly single older women, were singled out; their behaviours located within broader assumptions about drinking and female respectability (Skeggs 1997). One of the women interviewed reflected on the fact that 'when it gets late it [the clubrooms] can be a bit like Jurassic Park. It's all older women and I always think "God, go home"'. Another put it far more succinctly: 'They're just embarrassing and look like sluts'.

By contrast, the women interviewed rarely regarded their *own* drinking in these terms. All of the women interviewed perceived occasions of excessive drinking to be 'time out',

an opportunity to ‘cut loose’ or because they had a ‘free pass’ [a reference to their male partner allowing them a night away from domestic responsibilities]. While such themes of ‘cutting lose’ or being ‘off the leash’ are common to accounts of male drinking and are often presented as an archetype of hegemonic masculinity, this is not to suggest that the women involved in this research sought to invert or transgress an established gender order, rather that the pleasure and enjoyment derived from the sociality of drinking are far from being the preserve of male drinkers alone.

Critically, a discussion of the significant pleasure that women gained from drinking remains something of a discursive oversight in popular narratives of alcohol consumption more broadly, despite it offering a space for relief and respite and a place in which same-sex friendships can be expressed, developed and consolidated (Brown and Gregg 2012).

### **Enjoyment and pleasure**

Given that many of the women interviewed were involved with a range of volunteer club activities, this imposed certain spatial and temporal limits on their drinking activities. Drinking was often woven into the daily rhythm of attending a game, socialising at the club, then ‘kicking on afterwards’. At the game, the women would frequently have a ‘chardy’ [a chardonnay] and a ‘catch up’, while supporting their husbands, boyfriends or sons who were playing on the day. Here, drinking was a time for women to reflect on life-world issues that were not overly personal or intimate – how the kids are doing at school, the purchase of a new car, an update on a holiday destination and the like. As the day and evening progressed, and drinking moved into the clubrooms, those women who were not involved with club tasks continued to drink, although this tended to be fairly measured as the women were more often than not, the designated driver.

Oh, it’s a social thing. (Mandy, 32, Eastern Magpies supporter)

Most of my weekends are taken up with the kids’ sport, so this is a bit of a chance for me to unwind. (Sally, 32, Southern Stars supporter)

It’s a great club. Lots of fun. There’s karaoke, and competitions. I really look forward to it ... if the boys’ have won (laughs). (Caitlin, 55, Western Bullets supporter)

I’m paranoid about breathos on the weekend, so I just have one or two. It’s a good laugh, though. (Louise, 45, Southern Stars supporter)

As such comments suggest, drinking is clearly a pleasurable activity; a chance to ‘unwind’ and a place to express the kind of same-sex camaraderie that is commonplace in accounts of male drinking in sport. Such preliminary narratives, however, start to suggest that women’s drinking – in this particular sporting context – is subject to a pressure on pleasure; drinking is not as unequivocally ‘off the leash’ as it is more commonly depicted in accounts of men’s sport-related drinking where ‘competition in the quantity and pace of alcohol consumption’ (Peralta 2007) are central to the ‘doing of masculinity through drinking’ (Thurnell-Read 2013, p. 2). The ‘doing’ of drinking, in this case, undoubtedly has a performative dimension to it, yet pleasure is not bound to the displays of bodily excess and restraint that we see in accounts of male drinking (Gough and Edwards 1998, Campbell 2000, Palmer 2009, De Visser and McDonnell 2012).

### **Discussion**

This paper has presented preliminary findings of women’s understandings and experiences of sport-related drinking. The paper is offered as an account of women’s drinking in a

particular sporting context – as followers of Australian Rules football in one major Australian city. As such, it does not lay claim to broader generalisations about the relationship between alcohol, sport and female identity, but it does highlight the glaring gap in the literature on gendered discourses about women, sport and alcohol. In particular, a discussion of drinking pleasures is missing. As Lindsay notes, ‘drinking alcohol is inherently a social practice strongly associated with pleasure and celebration’ (2009, p. 371), yet the absence of discussion of women suggests that pleasure and celebration, at least in the context of sport-related drinking, are wholly masculine preserves. The qualitative data presented here, however, suggest that this is not always the case.

Moreover, the data presented run counter to the dominant discourse that women drinking, particularly in public, are ‘problem women’. The women interviewed here were mothers, wives and/or club volunteers, several had professional occupations – teachers, lawyers, even an academic – others were students. The relative homogeneity of the women lays open the possibility for further research with a more diverse range of women with different relationships with alcohol, and it is important to note here that none here identified with the caricature of the female binge drinker (though many recognised it). A common narrative device in use is that such women behave as ‘ladettes’ when drunk in public, transgressing normative and dominant forms of femininity by participating in behaviour traditionally defined as male (Day *et al.* 2004, Jackson and Tinkler 2007). There is a need to move beyond the literature and taken-for-granted orthodoxies so as to not reinscribe some of the double standards and assumptions about women’s drinking. As I have suggested here, we can certainly extend our conceptual and theoretical frameworks for thinking about sports-associated drinking, and the meanings women attach to their own and others’ drinking.

A theoretical framework that may be tentatively advanced is the notion of ‘hegemonic drinking’ rather than hegemonic masculinity. This may provide a useful new way of framing female drinking in sport. Dominant, powerful practices and drinking tropes cut across gender, and sport-related drinking is not necessarily about enacting or expressing a particular form of masculinity. The preliminary data presented here are a tentative move towards advancing alternative theoretical frameworks for understanding and explaining sport-related drinking. It is tentative, as we know so very little about female drinking in sport, other than perhaps our own anecdotal or personal experiences of sport and, as critical scholars, we need to do more than extrapolating theory from anecdote. Rigorous research is needed. As Palmer argues elsewhere:

without substantive empirical research into the presence and meaning of drinking behaviours among women in a sporting context, we run the risk of perpetuating various exclusions of women from key sociological debates and agendas about sport, identity and the place of alcohol in women’s perceptions and understandings of the two. (2011, p. 172)

It is also tentative as there are two aspects of women and sport-related drinking that has not been considered here. While some of the women interviewed alluded to continuing drinking at pubs and nightclubs after the football club and/or as part of a ‘girls night out’, an analysis of these activities is beyond the scope of this paper. The focus here is on women’s experiences and articulations of drinking in this particular sporting context, rather than on drinking that spills over into other settings and spaces. Certainly, a consideration of women’s drinking, in the round, is an important avenue for future research. Following this, the paper has not considered how others may perceive the drinking of female fans on a night out or in situations where men and women drink together. Women also drank alongside men at Grand Final celebrations and

commiserations and the traditional end-of-season ‘Mad Monday’ celebrations, and further research on men’s perceptions of this is undoubtedly needed.

One of the concerns of the research has been to extend the theoretical, conceptual and empirical base of studies of sport-related drinking. As I have suggested here, an analysis of women’s attitudes towards, and their experiences of, their own and others drinking is more nuanced than previous theoretical paradigms that have done justice to, and falling back on constructions of the ‘gender order’ in studies of sport, or drinking, simply underscores the omissions and oversights in the scholarship. This is not to suggest that we erase gender from the discourse, but to rely on assumptions about male drinking as ‘normal’ obscures the ways in which women understand and experience their own and others’ drinking, and the contributions this may make to studies of sports-related drinking and the sociality of alcohol consumption more broadly.

In as much as it has been argued that there is a plurality to masculinities, in sport and elsewhere, there is equally a complexity to drinking (and femininities). As a social practice, drinking is not done, experienced or understood universally. There are different degrees of engagement, and one’s relationship with alcohol and sport, for both men and women, intersects with ethnicity, religion, sexuality and social-economic position, among others. Nonetheless, women’s experiences of sport-related drinking have eluded sociological scrutiny, and this paper provides a point of departure for a burgeoning research agenda in the studies of sport and alcohol.

## Notes

1. See, for example, *Footballer: My Story* – the autobiography of Kelly Smith, the captain of the English women’s football squad, or *Riding Wild*, the autobiography of former Australian surfing champion, Pam Buridge, both of which document the author’s battles with alcohol addictions.
2. The ‘Barmy Army’ is the name given to the group of English cricket fans who follow the Test series around the globe. The name was given to the group by the Australian media during the 1994–1995 Test series in Australia, for the group’s willingness to travel to Australia in the near certain knowledge that the English team would lose.
3. The methods and methodological concerns that this study raised have been more fully detailed in Palmer and Thompson (2010).
4. The sample of 67 (72%) male interviewees was representative of SANFL records, which indicated that 72% of club members were male.
5. Although definitions of ‘fan’, the relative absence of women in discussions of fan culture and how one becomes a fan or expresses their fan identity or allegiance are all subjects of critical scrutiny (Crawford 2004, Mewett and Toffoletti 2011, Pope 2011, Toffoletti and Mewett 2012), such processes of becoming and belonging are less central to this paper and its focus on women’s experiences and understandings of their own and others’ sport-related drinking.
6. Although alcohol was not consumed during the interviews, it was, at times, consumed when participants attended football matches and after game functions. The ethical and reflexive dimensions of doing this (and other) research during which alcohol was consumed have been documented more fully in Palmer and Thompson (2010).

## Notes on contributor

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