

The ‘St Kilda Schoolgirl’: Public Discourse, Digitisation and Reconfiguring the Footballer Sex Scandal

Throughout much of the twentieth century, sports scandals relating to the off-field social world were generally limited to issues such as the occasional pub brawl, drink driving, fraud or financial wrong-doing. And that was only when such issues spiralled into scandal – in many cases they may have resulted in brief news reports and some minor disciplining, but were not necessarily considered scandalous. Other events in the social world of masculine team sports during the past century relating to the treatment of women caught up sexually in the cultural environment of sports teams and clubs sometimes *ought* to have become scandal but have more often remained hidden; at other times these scandals have emerged in ways which involve reportage that overwhelming – if implicitly – supports the perpetrators of sexual violence over women victims, survivors or complainants.¹

By the start of the twenty-first century, sports sex scandals were being more widely reported, debated and determined by

news routines and media commentary. However, most recently the way in which these scandals play out has shifted beyond the 'knowable' forms of media narrative as a result of the use of digital communication tools, social networking, YouTube, Twitter and other applications that 'give voice' to those who have been 'wronged' in a sex-based scandal. In Australian Rules football culture, this was most-readily witnessed in 2010 and 2011 in what became known as the 'St Kilda Schoolgirl' scandal, which involved players from the AFL's St Kilda Football Club, a young woman who had first encountered some of the players during their visit to her school, sexual involvement with several players, an alleged teenage pregnancy, a romantic involvement with a much older player-manager whose initial role was to resolve the scandal. The 'passing around' of a young woman football fan among players and club stakeholders is, of course, not in any way new. However, this scandal departed from the normative routine of sex scandals in that the young woman, Kim Duthie, was able to disrupt the standard sex scandal narrative that typically makes a young woman 'victim' or silences her altogether and, instead, maintain media focus on herself not as victim but as complainant.

What is new here is the fact that the communication involved in this scandal utilised both traditional news media and digital forms of dissemination to construct various accounts and positionings of both parties. The argument here is that the discourse around the incident or scandal is structured not solely by traditional media forms and not solely by the public relations histories and forms utilised by masculine team sporting organisations. Rather, the ways in which the scandal has been communicated publicly is governed by the intersection between both. What that produces is a set of shifts not only in how sports-player sex scandals are responded to publicly but in how a victim is positioned, addressed and has her story coded as legitimate or dishonest. However, as I will argue, these shifts are not wholesale but maintain certain

continuities in the ways in which complainants within sex scandals have their story publicly articulated, and the new elements here on the one hand open possibilities for cultural or institutional change in the ways in which elite/celebrity masculine sports teams, codes, leagues and individual players demonstrate ethical responsibilities towards women, but on the other hand constrain those possibilities.

This chapter will start with a brief summary of the 'St Kilda Schoolgirl' story, before looking at some of the ways in which we can make sense of the shifts and new elements in footballer sex scandals. Important here, firstly, is considering how Duthie's use of digital media maintained her – as complainant and *not* victim – at the centre of public discourse rather than being subject to the traditional eradication or invisibilisation of those who have been assaulted or victimised by elite footballers. Secondly, I will look at the public relations mechanisms deployed by the AFL during and subsequent to the incident. These have included both engagement with news media and the use of digitally distributed text and video as part of a risk management strategy, the new element here being a direct address to the young woman through invoking a discourse of welfare and vulnerability that aims to mitigate the negative publicity brought about by the scandal. Finally, I will examine some of the ways in which the young woman's media activism opens the space for critique of the conditions that make 'scandalous' behaviour possible in the off-field environment of contemporary football in terms of the extent to which a broader groundswell of criticism by women would be helpful in bringing about cultural change to a more ethical football culture.

Scandal as a Narrative of Media Incidents

Sex scandals differ from other types of scandal such as fraud, political intrigue, back-room deals with public money and nepotism. Scandals relating to sex, sexuality and the outcomes of

sexual behaviour are structured by a discourse of contemporary sexualised culture often preoccupied with sexual values and practices, the proliferation of sexual texts, a public and sometimes lurid interest in gossip and reports of unusual sexual experiences and arrangements, and controversies and panics around claims that older conceptions of sex and sexuality are breaking down.² Scandals typically centre on media-disseminated allegations that would ordinarily be damaging to an individual or organisation's reputation. In the case of sex scandals there is usually an element of sexual behaviour that is deemed non-normative – an affair, a substantial age-gap between the participants involved, sexual assault, among others. Sex scandal stories play out at the interface of that which is normally relegated to the 'private' and 'public interest'.³ The series of incidents that became known as the 'St Kilda Schoolgirl' scandal bears the common tropes of sex scandal in regard to the non-normative or non-traditional values indicated in the narrative of scandal – a young woman who has had sexual relations with a number of footballers and a much older player-manager; the fact that her initial encounter with players occurred through a school visit; the fact she was under eighteen years of age at the time of the initial encounters; and the fact that she was alleged to have been pregnant to one of the footballers. These particular elements are neither atypical nor in any way matters of social shame for the individuals involved. However, the combination of the celebrity status of the members of St Kilda Football Club, and the discourse through which these incidents are available to be consumed as gossip provides them collectively with the status of scandal. At one level, this scandal allows new public relations mechanisms to come into play to protect the players and league stakeholders from criticism of wrongdoing. At another, it opens opportunities to engage critically with the sexual practices of elite masculine team sportsplayers and the institutional culture of Australian Rules football in regard to gender relations.

The series of incidents, stories and news items that comprise the cycle of scandal began in May 2010, when it was reported that two St Kilda footballers had been accused of having sex with a seventeen year-old woman who became pregnant to one of them.⁴ It was noted that although the players had visited her school at which point they first came to her attention, she did not formally meet them until some weeks later in a Sydney nightclub on the evening of a win for the team. The report, which did not name the players, noted that Victoria Police and the AFL became involved after the pregnancy was reported to her school principal, that an investigation occurred but that the players had been cleared by both Police and the AFL of any wrongdoing. It was also inferred on the same day that the young woman may also have been sexually involved with a player from rival team Collingwood.⁵

Later in May 2010, *The Age* revealed knowledge that a photograph of the young woman had been emailed among past and present St Kilda footballers, staff at the AFL Players' Association, staff at the Department of Justice, the Transport Accident Commission (a major sponsor of junior football in Victoria) and the Melbourne Magistrates' Court.⁶ Forwarded emails included suggestions that recipients visit her Facebook page to 'do your worst';⁷ that is, punish her for her role in the first part of the scandal earlier that month. With her identity revealed, the young woman made a complaint to Victoria Police; the response of the AFL was to note that social networking privacy was problematic, that there would be no investigation of the forwarded image and identification of the young woman, and, as AFL chief executive Andrew Demetriou put it, children in any case should be discouraged from using Facebook.⁸ By early June, however, Demetriou altered his position and stated that those forwarding the emails were acting distastefully, although there was some concern that what was distasteful in the view of the AFL was the fact that the email named the players involved, rather than expressing alarm that the

young woman had been identified widely among the network of footballers, club and league stakeholders and associates.⁹

The next phase of the scandal occurred in December 2010 when Duthie posted nude and sexual pictures on Facebook and Twitter of St Kilda captain Nick Riewoldt and his teammates Nick Dal Santo and Zac Dawson. The first photograph showed Riewoldt standing naked, posed and holding his genitals next to a clothed Dawson who holds what appears to be a condom packet beside Riewoldt's genitals. The second image revealed Dal Santo on a bed with his penis exposed, appearing to masturbate. The images were overlaid with the phrase 'Merry Christmas courtesy of the St Kilda Schoolgirl' and were redistributed virally within a matter of hours. The club responded quickly with a press release stating that they were liaising with Victoria Police to have the photographs removed, and that they were concerned the images were obtained illegally. Victoria Police responded to queries stating that it was not a police but a civil matter for the two parties to resolve.¹⁰ However, later the same day it was revealed that Facebook had been contacted and the young woman's account was forcibly closed while at the same time the Federal Court of Melbourne placed a temporary injunction against the further publication of the photographs.¹¹ Initially, Duthie informed the public through both interviews and statements on her Twitter account that she had been in the room when the photographs were taken, had been the only woman present, and that the players involved had been drinking heavily.¹² Statements of support for the footballers came from several spokespersons, although Riewoldt made his own statement declaring that he had never met Kim Duthie, that the photograph had been taken at least twelve months earlier by fellow player Sam Gilbert, and that he was angry with his teammate as he had asked at the time that the image be deleted.¹³ It was then alleged by Riewoldt's manager Ricky Nixon that Duthie had been attempting to extort \$20,000 in exchange for the photographs,

and it was noted that an affidavit filed in the Federal Court by Sam Gilbert confirmed he had taken the photographs himself 'for private use' in Miami, with the young woman copying them later from his laptop in March 2010 without his knowledge or permission.¹⁴ Later that year it was reported that her pregnancy with twins had ended in the miscarriage of one and the stillbirth of the other.

A controversial deal between the young woman and the St Kilda Football Club was made in January 2011, whereby the club would provide accommodation for her for some months in Melbourne in exchange for a list of assurances, including confirmation that no player from the club had approached her during their school visit, that no phone number of a player had been given to her at the school, and that she had met the players only at a social event in Sydney in March 2010.¹⁵ During February 2011, debate on the scandal continued, with former Commonwealth Government treasurer Peter Costello questioning in an opinion piece if it was right that sportsplayers visit schools:

Footballers are not chosen for their moral principles. They do not go into a national draft for budding philanthropists. They can run and catch and kick a ball. What are the clubs thinking when they send them to schools to give guidance on life skills? Any right-thinking parent would quake with fear to hear that footballers were coming to their daughter's school to give a little bit of inspiration.¹⁶

This commentary had the important effect of opening discussion on the role of the footballers themselves in the scandal, discrediting the previously unquestioned view that footballers are appropriate role models for motivating adolescent students.

On 18 February 2011 it was revealed that the young woman at the centre of the scandal was now involved with the forty-seven

year-old married Australian Football League player-manager Ricky Nixon¹⁷ who had been visiting her in a hotel room now known to be paid for by both St Kilda Football Club and, later, the *Herald Sun* newspaper.¹⁸ Within two days, news stories stated that Kim Duthie claimed to have evidence of the affair with photographs and video footage that would confirm the relationship.¹⁹ A former footballer who had played for Carlton, St Kilda and Hawthorn, Nixon was a significant stakeholder in Australian Rules football, running the sports management agency Flying Start, a regular radio commentator on sports, and had previously been the subject of a number of news stories after arrests for drunkenness and driving under the influence. Nixon stated publicly that he had not had sex with her, but that he ‘had inappropriate dealings with her’.²⁰ This is a term of indistinct signification which was never explained or clarified. The scandal continued to unfold further over several days in later February with footage of Nixon’s belongings in her hotel room and images of drugs present in the room which were alleged to have been brought there by him. On 22 February, Duthie was threatened with a warrant in order to be questioned by Victoria Police²¹ over the presence of alleged drugs in her footage of Nixon which she had supplied to the *Herald Sun* newspaper and which had subsequently been forwarded to the police. She was released without charge.²² At the same time, Nixon left the country for an overseas recruitment trip, although it was inferred that sources close to him suspected the young woman had been spiking his drink as ‘his recollection of events is hazy’;²³ nevertheless police intended to question him.²⁴ Indications that the scandal was beginning to affect negatively the broader public image of Australian Rules football emerged, with high-profile sports journalist Caroline Wilson objecting not only to the scandal but to discourses deployed by the AFL to mitigate rather than address the situation:

This ugly scandal symbolises Australian Rules football for those outside the industry and around the country. Right or wrong, Australian Rules football has been tainted. And the game should have taken a stronger stand by now instead of talking constantly and yet again about its concern for the girl who had sex with two St Kilda and one Collingwood footballer early last year.²⁵

With several players no longer willing to work with Nixon²⁶ or, indeed, to risk being tainted by association, the AFL Players' Association appointed Melbourne QC David Galbally to investigate the circumstances of the alleged affair between Nixon and the young woman.²⁷ After returning to Australia in early March, Nixon announced he would check into a rehabilitation clinic to resolve his personal and drinking issues,²⁸ and that his actions in regard to the young woman had been the result of a substance abuse problem²⁹ which had 'clouded his behaviour over the past eight weeks'.³⁰

On 6 March, Duthie was interviewed by Liz Hayes on Channel Nine's *60 Minutes* (Australia). The interview rehearsed much of the history and detail of the scandal to date, but also focused on her motivations for the release of the nude/sexual images. She explained that she was driven in part by vengeance after feeling hurt subsequent to having been suddenly excluded by players and others from the social world of Australian Rules football in which she had forged a sense of belonging. It was revealed she had lied about being pregnant to St Kilda player Sam Gilbert, confirmed that she had taken the images from Gilbert's computer herself, and footage of text messages between Nixon and herself was shown indicating that in the days following the revelation of the affair he had been on the one hand planning a future with her and, on the other, threatening her if she did not release a statement to the media exonerating him.³¹ The following day, AFL chief executive Andrew Demetriou announced he had known previously that

she was not pregnant.³² Ricky Nixon's accreditation as a player manager was revoked for a two-year period, and the young woman responded to the news on Twitter with the statement: 'Satisfied. Told you so. #YouLoseRicky'.³³ Nixon did not appeal the two-year suspension, and by April 2011, he was stating publicly that he no longer wanted to be involved in football management or within the Australian Rules institutions altogether.³⁴ The scandal narrative continued to unfold during the month of April, in which Duthie's family revealed they had received death threats, with her father stating he had wished she had been kept home from school the day of the fateful encounter with the St Kilda footballers.³⁵ Duthie also appeared on the Seven Network program *Sunday Night* and underwent a lie detector test with the results agreeing with her assertion she had had sex with Ricky Nixon. Nixon was also interviewed by the program and announced he had continued to receive a barrage of text messages and emails from the young woman, and that she was stalking him at his Point Lonsdale home, complaining that 'the harassment is continual and has caused stress and anxiety to me and my family'.³⁶

In mid-April, Nixon sought a court intervention order against Duthie³⁷ and it was revealed that he was collaborating with filmmaker Deanna Zacek to produce a documentary about his time in the AFL and his involvement in the 'St Kilda Schoolgirl' scandal.³⁸ In late April, Nixon admitted publicly that he had threatened to kill Kim Duthie and himself if their relationship became public,³⁹ and in early May the *Sunday Night* program showed footage of Nixon walking out of an interview after being asked if he had an ethical duty of care towards the seventeen-year-old Duthie.⁴⁰ Galbally's report to the AFLPA was leaked in early May, revealing that police forensic experts had confirmed the footage of Nixon in his underpants in Duthie's room was authentic, and that Galbally's investigation concluded that Nixon had conducted a sexual relationship with Duthie, taken drugs with her, engaged with her

in a threatening manner, and had taken advantage of her not only as a person who was in conflict with his clients but as a minor.⁴¹ As the scandal narrative dragged on, an intriguing twist occurred when Duthie appeared on Channel Ten's *7pm Project* and recanted her claims that she had taken drugs and had sex with Nixon, publicly apologising on-air. However, immediately after the apology she spoke off-air while cameras were rolling and revealed that her recantation itself was a lie: 'You know. I can tell already that you know, that everything I just said I lied about'.⁴² The producers broadcast this statement, although Duthie later stated on her Twitter account that she was aware the cameras were rolling. There was some media speculation that Duthie was under pressure from Nixon to retract her initial claims or that they had struck a financial deal for that retraction.⁴³ While some minor media and online coverage of Duthie continued, and Nixon's financial and institutional status were regularly reported on, including a violent assault on his ex-fiancée,⁴⁴ the scandal narrative wound down after it was revealed that no charges would be laid against Nixon in relation to sexual offences against Duthie.⁴⁵

Media Activisms

Although filled with twists and apparent lies at times from all parties, this scandal demonstrates some of the continuing problematic ways in which women are treated in the context of the off-field celebrity social world of elite athletes as well as how they are represented and addressed in the circumstances of a media scandal. There is a clear argument that the policies and programs intended to counter the systemic value systems regarding masculine behaviour and objectification of women such as the AFL's *Respect & Responsibility* policy⁴⁶ are ineffective in preventing some of the more alarming cases of objectification, sexual violence and forms of emotional abuse such as social exclusion of those previously invited into

the social sphere of footballers, and the mechanisms utilised to discredit the competency of a younger person to speak their view on events which impact on themselves as much as on footballers, clubs or the reputation of the league. There are, however, some grounds for considering how this specific scandal might foster some broader cultural change on gender relationality within masculine, homosocially oriented institutions. This is especially the case, given some of the new elements in how scandalous material was revealed, which include the ways in which Duthie was able to make use of digital media to speak and maintain her story, rather than rely on the more mundane and predictable narratives of the ‘wronged woman’ in traditional press environments.

The most important new element in this scandal is what we might consider Kim Duthie’s ‘media activism’, by which I mean her utilisation of both traditional and digital media forms to convey a particular politicised message, not merely her views or revelation of gossip. To define her as a media activist is to point out that her use of digital media technologies is *tactical*. For Michel de Certeau, a tactic ‘insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance...It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into “opportunities”’.⁴⁷ That is, traditionally football institutions have had some element of media control or domination of the narrative in cases of scandal management, whereas Duthie has made tactical use of their media terrain to assert her claims over footballer wrongdoings. At the same time, the use of digital media as a site through which to make her concerns known publicly can be understood as a formation similar to cultural jamming. For Mark Dery, the language which conceals and protects corporate capitalism is undone – effectively deconstructed – through the subversive promotion of a plurality of views,⁴⁸ which more recently has found its fruition in an interactive engagement of an online ‘war of information’,⁴⁹ and Duthie’s use of digital media can be

understood as an activism that presents such a plurality against the usually singular, united narrative dominated by the AFL in the management of a football sex scandal. Finally, some of the media activism here, including her initial defiance of the court order to destroy the images of Riewoldt, Dawson and Dal Santo, might be understood as a form of electronic civil disobedience.⁵⁰ Characterising her as a digital media activist is not, of course, to suggest that she is deliberately and self-consciously motivated by the same series of normative ideals that might typically encourage those we normally consider to be activists of the political and/or postmodern left. Rather, it is to point out that her actions in using digital media, the textuality of her statements, the digital recording and distribution of images are performative acts which are always out of the control of the author – the speech goes on to have a life of its own. In this perspective, her motivation and authorial intention is irrelevant, for it is in the reading, interpretation and cultural impact of her actions, distributions, digital texts and interviews that a form of media activism can be identified.

The young woman's activism has crossed both traditional media and digital/online communication. In the case of the first, she has accepted interviews and, apparently, made certain deals with the *Herald Sun* for the costs of her accommodation⁵¹ and with Channel Nine who may have paid for her *60 Minutes* interview.⁵² Indeed, it was also remarked upon that she quite expertly faced a media pack at Melbourne Airport on her return from Queensland just prior to Christmas 2010.⁵³ However, it is the speed and veracity of her use of digital tools and a range of social networking sites for conveying a message that is the more striking aspect over the period of the scandal, particularly from late 2010 until late March 2011. The young woman's use of digital media is, of course, partly generational: as a seventeen-year-old raised in a first-world Western region, she participates in a culture in which the internet has become the obvious site for a range of forms of self-expression,⁵⁴

many of which have their own codes of practice, textuality and narrative and ways of writing and speaking⁵⁵ which can at times be a performance that is self-consciously ‘notorious, obnoxious or annoying’.⁵⁶ Such expressive forms also often facilitate a peer networked culture of mutual dialogue;⁵⁷ both the mutuality and the pestering her online expressiveness produces was clearly disruptive to AFL stakeholders who had not previously encountered such communicative forms by victims or complainants in a sex scandal. At the same time, Duthie’s digital media activism mirrors some earlier feminist political actions which sought to name perpetrators of abuse as a means of restoring a construction of women’s agency.⁵⁸ In acquiring and distributing the images of St Kilda players, she not only created scandal but named those who had participated in the perpetration of her exclusion from club sociality subsequent to their understanding she was pregnant to a player. According to the *60 Minutes* interview, she had been trusted to be in footballer Sam Gilbert’s home alone during their brief relationship and at that time accessed his computer and downloaded the nude/sexual photographs that were later in 2010 posted online. She claimed that posting the images to cause embarrassment was a response to Sam Gilbert, St Kilda Football Club and the AFL for cutting contact with her and excluding her from their social activities. Feeling ‘hurt and isolated’ she stated that she was driven by power and the desire for an apology for the manner in which she was sexually used and then ostracised, cast aside.⁵⁹

Although her Facebook account was suspended as a result of the image postings,⁶⁰ she transitioned easily to other Web 2.0 sites such as YouTube and Twitter in order to continue the campaign and maintain the distribution of the images until eventually prevented from doing so further by a court order. Subsequent posts on YouTube and Twitter resulted in a significant following through which she made a number of statements highlighting the culture of objectification among celebrity Australian Rules

footballers. In December 2010, she used video site USTREAM to discuss and explain her actions and the reasons for posting the photographs online.⁶¹ At the same time, she responded to queries from people posting to her online on both Twitter and Formspring,⁶² the latter exemplifying Web 2.0 participatory culture as a question-and-answer interactive site which has been operating since late 2009, allowing users to discuss issues and link commentary to other social networking environments. Later, it was digital footage taken surreptitiously from a mobile camera of Ricky Nixon's presence in her hotel room, apparently with illegal drugs, that she was able to present to the *Herald Sun* newspaper as part of the ongoing campaign alerting the public to the ways in which Australian Rules football stakeholders act in regard to women. During her *60 Minutes* interview, it was a digital archive of emails and text messages from Ricky Nixon both wooing and threatening her that provided further evidence of the cultural problems in the treatment of women by footballers.

There is one important and very significant effect of what we can refer to as Duthie's media activism that produced a change in the discursive, historical and cultural manner in which media scandals over masculine team sportsplayers' sexuality and objectification of women play out. This is that the use of digital tools, supplemented by her interviews in broadcast news media, have provided the objectified woman at the centre of a scandal the opportunity to have voice. Regardless of motivation, Duthie's use of both digital and traditional media maintained focus on herself not as *victim* but as *complainant*, overcoming the explicit and implicit silencing that is experienced by most women involved in a masculine group sex scandal,⁶³ and ensured that the issue of ethical behaviours in terms of footballers' attitudes remains one grounded in gender relationality. This is a significant shift in how sex scandals involving elite team sportsplayers address and respond to those involved. In earlier scandals, an impressionable young woman used sexually by multiple

football players finds her own story is given little media coverage and often her reports to the police do not result in charges – that is, organised actions of masculine institutional hegemony position the woman at the centre of a sexual scandal as the absent other,⁶⁴ unable to assume the position of the speaking subject within a given discourse.⁶⁵ Without the discursive or communicative opportunity for voice, a victim of a sex scandal is thereby available to be coded either in reporting or by interpretation of readers as either the gold-digging vamp or the wronged virgin, typically the former.⁶⁶ Often, the woman in a sex scandal is only able to speak her story later, and only through banal, mundane narratives in a magazine ‘tell all’ that positions the woman as victim and the reader within the context of audiencehood for scandal,⁶⁷ but never addressed through the media engagement of an organisation or institution to which perpetrators of the scandal belong. For example, of a woman who was sexually assaulted in 2002 by up to twelve members of the Cronulla Sharks while on a pre-season tour in New Zealand – when the scandal erupted in Australia in 2009, player Matthew Johns made a statement on *The Footy Show* and discussed the anguish the incident and its revelation had put his wife through. In contrast to the concerns for Johns’ wife, the victim remains absent from the rhetoric deployed by the institution that protects the perpetrators of the act, as presenter Sarah Ferguson pointed out in her *Four Corners* documentary of the incident: ‘But neither he nor any of the players we contacted asked about Clare’.⁶⁸ In the context of finally being able to speak her story in the documentary, however, she is positioned through specific questions, editing and the standardised narrative of revelation as ‘victim’. In the case of the ‘St Kilda Schoolgirl’ incident, the discourse of footballer sex scandal has been subverted by her persistent use of digital media, circumventing the traditional and recognisable channels through which the perceived ‘vamp’ attempts unsuccessfully to tell her story ‘as victim’, effectively demanding and forcing the AFL and the club

to address her instead as 'complainant' in ways in which women in previous scandals have not been.

Again, this is not to claim Duthie is an intentional and self-conscious gender activist, although it is important to point out that her motivations should not be wholly excluded from considering the politics of the effects of her actions, as there is an identifiable politicisation of the issues of footballer treatment of women that can be teased out in her statements on motive. In an interview with journalists at Melbourne Airport on Christmas Eve, she stated the following: 'I'm not looking for money. I'm looking for a deal to tell my side of the story';⁶⁹ ensuring that her story is told in a particular way – not necessarily fully within her control, but actively disrupting the narrative of footballer sex scandal – has been central to both her motivation and the effect that her story has produced. At the same time, the impetus of her actions was known to be one of vengeance, although the key factor here is not revenge *per se*, but revenge over the ways in which she had been positioned early in the scandal. In discussing her reasons for distributing the nude photographs, she stated in a December 2010 interview with Western Australian media personality Howard Sattler: 'Basically I want the players to know how it feels to have your reputation ruined, as I had mine ruined'.⁷⁰ As importantly, her vengeance appears to have been related to her exclusion and ostracisation from the celebrity world of elite football to which she was once permitted access. As she put it of her time socialising with the players during 2010: 'I had a taste of that lifestyle and even more when I met the AFL players...It gives you that sort of buzz being around them...I just couldn't step down from being up that high'.⁷¹ Certainly it is possible to read such ostracisation and exclusion, particularly of someone who was invited into the sociality of a peer group, as acts of bullying.⁷² Arguments have been put forward, including by a former director of Essendon Football Club, that the exclusion of the young woman after her

affairs with football players was an act of mistreatment,⁷³ and one which is common to masculine, homosocial institutions in which an in-group/out-group economy actively excludes women through a range of mechanisms including the implicit and the linguistic but also the ostensible and the physical.⁷⁴ Additionally, the masculine values traditionally applied to team-based sports add a further form of automatic exclusion of women by positioning them as *other* within the context of on-field and off-field sporting engagement and masculine team bonding.⁷⁵ By intentionally combating that ostracisation, she has drawn attention to elements of bullying in the culture of masculine team sports.

At the same time, it is important to understand the transition between motivation and effect of this arguable media activism by teasing out some of the less ostensible issues of gender relationality from her statements and interviews. She has made a number of statements about the ways in which women are treated by footballers and athletes: 'I think they treat girls pathetically. It's not right at all'.⁷⁶ Importantly, the rhetoric appears almost innocent, as if a discovery rather than a rehearsal of prior utterances by those who have spoken out against the treatment of women by celebrity sportsplayers. Attending a St Kilda training session in mid-January 2011, Duthie hung a poster that read: 'RESPECT. AFL can you please spell that for me?',⁷⁷ a reference to the Aretha Franklin 1967 song 'Respect' which served as an anthem within 1970s feminist political activism. A mediation session between St Kilda Football Club and the young woman resulted in an initial arrangement for a series of mutual apologies. The mediation session was ordered by the Federal Court hearing over the release of the nude photographs, although prior to the session the young woman pointed to the inequity in the difference between requirements for herself and for the club members: 'They've said "If you apologise to Nick publicly, then we'll apologise to you privately", but if it's private it's as though they've done nothing wrong. I want them

to be public about it, that's what we're sort of trying to mediate'.⁷⁸ What is produced here is a critique of the inequity between how one is required to respond operates within a dichotomy of gender and, simultaneously, a dichotomy of the institution versus the private individual, the irony being that the private individual must apologise publicly, while the public, celebrity institution makes its contrition only in a private forum.

Maintaining public attention on herself as complainant through bypassing the traditional narratives that make public a wronged party in a sex scandal, the young woman has effectively produced a response to the ways in which exclusion and 'othering' of women occurs as well as the problematic and inequitable relationality of gender in sports institutions, prompting some women stakeholders in clubs to speak out,⁷⁹ and subverting the routine and recognisable discourse of scandal to one which has the capacity to address the issues she has raised. Ultimately, by allowing her story to be told through a matrix of partial items online that in the formation of scandal filter into news, supplemented by her own broadcast audio and video interviews, the young woman has been effective in tactically disrupting the traditional and mundane course by which such scandals play out through exclusions, de-legitimations and refusal of victim authenticity, pointing to a number of ethical gaps in the ways in which institutions respond to the complainant in a sex scandal, and opening the opportunity for exploring alternative forms of ethical engagement around the culture that makes a footballer sex scandal possible.

Public Relations and Risk Management – The Discourse of Welfare and Mental Health

Victims of rape, sexual assault and women who are objects of political and celebrity sex scandals are traditionally cast as either 'virgins' who, lacking autonomy, have been mistreated or had

their consent to sex misread and misunderstood, or as ‘whores’ who have manipulated or lied and ultimately put an ‘innocent’ perpetrator at risk.⁸⁰ In some cases both have been applied to the same subject in media discourses. Writing about the United States sex scandal involving televangelist Jim Bakker, Joshua Gamson notes that the woman involved, Jessica Hahn, was positioned by news stories and particularly claimants defending Bakker simultaneously through the dual discourses of virgin and vamp: ‘Good girl and her evil twin, trusting, naive, ruined woman and calculating, sex-drenched gold-digger, victim and vamp’.⁸¹ For the greater part, broadsheet news media in Australia represented best by the Fairfax group of online and print newspapers (*Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *Perth Now* and *Brisbane Times*) have been relatively balanced in their coverage of the ‘St Kilda Schoolgirl’ story, refusing either explicitly or implicitly to code her as either innocent victim or predator across more than eighty news articles on the topic published between May 2010 and July 2011. At the same time, articulations of wrongdoing on the part of the players has also not been made explicit in the writings of journalists, although some opinion-columnists in those papers did make statements to the effect that cultural change in the ways in which sportsplayers treat women was required.⁸² However, from articles as far back as May 2010, questions over the capacity of the young woman to tell the truth about the incidents were raised subsequent to the revelation that she had lied about her age to St Kilda players from the beginning – claiming to be nineteen years old.⁸³

Some of the shifts in the ways in which the public relations strategies of the AFL and St Kilda Football Club that occurred during the scandal may well mitigate the benefits Duthie’s activism brought to public debate. In the early stages of the scandal in May 2010 when it was known that a young woman was pregnant to a player whom she had initially met during a school visit, the AFL’s public relations strategy was to focus on

the players and the club's management of public events, with operations manager Adrian Anderson stating 'The AFL's concern in relation to this matter was whether any AFL player had acted inappropriately during the course of a school visit. This was not the case'.⁸⁴ This strategy repeats the standard approach of rejecting the opportunity to address the nature or event of the scandal, or to acknowledge the complainant, and instead focusing on how any internal investigation will ensure no wrongdoing on the part of the institution or its internal culture, and to promote the strength and solidarity of the organisation and its members.

The AFL Player's Association response to the release of the nude and sexual images of Riewoldt and Dal Santo was initially to make a defensive statement that did not mention Duthie, but instead stated that 'Players are outraged at the gross invasion of privacy committed today...They are sick and tired of being seen as "fair game" by some in the community...[and] subjected to these kinds of seemingly malicious actions'.⁸⁵ As Will Brodie put it, the St Kilda Football Club's approach to the nude photographs scandal was initially to follow '...the script: we are the wronged parties, our club is strong and united, there is no damage done, the photos were taken from Gilbert's computer without his knowledge or consent'.⁸⁶ A few days after the initial release of the images and two days after her series of radio interviews and Twitter and Formspring statements and online videos, Duthie was required to attend the Federal Court in Melbourne. Unable to represent herself at short notice while still holidaying with her parents in Queensland just before Christmas, it is St Kilda Football Club which begins to acknowledge her directly, with club vice president Ross Levin referring to her as 'a malicious troublemaker who was delighting in the distress she was causing'.⁸⁷ This is the first media statement in print in which Australian Rules football stakeholders address or acknowledge that there is a complainant at the centre of the scandal, and this is arguably the

result of the inability to maintain a clear and networked media risk management strategy leading – in a tone that appears frustrated and angry – to accusatory statements of a kind rarely witnessed in elite football teams’ professional public relations approach over the past half-decade.

As the story unfolded in late 2010, the AFL’s response to the scandal continued to shift strategy, with a renewed and more extensive focus on the young woman. Rather than silencing or ignoring, the AFL and the integrated public relations strategy of other stakeholders has repeatedly been to argue that their actions around the scandal are grounded in their concern for the ‘welfare’ of the young woman, utilising a discourse of vulnerability as a means by which to frame her and her actions. In an opinion piece in *The Age* in February 2011, Chief Executive of the Australian Football League Andrew Demetriou stated that the AFL has ‘offered her support and we have also at various stages been in contact with the Education Department, Department of Human Services Child Protection, welfare support services and Victoria Police to see what assistance they could offer’. He also stated that as ‘a vulnerable teenager, indeed child, it is her welfare that is paramount’, and that the AFL’s concern is for ‘particularly those who may not be able to help themselves, including this young girl’.⁸⁸ Subsequent reports and stories about the scandal have reiterated the AFL stance that the young woman was herself ‘vulnerable and has serious issues’,⁸⁹ indicating the initial effectiveness of the AFL’s public relations position on the scandal. During the *60 Minutes* interview and report on the incident in March 2011, Demetriou’s position that the AFL had not failed in a so-called duty of care towards the young woman was repeated: ‘Certainly not with this girl. We’ve always taken the position that the girl’s welfare is paramount. And anything we can do to assist her we’ve tried to do’.⁹⁰ The discourse of vulnerability and the welfare motif were articulated in order to justify a controversial arrangement made

between St Kilda Football Club and the young woman, in which the club would provide her with accommodation in exchange for assurances and confirmation that she had not met players from the team during their visit to her school. The club announced that the arrangement included providing housing for her for a 'few months in order for her to gain stability back into her life'.⁹¹ This new strategy, reinforcing and strengthening the statement of 'concern' thus again maintains focus upon the woman at the centre of a football sex scandal, contrasting with older approaches in which the discourse addressing a scandal centres on the damage done to the team, the game, to individual players and their families.⁹²

Effectively, this strategy is an attempt to reframe the scandal by de-legitimizing the young woman in a new way. A discourse of vulnerability here is one which articulates a victim as at risk of being wounded in some form, or having already been, and being susceptible to further hurt, lacking the resilience to avoid such exposure or weakness. It is not a response to vulnerability in either actual or philosophic terms, but a framed use of the signifier of vulnerability to do injurious damage to the reputation of a young woman in order to dispel the potency of her complaints about the behaviours towards women which stem from Australian Rules football culture. Demetriou's statement positions her not as vulnerable to the players or as a young person victimised, sexually used or objectified by the players, but as vulnerable to herself and her own actions in regard to discussing her stories at large; effectively she is depicted as an at-risk child, incapable not of responsibility but of making responsible adult decisions. Indeed, the vulnerability motif has been utilised to depict her as self-destructive, whereby the distribution of the photographs, revelations of the affair and other information shared by Duthie both online and in interviews impact on the club, individual players and stakeholders and the AFL more broadly are to be viewed as collateral damage within the perception of a young

woman who is at risk of self-annihilation. For example, subsequent to the revelation of the affair with Ricky Nixon, players whom he represented including Riewoldt, ‘were sticking by him in the belief that he had become the victim of a 17-year-old ticking time bomb’.⁹³ While press coverage of the latest stage in the scandal openly questioned the appropriateness of a player-manager either having sex with the young woman or even being unchaperoned in her hotel room, depictions of her in news-writing ostensibly draw on the broader discourse of vulnerability, with references to her as a ‘damaged 17-year-old’;⁹⁴ ‘unreliable and dangerous’;⁹⁵ in need of ‘counselling support’;⁹⁶ and ‘troubled and troublesome’.⁹⁷

Importantly, the concern-for-welfare strategy of the AFL was supported more widely, with Victoria’s Child Safety Commissioner Bernie Geary stating in late December 2010: ‘This child is in danger, this child will be left at the end of this situation as a vilified person’.⁹⁸ Alarmingly, child psychologist Michael Carr-Gregg stated in a radio interview that ‘the teenager exhibited grandiose, self-destructive behaviour indicating she had a “serious psychological problem”’.⁹⁹ In both cases, the AFL strategy was reinforced by the denotation of Duthie as a *child*, therefore sexually precocious, therefore dangerous to herself and to others. There was also clearly some need for the football club and AFL more broadly to develop a new strategy, as the legal approach was not operating to prevent the scandal from continuing or to justify their position as wronged party. As St Kilda pressed for further court orders to seek destruction of the images, club vice president Ross Levin stated that the players ‘intended to sue for damages, for breach of copyright, breach of confidence, mental distress and trespass’.¹⁰⁰ On Christmas Eve, Justice Shane Marshall responded to the request for destruction as ‘fairly draconian’, stating that he was unwilling to make an order in the teenager’s absence, indicating a lack of support by the courts for the fast-paced legal tactics to contain the scandal. In the unworkability of this approach, the discourse of

vulnerability was deployed to frame the story so as (a) to depict the organisational structure of Australian Rules football as *both* strong and caring, and (b) to de-legitimate the strength and efficacy of her complaint.

However, the utilisation of the discourse of vulnerability as a mitigation strategy that aimed to provide what Deb Waterhouse-Watson has referred to as footballers' 'narrative immunity' in sexual assault cases¹⁰¹ did not go uncontested: Beverly Knight, a former director of Essendon Football Club, condemned this approach in saying, 'I think football's tried to make her...into a nutcase and it hasn't come out in support of its policies, and it needs to do that with voices'.¹⁰² Her statement points to the ways in which the AFL distanced itself from its usual approach of maintaining focus on the strength and solidarity of its own organisation and the effectiveness of its policies; in the failure of legal mechanisms, actions to silence or ignore the young woman as complainant and the risk of the *Respect and Responsibility* policy being characterised as irrelevant and ineffective, the discourse of vulnerability was the more efficient means by which to attempt to make the young woman's statements and the issues surrounding the scandal illegitimate. Thus the utilisation of a discourse of vulnerability here is an act of wounding in itself, as it de-legitimises not just Duthie's claims but her voice.

As a public relations strategy that does more than simply refer to the young woman as a liar or a sexual predator, it rejects the more introspective option of offering to examine institutional or cultural problems in the gender relationality through which such vulnerabilities are produced. Rather, it presents the 'problem' of the scandal in neoliberal terms as an individualised one. For Foucault, a neoliberal governance framework individualises risk and vulnerability, requiring the management and mitigation of these to be handled by individuals in contrast to that which neoliberalism rejects, being the socialisation of welfare and the

collective approach to risk.¹⁰³ This acts to decouple the events of the scandal from institutional structures and the problematic culture of gender relationality within football clubs, and instead to view the issues as having arisen from the acts of individuals, cast as the result of the instability of a troubled young woman, and needing to be managed and mitigated on an individual basis. At the same time, footballers and league or club stakeholders' behaviours are also individualised: Ricky Nixon's behaviour is put down to alcohol and drug problems, much as Brendan Fevola's problems were put down to his individual gambling addiction¹⁰⁴ rather than exploring the culture of gambling among elite team sportsplayers. Importantly, there is a significant gender distinction through which this individualisation of responsibility occurs. For footballers and for Ricky Nixon, the causes are external to the body, much like the drug which is commonly perceived in contemporary culture as something 'not real' that comes into the body but can be rejected and eradicated,¹⁰⁵ or dealt with in a rehabilitation clinic. The notion that the causes of the scandal are external and eradicable was presented by Nixon as the solution to the problem of his relationship with the young woman.¹⁰⁶ But for Duthie herself, the individualised causes are presented as *internal*: her mental health and her inability to make responsible decisions. This is a discursive positioning that is strengthened by the attempt to read and depict her online YouTube video-logs (vlogs) and her short Twitter commentary as ranting and incoherent – a strategy that aims to use these as evidence of her instability rather than a particular form of online cultural expression that mirrors the ways in which many YouTube uploaders and Twitter commentators work within a particular set of codes of performance online. Her narrative of anger was, of course, presented in the framework of *digital language* and not that of the professional public relations door-stop nor in the standardised narrative form of the vulnerable victim in a scandal. By depicting her as vulnerable and allowing her 'online work' to

be read through instability and incoherence, her statements become the evidence and reinforcement for the very code by which the AFL's public relations strategy has characterised her to be read.

The Digitisation of the Public Relations of Scandal Responses

In addition to the deployment of a discourse of vulnerability as a new type of strategy that aimed to immunise the league and its players in this scandal, a second new public relations tactic used by both St Kilda Football Club and the AFL's organisational management was to follow Duthie's lead and make substantial use of digital and online tools. These were utilised specifically to mitigate the poor public perception of the club and the league that resulted from the off-field scandals over the Southern Hemisphere's summer of 2010–2011. One example of this was the production of a short AFL Media documentary on the St Kilda Saints. Produced by film-maker Peter Dickson, *The Challenge* was narrowcast on saintsfc.com.au on 23 March 2011, and available through both St Kilda Football Club and AFL websites. As Geoff Slattery explained in an online article about organising approval for the filming of *The Challenge*:

We covered our reasons for wanting to shoot St Kilda, from the inside. To show the humanities of a footy club – any footy club, not just one under pressure – to allow the players to have their say, freely, without prejudice or manipulation or spin. And to name the show *The Challenge*, a title that would cover both on-field and off-field issues.¹⁰⁷

Explicit here in the motivation behind the documentary is that traditional media processes and news values are untrustworthy or manipulative, and will particularly focus on revealing scandalous

events rather than representation of the club or its players. Secondly, it can be read in this testimonial that other persons such as the young woman making statements online can prejudice the public perception of the club and players in ways which are not palatable to its own goals of protecting the image of the 'brand'.

The Challenge is a professional piece which focuses on St Kilda's new headquarters and facilities, the role of coach Ross Lyons in overcoming the club's grand final loss of 2010 and how he has attempted to keep up motivation of the team for a future grand final win. Briefly, it addresses some of the scandals that occurred over the summer, including the behaviour of members of the club while on tour in New Zealand with a breach of curfew and misuse of prescription drugs.¹⁰⁸ The 'St Kilda Schoolgirl' scandal is alluded to only very briefly, with none of the details of the events, pregnancy or the young woman's media statement discussed. In a very brief scene, an image of the *Herald Sun's* 21 December 2010 front-page headline stating 'Saint's Naked Fury' is shown while Nick Riewoldt's voice over discusses his view that the public are smart enough not to believe 'everything that's said in different mediums'. Another scene has Sam Gilbert and Nick Riewoldt sitting together in a locker room, Riewoldt's arm around a shirtless Gilbert, both confirming that while they fell out over Gilbert's failure to delete the nude image of Riewoldt, they are now 'alright' with each other. Riewoldt commented:

Obviously there was that period at the start where there was a bit of friction, but we've got a good history together both on the Gold Coast and the same club; I don't know, I feel that if anything it's brought us closer together, we've been really honest with each other and talked about our feelings and emotions.

Although the statement makes clear the scripted form of the documentary, it is delivered in a tone of seriousness and reflection,

working within a discourse of gentle sensitivity that mitigates elements of the hypermasculinity normally associated with masculine team sports.¹⁰⁹ Hypermasculinity marks football culture as the primary form of footballer gendered identity, despite the fact that such hypermasculine performance is currently out of step with contemporary forms of normative masculine behaviour which increasingly reflect a softer, albeit still-dominant, identity no longer marked by aggression, toughness, inviolability or violence. Although there is considerable masculine homosociality in the description of Riewoldt and Gilbert discussing 'feelings and emotions', the script appears to be one designed to inoculate against the possibility of a public perception that, through the nude images of homosocial partying and the scandals over the summer, riotous hypermasculine and sexual behaviour are part of the club's culture. Ultimately, it is coach Ross Lyons who reveals the purpose of the documentary as a media mitigation strategy against the poor publicity emerging from the players' off-field activities over the summer when he states:

Understand this: whatever's been written and said, we've gone into action and we're not going anywhere. Okay, so we're in control again. We get to create and write our own story.

That is, it presents a claim to taking control of the scandal's narrative, even though this did not occur, as Duthie was ultimately more extensive in her use of digital tools to manage the narrative and ensure her capacity to speak. In using digital media as a channel for distribution, Saint Kilda Football Club returns to the traditional public relations method of addressing a sex scandal in the refusal to address or refer to the complainant, and promoting the solidarity and strength of the institution in both the on-field arena through showing how the club plans to build towards a grand final win, and in the off-field environment by demonstrating

the camaraderie and unity between team members who had been known to have fallen out through the scandal. So it is in the newer environment of digital media distribution that the traditional methods of publicly mitigating scandal occur, while in the more traditional channels of public relations interviews, press releases or responses to news media queries, a discourse of vulnerability that discredits and de-legitimises the complainant is deployed.

Conclusion: Authorising Activism and Cultural Change

The question remains as to whether there can be any change to the problematic gender relationality in the off-field social world of masculine team sports through the two shifts in the narrative of scandal – Duthie’s digital media activism and the St Kilda and AFL strategy of invoking the notion of vulnerability while shoring up through traditional discourses of solidarity. Does this open the space to work towards a new or renewed ethical position that protects those who come into contact with footballers from being used, hurt or put at risk, even if such injury is through exclusion and ostracisation? And is there any evidence that it has opened the possibility for cultural change? The St Kilda Football Club and AFL’s strategy has been effective in mitigating the scandal and the onslaught of information that occurred online through bypassing and thereby transforming the recognisable narrative of the sex scandal. At the same time, however, the media activism of the young woman has altered the structures of address and response and the ways in which a complainant in a sex scandal can be identified and articulated by working at the interface between the traditional news media and online, participatory forms of dissemination and deliberation, perhaps transforming forever the ways in which a footballer sex scandal can occur.

While the situation and the differential use of media tools will indeed change the formation of scandal, the more necessary

changes to gender relationality are less knowable, and that is because the effects of different forms of activism are not knowable in advance, particularly when that activism centres on the work of a single individual. In other words, it may be tactical in disrupting some of the structures that prevent change, but whether that produces change itself is questionable. Some years ago, a number of theorists debated Judith Butler's very brief analysis of Rosa Parks who has often been accorded responsibility for significant civil rights changes in the segregationist south of the United States by refusing, in December 1955, to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger as she had been required to do. While her activism was highly symbolic on an international scale, it has also been criticised for representing the 'heroic individualist narrative'¹¹⁰ in which a marginalised person is depicted as having had enough, refusing to comply with systemic inequities and thereby unwittingly launching a social movement. Judith Butler discusses the Rosa Parks case only very briefly, using her as an example of a form of agency: 'In laying claim to the right for which she had no prior authorization, she endowed a certain authority on the act, and began the insurrectionary process of overthrowing those established codes of legitimacy'.¹¹¹ In other words, what Butler has argued in her brief analysis is that unlike other transgressions which work within an existing system and often do not produce change as agency is typically only an effect of power and thereby constrained, Parks' transgression occurred without that cultural or institutional legitimacy; as an act, it produced its own authority. Butler has been heavily criticised for this comment, including from those who are usually well-aligned with her theoretical and political stance on subjectivity, agency and discourse. The main criticism centres on Butler's claim that Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat was itself an act of authority and not only of defiance attributed to some quality inherent in Parks' individual performance of refusal.¹¹² Critics have suggested that an element

in the activism that has been missed in Butler's analysis is that Parks herself did not simply perform her defiance in a random moment of having had enough, but that she was already active in a complex arrangement of civil rights associations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee which trained activists in civil disobedience.¹¹³ That is, her activism had prior authority through her institutional connections to other activists. Secondly, her resistance did not take place in a vacuum, as there was already a groundswell of resistance to segregation which can be seen if one looks at the specific historical conditions of possibility for such resistance.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the Civil Rights movement was already emerging with significant activity in Montgomery and other places,¹¹⁵ and there was an enhanced mobilisation of the movement in the South in the years just prior to Parks' refusal.¹¹⁶ Finally, the transformative political agency that was produced by Parks' refusal to move from her seat also involved a retrospective authority, with the activist community in Montgomery accepting Parks as 'a suitable standard-bearer' for the cause,¹¹⁷ the groundswell of which gained traction in the months and years afterwards. While Parks' activism was of enormous significance for civil rights changes, it thus was not without prior authorisation or occurred outside of the cultural shifts that were already producing that change.

I do not wish to suggest that the young woman at the centre of the St Kilda football sex scandal is by any means necessarily an activist of the same kind of importance as Rosa Parks, nor to make the claim that her online activism will produce changes as sweeping as those of the civil rights movement in the United States. But the question of the effectiveness of her activism can be understood through the critique of the individual hero that emerges in the discussion of Butler's claim around Parks' self-authorisation and agency. The young woman's activism as a complex of statements,

videos, distributions of images and broadcast interviews is an act of defiance and resistance of the ways in which women are depicted in the context of sex scandals and the ways in which women and others are treated in the environment of elite football. The form of activism is new, even though, as I have argued, it is possible to see a gender politics among her motivations which indicates at least a tacit prior authority giving the acts legitimacy, or availability to be read as legitimate and perhaps even inspiring. But the true authority of the activism will be retrospective, and only if it produces an ongoing groundswell of defiance and critique over the ways in which women are positioned within the on-field and off-field environments of elite team sports. Former Essendon Football Club director Beverley Knight's call for women stakeholders to speak out on the issue indicates at least some institutional move towards the call for an upsurge of the sort of criticism necessary to undo the mechanisms that protect masculine homosocial environments from being condemned for the ways in which women are positioned or excluded,¹¹⁸ although that call is yet to be met in any meaningful way. Duthie's actions may be contributing to that initial groundswell, but she is not producing the performative act through which there is a sudden and maintained shift in momentum towards change in Australian Rules football culture. Whether the strategy of the AFL and St Kilda Football Club in depicting the young woman as vulnerable and unstable has been enough to reduce the possibility of her becoming a standard-bearer for a cause does, of course, remain to be seen in the longer term.