As Good as the Men? A Corpus Analysis of Evaluation in News Articles about Professional Female Athletes Competing in 'Masculine' Sports

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Abstract

This study combines corpus-linguistics with Critical Discourse Analysis using a model of evaluation from Systemic Functional Linguistics (appraisal) to investigate how the Australian print media portray female athletes in male-dominated sports. Historically, researchers have noted the persistence of patriarchal discourses in media reporting of female athletes and sports. However, much of this research sits outside the discipline of linguistics and tends to focus on individual or gender-neutral sports. As such, this study expands the existing research by undertaking a mixed-method approach and focussing on a 'masculine' team sport. The landmark event of the new professional women's Australian Football League (AFLW) in 2017 presents a unique opportunity to study how female athletes entering an all-male sporting sphere are portrayed in the media. Thus, the purpose of this research is to investigate how the new AFLW competition and players are represented with respect to dominant patriarchal discourses. To undertake this research, a specialised corpus of news articles from the Herald Sun newspaper is analysed. Findings from the keyword analysis point towards a potential shift away from biased language, although the qualitative text analysis reveals a biased narrative of negative comparison to male AFL players, thus reinforcing Australian Football as a stereotypically male sporting domain.

Key words: *critical discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, gender, sports media, evaluation, systemic functional linguistics*

1. Introduction

This article uses corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how the news media cover professional female athletes participating in male-dominated sports. Not only does sport play an important role in shaping community and national identities, but the way that sports are portrayed in the media can shape and reflect cultural values and beliefs, including with respect to gender. Over the past decades, research into gender bias in sports news (e.g. Bruce 2016; Fink 2015) has consistently reported the persistence of dominant patriarchal discourses, that is 'discourses that emphasize meanings and values that assume the superiority of males' (Coates 2012: 96).

Generally, women's sports receive very little media attention compared to men's sports (see Cooky et al. 2013; Eastman and Billings 2000; French 2013; Lumby et al. 2014). When these sports do receive coverage, athletes are generally 'depicted in ways that legitimate patriarchal ideologies' (McKay and

Rowe 1987: 262), such as being stereotyped, trivialised, objectified and 'othered' (see section 2). Historically, while it has been acceptable for women to participate in 'gender-appropriate' sports such as dance or figure skating, physical contact sports, such as wrestling, football and rugby, are deemed 'masculine' and therefore inappropriate for women (Koivula 1995; 2001). Thus, the launch of the new Australian Football women's league provides a unique opportunity to investigate how the media represent female athletes who have entered a male-dominated sporting space to compete in a full-contact physical sport.

Australian Football[1] has one of the largest sporting communities across Australia and is the fourth-best attended live sporting competition across the world (Gullen 2015), a notable feat considering the sport is only played professionally in one country.[2] Since the sport first began in the late 1850s (Australian Football League 2019a), women have actively been involved as spectators, but it is not until more recent decades that young girls have had the opportunity to play in community leagues. At the professional level, Australian Football has been a male-only domain until the launch of the Australian Football League Women's (AFLW) in 2017.

This research examines media coverage around the first AFLW season in the *Herald Sun* newspaper. While studies of gender bias in sports news reporting is an area rich in research, the majority of this has been undertaken outside the discipline of linguistics (see Ismail 2017 for a comprehensive overview). At the time of undertaking this study, there were no other existing linguistic studies of gender bias in sports reporting which focussed specifically on AFLW. Therefore, this research investigates how AFLW and its players are represented in the sports media in terms of previously identified patriarchal discourses (see section 2) for the 12-month period surrounding the 2017 inaugural season. I am specifically interested in whether these existing discourses are evident in the AFLW corpus, and if there are any notable similarities or differences in reporting before and after the season has been played. To undertake this research, I combine corpus linguistics (CL) with text analysis of evaluative language using a model of evaluation (i.e. appraisal) from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Appraisal is useful here as it provides an analytical framework to investigate how evaluative language is "deployed to construe power and solidarity" (Martin and White 2005: 32) such as with respect to patriarchal discourses. Appraisal analysis allows insights into the different attitudes towards and evaluation of participants within a text, and how such use of language establishes a relationship between the writer and their intended audience in relation to shared values (Martin and Rose 2007). See section 2 and 3 for further explanation of appraisal analysis as it pertains to the study of patriarchal discourses in this research.

Given that linguistic studies of gender bias in sports reporting that combine corpus linguistics with Critical Discourse Analysis are quite limited (see for example: Aull and Brown 2013; Caple 2013; Ismail 2017; Jaworska and Hunt 2017), this research also aims to contribute to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by introducing a mixed method approach to investigate gender bias in sports news. Critical Discourse Analysis provides an ideal framework for this study as it views language as a social practice, therefore 'both reflecting and

producing ideologies' (Baker et al. 2008: 280), such as biased views of female athletes participating in 'masculine' sports as presented in the media.

Section 2 follows with a review of the relevant literature on patriarchal discourses in sports reporting. Section 3 outlines the data collection and corpus construction process, as well as providing an overview of the analytical approach. Section 4 presents and discusses the results according to the dominant patriarchal discourses outlined in section 2. Finally, section 5 summarises the findings, provides suggestions for further research, and makes conclusions about gender bias in Australian sports reporting.

2. *Patriarchal Discourses in Sports Reporting*

Historically, researchers have consistently reported the persistence of pervasive gender bias and stereotypes used in news reporting of female sports and athletes, that is, the dominance of 'patriarchal discourses' (e.g. Bruce 2016; Ismail 2017; McKay and Rowe 1987). Despite a more recent increase in both female participation in sport and a public interest in watching women's sports (Bolt 2017; Jenkins 2017; Schirato 2013), scholars generally agree that 'sporting activities and athleticism' are still largely associated with men (Schirato 2013: 78). While a handful of more recent studies suggest there could be a potential shift towards a more balanced representation of female athletes in the media, these studies tend to focus on a gender-neutral sport such as track and field (King 2007), have a dataset restricted to news headlines (Caple 2013), or are situated in the context of a university environment (MacKay and Dallaire 2009) or a global sporting event such as the Olympics where emphasis on national pride may override gender biases (Jaworska and Hunt 2017; Wensing and Bruce 2003). In fact, Jaworska and Hunt (2017) point out that the gains made in reporting on women's sport during the Olympics are not necessarily carried through to the reporting in the following (non-Olympic) years.

From this body of research emerges a set of dominant patriarchal discourses, which I will explain in turn as they are relevant to this research. While the discursive practices discussed are prevalent across the literature, they are sometimes named or categorised differently depending on how the researcher has approached the analysis. As such, for this research I use the naming conventions which are described below, in line with Ismail (2017) and Caple (2013) (for objectification, trivialisation and stereotyping), as well as Aull and Brown (2013) (for othering and aspects of stereotyping). Where appropriate, I also make connections between each of the discourses to the relevant appraisal (evaluative) category, even though such connections are not made in the original (often non-linguistic) literature. Explanations of these appraisal categories are integrated in the discussion of the discourses, where relevant.

Objectification occurs through overt, and often sexualised, focus on a female athlete's physical appearance, with these women presented as objects for the male gaze, rather than as legitimate athletes (e.g. Bernstein 2002; Billings et al. 2005; Bruce 2016; Daddario 1997; Messner et al. 1993; Ponterotto 2014). In print media, this can occur through 'sexualised language' used to depict an athlete (Caple 2013: 273), such as suggestive descriptions of

body parts or comments about the clothing worn by the player both on and off the sporting field (Ponterotto 2014). In terms of appraisal, objectification would be considered 'appreciation', which deals with attitudes towards the value and composition of 'things', including objects (such as body parts) and performances (such as a sports game) (Martin and Rose 2007). While a handful of recent studies have found less sexualised portrayals of female athletes, these tend to focus on photographs (French 2013) and headlines (Caple 2013), special events such as the Olympics (Jones 2004) or do not analyse Australian data (Ismail 2017; King 2007; MacKay and Dallaire 2009). Further, none of these include media coverage of AFLW.

Trivialisation occurs when female athletes' abilities and achievements are downplayed or are presented as secondary to aspects of their personal lives (e.g. Cooky et al. 2013; Daddario 1997; Lee 1992; Ponterotto 2014). For example, female athletes have been portrayed as less capable than their male counterparts, with their sporting successes attributed to (good) luck rather than hard work and ability (Billings et al. 2005; Billings et al. 2014; Duncan and Messner 1998). Further, when athletes experience failures, this is often attributed to bad luck for males (e.g. *it was an unlucky game*), but to a lack of experience, skill, or mental and physical composure for females (Billings et al. 2014; Duncan and Messner 1998). Such evaluation of player ability would be considered negative 'judgement', an evaluative category associated with people's character, including their behaviour and capability (Martin and Rose 2007), whereas evaluation of a sporting performance would be 'appreciation'.

Trivialisation can also occur through **infantilisation**, that is, the overt use of the term *girl/s* to refer to adult women (e.g. Fink 2015; Jaworska 2016; Jaworska and Hunt 2017; Jones 2004; Koivula 1999; MacKay and Dallaire 2009; Messner et al. 1993; Ponterotto 2014; Sabo and Curry Jansen 1992). Researchers argue that this undermines their athletic achievements (Jones 2004), thereby relegating women to a 'subordinate status' (Holmes and Sigley 2000: 258), in the sporting domain. However, other researchers argue this could also be used as an in-group identifier (Holmes and Sigley 2000: 260), such as between players, or to establish a connection with the audience (Wensing and Bruce 2003). It is thus crucial to consider who is using the term and how it is being used in order to understand whether such usage can be considered subordinating.

Stereotyping occurs when female athletes are depicted in terms of traditional gender roles and ideologies, which reinforce 'appropriate' femininity (e.g. Bruce 2016; Daddario 1997; Wensing and Bruce 2003). For example, Aull and Brown (2013: 49) found that female basketball players involved in a fight were collectively chastised for their 'unladylike behaviours' (i.e. fighting). Additionally, research has also found that media preference is given to female athletes in heterosexual relationships (Bruce 2016), with focus often placed on their domestic roles as wife, girlfriend or mother (e.g. Cooky et al. 2013; Daddario 1997; Messner et al. 2010; Ponterotto 2014). Those who challenge gender norms are often ignored by the media, or 'subjected to pejorative coverage' (Vincent 2004: 444). Further, female athletes are also depicted as being emotional (e.g. Crolley and Teso 2007; Ismail 2017; Jones 2004; Kaskan and Ho 2016; Vincent 2004), whereas males are described in terms of their strength and athleticism (Angelini and Billings 2010). In

appraisal, emotions are considered 'affect', and can be identified as a mental state (e.g. *excited*) or behaviour (e.g. *crying*) (Martin and Rose 2007).

Gendered 'othering' occurs when male athletes and men's sports are positioned as the ideal or norm, with their female counterparts sidelined or consistently framed in terms of gender (Aull and Brown 2013). Othering can discursively occur through asymmetrical gender marking where female athletes and sports are referred to by gender but males are not e.g. *the best **female** basketball player* compared to *the best [male] basketball player*, or **Women's** *World Cup* compared to *World Cup* (Billings 2007; Crolley and Teso 2007; Duncan and Messner 1998; Fink 2015; Ismail 2017; Messner et al. 1993). Othering can also occur through more general comparisons to male athletes and men's sports (Bruce 2016). For example, Eastman and Billings (2002: 208) found that while female athletes are compared to men, male athletes are compared to mythical figures of power, thereby positioning them as the 'prototypical athlete'.

Combined, these patriarchal discourses consistently position female athletes as inferior to their male counterparts (Kaskan and Ho 2016), while reinforcing the idea that the sporting domain is 'by men for men' (Schirato 2013: 78). While some studies have identified less biased representations in some areas (e.g. Caple 2013, 2016; French 2013; Ismail 2017; King 2007; Lumby et al. 2014; MacKay and Dallaire 2009; Wensing and Bruce 2003), there is no denying that the media have historically and consistently disseminated 'strongly masculine', i.e. patriarchal, discourses (Schirato 2013: 78).

This research is thus situated in a context where the media have been criticized for perpetuating gender bias in sports reporting. Much of the literature discussed above, while relevant to this research with respect to identifying discursive practices of gender bias leading to patriarchal discourses, is situated outside the discipline of linguistics (exceptions include: Aull and Brown 2013; Caple 2013; Ismail 2017; and Jaworska and Hunt 2017, all of which combine corpus approaches with discourse analysis to study gender representations in the sports media). Further, many of these studies tend to take a quantitative approach, often using (manual) content analysis, and thus focusing only on instances of bias as identified through repetition of descriptors. While a quantitative approach has its strengths, extending the analysis through qualitative text analysis allows for a deeper analysis of patterns identified from the quantitative analysis (see for example Baker et al. 2008 or Hardt-Mautner 1995 for discussion on the strengths of combing CL with CDA). As such, this research aims to expand the existing literature by combining corpus linguistics with text analysis of appraisal to investigate evaluation in sports news reporting of AFLW with respect to previously documented patriarchal discourses. Corpus linguistic techniques are used to identify patterns of potential gender bias which are then investigated for evidence of patriarchal discourses. Appraisal analysis is employed to investigate the attitudes towards AFLW athletes as expressed through the news articles with respect to these discourses. Thus, this investigation into how female athletes who are entering a male-dominated sporting space such as Australian Football are portrayed in the news media will both expand the literature through linguistic analysis and add to our understanding of the media's role in reinforcing or rejecting stereotypically gendered portrayals.

3. Data and Methodology

To undertake this research, I built a specialised corpus of AFLW news articles sourced from the print edition of the *Herald Sun* newspaper for the 12-month period commencing June 2016. This period was chosen to coincide with the announcement of the new league and extends three months past the inaugural 2017 season. The *Herald Sun* was selected as the most widely read print newspaper in Australia for both 2016 and 2017 (Roy Morgan 2018).[3] It is also the leading newspaper in terms of volume of coverage of women's sport (Lumby et al. 2014: 103). Based in Victoria, where AFL originated and is still largely situated, the *Herald Sun* provides extensive coverage of the men's league and its players throughout the year, so it stands to reason that this should also be the case for the women's league.

That the *Herald Sun* reports on AFL throughout the year, not just during the season, is especially pertinent here, as my interest is in how AFLW is reported year-round across a range of news genres. Previous research into Australian sports reporting has found that in match-related news items, male and female athletes are depicted similarly (Caple 2016) with focus largely on the outcome of games (Sherwood et al. 2019). Caple (2016: 244) suggests, however, that these more equitable representations may be a 'unique feature of match reporting' and that further research into other genres of sports reporting is necessary. Another study of news reporting before, during and after the Olympics found that collocates of *woman* pointing to appearance (objectification) and gender roles (stereotyping) are more likely to occur before and after the Games have been played (Jaworska and Hunt 2017: 350-1) i.e. outside of the relevant sporting event. As such, my dataset excludes articles published during the season (4 February – 24 March 2017), because this not only helps to avoid overrepresentation of match-related items, but also allows for diachronic comparison of representations of players before and after the season is played.

News articles were collected from Factiva, an online database, using a search string that combines the official league name — both in full and abbreviated —with other common references to the new league.[4] Common references to the league were identified through manual analysis of selected news articles published between the announcements of the new league (in June 2016) and the league name (in September 2016), and then refined via targeted searches in Factiva. It is, however, acknowledged that not all articles focusing on AFLW may have been captured, such as those which only use player or team names, or reference the league indirectly.

In total, 235 news articles were collected across a range of sports news genres such as profile, feature, preview and opinion pieces (following categories from Andrews 2005 and Caple 2016). In corpus-based CDA, it is fairly common for specialised topic-based corpora to include a genre mix (see: Aull and Brown 2013; Bailey and McCrossin 2016; Baker 2014: 9-10; Baker et al. 2012; O'Halloran 2010). The articles in this corpus would largely be considered 'soft news' (Bednarek and Caple 2012: 189) or 'issues-based' news (Caple, 2016: 213) along with opinion pieces, all of which are likely to include more appraisal than 'hard news' genres (Bednarek and Caple 2012).

The AFLW corpus is split into two sub-corpora: AFLW-B, comprising articles published before the inaugural season, and AFLW-A, comprising articles published after the season (see Table 1). A reference corpus of Australian news articles sourced from News on the Web 'NOW' corpus (Davies, 2013) for the same time period is also used. The corpus design and data collection process is further detailed in Kemble (2019).

Corpus	Description	No. of texts	Word tokens
AFLW-B	Before the season (1 June 2016 - 3 Feb 2017)	164	65,840
AFLW-A	After the season (25 March - 31 May 2017)	71	22,016
AFLW	All articles before and after the season	235	87,856

Table 1. Overview of the AFLW corpora

The analytical approach used is a combination of corpus linguistics and qualitative text analysis of appraisal. Corpus analysis allows patterns, or discourses, to be identified across a range of texts (Baker 2006), which can then be further explored through analysis of selected individual texts. The main corpus techniques used are keywords and concordances. **Keywords** are those words which are unusually more frequent in one dataset compared to another (Baker 2006); that is, they are 'statistically salient in some way' (Baker and McEnery 2015: 5). **Concordance lines** present the surrounding text occurring before and after the keyword in question, that is, the co-text (Hunston 2011). The concordance tool allows the lines of text to be sorted in a number of ways, thus allowing for exploration of patterns of language use, and is "one of the most effective techniques" for identifying dominant discourses in a corpus (Baker 2006: 71). The corpus tool used here is AntConc (Anthony 2018).

The qualitative text analysis focusses on the interpersonal discourse semantic system of appraisal, situated within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Appraisal is concerned with interpersonal relationships – such as between a writer and their intended audience – as they are realised through language, and comprises three domains: attitude, graduation, and engagement (Martin and Rose 2007; Martin and White 2005). My primary focus is on attitude, which deals with the expression of emotions ('affect'), evaluation of character i.e. people's actions or beliefs ('judgement'), and evaluation of things, both physical and abstract ('appreciation') (Martin and Rose 2007). Appraisal analysis allows us to understand the stance or views of the 'speaker' (in this case, the newspaper) towards the participants in the text (the athletes), and how those values may align, or not, with existing patriarchal discourses.

When conducting text analysis of appraisal, we need to consider not only the evaluative item, but the target and source of the evaluation as well. In appraisal (attitude), if the target of evaluation is a person, this is considered judgement, and if the target is an entity, this is considered appreciation (Martin and Rose 2007). Affect is coded when the source of the evaluative

item is described as expressing an emotion, e.g. *I am **excited** to watch the game; I **love** playing football,* etc. Further, appraisal can be either direct ('inscribed') or implied ('invoked') (Martin and White 2005: 68). When performances, such as a sports game, are the target, evaluations technically fall into the category of appreciation. However, when such a sports performance is appreciated, this also implies judgement of the athlete(s) giving the performance. How to code such cases is an area of debate in appraisal. Take for example the statement *the team played fantastic.* Martin and White (2005: 67) state that in such a case, one type of appraisal invokes (implies) the other, i.e. the team is directly judged and the game is implicitly appreciated. Bednarek (2009) builds on this idea to propose an alternative approach whereby the logical connection (metonymic relationship) between the player and their performance is recognised, i.e. while the players are judged, the performance is also metonymically appreciated. While I primarily follow the conventions of Martin and Rose (2007), I occasionally draw on Bednarek's (2009: 116) description of 'metonymically implicated' attitude.

The starting point for analysis was the keywords. Three keywords lists were generated using AntConc (Anthony 2018). First, the full AFLW corpus was compared to the subset of the NOW corpus, using a p-value of 0.001 (Log Likelihood 4-term 10.83). Then, the two AFLW sub-corpora – A and B – were compared to each other using a p-value of 0.01 (Log Likelihood 4-term 6.63) as the previously used p-value yielded too few results. A frequency cut-off of 5 was applied to all three lists. This frequency threshold was arrived at after some trial. Five was deemed high enough to elicit words that potentially occur across a number of texts, and low enough to still have enough words to analyse while not being too time consuming to review manually.

In total, 698 keywords were generated for AFLW, 108 keywords for AFLW-B, and 110 keywords for AFLW-A. Each of these lists was then manually reviewed to better understand the 'aboutness' of the corpus, that is, the overall thematic contents of the corpus (Scott and Tribble 2006). In general, all three corpora include words relating to the Australian Football competition, gameplay, and key players, as well as other sports. The AFLW-B sub-corpus also focuses on money (*earn, insurance, million, pay*) whereas AFLW-A tends to focus more on player movement between clubs (*agency, deals, exchange, picks, sign/ed, traded*).

Each list was then manually reviewed a second time, in order to identify and categorise keywords pointing to potential evidence for or against the presence of patriarchal discourses (see Table 2). For example, *hands* and *wear* were classified as 'body parts and clothing' and could point to evidence of objectification.

Patriarchal discourse	AFLW	AFLW-B	AFLW-A
Objectification	*acl, eye, fair, fairest, jumper, knee, pretty, spine, wear*	*hands, head, wear*	-
Trivialisation: ability & achievement	*athlete, award, awards, best, brownlow, elite, fair, fairest, fast, flags, honours, job, medallist, mvp, nominated, skilful, skill, skills, speed, star, stars, success, talent, talented, versatile, versatility, winner*	*elite, fast, speed*	*award, awards, best, champion, fairest, final, gold, grand, honours, star, top, valuable*
Trivialisation: infantilisation	*boys, girl, girls*	*girls*	
Stereotyping: domesticity & sexuality	*age, born, brother, carer, childhood, dad, daughter, father, gay, job, kiss, marriage, marry, midwife, mum, sex, sister, twin, twins, young*	*parents*	*gay, human, kiss, marriage, married, normal, sex, transgender, wife*
Stereotyping: emotions & athleticism	*athlete, endurance, excited, excitement, grateful, happy, hope, love, loved, powerhouse, fitness, strong, tough, tall, want*	*exciting, good, hope*	*disappointing*
Gendered othering	*aflw, aflw's, boys, female, females, gender, girl, girls, male, men, men's, vwfl, w, wawfl, wbbl, wnba, wnbl, women, women's, wvfl*	*girls, men's, women's*	*AFLW, transgender, w, WNBA*

Table 2. Categorisation of keywords pointing to patriarchal discourses

Concordance analysis was then undertaken to investigate how the identified words in Table 2 are used in their co-text and whether any evaluation or patriarchal discourses were evident. In some cases, it was necessary to go to the paragraph or full news article. Appraisal analysis was then undertaken where there was evidence of evaluation. For example, evaluation of a player's appearance or body would be considered appreciation in appraisal terms and could be linked to objectification (see section 2). Section 4 explains the results for the different categories in Table 2 in detail.

4. Results

In this section, I present the findings of the keyword and text analysis with respect to each of the four patriarchal discourses described in section 2. I discuss results across the whole AFLW corpus, as well as any significant differences or similarities between the two sub-corpora, providing examples to highlight key findings.[5]

4.1 Objectification

Keywords related to body parts, clothing, and physical appearance were identified in the AFLW corpus as well as the AFLW-B sub-corpus (see Table 3). No relevant keywords were identified in the AFLW-A sub-corpus.

Corpus	Keywords	Keyness	Raw Frequency	Normalised Frequency[6]
AFLW	*fairest*	+316.25	41	4.29
	jumper	+39.97	10	1.05
	knee	+27.66	17	1.77
	fair	+26.13	28	2.93
	acl	+20.11	7	0.73
	pretty	+12.63	34	3.55
	spine	+12.52	5	0.52
	wear	+11.33	12	1.25
	eye	+11.26	17	1.77
AFLW-B	*hands*	+8.85	15	2.2
	head	+7.08	12	1.76
	wear	+7.08	12	1.76
AFLW-A	-	-	-	-

Table 3. Keywords potentially pointing to objectification

While these words indicate a focus on players' appearance, when viewed in their co-text there is no evidence of overt objectification, with focus instead on uniforms, injuries and gameplay. Those keywords related to clothing are used in relation to player uniforms (e.g. *football jumper, wear a helmet, wear the Dogs jumper, wear [socks] low*) with no evidence of sexualisation. Further, the keywords *knee, acl, head, hands* and *eye* generally refer to injuries sustained by the players or general gameplay (e.g. *a head knock, over my head*), with no overt evidence of the players being objectified. The keyword *pretty* in all instances is used as an intensifier (e.g. *pretty amazing, pretty awesome, pretty special, pretty strenuous, pretty stressful, pretty tough*), with no references to player appearance. Neither are *fairest* or *fair* used to describe physical appearance; *fairest* is used in relation to awards so will be discussed in section 4.2, and *fair* is used in the sense of equitable, largely in relation to deals and pay. However, both *hands* and *eye* do show some evidence of evaluation, so further analysis was undertaken, which will now be discussed.

Hands are an integral part of playing AFL; players catch and pass the ball to their teammates, so there is a logical connection between a player's body and their ability to perform, and thus the potential for appraisal.

1	noted for her doggedness and clean	**hands**. 35 Bianca Jakobsson Age: 23
2	role. Noted for her strength and clean	**hands**. 10 Sarah Jolly Age: 25 Hgt:
3	and never shies from a contest. Clean	**hands** and is accurate by foot. Has
4	assessment? "She goes all right, good	**hands**, kicks both sides, good
5	or be sent down back. Has good	**hands**. 28 Jessica Anderson Age: 19
6	" he said. "She read it well, good	**hands**, good decisions, good vision."
7	all day and has an incredible set of	**hands**. Kicked 30 goals last year for
8	Eastern Devils. Brilliant kick, strong	**hands**. 31 Dayna Cox Age: 23 Hgt: 1

Figure 1. Concordance lines for *hands*

Most instances in Figure 1 can be analysed one of two ways. First, the target of evaluation could be *hands,* which are evaluated as *clean, good*, etc. In appraisal, body parts are considered objects. This thus provides an example of direct appreciation, with possible objectification. However, if we consider the target to be the player who is evaluated as having *clean hands, good hands,* etc., this would be considered direct judgement as it is (idiomatically) evaluating the player's capacity. It is clear that *clean/good/strong hands* is a very domain-specific unit of appraisal; having *clean hands* does not mean that the player's hands are not dirty, for example, but rather that they are dexterous in the gameplay. This therefore raises the question of whether it is the body part that is being evaluated (appreciation), or the player's ability (judgement). These instances could be considered either 'inscribed' appreciation and 'invoked' judgement, or vice versa. Following Bednarek (2009), all instances could also be described as 'metonymically implicated' appraisal because of the logical connection between the hands and the player who uses them skilfully in her athletic performance. Regardless of this classificatory issue, these examples show no evidence of objectification of players despite the presence of appraisal. Rather, there is contrasting evidence of athletes being positively evaluated for their skill.

Moving to the keyword *eye*, analysis of the co-text shows that it is largely used in a figurative sense. For example, the new season is described as *eye-catching*, and the skills and performance of players are noted to have *caught the eye* of recruiters. There are two instances which are used to directly evaluate a player's appearance:

(1)   COLLINGWOOD MOANA HOPE 28, full-forward St Kilda Sharks (WVFL) Day job: Traffic operations manager. Tattoos take the eye [-appreciation] but forward-line heroics in the air and on the ground are no gimmick. (BPRF07-2)

(2)   Richelle Cranston Age: 27 Hgt: 171cm Forward. Another player from Geelong, this one with a gridiron background. Her dreadlocks catch the eye [+/-appreciation], as does her pace. Can find the goals, play midfield or even take a turn in the ruck. (BPRF02-06)

Both examples show some evidence of implied evaluation of player appearance through the metaphorical use of *eye,* together with the verbs *take/catch,* but the co-text is required for further clarification. In (1), Hope's tattoos are implicitly evaluated as being negative [-appreciation] through both the concessive *but* and the following co-text which implies that the tattoos are a gimmick. This implicit evaluation of her tattoos may also set an expectation

for the reader that Hope as an AFLW athlete may also be 'a gimmick'. The use of concessive *but* then indicates a countering of this negative expectation that has been created for the reader (Martin and Rose 2007: 57). Hope's *forward-line heroics* are described as *no gimmick* [+appreciation], thus implying that her on-field performance ('*heroics*') is the result of athletic ability [+judgement]. In (2), the evaluative unit *catch the eye* is ambiguous, but it is clear there are two targets of evaluation: *dreadlocks* and *pace*, which both *catch the eye*. The wider co-text provides evidence of implied positive evaluation of the player's on-field capabilities (*Can find the goals, play midfield or even take a turn in the ruck.*) [+judgement].

In summary, there is no evidence of the discourse of objectification found through the text analysis of the keywords identified in Table 2. While there are references to players' body parts, these are not sexualised. Additionally, the text analysis reveals a possible moving away from the discourses of trivialisation and stereotyping, with largely positive evaluations of player ability and athleticism, which will be further explored in the following sections (4.2 and 4.3).

4.2 Trivialisation

Trivialisation is discussed in relation to player ability and achievement, as well as infantilisation through the use of *girl/s*.

4.2.1 Ability and achievement

A number of keywords related to ability and achievements were identified, all of which are inherently positive (i.e. *skilful* is present but *unskilful* is not), with no keywords related to luck or failure. In the AFLW corpus, *fairest* has the highest keyness (+316.25) followed by *talent* (+215.61) and *best* (+124.65). When viewed in co-text, both *fairest* and *best* largely come from the AFLW-A sub-corpus and are used in the context of awards e.g. *best-and-fairest winner*. In fact, the keywords before the season largely relate to ability and those after the season to achievements (see Table 2). This indicates a shift in the reporting, from focussing on whether these athletes were capable and skilful before the season, to an acknowledgement of their value afterwards. In comparison, *talent* is found across the AFLW corpus and is used to describe the athletes (e.g. *the best female talent in the country; the talent pool; fresh talent from the October draft*), as well as a quality to be possessed (e.g. *her obvious talent; the talent and passion shown*). All instances of evaluative *talent* in co-text are positive, thus positioning the players as capable athletes.

Text analysis of these keywords also reveals direct comparisons made between the female athletes and their male counterparts. For example, looking at the lemma SKILL (in bold below) there are five such instances of explicit comparison to the men, all of which include evaluation of the female athletes:

(3) THE lowest standard country seconds team displays better **skill** levels than the girls did on Saturday night. Damo, Shepparton (BOLT09-3)

(4) "I can really see Melbourne over the summer months, after-work games and mixed games as more women become natural with the

> **skills** that boys have grown up with in the schoolyard," he said. (BFTR09-8)

(5) Some women players already display the **skills** that will make them likely household names. (BOED06-2)

(6) They showed us that they can handle a football just as gracefully and **skilfully** as men and the Australian community turned on their TVs in droves: ratings showed it was the most watched Saturday night AFL game of the season. (BOCL10-2)

In these examples, the male players are positioned as the point for comparison, with the women often falling short of the mark. In (3) and (4) the women's abilities are unfavourably compared to the 'lowest standard country seconds team' and schoolyard boys. Both examples appraise the AFLW players negatively [-judgement], although (3) is explicit whereas (4) is conveyed more implicitly. These examples not only trivialise the women's capabilities as professional athletes, but also provide evidence of gendered othering. Example (5) initially appears to be direct positive evaluation of skills [+judgement] but closer reading of the co-text (*some players*) reveals implied negative judgement of other players. This example also provides evidence of othering through the (arguably unnecessary) gendered tagging of 'women players', as compared to 'players'. Only (6) provides an explicitly positive evaluation [+judgement] of the women's abilities to *handle a football* which is described as being on par (*just as gracefully and skilfully*) with the men's ability.

While the keyword results initially point to a positive, athletic portrayal of AFLW players' abilities and achievements, the text analysis reveals some negative evaluation, often in direct comparisons to male athletes. It seems then that in the context of AFLW (i.e. the women's league) the players are positively described with no evidence of trivialisation. However, in the context of Australian Football more generally, the (female) players are often negatively evaluated, with their abilities trivialised in comparison to the (ideal) male players. These comparisons provide evidence of trivialisation as well as gendered othering, thereby reinforcing professional Australian Football as preferably male.

4.2.2 Infantilisation

Initially, there appears to be strong evidence of infantilisation, with *girl/s* occurring a total of 142 times in the AFLW corpus, with a very high keyness score for the pluralised form *girls* (+480.38). When comparing the two sub-corpora *girls* does not appear as a keyword in either, thus indicating relative similarity in use both before and after the season. Interestingly, *boys* also appeared as a keyword in the AFLW corpus, though with a much lower raw frequency and keyness than *girls* (see Table 4).

Keyword	Keyness	Raw Frequency
girls	+480.38	122
girl	+19.31	20
boys	+20.54	20
boy[7]	n/a	6

Table 4. Keyness and frequency for *girl/s* and *boy/s* in the AFLW corpus

The concordance lines were then consulted to investigate whether these terms refer to adults or children. The analysis reveals that while both *girl/s* and *boys* largely refer to children (see Table 5), in 35% of cases *girl/s* is still being used to refer to adults, thus pointing towards potential evidence of infantilisation. The use of *boy/s* in co-text is always as a reference point for girls' opportunities in the sport, thus providing additional evidence of comparison in the Australian Football sporting domain, even at the youth levels.

	girl/s		*boys*	
Reference to...	Raw Freq.	Percent	Raw Freq.	Percent
children (under 18)	86	60%	21	97%
adults (18+)	49	35%	3	2%
unclear	7	5%	2	1%

Table 5. Referents of *girl/s* and *boys* in the AFLW corpus

The text analysis reveals that singular *girl* is often used to refer to children (e.g. *little girl, the only girl*), though there are some cases of adult referents as well (e.g. *country girl, poster girl, heavily tattooed girl*). For those uses of *girl/s* where the target is an adult, the full text was also analysed to identify the source, i.e. who is using these terms. In fact, most instances of *girl/s* (55%) are used by the players themselves to refer to other players, for example (in bold):

(7) "Everything is outside work hours because all the **girls** are working," [Alison] Downie said. (BFTR102)

(8) "We're trying **girls** in different positions ... we were trying new things today. We'll take a lot out of that." [Demons midfielder Elise O'Dea said] (BFTR01-2)

(9) "Some of these **girls** have become some of my best mates," [Alicia Eva] said in accepting the award. (AFTR05-7)

(10) There will be a whole new pool of **girls** come draft time and it will all get bigger and better. [Karen Paxman] (AOCL04-1)

Other notable sources include AFL executives (14%) and letters from the public (12%). There are two instances of negative appraisal, both coming from reader letters, with all other evaluative instances providing positive appraisal of players. Additionally, analysis of the co-text surrounding *girl/s* reveals further examples of the discourse of gendered othering through direct comparison to the men's game.

While the keywords *girl/s* initially point to the discourse of infantilisation, the text analysis reveals that the majority of instances are coming from the players themselves. Therefore, it must also be considered that the use of *girl/s* by the players could be functioning as an 'in-group' identifier (Holmes and Sigley 2000: 260) to establish solidarity within teams and with the audience (Wensing and Bruce 2003). However, we must also consider the selection of these quotes by the journalists over other quotes which may not use *girls*. Further research, including comparison to a corpus of men's AFL sports news, is needed before extrapolating any wider conclusions.

4.3 Gender Stereotypes

The findings for gender stereotypes are discussed in relation to domestic roles and heterosexual relationships, as well as player emotions and athleticism.

4.3.1 Domesticity and heterosexuality

The keyword results indicate a focus on familial relationships (*daughter, dad, mum, sister, father, brother*) across the AFLW corpus, whereas keywords for sexual relationships (*marriage, gay, kiss, sex, married*) are largely found in the AFLW-A corpus (see Table 6).

Corpus	Keywords	Keyness	Raw Frequency
AFLW-B	-	-	-
AFLW-A	*marriage*	+74.81	30
	gay	+63.68	23
	sex	+50.58	21
	kiss	+30.45	11
	wife	+30.45	11
	married	+13.84	5
AFLW	*marriage*	+54.73	31
	daughter	+53.18	32
	dad	+50.58	24
	gay	+45.93	23
	kiss	+39.22	11
	mum	+31.49	20
	sister	+21.95	16
	father	+20.61	27
	brother	+18.69	18
	sex	+16.52	22

Table 6. Keywords related to personal relationships

The keywords in Table 6 point to potential evidence of players being stereotyped in traditional heterosexual roles as wives and girlfriends (of males) (*marriage, wife, married*) as well as mothers and caretakers (*daughter, mum, sister, brother*). The presence of *gay*, however, indicates a possible shift away from the historical media preference given to heterosexual athletes (Bruce 2016). In fact, analysis of the co-text reveals this word is frequently found along with the other keywords for sexual relationships in

relation to one specific event. At the end-of-season awards ceremony, one of the players kissed her wife (also a player) upon being named an award recipient. This moment took place in the context of the marriage equality debate in Australian politics and was thus widely reported on by the media. While initially, this may appear to be a positive shift away from the media focus on heterosexual athletes, given the political context in which this occurred, it could also simply be a case of what was considered newsworthy at that time. While it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss this in detail, the kiss itself is generally reported on neutrally, with attitudes in editorial columns and letters towards same-sex relationships and the legalisation of same-sex marriage varying widely in the corpus.

Turning now to those words related to familial relationships, analysis of the co-text reveals over half the instances of *mum* are from player quotes talking about their own parents, often in conjunction with their *dad* and/or *father*. In total, only 4 instances (<1%) refer to players as mums. The use of *daughter*, however, differs. The co-text reveals that these athletes are positioned by the media in relation to their well-known fathers, instead of acknowledging these athletes in their own right (see Figure 2).

1	Co-captain is a	**daughter** of former Magpie Greg Phillips
2	at the Herald Sun, said his	**daughter** was living her dream.
3	Long's	**daughter** waits on the Dons
4	MICHAEL Long's	**daughter** has turned down playing offers
5	GEELONG'S Lily Mithen,	**daughter** of media personality Anthony,
6	Carlton, as will Breann Moody,	**daughter** of former top horse trainer
7	to knock it back." Sheahan,	**daughter** of former Herald Sun chief
8	knew was that I was "Sheahan's	**daughter**". At the start of last year,
9	Best-on-ground Phillips, the	**daughter** of Port Adelaide great Greg,
10	be a support cast for Phillips, the	**daughter** of Port Adelaide great Greg,
11	Phillips story is wonderful. The	**daughter** of famous South Australian
12	Basketball star Phillips, the	**daughter** of former Port Adelaide
13	is another strength of the	**daughter** of former racehorse trainer
14	the SA senior team in 2016. The	**daughter** of former SANFL player Keith
15	to a few different clubs." The	**daughter** of revered football journalist

Figure 2. Concordance lines for *daughter*

The use of *daughters* here presents an interesting case where the discursive practice can be categorised as either trivialisation, stereotyping and/or othering, depending on how the analysis is approached. Daddario (1994: 282) argues that the use of the word *daughters* not only highlights the athlete's role in the family unit, but ultimately "reduces athletes to adolescent status" (i.e. trivialisation). This position is further supported by Knoppers and Elling (2004: 60) who argue this tactic is also used to represent women as both 'emotional and dependent on men (coaches and fathers)' which would be considered stereotyping and trivialising. Further, the use of *daughters* has also been noted as an 'othering' marker where equivalent *sons* is not used (Aull and Brown 2013). However, it must also be considered that this could be a way of 'constructing' the newsworthiness (Bednarek and Caple 2012) of the new league by linking (unknown) players to their already well-known fathers, thereby establishing a connection with the audience (Wensing and Bruce 2003). Further research is required to establish whether this discursive

practice is unique to the inaugural season or continues in the following seasons.

4.3.2 Emotions and athleticism

In terms of stereotypical ideals of 'appropriate' femininity, the keyword results point to the possibility of players being dually positioned as emotional but also athletic (see Table 2). Analysis of the emotion keywords in the AFLW corpus reveals these are all positive mental processes [+affect] related to wanting, thinking and feeling (see Table 7).

Keyword	Keyness	Raw Frequency
hope[5]	+324.86	123
excited	+32.99	23
love	+29.67	54
excitement	+27.86	12
confident	+22.91	20
keen	+20.78	16
want	+20.42	82
grateful	+18.19	9
happy	+11.68	26
loved	+10.91	14

Table 7. Emotive keywords in the AFLW corpus

While it is clear that these athletes are being described in relation to emotions, there appears to be a shift away from them being described in terms of (negative) emotional behaviours and actions, such as crying or screaming (e.g. Caple 2013; Crolley and Teso 2017). Further, when viewed in their co-text, the emotions are generally used by players or coaches in direct or reported speech to describe their experience being involved in the new league, rather than the media projecting these emotions onto the athletes. While the use of emotions in news discourse as a way to engage with readers is common (Bednarek 2010), it is also important to consider the selection of these quotes by journalists, which could be – consciously or not – contributing to the stereotyping of females as emotional.

In addition, analysis of keywords related to strength/weakness reveals a focus on athleticism, with players regularly described as *strong* and *tough,* traits that are traditionally considered to be stereotypically masculine. All descriptions of athleticism are portrayed positively or neutrally (e.g. *tall, strong and skilled, a professional athlete*) [+judgement], which indicates a potential shift away from stereotypical discourses of femininity being associated with weakness or passivity (Caple 2013; Schirato 2013). The analysis of the co-text provides further evidence for this, as shown in the concordance lines for *tough* (Figure 3).

1	league home, including Darebin's	**tough** midfielder Elise O'Dea and
2	University forward Karly Tapner is as	**tough** as they come and also appears
3	pick," he said after the draft. "She is a	**tough** and physical small defender
4	2014 Youth OIympics. She's quick,	**tough** and one of two Crows
5	Age: 27 Hgt: 165cm Midfielder	**Tough** and skilful onballer who
6	but plays with enormous heart.	**Tough**-as-nails, the uncompromising
7	Quick and	**tough**, from Western Australia and
8	CAT Phillips is one	**tough** cookie. The 24-year-old, who
9	but Lambert packs some punch.	**Tough** as nails, she is good at
10	defender/midfielder (Coastal Titans)	**Tough** and courageous half-back

Figure 3. Concordance lines for *tough* used to describe AFLW players

Line 8, however, provides an interesting example of a 'women as food' metaphor, which has been linked with societal attitudes towards traditional gender roles (Sigley and Holmes 2002) where women are depicted for the consumption of males (i.e. objectification). While it is outside the scope of this study to explore this metaphoric use further, expanding the co-text in the concordances reveals this may simply be an alliterative device used to rhyme with the word *rookie* in the following sentence.

In sum, the results point toward a potential shift in the discourse whereby players are positioned as both athletic and in command of their emotions. However, further research is needed to identify whether this is indicative of a more general shift in sports news discourse, or a feature unique to this corpus.

4.4 Gendered Othering

The keyword analysis identified a number of gender-related words, for example, *women's, men's, w, female, male, boys, girls,* etc. (see Table 2). The top keyword in the AFLW corpus is *women's* (+8931.99), which is unsurprising as this word is included in the official league name. When comparing the two sub-corpora, *women's* (+317.27) is again the top-ranking keyword before the season (AFLW-B), with *aflw* (+134.31) the top keyword after the season (AFLW-A), thereby indicating a shift in the way that the league is referenced in the media.

Gender marking is prevalent in the AFLW corpus in relation to both Australian Football and other (women's) sports. The keywords point to official tournament and league names being frequently marked with both *women's* and *w* (e.g. *WNBA, WBBL, WVFL, WAWFL, VWFL, WNBL, Women's Big Bash League, women's cricket, women's football, women's rugby, women's soccer, women's sport, VFL women's*). To investigate how *women's* is used in the corpus, with respect to Australian Football, I viewed the concordance lines with particular interest in those instances followed by the relevant football league references (see Table 8). The results show a high level of marking is used in the corpus. While it might be necessary in some cases to gender mark for reasons of clarity, there appears to be a disproportionate tendency to use (female) gender marking, given this corpus focuses exclusively on AFLW reporting.

women's + _____	**Raw Frequency**
women's league	134
women's football	59
women's comp/competition	54
women's game	34
women's AFL	31
women's footy	20
women's season	13
Total marked	**345**

Table 8. *Women's* co-occurring with references to Australian Football in the AFLW corpus

A comparative investigation was then undertaken of *men's* (+769.98; raw frequency 54) which revealed some instances of the men's game also marked in the corpus (*men's AFL; men's competition; men's game; men's (pre)season*). The analysis of these terms in their co-text reveals that male marking occurs only when the women's league and players are being compared to them. While these include comparisons of administrative topics such as rules and fixtures, there are also a number of evaluative comparisons. For example:

(11) I **doubt** it **will ever be as popular as the men's league** but good on them for giving it a go. (BOLT06-1)

(12) Clubs can trade <u>players and draft picks</u>, but <u>picks</u> are **not as valuable in the AFLW as in the men's league** because of the lack of depth in playing ranks. (AFTR05-3.txt)

(13) <u>The eight-week AFLW season</u> **will in many ways be as professional as the men's competition**, with a match review panel and testing for performance-enhancing drugs. (BPRV11-2)

These examples provide evidence of gendered othering by positioning male athletes as the ideal or norm. All the examples presented above provide evidence of negative appraisal of AFLW and its players. In (11) and (12) the league and its players are explicitly negatively appraised, but in (13) the negative appraisal is more implicit. The target (*The eight-week AFLW* season) is evaluated as being *as professional as the men's league,* but the use of *in many ways* limits this seemingly positive comparison. In fact, the following co-text reveals the *ways* to be related to the administration of the league, rather than the athletic abilities of the players. Further, looking at this example in the context of the full article, the competition is also referred to as a *semi-professional women's league* by one of the AFL executives.

Given the focus of this corpus is on the new women's league, we might reasonably expect to find more instances of references to the league marked with *women's* than *men's*. However, it could be argued that we would not expect to find any references to the men's league in the corpus given its focus on AFLW. Further, it might also seem unnecessary to gender mark references

to the new women's league, given the focus of these articles is the (new) AFLW. While it is most likely that some level of comparison – and therefore gender marking – between the two leagues could be expected (for example, with respect to the make-up of the teams or administrative topics), the analysis reveals one-sided gender marking and consistent comparisons made to the seemingly superior men's game and its male players, thereby providing strong evidence of gendered othering in the AFLW corpus.

5. Conclusion

This study has used corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how the news media cover female participation in male-dominated sports. It is one of few linguistics studies which analyses representations of female athletes in sports news reporting, using a combination of CL and CDA with text analysis of appraisal. Specifically, this research focused on the evaluation of AFLW players in relation to the patriarchal discourses of objectification, trivialisation, stereotyping and othering. I analysed whether these discourses are present in the *Herald Sun's* reporting surrounding the 2017 inaugural AFLW season and highlighted any notable differences or similarities in the reporting before and after the season was played.

In general, the keyword results point to a potential shift away from biased language previously used to describe female athletes with respect to objectification and trivialisation, with these AFLW players being positioned as legitimate athletes rather than objects for the male gaze. The analysis of concordance lines shows no evidence of sexualisation or descriptions of an 'ideal' feminised physique, with players instead being described as *tough* and *strong* athletes who possess *fitness* and *endurance.* Further, there is no evidence of attributing athletic success to luck, with all keywords positively focusing on skills and ability. Alongside this, the qualitative text analysis reveals evidence of both positive and negative evaluation of players' abilities and performances, but as evaluation is a vital part of any sporting community (Walsh and Caldwell 2016), this is not necessarily indicative of any gender bias towards these athletes. Further, while keywords do point to these athletes being described in terms of emotions, there is a shift away from historical descriptions of emotional outbursts, such as crying or shouting, to instead focus on players' emotional mental processes. Comparison to a men's AFL corpus is necessary to understand how male players are presented in the media with respect to emotions. Additionally, while the use of *girls* is prominent, the text analysis reveals the sources using these words are most frequently players themselves. This suggest the term may be being used as an in-group identifier rather than as a subordinating term, though further research is required before any wider conclusions can be made.

There is, however, still evidence of trivialising, stereotyping and othering found in the corpus. While these athletes are not positioned in stereotypical domestic roles, such as a (heterosexual) wife, girlfriend or mother, they are positioned as *daughters* in relation to their (usually) well-known fathers. It could be argued that this infantilises these athletes, thereby trivialising their athletic achievement of having been selected for one of the eight inaugural AFLW teams. The text analysis also reveals a persistent narrative of

comparison to male AFL players. The majority of these comparisons are explicitly unfavourable, positioning the AFLW players as less capable than their male counterparts. In some cases, what might otherwise be considered positive or neutral evaluation at the surface level, is revealed through the appraisal analysis to be implicitly negative and biased. This type of implicit evaluation can be 'subtly coercive' but very effective in positioning a text to align with the writer's values and ideologies (Thompson 2014: 83). Consistent repetition of negative comparison to the men's game creates a pervasive prosody that reinforces the prevailing patriarchal discourse that sports are 'by, for and about men' (Cooky et al. 2013: 205), which can thereby influence the readership to internalise these ideologies.

Taking all results together, a mixed picture emerges. While the discourses appear to be less patriarchal than in previous research, residual patriarchal discourses remain, thus providing an example of how the media contributes to perpetuating gender-biased ideologies of what constitutes a 'real' AFL athlete. The results from this study largely align with a non-linguistic study of tweets and media coverage during the inaugural AFLW season undertaken concurrently (Sherwood et al. 2019), which found that while discourses of sexual objectification were absent — with players largely framed as athletes — media attention focused on their personal lives, especially in roles as caretakers or mothers.

Thus, the results of this study into media provide new insight into how female athletes just beginning their professional career in a stereotypically male sport are evaluated with respect to previously documented patriarchal discourses. As this is the first linguistic study to focus on gender bias in AFLW sports news coverage, the scope is admittedly narrow. Data was drawn from a single newspaper over a one-year period, so expanding both the timeframe and data sources is necessary. Further, the *Herald Sun* is owned by NewsCorp Australia, the "newspaper partner of the AFL" (Australian Football League 2019a), and so thus may have a vested interest in retaining both their readership as well as their media partnership. Future research would benefit from a deeper exploration of media partnerships with sporting institutions, and the potential impacts this might have on representations of athletes in media coverage. Additionally, a full appraisal analysis has not been undertaken here. Instead, I have integrated this into the findings by pointing to instances of appraisal where appropriate. Future research could also undertake a more comprehensive appraisal analysis, with an in-depth discussion of metonymically implicated appraisal in relation to athletic ability, teamwork, and performance, as well as integrating appraisal analysis of complete texts.

The launch of the new AFLW in 2017 was a significant step forward to redressing the gender imbalance in the traditionally male dominated sporting space of Australian Football. However, the results of this study show that while some progress has been made with respect to patriarchal discourses in media representations of female athletes, others persist. As such, this research can provide a foundation for future linguistic research into gender biases in sport news reporting using a corpus approach to evaluation combined with Critical Discourse Analysis.

Notes

1. Australian Football is the official name of the code. Names like Australian Rules and, more colloquially Aussie Rules, are not recognised as official names, though they are widely used in the media and by the public (Australian Football League, 2019b).

2. The top three ranked sports in terms of crowd attendance are: the National Football League (NFL) in the US; Bundesliga in Germany; and the English Premier League (EPL) (Gullen 2015).

3. In 2016 and 2017, the *Herald Sun* had the largest print readership in Australia with an audience of 1,552,000 and 1,542,000 respectively (Roy Morgan 2018).

4. The Factiva search string used was: "AFLW" or "AFL women's" or "women's AFL" or (("women's competition" or "women's league") and "AFL")

5. When text examples are provided, the target will be underlined and the evaluative item bolded, unless otherwise indicated. The type of appraisal may also be coded in square brackets. '[   ]', with '+' indicating positive evaluation and '-' indicating negative evaluation e.g. [+judgement] or [-appreciation].

6. The base for normalised frequency used in this research is 1000.

7. *Boy* was not identified as a keyword and so is not included in the analysis.

8. About 81% of instances of the keyword *hope* refer to the player Moana Hope. However, when case sensitivity is applied in AntConc, it remains a keyword and so is included here.

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