

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The project *Masculine Behaviour and Social Networks in Team Structures* investigated four Melbourne-based AFL clubs in a 30-minute de-identified and confidential written survey. In the survey, players, coaches and staff in direct and regular contact with players were asked their opinions about appropriate gendered behaviours, some personal level data, and of their social relations with others within their club. The general aim of the project was to gain an understanding of how individual and informal social structures may affect the masculine attitudes of AFL players in relation to women. This report is summarised by the following key findings:

- ❑ AFL players are not a homogenous group. There is a wide range of attitudes found amongst the players. Some players hold *dominative masculine attitudes towards women* (i.e. tending more to attitudes that are pro-violent, anti-feminine, controlling of women, anti-gay, and see ‘manliness’ in terms of sexual success – thus most likely to engage in negative behaviours with women and violence with other men). Other players hold *non-dominative masculine attitudes towards women*, while still others hold attitudes somewhere in between these two positions. The range of attitudes observed among AFL players is not different from the range of attitudes we have observed in other samples of young males (e.g. secondary school samples).
- ❑ We identify five factors that are important in who players choose to socialise with after hours: *AFL experience, playing ability, masculine attitudes, the formation of social cliques/small groupings, and mutual social relations.*
  - *AFL experience:* Players tend to socialise after hours with others of similar experience (approximately similar number of AFL games played).
  - *Playing ability:* Those recognised by others in the team as best players tend to be more popular as people to socialise with.
  - *Masculine attitudes:* Depending on the context/culture of the club, masculine attitudes are associated with who socialises *after hours* with whom. In some clubs players with dominative masculine attitudes are more likely to be selected as someone to socialise with. Such attitudes also have an effect on who is admired, popular, influential and well-liked within the team.
  - *Social cliques:* As is common in many human social structures, players in all clubs form into cliques or small groups in after hours socialising.
  - *Mutual relations:* As is common in human social relations, there is a strong tendency for players to have mutual after-hours relationships (i.e., if one player says he socialises with another, the other player agrees that this is the case.) Such mutual social relations may be indicative of stronger social bonds between players. But, as expected, there are also many instances whereby players nominated by another as an after hours social partner do not recognise and reciprocate the nomination.
- ❑ It is notable that, in three of the four clubs, masculine attitudes have an

independent effect with after hours socialising, even when the other four factors (i.e. AFL experience, playing ability, social cliques and mutual relations) are taken into account. This suggests to us that masculine attitudes are important to club culture. Even so, players commented to us that these issues were not always openly addressed in clubs and among players. This suggests that the cultural aspects of masculine attitudes may reflect informal, perhaps implicit, norms that are developed among the players themselves.

- ❑ Although there are commonalities in the four AFL teams investigated, masculine attitudes vary from club to club in the way they are associated with after hours socialising. In some clubs players with dominative masculine attitudes are more likely to be people that others wish to socialise with. This suggests to us that each club has distinctive cultural and social norms among the players about masculine attitudes. For this reason any single, “one-size-fits-all” education program or intervention may not completely address the distinctive features of individual club cultures.
  - On average, players’ attitudes towards women/masculinity do not differ across clubs. But players’ attitudes are associated with social structures in different ways across clubs.
- ❑ Although best players tend to be admired, popular, and seen as influential by others, in general they are not well entrenched in the after hours social networks of players. This may lead to a separate ‘in-club’ culture and another for ‘after hours’.
- ❑ In all clubs, players with non-dominative attitudes (correctly) believe that others in the club have more dominative attitudes; whereas players with dominative attitudes believe others in the club hold the same attitudes as themselves. In other words, players with dominative attitudes towards women think that others in the club share those attitudes. They do not seem to recognise that in fact they constitute a minority.
- ❑ Attitudes toward women do *not* necessarily improve with AFL experience or age within the playing lifespan of AFL footballers.
- ❑ Overall, coaches/other staff have significantly less dominative masculine attitudes than AFL players. Analysis club by club, however, suggests that in some clubs there are no differences between players and coaches/staff.
- ❑ On average, AFL players’ masculine attitudes are not significantly different to those of Year 10 secondary school boys. Players’ masculine attitudes are however more dominative than Year 10 secondary school girls or female University students.
- ❑ The marital status of a player is not associated with attitudes toward women. On average, there is no difference in attitudes towards women between married players (including those in a de facto relationship), on the one hand, and single players on the other.
- ❑ In our data we find no evidence for a relationship between masculine attitudes towards women and player socio-economic status

- ❑ In our data we find no evidence for a relationship between masculine attitudes towards women and player cultural background
- ❑ Players who study in conjunction with their AFL commitments have significantly less dominative masculine attitudes than those players who are not studying and only engaged in AFL commitments

In our conclusions, we suggest three positive factors for the AFL from this research:

1. The wide range of attitudes held by AFL players; there are many with non-dominative attitudes (so this issue cannot be simplified to the old saying, “boys will be boys”);
2. The less dominative attitudes by players who are studying, suggesting that players involved in activities outside their football profession may be more open to other social norms and standards;
3. The potential influence of experienced skilful players who are widely admired and who often have less dominative attitudes.

We also suggest four possible problems:

1. For three out of the four clubs studied, masculine attitudes were implicated in how informal social structures were shaped, suggesting their possible importance in informal club culture.
2. A possible split of club cultures into ‘in-club’ and ‘after-hours’ cultures may make it more difficult for clubs or the AFL to use existing formal ‘in-club’ structures to affect change.
3. The lower integration of experienced, skilful players in the after-hours network means that their possibly moderating influences may not always be available at moments of “risk”.
4. The misunderstanding by players with dominative attitudes about how widely their standards are accepted by other club members; they may not readily perceive normative pressures by others against unacceptable behaviours.