



FOOTY CHICKS

A **STUDYGUIDE** BY MARGUERITE O'HARA

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Overview: *Footy Chicks*, a film by Rebecca Barry and Michaela Perske, looks at the complex world of football and sex. The film explores the scene off the footy field – a world of sex, male bonding and the women who pursue them. In 2004 there were several allegations of sexual assault made against some footballers in both the NRL (National Rugby League) and the AFL (Australian Football League). These scandals sparked debate not only about the behaviour of the footballers but also about the women who pursue them. *Footy Chicks* premiered at the 2006 Sydney Film Festival and will be shown on SBS television.

SYNOPSIS

Women love watching football. But some have more on their mind than just the game. Off the field their goal is to get up close and personal with the players. The possibility of sex with a football player is a fantasy for many women and a reality for some. *Footy Chicks* explores the scene off the footy field – a colourful world of players and the women who pursue them.

The film goes behind the scenes to reveal the game behind the game. It can be fun and competitive but like any other game, sometimes the rules get broken and it becomes dangerous.

When the fulltime whistle blows another game commences off the field in bars

and clubs. Whether it follows a win or a loss, it often involves a night out drinking with the boys and often the girls.

Access to football players is relatively easy. They know the importance of fans, many of whom attend after-match functions. Many young women know the pubs and clubs where footballers gather and go to these places hoping to link up with one of their idols. This often means more than a chance for a polite acknowledgement, a photo and an autograph.

Throughout one season Rebecca Barry and Michaela Perske followed some footy chicks to get a first hand view of the game played off the field. On the field the rules for the game are very clear for both player and spectator. Off the field, the game is filled with unspoken rules and rituals, some of which are

unravelling by Christie, Erika and players who are part of this world.

Footy Chicks is a documentary that puts a magnifying glass on the sexual culture of the football scene. The film delves into the unique world of football, sex and women's roles in this world. It puts these insights against a backdrop of societal attitudes and value judgements about these activities. What do the girls think? What do the players think? How is this game played out?

The film uses a combination of stylized re-creations and observational footage to show a world that is not only fun and colourful but can often turn dark and ugly. The viewer is taken into a world where the rules are never clear. We follow Erika and Christie on their journey to find a player. We hear from



women unable to control *the game*. We are shown the players' perspective, which ranges from amusing beer yarns to poignant and sometimes disturbing revelations about peer group behaviour and sexual abuse.

Footy Chicks was developed with support from the Australian Film Commission and commissioned by SBS and financed by the Film Finance Corporation.

Warning: *Footy Chicks* is rated M and contains some nudity, graphic images, frank sexual references and occasional strong language.

Curriculum Links

While this film has an M rating and does contain strong language, it offers

many insights into an area of sport and society that will be of interest to many young people, both male and female, sports participants, spectators and interested onlookers. Even students not 'into sport' should find the gender and identity issues the film raises worth exploring. For football and other sporting clubs, watching *Footy Chicks* could provide excellent stimulus for open discussion of these issues. It presents an alternative perspective on the sport and sex debate, one not often canvassed in the media

At school level, this film is suitable for senior students in years 10-12 and has something to offer in the following subject areas: Personal Development, SOSE (HSIE), Gender Studies, Media Studies, Sport and Physical Education, Values Education and Media Studies.

This guide suggests two possible approaches to studying the film:

1. As a way of looking at issues of identity and personal responsibility, peer pressure and values.
2. As an example of documentary filmmaking that sets out not to make judgements about the issues it deals with.

While these two approaches are clearly related, depending on the students' level of interest and capacity to discuss the issues openly, one or other of the sets of suggested questions may best open up the discussion. The initial sets of questions (A) Pre-viewing questions (B) Who says what, and (C) Gender and Language activities can be used with either approach.



(A) PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONS

Before Watching *Footy Chicks*

Discuss these questions in a group, preferably mixed, before watching the film

- Do you think men and women are judged differently when it comes to expressing sexuality?
- How do we draw the line between fun and dangerous behaviour?
- Who needs to draw the line?
- What part do alcohol and drug use play in social situations?
- Do men and/or women encourage inappropriate sexual approaches through the way they dress and behave in public places?
- Are men and women always responsible for what happens to them

in social situations?

- What is consent?
- What part do Women's magazines featuring stories of 'celebrity footballers' and their wives play in glamourizing the world of the footy chicks, e.g. the cult of Posh and Becks?
- Does being 'a sports celebrity' confer special privileges and/or responsibilities?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of the kind of bonding that is often encouraged in sports teams?
- What is it about footballers and other sports people that make them so attractive? Do musicians and other artists attract the same level of interest?

(B) WHO SAYS WHAT?

Watching the film

Each student or group could focus on

one or more of the people or groups appearing in *Footy Chicks* and take notes on what they say. Develop a group summary of each viewpoint on a black or whiteboard. Remember, not everyone appearing in the film has an absolutely fixed view. Take account of contradictions within each person's viewpoint. Allocate the different people listed below.

People in the Film

1. Christie: AFL fan
2. Erika: NRL and Union fan
3. Hayley: Cheerleader
4. Players and ex-players from the three codes who don't wish to be identified and some are shown with their faces obscured or as 'voiceovers'.
5. Females – Marissa and others – who don't want to be identified but are part of this sub-culture of football girl groupies.



THIS PAGE: THE DIRECTOR WITH THE ACTORS ON SET. ALL OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS ARE STILLS FROM MOVIE.



- 6. Kath Haines from Footy Fans Against Sexual Assault
- 7. Joan Allen: longtime Manly Sea Eagles fan
- 8. Greg Hunter: Sports journalist
- 9. David Millward: Retired Player and Chaperone to Manly Sea Eagles
- 10. Dr Clifton Evers: Lecturer in Gender Studies
- 11. Dr Catharine Lumby: Associate Professor Media Studies
- 12. Karen Willis from the New South

Wales Rape Crisis Centre

(C) GENDER AND LANGUAGE

How do words reflect and reinforce attitudes?

One of the questions you were asked to consider before watching Footy Chicks concerned the issue of whether males and females are judged differently in

relation to their sexual behaviour and the way they dress. This activity asks you to look at the language used to describe male and female behaviour.

Look at the list of words below and put them into the **Male** or **Female** column in Table 1, depending on who they are most often used to describe. Beside each word, indicate whether they are positive (p), negative (n) or either (e) depending on context.

Stud, slut, mole, boys, chicks, hunk, root rat, meat, spunk, tunnel, slag, party girl, good time girl, hot, party animal, whore, legend, aggressive, forward, to score, ho, skank, man-eater, womanizer, out there, bonding, gangbang, mooning, shagging, trophy, pig on a spit, infatuated, obsessed, promiscuous, starry-eyed, prime beef, nympho, virile, cute, pretty boy, doll, to hook up, macho, groupie.

| Male | Positive (p), negative (n) or either (e) | Female | Positive (p), negative (n) or either (e) |
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TABLE 1

1. ISSUES APPROACH

Looking at some of the issues explored in *Footy Chicks*

‘As filmmakers our primary goal was to make people think about the issues rather than fall back on stereotypes.’ (Rebecca Barry, Director)

‘Being non-judgemental is one of the biggest challenges of being a documentary maker.’ (Rebecca Barry, Director)

KEY:

- Issues raised in the film by participants, including the filmmakers’ views
- **Your response to the issues (bullet points)**

Footy Chicks was extremely difficult to make because people were very reluctant to talk to camera about their stories. (Rebecca Barry, Director)

- **How is people’s reluctance to talk on camera apparent in the film? Why might they prefer not to be identified?**

... you see the guys start to loosen up and relax a little bit after they’ve had some alcohol and you see the girls obviously loosen up ... their inhibitions seem to drop and they don’t seem to care as much. (David Millward, retired player)

They go out and drink to oblivion ... and that’s when things start to fall apart. (Clifton Evers, lecturer in Gender Studies)

Here’s the thing, when people are really pissed, they do things that they would not do normally. (Catharine Lumby, lecturer in Media Studies)

- **How is being drunk shown to affect behaviour in the film? Does having too much to drink excuse making unwelcome sexual advances? What do the retired players have to say about some of the situations described?**

... I don’t see why cheerleaders are necessary ... if they have girls going out there practically unclothed, it’s sending the wrong messages. (Joan Allen, Manly Sea Eagles fan)

These are young, healthy, athletic women who are wonderful dancers and are getting out there and strutting their stuff. (Karen Willis, NSW Rape Crisis Centre)

- **What do you think Cheerleaders add to football and other sporting games?**

... Peer pressure plays a significant part in it. With the young guys coming up and their idols ... and they want to be part of that group. (David Millward, retired player)

Peer pressure is about making someone belong. And they either shame them into belonging or if you don’t participate you are shamed out of the situation. (Clifton Evers, lecturer in Gender Studies)

- **How did you respond to the junior player’s account of the sex between one woman and several team members that happened at a private party after a match?**

What I don’t accept is ... when any group of boys take it too far ... and sometimes they do ... when a group of guys get together ... boosting each other’s egos ... they are going to step over the line sometimes. And as a female you just make sure you know where the line is. (Erika, footy fan)

- **How and when does the line between fun and danger get crossed in what we see in this film?**
- **What factors can blur that line for both men and women?**

They are celebrities and girls throw themselves at them. And you almost feel sorry for them because how do you know that someone is really interested in talking to you? (Christie, footy fan)

... For girls there is always the possibility that ... they will become a partner

of one of the footballers and enjoy the status that gives them. And of course the money and excitement ... and the adoration and maybe jealousy of their friends. (Karen Willis, NSW Rape Crisis Centre)

- **What are both the attractions and limitations of dating a sports star shown by the girls in the film?**
- **What do both Erika and Christie have to say about the boys they pursue?**

All footy players are arrogant ... it is part of the culture ... the man thing, all boys do it. And it’s further reinforced through footy. But for girls to turn around and do it, they’re called something else. But I hate that ... (Erika, footy fan)

... If a fella has five roots in a week he’s a hero. If a woman has sex with one or two blokes in a year then she’s a slut and a whore. The double standards are just phenomenal. (Karen Willis, NSW Rape Crisis Centre)

- **Are ‘double standards’ still common in society, or are these stereotypes breaking down in some groups?**
- **Much of the information about the differences in male and female sexual behaviour is anecdotal. Why is it so difficult to accurately determine the different sexual behaviours of males and females?**

It’s supposed to be the bloke that’s sexually aggressive. And if a girl wants that much sex, there’s something wrong with her. Suddenly she is strange or a slut or sick etc. ... and I think that’s just a societal norm. (Clifton Evers, lecturer in Gender Studies)

There should be no moral judgements about those sorts of things, it’s up to the individual to make decisions about how they want to express their sexuality and get sexual pleasure. (Karen Willis, NSW Rape Crisis Centre)

- **To what extent do either (or both) of these statements) accord with your views about this issue?**

... It's time to meet a real man, you know, you have your fun ... and I'm just over it, I think it has an expiry date. Because ... in five or ten years what are they ... they used to play football ... and then what? (Christie, footy fan)

... For me it's to go out dating these guys. But at the same time, everyone wants, deep down ... a proper relationship. I've been hunting for a while ... because I'm sick of playing around. I'd like it to be much more than just Ronnie [code for sex]. (Erika, footy fan)

- **Do these final admissions from the two women in the film suggest a darker side to the footy chick life that goes way beyond the words of one of the songs used in the documentary – *I Like the Way You Move*?**

Several football clubs have instituted programs to educate players about the potential dangers of mixing, alcohol, and sex and starstruck fans.

- **At what level should football clubs institute educational programs for players?**

2. STYLE OF THE FILM

Looking at how the film is made

Whether a film adopts a particular position on an issue can sometimes be difficult to determine. How can a film position viewers? We can sometimes answer this question by looking carefully at what the filmmaker includes.

There is always an editing process. Some scenes are deleted and parts of interviews are cut in. In this film we see, and hear the voices of individuals, both males and females, who bring different perspectives to the subject matter.

With some films, novels and other artworks we don't know a lot about the artist's intentions, but increasingly, makers of all kinds of art talk and write about their intentions. The film or other work of art should stand alone, but it

is often interesting to look at the final product in relation to stated intentions and see how they match up.

KEY:

- The way the film is made, including the filmmakers' views
- **Your responses to the film (bullet points)**

A couple of years ago allegations of sexual misconduct in the professional football world were coming thick and fast ... I found it frustrating that we never heard from any of the women who were a part of this world. (Rebecca Barry, Director)

- Why is it important to hear from the women who are a part of this world?

People were very reluctant to talk to camera about their stories. Players, both current and ex-players wanted to remain anonymous. (R.B., Director)

- **How does this reluctance inform the style of the film?**

The camera always attracts a lot of attention, which can be both a blessing and a curse. (R.B., Director)

- **What sort of challenges did this present to the filmmakers, particularly in the scenes in bars and nightclubs?**

Erika and Christie were committed and understood what we were trying to do. (R.B., Director)

- **How do Christie and Erika come across in the film?**

Some of the media stories about this documentary have included headlines such as: 'Footy Doco Lifts the Lid on Sex Scandals'; 'Film Lifts Lid on Footy Fans Who Go All Out to Score'; 'Skirting the Issue' and 'Hell Hath no Fury Like a Groupie Scorned'.

- **How accurately do any of these headlines capture the tone and emphases of the film?**

Sex and sport are a potent mix.

- **Are the visuals used in the film of legs, groins, tits, bums, strippers, lip gloss and group groping an essential part of telling the story as it is or do they tend to glamorize a world that is often far from attractive?**

There is a focus on the aural landscape ... we really ask the audience to listen. There is a lot of power in using voices of people you never see. (R.B., Director)

- **How effectively does the film integrate the stylized, recreated sequences with the nameless voices who describe some of their experiences?**

I hope it breaks down the stereotypes and goes some way to explaining the complexity of the culture. (R.B., Director)

- **What do you think the film presents as 'the complexities of the culture', and are they presented as more complex from the male or female perspective?**

In some ways I really admire these confident attractive women who can go out and get what they want ... but there is still a bit of the nana in me that thinks, 'what are you doing?' (R.B., Director)

- **What were your feelings about the women and the footy players at the end of the film?**

In 2004, members of both the NRL Canterbury Bulldogs club and the AFL St Kilda F.C. were investigated over sexual assault allegations. In neither case did police investigations proceed to the courts. However this is not to say that players did not behave badly.

- **How does this film show that potentially violent assaults and in some cases, rape, may occur in social situations where alcohol is a factor?**

While the early scenes in the film show

people having fun, later the film becomes quite dark and disturbing.

- **Explain how the tone of this film changes as it develops.**

TAKING IT FURTHER

Images and attitudes

One of the girls in the film is wearing a tee shirt with these words on the front printed across the bust line – 'It's Better ... Topless!' Clothing, particularly tee shirts, is often adorned with slogans. These tend to be of three main types.

1. Identifying brands such as 'Nike' or 'von Dutch' or 'FCUK'. The wearer becomes a walking advertisement for that brand.
2. More personalized slogans that identify the wearer, such as 'Class of 2005' or 'Shores Footy Club Premiers 2003' or 'I've been to the Gold Coast' or 'Go Green'.
3. Statement/invitation/attitude slogans such as 'Apple of grandma's eye', 'It's better topless', 'I love kisses', 'Italians do it better', 'What if Google was wrong?', 'Think inside the box', 'It won't suck itself' or 'Girls just want to have fun'.

Should people ignore these messages, take them as a light-hearted offhand joke or respond to them in some other way? Where should individuals draw the line between what is OK to wear, where it is OK and where it is not?

Big Brother

Recently on the reality TV program, *Big Brother*, there was an incident that prompted a national debate about where the lines between fun and possible assault should be drawn; or was it about the public airing of these things on television?

One male housemate was alleged to have held down a female housemate with whom they were sharing a bed, while another male housemate rubbed

his genitals in her face. When the woman objected, both males immediately stopped. The men were evicted from the house and the program and later expressed remorse about what they had done, which they described as nothing more than a practical joke. The woman involved accepted that the action was not malicious but also said they'd gone too far.

- Might this sort of incident encourage similar behaviour in people unsure of boundaries?
- Is this similar to any of the incidents described in *Footy Chicks* where having fun gets out of hand, resulting in serious sexual assault?
- 'Whatever a woman wears, wherever she goes and whatever state she is in, when she says 'no' she means 'no'. Freely given consent is the only criteria.'
- Do you think this principle is understood and accepted by men?

Discussing the issues

Choose one of the following statements and conduct either a class debate or a forum on the issue.

1. Neither the girls nor the footballers taking part in the group sex and other kinds of behaviour show much respect for either themselves or others.
2. Men and women should be free to go after the opposite sex without being subjected to moral judgments and condemnation.
3. Flirting, group bonding, sex, alcohol and notions of celebrity are a heady and dangerous mix in the world of sport. It's inevitable that sometimes it will get out of hand and turn nasty.

Another film exploring this issue:

Bull Durham (Ron Shelton, 1988) This film, starring Kevin Costner and Susan Sarandon, is about a female fan, played by Sarandon, who has an affair with a different minor-league baseball player each season. The tag-line used to pro-

mote the film was 'It's all about sex and sport. What else is there?' The film however shows there is a lot more going on.

WEB REFERENCES

<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=2181>

2004 article unpicking the intricate web of sport and sex in Australian society¹ (Accessed 14/07/06). Below is a brief extract from the article:

There is a notion that if women are involved in the footballing codes – rugby league, soccer and Australian Rules football in particular – they must be groupies, consenting to sex with their celebrity sporting heroes. Women's roles in sport are written for them before they pull out the pom poms or paint their faces: supportive Brownlow wives, soccer mums or sexually available flakes. The lesson we need to learn from the Canterbury Bulldogs is not about the level of pervasiveness of group sex, but that football authorities and players need to realize that women have many roles in sport beyond the sexual. While much of the funded research emerging from the AFL and ARL stresses groin strains or knee injuries, attention must be placed on the complex and intricate role women have played in Australian sport – as players, administrators, researchers, officials, fans and policy makers.

Other Web References:

Footy Fans Against Sexual Assault (FFASA) <http://www.ffasa.org/hpages.asp?PageID=30>
<http://www.onlineopinion.com>

Endnote

- ¹ Debbie Hindley and Tara Brabazon, 'Violence against women and sport's culture of women as accessories', On Line Opinion, 2004. <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=2181>

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