

Creative writers working on a women's football project: an examination of the collaborative practices of differing communities on a project for the women's game in Fiji, Samoa, and Solomon Islands

O trabalho de escritores em um projeto para o futebol feminino:
examinando práticas colaborativas entre diferentes comunidades
em um projeto para o esporte feminino em Fiji, Ilhas Salomão e Samoa

Arthur Almeida Passos

Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte/MG, Brazil
University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs/QLD, Australia
PhD Candidate, PUC-Minas
arthur-passos@hotmail.com

Amanda Fiedler

University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs/QLD, Australia
PhD Candidate, University of the Sunshine Coast

Juliette Sauvage

University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs/QLD, Australia
PhD Candidate, University of the Sunshine Coast

Kyle Mackenzie

University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs/QLD, Australia
PhD Candidate, University of the Sunshine Coast

Taryn Whiley

University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs/QLD, Australia
Undergraduate Student, University of the Sunshine Coast

Yoko Kanemasu

The University of the South Pacific, Laucala Campus, Suva, Fiji
Doctor of Philosophy, The University of New South Wales

Kasey Symons

Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne/VIC, Australia
Doctor of Philosophy, Victoria University

Lee McGowan

University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs/QLD, Australia
Doctor of Philosophy, Queensland University of Technology

ABSTRACT: Until recently, women's football in Oceania has received very little academic scrutiny. New research examines social and historical aspects of women's football in the region. As part of the project, a larger research team collaborated with football related organisations on the development of potential community resources. Informed by theoretical frameworks drawn from studies on formal and informal communities of practice, this paper examines the practices and processes of a creative writing research community in the design and development of resources aimed at a differing community of practice, in this case a group of football industry practitioners. This paper offers a brief overview of women's football in Fiji, Samoa, and Solomon Islands, describes the project outcomes and outputs, and presents insight on the experiences of the project team in their production. The paper contributes to theoretical fields related to communities of practice and to those social histories of women's football in general and specifically in Oceania.

KEYWORDS: Oceania; Women's football; Sports histories; Communities of practice; Creative writing.

RESUMO: Até recentemente, o futebol feminino na Oceania recebeu muito pouco escrutínio acadêmico. Novas pesquisas examinam aspectos sociais e históricos do esporte na região. Como parte do projeto, uma equipe mais numerosa de pesquisadores colaborou com organizações ligadas ao futebol no desenvolvimento de potenciais recursos comunitários. Valendo-se de enquadramentos teóricos extraídos de estudos sobre comunidades de prática formais e informais, este artigo examina as práticas e processos de uma comunidade de pesquisa de escrita criativa no planejamento e desenvolvimento de recursos destinados a uma outra comunidade de prática, neste caso um grupo de profissionais da indústria do futebol. Este artigo oferece um breve panorama do futebol feminino em Fiji, Ilhas Salomão e Samoa, descreve os resultados e impactos do projeto e apresenta uma perspectiva sobre as experiências da equipe no curso de suas atividades. O artigo contribui com campos teóricos relacionados às comunidades de prática e às histórias sociais do futebol feminino em geral e na Oceania especificamente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Oceania; Futebol feminino; História dos esportes; Comunidades de prática; Escrita criativa.

INTRODUCTION

Within the enormous geographical region known as Oceania there are countries with significant women's football heritage, as much as four decades of history, yet there are few studies on the subject. Scarcity of information, or difficulties in finding it, even on the Internet, is one of the challenges researchers who focus on the subject may face. Utilising the production of a recent book, which constitutes the first comprehensive investigation on the presence of women's football in the region,¹ we will seek, within the limits of this paper, to contribute to both the understanding of sports practice in the territory and the increase of its visibility in academia. With these two goals in mind, we will divide our work into three sections, which, in addition to contributing to the history of women's football in Oceania, relate to the community that gathered to undertake the project and supported the writing of this article as well as the perspectives of the students who were centrally involved in its main activities.

In the first section, "Communities of practice", we provide a brief literature review and focus on aspects such as the functioning of communities of practice in the university context; the transitions they make between formal and informal instances, inside and outside academia; the advantages and limitations of their approach, especially for students in higher education; and some of the ways communities of practice reflected in football have been investigated in academia, highlighting those studies related to the women's game. Working through theory and experiences related to the subject, some of these aspects will be explored via information about the community of practice that was formed between December 2022 and February 2023 within the School of Business and Creative Industries at the University of the Sunshine Coast, around the creative production of potential community resources – in the form of promotional and informational foldable A4 posters – aimed at recognizing, valuing and encouraging the practice of football by women in Oceania.

In the second section, "Women's football in Oceania", we summarise related elements of the book. This focuses on the subsections concerning women's football in Fiji, Samoa and Solomon Islands; three of the countries included by the students

¹ MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women's football in Oceania*.

involved in the project – Juliette Sauvage, Kyle Mackenzie and Taryn Whiley – as they sought to develop the aforementioned creative resources. More specifically, this section aims to highlight women who contributed, or continue to contribute, to the development of the sport in their country. Where we focus on these examples, we are acutely aware of the many equally important women who make invaluable contributions to their football community who are not included here. Some related contexts on the historical and contemporaneous difficulties girls and women face in the game are provided.

In the third section, “Students’ accounts on working as a community of practice towards women’s football in Oceania”, we offer the perspectives of the three named students. These accounts foreground some women involved in the development of the sport in the region. Moreover, they highlight other important information directly or indirectly linked to the game locally and in the region as a whole. This includes cultural aspects of the mentioned countries, criteria applied in selecting examples, challenges faced undertaking the research, skills developed, networks grown in and outside academia, gaps identified in research and resources, creative strategies employed in producing resources for prospective Oceanic footballing communities, and their expectations for future similar projects. We believe sharing such personalised information alongside what is collected, organised and provided in the first two sections will be useful to expand understanding of women’s football in the region.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

The term “communities of practice” was conceived as “a system of relationships between people, activities and the world”.² This system calls into question the traditional and hierarchical relationship between “student” and “master”,³ particularly where the interactions that occur within its scope are understood as “dynamic” and situated in “collaborative contexts”.⁴ Indeed, teamwork and the

² LAVE; WENGER. *Situated learning*: legitimate peripheral participation, p. 98.

³ WENGER-TRAYNER; WENGER-TRAYNER. An introduction to communities of practice, p. 4.

⁴ PHILP; JEFFERY; MCGOWAN. Collaboration and its discontents, p. 4.

learning processes that derive from it seem to constitute two central elements of communities of practice, characterised by two broad dimensions: the social and the intellectual.⁵ These dimensions may imply, for example, regular interactions between peers in a given community who are gathered around a common concern or topic of interest, and the creation and implementation of practices aimed at improving or building on their activities or interests, which might be in business, government, or education among many possible aspects.⁶ At their core, communities of practice present opportunities for identity development;⁷ provide modes of or frame a sense of belonging;⁸ are often directly or indirectly related to learning and making of meaning;⁹ promote and disseminate best practice; and develop individual and group or team-based skills.¹⁰

To illustrate the function and operation of a community of practice at a university level, members of communities of practice can include academics in a specific field or, increasingly, interdisciplinary cohorts where knowledge exchange and production are conceived and evolve through social and intellectual interaction and endeavour, often irrespective of the project,¹¹ which can often produce symposia, conference papers, non-traditional research outputs, presentations and publications.¹² In these environments, participants can define and demonstrate their academic competencies within a group comprised of other academics with overlapping and intersecting competences and interests,¹³ gain a sense of community,¹⁴ encourage health and well-being¹⁵ and, in the case of this project, fulfil a moral responsibility of the professional staff to students.¹⁶ The community of

⁵ PHILP; JEFFERY; MCGOWAN. Collaboration and its discontents.

⁶ WENGER-TRAYNER; WENGER-TRAYNER. An introduction to communities of practice, p. 2-4.

⁷ WENGER. *Communities of practice*.

⁸ WENGER. Communities of practice and social learning systems.

⁹ WENGER. *Communities of practice*.

¹⁰ See PHILP; JEFFERY; MCGOWAN. Collaboration and its discontents. WENGER; SNYDER. Communities of practice.

¹¹ PHILP; JEFFERY; MCGOWAN. Collaboration and its discontents.

¹² See AITCHISON. Learning from multiple voices. BATTY; SINCLAIR. Peer-to-peer learning in the higher education degree by research context. FERGUSON. The "write" skills and more. MAHER *et al.* "Becoming and being writers". PHILP; JEFFERY; MCGOWAN. Collaboration and its discontents. STRACKE. Undertaking the journey together.

¹³ PHILP; JEFFERY; MCGOWAN. Collaboration and its discontents.

¹⁴ MEWBURN; OSBORNE; CALDWELL. Shut up & write!. WENGER. Communities of practice and social learning systems.

¹⁵ MCGINN *et al.* Introducing Showpony.

¹⁶ HAYTER; WATSON. Supervisors are morally obliged to publish with their PhD students.

practice in the example discussed gathers a lecturer, two doctoral students, two pre-doctoral students (at Honours level) and a second-year undergraduate student and is, in part, supported by contributions from the project's external partners, the regional governing body for football, the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) and the Australian Centre for Pacific Islands Research (ACPIR).

The possibility of including individuals external to the university in communities of practice indicates that such communities are not limited to strictly formal activities, such as those that usually take place in the traditional domain and the associated practices of learning and teaching.¹⁷ The loose and serendipitous,¹⁸ reciprocal and unidirectional connections made within communities of practice, highlighted in informal setting,¹⁹ also serve academic communities of practice where resources, expertise and contacts are openly shared.²⁰ The exercise of collaborative writing, resulting in publication – provided that the challenges of co-authorship are appropriately and ethically navigated²¹ – can contribute to doctoral students track records and experience.²² Dependent on the condition of a given community of practice, the writing group, which can function as a catalyst and hub for the development of practice and related collaborative competences that enable group members to learn and connect with others,²³ encourage peer to peer support and mentoring.²⁴ In the case of our research, whose members are mostly linked to the field of creative writing, a key point is their concern in the interaction with broader communities beyond the institution,²⁵ some of which are reflected in football communities.

¹⁷ MCGOWAN; PHILP; JEFFERY. Collaboration and authority in electronic literature.

¹⁸ See PHILP; JEFFERY; MCGOWAN. Collaboration and its discontents.

¹⁹ MILLIGAN; LITTLEJOHN; MARGARYAN. Workplace learning in informal networks.

²⁰ PHILP; JEFFERY; MCGOWAN. Collaboration and its discontents.

²¹ See PHILP; JEFFERY; MCGOWAN. Collaboration and its discontents. ROBERTS. Limits to communities of practice.

²² HAYTER; WATSON. Supervisors are morally obliged to publish with their PhD students. KRAUTH; BOWMAN; FRASER. The exegesis and co-authorship. PHILP; JEFFERY; MCGOWAN. Collaboration and its discontents.

²³ WENGER. *Communities of practice*. WENGER-TRAYNER; WENGER-TRAYNER. An introduction to communities of practice.

²⁴ See BATTY *et al.* Mapping the emotional journey of the doctoral 'hero'. MAHER; FALLUCCA; MULHERN HALASZ. Write on! through to the PhD. PHILP; JEFFERY; MCGOWAN. Collaboration and its discontents.

²⁵ MCGOWAN; PHILP; JEFFERY. Collaboration and authority in electronic literature. WENGER-TRAYNER; WENGER-TRAYNER. An introduction to communities of practice.

Here it is worth mentioning that research on women's football communities and women's participation in football is increasing. Among the many examples of important works integral to understanding the women's game and its historical and cultural development are those by Brenda Elsey and Joshua Nadel,²⁶ Jean Williams,²⁷ Jonathan Magee *et al.*²⁸ and Sue Lopez,²⁹ and Sue Bridgewater's concise chapter on participation, attendance and spectatorship, and women's roles in football.³⁰ Stacey Pope and John Williams' work on women as fans;³¹ Hanya Pielichaty's work on football, family, gender and identity;³² Alex Culvin's work on professional players;³³ Annalies Knoppers and Donna de Haan's collaborative studies on female coaches;³⁴ and the body of work on women fans of men's football, such as those collected by Gertrud Pfister and Stacey Pope,³⁵ should also be considered. These works are augmented by individual case studies on women's football communities in Australia,³⁶ Denmark,³⁷ England,³⁸ France,³⁹ Italy,⁴⁰ New Zealand,⁴¹ Poland,⁴²

²⁶ See ELSEY; NADEL. *Futbolera: a history of women and sports in Latin America*.

²⁷ See WILLIAMS. *A game for rough girls: a history of women's football in Britain*; WILLIAMS. *Standing on honeyball's shoulders: a history of independent women's football clubs in England*; WILLIAMS. *Waltzing the Matildas*.

²⁸ See MAGEE *et al.* *Women, football and Europe: histories, equity and experiences*.

²⁹ See LOPEZ. *Women on the ball*.

³⁰ See BRIDGEWATER. *Women and football*.

³¹ See POPE; WILLIAMS. "White shoes to a football match!": female experiences of football's golden age in England; POPE; WILLIAMS. *A socio-historical account of female experiences of football's golden age in England*.

³² See PIELICHATY. *Football, family, gender and identity: the football self*.

³³ See CULVIN. *Football as work: the lived realities of professional women footballers in England*; CULVIN. *Football as work: the new realities of professional women footballers in England*.

³⁴ See HAAN; KNOPPERS. *Gendered discourses in coaching high-performance sport*. KNOPPERS *et al.* *Elite women coaches negotiating and resisting power in football*. KNOPPERS; HAAN. *Transnational coaches*.

³⁵ See PFISTER; POPE. *Female football players and fans*. POPE. *Female fans of men's football*. POPE. *Female football fans and gender performance*. POPE. *The feminization of sports fandom*. POPE. "The love of my life".

³⁶ See CRAWFORD; MCGOWAN. *Never say die*. STELL; REID. *Women in boots*.

³⁷ See MINTERT; PFISTER. *The female Vikings, a women's fan group in Denmark*. LENNEIS; PFISTER. *Gender constructions and negotiations of female football fans*. PFISTER; MINTERT; LENNEIS. "One is not born, but rather becomes a fan".

³⁸ See DUNN. *Football and the Women's World Cup*. POPE. "Like pulling down Durham Cathedral and building a brothel". POPE. "Who could name an England women's footballer?".

³⁹ See PRUDHOMME-PONCET. *Histoire du football féminin au XXe siècle*.

⁴⁰ See CERE. "Forever ultras". CERE. "Witches of our age".

⁴¹ See COX; THOMPSON. *From heydays to struggles*.

⁴² See JAKUBOWSKA; ANTONOWICZ; KOSSAKOWSKI. *Female fans, gender relations and football fandom*.

Republic of Ireland,⁴³ Scotland,⁴⁴ Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales,⁴⁵ Turkey,⁴⁶ United States,⁴⁷ and many other countries.⁴⁸

The task of co-authoring this article – however much such a task seems to be an increasingly anticipated outcome of such collaborations⁴⁹ – was not, at least formally, an initially planned or anticipated outcome of its activities in December 2022. The conception and realisation of this work is the result, to a large extent, of fortuity⁵⁰ and inter-institutional exchange,⁵¹ which is characteristic of working in a community of practice. It is a supplementary work presenting the experiences of three student participants in the community of practice, which focused on the creation of resources aimed at the community of girls and young women as (potential) footballers in Oceania. Before presenting the students’ experiences, including some of the challenges they faced, and strategies and lessons learned, we present a brief overview of women’s football in Oceania.

WOMEN’S FOOTBALL IN OCEANIA: FIJI, SAMOA AND SOLOMON ISLANDS

To discuss women’s football in Oceania, we will highlight three countries for which community resources were developed: Fiji and Solomon Islands, within the Melanesian sub-region of the Pacific Islands; and Samoa, within Polynesia.⁵² The first criterion for the selection of these countries – in addition to Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Tahiti, which, for reasons of scope and scale, will not be addressed here – is the status of their national football federations as members of the continental football body, the OFC.⁵³ Due to the short duration of the project, the second criterion, also related to scope and scale, restricted the number of member countries

⁴³ See BYRNE. Where are we now?.

⁴⁴ See MACBETH. The development of women’s football in Scotland.

⁴⁵ See SKILLEN *et al.* “The game of football is quite unsuitable for females and ought not to be encouraged”.

⁴⁶ See ERHART. Ladies of Besiktas.

⁴⁷ See GRAINEY. *Beyond Bend it like Beckham*.

⁴⁸ See HONG; MANGAN. *Soccer, women, sexual liberation*.

⁴⁹ KRAUTH; BOWMAN; FRASER. The exegesis and co-authorship.

⁵⁰ PHILP; JEFFERY; MCGOWAN. Collaboration and its discontents.

⁵¹ MOINGEON *et al.* Inter-organizational communities of practice.

⁵² JOLLY. Imagining Oceania.

⁵³ OCEANIA FOOTBALL CONFEDERATION. Member Associations.

each student considered in their work to recognise, support and promote the practice of women's football in Oceania.

It seems that the main and most common difficulty historically faced by women's football in Oceania is the lack of support.⁵⁴ Such an obstacle can manifest itself within "traditional" families – within the contested nature of tradition in the Pacific – that may not believe that sports – and football in particular – are the most appropriate activities for girls and women. This can happen in some Indo-Fijian communities – the second largest ethnic group in the country⁵⁵ – where academic achievement is often more highly regarded as a life goal, and the practice of physical activities may not be encouraged with the same enthusiasm if at all⁵⁶ – even when football is regarded as an Indo-Fijian sport.⁵⁷ Resistance against the idea of sports practice by women can also occur in other countries in the region. This is generally due to the strength of the "neo-traditional" gender roles within the patriarchal family systems that exist in the region,⁵⁸ that do not consider women playing sports appropriate, especially one that might be seen by such families as masculine and dangerous,⁵⁹ as it is often supposed to be the case of football.

In Samoa, for example, although the participation of girls and women in sports is still limited, other sports, such as netball and athletics, are more popular as a practice than football.⁶⁰ When compared to football, their popularity can be explained, to some extent, by the fact that such activities are shaped by a variety of factors, including gender issues, health, and the intersections of sport across education and familial obligation.⁶¹ In other countries, problems like these can end up being reflected – at least partially, and in a somewhat paradoxical way – in sports institutions that should encourage, to the maximum of their capacity, the practice of football by women. In Solomon Islands, for example, the weak initial results of the

⁵⁴ MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women's football in Oceania*.

⁵⁵ FIJI BUREAU OF STATISTICS. Census of population and housing.

⁵⁶ SUGDEN; KANEMASU; ADAIR. Indo-Fijian women and sportive activity.

⁵⁷ See SUGDEN. *Sport and integration*.

⁵⁸ See DOUGLAS. Christian citizens. LATAI. Changing covenants in Samoa? From brothers and sisters to husbands and wives?. See MACINTYRE; SPARK. *Transformations of gender in Melanesia*.

⁵⁹ MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women's football in Oceania*.

⁶⁰ MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women's football in Oceania*.

⁶¹ MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women's football in Oceania*. THORP. She shoots, and she scores.

women’s senior national team in competitions organised by the OFC, between 2007 and 2017, is likely the result of a lack of consistent support and more appropriate provision of suitable infrastructure and resources by the national football governing body.⁶² Such difficulties become even more explicit considering that men’s football, regardless of specific modality or age group, tends to be prioritised over the endeavours of senior women’s national set-ups, despite the potential benefits to the organisation as a whole. In Fiji, in 1983, while the country’s Under-16 team was preparing to compete in the Oceania Youth Soccer tournament – under the auspices of the Fiji Football Association (FFA) –, the Fiji Women’s Soccer Association (FWSA) had to raise funds through the support of local businesses to finance the women’s senior team’s participation in the inaugural Oceania Cup, the first ever international women’s tournament in the region.⁶³

Despite the challenges, those representatives of Fiji, Samoa and Solomon Islands and the broader Oceanic women’s football community, populated by outstanding women, have contributed to the sport both on and off the pitch. While we acknowledge that we are unable to shine a light on all of their many endeavours, they deserve recognition and acknowledgment for their contribution to the field. In Fiji, former player Susan Wise, who played in the late 1970s, currently holds the position of Vice-President of the FFA, having been a member of the institution Board for many years, and is as an invaluable mentor to the many women in the Fijian football community.⁶⁴ Lavenia Yalovi is a crucial member of the football community, as player, coach and mentor.⁶⁵ We see this in her role as the coordinator of the *Just Play* program, launched in 2011 with the support and funding of institutions such as Fédération Internationale de Football Association [International Federation of Football Association] (FIFA), Union des Associations Européennes de Football [Union of European Football Associations] (UEFA), OFC and AusAID, the Australian Government’s primary agency for international aid, with the purpose of promoting football as a multifaceted means of community engagement.⁶⁶ Two more women

⁶² MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women’s football in Oceania*.

⁶³ MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women’s football in Oceania*.

⁶⁴ MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women’s football in Oceania*.

⁶⁵ NARAWA. Suva keen to defend IDC.

⁶⁶ OCEANIA FOOTBALL CONFEDERATION. *Just Play*; RATUVA. Fiji Football launches *Just Play*.

whose roles highlight progress in the women's game in Fiji are Naomi Waqanidrola and Jemaima Rao. These women made an impact on the men's Fijian Premier League (FPL) competition in 2021, when Naomi Waqanidrola became the first woman coach in Fiji's premier football competition, while Jemaima Rao was the fourth assistant in the same match, becoming the first woman official in the same competition.⁶⁷ Despite gender barriers and those related to ethnicity,⁶⁸ many women from a diverse range of backgrounds are making a significant contribution to the game in Fiji including Naziah Ali, a successful businesswoman and advocate for the women's game, and Vani Buadromo, a player, coach, and mentor who is the current FFA Women's Development Officer (WDO).⁶⁹

Solomon Islands women's national team has featured many great players; women who have made important contributions to the game on and off the field. Diane Justus made her debut at the 2007 (South) Pacific Games, and since then has continued to play, coach and mentor others at every conceivable level of the game. In her role as Women's Football Development Officer at Solomon Islands Football Federation (SIFF) and as a coach for the senior women's team, she was instrumental in the development of a footballing infrastructure, from school age programs to organising and coordinating the national team set-up.⁷⁰ Other important figures in women's football in Solomon Islands include Antoinette Miniti, current WDO and the driving force behind the recent reestablishment of the women national football league and Maria Rufina, who coordinates the SIFF *Just Play* program and takes on the essential role of SIFF Football Safety Officer.⁷¹

Women's football exemplifies the importance and strength of family ties in Melanesian and Polynesian cultures. Both daughters of Susan Wise are currently involved in women's football, Antoinette Miniti's mother was involved in the game 20 years ago, and the story of the Ah Ki sisters, who played for the Samoan women's

⁶⁷ MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women's football in Oceania*.

⁶⁸ See KANEMASU. Going it alone and strong. KANEMASU; JOHNSON. Exploring the complexities of community attitudes towards women's rugby. KANEMASU; JOHNSON; MOLNAR. Fiji's women rugby players. SUGDEN. Sport and ethno-racial formation. SUGDEN; KANEMASU; ADAIR. Indo-Fijian women and sportive activity.

⁶⁹ MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women's football in Oceania*.

⁷⁰ KANEMASU. *Staking their claim*. MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women's football in Oceania*.

⁷¹ MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women's football in Oceania*.

national team at several age-ranges and in the women’s national futsal team, offer some illustration.⁷² An issue common across women’s football is highlighted in reports of the Samoan women’s national team that focus on returning to the team after giving birth, which can be a significant challenge.⁷³ A worthy illustration of the increase in the roles women take on around football is that of the media officer and journalist Angela Lafaialii Pauga, who writes about and covers women’s football for Football Federation Samoa (FFS). Using the national association platform, Angela has written several stories about the women’s game, capturing the development in football practice related to her role; her reports have become essential resources for the study of women’s sport in Samoa.⁷⁴

STUDENTS’ ACCOUNTS ON WORKING AS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE TOWARDS WOMEN’S FOOTBALL IN OCEANIA

This section comprises the students’ personal accounts of their experience in the community of practice. In methodological terms, the approach draws on the social history text, *Women’s football in Oceania*, the main source of information for the group.⁷⁵ The approach undertaken by the students as outlined in their discussions highlights a synthesis of research related to the book, contextual reviews of additional material related to the region and individual players, and a series of informal discussion with each of the book’s co-authors and other academic researchers working in the field. Regular weekly meetings took place across the duration of the project, where the paper’s authors met as a group to discuss progress, practice, challenges and the development of the project’s outcomes. The students then collated reflective autoethnographic writing on the project.⁷⁶ As they have written these contributions to the paper, there is a distinct change in voice and presentation of the work.

⁷² MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women’s football in Oceania*.

⁷³ PAUGA. International football and motherhood: Samoa leads the way for the Pacific.

⁷⁴ MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women’s football in Oceania*.

⁷⁵ See MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women’s football in Oceania*.

⁷⁶ See BRUCE. *Terra ludus*. CHANG. *Autoethnography as method*. MCPARLAND. *Autoethnography*. NASH. *Gender on the ropes*. RICHARDS. “Which player do you fancy then?”.

Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea

While I came to the women's football in Oceania project with broad assumptions of what the project required, the more I read from *Women's football in Oceania*, spoke with the stakeholders, and researched further, the more I learned about these incredibly complex situations, nations, and individuals. I was conscious of being an outsider to the community – both for the Pacific Islands and women's football – and needing to check any cultural biases to ensure they did not affect my judgement when researching and writing the resources; rather, trying to enhance the existing women's voices and stories, and inspire and encourage women to participate in football in the region. This project draws on existing research about the history of women's football in Oceania, which strongly influenced the selection of the countries we chose to create posters for. Although this project was aimed towards the OFC, meaning we needed to focus on their member nations, we also each read through the referred book to select two countries we thought might meet the initial project brief. Alongside a short history of men's and women's football in each country, the sections from the book also offered details about individual players and women involved with football in each nation. Reading through the relevant book chapters, what stood out to me about Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea was the numerous women who were featured, and the rich histories of football in the nations. We had yet to decide exactly what we wanted to do, but the general idea of focusing on a 'star story' and a timeline prompted me to select these countries based on this existing information and the compelling histories of women's football. Further consultations with key stakeholders influenced the approaches we took for presenting the information gathered.

Women wanting to play football – and sports in general – face many challenges in traditionally patriarchal regions, one of which is a perceived lack of role models;⁷⁷ this results in women not believing they *can* play football, that they will be able to make a career out of the sport or be accepted in their community. In our consultation, book co-author Yoko Kanemasu explained that this is a real

⁷⁷ SUGDEN; KANEMASU; ADAIR. Indo-Fijian women and sportive activity.

problem for women, because if they do not see themselves playing, they are less likely to get involved. Therefore, for my star stories, I chose to emphasise how these women created careers through football, illustrating it can be done and offering role models for women to look up to and aspire to follow in their footsteps. And importantly, to spotlight the names and histories of remarkable local women, share women’s stories more widely, and reclaim some space for women in sport. For Solomon Islands, this star was Diane Justus, former player and current coach in the Women’s Premier League. I selected her because she is an accomplished player and coach as well as the first WDO for Solomon Islands. This highlights that women can have personal achievements in the sport, but also give back to the community. Kanemasu stressed the importance of community and culture over individuality in the Pacific Islands, and this influenced how I framed the star stories. For Papua New Guinea, my decision was largely based on the same factors: although multiple women were named, Margaret Aka, former player, current coach and WDO, was one of the more prominent figures, and as well as being the WDO for Papua New Guinea, there was more information about her giving back to the community through coaching, and her career achievements.

The main challenge for this project was access to reliable resources. Information on clubs, games, and participants, as well as high quality images of them, were incredibly difficult to find. Any research outside the book required very in-depth digging on the internet, and I found the majority of information, pictures and documentation about players, coaches, clubs, and games on social media and women-run local media sites. Even finding an official women’s national team photograph was almost impossible, with no guarantee of accurate, current representations. Both nations had Facebook pages dedicated to the women’s national leagues, and Solomon Islands also had a Facebook page for women’s regional and local football. The OFC website did have articles dedicated to women’s football for both nations – with valuable information available through careful reading – however, the national football association websites had very little. A crucial source of information and photos was Pasifika Sisters,⁷⁸ a women-run media

⁷⁸ See TRAN. Revamp and Expansion for 2021 WPL.

site across the Pacific sharing stories of women's football. This highlights the lack of equal treatment when it comes to women and men's sports internationally, but also in Pacific Island regions – men's news stories and football histories feature proudly, dominating the national association website,⁷⁹ leaving the majority of women's sports documenting to the fans. This also relates to co-author Kasey Symons's research into the fans for women's sports,⁸⁰ how they create positive, supportive communities and share invaluable information. For me, the lack of easily accessible information underlined the importance of this project, emphasising the contribution of one community of practice to another – researchers and creative writers working to produce resources for women in sports in Oceania.

Another challenge for women in sports are gatekeepers – family, friends, and the wider community who may disapprove of women's participation. After meeting with Kylie Bates from UN Women, an idea that we had begun to form grew even clearer – that we needed to aim these resources towards the gatekeepers, rather than just the players or women we hoped to get involved in the sport. Kylie approved of our approach to focus on some of the benefits of the sport for women, and we decided to include a brief factoid about the health benefits of playing sport for women that would challenge some perceived gender stereotypes while highlighting its benefits. Further, she suggested we needed to be aware that for some women, getting involved would be dangerous, due to high rates of domestic and family violence in the region.⁸¹ In response, we included contact information for local and accessible family support services.

Symons advised that the best way to get stories across would be to use plain accessible language to support the project's goals. Therefore, I employed simple but engaging language to tell the stories of these women and their countries and, where possible, used active voice to encourage a connection between story and reader. Another crucial aspect of crafting the stories was framing – ensuring the language was not entirely individualistic, but rather emphasised the women's contributions to their wider communities as well to reflect cultural precepts and appease

⁷⁹ See SOLOMON ISLANDS FOOTBALL FEDERATION. News.

⁸⁰ SYMONS. How the AFLW fan space has created new fan narratives in alternative storytelling.

⁸¹ UN WOMEN. Gender equality brief for 14 Pacific Island countries and territories.

gatekeepers. While the content of the posters is fairly straightforward and non-confrontational, the purposeful emphasis on creating role models for women through sharing stories and achievements, as well as easing gatekeeper concerns, ultimately contributes to the project's aim of encouraging women's participation in football and sharing the rich history of the sport.

The highlight of the project for me was being able to see a real-world application for research and my creative writing skills – working towards something to assist in improving women's equality on the ground and encouraging them to pursue something they love. It was incredibly beneficial, engaging, and career-affirming to be involved in a project looking to close the feedback loop and attempting to make an academic resource more accessible at a grassroots level. Kylie pointed this out as a key research area for future work in the Pacific Islands, suggesting more projects like this in the future could begin making a difference. Although this project focused on creating a proof of concept, we hope to be able to continue to work with OFC and UN Women, consult with local groups to see what we could do that would benefit them, and begin working towards practical solutions for the Pacific Island communities.

Samoa and Tahiti

The project's preparation phase began on December 13, 2022. The team had its first meeting on January 9, 2023, where we exchanged introductions and conducted the first of four weekly interviews. Interviewees included Yoko Kanemasu and Kasey Symons, co-authors of the project's primary resource, *Women's football in Oceania*; Vikki Schaffer, a champion for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the University of the Sunshine Coast; and Kylie Bates, UN Women Sports Specialist. Discussing each interviewee's experience working within their respective fields served as a foundation for our research moving forward and afforded us the ability to ask questions about specific elements of our research. More specifically, interviews provided insight and advised us what information could be added to benefit our research outputs and things to remain conscious of while gathering data. For example, because we were encouraging women and girls to get involved with

football, we needed to also provide information that could assist them in times of crisis. This meant finding and including links to local support services, so they had access to resources for any issues that arose due to their participation. Following the first meeting and interview, each intern researched one of the sub-regions of Oceania: Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia and gave a short presentation to inform the rest of the team. This ensured that we had a base-level understanding of each region's history and cultures so that we could be cautious about what information to include or exclude, according to certain sensitivities. Presentations accommodated a broad range of information pertaining to each sub-region, covering topics from cultural customs and history to local cuisine and activities.

Following the presentations, we began developing posters as our proof of concept. Firstly, we selected six countries: Solomon Islands, Samoa, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Tahiti. I selected Samoa and Tahiti for inclusion due to the early stages of their development in the sport. I felt that the lack of championship wins, or gold medals, in popular events like the OFC Women's Nations Cup or the Pacific Games was a sign that these areas deserved more attention and that inspiring women and girls to participate in any way could benefit everyone concerned. Then we searched for women involved in the sport, either as players or working behind the scenes, and began writing 'Star stories'. These were short biographies that consolidated and presented the history and achievements of the women selected. I chose Sarai Bareman as the star story for Samoa's proof of concept. I felt that Sarai's history as both a player for Samoa's national women's team and her accomplishments as Chief Women's Football Officer for FIFA would make her an ideal role model and showcase the opportunities football provides on and off the pitch. And I selected Kiani Wong for Tahiti due to her early academic journey and as a player for Tahiti's national women's team. Kiani travelled to France where she studied for her bachelor's degree in art history while also pursuing her dream of playing football, so I felt that her story would inspire young women to follow their dreams in a similar way.

Following the completion of the star stories, a brief timeline and summary of the development of women's football in each country were written, to articulate how the sport had progressed over time. At this point, we received some notable

feedback from Kylie Bates, who suggested the inclusion of local support links and information. This was added to each poster during second drafts. Although the posters were completed, the research and the process of finding information came with a few noticeable difficulties.

The most obvious difficulty was the challenge of finding information pertinent to women who were not at the ‘top of the game’. While the book used as the project’s primary resource⁸² contained a large portion of the necessary information, the absence of information outside the resource became clear when we needed to search for dates, images, WDO contact information and local support services. My first star story, Sarai Bareman, was relatively easy to write and learn about due to her status in the sport as a professional player on Samoa’s national team and behind the scenes working for FIFA as Chief Women’s Football Officer. Tahiti’s Kiani Wong, on the other hand, was much more difficult to research. While she has accomplished a lot on and off the pitch, playing for Tahiti’s national women’s team and as an ambassador for the OFC, I was only able to find the information posted on the OFC’s website reposted elsewhere and a few news articles about her education in France.

This became a theme, as the same difficulties carried over to teams and federations. There was also a substantial challenge in finding images for the posters. While local football federations occasionally posted images as a part of attached news sections, to find more specific and less commercialised images, I often found myself on social media sites such as Twitter or Facebook, using images shared by players and administration on their own accounts. While it is clear from the project’s primary resource that the information is out there, the difficulties we faced, as a group of practising researchers, indicate that it should be made more available and accessible to increase the exposure of the sport.

One of the skills I developed during this project was the use of my browser’s translate option. Given that many of the websites containing information I needed were foreign, I found myself navigating translated pages. This was an issue because some mistranslated pronouns into English, thereby incorrectly gendering the

⁸² MCGOWAN; SYMONS; KANEMASU. *Women’s football in Oceania*.

people I was researching. This happened more than expected, particularly with Kiani due to Tahiti's French heritage. The same can be said for when I was looking for specific information on the women's game, only to find the use of 'he/him' pronouns which prompted me to double check that the article or website I was reading was about the women's teams. Due to this mistranslation, some of the information I found ended up being removed as it was exclusively pertinent to the men's team. For example, the Tahitian men's team played in the Pacific Games long before the women's team was founded, so ascertaining the precise date the women's team began playing was especially difficult when the translations were unreliable. In the end, the only way I could be sure what I had found was the correct information was to research both the men's and women's teams and ensure that the dates were not being mixed and players were not being incorrectly gendered. A lot of extra effort was required to confirm something as simple as a date or timeline.

As someone with little knowledge of football and whose Australian culture rarely emphasises the value of the sport outside global events, the complexities of the ranking system as well as game-specific terminology often made it difficult to understand what the information was about, and whether it was positive or negative. For example, not knowing the meaning of 'caps' in regard to a player's on-field history caused some confusion about the contextual placement of information in the star stories/biographies. Was being capped a good thing? And should it be included in a player or ex-player's biography. This also applies to the scoring system, or goals, and the structure of tournaments. For example, many teams often make it as far as the 'group stage' in tournaments like the Pacific Games or the OFC Women's Nations Cup. In order to understand the value of this information, I needed to develop my understanding of the sport, to determine whether making it to the group stage was worth drawing attention to.

Experiences working on the 'women's football in Oceania' project varied from adventures in learning and curiosity when researching the histories of football icons and their cultures, to a frustrated and meticulous expedition for information. Where general information about the players and local cultures was easy enough to find, specific details about the sport, like dates or visuals and photos of the team and individual players, often required further attention. Resorting to sources like

Facebook and Twitter for information and images of adequate quality was unconventional but ended up being necessary to fill the gaps left by news articles and other, more traditional, online resources.

Fiji

The ongoing commodification of sport and its high performing participants means elite male athletes are celebrated,⁸³ especially in sports that are entwined with national identity. Fiji, for example, prides itself on being a rugby union country and reveres its national team, the Drua, as modern-day warriors named for the naval warships sent into battle.⁸⁴ There is, however, a disconnection between this sense of national pride, and community attitudes towards female athletes that impedes female participation in sport at all levels, from grassroots through to elite national representative teams.⁸⁵ Focusing exclusively on football and the obstacles to female participation in the Oceania region, we decided to create community resources for dissemination to encourage more women to participate in football, and to also address the obstacles preventing them. Specifically, we decided to develop 'Star stories' wherein a Pacific Islander woman has succeeded in football, as a player, official or administrator. Speaking to Kylie Bates from UN Women was beneficial in this area as she highlighted the importance of including a story that showed what it was like to succeed from the perspective of a local Pacific Islander who had already done so. As Kylie said in our meeting, "If you can see it, you can be it." As a group, we decided to develop resources for countries from Melanesia, Polynesia, and/or Micronesia with success in football already, such as Papua New Guinea, or success in other sports, like Tonga and Samoa with rugby league. I am a rugby union player married into an Indigenous iTaukei Fijian family and have seen how celebrated male rugby players are, and so chose to develop the resource for Fiji women's football because I hope that increased acceptance of female athletes in one male dominated sport, like football, improves life for those in another, like rugby.

⁸³ VAMPLEW. The commodification of sport.

⁸⁴ FIJIAN DRUA RUGBY. About us.

⁸⁵ KANEMASU; MOLNAR. Problematizing the dominant.

During the research stage, I looked specifically for a person to celebrate that had formed a football career beyond playing. While searching through Facebook articles on the FFA page, I noticed a trend of negative commentary on certain posts celebrating female athletes and their championship wins, usually speculating on the athlete's sexual orientation, abilities, or the perceived degradation of traditional womanly behaviour. As these public opinions of sportswomen were quite negative, I wanted to find someone from the National Women's Team (affectionately known as the 'Kulas', also the name of the national bird of Fiji) who was in an undeniable position of power during a football match. In *Women's football in Oceania* I discovered Naomi Waqanidrola, the first female coach of a men's team in the Fiji Men's Premier League, and referee Jemaima Rao, the first woman to referee a men's Premier League match and used their names as keywords to find others. However, this did prove difficult, as there is no dedicated women's football page for Fiji. I searched Naomi's name on the *Fiji Sun* news website, and instead found Sofi Diyalowai, who was a great fit for the project. She has appeared in more international matches than any other woman in Fiji football history, has played on the women's national team for a decade and in 2020 qualified to referee the OFC Championships. Sofi recognises that her position is controversial to members of her community and uses her faith to validate her participation: "A lot of people I know didn't like the fact that I took up the sport because it is regarded as a men's sport. But I knew God gave me this talent, so I turned a deaf ear to all the critics".⁸⁶ She also is in the process of transitioning from player to full time referee and mentor, hoping to empower the next generation of female footballers.⁸⁷

The biggest obstacle I found in researching the Fijian women football players was the absence of news articles celebrating individuals who are born in Fiji. Trina Davis, for example, is a national representative born in the USA to an Indo-Fijian parent, who had some articles as she has played at the college level. While there were plenty of images available to choose from at a grassroots level as the OFC *Just Play* program was advertised on the FFA Facebook page with online photo album for each event, establishing a timeline was slightly more difficult. There was a list of

⁸⁶ MATAIRAKULA. Diyalowai proves critics wrong.

⁸⁷ MATAIRAKULA. Diyalowai proves critics wrong.

results for previous competitions the Kulas had participated in available on Wikipedia, but these needed to be cross checked against each competition (OFC WNC, Pacific Games, Youth Olympics, FIFA, etc.) for accuracy regarding the dates and locations. The timeline for younger grades, such as the Under-20 and Under-16 teams were very light on information due to large periods of no participation.

Academia by nature objectively sits above what it aims to describe, and the methodology used in developing this project is different in that it is using academia to inform the communities that the research involves instead of just looking at the situation and reporting findings to other academic sources. The research surrounding women in sports clearly describes a culture wherein female athleticism is not celebrated as it is in Anglophonic countries.⁸⁸ There is evidence that women are already wanting to participate in sports,⁸⁹ but the obstacles preventing them are often the result of misinformation or a lack of education surrounding wellbeing such as a fear of damaging reproductive systems through contact sports,⁹⁰ that sports would encourage women to defy heteronormative expectations,⁹¹ or that participants would experience abuse at practice or games from the broader community⁹². Our interviews with stakeholders provided invaluable information and insights into the intricacies of the communities I was working for, as well as offering important nuances surrounding language, community opinions and the purpose of the research. When choosing a writing approach, I chose to follow Yoko Kanemasu's advice: it was necessary to be tactful, using language and examples that not only aim to inspire future participants, but also to satiate the concerns of potential gatekeepers. We also opted to include contact details for crisis centres and domestic violence hotlines on the resources due to the real danger women faced playing football and to further support the local women.

Participating in this project enabled me to develop research skills and improve my creative writing. Creative non-fiction is a genre that gives me true joy to write, so this project was very entertaining and educational. It also gave me the

⁸⁸ LIU. Women, sport and exercise in the Asia-Pacific region.

⁸⁹ SUGDEN; KANEMASU; ADAIR. Indo-Fijian women and sportive activity.

⁹⁰ KANEMASU; JOHNSON. Exploring the complexities of community attitudes towards women's rugby.

⁹¹ SUGDEN; KANEMASU; ADAIR. Indo-Fijian women and sportive activity.

⁹² KANEMASU. Fissures in gendered nationalism.

opportunity to possibly enact change in a place that is special to me, and to champion and celebrate women and their resilience, accomplishments, and successes.

Final remarks

One of the highlights of the overall experience surrounding this paper are the advantages that the formation of the community of practice around football could offer to those involved. This seems to be especially true with regard to the students who had the opportunity to write about their experiences in the group and share them in this text. Considering their words, the educational, cultural and identity benefits, for example, are clear. They recognize the positive outcomes of their participation in the group by mentioning the development of certain skills, such as those aimed at solving problems typical of academic research; the acquired knowledge about other cultures, alongside the necessary reflection on the most adequate strategies to respectfully approach them; and some reinforcement of their academic and professional choices and goals, a reinforcement that gains more weight when they see themselves as able to incorporate the possibility of both contemplating their own tastes and interests and creating an impact outside the university.

Overseen by a common advisor, the students who either drove part of the production of the article – Arthur Passos – or directed the realisation of the women’s football in Oceania creative project – Amanda Fiedler – also recognise the benefits of such experiences for their academic and professional training. In this process, they were able to improve and or develop new skills, connect with people and materials directly or indirectly related to their research interests, and produce resources that will be useful for continuing their careers in academia, or elsewhere. Among such skills, people, materials and resources, it is worth mentioning the ability to work as a team and help students in higher education, the expansion of both their knowledge and experiences around football and creative writing and their network of contacts, at the university and beyond, and the joint development of this article to a significant extent.

The impact of academic work on women’s football in Oceania, which the project and article are only part of, still needs to be measured. This is due, above all,

to the recent nature of this effort on the part of the other members of the group, Yoko Kanemasu, Kasey Symons and Lee McGowan, who provided the collective basis for the realisation of this article and the creative community resources, through their extensive research on the subject and their continuous assistance towards the whole group. We must note the creative resources produced by students and intended for the football communities of Fiji, Samoa and Solomon Islands, are at the proof-of-concept stage and have not been published as yet. Nevertheless, considering what has already been done and what can still be done, we believe that the collaborative efforts of people from within the university, and those outside of academia, such as members of the OFC, can provide valuable support for women’s football in the region.

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