This is the published version:


Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30058913

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner.

Copyright : 2013, Taylor & Francis
Privileged Men
and Masculinities
Gender and Fantasy Sports Leagues
Luke Howie and Perri Campbell

INTRODUCTION: MASCULINIZED "FANTASYSCAPES" AND "MANLY" MEN

Playing fantasy sports is a past time for a particular type of person. The game and marketing operator, World Fantasy Games (2011), has compiled a range of data on fantasy sports participants. Their account of the typical "consumer profile" of fantasy athletes reads as follows:

37 year-old male, married with kids
Bachelor degree graduate and homeowner
An average household income of US$94,000
Spends 3–4 hours per week online
Large amounts of disposable income that is spent on beer, Internet services, prescription drugs, logo hats, running shoes, liquor, magazines and laptops. Almost half operate in two-screen environments (simultaneous use of televisions and laptops)

Middle-aged white men with lots of money are a much sought after target demographic in the marketplace. Competitors are estimated to spend US$800 million per year on fantasy sports with a total consumer impact estimated at around US$4.48 billion. Around one-fifth of men in Canada and the US had played fantasy sports in the previous year according to one recent study (Ipsos Public Affairs, 2011). The participation rate for women is far less—five percent in the US and eight percent in Canada.

Privilege in fantasy sports is tightly bound to questions of gender. The fantasy sports league discussed in this chapter operates at Yahoo!® Fantasy NBA. Fantasy basketball is the fourth most popular fantasy sport in the US. Participation in NBA fantasy games is generally lower when compared to other major US sports such as football and baseball, but the participant numbers are still sizable. An estimated twenty-eight percent of fantasy basketball players attended an NBA game, compared to eight percent in the general population (see World Fantasy Games 2011). According to the jargon used in fantasy NBA, the league under investigation is a 9-cat rotisserie
with a live draft and a non-keeper format. This means that participants in this league battle over nine statistical categories (“9-cat”) that accumulate (“rotisserie”) over the course of one NBA season (“non-keeper”). The participants in the league gather once a year for a live fantasy draft day in October where teams are selected and later added to the online game.

The theory and data presented in this chapter comprise the first published account from our research. The study is ongoing and involves interviews with fantasy basketball participants and their partners. Here we focus on some of the visual and textual features used by competitors to manage their teams’ identities. In particular, we report on the history of this league, team names and the message board discussions from the 2011–2012 NBA/Fantasy NBA season. The aim of this approach is to understand the types of masculine practices enacted in an online fantasy sports league, which reveals these settings as masculinized “fantasyscapes” where “manly” men toy with the limits of heteronormative realities. Our analysis also responds to the “underdeveloped” nature of the literature exploring fantasy sport (Dwyer & Drayer, 2010, p. 209). Whilst some attention has been paid to fantasy gambling, communications and participant motivations (Bernhard & Eade, 2005; Farquhar & Meeds, 2007; Lomax, 2006), an understanding of fantasy sports leagues as gendered and cultural experiences is comparatively lacking. The chapter is organized in the following way. First, we survey some of the key literature that relates to fantasy sport, masculinities and privilege. An account of the selected roles played by gender in a fantasy league is then presented. This account is drawn from data collected from the online platform where this league is conducted.

PLAYING FANTASY BASKETBALL

Playing fantasy NBA basketball intensely is a quintessentially masculine experience. It involves watching and witnessing male team sports, quantifying the movements and achievements of disciplined bodies and statistically analyzing the results. It involves the use of smartphones, social networking websites and complex digital networks for round-the-clock updates on scores, trades, injuries, crime reports, scouting reports and team management decisions. In 2011, playing fantasy basketball meant nervously awaiting the resolution of a widely publicized NBA player lockout and then watching real events unfold in discursive codes embodied by “box scores”. This is an activity that demands time, attention and dedication, especially for the player who wants to excel. Following the example of Sherry Turkle (1995), we might assume that those competing in fantasy basketball leagues are part of a “nerdy” subculture that wish to be “kings” and “warriors” for a day before returning to their humdrum lives. If we follow the arguments of Hutchins and Rowe (2012), fantasy sports connect to a sporting spectatorship that extends beyond television and into “digital plenitude”
where sports spectatorship is an active, engaged and online experience. Ruddock, Hutchins and Rowe (2010) also argue that online media have facilitated sports fandom in spaces that extend beyond, and in cohabitation with, television. Exploring the online, interactive world of managing a semi-professional soccer club via a website, they argue that MyFootballClub blends “simulated” and physical sport, reflecting “perennial desires to resurrect organic social and community bonds with the rhythms of media sports culture” (p. 324). Yahoo!® Fantasy NBA certainly incorporates multiple rhythmic realities, coinciding as it does with professional sports teams, their performances, injuries, trials and tribulations. Perri Campbell and Peter Kelly’s (2009) research suggests that fantasy basketball players are practicing a digital-self. Engaging with a community of like-minded people is a way of practicing an identity that cannot be easily realized in non-digital spaces. Yet, there is another critical dimension to playing fantasy sports that demands extensive and ongoing investigation. As initially identified by Nickolas Davis and Margaret Carlisle Duncan (2006), playing fantasy NBA is about being a privileged man.

The league under investigation was first formed for the 2000–2001 NBA season and stands as one of the longest running online leagues that we have encountered. According to Davis and Duncan (2006, p. 246), contemporary fantasy sports leagues first emerged in the early 1980s in the US. Journalists Glen Waggoner and Daniel Okrent are often credited as the “founding fathers” of fantasy baseball (Hu, 2003), but the history of fantasy football extends even further back in time. Frank Shipman (2001) argues that fantasy sports have been around since 1962, beginning as a laborious exercise in “paper and pencil” bookkeeping and developing into the lucrative computer-mediated industry that it is today. There is even evidence to suggest that fantasy football dates back even further, with a form of fantasy Professional Golfers’ Association (PGA) golf developed in the mid-1950s arguably representing the founding moment of fantasy sports and fantasy sports leagues (Esser, 1994). The history of fantasy basketball is not well understood, but it likely emerged during the 1990s when a rapid increase in interest in fantasy sports roughly coincided with an explosion in Internet use after the release and spread of the World Wide Web (UFL.edu, n.d.). Despite the heavy reliance on online spaces and computerized calculations of statistics, it is also worth noting that fantasy competitors also make wide use of various “offline” and traditional media sources to manage their teams with greater efficiency (Drayer et al., 2010, p. 129; Hutchins & Rowe, 2012, pp. 167–72).

The competitors who formed the league examined here were drawn from a dedicated group of NBA aficionados studying at a major southeastern Australian university in the late 1990s and an extended network of friends who attended high school together. At the time of writing, seven have a university degree, of which one has a PhD and two are studying for postgraduate degrees. All ten members hold down professional careers, and the
average salary of the group is around AUD$81,000 (US$85,000). All are heterosexual males in long-term relationships. The oldest player is thirty-four years of age and the youngest is thirty-one. Five played college basketball in Australia (which is more of a social activity when compared to the prestigious US system); one played at a semi-professional level; and another former member played professionally in Australia’s National Basketball League (NBL). The group also has decisively liberal and progressive political attitudes. For instance, all voted for left-of-center political parties and Green (environmental) candidates in the last federal election. One is employed as a journalist; two are tenured academics; and another member is a Muslim with a heightened awareness of the politics of Islam and Islamophobia.

Despite these characteristics, their fantasy NBA competition often descends into an environment that displays overtly masculine characteristics and even misogynistic attitudes. The various team names that have been created over the years are revealing indicators of this behavioral frame (and are discussed later). These materials—the archived histories of league, team names and message board content saved on the Yahoo!® Fantasy NBA platform—form a dense collection that highlights the meanings and consequences of fantasy basketball in the lives of these male competitors.

MEN AND MASCULINITIES

According to Donald Levy (2005a), “The voluntary, personal, nonsexual relationships of men with other men are one way in which men do gender” (our emphasis). Levy’s (2005a) account follows from the useful tautology of “men as men”. Men as men are able to experience and enjoy same sex, heterosexual relationships. Men as men are capable of experiencing these relationships in ways other than just in contradistinction to men’s relationships with women. His chief concern is with hegemonic gendered relations where the “manly” pursuits of “friendship” and “comradeship” are at stake. Levy’s analysis also occurs in a particular context—his doctoral thesis explores masculinities in fantasy sports leagues (2005b). Placing masculinity at the heart of fantasy sport, Levy argues that men in these contexts are not assumed to be hypermasculinist. They are thought to have privileged occupations, routine access to the Internet and the supposedly feminizing traits associated with higher educational achievements. Education of this type is thought to rely on so-called “feminist ideology” and collaborative “methods of decision-making”. In short, higher education makes men pursue the unmanly directions of compromise, but Levy (2005a) adds that men in online social groups might be “less complicit with hegemonic masculinity than some other groups”.

Toby Miller (2003, p. 47) draws attention to the legacies of thought that have emerged around the conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity. Following Raewyn Connell, Miller situates this concept as an outcome of social
forces that preserve historically relevant systems of domination ("no longer dominant but still influential") in "emergent" systems that are dominated by particular "ruling" and "upcoming" classes of people. Building critically on Connell's applications of these ideas to gender theory, Miller argues that the idea of hegemonic masculinity is an appropriate way to study gender and sports "where aggression, bodily force, competition, and physical skill are primarily associated with straight maleness" (Miller, 2001, p. 48). The expectation is that men be "straight, strong, domineering" and oppress "the many men excluded from it"; even "'subscribers' may find its norms unattainable" (Miller, 2001, p. 49). He argues for a reading of men's bodies as sites of contestation and of complicated and diverse meanings. Whereas Connell's and Miller's studies equated gayness and unmanliness as being at odds with hegemonic masculinities, it may be that even hegemonic masculinity shows itself to be a category of instability. Whilst male-on-male sexual desire in male team sports is denied both on and off the field, it also involves a certain appreciation of masculine bodily desire. Or, as one of the league names from the 2006 fantasy NBA season articulates, some might be in a "League of Masculine Love" (see Table 16.1).

The "problem" of hegemonic masculinity and sport was, for instance, conspicuously emphasized during an Australian radio sports program in 2006. Playing a word association game, a well-known Australian Rules footballer, Nick Riewoldt, responded to the word "homosexual" with the word "die" (Australian Coalition for Equality, 2005–2006). A popular sports blog hosted a discussion about this slip-of-the-tongue. For the most part, its contributions were critical and disappointed with the comments, but some were eager to add to the homophobic commentary:

If homosexuals are allowed to come out of the closet, homophobes should be allowed to do the same. Who are we to discriminate against homophobes. It's not their fault... they were born that way.

He shouldn't have said that. That's the sort of thing you might say with your mates, but on Triple M and Fox Footy... it's asking for trouble (our emphasis).

So he doesn't like Homosexuals. Where's the discrimination?

I think you're confusing hate and discrimination. I hate eating broccoli but I don't discriminate against them.

Not sure I can see anything wrong with this at all.

Please everyone stop trying to take the moral high ground just so you can get some kudos from your internet buddies, most of us do discriminate against Homosexuals (sic), that's life. They choose to act like an insecure female so they deserve all they get. No one makes them gay—they choose to be. (Big Footy Forum, 2006)

These contributions were not representative of all the available responses, but around a quarter of message board comments expressed a negative
attitude towards homosexuality. In an odd and perverse twist, Riewoldt’s relationship to sexuality was again in the public spotlight in early 2011 when private photographs emerged of him standing completely naked, holding his penis in the presence of a near-naked teammate (Robinson, 2011). Hegemonic masculinities, homophobia and straight male homoeroticism are not, then, rigid categories. “True masculinity” always emerges from the male body (Connell, 2005, p. 45). Masculinity is inscribed on the human body and through male bodily desire; that is, the types of body that men admire. The body “drives and directs action” and can be witnessed through aggressive behavior, sporting prowess and crime. The body’s corporeal limits are also sites where accusations of weakness and deficiency in masculinity are directed. These criticisms take shape when a supposedly masculine desire to push through the “pain barrier” is rejected (Miller, 2001), when men are unable to manage their health and when “natural” heterosexual activity meets “unnatural” homosexual perversity (Connell, 2005, p. 45). Embodied manly experiences sit amongst legacies of myth making where men are the hunters and women are the consumers of men’s productive activity. As Connell (2009) points out, these assumptions are relatively recent:

In most hunter-gatherer societies, women collectively produce more food than men do. In peasant societies, women are a vital, regular part of the agricultural labour force, working together with men in the fields or raising their own specialized crops. In many African societies, women have been prominent as traders. (p. 27)

Women’s—and men’s—roles are not as strictly defined as heteronormativity would dictate. Differences between men and women are often seen emerging from over-simplified accounts of gender difference, and the complex relationship between sport and masculinities has received considerable attention (Connell, 1993; McKay, Messner & Sabo, 2000; Messner, 1992; Rowe & Gilmour, 2009). Messner (1992) has argued that the development of young boys into effective men owes much to sport, while Lawrence A. Wenner (1998, p. 310) argues that sport reinforces gendered myths that men are naturally superior to women. Wenner and Steven J. Jackson (2009) argue that the evolving roles for women in sport are linked to increasing commodification, viewing the “performance of gender roles” as problematic in the masculinized domain of male team sports. They prefer to see sport and its various forms of media representation as a “site of struggle” (Wenner and Jackson, 2009, p. 2). This struggle means that sports culture and its media representation promote and stabilize masculine identity, while simultaneously acting as a site of resistance against hegemonic masculinities. This is a useful context from which to understand a group that emerged in response to particular coordinates of hegemonic masculinity in fantasy sports spaces. They are a group called Women Against Fantasy Sports (WAFS).
WOMEN, LANGUAGE AND FANTASY SPORTS

Our account of this long-running fantasy basketball league begins with the plight of women living amidst a space of privileged masculine excess. Kathleen Ervin (2012) describes WAFS as a “support group” for “fantasy sports widows” that was popular amongst “dispossessed wives and girlfriends”:

When Allison Lodish’s husband first started playing fantasy football, she viewed it as an innocuous pursuit. “Had I known where it would lead, I may not have been so eager for him to take up this hobby,” she says, having since reconsidered her initial stance. Over the course of the past five NFL seasons, her husband of 13 years has spent an inordinate amount of time reviewing player statistics, drafting teams, managing lineups, making trades, and trash-talking with fellow fantasy league participants—time that could have been better spent, in her opinion, with her and the couple’s two children.

Being a dedicated fantasy competitor interrupts other hetero-manly pursuits such as keeping the wife happy and looking after the kids. Alison Lodish is a “fantasy widow”, and one of the founding members of WAFS. But, while playing fantasy sports seems to be an almost exclusively male pastime (Levy’s study puts the figure at about 97.9 percent; also see Davis & Duncan, 2006), being opposed to fantasy sports is not so gender exclusive. One of the three founding members of WAFS is a man and a “recovering” fantasy sports “addict”. The WAFS website sold merchandise in the form of official WAFS shirts featuring the slogan, “I thought I was your fantasy,” and women’s underwear with an inscription, “Closed for the fantasy Season” across the crotch (Ervin, 2012). Gender matters to WAFS because gender matters in fantasy sports. Gender—with its contradictions and the realities it creates and sustains—was an important feature of the fantasy basketball league discussed in this chapter.

In shifting focus to the language of fantasy sports, Slavoj Žižek argues that a tautology can reveal deep significance and meanings in the contexts of everyday interactions (Žižek, 2010, p. 68). Tautologies represent linguistic redundancies and frustrations with the limits of language in describing complex emotions and life-worlds. Language has the mystical power to transform uncertainties out-there into speech acts and forms that act as realities in-here (Law, 2004), and also labels uncertain realities with particular words. In these moments we can never be sure that what is communicated by speech acts or written words will be received in the ways that we intend. When, for example, the phrase boys will be boys is used, the speaker is attempting to come to terms with something indescribable about boys and, in the process, confronts the limits of language. Yet, it is precisely the banal repetitiveness of the phrase that gives it its power—boys, it seems, behave in the ways that boys do. The team names chosen over twelve seasons reveal
the masculine attitudes, ironies and jokes that have come to characterize the social networking spaces of the league under examination. They are cases of boys being boys. Table 16.1 displays the best examples of this pattern in relation to team names over a decade or more.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Team Name</th>
<th>League Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Chodreteam</td>
<td>Stonecutters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Tong PO</td>
<td>NBA Masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Desert Knob</td>
<td>1 Ring to Rule Them All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>OBL Freedom Fighters</td>
<td>Return of the King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Pornstorecostify</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>DirtyKuffarBitchslap</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Marblehead Johnson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Arizona Bay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>THE SNIPER OF PUSs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>The Cherry Poppers</td>
<td>Lucky Breaks &amp; Heart Aches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Espace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>HST never forgotten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Tits McGee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Bloody Bitch Dead</td>
<td>How Kaine Got His Groove Back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>EataMuffADaySorority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Cobra Kai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>The Love Generator</td>
<td>The League of Masculine Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>My 5 Towns</td>
<td>Rising Up Against WAFS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>AQUAMAN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Madmen</td>
<td>Geelong Fantasy Ballers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Gary Coleman's Forarm (sic)</td>
<td>Geelong Fantasy Ballers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Kenny Powers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Tastes Like Chicken</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Thunderous Thrusting</td>
<td>Geelong Fantasy Ballers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Badly Packed Kebab</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We want to draw attention to particular themes that emerge from these league and team names, and revolve around sex and sexuality, and television and popular culture. The team names that relate to themes of sex and sexuality see privileged men making manly, heteronormative jokes about female and male body parts and sexual intercourse—one might say typical “locker-room” banter. There are four references to male body parts (“Desert Knob”, “Pornstorecstiffy”, “Marblehead Johnson” and “Gary Colemans Forarm”), all of which are penis references. There are three references to female body parts—one a reference to breasts (“Titts McGee”) and two are vagina references (“Eatamuffadaysority” and “Badly Packed Kebab”). There are three references to sexual acts among the team names that are squarely heterosexual (“THE SNIPER OF PUSs”, “The Cherry Poppers” and “Tastes Like Chicken”), whilst a fourth is more orientation neutral (“Thunderous Thrusting”).


Fantasy sport supports masculine fantasies, but it is not limited to a desire to be involved in professional sport. The team and league names are highly suggestive in relation to hegemonic masculinities and the sexual team names are often misogynistic. The films and television programs referenced also tap into particular ways of being hegemonically male. In American Psycho, Entourage, Madmen and Eastbound and Down, women are directly and openly objectified—sometimes violently—in the name of “edgy” comedy. Kickboxer and The Karate Kid tell the familiar tale of boys (weak and feminine) becoming men (strong fighters), while Tool and Thompson represent intellectual forms of masculinity; the former calling for the total destruction of Los Angeles and the latter for the hedonistic, drug-fuelled pursuit of “truth”. All are coordinates for particular masculine fantasies—everything from the desire for immediate sexual gratification, to easily “kicking somebody’s ass”, and even total and complete destruction (of a city and of oneself). An admiration for powerful male bodies is central to these mediated displays of masculine prowess.
Celebration of the masculine body is a central feature of discussion board dialogue during Fantasy NBA seasons. In recent years, the Yahoo! platform has expanded the available tools for discussion to include text altering (fonts, sizes and bolding, italicizing and underlining) and photograph uploading. Participants routinely supplement their discussions with photographs that display the masculine form of their favorite players:

Nov 13, 2:43 p.m.

Fast Neutrinos: A question for all managers. Which player on your team did you not really rate before the draft, but now after a mere couple of days of owning him, do you regard with a lot more optimism? For me, I am shocked and appalled that Tony Allen lasted to the last round. Dead-set gun! All trade offers will be refused (supplemented with a muscular image of Tony Allen).

Nov 13, 4:53 p.m.

Fast Neutrinos: I take it back, Jameer’s value is trending upward now! (supplemented with an image of a shirtless Jameer Nelson posing in front of a mirror. A tattoo on his back reads “ALL EYES ON ME”)

Nov 13, 5:08 p.m.

ReverseApacheMaster: Just like Wall St I’m ready to explode and make the top 50! (supplemented with an image of John Wall, smiling sweetly, biceps flexing).

Message board discussions like these are a way to “kill time”, chat with people who are offline friends as well and brag about one’s team and its collective physical abilities. Themes of sexual orientation are never far away from these images of muscular and often sexualized men’s bodies, with issues of sexual orientation sometimes appearing as “jokes”:

Dec 26, 12:04 p.m.

ClearEyesFullHearts: I love cock.

Dec 26, 12:59 p.m.

ReverseApacheMaster: Gay!!

Dec 25, 1:58 p.m.

Fast Neutrinos: That kind of honesty is refreshing Steve.
Dec 26, 7:25 p.m.

_The blackPINO:_ What a gay dog. What a gay cunt.

Dec 26, 7:57 p.m.

_ClearEyesFullHearts:_ I don’t mind you guys knowing—just imagine posting it on facebook for the whole world to see!

Discussions sometimes take place after offline gatherings and involve in-jokes understood only by those in the “men’s club” of this fantasy sports league. These related themes of admiration for the masculine male body and the open jokes about non-heterosexual orientation are combined with discussions of player performances. For example, the following discussion is about Phoenix Suns center, Marcin Gortat, in a thread titled “Marcin to his own beat”:

Jan 12, 8:09 p.m.

_Fast Neutrinos:_ (posts an image of a shirtless, muscular looking Marcin Gortat holding a sledgehammer and growling into the camera and a second image of Gortat landing an enormous slam dunk).

Jan 12, 8:56 p.m.

_Badly Packed Kebab:_ what’s with the sledgehammer?

Jan 12, 9:46 p.m.

_Fast Neutrinos:_ He’s breaking the hearts of all those GMs who passed on him on draft day (oh and they called him ugly too).

_Fast Neutrinos:_ Just remembered Robbo, his nick-name is the Polish Hammer!

_Badly Packed Kebab:_ Polish Hammer . . . has many different meanings I reckon!

According to Nikki Wedgwood (2003, pp. 185–86), sports operate within institutions where many young men “learn a physically assertive embodiment” that plays an important formative role in their “masculinity construction projects”. The discussion on the league’s message board suggests that these masculine projects take particular directions. There are few other contexts where it might be appropriate for heterosexual men to admire men’s muscles, deploy penis metaphors and comment on how these muscular men have broken the hearts of other men. It is permissible here for straight men to declare—presumably for the laughs of other straight men—that they “love cock”, and then not be criticized, persecuted or even taken seriously or believed. Wedgwood (2003, p. 186; also see Miller, 2001) has argued that
men display their sporting masculinity by performing a spectacular physical feat, displaying “power and accuracy”, and demonstrating “explosive speed and determination . . . [and] overpowering tackles and invasive, recklessly dangerous bumps”. Hegemonic sporting masculinity in this fantasy sports league also incorporates “manly queerness”, involving ironic public declarations that one is comfortable with being thought of as queer.

CONCLUSION: FANTASY SPORT AND THE GENDER ORDER

If “manly queerness” plays an important role in this heterosexual men’s fantasy league, then what role, if any, is reserved for women? This question is not easily answered. Women have been viewed as central to men’s sport for more than two decades, both as a category of analysis and as a bodily reality (McKay et al., 2000; Messner & Sabo, 1990). The evidence drawn from the fantasy sports league investigated in this chapter suggests that women might play little role, given that manly homoeroticism has a strong presence here, but so do misogynistic attitudes. Women are far less likely to be fantasy competitors and spend less money on their teams, although there is evidence to suggest that this pattern is changing (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012, pp. 173-75; Otto, Metz & Emsmenger, 2011). While Hutchins and Rowe (2012, p. 174) argue that fantasy sport remains a “male dominated environment”, they also offer an avenue for women to occupy “subject position[s]” that would otherwise be rarely available; for instance, the opportunity to own and manage a professional men’s sports team. Certain gender roles become, therefore, “imaginable” in fantasy sports leagues (Hutchins & Rowe 2012, p. 175).

This study is ongoing and involves interviews with the ten fantasy NBA players that form this league and their wives and girlfriends. The data collected will produce new accounts of fantasy sports as an everyday, mundane part of life, and of the ways that relationships with “significant others” are negotiated during time-consuming fantasy seasons and busy family and working lives. In this league there are no female players but there are prominent “others” in play. One of the long-term members of this league recently “retired”, citing responsibility towards his wife and his two babies as the reason. Unlike the sporting seasons that are the focus of fantasy leagues, the fantasy season often lasts all year. It is the league’s never-ending quality that made raising a young family incompatible with play for this participant.

The history of this league is, therefore, bound to the histories of the participants who have negotiated their development from male adolescence into adulthood. The changing circumstances that accompany different stages of life have travelled alongside an explosion of Internet-based technologies and witnessed the proliferation of sports spectatorship in spaces that exist far beyond broadcast television. Despite these many changes, the evidence suggests that fantasy sport fits within a cultural and media framework that acts as a “predominantly conservative force” in relationships between men and
women (McKay et al., 2000: 2). Certainly, the fantasy sports league featured in this chapter is testimony to enduring masculinities, persistent hegemonies and an unremitting desire for frontiers where privileged masculinities can be practiced.

REFERENCES


