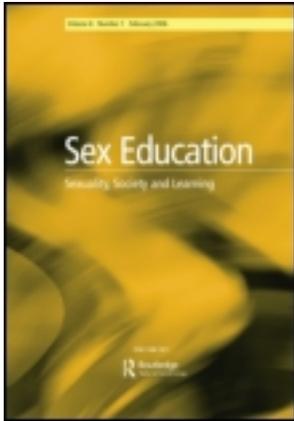


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Playing by the rules: researching, teaching and learning sexual ethics with young men in the Australian National Rugby League

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In 2004, the Australian National Rugby League (NRL) commissioned the Playing By The Rules research project in response to allegations of sexual assault by members of a professional rugby league team. This article offers an overview of the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted by the team, and the subsequent workplace education programmes designed to promote ethical sexual behaviour and attitudes within NRL culture. The researchers reflect on contemporary thinking in the relatively new field of violence prevention education aimed at young men, and consider new critical approaches to the intersection of masculinities and sexual learning.

Introduction

In November 2009, Moira Carmody from the University of Western Sydney and Clifton Evers, then based at the University of New South Wales, ran two weekend Sex & Ethics educators training sessions for 17 current and former players from the Australian National Rugby League (NRL) in Queensland. A number of the educators subsequently ran Sex & Ethics Education Groups with young players aged 16–18 from the Titans on the Gold Coast and the Broncos from Brisbane. The groups met for six sessions between December 2009 and February 2010, and were subjected to a six-month evaluation in August 2010. The training was funded as part of the Australian Federal government's Respectful Relationship programme, and marked the coming together of two evidence-based projects aimed at the primary prevention of sexual violence and the promotion of ethical sexual interactions between young people.

The Queensland groups were the only all-male groups to run the Sex & Ethics training in 2009/2010, and were especially significant given their intersection with the NRL's in-house sexual ethics/violence prevention programme Playing By The Rules. The programme is based on research conducted as part of the Playing By The Rules research project, led by Catharine Lumby and commissioned by the NRL in 2004, following public allegations of sexual assault by members of the Sydney Bulldogs team after a pre-season game at Coffs Harbour, New South Wales. The allegations received heavy coverage in the Australian media and resulted in serious damage to the reputation of both the NRL, and over 330 professional rugby league players (the majority aged 19–25), who were widely depicted as rapists and thugs.

The Playing By The Rules research aimed to determine whether there were any aspects of rugby league culture that encouraged or condoned violence or disrespect towards

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women. The NRL's stated rationale for commissioning the research was to ensure that the organization did everything within its power to ensure that women are treated with fairness and respect throughout the League (see Lumby, Albury, and McCarthy 2004).¹ Kath Albury and Clifton Evers were responsible for developing a proposal for a workplace education for NRL players, based on a review of existing literature on violence-prevention education for men, and on interviews with current players based at all 15 rugby league teams or clubs. At the time, the NRL had two clubs in Queensland, one in Victoria, one in Canberra, one in Auckland, New Zealand, and nine in clubs based in urban and regional New South Wales.

Researchers asked players to talk about their definition of 'a good night out', and invited them to talk about a time when they witnessed a good night out turn bad. Players were invited to reflect on the ways these good nights went bad for any women involved, and how issues like alcohol, celebrity, or 'post-game high' might impact on events. They were invited to reflect on the Bulldogs' rape allegations, and to reflect on their experiences of sexual issues within their club culture and the NRL more generally. They were also invited to speak broadly about their experience of life as a professional athlete and 'role-model', and to put forward their preferences for workplace education form and content (the interview data will not be directly quoted here due to confidentiality agreements).

In order to make recommendations in relation to a specific programme for the NRL, the team surveyed recent literature evaluating existing education programmes for men. They were assisted in this by Michael Flood, University of Wollongong, and Karen Willis, coordinator of Rape Crisis, New South Wales. Additionally, they considered the context in which the education would take place – not in school or college, but a workplace. For this reason, they surveyed literature on adult education, particularly Stephen Brookfield's (1987, 1995) work on developing critical thinking to promote social change. They also acknowledged that the majority of men in first grade were aged between 19 and 24, and were unlikely to have experienced school-based sexuality education that explored positive ethical conduct in sexual relationships, given that recent studies in both Australia and New Zealand have found that young people perceive most school-based sexuality as being primarily focused on 'diseases' and 'plumbing' (see Allen 2005; Carmody 2009a).

Although Australian data regarding the sexual behaviours of young people within the age group 16–25 are difficult to obtain, the team was aware that even younger players were likely to have experienced some form of sexual activity. The most recent Australian report, 'The State of Australia's Young People' (Muir et al. 2009), uses data from The National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health (Smith et al. 2008). This surveyed only young people in formal secondary study. The data reported by these sources indicated that 78% of students had engaged in some form of sexual activity, ranging from deep kissing (79%) through sexual touching (65%) to oral sex (44%) to sexual intercourse – just over one-third of students in Year 10 and one-half of students in Year 12 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008). Just under one-third of the sample reported ever having experienced unwanted sex (Smith et al. 2008).

However, the team was also aware of the cultural diversity of the NRL in terms of socio-economic background, ethnicity, and religious beliefs. For example, the 2009/2010 workshop participants indicated a diverse range of self-described ethnic groups. Eight participants (27.6%) did not provide details about their cultural background. Of the remaining 21 participants, the three largest cultural groups indicated were Anglo-Australian (37.9%), Aboriginal (13.8%), and Samoan (6.9%). Similar percentages (3.4%) of participants identified as Fijian, Kiwi, New Zealander and South American. As indicated in this long list, many participants provided complex descriptors reflecting their

diverse cultural background. The professional players who took part in the 2004 research were equally diverse, and included several players who were outspoken about their Muslim and Christian faith, which precluded sex outside marriage.

The *Playing By The Rules* team drew on Carmody's (2003, 2005) work on sexual ethics in violence prevention, with a foundation in Michel Foucault's ethical model of 'care of the self, care of the other' (Foucault 1990, 1997). The recommendation was that any NRL education should be based on a framework of ethical sexual decision-making, rather than prescribing a list of 'forbidden' and 'permissible' sexual relationships or activities. The recommendations also consciously incorporated what sexuality researcher Louisa Allen (2005) terms 'a discourse of erotics' – that is, they acknowledged that young men and young women could be sexual subjects in positive ways, and that ensuring that all sexual activity was safe and consensual was an important aspect of advancing mutual sexual pleasure. This approach was already prevalent in Australian safer-sex community education programmes aimed at gay men, but was (in 2004) an innovative approach to violence-prevention education aimed at all-male groups. At the time of the initial *Playing By The Rules* research project, much of the literature on men's violence prevention programmes was based on evaluations of date/acquaintance rape programmes for male college students in the United States. These programmes became increasingly common in the mid to late 1990s following research findings that 20–27% of US college women reported experiences that met the legal definitions of rape, and that in nine out of 10 attempted or completed rapes on college campuses the perpetrator was not a stranger, but a friend or acquaintance of the rape survivor (Choate 2003).

Violence-prevention education for men: some background

According to Luoluo Hong, most formal colleges and university responses focused on preventing sexual violence, as distinct from other forms of campus violence such as assault or bullying within fraternity initiations. Risk reduction and self-defence programmes were offered to women, and both single-sex and co-educational education workshops were designed to 'correct misperceived sexual cues, debunk rape myths and describe how to obtain positive consent' (Hong 2000, 269). While some programmes were entirely designed and delivered by university staff or consultants, others were (and continue to be) delivered by various combinations of trained staff and students in a peer education framework (see Hong 2000; Katz n.d.).

Some programmes take the approach that 'it is the experience of masculinity itself . . . that creates the psychological and cultural environment that leads men to rape' (Berkowitz 2002, 164). Others encourage men to understand the impacts of sexual violence in the community by 'empathy induction', which introduces men to survivors' stories of sexual assault. Others, such as those described by Hong, aim to question men's assumptions around sexual practices and consent. These programmes encourage men to take responsibility for clear communication, both when initiating sexual activity and responding to verbal and non-verbal sexual cues. Increasingly, education programmes taking this approach are less likely to emphasize 'No Means No', and more likely to explore the 'what and how' of consensual sex through discourses of erotics, pleasure and safety (see Carmody 2003, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). Other programmes feature 'bystander education', which encourages men to be aware of sexual violence as a problem that they can address in their own community. Bystander education encourages men to be alert for situations that might lead to abuse, and to intervene in potentially abusive situations (see Berkowitz 2002; Banyard, Plante, and Moynihan 2004; Katz n.d.). Berkowitz (2002) notes

that violence-prevention workshops could incorporate all of these approaches, or focus on just one or two.

As male-specific programmes have progressed, they have necessarily been subject to evaluations (many of which are summarized in Berkowitz 2002 and Banyard, Plante, and Moynihan 2004). The difficulty in evaluating violence-prevention initiatives is, of course, that it is not easy to determine whether a participant was predisposed to support, condone or perpetrate sexual violence *before* their participation in a workshop or programme. Consequently, some evaluations have relied on indicators such as pre and post testing to determine whether participants are more or less likely to support or condone 'rape myths' after an education programme (see Lonsway 1996). As Paul Schewe (2002a, 5) puts it: 'because of the paucity of well-developed studies and methodologically sophisticated research designs, the recommendations [in violence prevention education literature] are based as much in theory and practice as on sound research'.

Where research has been conducted, it suggests that even very well-intentioned programmes have unintended effects, including alienating men with an explicit wish to engage with issues of violence against women. In their study of men who had participated in rape education programmes, Scheel et al. (2001) found that those who felt they were explicitly or implicitly addressed as 'potential perpetrators, potential protectors, or potential victims' were likely to feel defensive and frustrated. They argue that these emotional responses suggest that participants in this type of programme are less likely to see the content as 'meaningful', and are therefore less likely to experience 'real learning' (Scheel et al. 2001, 262). In contrast, they suggest that programmes which centre on peer education and frame men as 'supporters and allies' are likely to be better received, and more conducive to learning. Fabiano et al. (n.d.) further suggest that it is worthwhile combining the 'men as allies' approach with a 'social norms' approach, which encourages men to 'correct misperceptions' about other men's and women's willingness to condone sexual violence. Like Carmody's Sex & Ethics programme, the Playing By the Rules programme seeks to extend the work of Banyard and colleagues (Banyard, Plante, and Moynihan 2004; Banyard, Moynihan, and Plante 2007) by locating the goal of sexual assault prevention within a sexual ethics framework. Banyard and colleagues seek to build allies for survivors and to de-escalate risky situations through a model based on the mobilization of pro-social behaviour on the part of potential bystanders (Banyard, Plante, and Moynihan 2004).

Teaching and learning in violence-prevention education for men: a reflection on the literature

Although most of the literature surveyed above refers explicitly to education programmes, very little attention is given to the actual, unsettling process of learning and teaching. Since much of the literature recommends 'reframing' exercises, it suggests that critical theories of education might be the most useful field to explore. Yet a great deal of the literature on critical education describes a learning and teaching process that could be described as the emancipation of a previously 'marginalized' or 'politically disenfranchized' learner (for example, Freire 2001).

In men's violence-prevention programmes, however, men are asked to *relinquish* certain privileges.² They are encouraged to disengage from a culture of 'compulsory heterosexuality', where male strength and competence is constructed in relation to female vulnerability. In these settings, learners are not encouraged to find strength in familiar identities, but to question aspects of themselves that educators suggest are supportive of

violence (e.g. adherence to ‘rape myths’). Where violence-prevention education does discuss the *process* of education, the difficulties of this approach are acknowledged. The body of theoretical literature on violence prevention offers many strategies for challenging men’s assumptions regarding sexual violence and building a sense of empathy with potential and actual victims of sexual assault. Other than the occasional aside, however, it contains relatively little strategic advice for educators, who seem to be framed as neutral ‘helpers’ in recommendations for programme design. For example, Paul Schewe observes that while rape myths are often addressed through a ‘true–false’ quiz, followed by a discussion, ‘educators need to avoid sending the unintended message that “You’re stupid for believing these myths, so I’m going to correct your dumb beliefs”’ (Schewe 2002b, 108). Schewe adds that ‘it is important for the presenter to include him- or herself by using “we” language, because people all have had rape myths inside their heads, and this can help overcome the fingerpointing tone of many “myth-fact” presentations’ (2002b, 109).

Schewe seems to be cautioning educators who, in Thomas Sork’s terms, have ‘based the [teaching] process on the learning “deficiencies of [learners]”’ (1988, 40). Given that violence-prevention education for men places a great deal of emphasis on ‘hunting assumptions’, Stephen Brookfield’s (1987, 1995) work on critical teaching and developing critical thinking can be usefully read alongside it. As Brookfield puts it, ‘we can justify almost any action with a learner, client, friend or colleague by claiming it assists the process of critical thinking’ (1987, 11). That is not to say that scholarly writing on violence-prevention education ignores the process of education altogether, however. While violence-prevention education literature relies heavily on behaviourist assumptions, there is evidence of real concern regarding the scarcity of research in the field and inconclusiveness of many evaluation tools (Lonsway 1996; Schewe 2002a). This seems to indicate that anti-violence educators and activists are very much aware of the possibility for miscommunication during the teaching and learning process. And indeed, as Scheel et al. (2001) observe, many well-meaning strategies intended to engage men in opposition to sexual violence leave them feeling powerless or frustrated instead.

As Tara Fenwick and Mark Tennant (2004) note, the model of ‘learning as reflective process’ can only work if the learner *is ready* to reflect and learn. As Brookfield puts it, ‘questioning the assumptions under which we have been acting, and exploring alternative ideas, is psychologically explosive’ (1987, 30). It is not surprising, then, that strategies which an educator may have framed as ‘questioning rape myths’ might be dismissed by a learner as ‘man-bashing’. In their summary of Jack Mezirow’s 1991 theory of ‘transformative learning’, Fenwick and Tennant observe that ‘when adults encounter a disorienting dilemma ... reflection is often triggered’ (2004, 61). But it is only when ‘reflection challenges the very *premises* undergirding problem-solving processes (What’s wrong with how I am seeing what happened and how it happened?)’ that individual perspectives can shift (Fenwick and Tennant 2004, 61). Berkowitz (2002, 169) suggests that sexual violence-prevention educators can facilitate a readiness to learn by ‘creating intensive programs which foster interaction, discussion and reflection’, observing that the *quality* of the discussion is often cited by learners as the aspect of the workshop that provokes them to change their thinking or behaviour. He goes on to urge sexual violence-prevention educators to ‘focus on process as well as content, and replace rigid structure with flexibility’, while maintaining a core set of programme elements (Berkowitz 2002, 169). Within the Playing By the Rules project, both the research process and the development of programme content were based on the researchers’ own reflections, not only on the content of violence-prevention literature and the data gained from interviews with players, but on scholarly frameworks of masculinity itself.

Rugby league masculinities

In the atmosphere of intense media scrutiny and speculation surrounding the *Playing By The Rules* research, both rugby league ‘outsiders’ and coaches and recently retired rugby league players suggested to researchers that young men simply needed to be issued with a ‘how to’ guide to prevent them from making ‘mistakes’ in sexual encounters. If they failed to follow the rules, a set of penalties and prohibitions should apply. Given that, like other professional athletes, league players were already managed and surveilled by a group of experts – trainers, doctors, physiotherapists, nutritionists, sports psychologists, publicity agents, team sponsors, anti-doping testers, and coaching staff – the research team was reluctant to apply an additional level of surveillance to their sexual lives. Additionally, the team considered that the current legal definitions of consent, sexual harassment and sexual assault provided sufficient formal regulatory guidelines for sexual conduct (and indeed should form a critical part of NRL workplace education programmes). The 2004 research team was also concerned that an overly simplistic model of youthful masculinity as ‘testosterone-charged’ and therefore ‘high-risk’ should not be applied without considering the specific interactions of ethnicity, class, religion and culture that applied to rugby league players.

Within Australian popular mythology, working-class masculinity is understood as deeply embedded within archetypes (the brave Anzac digger, the sporting hero, the surf lifesaver) and specific rituals of sporting success and athletic heroism – acts to prove one is strong, courageous, aggressive, autonomous, masterful, adventurous, tough, heterosexual, brave, honourable, competitive, capable, not intimate, not soft, not emotional, and so on. Within Australia, as elsewhere, R.W. Connell’s work has been widely used as a way of understanding the formation, practices and meanings of masculinity within a range of contexts. One of the key concepts to come out of Connell’s work is an argument for patterns of masculinities. This concept of ‘masculinities’ was developed to account for the shifting relations of hegemony and marginalization between groups of men and women (Connell 2002). According to Connell, institutions, labour structures, economics, and emotional relations lead to the development of a ‘hegemonic masculinity’ that has other masculinities arrayed around it. This hegemonic masculinity can differ depending on cultural and historical conditions. The appeal of Connell’s work lies in an understanding of masculinity(ies) as actively and socially constructed. If masculinities are socially constructed, then there must be conditions under which problematic masculinities and their associated beliefs and practices can change.

Sportsmen have been read as embedded in a pattern of hegemonic masculinity countless times in academic articles, and this belief of the direct relationship between sport and hegemonic masculinity has even made its way into mainstream media. Rugby league players can be competitive, strong, aggressive, homophobic, and at times can dominate others just through the sheer size of their bodies. However, this is only under particular circumstances. These attributes, often associated with hegemonic masculinity, do not directly equate to power – the key to hegemony. The young men who play rugby league are not just ‘footballers’; they are also working-class kids who were only able to complete school thanks to a football scholarship at a Catholic college; Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders from economically and socially disadvantaged rural communities; or first-generation migrant children of single parents who have emigrated from small Pacific islands. If we understand power as the ability to dictate and determine discursive structures and the political conditions of our lives, then it is clear that not all footballers have equal access to it (Foucault 1976).

The Playing By the Rules team was wary of over-reliance on the notion of hegemonic masculinity, which can be interpreted literally to equate power with men themselves. In the 2004 interviews, young men did not report universal feelings of 'power over' and domination. While they could be powerful and competitive on the football field, at other times they were uncertain and intimidated (e.g. in an office setting or at a sponsor's function). The players also spoke of their fear of injury, of how emotional they felt before and after games, and how different these feelings were to their emotional repertoire when at home with their partner or family.

In addition to considering the ways that feelings could impact on young league players' experiences of masculinity, the researchers reflected on the ways masculinity was embodied in different contexts. Players' bodies become central to their understanding of their manhood and masculinity through endless training drills, physical bonding, pain, joy at winning, disappointment at losing, back slaps of encouragement, and recovery (or fear of not recovering) from injuries. Their bodies are central to their masculinity. It is central to them as 'rugby league men'. It identifies them (e.g. their position on the team), allows them to perform their various roles, it feels the wins and losses and training, it makes visible what sort of man they are for others outside rugby league. Players are informed and formed at the level of their bodies. The researchers did not, however, argue that rugby league players' embodiment rendered them incapable of thought and reflection. Rather, the Playing By the Rules team sought to acknowledge bodies and feeling as part of the education process, rather than insisting on a purely 'rational' model of sexual learning. To this end, they drew on David McInnes, Jonathan Bollen, and Kane Race's (2002) account of affective sexual learning among sexually adventurous gay men, which led to a reflection on learning and doing gender, sex and sexuality through bodies as affective assemblages.

It was clear in interviews with both players and coaching staff that while many players were very comfortable with formal classroom learning, the majority of learning about what it means to be a professional footballer is accomplished through doing. It is not just a cognitive learning experience but an embodied and felt participation that can escape rationality as bodies learn what to do and how to feel during events, be they sexual or otherwise. Professional athletes do not learn to play football by sitting and studying – their learning is active and embodied. Similarly, most of us learn about sex by doing, rather than listening to lectures or attending courses on the subject. Yet there are aspects of both football and sexuality that are formally or informally codified, either as 'rules' or as 'the way we do things round here', and the 2004 research confirmed that these codes and rules are transmitted between players and others associated with the game through observation, discussion, or formal education (Lumby, Albury, and McCarthy 2004). Our survey of players found that there were varying approaches to education, with some young men preferring a workshop scenario with an external 'expert' facilitator, and others preferring to be mentored by a senior athlete. The Playing By The Rules workshops were eventually delivered by a pair of co-facilitators, one female 'outsider' (Kath Albury) and one male ex-footballer who had moved into a management and training role within the NRL. The techniques chosen had to be adapted to varying group sizes (between 20 and 35 players and club staff) and varying locations. While some clubs had classroom-style training rooms, others booked the training session into function rooms or basic athletic training areas.

The NRL programmes adopted a range of techniques intended both to inform and to encourage reflection, critical thinking, and change. These included short lectures (conveying factual information such as sexual assault law); small group discussion (including reflective practice); small and larger group discussion of 'hypotheticals' that

presented participants with ‘disorienting dilemmas’; physical games using a ‘agree’/‘disagree’ continuum; and trial-and-error identification of skills and strategies that might be useful in various sexual or social interactions.

Planning the workshops

As Carmody (2005, 2009a) has argued, educators seeking to promote sexual communication and prevent unsafe, violent or coercive sexual encounters have tended to favour moralistic models for sexual negotiation that emphasize the ‘don’ts’ of sexuality rather than the ‘dos’. These models privilege rational decision-making and articulate question-and-answer style verbal negotiation.

Having reviewed the interviews that we conducted with current players, it was apparent that most sexual encounters that could be seen as ‘problematic’ for professional footballers were similar in many ways to those of other young men in their age group. That is, they were often initiated where one or more partners were under the influence of alcohol or other recreational drugs in a nightclub or pub setting. In keeping with Moira Carmody and Karen Willis’ research on young people and ethical sex, most players said there was little verbal negotiation during the pickup stage, or during sex; rather, non-verbal cues such as ‘kissing the person, dancing with them, touching them’ ... or ‘ending up in the taxi together’ were taken as signs of sexual intention (in Carmody 2009a).

The players’ accounts differed from those offered by Carmody’s and Willis’ interviewees in that they were often concluded in a player’s hotel room, rather than at the home of one of the sexual partners, in a situation that could be seen as taking place on the ‘player’s territory’. That is, other team members would be at the same hotel, while the casual partner was, in most cases, unlikely to have her friends close by, during or after the sexual encounter. Some of the players interviewed in 2004 acknowledged that their ‘outsider’ status could place female casual sexual partners at a disadvantage.

Interestingly, while some players’ accounts of ‘picking up’ women and having casual sex reflected broader cultural double standards around male and female sexuality, others viewed their own celebrity status as ‘feminizing’ in a sense. That is, they recognized themselves as objects of desire, but also saw the negative aspects of being sexualized (and scrutinized) in this way, in terms of potential damage to their personal and professional reputations. They were also concerned by the possibility of unplanned pregnancies or sexually transmitted infections that went along with multiple sexual encounters.

Predictably, some players were most concerned with demonstrating sexual prowess (to their partners and other observers) before and during a sexual encounter, and saw this as *the* key factor in a ‘good’ sexual encounter. However, the majority of players (particularly those in their early 20s and older) emphasized the importance of what might be termed ‘aftercare’ following casual sexual encounters. Many older interviewees observed that establishing consent and negotiating condom use with a casual partner was relatively straightforward, especially in the context of their celebrity status for those who were attracted to it. Some interviewees had also clearly observed or participated in sexual interactions that were highly unethical, if not illegal, and nominated their discomfort over these events as motivation to participate in the research. Many players observed that boorish male behaviour *after* sex could also cause distress to a casual female partner, and lead her to feel tricked, manipulated, or dismissed. Some suggested that this was particularly likely to be the case if she was coming down from a pill, or just feeling the effects of a big night’s drinking.

The research team concluded that our education strategy should be based on players' own 'sexual stories' (see Plummer 1995), since straight men, like gay men, have already developed strategies for negotiating safer/consensual sex, even in 'high-risk' contexts. Our reasoning was that, if casual sex was framed only in moral terms, then both the players and their partners were 'bad'. To go out with the intention of getting drunk and picking up a casual partner for sex, with no intention of forming an ongoing relationship, could only be experienced as potentially shaming and shameful. This was a situation where men whose understanding of female sexuality was restricted to oppositions of 'good girls' and 'sluts', or who felt guilt or ambivalence regarding their own sexuality, were more likely to treat a casual partner disrespectfully, if not abusively, in order to end the evening and therefore avoid further contact.

The original workshops were designed to emphasize both similarities and differences between sexual partners; positing heterosexual interactions not as battles or struggles, but as pleasurable engagements that can also involve challenges and affective responses. The content of the workshops was challenging, in that it did not provide final checklists of 'good' and 'bad' sexual practices or scripting for every potential situation, but invited participants to reflect critically on past events and shape their future sexual encounters according to these reflections. Participants were also encouraged to develop relationships of care that extended from themselves to both their team mates and their sexual partners, and to reflect on the role they could play as an ethical bystander in situations where another person (on or off their team) might be at risk of unethical, violent or abusive treatment.

The recommendations were adopted by the NRL, and the first Playing By the Rules workshops were piloted at the NRL Rookie Camp in January 2005, and then adapted for delivery at every first-grade club that year. While the 2005 programme has not been repeated every year, sexual violence-prevention programmes are a core unit in the NRL's education and welfare programme, and are delivered in different formats each year by a range of consultants. Karen Willis and Kath Albury have delivered a version of the original Playing By the Rules programme to the Toyota Cup Rugby League Under-20s squads at their annual induction camps since the launch of the Toyota Cup in 2007. In 2009 Kath Albury stepped back from programme delivery to act as a participant observer at the Toyota Cup Camps in Sydney and Brisbane, and to conduct interviews that invited NRL Education and Welfare staff to participate in a reflective evaluation of the Camps to date. In 2010 Kath Albury, Catharine Lumby and NSW Rape Crisis board member Nina Funnell conducted training for the NRL Education Ambassador programme, which trained past and current players to co-facilitate Playing By the Rules workshops in partnership with an external 'expert' presenter.

The future: evaluations and mentoring

In 2008 the National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence and the Australian Commonwealth Office of Women commissioned a one-year project aiming to develop and trial a national Sexual Assault Prevention Education Framework, which would allow Australian services to evaluate and benchmark their education programmes against best-practice research. The Playing By the Rules project was one of 16 projects selected by the Sexual Assault Prevention Education research team to take part in the national mapping process, following the researchers' analysis of trends in 'promising' and best-practice violence-prevention education strategies. Kath Albury participated in a field interview as the writer/facilitator of a programme that met the requirements (according to the flexible guidelines), and was also invited to participate in the 2008 National Sexual Assault

Prevention Roundtable as a representative of the University of NSW and Playing By the Rules.

The report 'Framing Best Practice: National Standards for the Primary Prevention of Sexual Assault through Education' (Carmody et al. 2009) offers six standards by which sexual assault/sexual violence-prevention education should be measured. The report's authors state that 'these standards are designed to be aspirational and achievable', and go on to observe that while some Australian programmes 'already demonstrate strengths across all 6 standards of good practice', for others 'the standards will suggest areas of refinement and reconceptualisation' (Carmody et al. 2009, 22). According to the authors, the standards 'interlock and inform each other', and indicate a range of issues that programme developers should consider. They are designed also to allow organizations to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of existing programmes (Carmody et al. 2009, 22). The Australian National Standards for the primary prevention of sexual assault through education can be summarized as follows:

- (1) *Using coherent conceptual approaches to programme design.* Indicators include: theoretical approaches that include an understanding of the gendered nature of violence and the over-representation of men as perpetrators of violence; and theoretical approaches that support responsibility and positive behaviour.
- (2) *Demonstrating the use of a theory of change.* Indicators include: articulating the behaviour change theory models used in the programme, and the ways they link with the social, cultural and individual factors that may result in sexual assault occurring.
- (3) *Undertaking inclusive, relevant and culturally sensitive practice.* Indicators include: consultation with mentors, community leaders or representatives from the group that are to be targeted regarding the specific needs of the particular group.
- (4) *Undertaking comprehensive programme development and delivery.* Indicators include: demonstrating understanding of the context and setting in which the programme is to be delivered, with appropriate adjustments in terms of facilitation, staffing and so on; and providing a rationale for the context of the programme, with a clear articulation of how this might affect the programme's outcome and effectiveness.
- (5) *Using effective evaluation strategies.* Indicators include: articulating a clear and realistic process and intended programme outcomes to be evaluated; demonstrating how evaluation is to take place; and demonstrating longer-term follow-up.
- (6) *Supporting thorough training and professional development of educators.* Indicators include: identification of how educators will be resourced with knowledge of sexual assault including gender analysis, skills to address survivors of assault and knowledge of prevention theories and practices; training of educators that includes both education skills and moral/ethical stance in relation to the work; a demonstrated rationale for choice of facilitator; and facilitators' qualifications and experience relevant to the programme (adapted from Carmody et al. 2009, 24–29).

The Playing By the Rules project (as it rolled out in 2005) performed strongly in relation to Standards 1–4, but had room for improvement in relation to Standards 5 and 6. The education workshops have been continually evaluated and refined via reflective consultation and collaboration between the NRL's players, Education and Welfare staff, the researchers, Rape Crisis NSW, and other consultants. While this process certainly has value according to Mike Patton's (1997) framework of 'utilisation-focused evaluation', it has not facilitated publication and external review of the programme. Additionally, until

2009, although NRL players were often involved in co-facilitating workshops, they received no formal training.³ The NRL's uptake of the structured Sex & Ethics programme of training, delivery and evaluation in 2009 addressed these deficiencies, and cemented the notion of the ethical framework as a core aspect of rugby league education and welfare policy and practice (see Carmody 2009b).

Conclusions

The Playing By the Rules education project was conceived in a period of considerable public attention and volatility, in which it might be expected that the young men in the NRL would be defensive and hostile against 'feminists from the university'. While the researchers were initially conscious of a mixed (and occasionally hostile) reception, the players' own participation and engagement with the research and education process has increased consistently and positively since 2004. As a workplace-based violence-prevention/sexual-ethics-promotion programme, the project is uniquely grounded not only in a review of best-practice violence-prevention education, but in the stories and experiences of the participants themselves. It has also continually changed and evolved, based on the reflective feedback offered by NRL players and staff.

The research team was careful, too, to take an ethical approach to the understanding of sexuality and gender within an NRL context. Rather than viewing the rugby league players as a homogeneous group of broken or dangerous masculine subjects who needed to be 'fixed' or neutered by education, they tried to take a more nuanced approach, respecting the complexity of affective and embodied experiences of sexuality and sexual learning. The project has traditionally relied on a process of utilization-focused evaluation, which has allowed for continual improvements, but has not facilitated the communication of results beyond the rugby league community. In 2009, however, the NRL committed to meet the National Sexual Assault Prevention Education Standards, by increasing formal training and evaluation in the short term and extending the roll-out of the full Sex & Ethics programme in the longer term. The Playing By the Rules education programme, which began as a tense 'experiment', has become embedded within an ongoing programme of cultural change within the NRL.

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Notes

1. Recommendations for player education were made following an extensive review of local and international literature on sexual-assault-prevention education and adult education and a comprehensive written survey of nearly 200 current first-grade NRL players. In addition, face-to-face interviews were conducted with a selection of players, coaching staff, senior management, club administrative staff, and many others closely associated with rugby league, including players' wives and partners. The research process was endorsed and supported by the Rugby League Players Association. Both qualitative and quantitative interview data were combined with a review of the existing international literature on professional athletes' attitudes and behaviours in relation to women, and a comparative analysis of international research and practice in terms of

education, mentoring, codes of conduct, and informal protocols around gender relations and gender violence prevention.

2. For a comprehensive discussion of the issue of privilege in men's anti-violence education, see Pease (2008).
3. Many players involved in facilitation had tertiary qualifications in teaching or an allied field, but had not received specific training in sexuality education.

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