In Australia, netball is an enormously popular sport for girls and women. However, despite its long reign as a major female team sport few academic works have critically examined the place of netball in the development of women’s sport and the social construction of gender relations. Archived association minutes and correspondence, newspaper articles and interviews with netball players and administrators are used here to support the contention that netball was designed, promoted and promulgated to enhance the ideals of a ‘compliant femininity’, a premise that provided a socially legitimated foundation for netball and positioned it as an acceptable activity for women and girls. The way in which women secured and used spaces for their netball participation provides a compelling analogy about the place of women generally in Australian society. The paper builds on Jobling and Barham’s work on the history of netball in Australia but views the sport’s development using a somewhat different analytical lens from these authors. It is argued here that the historical development of netball is a potent illustration of the inherent power dimensions and struggles of women in sport. Netball’s growth also demonstrates how public expectations of masculinity and femininity shape sport participation.

Since its inception netball has been one of a limited number of sports that were easily accessible for girls to play in schools and in the community. By its very design netball was able to gain public acceptance and popularity. In its modified form netball was not perceived as a threat to male domination of sport, it was termed a ‘girls’ game’. Netball was therefore allowed to grow with relative freedom from pressures about female suitability. Over many decades netball organisers were able to create and maintain a public image of netball as a feminine sport. Whether this was a strategically planned tactic, or it simply evolved in response to existing social expectations about appropriate female behaviour, is open to debate. In their social history of the game, Jobling and Barham did not offer comment on this distinct aspect of netball’s development. In re-examining the history of netball, this paper explores how this particular game has been used in the mediation of images, rules and regulations and the constructions of feminine identities, masculinity, conformity and resistance in women’s sport.
Netball in Australia

The precise timing of the introduction of netball’s original form, women’s basketball, into Australia is uncertain and largely based on speculation. Previous research has traced the origins of the game in Australia to the turn of the century when it was thought to have been introduced into primary and secondary schools by teachers from England as a modification of basketball. Basketball was first played in 1891 and codified in 1892 in the USA at Springfield College, a physical education training institute in Massachusetts. It quickly spread to include female involvement, and Smith College, an institution for women 20 miles from Springfield, introduced a female version of basketball in 1892. In April 1896 the first women’s intercollegiate basketball game was held between University of California – Berkeley and Stanford University. In another variation of women’s basketball, Clara Baer, of New Orleans Sophie Newcomb College, developed and published modified rules in 1895 under the name ‘basquette’. Senda Berenson, athletic director at Smith College, followed this with her version in 1901. Sensitive to southerners concerns about women in sport, Baer’s edition had seven zones, no dribbling or guarding and rules that ensured players’ posture remained graceful. Berenson’s modifications were called the ‘Spaulding rules’ after their publisher and were not as restrictive as Baer’s southern game. Various adaptations of women’s basketball spread across the USA and into Canada mainly in women’s colleges and physical training schools, and became immensely popular for women as an outdoor game that emphasised teamwork and restraint. The most prevalent versions of the North American game initially divided the court into three zones and players had to stay in their own zones. However, these rules, and other early modifications of the game such as limited dribbling and no guarding, were replaced gradually by men’s rules over the ensuing decades. The conversion to men’s basketball rules occurred at various periods across both Canada and the US, for example, the state of Iowa strongly promoted girl’s basketball from its inception and retained a modified style of play with six aside limited zone coverage until 1994.

The Australian style of women’s basketball traces its roots to England where one version of its development has been attributed to an American, Dr Toll, who was visiting Marina Bergman-Osterberg’s Physical Training College in 1895. Madame Osterberg, believed that a girl’s education should be geared to her subsequent role as a mother and promoted sport as training for motherhood and for the delivery of healthy children. The modified game of women’s basketball appealed to her as it could be played in a manner that retained femininity and decorum. The sport restricted physical movements and involved no body contact and therefore was not perceived as a threat to a woman’s reproductive function and it was incorporated into the college’s curriculum. Women’s basketball teams initially comprised either seven or nine players.
compared to the five required for men's basketball. The number of players was increased for the women's game as a practical way of dealing with the mobility restrictions faced by women playing the sport in long skirts and restrictive attire, and addressed the issue of retaining poise and grace while playing.\textsuperscript{12}

Another theory on the introduction of women's basketball to England is that two English women watched a game of basketball at Springfield College and returned home to, 'develop a set of rules more suitable for the less robust female competitor who, in those days was regarded as a rather frail and timid person'.\textsuperscript{13} Rules were subsequently devised to accommodate the restrictive female dress of the day, as women's long skirts made dribbling the ball and lengthy passes difficult. In consequence, the court was divided into three equal parts, with players based respectively in one of these three sections and no dribbling was permitted. The rules did not permit players to travel the full length of the court as women were still considered frail creatures who were not capable of physical exertion without harm.

Women's basketball arrived on Australian shores in various forms, as it had not been formally codified in England. The first recorded women's basketball game was played in 1897 in Victoria and included much improvisation; women used broomsticks for posts and wet paper bags for baskets.\textsuperscript{14} Another early variation included the use of washing baskets on poles for goals. A separate pole was then used to tip the basket to allow the ball to be removed from the basket after a goal was scored.\textsuperscript{15} The genesis of women's basketball varied markedly across the country because the rules were not formally documented, they were largely passed on by word of mouth. While the early versions of the rules varied considerably, women's basketball was primarily played indoors as it had been in England.\textsuperscript{16} However, by 1899 the game had moved outdoors as indoor playing space was limited and outdoor play suited the Australian climate.

In England, the game was officially termed netball and the rules were formalised by the Ling institute and published in 1901.\textsuperscript{17} In Australia the game retained the nomenclature of women's basketball and regional variations continued with little notice of the English codification. The size of teams varied to include nine-aside, seven-aside, six-aside and five-aside versions. As a result attempts to standardise started to occur at the national level as early as the 1930s.\textsuperscript{18} However, these early attempts by the national association to regulate formal play and competitions in each state or association were only partially successful. Women and girls played by varied sets of rules up until the 1960s.

National rules were finally established in 1963 at the time of the first world championships. While some changes were made from early versions most rules were retained, each player was assigned a designated area on court determined by his or her playing position, a player could catch the ball with one or both
hands and had to pass it or shoot for goal within three seconds, and no dribbling was permitted. It was also officially defined as a non-contact sport.19

Throughout its history women’s basketball was a sport that kept a close eye on compliance with societal conventions about ‘acceptable’ female behaviour. Adherence to circumscribed standards in the public presentation of women in sports, in terms of both appearance and actions, was essential to the path of development that women’s basketball administrators chose. From the selection and modification of game rules through to its course of advancement and administration, women’s basketball encapsulated dimensions of social practice and a particular form of ‘compliant femininity’. The negotiations and social contracts pursued in the organisation of women’s basketball are explored in more depth in the following sections.

**Built for Conformity Not Speed**

The conception of women’s basketball as a sport specifically tailored for women assisted its subsequent growth in popularity. Its design was based on meeting the perceived needs of women, while staying within the confines of their social context and not threatening gender expectations. It is evident that the game’s designers and advocates aimed to explicitly address the requirements of women who wished to publicly engage in physical activity. The mass appeal of women’s basketball was located in a description of its parameters, ‘it lasts only 30 minutes, that is less than half as long as hockey: so that many girls who find hockey beyond their strength benefit by, and thoroughly enjoy it’.20 Field hockey required players to cover a large pitch and thus the level of aerobic exertion could be quite high. The lower level of strenuous physical activity and absence of any sanctioned body contact was perceived as a distinct advantage for women’s basketball. It was a sport that women could play and still remain graceful and ladylike.

Women’s basketball was specifically planned to emphasise teamwork and co-operation, attributes that were considered socially appropriate for women. Since only certain player positions were allowed to shoot for goals, and players could have possession of the ball for only a restricted time limit, the rules encouraged teamwork. ‘Netball because of its rules, ensures, that in the end, the team reigns above the finest individual’21. These rules reflected many of the restraints to acceptable female behaviour found generally in society at the time. Dimensions of co-operation and support, along with the absence of sanctioned body contact, and uniforms that were designed to retain a definite feminine quality, were used by promoters of the game throughout its formative years to encourage a wide variety of ‘mainstream’ women to play women’s basketball. An early publication on the game stated, ‘good temper, pluck, determination, extreme agility of mind and body, are traits universally found among Net-Ball
players, and best of all perhaps, that inexpressibility happy attitude, esprit de corps'.

Women's basketball initially allowed competition only between female participants, it was not overtly physical, and the rules were different from the men's game. Therefore, it did not contest male terrain in either psychological or physical terms. Although women's basketball did require physical skills, it did not require the use of excessive strength, aggression or overt physical exertion. The demure nature of the early versions of the game allayed community tensions with women in sport, and its feminine appeal counteracted the fear that players might acquire masculine attributes.

The spaces used for women's basketball were instrumental in facilitating its broad acceptance and relatively uncontested progress. In its formative years games were played on asphalt courts, school grounds, tennis courts, and in church and drill halls. In using these venues for their sport, girls and women did not have to compete with male-controlled sports for ovals used by cricket and the various codes of football. In keeping women's basketball quite separate from male sports, the game was also able to develop an independent management approach. This ensured that women's basketball did not have to deal with subordination issues faced by women playing sport where the organisation's control rested with males or men's associations.

The social acceptability of women's basketball was also evidenced by its widespread approval as a 'suitable' sport for female players in schools, churches and industrially sponsored competitions. Nauright and Broomhall asserted that public permission to participate in this sport was readily forthcoming from its beginnings because women's basketball was seen to complement the dominant conceptions of proper female physical activity. It did not constitute a challenge to the gender order or conventional perceptions of femininity. Women played netball merely for enjoyment, for physical activity, to obtain some independence and to secure a break from household activity. These reasons for sport involvement were common in the Victorian period when sport for females stressed the importance of physical activity to better prepare women for academic work, domestic careers, mutual sharing and obedience. Women's basketball provided women with the space to play sport while retaining compatibility with a 'compliant femininity'.

However, in practical terms women's basketball was not presented with wholly uncontested terrain. Despite organisers' attempts to quell public disquiet about women playing sport, by designing a game they felt met societal expectations, many community attitudes about female sports were still tinged with scepticism. A newspaper headline from 1926 proclaimed 'Women play basketball result: Four taken to Hospital'. The text of the article implied that
playing sport was a dangerous preoccupation for women and those who played did so at their own peril. Steps were continually taken to ensure that an acceptable feminine aspect of the game remained intact.

The 1930 minutes of an Executive meeting of the AAWBA stated that, ‘our girls should always be well presented and demonstrate good manners in public’. In a 1931 executive meeting of the AAWBA a motion was passed that required players to be silent during the course of a game. The documented discussion, which accompanied the motion, affirmed that the executive felt that women’s basketball should be designated as a silent game where only the captain was allowed to speak. The executive stated that they did not think it was ‘lady-like’ for players to shout and carry on while engaging in the sport. Accordingly, the rules of the game were changed to meet expectations about proper conduct of women in a public forum.

Looking Like Ladies

From the first games played, the public appearance of players and officials took the associated dress requirements of women’s basketball very seriously and standards were rigorously applied. Photographs from the 1920s through to the 1930s show the players’ uniform as comprising a stylish broad headband, belted tunic falling to the knee, a white blouse under the tunic and dark stockings. In Victoria, the initial uniform was a navy blue tunic that fell below the knee, a blouse, tie and black stockings and in the 1940s the stockings were replaced by socks. The Women’s Night Basketball Association of Victoria (WNBBAV) stipulated that uniforms must be eight inches above the ground when kneeling and that, ‘all girls must wear a blouse and matching underwear’. Each local and state association had its own rules about colour and length of skirt, which were strictly enforced. The regulation of proper and acceptable attire was central to the sport’s image and was subject to much debate and discussion throughout the century. The game’s central administration held this conservative line until the late 1980s when a move into commercialism signalled a monumental shift in its ideological stance.

While the official uniform rules were inherently conservative, it has been noted that there was some player resistance to strict compliance. The Age, in 1961, reported that a number of Perth residents had complained about the length of the players’ uniforms worn in a local competition. As a result, the Western Australian Women’s Basketball Association took action the following week; armed with tapes they measured every participant’s uniform at the competition. Representatives checked the uniform length for the regulation seven inches from the ground when kneeling. In response to the public criticism the Association’s president reported, with apparent distain, that, ‘of the 150 teams measured yesterday only 10 were passed’.
During these early years looking like a ‘lady’ was essential for women’s basketball players. Debates about the appropriateness of the attire worn by women engaging in sport and physical activity were not unique to basketball; such attitudes had plagued every sport since women first took to the playing fields. The cumbersome outfits that women were expected to wear in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries severely restricted their participation in many sports and inhibited their movement and competitiveness. These restrictive dress requirements were the prime reason the game of basketball had been modified for women in the first place. The prescriptive dress regulations that were evident in the regulation of women’s basketball were not dissimilar to cricket, cycling associations, golf, surf-life saving, swimming, tennis and many other sports. Cashman and Weaver observed that more media words have been written on the clothing of women playing cricket than their sporting ability in the initial years of women’s cricket. This public fixation and control of appropriate female attire in sports has been the subject of much feminist analysis and related to issues of self-identity, oppression and exploitation of women in sports. The dissension caused by female dress requirements has been the focus of detailed gender relation analyses. While women’s basketball strictly regulated the attire of its players, the stipulations were neither more conservative nor more liberal than those found in most other sports of the era.

Social Dimensions
In their work on netball Bushby & Jobling suggested that the majority of Australian women perceived sports to be a pleasant social outing or a diversion from home-making duties until the 1970s. However, in exploring the archival documents of the state sport associations of women’s basketball spanning the years up to 1970, it is apparent that many of the women involved in women’s basketball took their participation and the competitive side of the sport quite seriously. These women did not consider playing women’s basketball a mere diversion from their ‘womanly responsibilities’ and a number of committed women dedicated their entire lives to playing, coaching and administering the game. Nevertheless, a large proportion of players joined the sport for its social dimensions.

Smith & Humberstone believed the game’s appeal was located in its emphasis on letting everyone play regardless of sporting prowess, ‘netball is a game that can be played by women of all shapes, sizes and aptitudes ... netball is the game of a lifetime you can start at eight and still be playing in your fifties’. Players did not need to be outwardly athletic or overtly strong to play in social competitions. Many women who played women’s basketball were attracted to the sport because it had an obvious recreational component and it was a game that fitted comfortably into middle-class social acceptability. As only females
played women's basketball, girls and women players did not face the same social resistance to playing women's basketball that confronted other women who played less-conventional female sports. As the majority of women discontinued playing women's basketball when they had children it was not perceived as interfering with their family or domestic responsibilities. In interviews with players from the 1920s and 1930s it was reported that young single women dominated the game, and many women entered into teams that were supported by their church, school or place of work. This structure of involvement facilitated a large decline in player numbers as women made the transition from school to work and from work to marriage and children. Interestingly, this trend is still apparent in netball where the average age of players is 21 years.

Although obviously influential, the early role of socially oriented workplace-based teams in the development of women's basketball is not fully documented. It is evident from the records of the New South Wales Women's Basketball Association on Sydney competitions that a substantial number of businesses supported teams from the 1940s onwards. Companies such as Myer, Unilever, Rothmans, Esanda and Fletcher Jones appear to have regularly entered teams in competitions, and encouraged their female employees to be physically active. Many workplaces required women to resign when they married and this impacted on the basketball involvement of women who played for work teams. In general terms, workplace teams appeared to be much more prominent in larger cities. Country and rural areas fostered community club systems and church-based competitions.

No Men Allowed
The official exclusion of men from women's basketball was ingrained in AAWBBA's constitution and underpinned its ideological stance. Despite constant pressure to change, the AAWBBA executive held steadfast to a women-only policy for over 50 years. The game's advocates felt that if men were allowed to assume positions of influence they would soon dominate the organisation's decision-making. It was not until the 1970s that men were allowed to hold formal positions within the member associations. This female-only policy made women's basketball unique, as it was exclusively female from its players through to its top coaches and administrators. In retaining its gender exclusivity women's basketball was able to offer girls and women the rare opportunity to control and shape the direction of a sport. Although it could be argued that women's softball found itself in a similar position, softball never achieved the level of mass participation achieved by women's basketball.

The women who organised and directed the development of women's basketball held the reins tight on the game's development. Women's basketball
perpetuated an image of acceptability through public compliance to femininity expectations within its performative spaces, an acceptability that was seized upon and promulgated by the games’ organisers. Women’s basketball was unique in that it was able to create its own discourse that excluded men but still gendered women.

A New Era

Women’s basketball faced a different set of challenges when a new era of heightened awareness about gender issues in sports emerged in the 1970s. Sporting opportunities for women increased and a wide range of physical activities became more easily accessible. This, combined with the growing professionalisation of sports, meant that women’s basketball was forced to re-evaluate its position. It had to adapt to the changing environment or lose its place as the number one female team sport in Australia. A substantial component of the game’s early success was attributable to the limited opportunity for schoolgirls and women to choose other sports that were socially sanctioned as acceptably feminine. These distinctions were called into question as the women’s movement gained momentum and women began to make choices that contested long-standing notions of gender relations.

As new sporting opportunities emerged and sport for women expanded its participant base, sports organisations faced a period of striking change. Many sports shifted their focus from amateur, grass-roots bases and adopted professional and market-driven approaches. Substantial growth in women’s sports occurred as public funds were made available for the development of new facilities across the country. In particular, new housing estate areas were built with community sporting facilities as dictated by changes to state planning legislation and these spaces were quickly filled with netball teams and competitions. In New South Wales alone the number of districts affiliated with the New South Wales Netball Association grew from 41 in 1968 to 98 by 1979. The Casino District, for example, began with six courts in 1969, but six months later the number of courts used doubled to accommodate demand and by the end of 1970 there were 18 courts in use. The Ku-ring-gai District listed 63 teams and 520 players when they commenced competition play in 1969. By 1978 there were 235 teams with 1,600 players and by 1987 some 2,700 players were registered. This growth pattern was repeated across the state where the game attracted record numbers of players. The intersection of these ideological shifts produced a nexus that would dramatically reposition women’s basketball as a ‘new’ sport called netball.

The massive increase in players, clubs and competitions facilitated a change in the way netball was administered. The ‘kitchen table’ approach of years past could not cope with the increased demands that were being placed on the
previously exclusively volunteer-run administration. Netball moved into a new period of expansion and professionalisation that not only marked a shift in the administration but also a change to the public image and promotion of the game. In 1969 the Victorian Women's Basketball Association was among the first to introduce salaried staff positions when it hired a full-time salaried secretary at the state level. The sport's name officially changed to netball at a 1970 Council meeting of the All Australia Netball Association (AANA) in Brisbane. When the national association approved the new name of netball in its title, all member states followed suit and the sport became officially known as netball across Australia. This was the beginning of a huge paradigm shift in netball operations. While many women involved in netball welcomed the changes, they were strongly resisted by others and a number of power battles enveloped the sport.

At the national level the transition process was not smooth. Not all National Council members supported the new directions, and tensions were apparent between the old and new guard. The All Australia Netball Association (AANA) decided to pursue a strategy of commercialisation, sponsorship and expansion of netball into the new professionalism of sports in 1978. In this restructured administration the AANA employed their first Executive Officer and opened a national office. The first salaried National Executive Director hired in 1978 resigned not long into her term because of problems with the commitment of the Management Committee to the new direction and over concerns about her contract. Long-standing official Dorothy McHugh recalled the many challenges faced by the first executive officer:

... when she (the Executive Officer) got out there in the corporate sector, they didn't know what netball was about. It took her six months to build up an awareness of netball. Well once that started to roll, we didn't ever look back. You needed the professional paid people there, and in turn, All Australia exploded, and the states couldn't keep up with it, because they were all working in a voluntary sort of way.

Former National Coaching Director Joyce Brown then suggested that there should be a restructure of AANA because of a concern for what was perceived as a top-heavy administration. She argued that AANA had become more concerned about marketing clothes, insurance and other commodities, than about servicing the needs of players, coaches, umpires and administrators of the game. In a written response to Joyce Brown's suggestion, the National Secretary/Treasurer, Moira McGuinness acknowledged these concerns. However, she argued that the Association had also taken a gamble in 1978 when it agreed to hire professional staff and that if the Association was to 'service our players in exciting, imaginative programs and to provide an organisational structure and
highly qualified personnel capable of doing this ‘... we have to look to commercial avenues of assistance, such as sponsorship, to reach the goals we have set’.\footnote{highly qualified personnel capable of doing this ‘... we have to look to commercial avenues of assistance, such as sponsorship, to reach the goals we have set’.}

In an Interim Memo the National Secretary/Treasurer blamed AANA’s financial situation on its new philosophical commitment to organisational professionalism and questioned whether the Council were really supportive of such approaches. The Council decided to continue along the lines that had been ratified in 1978. This appeared to represent a turning point for AANA, marking a formal reaffirmation of the commitment to the change process. Initiatives and strategies to instigate change were pursued and sponsorship deals were actively sought to fund the new initiatives. However, gaining greater sponsorship funding seemed to elude AANA and they blamed their failure on the lack of media coverage.\footnote{In an Interim Memo the National Secretary/Treasurer blamed AANA’s financial situation on its new philosophical commitment to organisational professionalism and questioned whether the Council were really supportive of such approaches. The Council decided to continue along the lines that had been ratified in 1978. This appeared to represent a turning point for AANA, marking a formal reaffirmation of the commitment to the change process. Initiatives and strategies to instigate change were pursued and sponsorship deals were actively sought to fund the new initiatives. However, gaining greater sponsorship funding seemed to elude AANA and they blamed their failure on the lack of media coverage.} AANA were especially disappointed at the media coverage for the Sixth World Tournament in Singapore (1983).\footnote{AANA were especially disappointed at the media coverage for the Sixth World Tournament in Singapore (1983).} The Australian press did not send any reporters to cover the event and it was left to the Reuters Bureau in Singapore to send stories back to Australia. AANA decided that local pressure on media channels was needed and member associations were to begin media campaigns. As the minutes recorded, ‘letters, telephone calls from State, District, associated associations, clubs, teams and individuals are essential to convince the media moguls (mostly male) that a World Netball Tournament is a sporting event worth reporting’.\footnote{Letters, telephone calls from State, District, associated associations, clubs, teams and individuals are essential to convince the media moguls (mostly male) that a World Netball Tournament is a sporting event worth reporting.} Efforts to lobby the media did not yield many dividends and netball continued as a marginal sport in terms of media coverage. AANA worried that the low level of media coverage would be a major barrier to the sport’s progress and therefore began a concerted effort to rectify the situation.

While the commercial strategies of AANA achieved limited results, the perceived legitimacy of netball as a sport was further advanced in 1981 when the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra selected netball as one of the eight sports to receive federal government funding for a new sports scholarship scheme. Furthermore, in 1984 AANA proposed the creation of an indoor competition, Super League, to promote netball throughout Australia. The teams suggested were New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Australian Institute of Sport. ESSO Australia was the first major sponsor of the competition. It was decided to test the competition in 1985 after the National Championship to create spectator interest and gain greater television coverage.\footnote{While the commercial strategies of AANA achieved limited results, the perceived legitimacy of netball as a sport was further advanced in 1981 when the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra selected netball as one of the eight sports to receive federal government funding for a new sports scholarship scheme. Furthermore, in 1984 AANA proposed the creation of an indoor competition, Super League, to promote netball throughout Australia. The teams suggested were New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Australian Institute of Sport. ESSO Australia was the first major sponsor of the competition. It was decided to test the competition in 1985 after the National Championship to create spectator interest and gain greater television coverage.} In recognition of the growing need to support and develop elite level netball players AANA also established trust funds for players in 1986, enabling them to retain their amateur status and access to financial assistance when playing commitments impeded employment. The first-fully funded Director of Umpiring was hired in 1992. Adding to its enhanced status, and some twenty years after lodging its first application, netball was recognised by the International Olympic Committee allowing national association access to membership of their country’s National Olympic Committee in 1993. At the
The constant struggle for greater media coverage caused a great deal of internal dissension in the netball ranks. In some quarters it was felt that the game needed to be 'sexier' if it was going to gain wider public attention. However, long-time advocates such as the then national coach Joyce Brown felt there was little need for the use of frills and lace to promote netball. She fought for women netballers to be recognised for their skill and athleticism and was opposed to suggested changes to the uniform that incorporated lycra bodysuits and colourful patterns. The majority of administrators thought differently and the stight-fitting uniforms were approved.

In moving netball away from its amateur roots the national body had to make decisions that were not always popular within the sport. Netball Australia fuelled a huge debate in 1996 by proposing changes to the existing national league. Newspaper headlines such as 'Clubs in turmoil amid fierce backlash against radical changes' and 'State League future hangs in balance' typified the coverage. These sentiments were fuelled by the announcement of a 1997 National Netball League of eight teams playing two preliminary rounds and a final series. This signalled a move away from club to state teams with all teams named after birds, Adelaide Falcons, Adelaide Ravens, Melbourne Kestrels, Melbourne Phoenix, Perth Orioles, Queensland Firebirds, Sydney Eagles and Sydney Swifts. The responsibility for revenue and marketing was allocated to The National Netball League (NNL) Pty Ltd. The choice of team names would suggest a retention of its association with feminine images, which at the same time stress grace, was a consideration. It is unfortunate, however, that the term 'birds' is an unflattering Australian slang term for women and girls. The justification for bird names was based on the argument that other sporting codes have not over-exposed this grouping. Netball Australia claimed that 'Birds also display grace, speed and strength, attributes displayed by elite netballers'. While it can be reasoned that using bird names gave the NNL Pty Ltd the opportunity to establish identifiable team logos, mascots and merchandising, the overexposure claim is difficult to substantiate. Within Australian sport there are the Sydney Swans, Adelaide Crows, the former manly-Warringah Sea Eagles, Wollongong Hawks, Gippsland Falcons and Newcastle Falcons, spanning men's Australian Rules, rugby league, soccer and basketball.

In other domains of women's professional sport the Australian Women's National Basketball League has chosen to use a mixture of names such as Adelaide Lightning, Perth Breakers, Dandenong Rangers, Melbourne Tigers, and the Sydney Flames. Netball New Zealand's teams include the Otago Rebels, Southern Sting, Canterbury Flames, Auckland Diamonds, Northern Force and the Waikato Wildcats. These are all names that are seemingly much less 'graceful'
and convey less feminine images than those the NNL settled upon. It may be that netball is remaining true to its roots in choosing names that portray a softer more feminine image, that is also competitive, without being masculine or overtly aggressive.

**Discussion**

To simply position the development and evolution of netball as an extension of prescribed social practices, a promulgation of the subordination of women and reinforcement of the existing social order, would be unjust. Such a categorisation would suggest that all women who played netball were adhering to a 'compliant femininity', not challenging or resisting socially constructed ideals of femininity. Netball did create an acceptable avenue for women to strive for physical excellence within the established social order by reassuring that the dress, and behaviour of its players was appropriate. Likewise, to say that the female domination of netball was an articulation of independence, a moderated challenge to the normative model of sport and an act of female solidarity would be equally simplistic. The constant reinforcement of femininity and the female only dimension of netball provided women with a space where they could applaud each other's achievements instead of measuring women against male standards. Netball provided an avenue for women to feel comfortable about expressing their abilities not just as players but also as coaches, umpires and administrators.

During its early years women's basketball had to contend with debates about the suitably of women to engage in robust physical activity and team sports. While moderate exercise was seen as healthy, energetic activities were viewed as potentially harmful to health and reproductive capabilities. Women's basketball was able to respond to these fears by structuring a game that was moderately physical and only played by women. By ensuring that grace and femininity were still present in activity, advocates of women's basketball were able to successfully pursue their goals. In writing about the socialisation of women and sport Park stated, 'sports are cultural artefacts, and as such are very likely to reflect the dominant social structures and salient values of the societies in which they exist'. In tracing its history, women's basketball fits Park's claim as it has clearly reflected social expectations and the need to accommodate gender roles. The sport's image was built on moderation and compliant femininity, modesty in play and attire, these attributes contributed to its acceptance and popularity. The progression of the game's rules and dress requirements reflected a changing perception of social pressures in women's sports; the negotiating and compromise that was necessitated by having to combine strength, determination and competitiveness with grace, cooperation and femininity. Festle proposed that women in sport often engage in apologetic behaviours, consciously
or not, because of role conflict related to femininity and sexuality concerns. The concept of public apologetic behaviour can be transposed to netball, a modified sport predicated on emphasising female attributes.

This approach to accommodating social values in women's sport was not unique to Australia. During the formative years of female sport both netball in Great Britain and women's basketball in the United States helped define and reinforce concepts of gender. These sports also were used to disseminate and affirm idealised social values about women and therefore acted as mechanisms of social control, and symbolised a subordinate role when compared to men. As games with modified rules these sports served to accentuate the differences between women and men and created gendered social spaces that emphasised the polarisation between masculinity and femininity.

Herein lies the paradox of netball. Has it been an avenue of emancipation or one of restriction? Have its participants contested societal expectations of women in sport or constituted a compliant adherence? Did restricting the game to women only for so many years liberate women or merely create a sport that was seen as less than equal, a 'girl's game'? Did the players accept and agree with its conservative official rules and regulations or were they able to develop divergent identities within the sport? To dichotomise netball participation into one extreme position or the other, on what is really a continuum, would be to ignore its place in the lives of individual women. Within the parameters of netball women and girls were able to negotiate a position that did not directly contest societal expectations but provided women with the space to enjoy the benefits and enjoyment of sport participation. Importantly, netball allowed women to assume positions of power and authority without challenge from men. This was a particularly unique contribution in the world of sport.

Netball has changed over the course of the last one hundred or so years, and its definition of femininity has expanded to encompass increasingly athletic dress, physicality and behaviour. However, issues about femininity and masculinity still exist in Australian sport. In the controversial book Atlanta Dreaming (1996), photo expose, and the Golden Girls of Sport Calendar (1994), Australian female athletes posed in revealing photographs. In the ensuing debate about these publications Mikosza and Phillips concluded that the Golden Girls calendar denigrated female athleticism and reinforced stereotypical feminine models of sport. Such criticisms did not stop the Australian women's soccer team, the Matilda's, following the golden girls' lead and posing nude for a calendar to promote their sport. Sports Today quoted one of the players, Amy Taylor, as saying that she appeared in the calendar to prove to people that female soccer players are not necessarily all butch and masculine. This further evidence of the pressure on female athletes to prove that they are not 'masculine' suggests that women still feel pressured to fit mainstream societal expectations of
femininity. In the same magazine article netball player Liz Ellis commented that it was a shame that female athletes had to go to such lengths to prove their femininity. In early 2000 the Australian netball team refused a similar offer to remove their clothes for a calendar. It was reported that the team had voted decisively against such a move as they felt they did not need to show they were ‘women’.61

Conclusion
Throughout its lifespan netball has faced a continuous struggle of maintaining the right balance between athletic engagement and social conventions about appropriate female behaviour. Netball was structured to provide an avenue for women to break through and set new standards for sports participation. It did not facilitate radical changes in gender stereotypes nor did it foster any significant re-conceptualisation of gender issues in sport. The women guiding the development of netball practically and morally worked to retain a feminine aspect in its playing attire, movements and approaches, ever cognisant of public image and opinion. Netball was a ‘girls’ game’ that allowed women to stake a claim on sport participation and still be viewed as ladies. As such, it has serendipitously socialised women into sex-based, socially acceptable roles that largely reinforced the gender order in sport.

This is not to dismiss the contribution netball has made to women’s sport. It has been a significant institution in the constant struggle by women to engage public opinion and exercise their right to participate in physical activities. In this role netball has contributed to the acceptability of women playing sports. At a societal level it could be concluded that netball has both facilitated and constrained women’s participation in sport. Its conservative approach restricted, and was apologetic about, female involvement, yet it provided a sport that was socially acceptable for women to pursue. Thus, netball has been faced with the same dilemmas and contradictions of most female team sports. In striving for mass appeal netball adopted a ‘compliant femininity’ approach that avoided the risk of alienation associated with sports that are labelled as too ‘macho’ for women. In doing so netball has been consistently able to attract large numbers of women into the game.

The impact of recent changes in netball from the advent of mixed sex teams and competitions to the infusion of men into decision making roles in the administration of the sport will be interesting to track. Will these shifts signal the demise of the female tradition of control and leadership of netball? Netball has survived within the dominant male terrain of sports provision and involvement but it has remained a marginal player. The heightened profile of Australian women in professional basketball, which provides international career track opportunities, may rise to challenge the dominance of netball.
Basketball does not have the stigma of being a modified game for women with its associated 'inferior sport' label and has not overtly pursued an image of feminine propriety. Historically netball has been a site for continuing female comradeship, competition, leadership, identity and tradition whether this continues within the shifting parameters of social values and expectations about women and sport remains to be seen.

Notes
2 Jobling and Barham, Netball Australia.
6 Dean, "Dear Sisters" and "Hated Rivals".
9 Beran, From six-on-six to full court press, pp.15-17
12 J. Dunbar, 60 Years of netball in New South Wales. New South Wales Netball Association:, Sydney 1989, pp.11-12.
18 AAWBBBA minutes, 1931.
20 T. Martin, Netball Fundamentals, p.2.
21 Smith and Humberstone, Netball, p.12.
26 The article was included in archival material of the Queensland Netball Association with no reference to the newspaper title.
28 WNBBAV, 1960.
29 The *Age* (undated press clipping) 1961.
33 Cashman and Weaver, *Wicket women*, pp.66
35 Bushby and Jobling, pp.64-91.
38 M. Duncan, Conversations with netball players and administrators, Australian Sports Commission, Canberra, 1994, pp.2-91.
40 Dunbar, pp.18-19.
42 Dunbar, pp. 276-277.
44 VWBBA minutes, 1969.
46 All Australia Netball Association, Minutes, Feb 1980.
47 Duncan, p.56.
48 pers. cor. 17 November 1982.
49 pers. cor. 23 November 1982:3.
50 AANA, Minutes, 1983.
51 Minutes of Management/Finance Committee April 15-17, 1983.
52 AANA, Minutes, 1983:232).
55 *Sydney Morning Herald* 22 March 1996:16; *Herald Sun* 27.3.96:80.
56 Park, p.70.
61 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 April 2000.