

"Girlfriends of the Court"

Amicae Curiae

football, lingerie, Sport

Lawyers' Lingerie League: Clothing as Control?

In Career, fashion, media, shoes, women on **June 13, 2012** at **8:59 am**



(http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cassie_McRichie_-_page_8.jpeg)

Single-sculler Cassie McRichie, founder of the Albert Park Lake women's rowing club, wasn't troubled by an overly sexualised costume in 1900.

The last couple of weeks has seen the Lingerie Football League ('LFL') in the news (<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/lingerie-football-league-saunters-into-town-to-jeers-and-cheers-20120601-1zmyy.html>). If you're uncertain about what this entails, it is 'Hot babes in lingerie playing footy!' according to the Triple M website (<http://www.triplem.com.au/sydney/sport/photos/lingerie-football-league-in-australia>) promoting it. (See also a spectator's view here (<http://melindatankardreist.com/2012/06/a-sad-day-for-all-women-in-sport-deborah-malcolm-reports-on-weekends-lingerie-football-league/>).)

Some commentators have decried the so-called sport as sexist (<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/frills-and-spills-of-lingerie-football-tackle-all-women-hard-20120605-1zu5y.html>), while others claim that this is snobbery (<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/feminist-critics-of-this-new-sport-sound-like-snobs-on-a-soapbox->

[20120608-201nt.html](#)).

So is it sexist? If so, why? Are there implications for women more broadly?

Clothes in the 'sporting' arena

It seems to me that while the LFL is referred to as a 'sport', its purpose is clearly sexual titillation of heterosexual men. As 'true fantasy football' the [team names](http://www.lflus.com/powerrankings/) (<http://www.lflus.com/powerrankings/>) (Philadelphia Passion; Las Vegas Sin; Orlando Fantasy...) as well as 'lingerie' in the sport's title give away the overtly sexualised nature of the league and the role of clothing (or lack thereof) in representation of womanhood.

It might be argued that other women's sports represent women in skimpy outfits, and this is correct. Tennis players' short skirts, netballers' lycra outfits and rowers' tight-fitting 'zooties' are all revealing in their own way. In contrast to LFL however, these sports present themselves as sports first. While some may derive sexual gratification from watching, this is incidental. For LFL, the outfit is everything and useless suspenders and a garter highlight the sexual overtones of the uniform. They are sexually suggestive costumes alone.

[Helen Razer](http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/feminist-critics-of-this-new-sport-sound-like-snobs-on-a-soapbox-20120608-201nt.html) (<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/feminist-critics-of-this-new-sport-sound-like-snobs-on-a-soapbox-20120608-201nt.html>) pointed out that roller derby isn't singled out as sexist, concluding that there are classist overtones to criticisms of LFL. She points out that 'middle class' roller derby players 'wear their hotpants ironically' and therefore seem immune from criticism.

While costumes appear to be an important component of [roller derby](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roller_derby) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roller_derby), Helen Razer's point is perceptive. I wonder however if this suggests a self-awareness and raised consciousness in this context that is difficult to see in the LFL. Additionally, while some roller derby player names do have sexual overtones (eg [Bullet La Vulva](http://www.twoevils.org/rollergirls/) (<http://www.twoevils.org/rollergirls/>)) the game does not purport to exist for heterosexual male titillation in the way that LFL does (http://www.usatoday.com/life/lifestyle/2008-06-17-female-roller-derby_N.htm).

Secondly, it is almost impossible to imagine LFL being played by men because of the central role of lingerie (and heterosexual male titillation). Any other sport, including roller derby, can be played by men or women alike. To my way of thinking, this in particular earmarks LFL as a sexist endeavour.

The LFL seems to objectify women's bodies in a so-called sporting context, over and above the game itself. It does this through the clothing, an integral part of the LFL indicated in its name, and by the particular 'look' of women selected to play. This is another key difference from roller derby, that is played by women of all sizes and shapes. For women's 'sport' to gain acceptance, LFL implies is that we need to look a particular (sexualised) way for a particular audience.

As our culture absorbs this well-funded norm over and above women's sport generally, women's sport will further struggle for funding and standing. But does the message go further afield?

Clothes at work

If women are told that their sporting prowess is secondary to their appearance, what is happening in the workplace? The responses to previous posts on [this blog](http://amicaecuriae.com/2012/04/29/do-clothes-make-the-woman/) (<http://amicaecuriae.com/2012/04/29/do-clothes-make-the-woman/>) about women's working garb (<http://amicaecuriae.com/2012/02/12/i-know-what-boys-like/>) indicate that women, particularly in law (<http://amicaecuriae.com/2012/02/22/the-law-and-tights/>), continue to feel controlled by (legal) corporate culture in terms of what they wear.

Some tell us not to look titillating (<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/the-booby-trap-20120211-1syoi.html>) in the office by displaying cleavage or too much leg. Others tell us to wear skirts not trousers (<http://jezebel.com/5916586/forget-the-glass-ceiling-we-have-hemlines-to-consider>), to ensure we are 'feminine' at work.

It seems that what women wear – on the 'sporting' field, or in the office, is expected to suit the needs of men: either by displaying our sexuality, or by masking it.

If I could say that LFL was about empowering women to wear what they want as they demonstrate their athletic prowess, then whether or not they were sexually appealing to an audience would be neither here nor there. But I don't think that this is the intention of the game. As I despair at the control exercised over women by the unwritten rules of work-wear, so too do I wonder about the extent to which sporting women are to be controlled by the expectations of clothing.

Is it an issue bigger than the LFL? Or am I just seeking to impose my own clothing norms on women?

Guest author [Kate Galloway](http://www.jcu.edu.au/law/staff/JCUDEV_002672.html) (http://www.jcu.edu.au/law/staff/JCUDEV_002672.html) teaches law at James Cook University. You can follow her blog at [Curl](http://katgallow.blogspot.com/) (<http://katgallow.blogspot.com/>), and on twitter at [@KatGallow](https://twitter.com/#%21/katgallow) (<https://twitter.com/#%21/katgallow>).

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