Diasporic Belonging, Masculine Identity and Sports: How rugby league affects the perceptions and practices of Pasifika peoples in Australia

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Gina Louise Hawkes
BA (Hons) University of Sydney

School of Global Urban and Social Studies
College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University

April 2019
I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed. I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Gina Hawkes 11/04/19
Acknowledgements

To RMIT University for accepting and funding me and to all the staff who helped along the way, thank you. To my family and friends who have endured me, encouraged me, questioned me, and lifted me up when I needed it most, you are the light in my life. I want to particularly give thanks to Ashleigh Wardell, Frances Morrice, Megan Donker, Lara Williams and Mark Ashmore for being my ride or dies. To Sophia Hanover, Rob Larsen, Sam Burkley and Anoushka Klaus, thank you for always welcoming me into your homes on my numerous visits to Melbourne. To Shelley and Matt Hackett, and Maxine Sutherland and fanau, fa’afetai lava for all your Samoan wisdom and acceptance of my stumbling allyship, you have taught me so much, tele alofā. To my Krone clan, I love you all and always have and always will, thank you for helping me become the curious soul that I am and encouraging me to pursue my happiness. Mum, you’re a star.

To my brilliant, always encouraging supervisory team – Peter Phipps, whose knowledge and warmth always gave me the push I needed, Barry Judd, whose work and ethos is a continual inspiration, Kalissa Alexeyeff, who lead me through my milestones and was so generous with her time, and Hariz Halilovich for his helpful contributions to the final drafts of this work, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I would like to thank all the scholars who showed interest in my work, for all the chats and advice, there are too many of you to mention, but the openness of the Pacific and indigenous studies communities in particular, has been incredibly enriching and uplifting.

To my boyfriend who became my husband during this project, Ashley Hawkes, arohanui! You have taught me so much about Māori culture, and made me a better person in every way. Thank you for reading my work, wiping away my tears, listening to my presentation practices, offering your advice, relishing in the joys of sport and art with me, and for sharing in my excitement and anguish and always believing in me. To all the Hawkes family, I say ngā mihi and arohanui, I am so thankful to be part of your whanau.
Last but not least, to all my participants, I hope you will accept this piece of work as my small *koha* for all that you have given me. Thank you for your time, energy, life lessons, patience, good cheer and humour, and for your wit and wisdom, you continue to genuinely blow me away and inspire me to be both strong and vulnerable. Thank you Leo Tanoi, Patty Perez and your team at SVSG, and the anonymous NRL, NSWRL, Auckland rugby league, and community members who have given me their time. They say it takes an army, but I like to think it takes a sea of islands. We are all in this ocean together and you have kept me swimming. *Kia ora, faʻafetai lava, vinaka vaka levu, malo ʻaupito, meitaki maʻata*, thank you.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. iii
List of tables .............................................................................................................................. vii
List of figures ............................................................................................................................ vii
Glossary ....................................................................................................................................... viii

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 4
A trajectory of the research journey ......................................................................................... 9
Geographical focus .................................................................................................................... 10
The vā ........................................................................................................................................ 14
Decolonial methodology and paradoxes .................................................................................. 15
Sport and masculinity .............................................................................................................. 18
Thesis structure ........................................................................................................................ 21

CHAPTER TWO. METHODOLOGY ....................................................................................... 26
Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 26
Building the research question ............................................................................................... 28
Methods .................................................................................................................................... 32
Ethics process .......................................................................................................................... 34
Pasifika sports studies in the diaspora ..................................................................................... 41
The quotidian ............................................................................................................................. 44
An indigenous feminist habitus ................................................................................................. 47
Pasifika relational identity in a postcolonial diaspora: Incorporating the vā ................................ 49
Talanoa and Pasifika methodologies ......................................................................................... 52
Researcher and researched ..................................................................................................... 54
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 56

CHAPTER THREE. CONTEXT ................................................................................................. 58
Colonising indigenous masculinity ............................................................................................ 66
The paradoxical power of sport in the everyday ...................................................................... 70
A brief history of the Australian Pasifika diaspora ................................................................. 72

CHAPTER FOUR. IDENTITY AND RELATIONALITY: USING THE VĀ TO
EXPLORE SPORTING SPACES FOR AUSTRALIAN DIASPORIC PASIFIKA
PEOPLE ..................................................................................................................................... 77
Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 77
Emergent diasporic Pasifika identity and its connections to a global indigeneity ................. 79
Being between and belonging ................................................................................................. 85
Global indigeneity: Being indigenous away from home and on stolen land ....................... 91
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 103

CHAPTER FIVE. JOY AND PARADOX: EVERYDAY ENGAGEMENTS OF
THE PASIFIKA DIASPORA IN RUGBY LEAGUE ................................................................. 105
Framing and silencing: The myth of purity and truth ............................................................ 105
Paradoxes of sport.................................................................110
Joy and play ..............................................................................113
The other side of the paradox: Oppression and limitation .............120
Pasifika perceptions of sport and diasporic identity .......................123
Conclusion .................................................................................130

CHAPTER SIX. THE AUSTRALIAN PASIFIKA DIASPORA AND
MASCULINITIES: THE HEGEMONIC, THE POSTCOLONIAL, AND THE
HYPER......................................................................................132
Introduction................................................................................132
Historical background..................................................................134
Contemporary effects: The male Pasifika body and the myth of the “natural”.............136
Stereotypical Pasifika game play and hyper-masculinity .....................143
Emasculation and feminisation.......................................................151
Conclusion .................................................................................160

CHAPTER SEVEN. FAMILY, FAITH AND FOOTBALL: PERFORMING
THE VĀ WITHIN AND BETWEEN ..............................................162
Family ......................................................................................163
Faith .........................................................................................167
Football ......................................................................................180
Shame and salvation ..................................................................182
Indigenous performativity and the vā ...........................................185
Conclusion ................................................................................188

CHAPTER EIGHT. THE PARADOXES OF THE RESEARCH ITSELF:
BETWEEN OBJECTIVITY AND RELATIONALITY ......................189
Giving back and standing with ..................................................189
What of the role of research itself? The spaces between university research and
indigenous epistemologies ..........................................................192
“Objectivity” and connection ......................................................195
Vulnerability and strength ............................................................204
Conclusion ................................................................................206

REFERENCE LIST ......................................................................213

APPENDICES .............................................................................235
Survey questions for online survey 2016 .........................................235
HREC ethics approval ................................................................241
List of tables

Table 1. Pasifika and indigenous ancestry in the Greater Sydney area from the 2016 Australian Census (ABS 2017), p63.

Table 2. Pasifika and indigenous populations of Australia and New Zealand in 2016 (ABS 2017; Pasifika Futures 2017; Statistics New Zealand 2013, 2017), p63.


List of figures

Figure 1. Australian state populations as national percentages (ABS 2017) and NRL club locations across Australia, Greater Sydney, and New Zealand, p13.

Figure 2. Sydney University library sports section, 2018. Photograph by author, p19.

Figure 3. Survey answers to questions on importance of sport, p112.

Figure 4. Survey answers to question ‘If you were to play at an international level in your sport, what country would you most like to represent and why?’, p124.

Figure 5. Example of merchandise popular in Auckland, and sold at Pasifika events in Western Sydney, 2016. Photograph by author, p154.

Figure 6. Survey answer percentages to question ‘who is/are your sporting heroes and why?’, p155.

Figure 7. Merchandise for sale, Samoa Day, Liverpool Sydney, 2016. Photograph by Ashley Hawkes, p156.

Figure 8. Responses from multiple choice survey question ‘How important is family to you?’, p166.

Figure 9. The decrease in importance of religion across Pasifika culture, families, and individuals, taken from survey results, 2016, p168.

Figure 10. Pacific Test, 2018. Photograph by Ashley Hawkes, p187.
Glossary

[ofa – Tongan – love
alagaupu – Samoan – proverb
anga fakatonga – Tongan – the Tongan way
Aotearoa – Māori – New Zealand
arohanui – Māori – with much love
fa’a Samoa – Samoan – the Samoan way
fa’afafine – Samoan – feminine presenting male-born person
fa’afetai lava – Samoan – thank you very much
fa’alavelave – Samoan – obligations
fakelatai – Tongan – feminine presenting male-born person
fanau – Samoan – family
haka – Māori – war cry
kia ora – Māori – hello/be well/thank you
koha – Māori – gift/offering
mālie – Tongan – beauty
mana – various Pasifika languages – a spiritual/personal strength and power
malo ‘au pito – Tongan – thank you very much
marae – Māori – meeting house
Matai – Samoan – family chiefly title
mauri ora – Māori – maximum life-force/healthy and thriving
meitaki ma’ata – Cook Island Māori – thank you very much
moana – various Pasifika languages – ocean
ngā mihi – Māori – thank you
Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga – Māori – Māori Centre of Research Excellence
noa – Tongan – nothing/equilibrium/zero
pākehā – Māori – New Zealander of European descent
palagi – Samoan – European/foreigner/non-Samoan/white person
Pasifika – Samoan – people and other phenomena with an ancestral connection to the Pacific Islands
sipi tau – Tongan – war cry
siva tau – Samoan – war cry

1 These are simplified literal translations for easy reference. The complexities of Pasifika concepts are dealt with in the thesis.
**talangofua** – Tongan – obedience

**talanoa** – Tongan – to talk about nothing in particular (literal translation)

**tangata whenua** – Māori – people of the land

**tapu** – Māori – sacred

**tautua** – Samoan – service

**toko** – Tongan (slang) – brother

**uce** – Samoan (slang) – brother

**vā** – Samoan – the space between

**vinaka vaka levu** – Fijian – thank you very much

**whakahihī** – Māori – conceited

**whakapapa** – Māori – genealogy

**whanau** – Māori – family
ABSTRACT

Pasifika men are significantly over-represented in Australian Rugby League with their dramatic influx into the sport over the past 20 years often being attributed to their “natural” athleticism and other corporeal reasons invoking hyper-masculinity. They are both glorified and demonised for these perceived qualities, and like other indigenous groups of men across the world, can be caught in a paradox of indigenous male athlete as ‘hero and dupe’ (Hokowhitu 2013: xvii). This thesis takes a decolonial approach to Pasifika rugby league in Australia by drawing on the Pasifika concept of vā – the spaces between – to challenge popular paradoxes and binaries such as indigenous/non-indigenous, hero/dupe, physical/intellectual, Pasifika/Australian, and masculine/feminine.

The vā is a space of active service, harmony, aesthetics, and connection, and I argue for its central role in mending the gaps between colonially separated categories for the Australian based Pasifika diaspora, particularly in rugby league which has vā-like qualities. Sport is often described as liminal, being betwixt and between reality and fiction, and as such shares similarities with Pasifika concepts of relationality where it is in the spaces that connect, rather than those that separate, where meaning is made. Sport has the power to both affirm and transgress off-field hostilities and traditions. It can be (and indeed has been) used as a colonising tool to “discipline the natives,” and at the same time it can be (and has been) used as an opportunity to beat the “master” at his or her own game.

Within these paradoxes are the most fruitful spaces – which I connect to the vā – and where in this thesis liminality gets a Pasifika makeover. I focus on the lived experiences, feelings and emotions of sport for the Australian Pasifika diaspora (and to a lesser degree New Zealand’s), exploring how Pasifika masculinity is framed and how this affects diasporic Pasifika peoples’ roles in “the three f’s” – family, faith, and football. Being a Pacific Islander in Australia is very different to being one in New Zealand or the United States of America. In Australia it is sports and sports media where most visibility and knowledge of Pasifika culture emanates and much of this is based on ideas around masculinity. Like the sea connecting Pacific Islands, diasporic Pasifika identities are made through connections to each other, to ancestral homelands.
and to their new homes and what they do there, including the playing and consuming of sports, which is, by no accident, itself betwixt and between.

Sport often exists in a balancing act between possibilities for emancipation and oppression and can aid both simultaneously. This includes the emancipation of indigenous masculinity from an inferior position to hegemonic white patriarchal masculinity, and the oppression of other subaltern forms of masculinity and femininity, including homosexual and transgender masculinities, and women. By acknowledging both the powers and pitfalls of rugby league for Australia’s Pasifika diaspora, and drawing attention to how both often coexist within the perceptions and practices of Pasifika peoples, I shed light on the complexities of what sport brings to an indigenous peoples’ lives on an everyday level, both good and bad, and what sport offers in and of itself rather than as a means to an end. I demonstrate how rugby league in Australia plays a paradoxical role in both reinforcing and challenging social values around race and masculinity and I put forward suggestions for better ways of understanding. I argue that being indigenous away from home and on stolen land is different to being indigenous to the land one occupies, but that indigenous people share common experiences of colonisation.

This thesis takes an ethnographic, multidisciplinary and mixed-methods approach which draws on Pasifika methodologies and values, my anthropological background, my position as a white female researcher in a Pasifika masculine research topic, and a commitment to decolonial practices. Like the subjects of this thesis, the way it is written reflects a space between traditional academic paradigms, and decolonial, indigenous and Pasifika frameworks. I am just as interested in how to research diasporic Pasifika identity as I am on the subject of diasporic Pasifika identity. For this work to adequately engage with decolonial and indigenous practices, I question the role of research itself, considering the spaces and paradoxes between so-called objectivity in research, and Pasifika concepts of connection.

Rugby league is fast becoming a Pasifika majority-played sport in Australia, and this position comes with opportunities to refashion a colonially introduced national sport that is run and reported on by a majority white-male cohort and shape it in ways that better benefit Pasifika peoples. While rugby league can be accused of perpetuating
limiting stereotypes and perceptions of Pasifika identity, it also offers a rare space for subaltern masculinities and indigeneities, such as those from the Pacific Islands, to thrive in the culturally valued arena of sports in Australia. The arguments in this thesis contribute to more accurate understandings of Pasifika personhood being just as expansive as Hau'ofa’s Pacific geographic imaginings – Pasifika peoples are not just part of a ‘sea of islands’, they are part of a constantly changing global diaspora of emergent and creative identity practices. I contend that Pasifika identity is not merely reflexive or tied to particular cultural tenets, but rather is formative, emergent and creative.
CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

‘Attention without feeling is merely a report’ Mary Oliver (2015).

Like many “sports buffs”, early exposure to a particular sport ignited my love for it. For me, rugby league meant sitting in front of the fire as a young girl with my Dad, a bowl of corn chips and his home-made hummus that he prided himself on, listening to both the commentary on the screen and the more expletive-laden commentary of my father. I would sit on the floor and take in the exciting energy of the game while relentlessly asking Dad questions about every rule and move, to which he always patiently and enthusiastically answered. Neither my younger brother nor my Mum were interested in the game so it became a special thing between Dad and I. Sometimes my Grandfather would join us too, and soon my knowledge and love for the game merged with theirs and watching and talking about “the league” became a common source of joy and belonging.

While many people associate rugby league with a non-intellectual, misogynistic and violent arena, growing up with my social worker father who loved rugby league and could yell at the TV one minute and show love and care to his 10-year-old daughter the next, meant there was never such a binary for me. My mother is an artist, and I grew up loving art, theatre, philosophy, Barbie, dressing up, playing sports and watching league. What started as a way to connect with my Dad through something he loved turned into a lifelong passion and interest in the strange world of hyper-masculine sports. The awe-inspiring and at times painful-to-watch hits and runs, the speed at which these men could step and shirk off an opponent, or jump and catch and then control a ball to the ground with feet in air, has always impressed me. The game has an exciting pace, with tries often far enough apart to be worthy of jumping in the air in excitement when they happen, and not so far apart that you spend most of the game waiting for them to happen. I also loved seeing grown men show visible emotion, whether it be from winning or losing, with the scenes at the end of games sometimes being my favourite bit. The hugs, smiles, jumping, embracing and even crying were a rare sight and one that I always felt had a special place in sport. As I got older though, I found it harder and harder to justify, or publicly show my love for the game. I lived in alternative neighbourhoods, did arts at University and worked in
theatres. How could I support such chauvinistic male-dominated phenomena? Well, I hope this thesis can provide an answer.

Rugby league is the second most popular spectator team sport in Australia behind Australian Rules Football (commonly referred to as Australian Rules or Aussie Rules) (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2012). In 2015 there were 1.4 million registered participants in the game (NRL 2015) and across the large Eastern States of New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland (QLD) exposure to it in some form is unavoidable, whether it be in the dissemination of news, products or the games themselves. New South Wales, home to Australia’s largest city Sydney, houses ten of the 16 first grade National Rugby League (NRL) teams, nine of which are in Sydney itself (see Figure 1). In the NRL, Pasifika men make up about 45 per cent of professional contracts, and indigenous Australian men about 10 per cent so together this indigenous cohort form a majority. In the NRL there are two culturally identified boards – the Pacific Advisory Board and the Aboriginal Advisory Board. At many of the multicultural events put on by the NRL and in their indigenous round, there is a combination of indigenous Australian and Pasifika elements, often including Pasifika and Aboriginal art works on the jerseys of the teams during the indigenous round, as well as events featuring different indigenous foods and entertainment. There has been a yearly Pacific Test since 2013, and official NRL programs now running in Papua New Guinea. The number of participants has grown steadily over the past few years due largely to the development of women’s and junior leagues, but at the elite club level it is still very much a man’s game, and at the administration level it is a white man’s game. Despite Pasifika men’s prominence as players in this commercially successful sport in a popularly proclaimed “sport mad” nation they continue to be socio-economically marginalised, have high rates of depression, suicide and incarceration, are often under financial and social pressures, and are framed by popular rhetorics of warriorhood and “natural” physical athleticism much like their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers in the league, and in Australian Rules.

While my heritage and gender generally class me as an outsider to Pasifika rugby league in Australia, I do have some “insider” traits that unquestionably inspired and also helped in both planning and conducting this research. I was born in New Zealand which often seemed to qualify me more to my Australian-based Pasifika participants
as capable of doing this research, most likely due to the more obvious connections between Pasifika and European peoples in New Zealand than in Australia, as well as New Zealand’s indigenous peoples, the Māori, commonly being considered Polynesian or Pasifika in Australia. I have kinship connections to Samoa through a Great Uncle who married a Samoan woman and lived in Samoa most of his life. They raised eight children, who had their own families, and are now grandparents themselves. They are all cousins of mine and this extended Samoan kin network is one of the main reasons for my pursuing of this research in the first place, and gives me a personal connection to the Pacific Islands. Visits to Samoa and Auckland where the majority of my Samoan fanau (family) live have allowed me to see some of the more intimate family dynamics of Pasifika life, and given this research, and me as a person, a depth, commitment and passion that could otherwise be more difficult to attain. I am also married to a man of both Pākehā (A New Zealander of European/British descent) and Māori descent and have learnt much about Polynesian culture over the nine years of our relationship. These connections have helped my Pasifika participants understand my interest in this research and to some degree legitimised my presence and questioning to them. Because my connections are mainly Samoan and Māori the research does skew slightly towards these specific cultures, however I have tried to balance this with research with Pasifika peoples from other areas. The Samoan/Māori focus however is a true representation of the Pasifika diaspora in Australia as they are the largest demographics both in rugby league (along with Tonga and Fiji) and in the indigenous Pasifika diaspora in general (not including those of Fijian-Indian ancestry).

It is often through sports where the most publicly visible discourses around race, gender and indigeneity occur in Australia. With the dramatic increase of Pasifika players in rugby league over recent years, this thesis addresses the various ways diasporic Pasifika identity is negotiated in Australia and its connections to the popular Australian sport of rugby league. Through the lens of league, I present my findings to explore what it means to be indigenous in Australia but not to Australia. I argue that at the centre of the state-identified Australian relationship with sport is the otherwise often neglected and problematised indigenous male body, and that this raises important questions about indigeneity, gender, diaspora, and belonging within the Australian landscape. I ask how the popular framings of Pasifika men in rugby league
affect the perceptions and practices of Pasifika peoples in Australia, and to a lesser extent Aotearoa/New Zealand, and argue that these framings largely rely on western paradigms that do not reflect the reality of contemporary diasporic Pasifika identity.

This is the central research question of this thesis and I argue that popular rhetorics of Pasifika involvement in rugby league, whether they be about flair, natural athleticism, brute strength or hyper-masculinity, are based on the reification of indigenous peoples, a denial of Pasifika work ethic, and an ignorance of Pasifika world views. These views separate body, mind and spirit and hark back to colonial racial and sexual hierarchies. One of my main research findings is that separation and categorisation are in direct contrast to Pasifika epistemologies of the vā, which can be understood by non-Samoan (and other Pasifika language) speaking peoples as the space between separate entities, the space that connects and where ‘meaning is made’ (Wendt 1999). I explain how the vā is active, material, and aesthetic and as such shares many similarities to rugby league. Using the vā to analyse the paradoxes of sport as oppressive and emancipatory, and a space of glorification and demonisation, I argue that it can help Pasifika people break free from these binary categorisations. As well as the Pasifika concept of the vā, I draw on the Pasifika methodology of talanoa where I can, which comes from the Tongan tala – to talk, and noa – about nothing. This reflects the vā between those that I research and myself as the researcher. Talanoa is a respected Pasifika research methodology that centres around kinship, the group setting, the lack of an agenda and reciprocal engagement and sharing of stories (Vaioleti 2006).

Pasifika men are significantly over-represented in Australian rugby league with their dramatic influx into the sport over the past 20 years often being attributed to their “natural” athleticism and other corporeal reasons invoking hyper-masculinity. This thesis considers the damaging effects of the “hyper-masculine body” discourse, as well as addressing the positive potential rugby league has in transgressing various forms of oppression. Rather than arguing that sport is a positive force in society or outright challenging that assertion, I demonstrate how rugby league in Australia plays

---

2 Hereafter referred to as New Zealand for easier readability. Quotes and statistics drawn on in this thesis more often use the term ‘New Zealand’ so for clarity I have chosen to do the same.
3 See Nabobo-Baba 2008 for a more specifically Fijian understanding of talanoa.
a paradoxical role in both reinforcing and challenging social values around race and masculinity and I put forward suggestions based on my research for better ways of understanding. Sport can be a rare space for positive visibility and upward mobility for Pasifika and other indigenous men, and a space of exploitation, degradation and racism; it can even save lives and destroy them. Putting a Pasifika-focused decolonial framework at the centre of my research, I argue that these paradoxical complexities should be better understood before any moral claim is made about the positives or negatives of sport for marginalised peoples.

In this thesis I look at the colonisation of masculinity using indigenous concepts, arguing that the separation of mind, body, and soul was a major colonial tool that continues to negatively affect Pasifika peoples in Australia. I use concepts such as the vā, the Pasifika ideas of ‘I belong therefore I am’, understanding where one’s feet stand, and viewing things from various vantage points, to argue that many Pasifika men have internalised the narrative of their “natural sportiness”, and that a decolonial analysis shows that this is a myth. I fill some of the gaps in the popular South-to-North sports narratives of poor “peripheral” nations having their best talents stolen and exploited by professional sporting codes. These narratives lack local and critical detail, and often ignore the autonomy and ethnic persistence and adaptability of transnational minority groups, as well as amateur quotidian sporting activities. There is a growing voice in anthropologically inclined sports scholarship that is arguing the need for more non-western voices and ethnographically focused works which favour local points of view outside the dominant voice of the global north (e.g. Stewart-Withers, Sewabu and Richardson 2017; Teaiwa 2016; Uperesa and Mountjoy 2014). The everyday, mundane elements of sporting life amongst indigenous diasporas have not been thoroughly researched, and yet diasporas are a large and dramatically growing section of the global indigenous population, and sports are an important part of many of their lives. This thesis seeks to redress the imbalance between the over-representation of Pacific people in rugby league in Australia and the very little understanding and the misunderstandings of their specific cultural and religious needs at an everyday level.
A trajectory of the research journey

When I began my research in 2015, theories of muscular Christianity were prominent in culturally focused sports research, which encouraged me to focus on traditionally “masculine” sports. As mentioned at the beginning, I also happen to be passionate about rugby league and have a good knowledge of the game. I chose Australia because of the symbolic potency of sports in this country and the lack of critical research into the everyday saturation of sports in Australian life. Racism is often considered a more prominent issue in Australia than New Zealand (see George 2014), and there is a growing Pasifika diaspora, particularly on the East Coast, in this island-continent which borders the Pacific but which is not considered a Pacific Island. For many Pacific Island nations, there are more people living in diasporas outside the islands than there are living on the islands making this part of their identity as islanders significant. Unlike New Zealand where there is a higher percentage Pasifika population and many government and non-government organisations with a Pasifika focus, in Australia avenues of belonging and support can be hard to find. This can lead to difficulties with identity negotiation, where especially second and later generation Pasifika peoples can struggle with feelings of belonging and not feeling like they fit with either their Pacific or Australian family or friends. Rugby league, with its large and growing cohort of Pasifika men is often perceived as one of the few arenas for upward mobility, and it can provide a sense of belonging and community that is important for people who may not have other obvious feelings of belonging.

This is a male dominated arena however, and this thesis explores the masculine/feminine divide for Pasifika peoples, arguing that gender binaries are experienced in different ways for Pasifika peoples, and that an awareness of the va – the space between – the western understanding of genders, can help all of us understand how the masculine sporting dream of a rugby league career affects not just men, but women and others too. I argue that Pasifika men, like other indigenous men across the world, have been paradoxically feminised at the same time as being steeped in the rhetoric of savagery and warriordom in order to exclude them from the canon of good and proper maleness, and make them internalise this exclusion, and ultimately, loath it.
Despite Australia’s proximity to what is commonly referred to as Melanesia and Micronesia, and our colonial relationships with these areas, our history of race-based migration policies and the continued structural difficulties people face in migrating from these areas has meant most of our Pasifika migration comes through step migration from the Western Pacific, commonly referred to as Polynesia, through New Zealand, and then to Australia. New Zealand’s migration policies have been a lot friendlier to our Pasifika neighbours, particularly to the Western Pacific (Pryke 2014, Teaiwa 2016). The four most populous Pasifika groups in Australia by ancestry are New Zealand Māori, Samoan, indigenous Fijian and Tongan, in that order (Batley 2017). Pasifika peoples have complex migratory patterns, large diasporas, a generally “seen but not heard” presence in commercially successful sporting codes, and they are a community I have personal links with.

**Geographical focus**

Approximately 71 per cent of people in Australia live in major cities with populations over 100,000 people (ABS 2018), and the complexity of identity in these populous spaces is often overlooked in indigenous and other ethnic identity studies, in favour of more rural or homogenous communities (Smith 1999). Sydney also has the largest Aboriginal population in Australia with over 70,000 people claiming Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage in the 2016 census (ABS 2017). Renowned Māori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that there ‘is a belief that indigenous cultures cannot change, cannot recreate themselves and still claim to be indigenous. Nor can they be complicated, internally diverse or contradictory. Only the West has that privilege’ (1999: 74). The hybrid cultural spaces of cities are as relevant to Pasifika people as their ancestral homelands. Samoa, for example, has as many people living outside the nation as it does within it (Connell and Brown 2004). Samoan critical geographer, Sa’iliemanu Lilomaiava-Doktor calls for more Pasifika sports research to include places of the ‘periphery’ such as Auckland and Sydney, which, she argues, are ‘increasingly becoming “cores”’ (2009a: 67).

Biersack takes these urban diaspora debates specifically to Pacific masculinity studies, arguing that ‘urbanisation is a key reason for emergent masculinities in

---

4 Fijian-Indian ancestry was counted separately in the 2011 and 2016 Australian censuses and is not included in Pasifika demographic statistics.
today’s Pacific. Cities are cosmopolitan spaces in which actors are exposed to global institutions, values, identities, practices and imaginaries’ (Biersack 2016: 203). My work aims to not only acknowledge the importance of transnationalism and multiculturalism in sport and for Pasifika peoples, but to also help redress the imbalance in indigenous studies that tends to focus on more rural or “traditional” modes of life. To address all these issues I focus on one city specifically, Sydney, the capital of New South Wales on Australia’s East Coast and Australia’s largest city with both the highest amount of rugby league teams, and Australia’s largest Pasifika population. With this thesis’s focus on “the spaces between” however, and in acknowledgement of the important kinship connections between Pasifika peoples in Australia and New Zealand, I make regular comparative analysis to Auckland, New Zealand’s capital city, often referred to as ‘the Polynesian capital of the world’ (Hebert 2008: 171).

Best estimates state that 85 per cent of Australia’s population lives within 50 kilometres of the coast, which includes most of its capital cities including Sydney (Clark and Johnston 2016). Over half of Australia’s population lives in the two eastern states of NSW and QLD (32 percent and 20 percent respectively), with 26 percent in Victoria, and the remaining five states and territories making up the remaining 22 percent combined (ABS 2017, see Figure 1). While this thesis will often refer to “Australia” for matters of ease and space, it is predominantly the northeastern states of NSW and QLD I am talking about. It is important to note this as Australia is often referred to as being deeply “tribal” in sporting affiliations, meaning that people from different parts of the country are heavily invested in different sporting codes and often have very little to no interest or knowledge of another. While American football is widely enjoyed across the United States, and rugby union across New Zealand, in Australia, sporting affiliations are far more diffuse. Rugby league may rule in NSW and QLD, where the majority of NRL clubs are based, and have a small presence in Victoria and Canberra with their single clubs, but it is virtually non-existent in the rest of the nation, other than on pay television (this still makes it one of the largest sports however due to the high population of these areas). My own visits to Western Australia, South Australia and my time living in Victoria confirm these divisions. When I moved to Melbourne, the capital of Victoria, for the beginning of my PhD studies, I was shocked when my new flatmates came home to me watching an NRL
match and asked what code it was; to them rugby union and league were indistinguishable and of no interest. They, like most Victorians, were passionate Australian Rules supporters, which is spread out more across the country and is also particularly important to Aboriginal Australians who influenced the development of the game and continue to play it in large numbers (see Judd 2007, 2008).

Being focused on rugby league, this thesis deals predominantly with the majority population of NSW and QLD where rugby league is the most popular sport, and Sydney in particular, where most Pasifika people live and where rugby league rules. When I refer to Australia I am referring specifically to these regions unless otherwise stated (ABS 2017). I will now briefly outline the three core foci of this thesis – starting with the vā, moving on to decolonisation and paradoxes, and finishing with sport and masculinity.
Figure 1. Australian state populations as national percentages (ABS 2017) and NRL club locations across Australia, Greater Sydney, and New Zealand.
The vā

For Samoan peoples in particular, but understood with variation across the Pacific, is their connection to, and understanding of, the vā. As Albert Wendt tells us:

Important to the Samoan view of reality is the concept of Vā or Wa in Māori and Japanese. Vā is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things…A well-known Samoan expression is ‘Ia teu le vā’ – cherish/nurse/care for the vā, the relationships. This is crucial in communal cultures that value group unity more than individualism, that perceive the individual person, or creature, or thing in terms of group, in terms of vā, relationships (Wendt 1999: 402; see also Ka’ili 2017; Lilomaiava-Doktor 2009a; Refiti 2002 for scholarship on the vā).

This is a popular and oft-cited definition of vā, and one that I think accurately captures the essence of the concept, but it is important to note that it is but one possible descriptor of vā and that the concept is as complex and multi-layered as Pasifika cultures, peoples and histories. It is also a particularly Samoan definition. As a non-Pasifika person, I acknowledge my limitations in fully understanding the pregnant and nuanced meanings of vā, however I believe that writing about the vā in English can still shed much-needed light on the relational paradoxes of cross-cultural spaces inhabited by indigenous Pasifika diasporas. Vā is also inextricably connected to ta, with ta representing time, and vā representing space. This too is a simplified definition and I acknowledge that there are many complexities in the meanings and heuristics of these terms across the Pacific (see Ka’ili 2017; Tuagalu 2008). In this thesis I am focusing on vā as a way the Australian Pasifika diaspora can and does engage with identity politics and sports as well as other active tenets of their lives in connected relational ways. I argue that even without a good understanding of Samoan, Tongan or other Pasifika languages and customs, vā can still be a useful and important concept to grapple with. In my focus on sport as performative, material, and visual, it is more important to focus on space than time, hence why my focus is on vā rather than ta or even ta vā (space-time). It is enough to consider vā itself.
The vā has beauty in it – it is about maintaining and nurturing social spaces so they are harmonious and beautiful. There is symmetry and other aesthetic qualities to it which are evidenced in various Pasifika art forms – whether it be visual marks on a tapa cloth, or the beats of a drum in a song. In rugby league we can see these elements too, we have two halves, a repetitive structure of six tackles per side, and even the scores awarded for tries and conversions are even not odd numbers (unlike rugby union). Rugby league is often talked about in reference to its watchability and “attractiveness”, as are other sports, like soccer, with people often saying they want an attractive brand of the game so as to draw more spectators which equals more revenue. Is attractiveness and beauty in the Pasifika sense then similar in any way? I believe it is, and it is largely because of the active nature of vā and sport, and the common belief among Pasifika peoples that whatever you do, you do it as a service for others, for family, community, and God. Vā is active – caring for the vā takes action, like service, and doing things that maintain positive relations, like visiting, giving, receiving, or planting trees around the royal house which was once a common way to maintain the vā in Tonga (Ka’ili 2017: 32). The active performativity of sports can maintain vā similarly to these other activities.

Vā can also be liminal in similar ways to sport. Where sport is often said to be liminal because of its nature as being between a real and unreal state, the vā is a betweenness itself. Unlike liminality though, which is often conceptualised as a transitory space, and can occur between inanimate concepts, the vā is a strong connector and crucial to human and spiritual relationships and the very ways Pasifika peoples perceive reality as relational – the “Unity-that-is-All” (Wendt 1999: 402). This thesis addresses the liminal nature of vā, while showing that for Pasifika people, vā is a more conducive way to understand the high levels of Pasifika involvement in rugby league than social liminality, and certainly than any rhetoric of “natural” masculinity or physicality.

Decolonial methodology and paradoxes

In this thesis I focus on the binaries and paradoxes between work and play, the mundane and extraordinary, and joy and suffering which extend to sport’s ability to transgress as well as uphold cultural values. The most fruitful spaces, which I represent using the vā, are within these paradoxes, where classic liminality (Turner 1967) gets a Pasifika makeover. This thesis focuses on the lived experiences, feelings
and emotions of sport; what it adds to people’s lives on an everyday basis and why it is so pervasive. In doing so it attempts to contribute to a larger movement of decolonial methodologies in indigenous research across the world, where western paradigms of categorisation, separation, and “objectivity” are critiqued and replaced with more nuanced local understandings where indigenous experiences are centred (see Hennessy 2016; Nabobo-Baba 2008; Smith 1999; Thaman 2003; Uperesa 2016).

With the focus of this thesis on decolonial methodologies, it is important that I put myself under scrutiny as well as the communities I research in order to question the relationality between researched and researcher and the role of cultural research itself. I am just as concerned with how to research Pasifika masculinities as I am the subject and I connect personal vignettes with empirical and secondary data to create a holistic representation of the research journey as possible. This is a decolonial method rather than a postmodern one, because unlike the postmodern turn in anthropology that brought to light questions of objectivity and representation, such as the Writing Culture (Clifford and Marcus 1986) movement, I am less focused on who I am as a writer, or arguing about written representation, and more concerned about what my relationship with my research group can tell us about relationality and research more broadly (see also Hennessy 2016; Land 2015; Nabobo-Baba 2008; Smith 1999; Uperesa 2016). I focus particularly on the themes of paradox and binaries and suggest that separation and categorisation work in direct opposite to Pasifika ways of understanding which centre around the vā, that is the space that connects and is between. I use the vā to challenge the categorical separation of national heritage, indigenous and non-indigenous identities, masculine/feminine, research/researched, sport’s powers and pitfalls, and in Hokowhitu’s words, the paradox of the indigenous athlete as ‘hero and dupe’ (2013: xvii), which is central to this work.

It is important to acknowledge that I am a middle-class white woman attempting to research Pasifika masculinity. This position presents a number of limitations. While I have family connections to the Pacific, I am not of Pacific heritage. I am a Pākehā living on Aboriginal Australian land and I am a product of colonial success and white privilege. I am not a rugby league player and I do not identify as male. I could not engage in playing league with men for this project, nor access intimate team areas such as dressing rooms and other pre- and post-game spaces. I was aware that the
information I was told and witnessed was shaped in a certain way because of my position, as all information communicated from one person to another is, and that I had to rely on second hand accounts a lot of the time. This is therefore an analysis of how masculinity is framed and perceived – by outsiders, by insiders, by those who do not fit either of those categories, by the media and in the literature, and how it is practiced, acted upon and performed by Pasifika peoples. It is also an analysis of the analysis – how my research was practiced and what I learnt about university, social, and indigenous research along the way. It is not an attempt to represent Pasifika masculinity’s characteristics and traits in any normative sense. Instead it relies on what Pasifika people have told me, and my own analysis of these stories combined with further literature, research, media and other representations through popular culture and observed events and actions. Other than when I was with my Pasifika family members in New Zealand, or the few times I was invited into Pasifika people’s homes in Sydney and Melbourne, my research was conducted in public places. In my focus on family, faith and football, it is the performative and active socio-spatial relations these spaces embody and how these embodiments are practiced and perceived that I am concerned with. This is a relevant focus for sports studies and Pasifika studies, as both sports and Pasifika identity regularly engage with the active performance of duty.

While these personal gender and ethnic identifying limitations deny the research access to some arenas, my position also opens up some unique opportunities to make a valuable contribution. Firstly, outsider status can be useful (Geertz 1976; Levi Strauss 1963; Petray 2012) as it allows one to see things insiders may take for granted or be so used to that they do not question. Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus – that causes subjects’ actions to have ‘more meaning than they know’, precisely because they do not know what they are doing (Bourdieu 1977: 79) – serves the exploration of an outsider well. Because of my Pasifika kinship connections and Pasifika and sports knowledge, I was also able to practice the art of what Hage terms ‘ethnographic vacillation’ (2009), where one balances being inside and outside in order to experience deeply and emotionally, whilst also being able to step out to analyse and make sense of what is happening.
I also found that my ignorance, both perceived and real, meant people were more likely to take their time in carefully explaining things to me, which illuminated what people viewed as important – such as their knowledge of rugby league tactics or history, or family and religious structures. Secondly, there are still very few female researchers of sport and masculinity, and our voices can make a unique contribution. I found men were willing to express their emotions to me which may have been harder for them to do with another man, and I even had men say they were more likely to open up to a woman. I had grown men cry in front of me, and talk openly about their insecurities. I also found most of the men I talked with assumed I knew little about the game and explained its nuances and rules to me in great detail, and while I often did already know what they were telling me, this act of explanation yielded significant new insights. I do not try to hide the different experiences of white privilege, awkwardness, ease, and guilt I felt throughout this project, instead I choose to make them an explicit part of the process and critically analyse them throughout. I argue that my awkwardness and guilt at times during my fieldwork and subsequent research is but a miniscule fraction of the difficulties and complexities most of my indigenous peers face in their research journeys (see Uperesa 2010a).

**Sport and masculinity**

As I walk through the sombre shelves of the Sydney University library at the beginning of my research, running up and down enormous rooms, the cultural and anthropological floor full of dusty books on kinship, warfare, art, food, nostalgia, I finally come to the sports section and am struck by the contrasting brashness of it. Big glossy colourful books, scores of white male faces staring out from the bindings, words like ‘victory, legacy, hard men, no ordinary bloke, local hero, be your best, stand your ground’ jump at me from the bindings of the predominantly male sports biographies. The critical and academic nature of the university library appears to be missing here. The division between intellectual and physical pursuits is visibly obvious with this section of the library and was in fact one of the earliest moments I had in my research where I knew I wanted to contribute to a more critical cultural sports scholarship. Sport, like art and other forms of cultural practice, can be a powerful vehicle for creating, communicating, performing, transgressing and affirming cultural norms and identities, and yet these elements are often overshadowed by the “working-class”, “hyper-masculine” and “violent” reputations
popular games like rugby league have in Australia. Later in my research I did find that there was another small sports section in the library that was more cultural and critical, but it does not take away from the fact that the section focused on popular Australian sports was dominated by white male biographies and that the official “histories” of games such as rugby league, rugby union, Australian Rules and cricket were predominantly written by white men and lacked any critical depth or adequate acknowledgement of indigenous or female influences. One only need watch a game of ‘Friday night footy’ (as the Friday night rugby league games are colloquially referred to in NSW) to be showered in metaphors of warriors, legends and battles.

Figure 2. Sydney University library sports section, 2018. Photograph by author.
Some scholars have argued that sport can add to the destructive power of society, exacerbating existing tensions and causing unnecessary violence and pack or gang-like mentalities (Coakley 1986) and male entitlement (Pescud 2018). Arens compares American Football to a masculine ritual where the war-like language of battles, soldiers, and fighting is common (1975). In his analysis of American Football player biographies, he notes that they are ‘replete with symbolic references to war’ (1975: 77), including expressions of bodily contact, territorial incursions, armed combat, and judgements on what makes a ‘good fighting man’ (ibid). Others affirm that sport allows people (particularly men) to release their physicality in a controlled and comparatively safe space, and is an accessible, often cheap or free global phenomenon open to all where people can exist (at least in theory) on ‘a level playing field’ (Sipes 1973). There is plenty of anecdotal and historical evidence for each of these views, suggesting that sport has the power to do many things – it can both fuel and relieve various social and personal tensions. It has been argued that the more war-like a country or culture is, the more combative sports it will have (Sipes 1973), that sport can be a struggle over scarce status, power or resources (Coser 1956), and that it is simply a form of play that ‘continuously rank[s] and re-rank[s] participants over and again in hierarchies that are more kaleidoscopic, fragile, and ephemeral than they are enduring’ (Handelman 2001: 11507). Many also see sport as an important social and cultural phenomenon that can teach teamwork, leadership, and help people who are struggling in other facets of their lives, as the large array of sport for development organisations around the world lends evidence to (Jeanes et al. 2013). Sport can also mirror and challenge very real tensions in national governance and imaginaries, such as New Zealand and South African rugby union’s respective historical inclusion and exclusion of indigenous players (Hokowhitu 2009).

My research suggests that sport is both powerful in its ability to transform otherwise rigid social hierarchies, as well as playful, as something other than reality, where ranks are fluid and capable of changing. Sport is a serious form of playful competition and conflict that has the power to both affirm and transgress off-field hostilities and traditions. It can be (and indeed has been) used as a colonising tool to “discipline the natives”, and at the same time it can be (and has been) used as an opportunity to beat the “master” at his or her own game. It can create hierarchies as well as show them for the attempted power constructions that they are. Sport is not simply an
imperialistic tool of attempted hegemony, it certainly can be, but it offers opportunities for transgression as well.

Play scholar, Brian Sutton-Smith argues that while the general view ‘seems to be that the more powerful group induces the subordinate group by persuasion or example to play the hegemonial group’s games, under the presumption of their moral superiority’ (Sutton-Smith 1997: 96), it can also be argued ‘that the subordinate group finds in the games a fantasy of the powers possessed by those who dominate them’ (ibid). Within these different views, one thing remains consistent however, and that is the dominance of men. In all these arguments it is male sport, male violence, and male masculinity that is being discussed, although rarely explicitly noted.5

Thesis structure
I will now explain the structure of the thesis, and briefly introduce the focus of each chapter. Like the theoretical and empirical data of this thesis, the structure itself reflects a space between traditional academic frameworks, and decolonial, indigenous and Pasifika ways of doing things. I see myself as an integral part of the research context and therefore include personal thoughts and experiences in the thesis. The fieldnotes I took throughout the four years of this project were in a diary-type form, where I would reflect on my personal experiences and feelings alongside my more observational descriptions and details, the reasons for which reflect my methodology of favouring the vā over separation and which I expand on in Chapter Two. I share many reflections from this diary, including the potentially embarrassing and formative thoughts I had as my knowledge and understanding grew. I focus on the space between my research participants and myself, how I perceived myself through their eyes, and vice versa. Reflecting this choice of synthesis over separation, my literature review runs throughout the thesis, particularly in the methodology section, which is the key theoretical platform for the rest of the thesis. I do this because this is a significantly methodological work, it critiques and expands on methodological theory and practice, and one of the outcomes of this is that the separation of a literature review and a methodology chapter would be incongruous to the research conclusions; namely that separation and categorisation are in direct contrast to Pasifika

5 While “women’s sport” is a well-known term, “men’s sport” is generally implied by the singular “sport”.

epistemologies of the ōā – which connects, is harmonious, and reflects Pasifika ways of being.

Chapter Two is focused on methodology, and combines literature review, methods and elaboration of the key concepts and ideas used in this thesis, namely Pasifika concepts of relationality, decolonial practices, and paradoxes of sport, masculinity and social research. I explain the theoretical methods and practices used to gather data, and how this data was interpreted and analysed through a progressively refined Pasifika focused lens. I argue for the suitability of my multidisciplinary and mixed-methods approach which, while drawing on my background in anthropology, does not adhere strictly to western disciplinary boundaries. The literature introduced in this chapter (and drawn on throughout the thesis) comes largely from cross-disciplinary areas of study including indigenous studies, masculinity studies, Pacific studies and sports studies, focusing on work that crosses at least two of these boundaries, and sometimes connects all four. This approach allows me to critically reflect on anthropology, and western university research methodologies more broadly and address the specific research questions of this project from a more holistic and connected place that reflects Pasifika methodologies and epistemologies.

In Chapter Three I give contextual background, including a brief historical outline of the invention and separation of rugby league and union in England and their journey with “muscular” missionary Christianity through the Islands and the “Antipodes” of Australia and New Zealand. I provide some statistics and information on the dramatic increase of Pasifika representation in rugby league in Australia and expand on the differences between Australia and New Zealand’s relationships with their Pacific Island neighbours, and their relationships with rugby league. I argue that there is an imbalanced focus in sports studies on the spectacular over the mundane which is the more pervasive and can tell us a lot about how people actually experience and perceive sports. I provide more demographic information on Australia and Sydney’s Pasifika populations and argue further for the importance of this work.

This leads me to Chapter Four, where I elaborate on the ōā and explain its role in Pasifika identity and relationality and how we can use it to explore sporting spaces for Australia’s Pasifika diaspora. I discuss this in relation to global indigenous
movements where the centering of indigenous concepts is paramount, and argue for the centralisation of Pasifika concepts in order to better understand Pasifika identities and relationality. I have learnt that being indigenous away from home and on stolen land is different to being indigenous to the land one occupies, but that indigenous people share common experiences of colonisation. This chapter explores this through the vā, as well as introducing the Samoan concept of understanding where one’s feet stand. The vā is a space of active service, harmony, aesthetics, and connection, and I argue for its significant potential in mending gaps between colonially separated groups, including ethnic groups as well as binary concepts such as masculine/feminine and national affiliation in sports.

Chapter Five takes the focus on the quotidian as its central tenet, and I explore some of the everyday engagements of the Pasifika diaspora in rugby league as well as my own experiences with sport. For this work to adequately engage with decolonial and indigenous practices, it is important to convey the personal and the sensory experiences of both playing and watching sport and in this chapter I provide some personal vignettes that attempt to holistically present these experiences. I further explore the notion of paradoxes in diasporic and sporting identities, and argue that popular ideas around indigenous people rely on myths of purity and truth which effectively silence and reify indigenous groups, making change and internal difference difficult, and that there are many of these myths in sport. With these difficulties however, comes a vital part of sport for the Pasifika diaspora in Australia; that of joy. I argue that the everyday joy and playfulness of rugby league offers a space for Pasifika people to thrive and practice important elements of the vā, including its powerful components of service (tautua in Samoan) and beauty (mālie in Tongan).

Chapter Six addresses one of the core issues of rugby league in Australia for Pasifika people, that of masculine stereotypes and their damaging effects on Pasifika identity. I argue that the popular rhetorics used to describe Pasifika men and their playing styles do not reflect how Pasifika men themselves perceive their role in rugby league, and I look at how hegemonic and postcolonial masculinity have transformed how we think about Pasifika masculinity. I critique the myth of the “natural” prevalent in depictions of Pasifika men and argue that the vā can help us better understand Pasifika
dominance in rugby league, and perhaps help the larger Pasifika community thrive both within and outside of the sport.

In Chapter Seven, I move from perceptions to practices and take a closer look at the performative elements of what are popularly proclaimed to be three pillars of diasporic Pasifika identity – family, faith and football, and I focus on female Pasifika perspectives on these issues. I argue that what affects Pasifika men just as significantly affects Pasifika peoples of other gender identities, including transgender, third sex, non-binary and female identifying people, including those who identify with specific Pasifika identities such as Samoan fa‘afafine and Tongan fakaleiti. My data for this chapter was mainly created through conversations with female-identifying Pasifika women who talked about their own experiences as well as touching on issues for non-binary peoples. I then combined this with secondary data on non-binary identifying peoples in the Pacific, such as the edited volume on gender and sexuality in the Pacific by Niko Besnier and Kalissa Alexeyeff (2014), as well as Besnier’s work more generally (1994; 2011), Tcherkezoff’s work on transgenderism in Samoa (2014), and work by Presterudstuen on sexuality in Fiji (2010; 2015). I explore the role of family and female family members in particular, in the Pasifika masculine sporting dream. I also discuss indigenous performativity in sports, drawing on fieldwork both in Auckland where I have Pasifika family, and in Sydney where I participated in various Pasifika events and spoke with many Pasifika people. I look at how the vā is practiced and performed within and between the spaces of family, faith and football, and argue for the importance of these spaces in providing opportunities for Pasifika indigeneity, in all its variances, to be visibly claimed and performed.

The concluding chapter, Chapter Eight, focuses on the final paradox of this work, that between the western frameworks of university bureaucracy, and indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. I question the role of research itself and consider the differences between so-called objectivity in research, and Pasifika concepts of connection such as talanoa, where one’s feet stand, and the vā. This chapter ties back to my methodology chapter, expanding on decolonial practices by looking in more detail at how social research is conducted at Australian universities. I reflect on my research journey and what I have learnt through my experiences and through the literature, and I discuss the paradigms of “standing with” and “giving back” in
relation to my participants (with whom giving back was a popular term), and in relation to the idea of giving back in research. I again put myself under the spotlight I so often put my participants under, in order to share the burden and make explicit some of the changes I have undergone as a person through this research journey. I point to some of the privileges of being a white person researching indigenous cultures despite anxieties and feelings of illegitimacy, and compare it to some of the common difficulties and complexities indigenous researchers deal with. Ultimately I defend the need for critical decolonial engagement with sports and indigeneity in Australia no matter how you identify or how others identify you.

Australia presents a unique case for diasporic and Pasifika studies where being a Pacific Islander is different to being one in New Zealand or the United States, where there are more government and non-government statutory bodies and organisations, such as language and cultural centres, university departments and government initiatives (Teiwa 2016: 117). In Australia, it is sports and sports media, particularly around rugby league, where most visibility and knowledge of Pasifika culture is disseminated and represented. The framings of Pasifika identity in Australia have historically separated mind, soul, and body, and over-emphasised a western notion of hyper-masculinity that is damaging and limiting. Popular depictions of Pasifika masculinity rely on stereotypes of hyper-physicality and biological determinism limiting Pasifika men to supposedly “natural” physical qualities and denying their deep and innumerable skills, desires and aptitudes. I argue that there is nothing “natural” about the over-representation of Pasifika men in rugby league in Australia in terms of biology, but rather, that the sport occupies a space that shares similarities to Pasifika ways of being, particularly the relational space of ʻvā. I will now expand on the methodological aspects of this thesis and explain further the arguments introduced here.
CHAPTER TWO. METHODOLOGY

‘All too frequently the intellectual and the physical are assumed as antithetical and antagonistic’ (Grainger 2009: 53).

Introduction

In Grainger’s 2009 article on the racialisation of athletic performance in the Pacific Islands, he makes the above statement in reference to the discourse on “Islander” styles of play and the importance of seeing them in the context of a ‘long history of racialising athletic ability’ (Grainger 2009: 53). I use his quote to introduce my methodology chapter as it highlights the key methodological concerns of this thesis – the importance of qualitative research; indigenous Pasifika epistemologies of relationality and their connections to the va; and deep engagement with Pasifika perspectives and practices. In this quote Grainger expresses a modern conundrum – that of the continuing binary oppositional assumption of the intellectual and the physical introduced to Oceania through colonisation and perpetuated in part to this day. Grainger’s quote both pertains to the historical exclusion of serious engagement with sports and other corporeal practices in social science scholarship, and provides a launching point to consider how indigenous frameworks interact with western categorisations and the separation of body and mind and how these manifest in sporting discourse around Pasifika peoples – peoples whose physicality is often highlighted at the expense of their intellectual and other abilities, particularly in western diasporas (Hawkes 2018; McDonald and Rodriguez 2014; Zakus and Horton 2009).

In this chapter I outline the key foci of my theoretical methodology, how my research questions evolved through the fieldwork process, and I explain what methods I used and why. I expand on key methodological theories introduced in Chapter One and explain why they are important for this study, including the combination of feminist, postcolonial and critical indigenous studies in order to provide a fresh perspective on the corporal-gendered habitus of Pasifika masculinity within rugby football codes. I also expand on the significance of the auto-ethnographic and reflexive elements of this thesis as introduced in the previous chapter. I discuss my multidisciplinary and mixed-methods approach which draws on the Pasifika methodology of talanoa, my
anthropological background, my position as a white female researcher in a Pasifika masculine research topic, and how I have navigated through this, at times, rocky journey. This thesis draws on feminist and queer studies (e.g. Besnier and Alexeyeff 2014; Butler 1993, 1997, 1999; Haraway 1991; Lovell 2000; Presterudstuen 2010; Salih and Butler 2004; Tallbear 2014), masculinity studies (e.g. Chen 2014; Connell 1987; Connell and Messerchmidt 2005; Innes and Anderson 2015; Tengan 2008; Tengan and Markham 2009), critical indigenous studies (e.g. Harris 2013; Hokowhitu 2004, 2015, 2016; Nakata 2007; Smith 1999; Tallbear 2013; Uperesa 2010a), postcolonial studies (e.g. Besnier 2015; Chakravorty 2006; Hallinan and Judd 2013; Nabobo-Baba 2008; Phipps 2016a; Spivak 1999), Pacific studies (e.g. Besnier 2011; Gershon 2007, 2012; Hau’ofa 1994, 2008; Ka’ilii 2017; Teaiwa 2001, 2016; Wesley-Smith 2016) and sports studies (e.g. Besnier 2014; Besnier and Brownell 2012; Collins 1998; Grainger 2008, 2009; James 1963; Mangan 1986), in order to put a decolonial framework at the centre of my research. I argue for the importance of this intersectional and interdisciplinary approach in formulating and answering my key research question: How does the framing of Pasifika masculinity through competitive sports affect the perceptions and practices of diasporic Pasifika peoples in Australia? As this and subsequent chapters will demonstrate, my combination of methods and the questions they are designed to answer have all been formulated in dialogue with other scholars and what they have identified as needing research, as well as with the communities they pertain to.

My core research question is best examined using a cross-disciplinary analysis, utilising the multidisciplinary areas of Pacific, indigenous, gender, and sports studies. I take a critical anthropological approach that favours detailed observation and analysis of a particular cultural group, in this case diasporic peoples of Pacific Island heritage living in Australia and New Zealand (with a concentrated focus on Sydney, Australia) and engaged with sports, with the major case study being rugby league. The multidisciplinary and mixed-methods approach is to critically reflect on the nature of not just anthropology, but disciplinary boundaries more generally, and to get closer to the integrated and holistic nature of indigenous research methodologies and the concepts which I deal with in this thesis, such as liminality and “betweenness” which I conceptualise through the vā. By drawing on critical anthropology and incorporating it into cross-disciplinary studies, I am highlighting the need for an open
and engaged study of local nuances and local voices to answer my research questions, tying these engagements in with larger discursive and historical considerations.

Following American philosopher Richard Rorty, Ingold describes the following as anthropology’s core purpose:

It is to open a space, he writes, “for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause—wonder that there is something new under the sun, something which is not an accurate representation of what was already there, something which (at least for the moment) cannot be explained and can barely be described” (Rorty 1980) (Ingold 2014: 388).

While Ingold is referring explicitly to anthropology, I see this as a valuable pursuit for all socio-cultural disciplines, and even as a uniting force in cross-disciplinary studies where research can combine this sense of wonder with the realisation that explanation and description are just a fraction of the picture.

**Building the research question**

I will now break down my key research question, clarifying the main themes which are in bold: How does the **framing** of Pasifika masculinity through **competitive sports** affect the **perceptions** and **practices** of diasporic Pasifika peoples in Australia? The **framing** in this question refers to the ways Pasifika masculinities are (re)presented, (mis)understood, talked about, and shaped by some of the main disseminators of information about Pasifika people in Australia – the media, sporting organisations and Pasifika communities themselves. In addressing **Pasifika masculinity** specifically I am separating it from white/hegemonic/other masculinities, or femininities to explore how is is framed, made “Pacific” and separated from other ethnic and gendered categories. The term **competitive sports** in my research question refers to commercially successful, male-dominated sports in Australia, with a particular focus on rugby league. I use comparative data on rugby union, especially from scholars working on the sport in New Zealand where engaged debate with critical indigenous studies and postcolonialism is more advanced than similar debates on rugby league in Australia. I also draw on critical indigenous research on AFL in Australia as much of this work illuminates similar issues to my PhD around
indigeneity and masculinity in sports, but my main concern and my empirical data is mostly concerned with rugby leaugue.

The inclusion of perceptions and practices in my research question draws on Bourdieu’s understanding of practice and perception being an unbroken loop where one does not precede the other but they are continuously affecting each other in a circular fashion (Bourdieu 1977). In Bourdieu’s conception, one does not have a perception about something and then act on it through practice; one’s practices are themselves shaping one’s perceptions, and vice versa, not backwards and forwards, but cyclical. In looking at perceptions I explore how different people and groups talk about the self, masculinity and “good maleness”, of being Pasifika/other, and how they perceive themselves and others. I combine this exploration with practices, considering how Pasifika men actively practice their Pasifika masculinity; how is it embodied and performed, both on and off the field, and how is it challenged? I explore the embodied and performative nature of the Pasifika cultural pillars of family, faith and football, and argue that they carry vā within them, which is manifested through active and embodied service.

The diasporic in my research question refers to the diasporic identities of Pasifika peoples in Sydney, particularly second-generation Pasifika-identifying young adults who are a dramatically growing demographic and who form part of a relatively ignored group in indigenous studies – those who do not fit the “purity of indigeneity” myth (Harris 2013; see also Smith 1999). I focus on experiences of being indigenous away from home, and how movement, relocation, and demographic and lifestyle specifics, such as being young, urban, and both Pasifika and non-Pasifika identifying, affect a sense of belonging and relational identity. I choose to focus on Australia because it is a relatively understudied area in Pacific studies, with a rapidly growing Pasifika diaspora, which can illuminate much on the experiences of being diasporic, Pasifika, indigenous, and engaged in sports. Before describing some of the intersections between masculinity, indigeneity, cultural identity, migration and sports, it is important to consider the extent to which Pasifika people in Australia can be said to constitute or are members of a diaspora.
Most diaspora scholars (e.g. Clifford 1997; Cohen 1997; Gilroy 1995; Halilovich 2013; Hall 1990; Safran 1991; Sheffer 1986) agree that it takes more than migration alone to form a diaspora as a distinct collective identity. There have been many examples throughout history of temporary displacement and migration as well as complete assimilation of migrants into the “mainstream” cultures of their host countries. Many theorists of migration – like Barkan and Shelton (1998), Brah (1996), Cohen (1997), Clifford (1994), Hall (1990) and Safran (1991) – have attempted to define what exactly constitutes a “diaspora”. Safran, for instance, defines diaspora as a community that:

1)…has spread from a homeland to two or more countries…[and is] bound from their disparate geographical locations by a common vision, memory or myth about their homelands; 2) they have a belief that they will never be accepted by their host societies and therefore develop their autonomous cultural and social needs; 3) they or their descendants will return to the homeland should the conditions prove favourable; 4) they should continue to maintain support for the homeland and therefore the communal consciousness and solidarity enables them to continue these activities (Safran 1991: 83-84).

The second and third characteristics here may be irrelevant to many contemporary diasporic communities, including the Pasifika diaspora in Australia. Even if the “host” country firmly accepts the migrant community, many opt to maintain stronger or weaker ties with their original culture, language and homeland. In most cases however this does not mean that ‘they or their descendants will return to the homeland should the conditions prove favourable’. The majority choose to stay in their “adopted” homelands and successfully negotiate their “new” identities created through their diasporic experiences (Halilovich 2012).

Cohen (1997) broadens the definition of diaspora to include both voluntary migration and migration as a result of fleeing aggression, persecution or extreme hardship. His categories of diaspora are based on the main reasons for migrating, including “victim” (e.g. Jews, Africans and Armenians), “labour” (e.g. Indians), “trade” (e.g. Chinese and Lebanese), “imperial” (e.g. British) and “cultural” (e.g. the Caribbean) diasporas (Halilovich 2012). These prescribed typologies have limitations however, as
Tsagarousianou points out, as they ‘do not take into account the diversity of diasporic experience and do not really take on board late modern transnational mobility that takes significantly novel forms’ (2004: 56). As Halilovich (2013) argues, late modern transnational mobility, complete with economic, cultural and political factors, globalisation processes and information and communication technologies, is directly linked to rapid diaspora formation, challenging the traditional notions of diaspora. The new global context of living, including new technologies of communication such as the internet, satellite TV and mobile phones, as well as the availability and affordability of international travel, has redefined the notion of “homeland”, which can no longer be apprehended as only a physical, territorial category.

What emerges from these recent debates on diaspora is that diasporic identities are not static but rather constantly evolving and mobile. As Hall argues, ‘diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference’ (1990: 235). In this regard, Pasifika groups in Australia are very much a modern transnational diaspora. Concepts of home and abroad are constantly shifting (Lilomaiava-Doktor 2009a, 2009b) while connections to place and each other remain strong. As a well-known Samoan alagaupu (proverb) says and which my participants repeated: e sufi faiga, ae tumau le fa’avae – ‘the practices or forms may change, but the foundations and grounding remain the same’ (translation by Tuagalu 2008: 108). While the first generation of Pasifika diasporas in Australia could be largely classified as a labour diaspora, in search of better work and family raising opportunities, the second and later generations are largely cultural. They are refashioning what it means to be Pasifika and Australian in their newer diasporic homelands.

The key research question evolved significantly throughout the project, taking shape as I developed a deeper understanding of my participants and the complexities around sport in their lives. I focus on the Sydney-based Pasifika diaspora as the major case study in this project. Sydney, the city with the most professional rugby league clubs, hosts the largest Pasifika diaspora in Australia. I anticipated that there would be a lot of rich data here on diasporas, indigeniety and sports, especially in rugby league. In order to engage with the complexities of my question, I have also drawn on supplementary data by engaging with people and literature from other Australian
areas and New Zealand, as Pasifika peoples are often tightly interconnected across these regions. I became more aware of the importance of ethical questions in indigenous studies, including the growing decolonial movement in indigenous and Pasifika studies aimed at changing the way research is done to better align with indigenous values. My core research question reflects a specific and important issue for diasporic Pasifika peoples, namely, how do they negotiate their diasporic identities with their over-representation in male-dominated sports and how have those sports framed Pasifika masculinity? While doing this, I also ask how my own position as a university researcher and non-indigenous woman researching indigenous/Pasifika topics plays into these considerations.

I analyse some of the different ways Pasifika masculinity is framed; how it is talked about and presented by various peoples and groups, and in turn how those framings affect the perceptions Pasifika peoples have of themselves. I explore how men talk about their own position as Pasifika men and rugby league players, and how women and others perceive these discourses. I learnt that these perceptions are shaped by numerous factors, not least the media, but also wider communities and their own families and communities, e.g. churches and extended families, and that these perceptions shape and are shaped by embodied practices such as playing rugby league, attending church and performing family duties.

Through looking at the existing literature, and through my own findings on diasporic belonging and identity for Pasifika peoples living outside their ancestral homelands, the themes of masculinity and sports often came to the fore, with rugby league being the popular choice for Pasifika peoples in Australia and subsequently playing an influential role in many of their lives. My research questions, which originally focused on belonging and identity, quickly merged with Pasifika masculinity, as my findings made it more and more apparent that Pasifika identity and indigeneity, and masculinity, are inextricably connected for the majority of the Sydney-based Pasifika diaspora.

**Methods**
My research methods took an ethnographic approach, utilising a combination of semi-structured interviews, an online survey, media analysis, participant observation at
Pasifika themed events, rugby league games and with voluntary groups, and the keeping of a diary for fieldnotes and personal reflection. Defined as a holistic qualitative method, ethnography applies a variety of approaches and techniques to studying human actors in a social context. The most common ethnographic approaches involve participant observation, in-depth interviews and participating in the everyday realities of research participants as well as a reflexive engagement with the subject of study—i.e. people, their stories and their respective material and non-material cultures (Halilovich 2013). Ethnographic methods attempt to tie the emic with the etic – to engage with local nuance and local voices whilst seeing these as part of larger discursive, structural and historical realms.

Building upon conventional ethnography, my core methodology centered around conversations with Pasifika peoples aged 15 and over, and involved both semi-structured and informal conversations that often drew on talanoa-like qualities (Vaioleti 2006). Talanoa is a recognised and valued way of communicating for people of Pacific Island descent which draws on epistemologies of kinship, hierarchy, the sharing of stories, the group setting, and an informal, unrushed process of talking without an agenda. Unlike hypothesis driven Western knowledge, it favours a non-reductionist and non-linear approach to understanding the world, learned through hands-on experience (Stewart-Withers et al. 2017: 58). Stewart-Withers et al. explain how it differs from western scientific approaches:

Very different from Western knowledge which is based on theories and laws, is hypothesis driven, and looks to replicate, control and universalise, Pacific research approaches favour a non-reductionist, non-linear, holistic approach to understanding their world as they know it. Knowledge is learned through hands-on experience; it is understood to be experiential and pragmatic. This knowledge is non-linear, and non-reductionist. Knowledge, which is local, is informed by creators and ancestors and looks to connect humans with non-human aspects. Knowledge is collective and cumulative, and is to be shared (2017: 58).

My ability to talanoa was limited by cultural and linguistic knowledge and inclusion in spheres of relationality, as well as the time limits of the PhD, and the nature of my
research being about a particular topic (and therefore unable to be truly open and free (see Prescott 2008)). *Talanoa* is another complex Pasifika concept with various forms, all inextricably connected to relational context. As Fa‘avae et al. argue, ‘to properly engage in *talanoa* might take years of learning’ (2016: 143). For these reasons, I refer to some of my research as being conducted in a *talanoa*-like fashion as I prescribed to the rules of *talanoa* as best I could. I was able to employ certain aspects of *talanoa* more successfully than others, namely some of its methodological and philosophical values. *Talanoa* favours kinship connections and my family connections to Samoa and New Zealand Māori (see Chapter One) undoubtedly helped my Pasifika participants understand my interest in this research and legitimised my presence to them. As sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann recognise: ‘Reality is socially defined. But the definitions are always embodied, that is, concrete individuals and groups of individuals serve as definers of reality’ (1966: 134). In this context, it is important to acknowledge my positioning and my subjectivities not only in relation to my informants but also in relation to the broader context of the thesis topic. In her book *Reflexive Ethnography*, Charlotte Aull Davies argues, ‘all researchers are to some degree connected to, or part of, the object of their research’ (2008: 3) and I make this an explicit part of this thesis.

In the course of my research, I was often asked by Pasifika people why my interest in this topic and almost without exception, when I mentioned my family connections, there was a visible change in facial expression, a seemingly full-body relaxation move, and an audible ‘aahhh, cool’ or some such demonstration of acceptance and understanding. I am a fan of rugby league and grew up watching it, which also helped to legitimise my interests, but in this respect, it was my gender, not ethnicity, that was often implicitly challenged. I often had to prove my knowledge and love of the game to both Pasifika and non-Pasifika men in a way I have not witnessed other men have to do, and my position as a woman yielded both positive and negative results.

**Ethics process**

Another important element of *talanoa* is the preference for oral consent over written consent forms, and while I conducted a number of interviews where written consent forms were appropriate and used, I had many interactions in the field where consent was given orally and recorded in field notes. Stewart-Withers et al., in their research
on Pasifika sports management, decided not to use paper-based consent forms because of their dislocation with *talanoa* methods. I too pushed for this approach in my ethics applications, however found there is, what my colleagues and I describe as, a clear dissonance between indigenous methodologies and university ethics processes (see Hawkes et al. 2018 for our detailed discussion of this process). Stewart-Withers et al. argue:

such a formal process of written and even audio recording the agreement can make people wary of it… An explicit request for consent may look suspicious, threatening, inappropriate, or rude. Many Western institutions experience angst about the idea that non-Western research participants may be coerced into doing research and thus feel the need to push the idea of gaining some type of evidence to illustrate that informed consent has been acquired (2017: 60).

The question must be asked then – who is the written consent form actually for? The participant, or the institution? This thesis addresses this question. Considering the ethics process of the university as well as my own limited relational connections to Pasifika peoples in Sydney, and my lack of practice and expertise in *talanoa*, it was not possible to rely solely on *talanoa*. Instead I conducted a combination of formal and informal interviews, mixed with numerous discussions, observations, and *talanoa*-like interactions and conversations (see Fa’avae et al. 2016; Tecun et al. 2018 for discussions on the complexities of *talanoa* and not conflating it with unstructured interviews and other forms of qualitative research).

In developing my research design, I deliberately aimed to minimise the use of structured formal interviews, which, particularly for young Pasifika men, can have negative connotations associated with police or welfare interviews, however there were times when more formal interviews were appropriate and needed and I conducted 14 of these. They ranged from 45 minutes to two hours in duration and were invaluable in fleshing out the other observations and nuances of my research. Of these, 11 interviewees had Pasifika heritage (six Samoan, two Tongan, one Fijian, one Cook Island Māori, one New Zealand Māori), and the three non-Pasifika peoples had jobs where they engaged regularly with people of Pacific descent through sporting
organisations. There were 12 males and two females, ten lived in Sydney and four in Auckland. Age was not always gleaned specifically, but there were three teenagers, four in their twenties, and the other seven were between 35 and 60. While these interviews have been extremely useful and provided much important data for this research, I have found they can also be limiting. They do not adhere to Pasifika ways of communicating, and while I have interviewed a few people willing and eager to read and sign the four-page information sheet compulsorily set by the Human Research Ethics Council (HREC) of my university, I have also been in situations where it felt extremely inappropriate to pull out the paperwork, to the point where I simply could not bring myself to do so (which I expand on in Chapter Eight, see also Hawkes et al. 2017).

Over the course of my fieldwork in Sydney, my research was most conducive to informal discussions with people I met at the various events I frequented which included professional, semi-professional and amateur rugby league (and some union) matches, school sports carnivals, cultural events and festivals, markets, awareness campaigns, family occasions, dinner parties, and academic events. I volunteered as a photographer for the opening night of the Pasifika Film Festival and attended a number of their events, which led to meeting four ex-professional rugby league players of Pasifika descent whose insights into the game as a career were highly informative. I also volunteered with a Samoan NGO based in South-Western Sydney who raise awareness of sexual abuse and mental health issues specifically for Pasifika peoples. This included manning their stall at community events, referring people to suitable professionals, and working at a suicide prevention march welcoming people, selling tshirts, and serving food, and where I had many humbling conversations with people who had lost family members and friends to suicide and who shared with me the taboos and difficulties around this issue for Pasifika people. Most of these people were women and their insights into the connections between family, church and sports have been invaluable. I have met and talked with numerous people at rugby league games, Pasifika themed events, and in other public places and kept extensive field notes in a diary form. This included field observations with more personal reflections to express how I experienced the fieldwork holistically. I was not sometimes an ethnographer and sometimes “me” – I am always both (whether I like it or not), and my fieldwork diary reflects this.
Because of the limitations of my access to the field, I also include an online survey to triangulate my fieldwork findings with some more quantitative data. This survey yielded 44 individual respondents, 38 of whom identified as having Pasifika heritage, and all of whom lived in Australia and New Zealand. There were 25 female respondents, 18 male, zero other, and one skipped the question. Ages ranged from 15 to 46+, with the majority being in the 26-35 age bracket. They were asked a series of demographic, likert scale and open-ended questions regarding Pasifika culture, gender, religion, and sports (see Appendix). The majority of all my participants combined were second-generation and under 35, a trend which follows the demographic statistics of Pasifika peoples in Australia more broadly (Batley 2017).

I also include media analysis in my research because of the enormous and unavoidable role it plays in contemporary sports, particularly rugby league which is dominated by large broadcasting rights and advertising. It also plays a critical role in disseminating representations of and to Pasifika people. This is largely due to the commercialisation of the sports popular with Pasifika men and the media plays a significant role in stereotyping, as well as promoting Pasifika masculinities. As mentioned, in Australia, it is sports and sports media where most visibility and knowledge of Pasifika culture emanates. I therefore present some of the dominant ways Pasifika peoples, particularly “Polynesian” and Fijian males, are represented by the media, and I analyse how these depictions are perceived by the diasporic Pasifika community. I use statistical data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, most from the 2011 Census (ABS 2012), and what was available to me from the 2016 census (ABS 2017), and from Multicultural NSW (2011), Statistics New Zealand (2013, 2017) and the limited Australian Pasifika focused statistics available (including Ravulo 2009, 2015). These combined methods aim to flesh out a picture of diasporic Pasifika indigeneity and masculinity in contemporary Australia.

Who is Pasifika?
My research began by focusing on Samoan diasporas, but as the fieldwork progressed I found that Pacific Island diasporas in Sydney tended to use their common Pasifika heritage as opposed to national identities as a way to solidify community and belonging. This was especially the case in sports where people referred to themselves and their peers most commonly as “Islanders”, and then other more informal Pasifika
terms, such as “bros” or simply “the boys”. Even the friendly Samoan slang *uce*, loosely meaning “brother”, is used by, and in reference to, men from other Polynesian Islands, as is *toko*, the Tongan term, they were even sometimes used in reference to white men, particularly *Pākehā*, in a sort of “honorary brother” title bestowal. There were numerous stories told to me by my participants as well as in the media, about young Pasifika men moving to professional rugby league clubs and finding strength and support in the presence of other Pasifika men who act as mentors and emotional support. It became not only difficult to separate Samoans from other Pasifika peoples living in Sydney, it also became apparent that this was an exaggeration of an imagined boundary. This is not to deny the importance put on national heritage – divisions do of course exist, particularly in nationally-defined churches such as the Free Church of Tonga or the Samoan Assembly of God (both of which have a number of churches in Sydney), but when it comes to playing and watching club rugby the camaraderie expressed between Pacific Islander and Māori people is palpable and plays an important role in forming their identities as diasporic Pacific Islanders and a sense of Pasifika as a brotherhood. Most people I spoke with at Pasifika themed events and rugby games expressed pride in their national heritage, but talked more about the joy of being surrounded by other Islanders, and framed most of their opinions around Pacific Islanders as a unity.\(^6\)

What also became apparent in these arenas was the dominance of New Zealand Māori, indigenous Fijians and people from what is commonly referred to as Polynesia – the Eastern area of the Pacific encompassing over 1000 islands, including the nations of Samoa, Tonga, and the Cook Islands, and subsequently when this thesis refers to Pasifika peoples, it is referring mainly (although not exclusively) to people with ancestral connection to these areas. There are four main reasons for this:

1. Early anthropologists of the Pacific separated Melanesia and Polynesia based on biological essentialism which placed Melanesians at the lower end of European racial hierarchies and Polynesians above them (Thomas 1989). Fiji

\(^6\) When it came to national representative teams, national pride became more obvious, however this pride was more often framed in terms of playing for family and making them proud, than in any sense of competitive rivalry with other Island nations. The 2017 Rugby League World Cup for example heightened national boundaries, but rivalries were exaggerated by the media, and were more prevalent in other countries than in Australia where relations remained largely friendly.
was considered somewhat of a hybrid, confounding anthropologists with their ‘Melanesian looks’ and ‘Polynesian social structures’ (ibid). These are arbitrary European categories, however they hold some sway even today. One only need do an online search for maps of the Pacific to see the three areas of Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia clearly divided. I include Fijian people and practices in my study because of their close relationship with other Pasifika peoples in the Australian diaspora, the high visibility of Fijian players in the National Rugby League (NRL), and to disrupt the colonially demarcated lines of Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia (see Thomas 1989 for a concise argument discrediting the distinctions between Melanesia and Polynesia). The specific and complex indigenous/non-indigenous make-up and distinct migratory, historical and cultural patterns of Fiji are important, but their connection to other Pasifika groups in Australian sports make their national specifics less heightened than they may be in other places and areas. In the Australian rugby league context it is indigenous Fijians who are the major players, and I therefore am mainly referring to them when I discuss Fijian aspects of the game.\(^7\)

2. New Zealand Māori, Fiji, Samoa and Tonga comprise the four largest diasporic Pasifika populations in Australia and are subsequently interconnected in many elements of their sociality. There is a lot of research and controversy around Māori inclusion in the term “Pasifika”. In brief, they are included as Pasifika in this thesis because they are counted as Pacific by the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 Census and the NRL, making separation very difficult, and because of the close connections they share with Pacific Islanders, demonstrated both in my fieldwork and from what can be seen in the larger Australian diaspora, and the media. If this research took place mostly in New Zealand, the lines between Māori and Pasifika would be far more distinct, however the tensions between Māori and Pacific Islanders in New Zealand are not as strong in Australia where neither group is indigenous to the land, and where Māori and other Pasifika people are a small minority of

\(^7\) There are a number of historically complicated reasons for why Indigenous Fijians and not Fijian-Indians play such a dominant role in rugby league and union, see Presterudstuen 2010.
the national population.\(^8\) This thesis subsequently draws on fieldwork engaging mostly with Māori, Fijian, Samoan, Tongan and Cook Island Māori people, with minor inclusions from other areas, such as Papua New Guinea.

3. The most visible Pacific Islander representations in Australia, particularly in NSW and QLD, are men popularly considered Polynesian, more specifically, rugby league and union players with Samoan, Tongan, and Māori heritage, as well as those from Fiji, as the scholarly literature, media and my fieldwork all demonstrate. Teaiwa argues that in the
two dominant and highly visible arenas for positive Pacific participation on the Australian social and cultural landscape: sport and popular culture… it is the Pacific Islander male, and more specifically Polynesian male, who is the most visible (2016: 111).

It is unclear if she includes indigenous Fijians in this as they are arguably just as visible. This thesis addresses some of the reasons for, and ramifications of this visibility, whilst also including indigenous Fijians.

4. The Pacific Islands encompass tens of thousands of different islands, atolls, waters, nations, cultures, shifting boundaries, languages and religions and it would do no one island justice to try and consider all of them within the thesis limitations. I therefore stick to the ones most common in the Australian diaspora, who have strong representation in professional rugby league, and established diasporic communities, to best address my research questions on diasporic Pasifika identity and how framings of masculinity and sport affect them. For issues of time and space, when I refer to the Pasifika diaspora, I am referring mostly to the nations outlined here, and when I use the term “Polynesia” I am referring both to New Zealand Māori and the nations commonly accepted to be part of Polynesia (e.g. Samoa, Tonga, and the Cook Islands). I acknowledge the contentions in these categories (see Thomas 1989; \(^8\) People of Māori and other Pasifika heritage account for 1.43 per cent (or 335, 103 people) of the total Australian population according to the 2016 Australian census (Batley 2017; also see Te Punga Somerville 2012 for more detail on Māori connections to Polynesia).
Terms used by anthropologists, and more recently, interdisciplinary Pacific studies scholars to refer to the Pacific and Pasifika peoples and cultures have changed over time, with commonly used terms ranging from Pacific Islanders, Oceanian, Pasifika or Pacifica. A more recent trend which is starting to be used more frequently amongst those in Pacific Studies, is Moanan utilising the word used in a number of Pasifika languages for ocean – Moana. Tecun et al. for example, argue that they use this term as ‘a way to centre Indigenous perspectives that are not divided by poly/mela/micronesion fragmented views of our sea of islands’ (Tecun et al. 2018: 157). I believe Pasifika does this too and as a more commonly understood and used term in Australia where the research mostly took place, it is the best term to use for this particular research project. I do hope Moanan is used more in the future however. I will now expand on my core theoretical methodologies, interspersing literature reviews of theoretical themes with how they were methodologically utilised in my fieldwork.

Pasifika sports studies in the diaspora

As mentioned in Chapter One, there is a common acknowledgement in Pacific sporting literature that the prolific success of Pasifika peoples in rugby football codes shares similarities with other popular historical sporting flows, but in comparison is still at a very early stage of scholarship, with much encouragement from scholars for future research to help extend the boundaries of “global sport” to include the Pacific. Uperesa and Mountjoy’s argument echoes the sentiments of many Pasifika focused sports scholars when they say:

For a discussion to effectively address the reality of transnational sport around the globe, the “South” must be included not only as a counter to the hegemony of the “North-West” voice but also in order to accurately portray the various ways sport is played out in non-Western contexts (2014: 273).

While Australia might not be considered a ‘non-Western context’, in the multicultural city of Sydney the multitude of ethnic diasporas and the largest population of indigenous Australians in the nation (ABS 2017), make it a salient place for exploring sport for people possibly considered outside of the hegemonic ‘North-West’, or
European and white North-American contexts. Peoples from ‘non-Western contexts’ do not simply stay in those contexts and their significant and elaborate migratory networks can also be addressed to counter the ‘North-West hegemony’ of sports studies. The Pasifika diaspora in Sydney is rapidly growing, and currently numbers approximately 96,000 (ABS 2017), the largest diasporic Pasifika group in Australia, followed by Brisbane with approximately 63,000 (Ravulo 2015). There are a growing number of social scientists working within these communities but current literature is significantly limited (notable examples include George 2014; George and Rodriguez 2009; Lakisa et al. 2014; McDonald and Rodriguez 2014; Panapa and Phillips 2014; Ravulo 2009, 2015, 2018; Teaiwa 2016; Zakus and Horton 2009). I therefore draw on many examples from New Zealand where literature on Māori and Pacific Islanders in general and in sports, particularly in rugby league’s most similar code – rugby union, has been substantial. I particularly utilise the writings of indigenous masculinities scholar, Brendan Hokowhitu whose work on Māori masculinity and rugby informs this thesis throughout. I also draw on American and Hawaiian scholars working in indigenous masculinity and sports (such as Tengan and Markham 2009; Umeresa 2010a, 2010b).

As well as the two years of fieldwork I conducted in Sydney, I completed six weeks of fieldwork in New Zealand, to collect comparative data on the Pasifika diaspora in Auckland and surrounds. I conducted four formal interviews, as well as much informal talanoa with Pacific family and friends, and I attended an indigenous research conference at Auckland University, the importance of which I expand on throughout this thesis. I was also lucky enough to travel to Samoa, Hawai‘i, Tonga and Fiji just before and during my PhD, which included attending another indigenous research conference, at the University of Hawai‘i which was formative in exposing me to global indigenous research. Being able to draw on the comparative knowledge these visits gave me helped make the peculiarities and uniqueness of the Australian diaspora even clearer and confirm it as a good place to conduct research with diasporic indigenous peoples whose heritage lies in ‘non-Western’ contexts.

As Teaiwa rightly notes, within
Pacific Studies in Australia, which is geographically in Oceania and where there is significant Pacific research and policy work, there is a preference for engaging the Pacific out there in the Islands, but not the Pacific within Australian cities and neighbourhoods (2016: 110).

There is however some excellent work on Pasifika diasporas in Australia, and numerous calls for more work in the field (e.g. Alexeyeff 2013; Lee and Francis 2009). Lilomaiava-Doktor implores her readers to think of places like Sydney as having just as much relevance to Pasifika peoples as their island homes, arguing that ‘places of the “periphery” including Auckland, Los Angeles and Sydney are increasingly becoming “cores”. Core and periphery are therefore always in flux. Home is not only multi-local but trans-local’ (2009b: 67). For many nations in the Pacific, there are more people living abroad than there are in their ancestral homelands, and they have complex migratory patterns, including much circular moving between home and abroad (see Lilomaiava-Doktor 2009b), making diaspora a vital part of their identities as indigenous communities who move in large numbers to and from the lands they are indigenous to.

I am mostly concerned with diasporic indigeneity, specifically people with Pacific Island heritage living in the Australian and New Zealand diaspora as detailed at the beginning of this chapter, however I also discuss how experiences and understandings of indigeneity are connected across different groups. Most of my research was done in Australia and it is therefore imperative to consider the indigenous peoples of the lands on which I myself, and my participants live and work. As mentioned, New Zealand’s indigenous peoples, the Māori, are largely considered in Australia to be Polynesian and are counted in Australia as part of the Pasifika diaspora (although this is starting to change, see ABS 2017). Aboriginal Australians on the other hand are counted as a separate group in Australian statistics and have a different historical migratory journey and some different cultural traits to their Pasifika neighbours, as well as an obviously more complex and deep relationship with their ancestral homelands of Australia. There is very little research on the relationships between Aboriginal and Pasifika peoples in Australia (some historical examples include George 2014; Howe 1988; Ross and Taylor 2002; Standfield 2012), and while this relationship is not the core focus of this thesis, it is important to understand the ambiguity of Pasifika
indigeneity on Aboriginal land. I draw on Aboriginal sports research, where there is valuable work pertinent to this thesis, particularly in the relationship between Australian Rules Football and Aboriginal indigeneity (Gorman et al. 2016; Hallinan and Judd 2012, 2013; Judd and Butcher 2015) and I argue that while the Pasifika person is as much a migrant on stolen land as a non-indigenous person, the global indigenous experiences of colonisation connect them in significant ways.

There has been a lot more work done on the relationship between indigenous Māori and Pasifika migrants in New Zealand (Grainger 2008; Misa 2002; Teaiwa and Mallon 2005), and on the relations between Pacific Islander groups in the USA where strong national boundaries have resulted in gang culture and nationally fuelled violence between Tongan and Samoan gangs (Esser 2012; Huanh 2014; Morales 2016). Australia remains a unique case for analysing the subtle and quotidian framings around Pasifika indigeneity, masculinity and sports.

The quotidian

In the social sciences there is little research on the specific practices and perceptions of sport for Pacific people in the successful sporting nations where they play in large numbers such as the USA, New Zealand and Australia. There is a growing call within Pacific sports studies for more locally produced research which engages with the quotidian lifeworlds of diasporic Pasifika peoples as they experience them. Like many Pacific and sports scholars before me, I consider the important role postcolonialism, nationalism, and migration have played in the transnational reach of sports and Pacific culture, but my research attempts to bring these rubrics into the daily experiential habitus of Pasifika peoples living in a particular diaspora. As Teaiwa notes, ‘While Pacific peoples across the globe celebrate their football, rugby union and rugby league stars, what that means to communities on the ground in their particular social and political circumstances varies considerably’ (Teaiwa 2016: 117). By combining the transnational focused literature on sport with the everyday practices of sport for people living away from their ancestral homes, particularly second and later generations who are often dealing with competing identity formations, I want to help illuminate the power of sport for people who may not physically move transnationally, but whose identities are nonetheless tied to transnational webs of ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ (Lilomaiava-Doktor 2009a, 2009b).
Another element of this research which touches on my methodological choice to focus locally on the quotidian lives of a specific diaspora, is to seriously consider the positives of sport in the everyday lives of an indigenous group of peoples. Macro-theories that focus on national policies, or historical sports trajectories often highlight the injustices and oppression of indigenous peoples, or focus on the developmental capacities of sport to assist in other socio-cultural outcomes. While these are important considerations, it is just as important to acknowledge and explore the good things sport brings to people’s lives on an everyday level. Sport has the capacity to create joy, community, purpose, happiness and meaning, and many of my participants expressed their love and passion for sports. This approach of acknowledging the joy in sport and the playing of sport for its own sake has been seen by some scholars as a form of decolonisation in itself. Jeanes et al. argue that macro-social development agendas, as well as common attacks on sports development programs as neo-colonialist, often ignore complex and actual experiences for local peoples, and they argue the need to ‘decolonise methodologies within sport for development research to prioritise local knowledge and experience’ (2013: 135). This ties in with the growing calls to move away from indigenous struggle and survival narratives, to focus more on indigenous thriving and flourishing (Durie 2016; Rua 2016).

In Australia, McDonald and Rodriguez highlight the persisting functionalist attitude to sport, particularly to rugby, that espouses a positive, egalitarian nature, when in fact the reality of one’s success in sporting realms is strongly influenced by one’s ability to successfully negotiate between specific cultural, post-colonial discourses (2014). These development and functionalist attitudes view sport in light of its ability to influence other factors. They are future focused, as western thinking often is, and not concerned with the present or past, directions often more important to indigenous and diasporic communities whose ancestors are acknowledged as a living part of them. My research provides an alternative to this functionalist discourse by critically engaging with a highly visible and successful demographic in a popular commercial sport in an everyday experiential way – Pasifika men, whose connections to home, abroad, and various other value systems, including their relational identities to ancestors, family, community and God, may be perceived in radically different ways to the dominant white-male sports voice.
In Australia, Pasifika men are couched in discourses of problems, issues and struggles, much like their indigenous Australian brothers. They are over-represented in the justice system and have lower socioeconomic status than the white majority population (Ravulo 2015). Sports like rugby league, despite all their problems (which this thesis will deal with at length), provide, at times a very rare, opportunity for both mundane quotidian joy as well as spectacular livelihood building opportunities. Sport’s professional and development agendas have been the main focus for sports studies which concern themselves with the ways sport can “help” indigenous people to “develop”, essentially focusing on sport as a means to another end, and in lieu of experiential, playful and quotidian considerations, not to mention the assumption that indigenous people need to develop. I wish to add something different to this popular discourse, where sport and indigeneity can be studied together to explore what sport brings to indigenous people’s lives on an everyday level, both good and bad, and what sport offers in and of itself rather than as a means to an end, and I take the role of joy seriously. I therefore offer a critique of the western-centric sport for development discourse, which I believe places undue emphasis on the role of sport in developing external factors, such as achieving educational or economic goals (Jeanes et al. 2013). Instead, I focus on the cultural and creative elements of sports engagement.

Because of this, I foreground indigenous and Pasifika epistemologies of relationality, such as talanoa and vā, as well as Bourdieu’s formulation of the habitus which shares holistic aspects with Pasifika indigenous frameworks. Bourdieu’s habitus understands that power structures and physiological practice are bound in a constant loop with the individual, psychological, and perceptive, and that these inextricable relationships have innumerable possible forms. While sport may be a structured form of play, the possibilities for rebelling against forms and forces are significant, or as Bourdieu may put it – the structure is finite but the transformations possible within it are infinite. This shares important similarities to the Samoan alagaupu, ‘e sui faiga, ae tumau le fa’avae’ (the practices or forms may change, but the foundations and grounding remain the same). I resist a largely Foucauldian approach, despite its popularity in

---

9 While I am drawing mostly on Bourdieu, I acknowledge the important role Claude Levi Strauss played in Bourdieu’s formulation of these theories. Levi Strauss’s transformative structures were hugely influential for Bourdieu, particularly his affirmation that “the world of symbolism is infinitely varied in content, but always limited in its laws” (Levi Strauss 1963: 203).
sports and other body/sex concerned research, as I believe it over-stresses the power structures of sport in lieu of personal agency and practice.\textsuperscript{10} I mention this rejection of a Foucauldian analysis because of the large number of sports and masculinity studies that do draw on his theories of body, discourse and power and I want to show that corporeal studies of sports do not necessarily have to take a Foucauldian approach (particularly when there are more appropriate indigenous frameworks available). While I acknowledge the need to consider bodily discourse as inscribed through power relations and knowledge, I do not wish to highlight this as a core issue for the Australian Pasifika diaspora. Looking at sport through a combination of indigenous theories with some consideration given to Bourdieuss’s habitus may instead give a glimpse into why playing sport is such a powerful force in so many people’s lives. I believe Foucault does not allow for this level of agency, and a Foucauldian lens keeps studies of sport in the realm of the macro-social.

\textbf{An indigenous feminist habitus}

While Bourdieu was a twentieth century French intellectual, and himself failed to engage with much feminist and indigenous theory (Butler 1997), there is a lot in his work, particularly around the embodied nature of the habitus, that is conducive to feminist and indigenous inquiry. Bourdieu conceptualises social reality as constructed but nevertheless firm, much like many feminist and indigenous scholars, such as Judith Butler or Kimberley Tallbear (Lovell 2000: 15-16; Tallbear 2014). Bourdieu’s understanding of practice is most succinctly presented in his theory of the habitus, where he argues:

\begin{quote}
It is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know. The habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less “sensible” and “reasonable” (Bourdieu 1977: 79).
\end{quote}

Producing what one anticipates is something that can be seen in Pasifika sports studies where Pasifika masculinity is framed in very particular ways affecting Pasifika

\textsuperscript{10} I do consider it relevant to some degree however, especially in Hokowhitu’s framing where indigeneity in sports is considered within powerful historical hierarchies (including postcolonialism).
peoples’ own self-perceptions and practices. One of the founding fathers of Pacific studies, Epeli Hau'ofa argues that many Pacific Islanders have come to see themselves through a colonial lens, where they believe the story of their own degeneration, and as such perform it (1994). In Butler’s theories on performativity she shares a similar belief in regard to gender, which she argues, ‘operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates’ (1999: xiv). While Bourdieu is talking about perception and practice as an embodied loop of experience, and Butler approaches how this is enacted through gender performativity, Hau’ofa discusses how colonisation has affected Pasifika perceptions and practices through western knowledge production. This combination of western, feminist and indigenous epistemologies is an important methodological aspect of this thesis, where I hope to get closer to ‘standing with’ (Tallbear 2014) those whose knowledges have traditionally been marginalised. As Tallbear argues:

> Both feminist and indigenous epistemologists call out the sciences that do not account for their partiality and for representing their views as universal and objective, or value-neutral. Although indigenous and feminist thinkers don’t necessarily rely on the same analytical frameworks…the two intellectual worlds both push the sciences to be more accountable to the worlds (within which) they study (2013: 22).

It is evident within the western university research system that white male scholars like Foucault and Bourdieu are considered a neutral and strong place to start, they are ‘the view from everywhere’ to use Haraway’s term (1991), able to be applied to everything. What I argue in this thesis engages with Tallbear’s arguments, that we should engage more deeply with feminist and indigenous scholarship and positions, not in order to simply invert traditional binaries, to see things from an indigenous or feminist standpoint, but to become more attuned to the particular histories of privilege and denial and to create greater insight and responsibility (Tallbear 2013: 25).

Hau'ofa argues that colonial views of indigenous Pasifika peoples have had lasting negative effects on them (similarly addressed by Nakata 2007 in respect to Torres Strait Islanders) and that the popular framing of the Pacific Islands as small and
periphery is a dangerous myth which portrays Pacific peoples as less important than mainland western powers. He challenges the myth of “smallness” in the Pacific, expanding the geographical focus on land mass and colonially demarcated lines to include the vast Pacific Ocean and connections with various Pacific identities. He argues that the view of the Pacific Islands as ‘too small, too poor, and too isolated to develop any meaningful degree of autonomy is an economic and geographic deterministic view of a very narrow kind’ (1994: 151). Hau'ofa’s framing of the Pacific has become a stalwart of Pacific studies and a key shift in academic Pasifika epistemology. Giving Bourdieu’s habitus an indigenous feminist bent, by combining him with Hau'ofa and other indigenous and feminist scholars (such as Tallbear, Lovell, Butler and Haraway), I continue to question the smallness narrative of the Pacific and look closer at its effects on Pacific (particularly masculine) identity.

**Pasifika relational identity in a postcolonial diaspora: Incorporating the vā**

There can be a dissonance between the relational ways of being as learned by Pasifika peoples, and the postcolonial diasporic spaces they now inhabit and I present a way of thinking about this identity which focuses on relationality, replacing the deficits and colonial categorisations of hybridity with theories of ‘betweenness’ (inspired by Albert Wendt), and ‘doubleness’, drawing on theories by Michelle Harris (2013; with Nakata and Carlson 2013), and Damon Salesa (Salesa and Husband 2018) and which more accurately capture how Pasifika people in Australia are creating their own diasporic identities. I analyse these identity theories through the lens of the vā, the Pasifika concept of the spaces between, and importantly in the vā’s connection to sports and diasporic identity as material, aesthetic, active, and liminal. The vā straddles the world between academic research on hybridity, liminality, identity and relational personhood, and the everyday world of many Pasifika peoples who experience betweenness in every part of their lives, including their experience of being between what can feel like two different worlds (Australia and their ancestral Pacific Islands). The vā is always between animate beings, and so while I refer to the vā between the “world” of academic research and the quotidian “world” of experience for Pasifika peoples, it is important to remember that these spaces and their various paradigms are created and embodied by people.
A common sentiment among the people I have worked with, particularly second-generation Pasifika peoples, is their struggles with identity from a young age, where they feel they neither fit in with their Pacific family and friends, nor with their Australian or New Zealand peers (see also Lee 2008). They feel like outsiders in every circumstance because they are neither clearly one nor the other, they are “between”. This has often been referred to as hybrid (Harris et al. 2013), and frequently been assumed in postcolonial societies to be something that negatively affects indigenous peoples but not the colonisers. Indigenous peoples are categorised as hybrid in a way that excludes them from full membership in any one group (who are themselves hybrids but who falsely assume a “purity and “wholeness”) – indigenous people are framed as deficit – that they are never going to be as “pure” as they were “pre-contact”. I interrogate these assumptions throughout this thesis, drawing on qualities of the vā to help us critique hybridity and focus on how Pasifika relationality actually allows us to think of diasporic identity as an enriching third space where one can be between and still whole. I question the nature of hybridity, arguing that the concept of the vā more accurately reflects Pasifika (and perhaps other) identities and that all cultures, particularly in modern western contexts like Australia, are in fact hybrid – purity is a myth.

These identity politics for diasporic Pasifika peoples are connected to long historical trajectories of colonialism, postcolonialism and neocolonialism and this thesis considers the Pasifika diaspora in Australia as part of this ongoing process. As Australian social theorist Paul James argues, ‘with formal colonization, identity becomes both less variable and more vexatious’ (2015: 179), which we can see in the colonial separation of body and mind across the Pacific, as well as the separation and categorisation of the sexes and what is right and wrong. I explore the overlapping and changing of identities for Pasifika peoples living away from their ancestral homes where the inflexible and vexatious attempts to categorise and delegitimise “betweenness” have had a formative effect. While not venerating precolonial life and convicting all that has come after, this thesis gives serious consideration to the deeply destructive and constructive nature of colonialism and what it brings to indigenous masculinity and sports in the postcolonial arena of Australia. Postcolonialism is not that which comes after colonialism, but rather what the legacy of colonialism
continues to be in spaces where decolonisation is a comparatively recent discourse and a very real aspiration, whether possible (or even clear) or not.

Samoan writer, Albert Wendt, declared in the documentary *The New Oceania*: ‘No culture is perfect or sacred even today. Individual dissent is essential to the healthy survival, development, and sanity of any nation – without it our cultures will drown in self-love’ (2005). These sentiments are visible in the Pasifika diaspora in Australia, where many factors affect identity and belonging from both the Australian side and the side of the Pacific Islands, and second and later generation Pasifika peoples in particular are embracing flexibility and change. Is there something in this combination of traditional ontologies and modern postcolonial desires that makes Pasifika livelihood in Australia more difficult? And if so, what role does rugby league play in this? Hokowhitu argues for the importance of using a postcolonial lens to look at indigeneity, the Pacific and sports and I work throughout the foci of this thesis with a constant background consideration on the postcolonial nature of these spaces, taking this charge by Hokowhitu into serious consideration:

any analysis of indigeneity and sport must be firstly cognisant of “local knowledges” and place, the dispossessing nature of colonialism, the role sport played in assimilating the indigenous population within the nation state, the complexity that is the indigenous athlete as both indigenous hero and dupe, the possibilities that sport holds as a spectacle of indigenous resistance and, more than anything, the relationship between sport and indigenous postcolonial corporeality (Hokowhitu 2013: xvii).

Colonial incursions have caused multifaceted re-imaginings of local values but it is important to remember that postcolonial frameworks are not just something that “has happened” to indigenous peoples, but rather something that they as actors have dealt with and refashioned in complex interconnectedness with other ways of being. Rather than reclaiming something lost in the past, I argue that indigenous diasporic Pasifika peoples are refashioning what it means to be indigenous, Pasifika, Australian and diasporic.
I draw on postcolonial scholars Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Edward Said, to further contextualise my understanding of “home” and “abroad” for Pasifika transnational diasporas, such as when I refer to ‘an increasingly globalised world’ which, like Bhabha (1994), I concede has many mythical elements to it. That globalisation equals more access and mobility for all is not what I mean when I say this, rather, that people are saturated with the ideals of globalisation, even if they are not available to them. Bhabha argues that globalisation must always begin at home:

A just measure of global progress requires that we first evaluate how globalizing nations deal with “the difference within” – the problems of diversity and redistribution at the local level, and the rights and representations of minorities in the regional domain (2004: xv).

He then asks, for example: ‘What is the status of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, or the Muslims in India in the midst of the transformational myths and realities of global connectivity?’ (2004: xv). Australia is considered on the world stage as a developed and wealthy country, and yet its First Peoples have some of the highest recorded suicide rates in the world, closely followed by the nation’s Pasifika inhabitants (Institute for Economics and Peace 2016; Ravulo 2015). Like many indigenous and other non-western scholars, Bhabha is concerned with what is just, and these ethical and postcolonial considerations have helped shape my theoretical methodology.

Talanoa and Pasifika methodologies
Tecun et al. argue that talanoa is not informal, nor is it simply another way of saying ‘open-ended informal interviews, which glosses over its emotional and cultural complexity’ (2018: 158). In fact, talanoa is made up of many formal rules, assumptions and etiquettes, but not in the Eurocentric way we often think of formality, but in a Moanan way. Whether it be anga fakatonga (the Tongan way) or fa’a Samoa (the Samoan way), or any other Pasifika framework, it requires a balancing of mana, tapu and noa – the powerful, the sacred, and the equilibrium. Talanoa requires ‘closeness rather than distance’ (ibid), doing away with appeals of objectivity more common in western research paradigms.
When I was completing the first year of my PhD in 2015, there were a number of times, especially in reference to ethics, where we were warned against drawing on existing relations. We were taught that friends for example, could feel obliged and pressured to help us with our research, and that this would be unethical. We were taught a number of data collection methods, all of which centered around objectivity and distance. I, like many young university-ingrained researchers, took this as truth and set off into my fieldwork trying not to utilise my connections, and recruiting people in the impersonal ways encouraged by the university system. I cannot express how much I wish I had met more indigenous scholars and read more on *talanoa* and decolonising methodologies then! It was through the process of doing my research, including fieldwork, that I began to learn that these ways were actually in stark contrast to the ways valued by the cultures I was supposedly trying to understand and help create more knowledge about and with. It proved difficult to build relationships with people I had no existing connection with, ‘I belong therefore I am’ was working in full force (unbeknownst to me at this early stage) – I did not belong and therefore I was not a relevant person. The work took longer than it could have had I started with my connections and not tried to adhere to the western preoccupation with objectivity. I hope that my future work can continue to develop and engage with *talanoa* and decolonial practices.

Hawaiian schoar Ty P. Kāwika Tengan proposes that indigenous anthropology should include:

- Involving *Kanaka Maoli* (indigenous people) as active agents and producers of anthropological discourse rather than its object;
- Incorporating *‘Oiwi Maoli* (indigenous) protocols and practices into anthropological ones; and
- Conducting research and practice in ways that are relevant, responsible, and respectful to those with whom these projects are undertaken (Tengan 2001 cited in Ka‘ili 2017; see also White and Tengan 2001)

While this is a solo authored PhD thesis and as such adheres to western university research frameworks, I have steadily been able to incorporate more of these practices, and am able to use this PhD as an exploration of the very reasons why it is so
important to keep doing this kind of work – because it is still so difficult and undervalued in western universities. The way we teach and value methodologies and ethics are two places where I hope this thesis can provide some guidance. If nothing else, to acknowledge that knowledge is always positional and that it can (and sometimes must) draw on relationships, and that it can be oral, visual, embodied, and somewhere inbetween, amongst the va between people. In contrast to the critics who may say this is too unspecific, unscientific or esoteric, it is actually more accurate science as it engages with many rules and protocols to gain better knowledge, they are just rules that have gone unrecognised by dominant western research paradigms. The rules of talanoa for example, are as formal and fixed as many western scientific rules (see Fa’avae 2016).

**Researcher and researched**

Rugby league has a reputation in Australia (amongst many, but not all) for being hyper-masculine where women are either peripheral or absent and by inserting myself into this scene as a researcher my position allows for a somewhat unique take that I hope can add something meaningful to the valuable work being done by male researchers in the field (as well as the small but growing female cohort of rugby league scholars including Katarina Teaiwa and Roannie Ng Shiu). While I have kin connections to Samoa and New Zealand Māori, I am not of Pacific heritage, and am what is referred to in my home country as Pākehā. My presence at Pasifika events was conspicuous, not least to myself, and I discuss my own awkwardness in detail in this thesis, as well as how this position as Pākehā, or Palagi (the Samoan word for a white foreigner), framed people’s interactions with me – again there was a tendency to over-explain, yielding both positive and negative results. I found it difficult in many situations to explain the details of my research to people in the field, not least because of my own anxieties about appearing condescending, a comfort that improved with time but which made for some awkward but illuminating “learning experiences”. I breathed a sigh of relief when I found one of my biggest influences, Brendan Hokowhitu, encountered similar difficulties in his research:

---

11 At this stage as far as I am aware I am the only non-Pasifika female currently studying rugby league and Pasifika relations in Australia, but there of course may be others.
I have found it almost impossible to discuss with other Māori men the theory and critical notions that underpin my work, because the language I speak is viewed as a Pākehā language, and the higher level of theoretical thought involved contrasts with the silent, tough, and practical Māori masculinity that is distantly common. In many Māori contexts, to talk of theory is perceived as whakahīhī (conceited) (2004: 261).

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I struggled greatly to explain my work in a way I felt was balanced and relevant to Pasifika peoples, anxiously aware of not wanting to sound whakahīhī and I share some of my embarrassing yet important diary entries from these moments in this thesis.

Uperesa also refers to the differences between what the academy expects of you and what the people with whom your research engages with expect from you. She argues that while faculty members encourage her to enrich her work with ‘theoretical sophistication that speaks across cultural and geographic areas so that it is not narrow or provincial’, her local interlocutors are more interested in ‘the account of football’s place in local history’ (Uperesa 2010a: 293). This has very much been the case in my work, where I am often jumping between theoretical explanations of my work to academic people, and the more pragmatic concerns with my interlocutors – whether they be Pasifika or not. In fact, it is the latter I struggle with more in my research. Having had years of experience in the world of academia, I perhaps ironically, found articulating my work to respected and admired (not least by me) scholars far easier, if not for initial nerves, than I did trying to explain my work to a 14-year-old Samoan-Māori boy living in Western Sydney. Why did I feel I had more to prove, and in fact, more to lose, in conceptualising my work to him than I did with people who could potentially be my colleagues, or even more, my employers one day? I believe it has to do with authenticity and legitimacy, and this desire to feel useful to the community. I wanted him to “get” why I was doing what I was doing, and in a way validate it, to think it was valuable. This thesis is my gift to all the Pasifika people who helped me, either directly or indirectly, with their knowledge, their patience, and their humour. It has been my obligation for the past four years to return these gifts in the best form I know how, my fa’alavelave is this humble piece of work and my greatest hope for it is that it is simply received by those who know far more than I in the Pasifika
community.

I have outlined the key theoretical methodologies of this project – that of the quotidian sporting framework for the Pasifika diaspora in Australia; the combination of indigenous and feminist frameworks and their possible connections to Bourdieu’s habitus; indigenous masculinity and postcolonial studies; indigenous Pasifika epistemologies around relationality and identity; and the connections and disconnections between researcher and researched. My focus on quotidian lifeworlds, or habitus, as opposed to macro-social structures of ‘economic determinism’ (Hau’ofa 1994) is an approach many Pasifika and sports scholars have recognised the need for in recent years (e.g. Dewey Jr 2014; Lakisa et al. 2014; Lee and Francis 2009; Lilomaia-Doktor 2009a; Molnar and Kanemasu 2014; Uperesea and Mountjoy 2014) and my methods reflect this need.

Conclusion

Post-Hegel, the other must not be overcome (sublated) for the sake of the self, but the ethical stance means permitting the other to live in its alterity in the full knowledge that one’s notions of self-coherence and self-identity will be interrupted by the difference that one embraces (Salih and Butler 2004: 3).

For me, this is what the cultural research project is largely about; acknowledging difference, spending time and working hard to understand it as best you can, and allowing it to change yourself. By acknowledging the power of the spaces and relationships between selves and environments, a more holistic sense of indigenous Pasifika identities can begin to take shape. Non-white voices from the global south are noticeably absent in sports studies, and in Pacific studies there is a resounding call for more ethnographically engaged research in the new urban homelands of Pasifika sporting peoples. This thesis seeks to redress these imbalances (as much as the limitations of my position as a non-Pasifika person allow) within the interdisciplinary fields of both Pacific and sports studies by; engaging with the perspectives of indigenous Pasifika peoples who use rugby league as an identity forming vehicle in diasporic spaces; exploring indigeneity and masculinity from a female point of view (with connections to Pasifika culture, but ultimately as an outsider); and employing Pasifika methodologies and theories, and as such contributing to the growing
decolonisation movement within indigenous and other social studies. I now turn to the more specific historical and contemporary contexts of rugby league and the Pasifika diaspora in Australia.
CHAPTER THREE. CONTEXT

Fieldwork diary entry, 30th June 2016:

I went to a rugby union game in Coogee last weekend, I actually thought it was going to be league! It was fascinating how different the clientele were. Rugby is so much more elite. The men are all tall and slim (and mostly white), with their beige pants and expensive branded puffer jackets – TAG Heuer etc., jerseys tied around their shoulders, with young kids and attractive wives in white skinny jeans and casually expensive looking jackets, with perfectly tussled hair. There were more brown boys on the team from the western suburbs, and I saw one islander family who were supporting them, they had a grandpa, grandma, mother, daughter, and baby, and were in cheaper clothes, trackies [tracksuit pants] etc. they looked a lot poorer, and were very quiet in comparison to the other louty private school boy types. I could hear a big group of men talking but they were so inoffensive and boring I’ve forgotten the details. It was about the game, their injuries, being a dad (nothing deep), work etc. Most of them were drinking VB [beer] cans sold at the grounds. It was freezing but sunny. There were perhaps 200 people there? I’m terrible at estimating. Randwick were thrashing the Western Suburbs team, who had a name I had never heard of but was somewhere near Wentworthville. Rugby union in Australia is the rich boy’s game for the most part, that was confirmed.

This was just one experience I had watching local rugby union in Sydney, one of the first, and an accidental one, but one that solidified on a local level the socio-economic differences in league and union engagement in Australia. Rugby union has been known since its invention, as a game for “gentlemen” and this class distinction can be seen to this day, particularly in Australia. In New Zealand the distinction is less class based (although it still is to a smaller degree), with rugby union being the unofficial national game and available on a larger scale. In Australia, league is far more accessible. Union has also enjoyed more scholarship, while league has been relegated to the margins – a game for the less educated. These distinctions have a long history, emanating from the class struggles and geographic divides of nineteenth century
Britain and continuing through various shaping factors in Australia, particularly in Sydney.

Rugby originally split into rugby league and rugby union in nineteenth century Britain when the more working-class northern chapter decided they could no longer afford to play without payment like the south did, and they created rugby league as a professional code where you could get paid for your time away from work to play. The south wanted the sport to continue as an amateur game for “gentlemen” who had the leisure time for unpaid sports (Collins 1998) and so developed rugby union. The rules of the two games were not clear in the early days, and have changed considerably throughout their histories, especially league which has been more flexible in rule changing. Rugby league has been a professional sport since the nineteenth century, while union only professionalised very recently, in 1995. In Australia, the English class distinction between the two codes was mirrored, with upper-class Protestants controlling union and working-class Irish-Catholics splitting into league from the first decade of the twentieth century (Phillips 1994). In contemporary Australia rugby union is less available to the masses than in New Zealand where union is considered the national sport (although not officially). In Australia, rugby union reflects the English model of the sport being a mostly “upper-class” game, whereas in New Zealand, largely due to the early success of the All Blacks (the New Zealand rugby union team), from their first international tour in 1905, rugby union has become a symbol of ‘mateship, intrepidness…[and] coloniser-colonised reconciliation…without the game losing its imperialist aura’ (During 1998: 35; see also Falcous 2007).

In this chapter I give some brief historical and demographic context to my study. I start with the more specific historical details of rugby league in Australia and the Pasifika diaspora, and work my way out to the broader history of sports in the Pacific region and popular theories of sport in general. I focus on colonial changes in the region and what has happened since and because of them. I do not go into precolonial sports and games, or precolonial history as it is the colonially introduced sports I am interested in, particularly rugby league and related codes. I focus on Australia and differences to New Zealand, and some of the differences between league and union and how these came about. It is important to note the uniqueness of the Australian
rugby league-Pasifika relationship as there has been much written about rugby in New Zealand and on Pasifika New Zealand relations, but very little on league and Australia. As a dual citizen of Australia and New Zealand, with kinship ties to the Pacific I feel I am in a good position to consider the unique position of Australia’s, and Sydney’s (and NSW’s and QLD’s) inextricable transnationalism with New Zealand and the Pacific Islands, particularly when it comes to Pasifika diasporas. Like the rest of this thesis, this chapter oscillates between nuanced local contexts and transnational and broader historical and structural considerations, painting a picture of their connectedness.

The highest professional codes of rugby union are limited to pay television in Australia, and ticket prices to games far exceed those of rugby league matches. Private boys schools and universities in Australia are the most involved in the playing of the sport at a grass roots level with the opportunity to move up professionally. Rugby league on the other hand is considered the “working-class” game. In NSW and QLD, there are at least three NRL games televised per week on free-to-air, cheaper ticket sales, more grassroots community-based clubs that exist outside of private schooling, and high media exposure in daily television, digital and paper news.

In the early twentieth century, and during the First World War, league grew dramatically in popularity in Australia, overtaking union with its focus on entertainment, accessibility and professionalism. Sydney was its Australian birthplace, first attracting unprecedented interest in 1910 when 16,000 spectators turned out to watch a local club game while only 12,000 attended the interstate union game nearby (Phillips 1994: 199). International matches the same year showed similar trends, with only 15,000 in the crowd for the All Blacks versus Wallabies, while 39,000 turned out for the league game between Australia and England (ibid). As Phillips argues, at this moment, league ‘was a superior spectacle’, and while

Union could be a slow, closed and stagnant game; league, following changes made in England around the turn of the century, was played with a reduced number of players, no lineouts and a more efficient clearing of the ball from the ruck. It provided better entertainment (ibid).
This trend continued throughout the First World War, as union’s Anglo-Protestant organisers took the view that games were not part of military patriotism and subsequently cancelled the premiership program from 1915-1918. At the same time league’s working-class Irish-Catholic faction took it as an opportunity to assist recruiting and fundraising for the war and while international and interstate matches ceased, gate takings for club matches increased up to sixfold as many saw it as an opportunity for some relief from the war (Phillips 1994: 202). These decisions had lasting effects into the next decades, when league boomed and union suffered, and the class distinctions spread into ethnic distinctions after the mass migrations of non-British Europeans in the 1940s and ‘50s. To some degree union, but more so league, became a welcoming place as early as the 1970s for sons of migrants from places like Greece and Italy who had recently arrived in Australia in large numbers and quickly became part of the working-class. Aboriginal men were also growing in numbers from the 1960s, in both sports, but more so in league.

Phillips recalls that in the 1987 Sydney competition, Aboriginal men constituted nearly nine per cent of players in the top two divisions while accounting for only two per cent of the state population (1994: 206). He also points out however, that this over-representation presented a paradox, on the one hand with perceptions being that their over-representation meant league was perceived as more accessible than other sports, while on the other, they were limited to positions based on speed and ‘lack of leadership’ that characterise stereotypes of indigenous physicality to this day. Phillips argues that ‘overall league has done little for the social plight of Australia’s Aborigines’ (1994: 206). Phillips’s chapter, cited regularly in this section on Australia’s early up-take of union and league, was written in 1994, and as such makes no mention of Pasifika players in the sport, giving further evidence to their rise in the sport being a recent one.

The continuing ethnic and class distinctions have affected league’s consideration in academia too as it has been noticeably absent from sports studies, where the more elite global game of rugby union enjoys more consideration. As Dewey notes, ‘Its conspicuous absence in academic commentary has not only replicated the League-Union division, but also failed to acknowledge how Pasifika athletes have journeyed across code boundaries just as they have crossed the borders of nationhood’ (2014: 61).
This “code-hopping”, as it is popularly called, has particular cultural reasoning behind it for Pasifika peoples which this thesis deals with in later chapters. For now, it is enough to acknowledge that spaces between national and code boundaries also allow for the practice of being in-between, and the multiple obligations of vā that this entails, and that more studies on league, and on the two sports together are needed.¹²

Pacific Islanders in New Zealand are more of a majority of the national population than they are in Australia, making up approximately seven per cent of the population, whereas in Australia they account for less than one-and-a-half per cent. There are also stark differences in participation rates between rugby union and rugby league in the two nations, with only 21,929 registered league players in New Zealand in 2018, most in Auckland (pers. comm. New Zealand Rugby League 2018), while in Australia there were over 170,900 registered players in 2017 (NRL.com 2017). Rugby union in contrast, had 155,934 registered players in New Zealand in 2016 (Allblacks.com 2016), while Australia had only 141,500.¹³ We must remember too that the population of New Zealand is only 4.7 million while Australia has a population of 24.6 million. In Australia, rugby league is the third most attended sport, and union is seventh. In New Zealand union is the most attended, while league is fourth. Players from the Pacific Islands are over-represented in both codes and countries, at both elite and “schoolboy” level, particularly in the largest cities of each nation – Sydney and Auckland. Perhaps the first thing one might notice in the Australian sporting media is the dominance of what are commonly referred to as hyper-masculine football codes – league, union and Australian Rules football in particular. In Sydney this is especially the case, where local teams are represented in each of these three codes, unlike other Australian cities where sometimes only one or two (and sometimes none) of the codes are represented at the first grade level (see Figure 1).

¹² It is also worth mentioning that Pasifika code-hopping has extended to the AFL which, although largely unsuccessful from an on-field point of view, has arguably seen success in marketing terms.
¹³ Participants aged 15+. The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) found over 70,000 Australians aged 15+ participated in organised rugby at least once per week, while a further 117,000 had at least one organised rugby experience each month (ASC 2016).
Table 1. Pasifika and indigenous ancestry in the Greater Sydney area from the 2016 Australian Census (ABS 2017).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Greater Sydney Ancestry numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polynesian</td>
<td>67,099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>24,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micronesian and Melanesian</td>
<td>2,089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceanian, nfd.</td>
<td>2,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL PASIFIKA</strong></td>
<td><strong>96,418</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL ABORIGINAL/TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER</strong></td>
<td><strong>70,135</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Pasifika and indigenous populations of Australia and New Zealand in 2016 (ABS 2017; Pasifika Futures 2017; Statistics New Zealand 2013, 2017).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Australia (number)</th>
<th>Australia (% of population)</th>
<th>New Zealand (number)</th>
<th>New Zealand (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pasifika</td>
<td>206,673</td>
<td>0.88%</td>
<td>295,941</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>128,430</td>
<td>1.43% (with rest of Pasifika)</td>
<td>734,200</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander</td>
<td>786,689</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pasifika peoples are known for their sporting prowess, probably more so by the masses of the ‘Pacific triangle’ (Lee and Francis 2009) of Australia, New Zealand, and the United States of America, than they are for anything else. The term ‘brawn drain’, a play on the ‘brain drain’ concept, is often used to describe the migration patterns of Pacific Islander peoples (Bale 1991; Murphy 2011). As Lakisa et al. note, there is a striking amount of people of Pacific descent in the NRL, with 36 per cent of contracts in 2011 being signed by Pacific identifying people (including New Zealand Māori) when the same population was little over one per cent in Australia as a whole (2014: 348). This has grown even more since Lakisa’s study only four years ago, with commentators during the 2018 Indigenous round, putting the Pasifika NRL player numbers at 42 per cent and Aboriginal players at a further 10 per cent meaning that together this indigenous cohort makes up a 52 per cent majority. At an amateur level, the statistics are even higher, with over 50 per cent of school-aged rugby league players in Australia being of Pacific heritage in 2015 (pers. comm. David Lakisa 2016). These statistics are echoed in the United States of America where American football is similarly popular amongst Pacific Islanders, and where it is said that Samoans and Tongans as a group are 28 times more likely to play in the National Football League (NFL) than any other ethnic group (Vainuku and Cohn 2015).

While rugby football in Australia may be reaching equal representation of white and non-white players, the structures surrounding the games are still highly dominated by white males (Long 2017; pers. comm. with NRL employee) and there is no guarantee that equal numbers will mean equal power. The upper echelons of management, from corporate to coaching staff are predominantly made up of white men, and the surrounding media as well as sports studies are dominated by white male voices. Young Pasifika players are still exploited, as a Samoan community worker in Western Sydney told me about, after which he said:

*And there’s many of them, many of them come across here, they trial out, next minute, they might not perform as well as they could’ve or were expected, and they kind of just leave them in limbo, ‘OK we’ll move on to the next person’, but what happens to this kid? And that’s what I see with sports and our Pacific, our people, is that we’re not valued, I don’t think we’re valued or treated properly.*
Within these sports over the past decade, there has been a dramatic increase in Pasifika men (including Māori) playing at both the elite, and school boy levels. There are many reasons for this, some complex, some seemingly simpler, but one always stands out in popular culture, and is often the first (and only) that comes to people’s minds when prompted to talk about this over-representation – that is, the male Pasifika body. The stereotyping of this body is rife, throughout colonial history, within contemporary sports, and more broadly in their respective western nations (including the Pacific triangle of Australia, New Zealand, and the United States). If Australian sports are considered hyper-physical and masculine, then the male Pasifika body has come to represent this above all others where the symbolic potency of rugby league in particular has become a seemingly “natural home” for Pasifika men in Australia. Often when people ask me what my PhD is about and I tell them it is around Pasifika men in sports, they immediately remark on their natural aptitude for rugby codes based on size.

This is only one side of the story though, which focuses on elite levels and stereotypes about natural ability, and not on the everyday experiences and the complex historical and structural influences of sports for Pacific peoples. This thesis challenges the “naturalness” and “inevitability” of Pasifika or Māori men playing these sports. Much of Hokowhitu’s work is dedicated to highlighting the deeply purposeful and structured ways Māori were pushed away from intellectual pursuits by British colonialists, and into physical ones, including the playing of rugby at elite levels. He argues that natural New Zealand Māori athleticism was a myth created by British colonialism aimed to enslave Māori in manual pursuits rather than intellectual ones (2004: 269). This construction of Māori (men) as athletic and manual was to paint them with the same brush being used by colonialists in the Pacific more broadly and the following chapters argue that these perceptions continue to plague Pasifika diasporas to this day.

As Lakisa et al. argue on their work with Pasifika rugby league players in Australia,

The physical prowess of Pasifika athletes might be considered a blessing, but assumptions that they are “born” to play rugby or are “natural” rugby players have a twofold impact: first, they devalue the tremendous work ethic and
preparation of Pasifika athletes; second, they send a message to young Pasifika males that acumen in collision sports ought to be prized above other cultural alternatives (Lakisa et al. 2014: 350).

This twofold consequence was highly evident in my own work as this thesis demonstrates throughout. For now let us take a look at how these ideas were promulgated with some brief historical context, taking a step back in time to look at how sports came bounding into the Pacific in the late 1800s, one arm tightly looped with muscular Christianity, the other outstretched with offerings of enlightenment ideals about cultural and racial hierarchy.

**Colonising indigenous masculinity**

The colonisation of indigenous masculinity, the effects of which permeate contemporary depictions of Pasifika masculinity, involved the separation of mind, body, and spirit, and the moralising project of classifying what was “right” and “wrong” within each phenomenon. Pertinent to colonial masculinity was the suppression of qualities that were deemed “feminine”, and the othering of sexual complexity (see Besnier and Alexeyeff 2014). In the Pacific Islands this included the introduction of distinct boundaries between man and woman, and the delegitimising of anything in between. Traditional complementarity between the genders was weakened, and, one could argue, significantly destroyed. Referring to Māori in New Zealand, Hokowhitu looks at: ‘the complex ways Indigenous masculinities and sexuality have been essentialized into colonial binaries, internalized by Indigenous men and manifested in a heterosexual Indigenous patriarchy reinforced by notions of tradition and authenticity’ (Innes and Anderson 2015: 13). In Samoa and Tonga fa’afafine and fakaleiti respectively were inscribed with the European discourse of homosexuality with such success that we now know very little about who they were pre-contact, or if they even existed in a form similar to what we see today (see Besnier and Alexeyeff 2014; Farran 2010; Tcherkezoff 2014). Homosexuality was at the same time, condemned as un-Christian, perverted and wrong – both symbolically, and in many cases, legally. Hokowhitu argues that ‘European bourgeois heterosexual masculinity’ has come to ‘represent humanity’ (2015: 84) and that ‘[d]eviance from this world of European masculine forms – that is, feminine, non-European, and non-heterosexual – was central to the “othering” process of European colonisation’ (2015:}
These othering processes were to effectively exclude indigenous people and women from universalising discussions on humanity and individuality that gained increasing popularity since the Enlightenment, it was only the white man who was considered fully human and therefore deserving of individual liberties and “human” (white man’s) rights. The British school boy system and its use of sports as a moralising mission to create the good disciplined muscular Christian was pivotal in bringing these enlightenment ideals to the islands (Guttmann 1994; Mangan 1986).

Sport was a major part of the civilising mission of imperialism across the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Guttmann 1994). Football codes in particular were tied to notions of muscular Christianity, and good disciplined British citizens. Physical education ministers were set up across occupied British territories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, with the following sentiment from the Church of Scotland’s physical education minister in Thogoto Kenya in 1907, Dr John W. Arthur, being typical of the era:

A game of football in the afternoon…was played for moral benefit as much as recreational relief…to stiffen the backbone of these boys by teaching them manliness, good temper and unselfishness – qualities amongst others that have done much to make them a Britisher (in Bale and Sang 1996).

The British colonialists at this time believed in an athletic morality where the muscular Christian was a strong disciplined and physically healthy (white) man. This was part of a good man’s well-rounded personality, as he was just as capable in the classroom as he was on the field. The field became a place good Christian gentlemen could let off steam and engage in their more brutish violent desires. Indigenous men however, were limited to this physical realm only, seen as a place where their “true” nature could be channeled safely. As Calabro argues in her work on Māori in rugby, ‘the perceptions of the hyperphysicality and rebellious “nature” of Maori bodies reflect a history of politics that has aimed at circumscribing their aspirations and their possibilities within physical arenas’ (2014: 391).

Mangan (1986) explores the important role of sports in British imperialism, tracing the history of sporting games through the British public schoolboy system into
colonial frontiers. He argues that it was due to public headmasters’ proselytisation that sports spread rapidly throughout the British Empire and beyond, calling up ‘a force of missionaries, teachers, soldiers and administrators’ (1986: 43) to spread the doctrine of muscular Christianity. He presents compelling historical documentation on how British sports saturated the world from the nineteenth century and provides a broad historical framework from which to consider more detailed ethnographic and contemporary examples, such as those from Pasifika and other indigenous scholars drawn on in this thesis. Typical to the type of documents he analyses from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is this quote from public schoolboy headmaster, Norwood, who was a committee member for the School Empire Tours in the 1920s. He believed that ‘rugby football promoted the cardinal virtues appropriate to the imperialist: unselfishness, fearlessness and self-control’ (Mangan 1986: 23).

The football and cricket pitches Britain spread across the world were not only a physical reminder of British imperialism, but a philosophical and symbolic one. As Mangan states, it was here where ‘the games ethic flourished, here was enthusiastic allegiance, here was housed the embryonic diffusionists and here a seductive image of Empire was projected unremittingly’ (1986: 43).

There is no general consensus on the details of who and when exactly rugby union and league came to specific Pacific Islands. Like much literature on sports, it can be difficult to ascertain the difference between myth and fact. Because players and fans are often the ones who end up writing about sports, their work can skew into more favourable lights than reality, especially when it comes to indigenous or female influences on the games. Barry Judd discusses this in his work on Australian Rules Football and Aboriginal influences. In his and Hallinan’s 2012 paper, they address the ‘history wars’ of Aussie Rules, discussing a number of influential historical claims to the origins and spread of the sport. They argue that discourses of Anglo-Australian nationalism have ignored and attempted to eliminate indigenous influences in the game and that these discourses continue to have a lasting effect in the “national” sport, where quotidian and structural racism continue despite official acts to get rid of it (Hallinan and Judd 2012). They look at ‘dueling paradigms’ in historical accounts of the game, and argue that official histories of AFL largely ignore the Aboriginal influence of marn-grook on the sport.
Similar to my own arguments regarding Pasifika peoples in rugby league, Hallinan and Judd argue that stereotypical definitions of indigenous Australians as “‘childlike”, “physical”, “savage or noble savage”, “intellectually lacking”, “stone-age”, “out of time”, “exotic” and “hunter – gather” continue to permeate the culture of Australian football (2012: 976). The official book on the game, released in 2008, on the AFL’s 150th birthday, failed to acknowledge the importance of indigenous influence in Aussie Rules with the only nod to it being a tokenistic chapter from Aboriginal player Adam Goodes (Hallinan and Judd 2012: 982). Hallinan and Judd go on to critique one of the major voices in AFL history, Gillian Hibbins, who called the inclusion of indigenous influence in the creation of Aussie Rules a ‘seductive myth’ (Weston 2008). They argue that her rejection of indigenous engagement in the sport is so uncompromising that her writing paints a picture of colonial Victoria ‘in which Indigenous Australians and British colonists would appear to exist in different temporal and spatial terms. In this vision of Australia’s colonial past, Indigenous people and British colonists occupy different countries’ (2012: 979).

I have found a similar lack of engagement with indigenous influence in work on rugby league and union, where it has proved near impossible to find historical details on how Pacific Islanders influenced the games. Most people seem to assume that Catholic missionaries introduced rugby to the islands, however popular sports historian Tony Collins, argues that it was in fact French Marist Brothers who introduced rugby to Samoa and perhaps other places too (Collins 1998). It has been very difficult to find reliable information on this and I hope someone can rectify this gap in literature soon.

Guttmann offers another influential work on the role of sports in British imperialism where he argues that it is important to study sports as intensely as other cultural rubrics, as they are found in vastly different cultures across the globe, and that the popular advocating of modern sports as simply cultural hegemony is deeply flawed; ‘that the adoption of another culture’s sports is ipso facto a sign of lost authenticity ignores the fact that cultures are never static’ (1994: 184). Similarly, Sacks’s work on cricket and the hybridised Samoan version of the game, kirikiti, shows how sports emerge as ‘sites of intercultural contact, engagement, and confrontation’ that signify and embody cultural contestations (2017: 1484). These scholars lend evidence to the
complexities of sport and why further analysis is needed to challenge simplistic ideas of sports as hegemonic and imperial. This opens up a significant concern for my project – the power of sports to both affirm and transgress social values.

The paradoxical power of sport in the everyday

It’s not simply because sport are structured games or use the language of play, it’s because they're open-ended, and they have a double-edged capacity to present ourselves to ourselves in our sheer potentiality while at the same time conserving cherished images of what we are….this element of “what-if” stirs our imaginations and our hopes until the final outcome of a sporting event is determined, and connects us to the reality or our own indeterminacy (Rowe 2008: 129).

Globally and historically, sport has popularly been separated into two camps of perception – revered as having a unique ability to unite people otherwise separated by religion, race, or politics (Murray 2014), or seen as insignificant, destructive, a mere distraction from more important things (Coakley 1986), or a war-like amplifier of existing conflicts and tensions (Sutton-Smith 1997: 94-5). Sport is often heralded as an equality creator, football for example is called the global game, or the ‘one true global language’ (Murray 2014), and international events like The Olympics and the FIFA World Cup incite hyperbolic media barrages on the power of sports to unite the world and create a platform where everyone competes as equals. As Duvall and Guschwan argue regarding the 2010 World Cup:

[It was] the largest international sporting event ever staged in Africa and it was the first time that the continent had hosted a World Cup. For international audiences, the tournament was packaged as a coming of age for the continent, and a welcome back to the international community for South Africa, the nation that had been shunned during Apartheid. The tournament was imbued by a narrative of triumph embodied by Nelson Mandela, the symbol of anti-Apartheid resistance (2013: 303).

They go on to acknowledge that in ideal form sport symbolises a ‘color blind’ meritocracy, but that in reality this is rarely the case (ibid).
The complexity of sport and the effects it has on society are not easily quantifiable, and the popular advocating of sport as a champion of equality can be deeply illusory (Coalter 2010; Jarvie 1991). Conflict theorists have argued that sport can be pointless, destructive, a form of oppression, or imperialistic (Coakley 1986). The politics of large sporting events like The Olympics or the FIFA World Cup are popular receivers of criticism, and can provide fascinating insights into global and national affairs. The recent corruption scandals within the highest ranks of FIFA, and the political minefield faced by Brazil in hosting both the World Cup and Olympics in the space of two years, are just two recent examples of sport’s intersection with global politics. Historical examples are many, including Germany’s hosting of The Olympic Games during Nazi rule in 1936 causing different nations to face difficult decisions on where sport and politics should meet. Russia’s laws against homosexuality came to the fore during their hosting of the 2014 winter Olympics, and other major events often bring to light the labour conditions of host nations, such as Beijing’s workers for the 2008 Olympics, or Brazil’s exploitation of people for the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics. While these global sporting spectacles attract attention from scholars worldwide, the everyday saturation of sports tends to gain less traction in scholarly discourse.

It has long been acknowledged that sport is an international phenomenon, and part of a global movement of ideologies and people. Within these dichotomies lies a vast and under-analysed realm of realities and possibilities for sports in the modern world. Macro-social and development approaches often rely on western-centric economic models that ignore cultural variation, and therefore fail to utilise the nuanced and powerful possibilities of sport. In sports studies, mega-events and other one-off spectacles are often a major focus, taking into consideration the exceptional rather than the mundane. Issues like hooliganism and other violent consequences of sports are worthy areas of study, but they are not the majority of experiences for sports-engaged peoples. The everyday, quotidian, mundane elements of sport are very little understood and yet prolific and global in their reach. We often hear laments in documentaries, museums, and historical works, about the lack of interest many societies in the past had in recording the everyday activities of regular people. Instead, the worlds of kings and queens, great leaders and the aristocracies of the past are what
have survived most through history. I feel we are making a similar mistake with the critical study of sport – a pervasive activity as important in many people’s lives as family, and work, and yet seen as unworthy of serious study.

While the popular championing of sport as an equality creator can be ignorantly simplistic, so can accusations of pointlessness, thuggery and stupidity. Sport is complex, in its diversity and history. Conflict is not only an element of sports themselves, but of the hierarchies of power and influence that surround them. The ‘multilayered governance structures’ (Besnier 2012) of modern sports in Australia need to be examined alongside the emancipatory powers of sport, and the joy and meaning it brings to millions of peoples lives globally and throughout human history. Why is sport’s appeal so powerful and enduring, despite the atrocities it has at times, encouraged? Ethnographic research can help us answer this question in a way that engages with the lived experiences of people involved in sports, but it is not a common method of enquiry for sports studies which tend to favour short-term participatory research with surveys and other more quantitative methods. Ethnographies that do touch on these issues include Klein’s treatment of conflict in the Dominican Republic’s passionate uptake of American baseball where ‘hegemony and resistance’ co-exist in ‘an unstable, dynamic tension’ (Klein 1991: 111), and in Hokowhitu’s various explorations of the strange nature of power hierarchies in sport in New Zealand drawn on throughout this thesis. C. L. R. James’s well-known work on cricket’s power to affect racial, political, and artistic boundaries provides an example of how sports can be used to free and equalise (1963). These paradoxes of sport as equalising and dividing, oppressive and emancipatory, are critical in understanding sport as a complex and powerful human phenomenon. Within these dichotomies lies a vast and under-analysed realm of realities and possibilities for sports in the modern world.

A brief history of the Australian Pasifika diaspora

As mentioned in the introduction, and as the demographic tables show, despite Australia being close geographical neighbours with what is commonly referred to as Melanesia and Micronesia, most of our Pasifika migrants come from the area commonly referred to as Polynesia, often via step-migration through New Zealand whose migration policies have historically been more favourable to the Pacific,
especially to the western Pacific islands of “Polynesia” (Pryke 2014, Teaiwa 2016). During the post-war era of the 1960s, ‘70s and ‘80s, migration from the Pacific grew significantly, as the process of decolonisation began with Western Samoa gaining independence in 1962. Some countries, such as New Zealand and the USA opened pathways for migration for Island nations with whom they had previous colonial ties, whereas others, such as Australia and Germany made no such leniencies (Lee 2009: 8). The former New Zealand-run colony of Samoa did not mean Samoans were to get citizenship rights in New Zealand though, instead they were used as part of a forestry-heavy labour trade throughout the ‘50s and ‘60s, and in 1970 New Zealand introduced the Samoan quota which allowed 1100 Samoans to migrate to New Zealand each year. Australia made no such agreements with former colonies, such as Papua New Guinea, nor did it help the ‘South Sea Islander’ labourers (most of whom were from the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia) who were working as indentured labourers on the sugar plantations of Queensland, often referred to as Australia’s sugar slaves (see Banivanua-Mar 2007; Saunders 2013).

Migration from the Pacific was discouraged in Australia during the 72 years of the White Australia Policy, in place from 1901-1973, however migration still steadily increased, much of which made use of the Trans Tasman Travel Arrangement between Australia and New Zealand, allowing Islanders and Māori with New Zealand citizenship or residency to easily move between the two nations as well as work (Lee 2009). Not all Pasifika migration came through New Zealand, with early migrants making use of family allowances and starting chains of family migration, while others have entered on short-term visas and stayed illeg ally, often engaging in undocumented rural labour work (Lee 2009; Nishitani and Lee 2017). Many of the young second-generation Pasifika peoples I met had parents who migrated to Sydney in the ‘60s and ‘70s for low paid manual labour jobs and better opportunities for their children. Some came to play rugby league or union, but most quickly gave this up in pursuit of financial security in jobs where Pacific Islanders were seen as cheap labour, such as factory work. I must make it clear that I am not deriding this work in any way, many Pasifika peoples I have spoken with take great pride in theirs and their parents hard work and sacrifices and like them, I am often in awe of their dedication to their families and the myriad of sacrifices made for future generations.
Nowadays there is still a lot of Pasifika migration through New Zealand, as well as family sponsorship and overstaying. New Zealanders in Australia are not automatically eligible for government assistance such as disability or unemployment benefits, and while many move for the better pay and more jobs, the “Australian dream” often falls short. When it comes specifically to sport, exploitation can play a particularly large role, with young Pasifika hopefuls often willing to put up with a lot less comfort in an already difficult market place. As I have already argued however, this dream can present opportunity, community and belonging, at both the professional and amateur levels. Over the past twenty years the number of Pasifika men in the national rugby league has increased dramatically, from only a handful of players in the ‘80s to almost half of all players now. The former Pasifika NRL players I spoke with during this research, some of whom were the very first, all talked about how rare they were back in their playing days, how they were given race-based nicknames, and how commentators and other media personalities struggled with the pronunciation of their Pasifika names. They would seek out other Pasifika players, even from competing teams, and form friendships in order to feel they belonged in the organisation. Pasifika peoples are also one of the fastest growing demographic groups in Australia. From 2011-2016, the population of those claiming Pacific Islands ancestry in the Australian census grew by 37.7 per cent, on par with Chinese ancestry growth, and much higher than the total Australian population growth of 8.8 per cent (Batley 2017).

When talking to two highly accomplished former NRL players of Pasifika heritage (identities to remain anonymous), one lamented that the other was not well-known or acknowledged much in Australia despite his long and successful career playing for a number of clubs and representative teams. He said he was bigger in New Zealand, despite having lived in Australia since the early 2000s and winning more than one NRL premiership for Australian based clubs. Both of these men do a lot of work with Pasifika youth, the NRL Pasifika development camps, and youth justice work, but are rarely seen on the various mainstream media outlets of the NRL. Current Pasifika players however are regular guests on television and radio, but they are still lacking in commentary and regular media roles such as hosting television or radio shows. They are often used as comedic relief with their senses of humour popular among rugby league media influencers. Recent developments include the yearly Pacific Test since
2013, and a Pacific Youth Summit which has run for three years and involves a number of school-aged Pasifika children in Sydney attending a three-day course on empowerment and cultural knowledge with current and former Pasifika NRL players. In 2016 there was a push to pronounce names correctly (see Hill 2016), which resulted in a lot of Pasifika player names suddenly changing in the eyes of the public, but which has now been largely accepted and resulted in far better quality commentating, pronunciation and understanding of Pasifika languages. In Chapter Four I discuss the recent indigenous rounds of the NRL and the inclusion of Pasifika elements as well as the creation of the Māori All Stars team who are set to play the Indigenous All Stars team (who were created in 2010) for the first time in 2019.

The key research question of this thesis on how framings of Pasifika masculinity in rugby league affect the perceptions and practices of diasporic Pasifika peoples in Australia is both a historical and a structural one and this chapter has given some brief historical and demographic context to this line of enquiry. I have discussed how rugby league and union were divided based on class and geographic lines in nineteenth century Britain and how this division played out in Australia. I argued that the muscular Christianity spread throughout Oceania through high-contact rugby codes during British colonising missions played a significant role in limiting indigenous peoples to physical realms, and separating the physical from the intellectual or soulful. This idea continues to this day with the stereotyping of Pasifika (and indigenous Australian) men as naturally physical being rampant. I pointed out that these divisions are visible in sports scholarship too where the “higher class” game of rugby union has enjoyed more scholarship than rugby league, and where mega events and the extraordinary are favoured over the everyday saturation and importance of sports for people on the ground. The rest of this thesis attempts to rectify some of these imbalances.

I will now go on to explore the issue of indigeneity in more detail, expanding on the Pasifika frameworks of relationality for the diaspora, the vā, and explore further the role of ‘indigenous’ in ‘indigenous masculinities’ for Pasifika men in Sydney’s rugby league community. I argue that considering the vā allows us to move away from the paradoxical notions around indigenous male athletes and I suggest there are places within rugby league and in settler states where these athletes can move outside of the
binaries assigned to them and occupy spaces between, where they can practice ṛā, and which is altogether less limiting than the colonial categories they have been historically and consistently forced into.
CHAPTER FOUR. IDENTITY AND RELATIONALITY: USING THE VĀ TO EXPLORE SPORTING SPACES FOR AUSTRALIAN DIASPORIC PASIFIKA PEOPLE

Introduction
During my fieldwork there was a palpable sense of indigenous solidarity at many Pasifika themed events that went beyond the typical acknowledgement of country that many Australian events incorporate and where indigenous inclusion generally begins and ends. I often witnessed in-depth inclusion and collaboration, such as at a 2018 Pasifika night at the Australian Museum, organised and focused on ‘Oceania connections’ across the Pacific but with Aboriginal Australian elements including a ‘first-nations jewellery’ making workshop run by an Aboriginal woman, and dialogical talks about the connections and respect between Aboriginal and Pasifika peoples in Australia. As one of my second-generation Samoan participants expressed in regards to organising any event in Australia, of which he had organised many:

...for me it must come back down to...where does our feet stand? We’re not in Samoa, we're not in New Zealand, we're in another people's land so therefore we must look back at our indigenous references to look at how we're going to deal with, you know, in the past Polynesians were Polynesians, we’ve been doing it for 3000 years, but for other indigenous cultures we can still apply our indigenous references to how we work with them. So when you look at it from that perspective...they’re the first peoples of the land, and they must be incorporated into the thing if you're here.

This idea of where one’s feet stand is a common one for Pasifika peoples, with a number of alagaupu (proverbs) from Samoa and across the Pacific referencing this idea. Perhaps the best known Samoan one is ‘e sui faiga, ae tumau le fa’avae’ meaning ‘the practices or forms may change, but the foundations and grounding remain the same’ (translation by Tuagalu 2008: 108). This idea is particularly pertinent to indigenous diasporas who may not be indigenous to where they live, but who share some common experiences of colonisation with the people who are indigenous to where their feet now stand.
New Zealand born Samoan Australian, Tim¹⁴ and I are sitting at a café in the wealthy Sydney harbour suburb of Elizabeth Bay when he shares the following insight.

There's always multiple views in life, there's the view from the beach, the view from the boat, there's the view from the guy in the coconut tree, there's the view from the guy in the mountain and there's the view from the birds, then there's the view from under the sea. So we must look at things from so many dimensions before we can say it's an apple or it's a pear.

Inner city suburbs such as this are not known to be the friendliest of places but during the course of our two-hour discussion, five people stop to talk to Tim. He is on first name basis with all of them, as well as the café owners who he tips generously. I am quite blown away by his friendliness and a touch jealous at his ability to create community in a suburb of Sydney in which I was miserable and alone eight years prior. We are discussing postcolonialism and rugby league when he shares the above quote which could be classified as Samoan phenomenology – that reality is made up of multiple perspectives, not one of which is more true or authentic than any other, and all of which are needed before we can say what something is. He is hesitant throughout the conversation to make any generalisations, answering many of my questions about the Pasifika diaspora and changes in Sydney with a qualification that every person, family, or case is different. At one point, after stating that it can be dangerous to line things up and compare them, he says in a somewhat defeatist but accepting tone, “although unfortunately that’s what happens in the world of analysing”.

Tim’s sentiments echo the historically tumultuous relationship between indigenous methodologies and western scientific paradigms of separating, analysing and comparing. The nuance of everyday experience is often lost within these analytical frameworks, as Tim lamented, but analysing why this happens and what can improve it can help rectify this. In this chapter I delve into the ambiguity of the concept of indigeneity for Pasifika peoples in Australia in a way that attempts to honour the Pasifika praxes of different perceptions being equally significant and inextricably

¹⁴ All fieldwork names are pseudonyms unless last name given too.
connected, and acknowledging the changing forms and continuing foundations of where one’s feet stand.

This chapter, like the rest of this thesis, combines my qualitative research with Pasifika-focused decolonial frameworks, in an attempt to address issues that are both pertinent within the academy and for the greater Pasifika diaspora in Australia. I address the concepts of agency, authority and hybridity, and how they are talked about by researchers, and by my Pasifika participants. This is done through the lens of sport as a vehicle for practicing and perceiving elements of identity. I contend that Pasifika identity is not merely reflexive or tied to particular cultural tenets, but rather is formative, emergent and creative (Hall 1989; Harris 2013), and that Pasifika peoples occupy a tenuous place between indigenous connection with Aboriginal peoples, while still being migrants residing on stolen land. I explore some of the relational spaces between aboriginal Australians and the Australian Pasifika diaspora and discuss this within a larger analysis of “global indigeneity” and indigeneity as a classificatory concept. What is it like to be indigenous in an increasingly globalised world, and what of being indigenous away from your ancestral home and on the lands of another indigenous group? What authority and agency do you have when living as a minority diaspora in a postcolonial western settler state? And are indigenous peoples hybrid in a way that non-indigenous people are not or is hybridity essentially a myth? I continue to explore the concept of vā to argue that it is within the relational spaces “between” where not only sporting identities can thrive, but diasporic, indigenous and gender identities. In this chapter I address these theoretical debates around indigeneity whilst at the same time painting a picture of the “doubleness” of the identity of Pasifika peoples in Sydney as they negotiate their position as Pasifika, Australian, and sports players and consumers.

**Emergent diasporic Pasifika identity and its connections to a global indigeneity**

Michelle Harris’s concept of ‘emerging identities’ is helpful when conceptualising diasporic identity of indigenous peoples in a western settler state, which she defines as ‘a space indigenous people carve out to be who they are’ (2013: 10). She argues:

> to claim indigeneity is to self-consciously recognize that certain cultural “traits” (such as language, religion, ancestry) are important emblems in
representing one’s self, and mobilising these emblems as signifiers of belonging, is, in part, making a political statement of solidarity with others who also identify as indigenous (Harris 2013: 10).

She argues that the ‘prehistoric’ discourse around indigenous peoples serves to make their current existence irrelevant. Imbuing indigenous peoples with mysticism, and other ancient characteristics in effect delegitimises them today and makes whatever changes occur a form of cultural loss where they get further and further away from some primordial “pure” form. Harris argues that rather than diasporic peoples being between two cultures, and subsequently viewed as inauthentic to either one, as it is so often implied, a better formulation would be to see them as forming their own culture of ‘mobility, globalisation, and dislocation’ (2013: 14). Similar arguments can be found in Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s work where she claims that at the heart of arguments around indigenous “authenticity” is the belief that unlike the West, indigenous cultures cannot change, or be internally diverse or contradictory and still claim to be indigenous (1999). The implication is that while non-indigenous, or western cultures are seen as fluid and changes often perceived as culturally enriching, indigenous cultures, by being tied to some mythical “authentic” mode, can only lose as they move further away from it.

This is very much the case with the Australian Pasifika diaspora. Pasifika historian, Damon Salesa said in a recent opinion piece that to ‘see people as “halves” requires us to break them. We have too many broken people in our world already…’I think the Polynesian way is simply better, & more empowering. In Polynesian cultures, people aren’t half and half, they’re double’ (Salesa and Husband 2018: n.p). Rather than asking how “authentic” Islander traits can be practiced in the Australian context, which (whether intentionally or not) suggests that there is something lost or incomplete about being a diasporic Pasifika person, we can instead look at the unique inbetweeness that makes the diasporic Pasifika experience in Australia unique, with its own claims to political, community and self identity. This combination of indigenous and Pasifika understandings allows us to more accurately understand Pasifika personhood as just as expansive as Hau‘ofa’s Pacific geographic imaginings.
Except for those working in academia or the arts, most of the Pasifika peoples I spoke with were unsure what I meant when I asked if they thought there was a growing indigenous movement. After I explained it in more detail however, mentioning the growing ability many of us have to connect with people across the globe and mobilise, and some various events, such as the indigenous solidarity shown around the Keystone XL Pipeline in North America, or the movement to change the date of Australia day, or the growing amount of indigenous conferences and organisations that span specific indigenous groups, they always agreed that there was a growing movement, but that Pasifika people would not always see themselves as actively part of it. A second-generation Samoan man, Tama, who has worked closely with the NRL for many years did not believe most of his friends were actively in such a movement, but that it ‘absolutely’ was happening and that ‘celebrity power’ plays a large role in its popularity. For young boys in particular, seeing their role models in the NRL make visible purposeful claims about their Pasifika heritage makes that identity more desirable for themselves.

Tama shared a story about a friend of his who lives in Sydney, and who played NRL, and only wanted to be identified as Polynesian once the sport ‘forced’ it on him. Before that he never thought about his Polynesian heritage, like many of his generation, his parents focused on assimilating to their new Australian homeland rather than teaching Pasifika culture or language (a common story for many in the older generations, some of whom were banned from speaking their mother tongue in their early schooling years back on islands such as the Cook Islands). The game of rugby league allowed him to embrace his culture in a way he had not been exposed to previously. When he told this to Tama, Tama said to him jovially, ‘so you’re plastic’, a derogatory term meaning you are not true to your roots, you mould yourself conveniently. His friend responded ‘no!’ and explained that he has enjoyed learning more about his culture and becoming more aware of his heritage. Another NRL player, Dene Halatau, said in a recent newspaper article, that he took on a role at the NRL Pacific Youth Summit to teach Pasifika children from an early age about their heritage which is something he did not have until playing rugby league:

I’m talking to the kids about my journey and when I first started to want to learn about my culture and that process… Also how I felt with [sic] about my
identity being brought up here in Australia, being brought up mostly in a fairly white area where I have a lot of Aussie mates that I grew up with that I associated with most of my childhood, it wasn’t until I started playing football and changed school that I got more in touch with my background and my culture (Stanton 2018).

These are good examples of Harris’s ‘emergent indigenous identities’ (2013) – these men’s Pasifika heritage, despite always being part of them, only became part of their self-owned and recognised identities when encouraged from the outside. In this case, rugby league helped them explore and own their Pasifika heritage. It should also be noted that many indigenous people do not actively identify or like the term “indigenous”, it is after all only made sensible through a relationship to the non-indigenous, a relationship that has invariably favoured the latter. Pasifika peoples I spoke with, or who were involved in the survey, or for that matter those on social and other forms of media, rarely refer to themselves as indigenous, preferring national identity markers or larger area ones, such as Polynesian or Pacific Islander. At indigenous conferences and in academia however, they are more embracing of the concept and of conceptualising and sharing a global indigeneity. This is the stance I take in this thesis because of the larger themes I engage with around various indigenous and First Nations identities. The issues of sport and masculinity are deeply embedded in colonial processes, and colonisation is one of the main creators of the indigenous/non-indigenous divide, therefore, despite the complexities and identity politics of indigeneity, it is a concept we must grapple with if we are to understand the historical and structural violence faced by the world’s indigenous peoples, and start to morph narratives of surviving into ones of thriving. One’s identity as an indigenous Pasifika person can emerge at different stages of one’s life depending on the challenges one faces in identifying in certain ways, and sport can be a potential assistant in this process. The small examples above are just two where rugby league encouraged the exploration of Pasifika identity, but in other cases it can take a lot of courage and risk to “claim” indigeneity as such, as it can often mean missing out on some of the spoils of aligning with the white patriarchal hegemony of postcolonial society, even within the space of rugby league.

In 2010, high profile player of Aboriginal and Māori heritage, Timana Tahu, walked
out of the NSW Blues State of Origin camp the night before a game due to racial abuse from one of rugby league’s highest profile stars and official “immortal” of the game, Andrew Johns. Johns was giving an “inspirational” talk to the group of men about to play in what is Australian rugby league’s biggest and most respected annual tournament, even more so than international games, when he referred aggressively to a number of Aboriginal and Pasifika players on the opposing team as ‘black cunts’. Tahu walked out of the room and refused to play (George 2014). Tahu was a star of the game at the time and there was expansive media attention, of which most was framed around Tahu’s decision to leave and not Johns’s decision to make racist remarks. In this moment Tahu made a statement about his indigeneity, which was particularly important due to having both Aboriginal and Māori heritage – he was no longer going to be complicit in casual racism against him and his fellow indigenous colleagues. In statements that followed, Tahu said he did it to set a standard for his children and that he had been putting up with similar comments from Johns and others in the sport for years and he had had enough (Webster 2010). He claimed and stood up for his shared indigeneity, and with great expense, being criticised and attacked by the media for years to come and missing out on playing Origin. In this moment, Tahu chose to claim his indigenous identity over complicity in casual racism, and the consequences highlight why this is a difficult thing for many people.

An example of emergent claiming of indigenous identity from my own fieldwork is Brisbane player Josh McGuire who some teenage Pasifika boys I interviewed in Auckland said was one of their favourite players because he was a palagi who chose to play for Samoa because of his Mum’s heritage, one boy saying ‘I love his story because England offered him to play for England and he denied, Australia offered, he denied. And he just went to play for Samoa just to make his mum happy. That’s the goal.’ I thought it was interesting that this boy chose a palagi as his favourite player, seemingly admiring his ability to move between his white and Samoan identities. All three of the young men in this interview reiterated a number of times that family was the number one reason to try and do well in rugby, and as McGuire and Tahu’s examples demonstrate, this does not always mean getting the largest sum of money possible to support them, it can mean owning your indigenous heritage to make them

15 The mainstream sports media in Australia has been aptly termed ‘whitestream’ media by Hallinan and Judd (2012).
proud or set an example.

There are of course many other examples, both from rugby league, such as high-profile Aboriginal player, Greg Inglis, who has endured well-publicised racism throughout his career (Australian Associated Press 2018), and in Australian Rules, where another high-profile Aboriginal player, Adam Goodes, copped a barrage of abuse to the point where he was essentially ‘booed into retirement’ (Judd and Butcher 2016: 68). Perhaps two of the most iconic moments where indigenous athletes claimed their indigeneity in a very public way in Australia, were when sprinter Cathy Freeman wore the Aboriginal flag around her shoulders at the 2000 Olympics after winning the 400 meters, or the iconic photograph of AFL player, Nicky Winmar, who lifted his shirt during a match in 1993 and pointed proudly to the colour of his skin. Klugman and Osmond wrote of this particular moment that ‘plenty of protests had preceded Winmar’s act, but sport reaches into a part of culture that the courts and politicians struggle to access’ (2013: 5). These personal and visible acts of indigenous identity claiming in sport do indeed seem to stay in the social imaginings of Australians more so than other events, again providing evidence to the power of sports as material and symbolic everyday practices where indigeneity is affected and affects.

We can see this idea of emergent indigenous identities playing out in the recent uproar surrounding the Rugby League International Federation’s eligibility changes allowing ‘tier one’ players to play for their ‘tier two’ nations in the 2017 Rugby League World Cup. Previously, once you had played at representative level you were only eligible to play for that nation (which is still the case in rugby union). These changes meant that players who had previously represented Australia, New Zealand and England, the ‘tier one’ nations, would now be eligible to play for ‘tier two’ nations based on their heritage should they choose, such as Tonga, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Samoa. A couple of big name Australian and New Zealand representatives took up this offer and there was a media uproar.

Sports journalists, the general public and athletes themselves started throwing around phrases like ‘defectors’, ‘turncoats’, ‘snubbing’, and ‘turning their backs’ regarding switching players (e.g. Otto 2017 who called the rule changes a ‘farce’). High profile
Australian and New Zealand stars Andrew Fifita and Jason Taumalolo, who decided to represent Tonga instead of Australia and New Zealand respectively, have been particular centres of attention. Some commenters have focused on the timing of their decisions, criticising them for being so late, but these details are often thrown into a general disdain of the game’s eligibility changes and the individuals who chose to utilise them to represent their ancestral homes (or ‘defect’ as the favoured word became). This discourse fails to acknowledge the complex identities of multicultural peoples living in Australian and New Zealand diasporas and their connections across nations.

By choosing to play for Tonga, Fifita and Taumalolo publicly embraced their indigenous identities – they carved out a space where they could represent themselves as Tongan, having previously represented Australia and New Zealand. I would argue that rather than this being a rejection of their diasporic homelands as the media discourse came to present it, it is an embracing of their identities as diasporic – not a statement of ‘we are no longer Aussie or Kiwi’ but ‘we are Aussie-Tongan, Kiwi-Tongan’. In many ways they were embracing Salesa’s idea and making a statement that said ‘We are doubles, not halves’. Like Tama’s friend who only got to know his Pacificness through rugby league, or Timana Tahu who decided to make a public stand about his indigenous identity and solidarity, each of these men emerged more into their indigenous identities at different stages of their lives and through the game of rugby league. They have gone beyond “reclaiming”, which suggests going backwards to re-gain something lost from the past, and instead pushed for a re-imagining and creation of a new whole – the diasporic Pasifika person. It is also worth noting that when players switch allegiance to play for New Zealand or Australia from Pacific Island nations, there is no such similar outcry (Vaka’uta 2018), this is seen as a “natural” progression, while moving in the other direction is seen as ungratefulness, snubbing and defecting.

**Being between and belonging**

A number of my participants spoke about rugby league as a way Pasifika peoples place themselves within Australian culture, but also as a way to mark their uniqueness. One of my male Māori participants described sport as a ‘*quasi-community centre*’ that he believed was especially helpful to people with collective
backgrounds such as indigenous cultures, a sentiment shared by many of my participants. They liked that they were dominant in a publicly popular sport in Australia, but also that they were different.

Rugby league can connect Pasifika peoples to the larger Australian culture by sharing their stories in a highly visible arena alongside people from various other cultural milieux, but it is also an opportunity to perform and embody their Pacificness. Pasifika people are not just participants in a game, they are active agents of that game, and how that game is changing. Most of my participants expressed their identity in Pasifika-Australian/New Zealand hyphenated terms, such as ‘second-gen-Tongan-Australian’, ‘Samoan New Zealander’, ‘Australian/Cook Islander’ or in the portmanteau ‘Mozzie’ for a Māori Aussie (slang in itself for Australian). They are creating their own identity, one that connects with their Australian homeland but which, as the players who chose to represent their island homes show us, also connects with their ancestral homelands. While many are still struggling with this supposedly “hybrid” identity, a better understanding of how this can be a new and whole identity in itself could help people feel less inadequate in either cultural world. What I propose is that Pasifika cultural concepts can help us understand why sports, particularly rugby league, play the large role that they do, the central one being vā to which I now turn.

Sport is active, as are the ways in which we maintain the vā between seemingly separate entities. Whether it be the space between Australian/Pasifika, male/female, or work/play, the vā can help us think about the connections between these supposed binaries. This is why the performativity of sport is so important and where we can see its most obvious connections with Pasifika epistemologies of vā. Performance is a combination of service mixed with beauty which are two of the most important aspects of the vā. On the rugby league field for example, you are serving your team, your club, your family, your fans, and perhaps your state or nation and even God. You are doing this in a way that has beauty – or at least you are hoping to – a player who is playing well is often described in aesthetic terms – a beautiful pass, a stunning run, a sensational kick or gorgeous try, in fact just last night the commentator of the game I was watching described a try as sensuous! Within this beauty is a symmetry and harmony of a well playing team, therefore a good league player or team is combining
service with beauty. Maintaining the vā requires active service, and a commitment to harmony and beauty. Perhaps then, an important part of what draws and retains Pasifika people in rugby league is not some innate physical ability, or some deep seeded warrior ancestry, but rather its reflection of the vā – it is active, aesthetic and symmetrical. It is about actively performing a service that is beautiful.

Others have argued this idea in regards to religious and family service, but not in sport (see Ka’ili 2017; Tuagalu 2008). I argue that maintaining the vā through your role as a team member on a field has just as much mana as serving through preaching, or fulfilling a family role. Like good rugby league and the vā which require constant active service and are never stagnant, identity is also an active process of creativity and emergence. Because of this, we can see that neither individual nor Pasifika identity is tied to cultural tenets or unchanging past formations, but rather something that diasporic Pasifika peoples are creating, changing, and refashioning through understandings of the vā, which includes through sports. E sui faiga, ae tumau le fa’avae – the practices or forms may change, but the foundations and grounding remain the same.

We should also consider the relationship between Australia and New Zealand and how Pasifika peoples maintain and express the vā across these two nations where there are a lot of connections between Pasifika families, as well as sporting affiliations. Most notably for rugby league, is the inclusion of the New Zealand Warriors in the NRL. Many Pasifika peoples, both in Australia and New Zealand support this team which is often made up mostly, and at times, almost exclusively, of Pasifika players. Pākehā and New Zealand expats in Australia also follow this team, although some white Australians criticise their inclusion in the competition, on the grounds they are not part of the “Nation” supposedly referenced in the N of the NRL. This argument does not generally go very far however, as the Warriors often do well, there is no national competition in New Zealand that can compete on any where near the level of the NRL, and if that were a sensible argument then you could also argue that all teams get rid of their players from other countries, which, as we already know, would result in a far lesser quality competition.

16 Mana is a complex phenomenon with various meanings across the Pacific. At its most basic it means a spiritual strength (see Tomlinson and Tengan 2016).
The vā between people in Australia and New Zealand is liminal in many ways, as the national boundaries of the two Commonwealth countries are also real and not real. National boundaries are constructs, but with very real implications and limitations. For Pasifika peoples in Australia, this division has often been particularly blurry because of their close connection with New Zealand and Pacific Island nations (see Russell 2012 and Standfield 2012 for eighteenth and nineteenth century connections between indigenous peoples of Australia and New Zealand). This space between the two nations does not separate Pasifika networks, but gives them more connecting social pathways (Lilomaiava-doktor 2004: 357). As Lilomaiava-doktor argues specifically of Samoan peoples but what can be argued for other Pasifika people, is that it is the vā ‘rather than geographic boundaries that are central to Samoan conceptions of movement’ (2004: 357).

Pasifika identity is embedded in the connections and relationships “between”, and not just between people, but between people and non-human elements (see Gershon 2012). Māori people for instance, introduce themselves through their relationship to iwi (tribe), not who they are as an individual. They reveal their identity through relationship to environmental signifiers, such as their waka (canoe), and their maunga (mountain), and to their ancestors, which may change depending on who they are talking to, choosing to emphasise the ones most relevant to their interlocutors. Similarly, people from Samoa have status and place-based indicators in their name, which will give their interlocutors a sense of their relationship. A New Zealand psychological study in 2005 found that Samoan sense of self was not individual, starting from a sense of “I”, but only had meaning in relation to others; ‘This self could not be separated from the “vā” or relational space that occurs between an individual and parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other extended family and community members’ (Tamasese et al. 2005: 303).

At the 2016 Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga (New Zealand's Māori Centre of Research Excellence) conference in Auckland, I was lucky enough to listen to the High Court of New Zealand’s Justice Joe Williams give a paper, where he explained how Māori science works in opposition to western science. He compared Cartesian dualism to the Polynesian understanding of: ‘I belong therefore I am’, claiming that ‘kinship
explains everything’ for Polynesian people and that ‘if you get this, you get the whole system’ (Williams 2016). Relationships between peoples and groups are where strength and identity are created, like the sea connecting their islands following Hau‘ofa (1994), their identities in the diaspora are made through their connections to each other, to their ancestral homelands and to their new homes and what they do there, including the playing and consuming of sports, which is, by no accident, itself ‘betwixt and between’ (Turner 1977).

A downside of being between, as well as ‘double not halves’ is that it often doubles the pressures – different sets of expectations and norms need to be navigated, especially when your actions are seen to reflect “your people” which is so often the case for indigenous and other minority groups. In rugby league, Pasifika player’s actions are highlighted and scrutinised, as are most elite athlete’s actions, however unlike white male players, their behaviours are often seen not just as a reflection of their own personal faults and skills, but their entire culture’s – whether that be Samoan, Polynesian, or Pasifika for example. If a Pasifika man does something others deem as wrong, he shames his entire culture. As Teaiwa reminds us, he is held responsible not just for himself, ‘but everyone’s image, everyone’s hopes, and everyone’s mana’ (Teaiwa 2016: 113). Many of my participants talked about sport as a way to make their people proud, but also the pressure that is put on them by extended families and cultural communities who often rely on them for money and status. Outsiders inflict this pressure too where the actions of one or a few players of a certain heritage come to be seen as an affliction of their ethnicity. While white players may drop the ball just as regularly as Islanders for example, there is no “Anglo hands” stereotype, whereas “Islander hands” is a common derogatory stereotype. A white man is generally considered as representative of the individual self only – the white privilege of individualism and personal autonomy in action. This is not just something that indigenous men have to deal with, as anti-black racism breeds many of these stereotypes for players of all non-white backgrounds (see Arvin 2015).

While many of my participants talked about sport as a way to make their people proud, there is also enormous pressure put on them by extended families and cultural communities. A New Zealand born Samoan man living in Sydney talked about a now
very successful Pasifika athlete when he was young and the family and other pressures put on him and other Pasifika league players in Sydney:

*He used to play with my son, they grew up together. And if he had a bad game, man, wait until they get in the car park, he got bashed. And I tell you, I said to his Dad, ‘bro you don’t have to do that’. I don’t know how parents do that. You know, I’m glad he’s come from that to where he is now, but I just thought at the time, there’s no need for that on a young kid. Yeah some parents go to the extreme, and I’m sure they regret it now, what they done, but you know, these guys are under 13s, under 14s…I do think the parents put a lot of pressure on the kids to do well, but they need to understand that they need support as well, not the other side of support, from one extreme to the other…and when money comes into it and contracts come up, they think they’ve made it. They think ‘my son’s making $15,000 in a lower grade’, and they think ‘oh my son’s gonna be NRL’, and that expectation doesn’t come to a point, doesn’t really work out, then you gotta look at why. The kid can’t get to training… the kid has to get a bus or a train, gets home 10 o’clock at night, has to do his homework, which he won’t do, he’ll just go straight to bed, and up again, same deal, go to school, probably no breakfast, and then will have to go to training.*

Other participants shared similar stories about boys being physically punished by family members when unmet expectations on the field led to disappointment and shame felt by families. As Teaiwa notes, ‘The deeds, words and images of an elite Pacific athlete can uplift or shame their entire cultures. This is the nature of Pacific, and especially Polynesian, relational personhood’ (2016: 136). She then draws on writer Sia Figiel who states that for Polynesians, “‘I’ is “we”…always” (1996: 136 cited in Teaiwa 2016: 125). Shame is a big issue for many Pasifika peoples as it connects to both their relational personhood, as well as their strong Christian faith, they are never just letting themselves down, but often their families, their extended community, their church, their people (Pasifika or Samoan, Tongan etc.) and even God.17 As a Tongan Australian woman in her twenties shared,

---

17 I discuss more on the religious connection to shame and Pasifika relationality in Chapter Seven.
I’m related to a lot of footballers, this is their source of income, this is the source of their livelihoods, and this is something that they’ve become so dependent on, they feel like this is a gift that they be able to use to serve their home and their communities.

This difficult and at times lethal combination of family, faith, and community pressures for Pasifika rugby league players, is then combined with that of outsiders who also inflict pressure, not least by creating damaging and limiting stereotypes.

There are many examples where the actions of a few have created a racial stereotype, and I do not wish to repeat them. I will however give one small example, which demonstrates the type of casual racism apparent in rugby league in Australia, from Fox Sports commentator Andy Raymond during the 2016 Pacific Test between Tonga and Samoa, when he commented on the largely Pasifika crowd at the Sydney event:

There is not one issue among the crowd, the only issue might be the hot dog sales at the end of the night on Church street running out of product. I reckon it could be, just having a look at the crowd, I reckon it could be the night to go and sneak into the pub because there will not be a door man in business at any Sydney pub tonight, they’re all here at the crowd (Fox Sports 2016).

In this short snippet of commentary, we have a white Australian man showing his surprise at the good behavior of a largely Pasifika audience, demonstrating the quotidian racism of lowered expectations, while at the same time perpetuating stereotypes of Pasifika people eating junk food and working in security. It is also worth noting that, as far as I could find, there was not a single case of backlash against this comment.

Global indigeneity: Being indigenous away from home and on stolen land
As we can elucidate from the arguments made by Hokowhitu, Smith, Salesa and Harris, an issue for critical indigenous scholars is the need to avoid essentialising what it “means” to be indigenous in the world today. The indigenous experience varies greatly across cultural, class, gender, and geographical lines, however it is
worth asking ‘what connects indigenous people globally?’ because there is power in numbers and by identifying similar stories, experiences and strategies, we can potentially improve them. After attending the Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAISA) conference in Hawai‘i in 2016 which is one of the world’s largest and leading networks of indigenous scholars, I felt that two complex and entwined key things were happening – on one side there is the growing and needed acknowledgement and understanding of the complexities, contradictions and differences between indigenous peoples which do not fall into colonially demarcated lines of nation state or western-enforced ideas around purity and authenticity. And on the other there was a recognition of indigenous struggles as having a shared experience globally due to the historical structures of colonial empire building. The commonalities were extraordinary – the de-masculinisation for example, the stripping away of autonomy, the separation of body and mind, and structural violence that leads to self-perpetuating disadvantage. There was a significant call throughout the conference for indigenous studies to learn from one another and create larger branches for self-determination and recognition. People were sharing in each other’s struggles and relating to them.

Separation has been part of the western scientific framework since the early 1600s when Decartes introduced Europeans to the idea that body and mind need to be separated in order to trust our knowledge, supposedly keeping pure reason and science away from the bias of senses or feelings. It was a major destructive tool of colonial and postcolonial frameworks which encountered many indigenous epistemologies that worked almost in exact opposite, where senses and feelings, context and relationship, were a crucial part of knowledge. As Hawaiian scholar Manulani Meyer argues, ‘The separation of mind from body and body from mind became the soul of Science and therefore how Europeans began to experience their world’, she immediately adds: ‘We must mend this rift’ (2003: 12). Subsequently, focusing on connection and context as opposed to separation and categorisation can be another way to decolonise indigenous studies. Connection, after all, lives in the vā, the between, while separation is the opposite, and separated things hold no meaning or mana on their own.

Brendan Hokowhitu’s argument here is also pertinent. He argues that:
The pan-indigenous movement is (if there is such a thing)...based on the common sharing of the anguish and loss of colonization that, in turn, has created a generalizable indigenous ontology and taxonomy...several strategically essentialized cultural pillars, including land, language, and culture, have risen from the ashes of the colonial taxonomic meltdowns, which indigenous peoples have strategically employed to gain at least some foothold of agency (2016: 85).

Hokowhitu is basically arguing that what connects indigenous peoples globally is the experience of colonisation and the continuing destructive legacies it has left in its wake, both materially and symbolically, and how indigenous peoples attempt to gain some agency through connecting and claiming a generalisable indigenous experience, through strategic focus around certain issues. Of course, what happens when people start to mobilise around particular issues, whether it be land rights, language revival, or sports, is that questions over authority and voice – who can speak for who – become very complex and contested. I am interested in who gets to speak for indigenous athletes, particularly those in settler state diasporas, and what of their decisions and agency outside of their bodily labour.

Samoan rugby union player, Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu (who grew up in New Zealand and has played rugby in many countries), in an interview with Dale Husband, points to the destructiveness of colonial separation, arguing that colonialism separated the Pacific Islands and that we must incorporate indigenous epistemologies to regain the true connections:

But the links are everywhere in our languages. Like in alofa, aroha, or aloha. In our numbers too: tasi, lua, tolu, fa and tahi, rua, toru, wha. And in the legend of Māui who wasn’t just the discoverer of Aotearoa but also of Tonga and Hawai‘i. It’s all there. But, unfortunately, the colonisers did this brilliant number on us, just as they did in Africa. They knew how to colonise the mind — and the people. You have to divide people. Which is what they did with us. They divided and conquered. So now we need to take back who we were and who we are (Husband 2015: n.p.)
He also sees the importance of connection to land however, and that while indigenous Pasifika people are deeply connected, they have different and specific connection to different places, immediately clarifying the above passage, with the words, ‘But at the same time, I can definitely see that this is the land of the Māori. This is Aotearoa’ (ibid). This is the complex position many contemporary and globally mobile indigenous peoples face, particularly those living in diasporas on lands of other indigenous groups. They share connection through, often ancient, pathways of communication, trade and language, as well as the lived experiences of imperialism and colonialism, but are also highly diverse, with specific claims to different phenomena whether it be land, language, or knowledges.

Who gets to speak for indigenous athletes becomes especially pertinent for diasporas where the “cultural pillar” of land is unclear, they are not on land that was once their ancestors, but they do share experience of their lands and peoples being colonised. As mentioned, there is an ambiguity to the position of the Pasifika person as indigenous but not indigenous to Australia. Pasifika people share similar historical and postcolonial experiences with their indigenous Australian peers from enduring over 250 years of colonial intrusion, including intergenerational trauma, a history of genocide, the killing, capturing and raping of their peoples, policies of separation and assimilation, eugenics-inspired racial stratifying, the destruction of traditional practices and languages, and continuing racism and structural inequality which results in some of the highest suicide rates in the world, statistically lower socioeconomic status, and higher incarceration rates (Horton 2014; Institute for Economics and Peace 2016; Ravulo 2015). These are just some of the negative shared aspects of being an indigenous Pasifika or Australian person. Another commonality between Pasifika and Aboriginal peoples in Australia is their over-representation in commercially successful, male-dominated contact sports, most notably rugby league and Australian football.

Like indigenous Australians, Pasifika peoples in Australia are used to being portrayed in the media and popular culture through the language of problems and crises, while sport is one of the few avenues where positive presentation is more common. As Phipps and Slater note in reference to Australian Aboriginal peoples, without positive
platforms like sports and festivals where indigenous and non-indigenous peoples can engage, there is a danger that non-Aboriginal people will ‘continue to engage and pick up knowledge and information about the Aboriginal community only through crisis’ (Maddison 2009: 38 cited in Phipps and Slater 2010: 42). Sport, especially rugby league, (and Australian football for Aboriginal people) provides one of the few avenues for positive recognition of Pasifika and Aboriginal peoples by the wider (largely white) community in Australia (and to a lesser extent New Zealand where there are more opportunities outside of sport for indigenous/Pasifika peoples).

Australia as a nation-state has a strong connection with sports. In the official documents for the Australian Citizenship test for example, the section on Australian identity opens with sport and recreation, and says ‘We are proud of our reputation as a nation of “good sports”. Australian sportsmen and women are admired as ambassadors for the values of hard work, fair play and teamwork’ (Commonwealth of Australia Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2014: 43 cited in Rowe 2016: 1472). Rowe has questioned this idea of ‘good sports’ and what it means in the multicultural Australian context from a media lens, what I argue is that this national identity is significantly built on the bodily labour of indigenous men, and when it comes to rugby league, on Pasifika men in particular, and that 1) there is a silence around this from ‘whitestream’ (Hallinan and Judd 2012) society, and 2) this bodily labour and the subsequent silence are perceived and practiced by Pasifika and Aboriginal men, as well as by their families and communities, in ways that run counter to the common stereotypes which have been at play since sport was introduced as a colonising tool in the region.

As mentioned, Pasifika men in the NRL make up about 42 per cent of professional contracts, and Indigenous Australian men constitute about another ten per cent. In the NRL there are two culturally-identified boards – the Pacific Advisory Board and the Aboriginal Advisory Board which ebb and flow in terms of activity due to inconsistent funding and resources. At many of the multicultural events put on by the NRL and in their indigenous round, there is a combination of indigenous Australian and Pasifika elements, often including Pasifika and Aboriginal art works on the jerseys of the teams during the indigenous round, as well as events featuring different indigenous foods and entertainment. The inclusion of Pasifika in indigenous themed
campaigns is a recent one however, with the New Zealand Warriors the only team not to sport an indigenous designed jersey for the NRL indigenous round in 2017, and there is still disagreement on whether Pasifika designs should be included as indigenous (NRL 2017). In 2018, for the first time, the NRL indigenous festival included women’s and men’s Māori teams from New Zealand playing indigenous Australian teams, and for the first time in 2017 an ‘alternative’ Australian national anthem was played during the indigenous round (Hirini 2017). There is a yearly Pacific Test where nations from different Pacific Islands play each other, usually in Sydney, and there are official NRL programs running in Papua New Guinea and campaigns to get Papuan and Fijian teams in the QLD and NSW rugby league competitions.

There have also been conflicts between Pasifika and Aboriginal groups, historically and in the contemporary sporting world, such as a fight in 2008 where a group of Samoans beat well-known Aboriginal NRL player Johnathan Thurston’s uncle to death, supposedly in retribution for earlier attacks on Pacific Islander youths by an Aboriginal group of men (Schwarten 2008). During the interview with the second-generation Samoan man who shared his thoughts about the importance of where one’s feet stand, despite his understanding of the importance of recognising and incorporating indigenous connections, he says ‘I’ve got a lot of people who feel the other way’. As our interview continues, he goes on: ‘I’ve come across a lot of people within my travels that don’t want to mix our indigeneity with indigenous people here in one program’. I say how I have experienced that in some of my conversations with people, where Pasifika people seem reluctant to say anything about Aboriginal people, or they express a sort of pity towards them. This prompts him to talk about the issue of visibility and the media’s role in heightening and highlighting tensions between Pasifika and indigenous Australians, saying there have been ‘some very high profile clashes and murders and homicides’. I say how I read about Johnathan Thurston's uncle, to which he replies:

Yeah all the stuff like that builds a very, but, ok, that's what happens when the media things, and then the people react, ok so that's already caused trouble for us full stop. So cultural workers and creative people have, like us, to understand that, and we have to understand and look at it to understand the
reality of it, the reality of it is – yes this has happened, it’s been promoted widely, mass, so there’s going to be implications on a wider basis but for us on everyday, it affects us, because you know Aboriginal people [say] “ah fucken Islanders”, you know – “who the fuck are you guys?”... And then the Islanders, they’re like “ah fuck them, they’re like this and that and that and that”.

The interview took an unexpected turn at this point though, instead of blaming the ‘whitestream’ media for fuelling these tensions, which is where I thought the conversation was heading, he says we also have to understand the significance of what our white ancestors did on and for the land we occupy, or where our feet stand in relation to them too. To my surprise, he shares the following:

Yeah, well this is part of living within the, like, of late, I’ve been saying to my friend, we must acknowledge where we are to understand it properly, we are here in the Commonwealth, they had a big war, 1914 up to...bang! From those dates, they split the world up, from that, that’s a new world order, even before that. So we need to understand we're in a white dominated structure, you know, it’s the reality and then when you hear everyone’s grievances within this and that and that, it’s still within the framework, you know what I mean, it will always be within the framework, so the more we understand where we are, what it is, it’s better for us. You know I think people, and I’m not trying to take away from anybody that’s experienced stuff, it’s true and it’s real and it’s life, but once you understand the bigger framework of it then you’re gonna be able to do something more about it, not just, you know. We’re here, we're dominated by a lot of corporate stuff, media, white guys, you know, who have been taught that it's their time, it's their world right now and that on a spiritual level, they're leading us to salvation and all, again.

I ask if he sees this as a sort of pseudo-Christian mission, he replies:

I’m telling you, it is, I’m telling you they're fundamentalist Christians behind everything! If you look back into history and that properly, you'll see it, and so these people run the NRL, these people run all the big business.
For this man, his indigenous Samoan framework of thinking about where one’s feet stand helped him formulate an acceptance and understanding of hegemonic ideals, a perhaps unusual and certainly for me, unexpected observation, but one that I came to recognise in many of my conversations and observations with Pasifika peoples. There was the second-generation Samoan man I spoke with who saw success as a balance between Pasifika values and the ‘white man’s game’, and others who decried what they referred to as ‘the Pasifika sob story’, such as the Māori NRL employee I interviewed who held the impression that if anyone is good enough they will be discovered, and the Cook Island Australian I chatted with who hated Pasifika people ‘playing the race card’. For these men you had to play the game and even respect it (so long as you respected your own differences as well, as they were just as negative about succumbing completely to non-Pasifika ways of being). I came to realise that my own desire to see these hegemonic frameworks completely refashioned and not simply ‘played’ was a position of privilege and a symptom of my identity being rooted in western frameworks. These men were playing and negotiating through complex webs of identity and connection.

My early desires to see more explicit challenges to hegemonic frameworks also came from my education and the influence of scholars like Audre Lorde who made the argument that the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house (1984). In this well-known quote she is referring to western feminism’s racist and homophobic blind spots, however it has been appropriated and used widely to discuss oppressive systems the world over. Diaz for example uses it to illuminate his own experiences of playing sport in Hawai‘i:

while...the early pleasure I obtained from football came from beating the colonizer at his own game, I have also come to learn from writers like Audre Lorde that part of the problem we face today has everything to do with trying to beat the master with his own tools (2011: 96).

What I think my participants were more concerned with though was negotiating a space within existing frameworks where they felt they could belong and be between simultaneously. This is especially the case if you do not wish to wholly dismantle the
master’s house, but rather refurbish it, which was more in line with what diasporic Pasifika peoples I engaged with seemed to want. When I think of this quote from Lorde I cannot help but think about how hard it is to dismantle a bed you used an Allen key to assemble if you cannot find that same allen key. Yes, you could destroy the bed by cutting or sawing it up, but if you want to move or refashion the bed, the Allen key would be your first useful tool. With all due respect to Lorde, I suggest that sometimes it makes sense to use the master’s tools, if not simply to get inside the house or make the bed. Then perhaps refashioning and dismantling can begin to take place. This is not a popular view amongst cultural researchers, nor is it one I had before doing this research, but my Pasifika participants have shown me how it is sometimes necessary to show great patience and clever negotiation between different values and frameworks if you want to survive and thrive. It should be noted that this is a specifically diasporic viewpoint, as while migrants may want to refashion the house to make it more ‘theirs,’ many others, including those indigenous to the nation they live in, may indeed wish to wholly dismantle the master’s house. While my own identity is to some degree, a double of New Zealand and Australia, it is still a Pākehā/European one, what these men were negotiating was how to combine different elements of one’s position as an indigenous diasporic person to enrich and expand one’s opportunities and identity. This involved recognising one’s own indigenous identity, as well as the historical (e.g. colonisation, wars, Christianity) and structural (e.g. media, business) phenomena that constitute their newer Australian homeland, it is part of the emerging doubleness of their diasporic Pasifika identities.

My research is obviously focused on Pasifika peoples but when I started considering indigeneity in Australia more broadly, and what being indigenous in and away from ancestral homes actually looks like, I had no idea just how difficult it would be. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, there is very little academic work on Australian indigenous and Pasifika relationships, and there was a disappointing lack of interest by Pasifika people in my fieldwork in discussing Aboriginal affairs (with some exceptions of course). The brotherhood so tangible in Australia between different Pasifika peoples – Māori, Polynesian, Fijian etc. rarely explicitly included the first peoples of Australia, although this is slowly changing. There is a lot more research on the relationship between indigenous Māori and Pasifika migrants in New Zealand (Grainger 2008; Misa 2002; Teaiwa and Mallon 2005), than on Pasifika and
indigenous Australian groups in Australia. Australia remains a unique and interesting case for analysing the subtle and quotidian framings around Pasifika and Aboriginal indigeneity, masculinity and sports. One notable exception is James Rimamutu George’s work, including his 2014 PhD thesis that explores the interface between Māori, and to a lesser degree, Pacific Islander migrants and Aboriginal peoples in Australia. As he laments early in his thesis and to which I can relate:

The literature review for this thesis has in many ways been a discouraging experience. Firstly because there is so little academic material concerning the interrelationship between Aboriginal and Maori people, and secondly because the content that is available is overwhelmingly derogatory of Aboriginal people. For example, one site positioning itself as “historical” describes the difference between colonisation in Australia and New Zealand …[with] the following statement: ‘The Maori have a warrior-style identity, but feel that their treaty with the British was never honoured by the other side. On the other hand, the Aborigines have more of a victim identity. They feel that they were wronged by Christian missionaries, and that their peaceful life was shattered by English soldiers (Convict Creations 2010, p. 3) (George 2014: 31-2).

George comes back to this perceived hierarchy of indigenous peoples regularly in his thesis, where Polynesian, and particularly New Zealand Māori, are put at the top of a hierarchy of indigenous peoples. In his own research Aboriginal participants often referred to an arrogance amongst Māori and Pacific Islanders, while islanders themselves at times expressed this arrogance (2014: 12). He also discusses the desire to emulate perceived Māori success from other indigenous groups across the world, a desire I saw in my own research, often citing the fact that Māori are beneficiaries of a treaty – the treaty of Waitangi, despite the controversy surrounding it. The Polynesian as warrior (and it should be noted that it is men most often being implied here) remains a stalwart of the Polynesian and Māori “brand” of indigeneity and one that is both glorified and demonised by outsiders, indigenous or not (see Arvin 2015). At the Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga conference in Auckland in 2016, many indigenous delegates from around the world talked about their respect and admiration for New Zealand and Māori, with many saying they are used as an example of what is possible for indigenous groups across the world. At one point in the concluding rituals inside
the Auckland University *marae* (meeting house), an Aboriginal man stood up and talked about what an honour it was to be there and how Australia has a lot to learn from New Zealand, and in the papers presented by Aboriginal scholars during the conference, there was a palpable sense of pity and sadness from the audiences at what was perceived as the even-worse conditions of Aboriginal peoples in Australia compared to Māori in New Zealand, and numerous comments were made about how much better race relations were in New Zealand compared to Australia.

These are of course simple observations of extremely complex historical and structural relationships, and are simply some of the ways Aboriginal and Pasifika peoples have been perceived throughout their respective colonial histories. They are not tied to any natural truth or characteristic of the indigenous groups, but rather to the ways they negotiated British intrusion based on their pre-existing cultural structures, and the ways the specific colonialists chose to deal with them and represent them historically (see Standfield 2012 for detailed descriptions of Tasman race relations from 1769-1840). As noted, the warrior imagery of Māoridom was represented as more masculine than the “victim” rhetoric that came to represent Australian Aboriginals. While this imagery neglected women and still placed Māori in a category of savagery well below European enlightenment, its perceived masculine ideals were in many ways more understood and respected than the radically different and completely misunderstood ways of being of Aboriginal Australian groups. The sooner we can do away with stereotypes like warrior or victim the better we can engage with real cultural integrity in contemporary circumstances – cultural integrity that is not tied to mythic pure forms from the past, but refashions, creates, and cultivates based on emergent and changing identities.

Finding ways to claim and emerge as an identity that wholly embraces diasporic doubleness, rejects halves, and understands the importance of the vā, the betweenness and relationality, is a way to be indigenous, Pasifika, diasporic, and Australian in a whole (and wholly) new way – a way that takes in all the views, not just backwards, but backwards, around, forward. It can get us closer to seeing the view from the beach, the boat, the coconut tree, the mountain, the birds, and under the sea. It is important, however, to understand that staking out this space looks different to all of
us, and that claiming an indigenous or diasporic indigenous identity is not a straightforward or easy position to take (see Hawkes 2018).

Like the vā, identity is active. Maintaining vā requires action, as does maintaining identity. “Maintaining” here is understood perhaps not in the way that first comes to mind, that of keeping something in the same state. Rather, it is acknowledging change as a central part of identity and relationships and maintaining and moving in a way that is harmonious with a sense of self through these changes. A core part of Pasifika identity is that it is active, for Samoans for example, to uphold fa’a Samoa (the Samoan way) one must continuously engage in things like service (tauttua) and obligations (fa’alavelave). Similarly for Tongans, anga fakatonga, the Tongan Way requires ‘ofa which involves actions to show one’s love, and talangofua, which is the act of obedience. Rugby league is fast becoming a Pasifika majority-played sport in Australia, and this position comes with opportunities to refashion a colonially introduced national sport that is run and reported on by a majority white-male cohort, and shape it in ways that better benefit Pasifika peoples. While rugby league can be accused of promoting hyper-masculinity, quotidian racism and perpetuating limiting stereotypes and perceptions of Pasifika identity, it also offers a rare space for “subaltern” masculinities and indigeneities, such as those from the Pacific Islands, to stake out a space for a rich diasporic belonging in the culturally valued arena of sports in Australia. The material, active and aesthetic qualities of rugby league make it a salient space for practicing these same qualities of the vā, and connect it to identity forming practices, particularly for Pasifika peoples whose identities are often inbetween, as well as active.

The ideas of ‘doubles not halves’ and ‘emergent indigenous identities’, connected with Pasifika understandings of the vā, where one’s feet stand, and using all vantage points to understand something (the view from the boat, sand, coconut tree) can help us come closer to understanding Pasifika and other contemporary indigenous identities in their contemporary richness and complexity. Part of being able to do this however, also relies on our ability to see the strange paradoxes of sport in its everyday practices for different groups of people on the ground which I turn to in the next chapter.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have unpacked some of the ambiguities of the Australian Pasifika diaspora’s relationship to the traditional owners of Australia and argued that there is a growing, but still limited, understanding of the shared experience of colonisation for Pasifika and indigenous Australians. One way Pasifika people perceive this is through the metaphor of ‘where one’s feet stand’, which acknowledges the importance of land, and infers that one’s feet have stood in many different places and are capable of moving again. The key idea behind this refers to forms and practices always changing while the foundations or core values remain the same, like the quote used in the opening of this chapter by the second-generation Samoan Australian, where he argued that indigenous references across lands need to be incorporated wherever you are. This shares many similarities with both Levi Strauss’s transformative structures (referred to in Chapter Two) and Bourdieu’s habitus where structures are understood as finite while the transformations possible within them are infinite.

The reference to ‘perceptions and practices’ in my main research question reflects the indigenous epistemologies explored in this chapter and which could be seen as forming an indigenous habitus. Bourdieu’s formulation, where perceptions are of an internal nature – how one perceives the world – and practices are how these perceptions are externalised or performed, is as circular in nature as Tim’s phenomenology of viewpoints, Salesa’s doubles not halves concept, and Harris’s emergent indigenous identities – combined, we can begin to paint a picture of the complex habitus of rugby league engaged diasporic Pasifika Australians. Bourdieu understood that perception does not come first, followed by practice, they are both always affecting the other – it is by practicing that our perceptions change, or in Bourdieu’s own words:

It is necessary to abandon all theories which explicitly or implicitly treat practice as a mechanical reaction, directly determined by the antecedent conditions and entirely reducible to the mechanical functioning of pre-established assemblies, “models” or “roles” (1977: 73).

In this theory, where perception and practice exist in a constant and unbreakable loop of relationality, there is a denial of the body/mind separation (Robbins 2000: 16)
much like in understandings of the \(\nu\tilde{a}\), where the relationships between are in themselves whole and to be nurtured. Bourdieu understood that perception and the body are intrinsically linked and formed through the repetition of corporeal practice. The habitus for Bourdieu was about embodied learning. This idea shares similarities with much indigenous epistemology, including Pasifika concepts of relationality (Ka’ili 2017; Meyer 2003; Mila-Schaaf 2010; Tecun et al. 2018) and the inextricability of the mind, body and spirit as well as the individual’s inextricability from the communal that is represented in the \(\nu\tilde{a}\) and in the doubleness of identity as outlined in this chapter. The \(\nu\tilde{a}\) then, can help us further investigate the nature of the habitus, putting it closer in line with how Pasifika peoples experience their habitus, as embodied, corporeal practice, as an unbreakable loop of perception and practice, as experiencing all the inbetweens and gauging meaning and belonging from these spaces.

In the next chapter I hone in on the quotidian nature of sports for the Australian Pasifika diaspora arguing that it is in the mundane and everyday where most formative and meaningful sporting experiences occur. I combine my personal experiences of the feelings, aesthetics, and other sensory aspects of sport with my participants’, in order to paint a picture of the lived experiences of sport in Australia (and to a lesser extent New Zealand) and perhaps capture why they are so pervasive and what they offer in and of themselves. I argue that sport is an art form, with aesthetic, harmonious, and material elements, much like the \(\nu\tilde{a}\), and as such opens up avenues for both powerful refashionings of the current position of the Australian Pasifika diaspora, at the same time as limiting it. I explore this and other paradoxes in more detail, arguing that the \(\nu\tilde{a}\) can help us break free from binary categorisations.
In this chapter I continue to look at how indigenous peoples are often framed around questions of validity and authority by outsiders, and question who is silenced by these actions. I argue that diasporic and urban dwelling indigenous groups, such as Australian diasporic Pasifika people, especially second or later generations, often struggle with their sense of identity in a world that is run by western separation and a desire to clearly categorise and compartmentalise. Western rationalisation attempts to create binaries between entities that are more often than not both far more harmonious and complex. The paradoxes of rugby league and within diasporic and gender identities are that sport and identity can present two sides of a binary simultaneously—they can express the vā between hero and dupe, masculine/feminine, Australian/Pasifika and many others, and in order to understand how, we must cultivate better understandings of indigenous perspectives. I agree with Spracklen, Timmins and Long (2010) that as ethnographers of rugby league it is our job to ‘try and make the game more equal’, but if we are unable to do that, we must at least ‘expose the game’s failings in understanding “race”, racism and racialised discourse (and gender and sexuality)’ (Spracklen et al. 2010: 410). With this acknowledgement of the negatives of sport for Pasifika peoples however, we must also acknowledge the positives, and in this chapter I argue for the importance of the quotidian joy sport cultivates, the emotions and feelings of playing and watching sport, and the connections between sport and art, and ultimately their similarities to the vā. I draw on the case study of rugby league in Sydney to look specifically at how young Pasifika men perceive and practice this sport at an everyday level at the same time as making personal comparisons to how I, and how other Pasifika peoples, experience sport.

**Framing and silencing: The myth of purity and truth**

Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes that in racial debates, and this definitely happens in sporting arenas, “‘Authorities” and outside experts are often called in to…give judgements about the validity of indigenous claims to…ways of knowing’ and that these debates ‘frequently have the effect…of silencing…the presence of other groups within the indigenous society like women, the urban non-status tribal person and
those whose ancestry or “blood quantum” is “too white” (1999: 72-3). This idea of authenticity can be internalised too, for example a good friend of mine born in New Zealand to Samoan parents and living in Sydney did not think he would make a good interview subject for me as he is ‘the least Samoan person’ he knows. He felt he did not have the right to speak on being Samoan despite both his parents being Samoan (one of whom is a matai and Pastor), having a large Samoan family and looking unmistakably Polynesian. Young urban diasporic Pacific Islanders of Sydney with whom my research engaged could be categorised as the ‘urban non-status’ people Smith refers to as this sentiment is a common one. Many younger people would say things like ‘Oh I’m not a real Samoan’ or they would tell me about someone else they thought would be more suitable for me to talk to. When I asked what a “real” Samoan or other Islander meant, they would either not quite know but know that they were not one, or they would say they do not know the language or customs. Even within Pacific studies itself, especially in Australia, the voices of urban, mixed race, and second or later generation Pacific Islanders are notably lacking. The sort of thinking critiqued by Smith regarding outside authorities used to validate indigenous claims is underpinned by the assumption that indigenous peoples have an authenticity which is ultimately rooted in the past and the further away they are perceived to be from this past, the less valid their indigeneity becomes.

Underlying these assumptions is what Hokowhitu calls the ‘Western metaphysical preoccupation with ontology’ (2016: 89) – the quest to uncover some pure identity, to know what is essential to being human, which ‘necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity’ (Foucault 1984: 79, in Hokowhitu 2016: 89). We can think of this in sports in relation to nationalism and the idea of loyalty, such as the uproar discussed in the previous chapter about Pasifika allegiance changing in international rugby league where we see an incongruence with how diasporic Pasifika peoples are expected to behave, and their complex multifaceted identities. There is no one pure form at the bottom, their identity is made from the many masks we all inevitably wear as we negotiate change. Rather than being a hybrid of disparate parts, the Pasifika diaspora is emerging and changing as a distinct cultural identity with its own rich cultural beliefs and practices.

While the myth of purity has been particularly perilous for indigenous peoples, it is a
myth for nearly all of us, and yet it remains so pervasive in western perceptions of indigeneity. Whereas white people claim wholeness through change (being “Australian” for example is an identity created through historical British changes to punishment and the expansion of empire), indigenous peoples are accused of losing authenticity through those very same changes. Teresia Teaiwa, in a paper titled *L(o)osing the Edge*, argues that ‘the native is hybrid’, and that ‘Hybridity is essential. For the edge’ (Teaiwa 2001: 344). She is referring to being one of the pioneers of cross-disciplinary, indigenous-driven Pasifika scholarship and her and her colleagues’ place ‘on the edge’ of disciplines and positions of power among other edges. Hybridity is not just essential to the ‘native’ however, it is essential, or rather, unavoidable, in our modern western lives. This is not a new idea, there are even popular memes made about it, one for example points out, among other things, where modern numerals and letters originated from, paper, our concept of time, and other essential everyday elements of our lives in an effort to show that we are all amalgamations of a global hybridity. It is false consciousness on behalf of the non-indigenous white person to think they are not themselves hybrid, that they are whole, proper or pure – a “real” Australian.

In early 2018 I interviewed Leo Tanoi who curated the 2010 *Body Pacifica* exhibition at Casula Powerhouse Museum which featured former and current Pasifika NRL players in traditional dress and drew a lot of attention and controversy from academia. One of the main concerns expressed by academics was that it essentialised representations of Pasifika men relying on the stereotype of their bodies being athletic and warrior-like (see Uperesa and Mountjoy 2014). In Leo’s perspective however, this sort of criticism was highly simplified:

*You know what was the most amazing thing when we finished doing Body Pacifica, was turning up to all these academic talks and people were just rubbishing what we were doing without really understanding the whole complexities of the arts project, the engagement and that. And then I started to realise there were people within academia writing in defence and support of it but most of it was in defence [defensive against it] and it had a very prudish Christian overtone and it was weird because quite a lot of the people weren’t Christian, they're academics. So I started to analyse it myself and I was*
thinking to myself: what is going on here? We're the Islanders, we can do whatever we want with our bodies, and who are these people? And then I look at them, and oh my God, they just sit behind desks, they've never met anyone, and they've just read texts and stuff from everybody without engaging the community and engaging key people to understand the realities of it. So that whole argument of the abuse, the continuation of abuse of the Pacific people, that we shouldn't be masculine and this and that, I just thought it was like, fuck! Where have you guys been? You know the real world is, we don’t give a shit, at the end of the day we do whatever we want with our bodies, we can put ourselves on calendars. You know they were saying ‘Oh the NRL perpetuating masculine this and that’, I was going oh my God, are you serious? We're celebrating our culture. We are who we are and we love our culture and we're celebrating our culture (emphasis mine).

Leo, like many other Pasifika men in Sydney and Auckland, understands many of the complexities around sport and Pasifika involvement in it. While academics worry that exhibitions such as Body Pacifica reify and essentialise because of their focus on traditional and sporting connections for Pasifika men, the men involved do not necessarily want to be separated from masculinity, sports and traditional physical roles. For these men, it is more about seeing the embodiment of masculinity as one option out of many rather than downplaying it. Physicality is not the opposite of intellectualism or any other non-physical characteristic; they are connected and can be equally embraced and celebrated. In fact they must for Pasifika people, as Meyer argues, ‘we must mend this rift’ (2003: 12). Uperesa and Mountjoy recognised the importance and complexity of the exhibition, arguing that:

The art center–NRL effort to highlight the cultural identities of NRL players as valued and legitimate is one that (however imperfectly) aims to arm young Pacific men in new diasporic contexts with recognition of and pride in their cultural identities, which they themselves have said are important (2014: 271).

This last point on what Pasifika men have themselves viewed as important is crucial, as Leo’s criticism of the academic events and readings he accessed attests to and why I argue for the serious consideration of the power of sports in creating and
maintaining valued understandings of identity. It is not enough to denigrate the role of rugby league for diasporic Pasifika peoples, despite all its failings we must acknowledge and try to understand what it offers Pasifika peoples, men in particular, and why it is so pervasive in their lives. In the small amount of literature that acknowledges this positive side, the focus is still too reliant on physical and historical elements.

The tendency for Pacific studies to focus on the islands and not on the ‘urban, non-status’ diasporic Pasifika person, is just as clear in Pasifika sports studies where most research is done either in the islands, or on elite migration patterns focusing on global connections, but not everyday practices in non-island homes. Some Pasifika sports scholars have even argued that pointing westward to ‘Pasifika settlement communities…privileges the exceptional journeys of elite professionals over the experiences of amateurs’ (Dewey 2014: 194). This sort of argument ignores the reality of ‘urban non-status’ diasporic life for a large and growing section of the global Pasifika community. It makes the incorrect assumption that it is only elite athletes who migrate and play sport in Australia or New Zealand. Especially for the growing second and later generation Pasifika diasporas in these and other nations (like the USA), quotidian and amateur sporting engagement plays an enormous role in their everyday lives, whether it be playing, spectating, or any other non-professional involvement. Diasporic places are no longer exceptional for Pasifika peoples, and contrary to popular framing, focusing on them does not mean, by default, focusing on elite mobilities. A few of my participants explicitly mentioned the damaging nature of assumptions such as this, albeit not from Pacific studies scholars, but from their Pasifika families living on the islands. They felt there was a big difference between how diasporic Pasifika life in Australia and New Zealand was perceived by those ‘back home’, and how the majority of diasporic Pasifika peoples actually lived. It was not often the grand and easy life envisioned by their island living families, but full of new difficulties, like living expenses, low wages, ineligibility for benefits, home sickness, and the pressures of being an indigenous minority, as well as the expectations for remittances often coming from their island communities. The belief that Pasifika people living in Australia, New Zealand or the US are “elite” is one that does not represent the lived reality for the majority of diasporic Pasifika peoples.
Paradoxes of sport

Throughout this research, I have been continually faced with sport’s paradoxical positions – its ability to push and pull, offer opportunity and oppression, dismay and joy, to exploit and facilitate autonomy. When I first read Hokowhitu’s description of the indigenous athlete as hero and dupe I was struck by the paradoxical nature of these two categories, and yet the more research I did the truer I could see the two being simultaneously held together and how many Pasifika people seemed to have an awareness of the oscillation between the two. What became even clearer though, was the power of the space between and the everyday engagements happening somewhere within this spectrum. My research participants as a whole hold sport in a space between positives and negatives, what I am using the vā to help us think about. There is vā-like space between hero and dupe; it is a complicated space with both good and bad things – things that help, and things that hinder. This does not mean however that this should be a hard space to find identity, it would only be hard if we were to continue thinking that one must be a clear categorical thing, and not something that exists in spaces in-between. The vā between hero and dupe is the space that connects, where meaning is made – a space where you can affect and change the two surrounding categories.

It is largely through colonially introduced ideas that we see these between spaces as “less than”. If we look at, and value it like the vā, we can see it as a truly productive and in fact, beautiful space. This does not mean accepting the negatives, far from it. What it can actually mean is that you are set up in a good way to challenge and refashion the negatives into positives. You do not have to be a dupe, and you certainly do not have to be a hero, you can be something in between, something totally different, something that feels better than either of those two things alone. The non-Pasifika people in my life tend to have a love or hate attitude to sports – they either could not be less interested, or they are passionate about sports and regularly watch and/or play. The Pasifika people I have met in Sydney (both those who I interviewed formally and those who I talked with at various events, as well as my online survey participants) have a slightly different spectrum of sports engagement, often somewhere in between the love or hate attitude.

Every male I interviewed had either played sport when he was younger or still played
and most of the females had a large sporting influence in their early lives, often due to teachers, parents and/or peers assuming they would be good at or enjoy sports because they are Pasifika. Considering my research’s focus on sport it was unsurprising that my interviewees were all involved with sports, what was telling though was just how pervasive sports were in the lives of almost everyone I engaged with. Even at non-sporting events, like Sydney’s Samoa Day, or the Pacific Unity Festival in Western Sydney, sports were dominant, in the sheer amount of sports-themed clothing people adorned, the market stalls selling sporting merchandise, the hundreds of kids holding footballs, and in the stories people told me about either their own sporting experiences, or that of their brothers, fathers and cousins. There were also often recognisable Pasifika NRL players at these events. At one Samoa Day there were even two former NFL players from The United States actively recruiting young men to try and play NFL in the States, selling it as an opportunity for boys who have been told they are ‘too big’ for NRL. Most people knew, or were even related to at least one professional or ex-professional rugby league player. In contrast, I have numerous non-Pasifika friends who have lived in Sydney many years and in some cases their entire lives who have no connection with or interest in rugby league or sports in general.

One Pasifika woman told me how she actively fought against being ‘sporty’ when she was young because of the assumptions people made about her ‘natural’ Pacific love and aptitude for sports. It was not until she had children of her own that she realised she did actually like sports, once the decisions to watch and play were on her own terms. I had a similar trajectory, but for entirely different reasons. I was naturally very sporty as a young girl and embraced it up until my early teens when my gender became an issue. A boy broke up with me because I beat him in a race, and everything around me taught me that sport was not for girls. It made me feel too masculine and I quickly gave it up, forgetting about it as an option until my late twenties when I finally felt comfortable enough to take up football (soccer) again. While Pasifika men and women may not have to deal with this specific gender stereotype around sport, they do have to deal with a myriad of other ones that make assumptions about their “natural” abilities and desires around sport, which may not reflect reality.
Sport does, however, play a large role in everyday Pasifika lives in Australia, as I have already argued. In the online survey I conducted, 72 per cent of Pasifika people agreed or strongly agreed that sport was an important part of their lives and 86 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that sport was an important part of Pacific Islander culture. Only 41 per cent believed sport meant more to Pasifika Islanders than it did to white Australians however (see Figure 3). In response to the statement ‘sport means more to Pacific Islanders than it does to white Australians’ 13 people disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 14 agreed or strongly agreed, with 7 being unsure. This almost exact half and half split reflects the argument that sport can be both a highly positive and negative influence in peoples’ lives. The agreement with the statement ‘sport is an important part of Pacific islander culture’ was however, a lot higher, with no one strongly disagreeing, and 30 agreeing or strongly agreeing. Twenty-six respondents agreed or strongly agreed that sport was an important part of their life (out of 34 respondents).

Figure 3. Survey answers to questions on importance of sport

![Survey answers to questions on importance of sport](image)

I have had numerous Pasifika men tell me sport ‘saved their life’. A Samoan man told me of his downward spiral of drug and alcohol abuse before he found rugby league. It gave him a sense of purpose, and was something he enjoyed and felt valued in. A Māori man who moved from New Zealand in the 1980s said his family felt like
outcasts until they found a rugby league club in Sydney which gave them a route into
the local community, same with a Cook Island family who used it as a way to meet
other Islanders and connect. In my own club I have seen women and men get jobs
through teammates, find homes, become best friends, God parents, and in some cases,
moved. With so many of us from other cities and countries, to have this community
and the opportunities it opens up, is a unique and valuable thing. An Aboriginal man I
met talked about the vital role Australian Rules played in his young life of moving
from foster home to juvenile detention to foster home and around again, and said
‘Without sport I’d have had nothing and would’ve just kept going back to gaol’. Sport
was what gave him his first sense of purpose and value which he was then able to
build on. His Australian football playing days were what kept him going as a young
man, what brought him joy in a difficult life of foster homes and overt racism.

**Joy and play**

Despite all its problems, it is important to seriously consider sports’ power and
potential, not just as a means to some other end, such as financial or social capital, but
as something important in and of itself, as something joyful, meaningful and fulfilling
in life. As Phipps and Slater note, ‘Belonging – being and feeling at home, safe,
nurtured and responsible for, and to, people and place – is fundamental to not only
individual but also social wellbeing’ (2010: 41). A major reason for playing rugby
league for young Pasifika men in Sydney is simply to enjoy it, with this enjoyment
coming from a sense of belonging and camaraderie, which in turn heightens self-
esteeem, as articulated by one of my young second-generation Tongan-Australian
participants, who said that there is something about league ‘that helps shape [Pasifika
boy’s] esteem because they’re surrounded by friends, that’s why I feel football is such
an important arena to a lot of our young growing developing boys. And girls.’

Sport offers joy in its ability to create meaning, community, belonging, happiness and
opportunities, and it is just as important to acknowledge the role of joy in sports as it
is the continuing problems, especially for people from historically and structurally
marginalised groups. As Phipps argues,

> Enjoyment can...be an act of resistance against the dominant global culture
and its preferences for productivity and commodified pleasures. Pleasure in
the experience of specific, collective cultural difference really matters to people—most urgently to groups facing adversity. This is a serious point given the profound existential crisis the experience of (post)colonisation forces on Indigenous peoples (2016b: 252-3).

For the world’s indigenous peoples, such as those diasporic Pasifika peoples engaged in rugby league in Sydney with which this thesis mostly deals with, sport’s quotidian, almost taken-for-granted presence can play a profound role in helping shape and make sense of their lived identities.

Below I share an excerpt from my fieldwork diary where I try to capture the feeling of playing sport. As mentioned in Chapter One, part of what drew me to this research topic is my own love and aptitude for sports, and a sadness of sorts that many people miss this or do not understand it. If we are to address the greater structural and historical complexities of sport, then we first need to get a feel for the lived experience of it. The most influential Pacific studies scholar in history, Epeli Hau‘ofa recognised the importance of moving away from ‘uncompromising empiricism’ (Hau’ofa 2008: 9) in western intellectual traditions, and into a more engaged and felt experience of research in the Pacific. As Wesley-Smith reminds us, Hau‘ofa

called for the inclusion of intuitive knowledge and “feel” for the subtleties of cultures and relationships: “We must devise ways . . . to tap instead of suppress the subjectivity to which I have referred and thereby humanise our study of the condition of the peoples and cultures of the Pacific” (Hau‘ofa 2008a, 9) (Wesley-Smith 2016: 158).

Part of this approach, often framed as decolonial, is the sharing of lived experience with one’s research participants. I have a long affinity with sports, and I share now one of my more recent experiences to generate a sense of the feelings of sport as a lived and embodied experience in order to stand with, if only in a very small way, those athletes I discuss throughout this thesis.

Fieldwork diary entry 2017:
As someone who spent most of her twenties waking up late and hungover on a Sunday, there’s an immediate sense of success when waking up early on a fresh winter’s Sunday morning to play football. The ritual begins straight away with a sleepy eyed stumble to the shower which sparks the beginning of the wake up. Oops! I forgot to shave that bit of my legs between my shorts and socks. Oh well, no one cares about that. Unlike when I played as a teenager, and was teased for having hairy legs, the focus now is on fun, teamwork, improvement and yes, hopefully, winning. My clean kit goes on, number 14 this season, a lot of the girls have favourite or lucky numbers but I have no attachment to numbers, I’m not sure why. Since it’s winter, a hoodie and tracksuit pants go immediately over the top. It’s bulky and I look as unglamorous as possible, but I feel fierce and I realise it’s one of the few times in my life where I feel confidence unattached to attractiveness. This makes me both sad and happy – sad for past me who couldn’t separate those two things, sad for my millions of sisters who I know have this socially internalised connection, and happy that I’ve found a way out of it in these brief moments. Hair up, headband on, sunscreen, and sneakers. I fight with my wedding ring for a minute as I eventually squeeze it over my knuckle and on to the bedside table, no jewellery allowed. How serious! I’ve packed my bag the night before, as I am 1 – A complete nerd, and 2 – Capitalising on as much of a sleep-in as possible by preparing the night before. I might have a piece of fruit, but my stomach is in knots, I don’t know how anyone can’t be nervous before a game, even if I don’t feel nervous in my mind, my stomach always is. Frozen water bottle into the bag with boots, shinpads, socks, tape and ankle brace. It’s time.

Arriving at the field with a mixed sense of nervousness and anticipation with excitement and an awareness of the heaviness of one’s body is a strange feeling, one I don’t get anywhere else. Warming up you try to get into your body, awakening every nook and cranny of muscle that might be trying to sleep through. Some of the warm ups feel quite silly but that’s the beauty of teammates, you all look silly together and in that togetherness the silliness dissipates. It reminds me a lot of being at drama school and the similar warm ups you would do as a group there. It’s the first moment of togetherness for the day, and just like in drama, there’s a good mix of seriousness and
concentration with laughs and relaxing into our minds and bodies. In high school I did a lot of athletics, which did not have the same joy of camaraderie, it was always fun doing events with friends, but ultimately you were competitors not teammates, and it is telling that the most fun I had at athletics were in the relays and when my school or district were audibly cheering from the stands and sidelines.

I think everyone needs to be cheered for in something in life, it is such an immediate and tangible feeling of worthiness. It may sound self-indulgent or egotistical to want this praise but I don’t think anyone can deny that it feels good. Another similarity between performing on stage and performing on the field is this real-time close proximity acknowledgement from others. On the field when you make a good pass, or a great clearance, a tackle, a run, a save, or score a goal, you are not just feeling good about doing so, you are sharing that feeling with your teammates on the pitch, and those supporting you from the sidelines – your reward is their reward, and I can only imagine how this must feel when there is an entire stadium cheering for you, let alone thousands or even millions you can’t see watching through various media channels.

I love the smell of a freshly cut field, especially on a cold winter’s morning with the sun warming up in unison with us. You can see the little waves of heat and steam coming up off the grass and you take some deep breaths in to ground yourself and take in the fresh air. As the day gets later the smells change and by the end of the game you’re completely unaware of smell as you simply try to regain your breath and are tired and battered. As that first whistle blows though, you are still finding your way between real life and the life of the game – you are no longer all your individual qualities, you are part of a team and you have to give and take accordingly. Again, like an actor responding to changes in tempo, pitch, and those other slight differences that can occur in a scripted play, the team player has to be present and ready to respond. Intuition and quick thinking are two qualities that are just as important to the actor as they are to the athlete. It has always confounded me how arts and sports are often presented as diametrically opposed.
For those 90 or so minutes you’re on the field, everything else in your life disappears. There is no energy left to worry about them, you are completely free to play.

Henricks argues that play is a ‘rebellion of consciousness against the forms and forces of the world’ (2008: 177), and while sport may be a structured form of play, the possibilities for rebelling against these forms and forces are significant. Much like Bourdieu’s finite structures and infinite transformations and the Pasifika epistemology of changing practices on the same foundations (understanding where one’s feet stand), this understanding of the play in sport gives a glimpse into why playing sport is such a powerful force in so many people’s lives including my own.

The above is but a tiny sliver of understanding what playing must feel like for anyone at a higher grade than local club level. What I am most experienced at, and what has equally profound, and to many people, confounding power, is the act of spectating sport. Grown adults crying, wailing, jumping up and down, singing, screaming, hugging, even kissing, all of these public emotional displays are common on the sidelines of what we usually consider hyper-masculine, and unfortunately for the most part, homophobic arenas. The sport itself may be men brutally smashing into each other and “fighting” for possession, runs, or tries, but the men watching are showing just as spectacular displays of emotion and affection that would not commonly be considered qualities of mainstream masculinity. The fields and sidelines of sport, including rugby league, are one of the few spaces where men feel comfortable showing extreme emotions and affection with their fellow male companions, and even with strangers (Uperesa 2010b: 87-89).

While media has profoundly changed the way we consume sports, and the way it is played, there is nothing like being in the same physical space as elite athletes doing things you can only dream of. You get a sense of the occasion in a way television cannot capture. You hear the crushing sounds of bodies slamming into each other in a way that makes you involuntarily squirm. It is perhaps voyeuristic, but it is also deeply human in that it is sensory and shared. You are sharing the experience not just with the players but with thousands of others, unmediated. With our lives being more separated and compartmentalised than ever before – whether it be through
technology, or nuclear family and high-density living, the experience of sharing a space with people passionately engaged in the same thing you are is a truly special one. We know this can come with dangers of course – the “mob” mentality, hooliganism, violent patriotism etc., but these are the exceptions. What happens most in these spaces, every day across the world, is actually beautifully harmonious where the full spectrum of human emotion is given permission to manifest – from absolute jubilation, tears of joy, relief and pride, to heart wrenching agony, the acceptance of unfairness or bad luck, frustration, pain and tears of sadness (Lenneis and Pfister 2018).

As C. L. R James wrote in what is perhaps the most famous book on cricket, *Beyond a Boundary*, in the somewhat loftily titled chapter *What is Art?*; ‘the spontaneous outburst of thousands at a fierce hook or a dazzling slip-catch, the ripple of recognition at a long awaited leg-glance, are as genuine and deeply felt expressions of artistic emotion as any I know’ (1963: 274). As a spectator, you become part of the performative spectacle, in harmony with others, and living in between reality and play. You are part of the vā – complete with its activity, harmony, beauty and betweenness. You are in a liminal space between reality – you are really there feeling real emotions with real others; and play – watching a game made up of arbitrary rules that would be completely meaningless out of context. Because of the context however – the performativity, the aesthetics, the shared space – it is deeply meaningful, and the vā after all, is ‘where meaning is made’ (Wendt 1999).

Sport as cultural practice is more than performance or representation. Sport has an intrinsic presence where practice, process and play are inextricable. In the arts, practice and play are often considered interchangeable, where playing with forms and ideas becomes your “practice”. It will often culminate in a finished piece of work, and then continue to evolve as the artist continues playing with ideas – through playing one becomes a “practicing” artist. Similarly, through playing sport, one becomes a practicing athlete. While artists are often encouraged to call themselves artists however, even if they have a “day-job” to help support themselves, athletes are rarely considered athletes until they reach an exclusive level of professionalism, and the sport is no longer considered a hobby. Why does sport hold this lowlier position to art
when they share so many similarities? Can an amateur athlete not claim their athleticism as a major part of their identity?

I believe there are a number of connections between sport and art, contrary to seemingly popular opinion, and I believe play is the missing connection. Most of my friends are rather staunchly “into” one or the other, and have interesting, often derogatory thoughts on the other. My friends in the arts think sports are ‘reckless’, ‘violent’, or for ‘bogans’ (the Australian equivalent of a US ‘redneck’ or UK ‘chav’), whereas my sporting friends and participants think the arts are ‘pretentious’, full of ‘wankers’, or simply inaccessible. As someone who has always loved both equally, from hyper-masculine rugby codes, football/soccer, and athletics, to difficult classical literature, feminist theatre and art history, I cannot help but get confused and a little sad when people draw these divisive lines. Sport and the arts are both powerful and emotional experiences at their best, and painful or simply boring at their worst. They both share aesthetics – the ‘beautiful’ game of football, the ‘sublime’ words of Proust, Lionel Messi’s ‘stunning’ skill, or Dali’s ‘magnificent’ use of light. Aesthetics may immediately bring art more to mind than sport, but contemporary sport is just as involved in aesthetic presentation as the arts – there are in fact entire journals dedicated to the aesthetics of sports, where great philosophers such as Kant and Heidegger are imagined on the field, and they have some compelling and sensible things to say (Edgar 2013).

C. L. R James argued that cricket, (and which you could argue about most sports) is ‘first and foremost a dramatic spectacle. It belongs with the theatre, ballet, opera and the dance’ (1963: 258). He argues that cricket should be approached as a ‘full member’ of the artistic community; that it is ‘an art and we have to compare it with other arts’ (1963: 258). Sports are often relegated to the frivolous and unimportant, not worthy of the serious consideration given to the arts, or other phenomena, such as food (see Malaby 2009), with the qualitative social sciences being no exception. I agree with C. L. R. James and would expand his views on cricket to rugby league and many other sports as well. Rugby league for example, is as much a dramatic spectacle as theatre or dance. It takes training and preparation, and people to embody and

---

18 I acknowledge that not everyone has access or time for all these things but many people do and still hold the view that they are diametrically opposed.
perform different roles. There are front of house performers (the players), and back of house crew members (the coaching staff, medics, and media). It is as valuable and pervasive as art and should be considered on par with the arts as an important cultural phenomenon.

I take Besnier’s position that a synthesis of ‘sport as play and sport as the serious life, sport as cultural performance and sport as everyday practice…provides the key to unlock the study of sport…in this global era’ (2012: 454). In anthropology, art has long been studied throughout different times and cultures, often with scholars waxing lyrical about the vital role of art in this or that’s cultural world, and I do not argue against this. Sport, on the other hand, has traditionally been seen as something peripheral, or lower-class, a leisure activity outside the serious realm of culture. For instance, even in Lee’s careful consideration of Pacific migration and transnationalism, she neglects to mention sport in the ‘cultural’ elements important to migrants, instead listing ‘music, food and art’ (Lee 2009: 13). While these are important cultural phenomena, the role of sports for Pacific peoples is not only equally important but highly visible in the wider world. The global spread of sport is more than an unrelenting hegemonic force – it can change and adapt cultures, but can also be changed and adapted by them. It can be a way to ‘beat the master at his own game’, and a way to potentially develop sports in ways that benefit indigenous and other minority peoples.

The other side of the paradox: Oppression and limitation

I have highlighted some of the more positive sides to sport’s various paradoxes. It offers joy and meaning, purpose, belonging, value, and just general everyday excitement and fun. It provides a space for artistic expression and emotional embodiment, and it reflects the vā between reality and play. On the other side there are a lot of negatives to consider. I have seen cases where sport arguably played a central role in ruining lives, where family and the larger community put so much pressure on a young boy to do well in sports that they developed depression, suffered from the lack of having a “plan B”, and in the worst cases, committed suicide. Five young male Polynesian rugby league players committed suicide between 2013 and 2015 in Australia (Barrowclough 2015), and young Pasifika men (and women) in Sydney continue to commit suicide at an alarming rate, far higher than national
averages, and they share some of the highest youth suicide rates in the world with Australian Aboriginal peoples (Horton 2014; Ravulo 2015; Institute for Economics and Peace 2016).

I interviewed a New Zealand born Samoan man who knew one of these young men, and who shared his insights into the combination of pressures boys in similar situations face:

*I can see with a lot of our Pacific young boys there was a lot of pressure...as far as trying to please the coach, please the parents, you know, so, I would bring these boys to training...even just to get to training was a huge task for them, to get there from school...to their training grounds on time, and the way that they were treated by staff, I thought that was uncalled for...really talking down to them, like coaches would constantly swear at them, that sort of stuff...and it’s either gonna motivate them or it’s gonna put them down. And a lot of time with our boys it puts them down...it might be a cultural thing for Aussies, it might motivate them, but I didn’t really see it for us, I stood up to one of the coaches and I told him, I said, ‘what you’re doing is wrong’, and he kinda said to me ‘I’m the boss here, I’m the coach, I do what I wanna do’. But I really, I just told him ‘that’s not right and I’m gonna take it to the board’. But when I took it to the board, they’re kinda saying ‘it’s just normal, it’s just how it is’, and that’s why I see a lot of talented boys, especially our Pacific and Māori boys, don’t make it, ‘cause they can’t handle that, they just can’t...their momentum drops, I’ve seen guys that should be in the NRL now that are doing nothing, absolutely nothing...I don’t know whether they push the boys that hard to make them mentally tough but I think our boys culturally get enough of this from their parents, through abuse, you know, the discipline they get at home...I get emotional about these things, you know, just to see how our young Pacific Island/Māori boys are treated...I don’t think we’re valued or treated properly.*

Here we have just one example of the challenges Pasifika men face when pursuing a rugby league career in diaspora where the sport offers both opportunity but also extra pressure and in some cases, abuse, which can pile on top of other pressures from
home to school. While all boys jostling for a rugby league career face the same situation in terms of coaching, they do not all relate to it in the same way. A number of men involved in the game thought that indigenous, Pasifika and even boys that had come from rural backgrounds, were less likely to react positively to swearing and similar hardline coaching styles that could impose too much pressure on their often already negative-reinforcement-heavy home and schooling lives.

A second-generation Samoan man who works with the NRL said that the young boys who come from rural areas often connect well with the Polynesian boys in the youth squads because they have worked with indigenous boys, and they recognise and share a humbleness. He said that management need to realise there are similarities but also differences between the indigenous Australian, Pasifika, and other boys and not treat everyone the same. Similar to Tim who talked about where one’s feet stand in the previous chapter, he saw what he referred to as ‘the white man’s game’ as the prevailing and unstoppable social framework of our time, and he thought that the boys who do the best are the ones that learn how to balance this game with their own values. He framed his own success similarly, explaining how he got his first job with the NRL because he was a teacher with a degree who was also Polynesian – he was the combination they were looking for – relatable to them and their business models, and relatable to their growing Pasifika talent pool. Like Tim, he showed no desire or hope that these frameworks could be changed, only worked within. For him, fitting into the framework is the only way to succeed, but you do it in a fine balancing act with your own personal and cultural values. This balance is part of the doubleness of the Pasifika Australian diasporic identity and one that takes skilful negotiation. It also has to be negotiated however, with damaging stereotypes of masculinity which the next chapter will discuss in detail but which can result in mental health issues, including suicide or attempted suicide, as well as drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and the lack of education and other skills to develop a different career with.

By bringing attention to some of the pitfalls of the ‘rugby league dream’ for the Australian Pasifika diaspora, I do not mean to disregard the positives of these dreams,
or give a Hoberman-style attack\(^\text{19}\) on the popularity of sports for non-white men (see Hoberman 1997). As Sharon Rowe argues, sport can be ‘a dynamic, creative, and transformative force in our social life’ (2008: 145). Regardless of the difficulties facing Pasifika men in sport, it is still pervasively perceived as a way out of low socioeconomic conditions, and a way to serve family and community – ‘to give back’ as so many of my participants said. Camaraderie and teamwork were often talked about among Pasifika peoples as the most important qualities of rugby league, as a second-generation Tongan woman said ‘it’s a very team-oriented sport, and we do community so well, we live in communities, we were brought up by communities’. As I will expand on in Chapter Six, these qualities are in stark contrast to the qualities most often spouted by the media as particularly ‘Pacific’, which tend to centre around showmanship, flair, and natural individual qualities.

**Pasifika perceptions of sport and diasporic identity**

While rugby league can promote the rhetoric of Pasifika men as hyper-masculine, it can also be a particularly important site for the practice of Pasifika values for Islanders in the diaspora, such as communality, service, and *mana*. Like church and large family networks, two pillars of Pasifika culture, sport is something that is communal. A second-generation Cook Island Māori man believed that even more than church, sports teams were crucial in creating community for Cook Island migrants in Sydney as they helped people ‘transition’, and ‘bought people together’. A young Samoan-Kiwi man saw it as a great way ‘to let off steam’ due to the ‘responsibility and the struggle that the majority of the P.I community face’, and a first-generation Papua New Guinean woman described sport as ‘a universal language’ (survey responses 2016). Sport also has a special place in Australian popular culture therefore providing solidarity with both a unique Pasifika psyche, as well as an Australian one, bridging that gap between competing identities which so many diasporic peoples struggle with, particularly second and later generations (George and Rodriguez 2009; Harris 2013; Lee and Francis 2009).

\(^\text{19}\) Hoberman’s book ‘Darwin's Athletes: How sport has damaged Black America and preserved the myth of race’ focuses solely on the negative aspects of sports for African American men in the United States.
In the survey I conducted of Pasifika peoples living in Australia and New Zealand, there was a fairly even split between people who said they would represent their diasporic home of Australia or New Zealand if they were to play sport at a representative level, or their ancestral Pacific Island home (see Figure 4), supporting the idea of diasporic Pasifika identity being more about doubles than halves.

**Figure 4. Survey answers to question ‘If you were to play at an international level in your sport, what country would you most like to represent and why?’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Pacific Island nation</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia or New Zealand</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both an Island nation and Aus/NZ</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was enthusiastic response to this question with 33 responses (out of 45 participants). Reasons for their choices varied greatly, some using their country of birth as reason to play for that country, while others wanted to play for ‘heritage’, ‘family’ or ‘culture’ despite country of birth. Money was both mentioned as a reason to play for Australia or New Zealand, as well as a reason to play for an island nation – with some arguing that there are better resources and opportunities in the countries of Australia and New Zealand, while others saying this would not be reason enough. As one respondent commented, ‘I...feel like a lot of Samoan stars are taken...[by] New Zealand and Australia because they pay better money, but I’d feel like my love and pride for Samoa would override money any day!’; whereas respondents who said they would play for Australia cited ‘better opportunities and benefits’, while one respondent said she would play for Australia because it had ‘given me the opportunity
to even be able to do this survey. Although ethnically I am Samoan...I also pride myself in being an Australian’.

Other reasons given as to why they would choose to represent an Island nation included:

Samoa. Sport for Samoan people means more than an egotistic satisfaction of personal goals.  

I would choose Samoa, I was raised in New Zealand since before I turned 1 but Samoa has always been my home at heart.

Fijian Because it would mean a lot to my Family & country.

Tonga, because my nationality identifies who i am as a person. My culture is an important part of my life. I’d represent Tonga because i am proud of my roots and also the Royal family.

While reasons to choose to play for Australia or New Zealand despite Pasifika identity included:

I would say Australia because I have a stronger connection with the country I call ‘home’. I was very young when I left Fiji, and have not gone back for over two decades - definitely a disconnect with my country of birth.

New Zealand as it is my place of birth.

Australia, born here and am a citizen.

NZ, it is where I live.

20 Answers copied verbatim.
As this data shows, there are numerous reasons why Pasifika-identifying people hold their Island homes and their diasporic homes in both lower and higher regard. Being born somewhere is important to some, while where you live or have lived longest are the defining factors for others. The most telling trend with this question was the equal split between Island and diasporic allegiance, supporting the notion that diasporic identity for Pasifika peoples is a constant negotiation between national identities. Respondents seemed just as eager to give reasons as to why they would choose Australia or New Zealand as they were for choosing a Pacific Island nation. Two respondents even put one of each (Australia/Fiji, and New Zealand/Samoa) despite the question only asking for one answer. The New Zealand/Samoa answer even implied the two nations were one to him as after listing the two nations, he simply wrote ‘it is where I’m from’.

Philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, in his critique of everyday life, argued for the importance of the quotidian and the mundane; ‘all we need do is simply to open our eyes, to leave the dark world of metaphysics and the false depths of the “inner life” behind, and we will discover the immense human wealth that the humblest facts of everyday life contain’ (Lefebvre 1947: 132). He then draws on Hegel to say ‘the familiar is not necessarily the known’ (ibid). This could not be truer of sports, especially in Australia and especially popular male-dominated sports like rugby league. The exceptional is almost always prioritised over the mundane. News stories will go into detail over the bad behaviour of a few players, as news stories are expected to do, but there are hundreds of others who are doing degrees or apprenticeships, community work, supporting their families as well as training almost every day. I do not propose the news be a dispassionate list of every mundane thing professional athletes do off the field, but it is important that there is some awareness of the everyday as this is the norm in rugby league, and it is the space we need to look at if we are to properly understand Pasifika over-representation in rugby league that does not rely on colonially introduced and shaped stereotypes. As Lefebvre says, ‘Man must be “everyday”, or he will not be at all’ (Lefebvre 1947: 127). This everydayness is not to be confused with amateurness, as professional rugby league players still experience an every day and many Pasifika amateur players have hopes of playing professionally, while many Pasifika peoples are connected to professional rugby league through kin. As mentioned previously, most Pasifika people I spoke
with in Sydney had a cousin, uncle or brother either currently playing in a professional grade or who had played at some stage, so there is an interconnectedness between the elite’s everyday experiences and those of the larger community.

Even for young men without professional contracts in their sights, joining a rugby league club or even playing at school can bring great joy and a sense of belonging. Outside of sport they often struggle with their Pasifika heritage in an Australian home – they feel they are neither ‘Pacific enough’ nor ‘Australian enough’ and sport connects not only peoples but different parts of one’s own identity such as the body, soul and mind which are all involved in the playing of rugby league for Pasifika peoples. For many nations in the Pacific, there are more people living abroad than there are in their ancestral homelands, making diaspora a vital part of their identities (Gershon 2007). But there can be a dissonance between the relational ways of being as learned by Pasifika peoples, and postcolonial diasporic spaces like Australia which they now inhabit and sport often helps with this. The common terms my participants used to describe what they loved about rugby league were always communal in nature – teamwork, camaraderie, a sense of brotherhood, and above all, the chance to represent your family and make them proud. As Lilomiava-Doktor argues regarding Samoan peoples; ‘Part of the balancing act of being Samoan is the reconciliation between the implacable Euro-American demands of the individual with those of the often hegemonic and Island collective self’ (2009a: 66).

This is true not just for Samoans but for people from across the Pacific. Many of the second and later generation people I engaged with had struggled with acceptance from both sides of their identifying communities. Some had endured bullying by their Pasifika family and friends, often in reference to not being authentically Pasifika ‘enough’, with such insults being directed at them as *fia palagi* (wanting to be white) ‘plastic’ (a common insult directed at non-white people who are perceived as trying to be white), or ‘*panipopo’*, a reference to a white Samoan sweet, by their (often older) Pasifika community. One second-generation Tongan woman said the following of her parents and aunties:

*I feel there’s still a lot of ignorance...we grow up in a culture, that sort of gives us a very tunnel goal, and we don’t know how to be open minded to that*
beyond our culture. And through personal experience, I know, like my Aunties, or just people who don’t know better – they would rather, you know, share negative thoughts, instead of being really open and to learning. I don’t know, it’s a pride thing.

While there can be a dissonance between these second and later generation diasporic Pasifika peoples and their older community members, they also struggle with inhabiting the space of “other” by white Australia, often being asked where they are from, having assumptions made about their abilities, and enduring lowered expectations. An Australian-born man of Cook Island heritage said people at his Sydney-based University often assume he is an international student because of the colour of his skin and he has to regularly correct them: ‘I’m a born and bred Aussie!’, and one of my New Zealand born Samoan friends had a white Australian woman in Melbourne tell her ‘you speak really well for how you look’. It is often in sport where these young diasporic Pasifika peoples feel most comfortable being “between” the competing identities of Pasifika and Australian, and indeed where they can feel whole and like they belong. It can reflect the doubleness of their Australian/New Zealand-Pasifika identities, especially in rugby league with its large cohort of Pasifika role models.

This is part of the paradox of sport, it can play the role of both oppressor and emancipator, both sides of which are visibly apparent in Pasifika masculine identity in Australia. Men I interviewed could be brought to tears with the injustices they perceived in the rugby league community in Australia, while in the very next sentence describe their love and passion for the game. It is therefore important to move away from the western-centric ‘sport for development’ discourse which often assumes sport will in itself develop external factors, such as social capital (Spracklen, Long and Hylton 2015), or the advancement of educational or economic goals (Jeanes et al. 2013), and which has a tendency to assume that ‘sports development’ will result in better conditions for indigenous or diasporic minorities without properly considering the everyday complexities of the groups with which it engages (Judd and Butcher 2015). It is also why the importance of sports cannot be disregarded. Instead, if we consider the creative elements of sports engagement and the contradictions it so often places people in, we can get a better understanding of what parts of it do help, what
parts might actually hinder, and what parts need improving.

Besnier argues that sport incorporates many aspects of human social life, and is an important realm of social inquiry because it provides:

- a nexus of body, multiplex identities, and multilayered governance structures, combined with a performance genre that possesses qualities of play, liminality, and storytelling, that enables us to explore the connections among these dynamics in a unique way (2012: 454).

Focusing on joy and play provides a key to better understanding the power of sports, as something more than a means to some other development goal, for different peoples around the world. As Sutton-Smith argues, the ‘constant modern tendency’ to think of play, games, sports and festivals ‘as simply a function of some other more important cultural process…tends to underestimate the autonomy of such play cultures’ (1997: 106). All mammalian life plays, and every society engages in playful activity – from ritual and courtship, to sports and creative arts. Sport is often presented as the most structured and universally recognisable form of play, and yet its playful elements are often not considered in “serious” sporting literature (Besnier and Brownell 2012). Play is not simply non-reality, frivolity and silliness, it a serious social tool, and its creative, performative, and spectacular elements are important in sports for different groups of people. The combination of these elements can be a major part of sport’s appeal, especially to diasporic Pasifika peoples, who, as this chapter argues, often struggle with a concrete sense of belonging. Sport shares many similarities with notions of vā, which is also creative, performative, and maintained through active service. The vā also has aesthetic elements, requiring harmony and beauty to be properly nourished, which, as I argued in the previous chapter, form a significant part of modern rugby league (and other sports).

By acknowledging both the powers and pitfalls of rugby league for Australia’s Pasifika diaspora, and drawing attention to how both often coexist within the perceptions and practices of Pasifika peoples, I am trying to shed light on the complexities of what sport brings to indigenous people’s lives on an everyday level, both good and bad, and what sport offers in and of itself rather than as a means to an
end. The current position of male Pasifika rugby league players asks a number of questions about the paradoxical position of not only sport, but Pasifika identity, including how one negotiates the push-pull factors coming from every angle when you are both part of an indigenous diaspora in a white-majority nation and you play a colonially introduced and run sport where your people, or your men at least, are fast becoming a majority. Only when we fully grasp the nuances of Pasifika people’s relationship with rugby league and racism in Australia, can we use this knowledge to potentially help Pasifika heritage become something more powerful, meaningful, and above all, helpful, to the growing international Pasifika diaspora.

Conclusion
In this chapter I have tried to look more specifically at some of the everyday issues facing the Australian Pasifika diaspora when it comes to sport, and to tie this in with an explicit discussion on my own positionality and how the research process weaves my participant’s worlds and mine together. I have highlighted some of the pressures that need negotiating in order to claim a Pasifika indigeneity in Australian sports, including issues around authority and who can speak for who, such as with the Body Pacifica exhibition. I argued that sport can be an important place of joy and unmediated feelings, including the dramatic and aesthetic, which it shares with art and the vā. I discussed some of my own experiences with this space in order to not only bridge the gap between myself and my participant’s love of sports, but to also give a sense of some of the unmediated and mundane sensory feelings one gets in preparing for and playing with others on a team. Sport can be valued in and of itself, not just as a means to an end, but as a place of pleasure and belonging, as well as both opening up avenues for powerful refashonings of diasporic Pasifika identity, and presenting pitfalls and difficulties. It can be both an aggravator and reliever of social tensions, with Pasifika peoples themselves often holding this paradox simultaneously, seeing both the potential and the limitations of rugby league for Pasifika communities in Australia. Central to much of this paradox is the quotidian nature of sport and the everyday engagement Pasifika peoples have with their sporting habitus including the joy, meaning and belonging they find in sports, particularly rugby league with its growing community of Pasifika men.
In the next chapter I focus on the issue of masculinity which presents some of the main negative sides of the paradoxes of sport for Pasifika peoples in Australia. I argue that the popular rhetorics around Pasifika men in rugby league in Australia are far removed from how Pasifika men themselves see their position in the sport. I discuss the merging of postcolonial, hegemonic and hyper-masculinity at this particular time and place in history, and critique stereotypes of “the natural” and biological determinism whilst arguing for a larger focus on Pasifika epistemologies and concepts, such as the vā, to help us understand more accurately, and with cultural awareness, the dominant position of Pasifika men in rugby league in Australia and how this position can become more meaningful and helpful.

‘As creations of conquest, forms of colonial masculinity are not natural, necessary, or permanent, any more than is colonization itself’ (Morgensen 2015: 39).

Introduction

In this chapter I look at some of the perceptions and practices of masculinity for Pasifika men in Australia’s rugby league community focusing on representations of Pasifika and Polynesian masculinity and how these intersect with Pasifika men’s own understandings of their masculinity. I address how the values and meanings attached to masculinity and the visibility of Pasifika men in rugby league are perceived by diasporic Pasifika communities in Australia, as well as how they are perceived by the wider Australian and, to a lesser extent, New Zealander public. I clarify my understanding of the key concept of masculinity, and address the issue of hyper-masculinity within Australian sports and their relationship to Pasifika men. Continuing my focus on paradoxes and binaries and the liminal spaces in between, I argue that the binaries of masculine/feminine and man/woman have detrimentally affected Pasifika identity and limited them to a western heteronormative framework that ignores the importance of the vā. This chapter addresses Pasifika masculinity in rugby league by considering how these concepts intersect with postcolonialism, both historically and in the contemporary Australian scene, and argues that simplistic stereotypes continue to shape the lives of many Pasifika peoples. Images of the “noble savage” and “fierce warrior” continue to permeate popular perceptions of Pasifika masculinity and this chapter looks at some of the reasons for this and how it affects Pasifika peoples of all genders’ self-perceptions. This chapter is not so much an exposé on what Pasifika masculinity is in any ontological sense, but how it is used and understood, and what this means for the greater Pasifika community. Like femininity, there is no one-size-fits-all definition of masculinity, no accepted and definitive meaning, and the term itself invites justifiable ridicule – it might not even be a helpful term, but it is a popular one, and one that therefore needs to be addressed.
The first question that would often come up when explaining my work to people, especially in the early stages when I was still developing the focus, was why am I looking at men and masculinities, and not at the fascinating and growing world of women in sport? I am a woman after all. There are a number of reasons both for this question and for my answers. I address the possible reasons for the question in Chapter One, where I note that women and indigenous scholars are requested to justify their work far more than white males, for whom, on the most part, the world in all its peculiarities is an open realm of enquiry (bar some very specific female only groups perhaps). “Others” however, are still expected to work within “their own”. I do not however, advocate for all of us having to stop answering these questions, rather that everyone should be made to answer them, including those that have rarely had to. There are some key reasons why masculinity for male-identifying subjects is the focus of this project, which overlap with my reasons for choosing Pasifika and sports research. They include the following:

1. Suicide is the leading cause of death for men under 45 in Australia. Over the past ten years, the number of suicide deaths was approximately three times higher in males than females. In 2015, 75 per cent of people who died by suicide were male (Mindframe 2016) and the rates are severely worse for indigenous and Pasifika Australians, particularly those aged between 15-29 (Institute for Economics and Peace 2016).

2. There have been a number of high-profile suicide cases amongst young Pasifika men who were working towards promising rugby league careers, with at least five in the past four years, and three in 2015 alone.

3. Pasifika friends, family, and informants have told me it is important, often expressing concern about the over-aspiration of young Pasifika men to be in conventionally masculine arenas such as rugby codes and the military, and concerns with violence and mental health in these areas, and there are numerous calls for more work on this topic.

4. Rugby codes are often referred to as ‘hyper-masculine’ and with the large amount of Pasifika involvement in the game, the relationship between hyper-masculinity and Pasifika masculinity is often taken-for-granted as a natural connection without questioning.
5. The issue of “toxic masculinity” is a prominent one in the contemporary zeitgeist, and I believe that by engaging in research that could potentially help men is in effect profoundly helping women.

Suicide and its subsequent mental health issues, Pasifika concern, and high Pasifika involvement in hyper-masculine physical cultures then, are a “perfect storm” of sorts for the powerful and often taken-for-granted phenomenon of masculinity to be unpacked. The saturation of sports across all forms of media, coupled with the rise in Pasifika visibility in these fields where family and community pressures can be very high and ideas around masculinity limiting, can dramatically increase pressure on athletes. Better understandings are needed on the various elements that make this life both so venerated and so difficult for the athletes and their wider diasporic Pasifika communities.

**Historical background**

There are of course vast differences between masculinity and men, much like there are between gender and sex (see Butler 1993). My focus is on people who identify as male and whose identity as such would unlikely be questioned by the dominant patriarchal masculine ideals of the contemporary west. To play in the NRL you have to physiologically identify as male, and prove your ability to compete with other men in physical contest.21 Whereas men are individual people, masculinity is a contested and shifting terrain of embodied identity politics, and one that can be applied to all genders. As Hokowhitu argues;

…there is nothing biologically determined or culturally essentialist about masculine oppression, yet the men produced through ideologically dominant forms of masculinity are very real and have very real consequences for women and other men (Hokowhitu 2015: 87).

21 At time of writing a professional women’s AFL league had just been launched to significant acclaim, but the most elite levels of the top five spectator team sports in Australia – AFL, rugby league, soccer, cricket and rugby union – are still male-only. At the end of 2018 a women’s NRL launched with four of the first grade men’s clubs entering women’s teams into a national competition that ran during finals season of the men’s NRL and is set to continue with the same format in 2019.
In other words, while masculinity is a trope, with no “real” meaning, it nevertheless has very “real” consequences and is tied up with powerful historical and political influences (Besnier et al. 2018). It is a term with certain political connotations which change according to time and place, and is a contested and fluid term. It has no inherent physiological root, and yet it has played, and continues to play, an enormous role in shaping embodied social structures, not least, that of sports and indigeneity. The quote above of Hokowhitu’s is taken from Innes and Anderson’s edited collection of essays on indigenous men and masculinities which takes masculinity scholarship from framings of that-which-is-not-feminine, to also consider that-which-is-white, two colonial patriarchal structures of western masculinity, and what R. W. Connell terms ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell 1987). One of the objectives of indigenous masculinity studies is to explore, and presumably help break down, the patriarchal nature of white mainstream masculinity. As such, many indigenous masculinity theorists draw on Connell’s Gramscian/feminist term applying it to questions of race and indigeneity.

Hegemonic masculinity refers to ‘the currently most honored way of being a man’ (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832) – the culturally idealised form of masculine character – whether it be representative of actual men or not. Hawaiian scholar, Ty P. Kāwika Tengan, argues that the concept of hegemonic masculinities has helped us see how patriarchal structures have been legitimised and other masculinities and femininities have been marginalised (Tengan 2008: 15). Hegemonic masculinity is not just a classificatory concept which places masculinity over femininity, but particular types of masculinity over other forms of masculinity – including white-European heterosexual masculinity over other ‘subaltern’ forms, including homosexual and indigenous masculinities. Tengan argues that ‘Hegemonic masculinities and subaltern masculinities should not be seen as two homogenous, discrete productions that are separated by distinct boundaries’ (2008: 15), they are rather, part of a spectrum and deeply tied to politics of power – what is considered “proper”, “real”, or “true” masculinity is influenced by those it aims to serve, this is the hegemonic.

We can use the concept of vā here to think about the spaces between the binary of hegemonic and subaltern masculinity, as well as other spaces between
heteronormative gender and sexuality categories. Pasifika gender norms have engaged
with the vā for centuries, Samoan fa‘afafine for example, are often said to possess a
gender fluid identity, or as Besnier puts it, a ‘gender liminal’ space (1994). Like sport,
masculinity is both real and unreal – something we create but with potentially very
real consequences. Thinking simultaneously about masculinity in rugby league for
Pasifika peoples in Australia whilst also holding a concept of betweenness and the
Pasifika relational spaces of vā in our minds – the connections between people in their
sporting, sexual, and other identities – can help us open up better avenues for
understanding Pasifika masculinity than the tired and stereotypical ones of colonial
influence.

The quote from Morgensen at the beginning of this chapter – ‘As creations of
conquest, forms of colonial masculinity are not natural, necessary, or permanent, any
more than is colonization itself’ (2015: 39) – is taken from Innes and Anderson’s
collection and the editors make a similar argument in their introduction, where they
argue that the ‘hegemonic masculinity that is perpetuated through white supremacist
patriarchy’ has come to be accepted and internalised by indigenous men as a ‘result of
the colonization of their lands, minds, and bodies’ (Innes and Anderson 2015: 10).
These arguments, while being in reference to the Americas specifically, can be
applied to the colonisation of Pasifika masculinity in Australia, and the internalisation
of hyper-masculine football cultures in this country. There is nothing natural about
Pasifika men playing such a dominant role in rugby league, nor is there something
“authentic” about the warrior and noble savage discourse so many associate with
Pasifika masculinity, they have come about from years of (post)colonial influence.

Contemporary effects: The male Pasifika body and the myth of the “natural”
As discussed, there are many complex social and historical reasons for the increase of
Pasifika men in rugby league but the one that stands out in popular culture, and often
the first that comes to people’s minds when prompted to talk about this over-
representation is the male Pasifika body. The stereotyping of this body is rife,
throughout colonial history, within contemporary sports, and more broadly in the
three economic powerhouses of the Pacific triangle (Australia, New Zealand, and the
United States). In popular sporting discourse, Pasifika men are represented as
“naturally” gifted footballers – fast, agile, big, and childlike – part of what Grainger
calls the ‘cult of Pacific primitivism’ (Grainger 2009: 49). Hokowhitu’s work often highlights the purposeful and structured ways Māori were pushed away from intellectual pursuits by British colonialists, and into physical ones, including the playing of rugby. He argues that natural New Zealand Māori athleticism was a myth created by British colonialism aimed to enslave Māori in manual pursuits rather than intellectual ones (2004: 269) and he presents some extraordinary historical evidence of the awareness of Māori intelligence and the calculated attempts to deny this through symbolically and physically moving Māori out of the classroom and into manual labour (2004: 267). This, he argues, was in order to justify the ruling of them, but also to create a manual workforce (ibid) and draw a line between physical and intellectual, a line I argue permeates discourse around Pasifika men in sports to this day. This construction of Māori (men) as athletic and manual was to paint them with the same brush being used by colonialists in the Pacific more broadly where the illusion of the ‘noble savage’ was central (Hokowhitu 2004, 2009, 2013) – man in his natural uncorrupted state, embodying an unenlightened simplicity, devotion and naivety (Besnier 2014: 273; Grainger 2009: 52; Spivak 1999). This view was mixed with the twin idea that Māori and other Pasifika men were “natural warriors”, and together these stereotypes have helped create and sustain the myths of natural Pasifika athleticism and the focus on their physical attributes.

There are a number of groups and awareness campaigns aimed at Pasifika men in Australia and New Zealand, which focus on how to be a good man, or a “real” man, where reframing “tough” Pasifika masculinity and its detrimental effects on mental health and family are foregrounded. I met a number of men in Sydney from the Kiwi Daddy’s who focus on men’s mental health and its relationship to family violence and family wellbeing, and who have a large Sydney cohort made up mainly of Māori and Pasifika men. Through social media and events they share stories and try to raise awareness about stereotypical masculinity and how it detrimentally affects both men’s mental health, and the health of their families. Another group I encountered was in Auckland, called Man Up, which is run in conjunction with the controversial fundamentalist Pentecostal Christian church, Destiny Church (also largely run and attended by Māori and Pasifika people, and which I expand on in Chapter Seven). It also tried to reframe “better masculinity” around family dynamics and was explained to me by a Māori man as a space to become a better father, for men who have been
through a lot, particularly those coming out of prison. With these groups, the ‘most
honoured way of being a man’ is being reimagined to try and combat a number of
issues affecting Pasifika diasporas in Australia and New Zealand including mental
illness and suicide, and family violence. How successful they are in doing this is
outside the scope of this research, but it is worth noting what they identify as
detrimental aspects of masculinity, and how relationality is used to try to combat
these (expanded on in Chapter Seven).

The media plays a critical role in disseminating representations of and to Pasifika
people, both stereotyping and promoting Pasifika masculinities. This is largely due to
the commercialisation of rugby league. Sport is currently the dominant arena for
positive Pacific participation on the Australian social and cultural landscape, and
consequently it is the Pacific Islander male who is the most visible, most notably the
Polynesian male as opposed to Melanesian or Micronesian (Teaiwa 2016: 111)
despite Fijians and Papua New Guineans starting to gain popularity within rugby
league. Unlike New Zealand or the United States, there are very few Pasifika focused
organisations and programs in Australia (Teaiwa 2016: 117) leaving the prolific
media attention of rugby league players to disseminate most discourse on “Pacific-
ness” across the country. These images and the discourse that goes with them often
present Pasifika men as bodies without minds – corporeally gifted for high impact
contact sports, but lacking in discipline or leadership.

In the Australian sports media, certain words that echo the colonial image of Pacific
male “natural athleticism” are used repeatedly to describe “Pasifika styles” of play.
“Flamboyant”, “undisciplined”, “unpredictable”, “exciting”, “flair”, “warriors”,
“flying”, “quick”, and “powerful” are all in familiar rotation when discussing Pasifika
rugby players. Former representative league coach Graham Lowe recently made a
statement saying that ‘The NRL clubs continue to develop Polynesian players because
of their explosive power...at the cost of developing their own Australian players’
(Ritchie 2015, emphasis mine). There are two problems with this quote – firstly it
separates Polynesians from Australians, denying Polynesian claims to
“Australianness”, despite the fact many, if not most, Polynesian NRL players are born

22 Followed by rugby union which is not as accessible outside of private education or pay-television
subscriptions in Australia, but is nevertheless popular among Pasifika communities.
in Australia and as we have seen, often consider themselves a double of Pasifika and Australian identities; and secondly, it naturalises the skills of Polynesians by claiming they are developed because of their ‘explosive power’, as opposed to their hard work, dedication, or any other skill that one must cultivate in order to be an elite athlete.

Even in what could be classified as pro-Pasifika stories, stereotypical images abound, such as a recent *Sydney Morning Herald* piece, which, while praising the increase of Polynesians in Australian rugby, attributed their success to ‘talent and sheer numbers’ (Murphy 2011) – another two natural factors. Grainger points out that the consequence of these types of stereotypes is that

brown sporting masculinity is overdetermined from the outside as both physical and natural. The net effect is that the racialization – what could be termed, imputed otherness – of athletic ability is seen as so natural that it requires no comment at all (2009: 47 emphasis in original).

These qualities are taken for granted, and no critical comment is indeed what dominates the media discourse on Pasifika rugby league players.

During my fieldwork I saw and heard about a lot of manifestations of the “natural masculinity” of the Pasifika rugby player being internalised by Pasifika boys, with a significant number pronouncing rugby league as their ultimate, and often only goal in life, at the expense of developing more realistic career goals or alternative options. The perception is that sport is the only hope for young Pasifika men – the only way to provide, survive and thrive. This is particularly common among Pasifika men who have been told they are “naturally” gifted footballers all their lives, and not been told they are good at much else. In response to the survey question ‘What things have you been told you're good at? In life and/or in sports?’ one young Fijian woman responded ‘I haven't been told what I'm good at, so have had to define that myself’. In response to the next question – ‘what things have you been told you’re bad at? In life and/or in sports?’ a New Zealand born Samoan Australian responded ‘I was told a lot of negative things as a young person growing up in my family. My parents told me I was stupid, I wasn't good at much’. This respondent was very involved in sports, rugby league and union, as well as other sports and saw sport as extremely important. The
Fijian female on the other hand did not like sports, and was focused on being accepted into a Master’s program, helping her family, and being a good Christian.

Young men in particular can internalise the expectations of being sporty and masculine, and pressure each other, as a Samoan born schoolboy expressed to me:

Like sometimes the guys that enjoy rugby, they call others – sometimes you don’t wanna hear about it – like pussies and things like that, like ‘why can’t you play rugby when you’re an Islander?’ ‘Why the other Islanders can play rugby and you can’t?’ But you know everyone’s got a different plan, you might not wanna play rugby, you probably wanna be in the army or something that’s different, I think it’s too much pressure on the other Islander kids.

While this teenage boy wanted to be a teacher himself, he believed that a footballing or army career were the two dominant arenas for his Pasifika brothers. As one of my Samoan friends put it – rugby codes may be ‘the first horse out of the blocks’ for young Pasifika men in Sydney and Auckland, but a military career closely follows for many. As Calabro writes of Māori boys specifically but which we can relate to young Pasifika men more broadly; ‘To many rangatahi (Māori youth), [the army] is one of the few options available for a Māori man to secure an income and express his identity—and a more realistic option than a rugby career’ (2016: 235-6).

Many young Pasifika boys in Sydney desire a professional footballing career, as my participants demonstrated. A Fijian academic and social worker who runs initiatives with Pasifika kids and rugby league in Sydney’s west talked about the huge over-representation of the aspiration to be a rugby league player among Pasifika kids. When I asked him what he saw as some of the key barriers for Pacific peoples trying to make it in the game, he answered:

We see a very large proportion of men, of boys, saying I just want to be a rugby league player, some union, but mainly league and I think...there’s a couple of issues – the first one is obviously that not many make it to that level, and it’s not just about competency or skill, it’s just the amount of opportunities. You know, we’ve got hundreds that come through but only a
very few are selected for the various squads...and this is where a lot of issues come for Pacific [kids]...[the] high aspiration to be a league player, at 14, 15, they get scouted, get signed, and they just go ‘this is it.’ I mean they’re not even really receiving any income from it, but they just think that they’re set. Progress on...and then get retained for a period of time and then get to a point where they can’t go any further. Now they’re progressed within that development stage where you’re creating an identity for yourself with an underlying notion that I’m going to be the next, you know, whoever-star-player, and I think that can be an issue in itself, because how do we counteract some of those strong aspirations towards other aspirations that create a more realistic grounding – if I don’t make it as a player, I’m going to fall back on this other vocation.

This was confirmed a number of times during my fieldwork, with nearly every Pasifika person I interviewed having at least one story of a male family member or close friend being heavily involved in rugby, and having a hard time when they did not ‘make it’. As one of my participants said of Pasifika peoples in Sydney, ‘they all have ties to some game, some way, someone in the family’. It was often perceived as a way out of low socioeconomic conditions, and a way to serve family and community, ‘to give back’ as was one of the most popular terms of phrase amongst my participants (and which I expand on later).

There is also often intense pressure put on young Pasifika boys from their families to play and do well in rugby, even if a boy seemed to have more passion and skill in a different sport, such as cricket, or if they had no interest in sport whatsoever. If Pasifika boys are big and not interested in rugby they will often be admonished for it and asked why they do not play. A cricket coach in Auckland told me of young Pasifika boys he had seen who were naturally gifted cricketers but whose families did not ‘understand the game’ and did not show support, instead pushing their sons to play a rugby code. It is not making any giant leap to suggest that this is partly due to the popular perceptions of the “natural Pasifika rugby player” where we can see the

---

23 Often a combination of both league and union.
effects of this idea permeate with both the potential players themselves, and amongst their families.

During this and other conversations I had throughout my fieldwork, I could feel the familiar narrative of “hoop dreams” in the United States echoing as “field dreams” in South Auckland and Western Sydney. Where less than one per cent of people who try to make it to a professional level will actually get there (and then usually only for a very short time), the necessity for a “plan B” is critical. As Eitzen argues, ‘Confusing the possibility with the probability of sporting success has sustained the “myth” of upward mobility through sport for marginalized populations for decades’ (Eitzen 2009 cited in Uperesa and Mountjoy 2014: 273 emphasis in original). When you are told from a very young age that sport is the only option for upward mobility, that you are a “natural sportsman”, this can become a problem if that dream does not work out (Brooks 2011).

A 28-year-old second-generation Cook Island Māori man born in Sydney told me he wanted to be a professional sportsman from the age of about six and was obsessed with sports from the moment he could walk. He was heavily involved in rugby league and union growing up, as was his father who refereed at a semi-professional level. Despite this sustained contact, he never thought about the option to work in sports in a non-athletic capacity. He was doing his Masters in sports management and working for a rugby league organisation when I interviewed him in March 2017, and said he never would have thought it was possible if it had not been for a tweet he happened to see from a lecturer asking for people to do the Masters. He said there were very few Pacific Islanders in sports administration and that the lack of role models in this area could have something to do with it. Despite his, and many other Pasifika people’s sports-heavy backgrounds, very few move into off-field sporting roles, particularly in the upper levels of administration and management. In the NRL where player numbers are nearing 50 per cent Pasifika, the numbers in management and administration were estimated to be less than 10 per cent by NRL employees I spoke with, and of the 16 first grade NRL teams in 2017, only two had captains of Pasifika
heritage. This is slowly starting to change, as this man and others exemplify, but the distinctions made between physical and intellectual capacity, I suggest, continue to plague Pasifika sporting dreams.

**Stereotypical Pasifika game play and hyper-masculinity**

As much of Hokowhitu’s work argues, and as we can see from historical records (e.g. Karehu 1993), European colonisers in New Zealand utilised numerous tactics to emphasise the hyper-masculinity and machoism of Māori, and because enlightened reason was understood as being antithetical to the brute strength of hyper-masculine physicality, Māori were effectively excluded from the upper echelon of “enlightened being”. One small way Pākehā did this was through mistranslating Māori texts to make them seem more patriarchal than they were, including mistranslating the now famous *ka mate haka*, usually performed before an All Blacks game. The original meaning of the *ka mate* lyrics, according to Māori scholar Timote Karehu, included a reference to the power of female genitalia in neutralising one’s enemies. As Chief Te Rauparaha seeks refuge in a *kumera* (sweet potato) pit in Chief Te Wharerangi’s village, the wife of Chief Te Wharerangi sits over the entrance to the pit to hide him and neutralise the chants of his enemies trying to flush him out. Jackson and Hokowhitu remind us ‘in Māori culture it was believed that women’s genitals could not only neutralize chants but embodied considerable power’ (2002: 129). By sitting over the pit the genitalia of the Chief’s wife protects the other Chief from their enemies, and as he hears them retreating he utters the famous words *Ka mate, ka mate. Ka ora, ka ora. Ka mate, ka mate* (I die; I die. I live; I live. I die; I die), he then exclaims “*Ka ora, ka ora. Tenei te tangata puhurupuhuru nana nei i tiki mai whakawhiti te ra,*” (I live; I live. For this is the hairy man who has fetched the sun and caused it to shine again). The ‘hairy man’ is a reference to the woman’s genitals but most Pākehā translations have denounced this meaning, such as sports writer Spiro Zavos, who thought the meaning was incongruous to Māori masculinity and claimed that:

> Māori culture is male hegemonic…it is implausible that the All

---

24 These were the New Zealand Warriors and Newcastle Knights. There were also two Aboriginal Australian captains in 2017 (for the Gold Coast Titans and the South Sydney Rabbitohs). Men of European descent captained the other 12 teams.
Blacks…would embrace a *haka* that had such embarrassing connotations…The hairy man in this *haka* is an archetype of strength, a figure of power, capable of bringing about the triumph of life over death (1998: 71-73 cited in Jackson and Hokowhitu 2002: 129-30).

As Jackson and Hokowhitu lament, ‘Thus, a Maori interpretation of the *Ka Mate haka* is rejected, not because it has been shown to be illegitimate but rather on the basis that it threatens male power and in particular White male power’ (ibid). I would add that the use of the word ‘embarrassing’ by Zavos also tells us a lot about white patriarchy, where shame is attached to female sex and the mentioning of female sexual organs, highlighting that the processes of dehumanising and feminising share significant similarities (see also Innes and Anderson 2015; Tengan and Markham 2009).

Significant problems with indigenous masculinity today seem to be about trying to regain something that has been erased and transformed by colonial processes. Attempts to “go back” to what it meant to be masculine pre-colonisation and western imperialism fail however, because it is impossible to go back without the learned contemporary contexts of masculinity. Just like the diasporic identities being refashioned by Pasifika peoples in Australia, it is less about going back and reclaiming, than it is about refashioning, using more of one’s own indigenous concepts, and less western categorisations. This frees one from the false notion that a people can be stripped back until the “truth” appears. What is indigenous has been manipulated by systematic destruction of indigenous understandings, meaning that what is attempted to be salvaged is a bastardised version of what really came before, for example, that Polynesian cultures were male patriarchies in the way we understand those terms today. The power of the feminine has all but been eradicated by years of colonial white male-lead thinking, as the story of the *ka mate haka* lends evidence to. The patriarchy of Polynesian cultures has been significantly shaped in response to western colonisation and imperialism, as have many other cultural identities across the globe (see James 2006; 2015). We can see this in the American constitution where the notion that ‘all men are born equal’ existed seemingly un-hypocritically side-by-side with slavery, because the ‘all’ in ‘all men’ did not mean men physiologically, but those deserving of the status, – “proper men” – those who displayed hegemonic masculinity – those who were white. Women, indigenous, or
black men were dehumanised and therefore not included in the celebratory democratic way of thinking based on supposed equality and freedom (see Fanon 1952).

Often western sports studies perpetuate racial stereotypes of Pasifika men with their focus on “flair” promoting a particular style of flamboyant, undisciplined, unpredictable, and exciting game play (see Clement 2014). An informant of Panapa and Phillips’s study with the NRL stated that he felt ‘his skills were not recognized, or developed, and he was stereotyped as a particular type of player who only performs certain tasks based on the preconceptions of the coaching staff’ (2014: 1381). The authors go on to argue that experiences such as this ‘reflect international examples of minority groups or specific “racial” groups who are coerced or forced to play a certain style or in a specific position that does not necessarily reflect their achievement or ability’ (2014: 1381). An ex-professional NRL player shared a similar story with me, where his speed and size impressed the coaches so much that they ignored other areas where he obviously needed help, including alcoholism and depression. In each of these cases there is the assumption that a certain type of body will produce a certain type of game-play. These dominant representations of “Pasifika styles” of play derive from largely unquestioned colonial tropes that tend to lump all Islanders in together effectively ignoring diverse skill.

These Pasifika styles of play are also often presented in opposition to leaders and “working men”– who are invariably represented by the white man, possibly the captain, who is presented as disciplined, focused and smart – able to read the game, lead the boys, and dig in when the going gets tough. There is far less mention of cultivated skills and hard work in popular depictions of Pasifika men, and a reliance on more “natural” elements, such as their size, speed and physical power. They are lauded for the spectacle they provide in a highly commercial world where visibly exciting game play is a must, but they are rarely allowed to cross the invisible line separating that style from the captains, the leaders, the men in charge; or in other words, the predominantly white men.

An example of this is how Simon Mannering, one of the few Pākehā players for the NRL’s New Zealand Warriors, is talked about in the media compared to his Pasifika teammates. Commentators and spectators alike often refer to him as ‘the work horse’,
and he is lauded for his reliability and leadership. As one reporter stated, he has ‘over the years…earned a reputation as a skilled player who always works hard for the team and is absolutely reliable’ (Canterbury blog 2015a). It has become a joke in pub banter to mumble inaudibly along with the words ‘Mannering’ and ‘work horse’ to which people laugh and nod in understanding – it is a cliché to say that Mannering is a reliable work horse. In contrast, Simon’s long-term teammate Manu Vatuvai, a New Zealander of Tongan descent, is nicknamed ‘The Beast’, and is often the butt of jokes about ‘Islander hands’, which refers to a stereotype about Pacific Islander’s hands being too big to catch the ball. He is generally considered a player of great skill, but unreliable and inconsistent. In the words of the same blog writing about Mannering, he ‘terrorises’ the other team with ‘speed and power’ (Canterbury blog 2015b).

Watching a Warriors game at a pub in Sydney one night in 2016, my husband Ash and I were approached by a white Australian man who made a comment about Ash’s New Zealand t-shirt. He made a comment in that classic Australian “banter” kind of way, about Ash ‘being on the wrong team’, and proceeded to tell him about the ‘Islanders ruining the game’, not being able to catch the ball, followed by an ‘ah, but you’re not allowed to say that anymore are you?’ He quickly moved on after a negative response from my husband. His comment is just one example of the quotidian racism found in Australia against Pasifika men in rugby league, and indigenous men in sports in general. No Pasifika player in the game being watched had dropped the ball but it was a stereotype at the top of this man’s mind and one he presumably thought worth sharing with a New Zealander because of their majority-Pasifika NRL team. His final comment on ‘not being allowed’ to make racist comments ‘anymore’ is a common sentiment found in many aspects of Australian culture, where some perceive anti-racism as a form of political correctness that hides the reality of what white people are “really” thinking. My husband, being a sportsman with Māori heritage but who looks Pākehā, and who only moved to Australia eight years ago, has been faced with numerous situations like this which have come as a shock to him compared to his time living in New Zealand. Men in his football (soccer) team have made numerous racist remarks about Aboriginal people, and online they have shared stories with great delight about the sexist and racist nature of sports personalities they admire, often with the qualification that they know it is not ‘politically correct’ but that is presumably part of the fun.
In contrast to the “natural” Pasifika qualities so often referenced by the media and the wider public, the words my participants used when asked ‘what makes a good rugby player?’ and ‘what do Pasifika people bring to the game?’ have been surprisingly different. I have asked at least 30 Pasifika men what qualities make a good rugby league/union player, and not one mentioned speed, power or showmanship, let alone being ‘a beast’ or ‘warrior’. Qualities they expressed as important included: creativity, flexibility, resilience, humbleness, being communal, friendly, hard-working, malleable, intelligent, and having passion, commitment, and trust in your self, teammates and coach. I asked a group of three teenage Polynesian boys in Auckland if they had a message for others about being a good rugby player, and a 16 year old Samoan-born boy wanted to share his favourite quote: ‘hard work will always beat talent when talent don’t work hard’. These characteristics are in stark contrast to the “hyper-physical/natural” rhetoric we are so used to hearing about Pasifika players in mainstream media.

As mentioned, rugby league in Australia is often referred to as ‘hyper-masculine’ (Georgakis and Russell 2011; Hogg 2013). It is a place where men perform in visceral spectacles of vigorous activity with little to no protective gear. They run, jump, swerve, tackle, scrimmage, kick, and perform all sorts of physically difficult feats. It is a place where hyperbole runs thick and fast, war-like metaphors are rife, and women are either absent or peripheral.25 The fields are commonly referred to as ‘battle-grounds’, the men ‘warriors’, and the games ‘legendary’. Media attention is prolific, particularly in Sydney where the majority of NRL teams are based, and the major NSW and QLD newspapers have dedicated sections to the sport, even in the off-season, most of which are focused on men. Its media presence is large and even if one does not participate in the game in any way, its presence in popular culture is unavoidable across the Eastern Australian states of NSW and QLD, still highly visible in VIC and to a lesser degree across Australia. What does it mean then, to have such a popular sport be perceived as hyper-masculine? Many people talk about these sports

---

25 Rugby league is also played by women and children, and is a popular spectator sport for women and families. In the last five years there has been an increase in female hosts and reporters in televised games, women in the higher ranks of corporate leadership, and welfare and education initiatives aimed at increasing female participation and educating men about their rights and responsibilities towards women. Regardless, it is dominated by men, and controversies around violence against women continue to occur at an alarming rate.
as being hyper-masculine but it is difficult to find any clarification on what the term actually means, even in Diaz’s excellent treatment of Pasifika masculinity in American Football, he neglects to define his use of hyper-masculinity (2011) as do most authors on the subject.

When something gains the prefix “hyper” it often exemplifies an extreme case of that which it precedes. Hyper-manic, hyper-managerial, hyper-critical for example, would be considered in excess, over doing it, or too much – the “hyper” is considered surplus. You can be praised for being critical, but may be questioned if you are being hyper-critical. If you are successfully managing a team or business, you are probably not considered hyper-managerial. It is not only considered as wasted and unnecessary energy, but can be detrimental – nobody likes to be criticised or managed to the extreme. What then is the meaning of the hyper in hyper-masculine? While many sports scholars draw on this term, I have found very little explanation or analysis of the term itself – what does it mean for masculinity when we add this prefix? Is there a surplus of masculinity in hyper-masculinity?

One clue might lie in its common rejection as a term by those most likely to be accused of it. When asked if they thought rugby league was hyper-masculine, almost all of my participants responded in the negative. A Māori NRL employee laughed off the suggestion, interpreting hyper-masculinity as simply being ‘competitive’ and ‘wanting to win’ and that rugby league players have to have these qualities. He also suggested that, in general, Pasifika men thrive off the stereotype that they are good at these things. He said that what was destructive was when they are thrown into a competitive world at a very young age that by the time they reach a professional level they have never had to make a decision for themselves:

Players have little empowerment – they’re told where to go, when, what to eat, drink, say, look etc. and it’s hard when they’re told everything and then let go on the weekends and just expected to make good decisions when they’ve had no practice. They need to be taught leadership and given a voice, empowered to make more of their own decisions. Some clubs are getting better awareness of this.
He was referring here to the pattern of violence, drug and alcohol abuse or other bad decisions many young rugby league players make and thought it was less about having some surplus of masculinity, and more about being given autonomy from a younger age. We should remember that the NRL is an organisation that relies on the performances of young men, often as young as 18 or 19, and rarely older than their early thirties. According to psychological research in the UK (Reniers et al. 2016), this is the most risk-taking group, compared to women the same age, and men and women in other age groups. They are at an age most people older would probably agree is the one where you make most mistakes and possibly, bad choices. They are also the demographic most likely to be chastised for their mistakes. As Besnier argues, there is a surprising consistency across the world’s societies where it is common for older people ‘to blame younger men for the ills of society, denouncing them as lazy, uncooperative, disrespectful, and irresponsible’ (2015: 3).

It is easy to forget that the heroes, villains and sports stars we admire and admonish on a regular basis are often very young, particularly rugby league stars who can look deceptively older. As someone in her early thirties, I still often get a shock when I realise most of the men I watch playing rugby league are younger than me, sometimes more than a decade so! We may ask though, why do the poor choices made by rugby league players so often seem to go hand-in-hand with hyper-masculine and highly hetero-normatively created spaces like elite rugby league?

The hyper-masculine rugby player is an ambivalent figure, and one tenuously tied to hegemonic masculinity, itself a term based in ideals rather than reality, and it is certainly not limited to Pasifika or indigenous males. As Hogg argues of masculinity in Australia in general,

Throughout history a succession of male stereotypes – the bushman, the digger, the surf lifesaver – have celebrated Australia as a (white) man’s country. These stereotypes stand for the characteristics by which Australians define themselves: resourceful, anti-authoritarian, brave, physically strong and sticking by our mates. To most Australians these are virtues. But they are accompanied by a number of other attributes that might not be so positive:
stoical, resistant to emotion, and inarticulate about feelings (Hogg 2013; see also Ward 1958).

The dominance of the Pasifika rugby league player both challenges and exemplifies this discourse. He challenges the rhetoric of Australian identity as white, but he also exemplifies the qualities of the “good” man being tough and unemotional.

Pasifika masculinity has to deal with a myriad of simplified and contradictory stereotypes. There is the stereotypical rugby player – tough, big, stoic, “hyper-masculine”. Along similar lines are the hyper-masculine labour roles he is popularly depicted as occupying, such as a security officer/bouncer, or other labour-intensive jobs that reinforces the idea of brawn over brains. But there is also the Pasifika man as modest, religious, “childlike” in his devotion, humble and shy. There is the stereotype of the Pasifika man as a “mummy’s boy” – needing to be looked after by strong, protective Pasifika mothers, devoted to family, and brought up with negative reinforcement, physical punishment and an enforced respect for his elders. There is also the Pasifika man as good father and bad father – traditionally a very involved and loving father and leader was the highest position a Pasifika man could achieve. In more modern depictions he is neglectful, abusive, alcoholic, involved in the prison system, or emotionless. These are of course stereotypes, but they were all mentioned to me by both Pasifika and non-Pasifika peoples during my fieldwork, and I use them to illustrate the paradoxical position Pasifika men are often put in and the discombobulating ways colonialism has shaped their identities. Add to this the contrasting opportunities and limitations sport offers them, and their position as a minority diaspora in Australia, and we only begin to scratch the surface of how these competing oversimplified stereotypes can play a confusing and damaging role in their lives. One of my Fijian participants talked about the difficulties of this in his counselling sessions with NRL players:

All I can say is the stereotyping around any footballer, rugby union, league, the footballer being the epitome of the alpha male can somewhat deter the ability to understand how to emote, how to feel, how to work through, you know, feeling. A lot of my counselling sessions are around being more aware of your thoughts, your feelings, your behaviours. And I think it’s not just
unique to Pasifika, I think that’s across the game, but I do that a lot with Pasifika and I do think that’s not just because of the game but the way in which we’ve been brought up, to not verbally articulate those things, we do it more in the talanoa, in the group setting ... a lot of my sessions are just players dealing with emotions and feelings, and just tears, and whether that’s a gender thing, a sociocultural thing, there’s a lot of intersectionalities.

As mentioned, hyper-masculinity is an oft-used term, but a rarely explained or analysed one. Even in otherwise very rigorous academic literature on hyper-masculinity, explanations of it as a concept are rare. It is safe to say that it carries with it a negative connotation, just like other hyper prefixed terms, as is evidenced by few people wishing to claim the term for themselves. It is often used to criticise sports such as rugby league, and is consequently problematic for Pasifika men, particularly with the colonial history of how they have been perceived. From noble savages and warriors, to hyper-physical and masculine rugby league players, this trajectory misses more culturally aware reasons for Pasifika over-representation in rugby league in Australia. Perhaps counter-intuitively, but part of the complex historical manipulation of indigenous sexualities and gender, is that this trajectory which focuses on brute strength and brawn, also carries with it a feminising framework. Masculinity and femininity are a binary opposite in western thinking, and the vā-like qualities of connection and relational meaning between them has all but been destroyed, largely through Christian shame, and British moralising missions across the Pacific. To not be properly masculine, in popular western thought, is to be feminine, and femininity is not part of a “good man’s” character. There is no space for the vā in this binary, and as such indigenous men have been trying to claw their way out of being feminised and into an arena where they are taken seriously by the white male patriarchy, which often puts them at the hyper-masculine end of the “proper male” spectrum (see Tengan and Markham 2009).

**Esmaculation and feminisation**

These ideals around masculinity can be seen in Hawai‘i with American football. Tengan and Markham (2009) look at the historical shift in the University of Hawai‘i’s (UH) American football team’s image where they decided to rebrand with a more ‘masculine’ image, dropping the ‘Rainbow’ in ‘UH Rainbow Warriors’ and replacing
traditional Hawaiian performances and mascots with the New Zealand Māori haka and ‘warrior’ imagery. Tengan and Markham argue that Polynesian performances of masculinity within the sport embody the larger US-Pacific Islander engagement of US empire, militarism and capitalism, and that ‘Native Hawaiians and other locals have seen the Maori as successfully resisting the colonial feminization that occurred in Hawai‘i and continues to be perpetuated by tourism’ (Tengan and Markham 2009: 2422). They argue that:

football players and spectators alike use performances of Polynesian warriorhood to make claims to an “authentic” pre-colonial and pre-modern masculinity. These claims counter a more general discourse of emasculation – an erasure of men and negation of male efficacy – that has accompanied the colonial process in the Pacific (2009: 2413-4).

This succinct quote sums up much about the emasculation process of Pasifika males in their postcolonial diasporic homelands in the Pacific triangle, and the authors argue that football can be a particularly important site for the practice of Pasifika values (family, spirituality, mana) for Islanders in the diaspora (see also Diaz 2011). Tengan and Markham also critique the common ‘sheer numbers’ narrative where football is presented as one of the few opportunities for upward mobility for Polynesian men, suggesting it is only a small part of the story and ‘a limiting view of factors contributing to the prevalence of Polynesian football players’ (2009: 2413). They do not discount this narrative, and quote people such as NFL player Paul Soliai from American Samoa who said ‘in Samoa there’s only two ways off the rock, you join the army or you get a scholarship for education and sports’ (Tang 2009). This sentiment was shared by my participants too, particularly of American Samoa, where, as one participant said, ‘gridiron’s their ticket out of there, their ticket to get off the island.’ Like Tengan and Markham however, I see this as one small part of how Pasifika men have come to hold the position they do within footballing codes, as well as a position that is itself highly historically inscribed – we should ask, not only why is it one of their only ways ‘off the island’, but also why do they want off?

In male-targeted sports marketing there are many similarities to female-directed beauty marketing where keeping a level of anxiety and of never being quite good
enough is paramount. As Tengan and Markham argue of sports advertising, it often features ‘images of strong, physical, working-class men’ (who are also increasingly dark-skinned I will add), yet these advertisements are targeted at a white middle-class male audience in order to evoke in “softer” men anxieties of modernity’s “feminizing” effects and an envious identification’ (Tengan and Markham 2009: 2414). The image of the ‘black super athlete’ as they call him, reifies a ‘notion of primitive hypermasculinity that is both glorified and demonized’ (ibid) and could be said to create the hyper prefix because of this ambivalence – he is not the hegemonic masculine ideal (because he is black), but he is extremely strong and not “soft”. His presence as a pendulum between the paradox of glorification and demonisation therefore is not hegemonic masculine – it is hyper-masculine.

The merchandising that comes with these images could be viewed as a type of commodity fetishism (Taussig 1980; Tengan and Markham 2009: 2415), and is in full display in the pockets of both Western Sydney and South Auckland’s many clothing stores where there are large Pasifika populations. The Americanism of apparel in South Auckland struck me in particular, where the majority of the population is Pasifika. Not only is sporting merchandise dominant, there is a huge amount of American NBA, NFL and even baseball codes proudly on display. Baseball caps and basketball singlets are particularly popular. Among the suburbs with the highest Pasifika populations, nationally branded apparel was also popular, a lot of it not official, but simply in an American style, with Pacific Island names (see Figure 5).
NRL apparel was also highly visible, followed by All Blacks merchandise which seemed to be more popular in the tourist centres and upper socioeconomic areas. One could argue that the affinity with US sports, particularly those sports with high numbers of non-white players such as the NBA and NFL, appeal to Pasifika peoples because of an affinity with men they see as outside of the hegemonic masculinity of white men, the ‘black super athlete’ as Tengan and Markham refer to him (2009: 2414). There were 43 named athletes given in response to my survey question ‘Who is/are your sporting heroes and why?’ (see Figure 6). Of these, I would classify seven as ‘black super athletes’ in Tengan and Markham’s terms, for example Lebron James, Serena Williams, and Mohammed Ali who were all mentioned, sometimes more than once. Seventy-four per cent of all answers were athletes of an indigenous or African background, with only 26 per cent being of European background (Figure 6). Four respondents mentioned humbleness as the reason why they admired the person/people they did, with five athletes being named, four of whom were indigenous. Another popular reason given for why respondents chose certain ‘sporting heroes’ was the perception of the athletes working hard despite difficult circumstances. One respondent mentioned LeBron James, Valerie Adams, and David Tua, saying ‘They’re all determined sports people who have strong will and came from struggling backgrounds’; Muhammad Ali was mentioned for having ‘moral integrity’; Tongan-
Australian rugby union player Viliami Ofahengaue was chosen because ‘he worked very hard in achieving his goals’ and ‘never forgets where he came from’; and Samoan rugby union players, Mahonri Schwalger and Eliota Fuimaono-Sapolu were mentioned with the reason that they ‘aren’t afraid to stand up to those in charge when they feel the team aren’t being treated fairly! They stand up so the future generations can stand out!’ A lot of these answers also included comments on how these athletes are an ‘inspiration’ to the respondents, and overall lend evidence to the importance of role models one can relate to and the popularity of non-white athletes for Pasifika peoples.

Figure 6. Survey answer percentages to question ‘who is/are your sporting heroes and why?’

| Athletes of an indigenous or African background | 74% |
| Athletes of a European background | 26% |

In Sydney’s western suburbs similar scenes to South Auckland played out but on a smaller scale. With smaller Pasifika populations, and more dispersed multiculturalism, the sporting merchandise has more of a general fitness focus aimed at the broader population. Cheaply made American style basketball singlets are replaced by branded running tops, yoga pants and accessories. A Sydney based man of Samoan descent told me he could easily walk down the street in Auckland in a basketball singlet and lava lava (Samoan sarong), but not in Sydney where he would be likely laughed at, or worse, physically threatened. The exception to this is at Pasifika events, such as Samoa Day, or other Pasifika cultural days where the sports
merchandise popular in Auckland is pervasive (see Figure 7). The Pasifika man in Sydney therefore holds a more tenuous position than he does in Auckland, which adds to the ambiguity of his identity. It is not as easily understood and accepted in Sydney as it is in Auckland. What he does often seem to represent, to both Pasifika and non-Pasifika peoples however, is this notion of hyper-masculinity, something that appears at once to be both desired and admonished. I therefore suggest that the hyper in the hyper-masculinity of rugby league has taken on new forms in the recent increase of Pasifika players where the prefix is used as a criticism to keep Pasifika men in their place, as something to be glorified (so that Pasifika men also want it), but more importantly, demonised so as they know “their place”.

**Figure 7. Merchandise for sale, Samoa Day, Liverpool Sydney, 2016. Photograph by Ashley Hawkes.**

Tengan and Markham note a number of comments made by people around American football in Hawai‘i/USA, who classify traditional Hawaiian dances like the hula as feminine or in the very derogatory term ‘faggot’, and the haka as ‘properly’ masculine. They argue that these sentiments fly ‘in the face of a long tradition of Hawaiian and Polynesian acceptance of transgenderism, thus further underscoring the ways that “Polynesian” warriorhood in UH football contradicts the culture it claims to be honouring’ (Tengan and Markham 2009: 2424). I see this sort of misrepresentation and misunderstanding happening in Australia as well. Hyper-masculinity is often
implied to be part of Polynesian or Pasifika culture, when in effect it is more often a creation of, and reaction to, white imperialism, as my discussion on hegemonic masculinity earlier in this chapter argued.

Tengan and Markham also draw attention to the prominence of the military in the Pacific, and its connections and connotations with sport. Nowhere is this more obvious than Hawai‘i, and perhaps American Samoa and other US-controlled islands like Guam. They bring light to some horrifying statistics:

Hawai‘i is one of the most highly militarized places in the planet, and the headquarters of the US Pacific Command – which covers almost half of the globe. In the current theatre of America’s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Pacific islanders have had the highest casualty rates (as percentage of population) among all ethnic groups serving in the US armed forces. The prevalence of Oceanian soldiers has not only to do with the limitations of island economies, but also the kinds of cultural and gender identities formed by a whole host of militarizing institutions in the Pacific, including sport (Tengan and Markham 2009: 2425).

This connects with Soliai’s and my participant’s comments that the military and sports are the only opportunities to get out of American Samoa. Tengan and Markham end with a powerful claim – ‘if the “choice” between football and fatigues continues to be the only “reality” given to our young men (and women), then it is evident what kind of “defence” they will end up playing’ (2009: 2425). Tengan and Markham are suggesting that with the low chances of making it as a professional footballer, young American Samoans and Hawaiian men often fall in to what they see as the next best (and often only) option, that of the US military. Even in Australia where there are more opportunities for young men than the military or football, they are still areas with a high over-representation of Pasifika peoples, where the stereotype of hyper-masculinity is seen to manifest. If symbols like rainbows, the hula, or closer to home – showing emotion, vulnerability, or intellectualism – are framed as feminine, homosexual, or somehow lacking a proper place in good maleness, then Pasifika men will continue to be limited by the patriarchal heteronormative frameworks surrounding sports and diasporic identity in places like the US and Australia.
As I have argued throughout this thesis, sport often exists in a balancing act between possibilities for emancipation and oppression and can aid both simultaneously. This includes the emancipation of indigenous masculinity from an inferior positioning to hegemonic white patriarchal masculinity, and the oppression of other subaltern forms of masculinity and femininity, including homosexual and transgender masculinities, and women. Hokowhitu states that ‘one of the fresh insights indigenous masculinity studies makes possible in the colonial context is an understanding of power beyond the dialectic of a single binary’ (2015: 83). I would add that it also shows the power of a dialectic of a single binary, that of man and woman, and how the strict separation and classification of the two has detrimentally affected indigenous masculinity.

Hyper-masculinity presents an interesting conundrum for Pasifika men where they are at once both demonised and glorified for their masculinity. As mentioned, Hokowhitu says rather unapologetically of the Māori athlete, he is both ‘hero and dupe’ (2013: xvii). He is caught up in a paradox – the indigenous man or man of colour is both glorified and demonised. The Pasifika rugby league player often represents this type of glorified hyper-masculinity – with his war dances, large stature, tattoos etc. he is often admired for the very same qualities he is demonised for – these are physical not intellectual qualities, he can have these things, but he cannot move outside of them. He is limited by them.

But only if we continue to view them as a binary, which is where the power of the vā is so important. The paradox between emancipation and oppression, and the other paradoxes sport presents – the hero and the dupe, reality and fiction of play, glorification and demonisation, just to name a few – are only limiting when set up in this binary way, we can think of the space that connects each of these binaries as being like the vā – a space where Pasifika involvement and potential not just in sport, but in diasporic living, can thrive. Like Salesa’s argument that seeing diasporic Pasifika people as halves requires us ‘to break them’, seeing people as either a hero or a dupe, or glorified or demonised, requires us to do the same, and as Salesa tells us, Pasifika people are not half and half, they are double. We must therefore embrace refashionings with indigenous concepts, including the wholeness of being “between” in order to not break Pasifika people but embrace their doubleness.
Hokowhitu also implores us to remember, however, that the indigenous man is not just a victim of colonisation and western patriarchal classifications; he has his own forms of oppression, particularly towards indigenous women. He can be both the oppressed and oppressor in two essentialised binaries—colonised/coloniser and men/women. While not made explicit, intersectionality is a big theme amongst much of Hokowhitu’s work, and work on indigenous masculinities in general, in its very name as a research focus after all, is the combination of race and gender. He argues:

it is an inauthentic position to eternally point the moral finger at the ethical corruption of colonization for…the contemporary heteronormative patriarchal face of many Indigenous cultures remains to subjugate women and alternative forms of Indigenous masculinity and sexuality (Hokowhitu 2015: 87).

It is difficult, if not impossible though to separate what has been learned through colonial history and what is part of Pasifika or other indigenous societies regardless. They do not exist in separate realms, and we must be cognisant of the major role western categorisation and morality has played in Pasifika societies, particularly those in western diasporas such as Australia. As I have argued, there are many elements of Pasifika society that have been so defined by western frameworks for so long we know very little of how and why they were originally perceived, such as fa’afafine, but also the complementarity between the genders, and what is considered masculine/feminine.

There are scholars who disagree with work that focuses on traditionally masculine spaces like rugby and football arguing that it does little to challenge the hegemonic hyper-masculinity in Polynesian societies which has marginalised and suppressed the feminine embodied by other masculinities, particularly those of transgendered men (Chen 2014). Chen for example, argues that Tengan and Markham’s research on Hawaiian masculinity and football actually serves to increase dominating effects of a hyper-masculine Polynesian identity, rather than challenge them (Chen 2014: 82) as she sees no space within football for emancipation of subaltern forms of masculinity and pushes for a move away from it completely. Like Tengan and Markham however, I see this focus on male-dominated sports as a necessary step in the direction of
decolonising masculinity and sports in the Pacific precisely because sport does continue to play such a dominant role for Pacific peoples – this cannot be simply discarded. As many of my participants made clear, sport brings joy and meaning to Pasifika men’s lives, and there are elements of its masculine reputation that bring them great pride. As my participants argued, Pasifika men can ‘do what they want’ with their bodies, and part of this is engaging in a skillful negotiation between their own indigenous frameworks, and ‘the white man’s game’. While sports like American football and rugby codes continue to play a large and important role in many Pasifika men’s lives, we must continue to pay it the respect it so clearly receives from our Pasifika brothers and sisters, while continuing to develop criticism and analysis. Wanting to ignore this and turn it into something else entirely comes from a place of privilege.

**Conclusion**

In the Australian rugby league context there is an unstable relationship between the subaltern masculinities of indigenous Pasifika ethnicity, and the hegemonic masculinity of stoicism, toughness and brute strength displayed in the sport. Masculinity is a fluid term, and while the categories of ‘hegemonic’ and ‘subaltern’ can be useful in thinking about the power of white heterosexual patriarchy, they are better thought of as a spectrum of historico-political movements which aim to legitimise and delegitimise various ideas of what masculinity means. For the Australian Pasifika diaspora in rugby league there is a rift between how others frame them and how they perceive themselves. The hyper-masculine language of flair, speed, and power, which harks back to colonial ideas around physicality and the noble savage, is in stark contrast to the communal, humble and hard-working qualities espoused as important by Pasifika men. Stereotypes that heighten this hyper-masculinity are common and detrimental, such as misinterpreting Māori lyrics to make them seem more male hegemonic, lowered expectations of Pasifika behavior, replacing or deleting symbols that are considered too feminine like the hula or rainbows in Hawai‘i, and ignoring diverse skill and hard work in favour of a rhetoric of talent, sheer numbers, and explosiveness. The Pasifika rugby league player as a representation par excellence of modern masculinity in line with American based glorifications of the ‘black super athlete’ makes this position both desirable and limiting, as the huge over-representative aspirations of young Pasifika boys in Sydney
to play in the NRL attests to. The concomitant statistics of this group including low socioeconomic status, and high rates of suicide and incarceration suggest there is something very wrong with the way rugby league’s masculinity is framed as Pasifika boy’s and men’s “natural” pursuit.

Colonial and hegemonic masculinity, or ‘the currently most honored way of being a man’ (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832) are not ‘natural, necessary or permanent’ (Morgensen 2015: 39) and are often not even real – they are an idealism, not a reality, as the rhetoric/reality divide of how Pasifika men are discussed by rugby league media lends evidence to. Masculinity can (and does) change based on societal norms, but it is also significantly bound by these norms at any one time. In other words, it changes, but not easily. Seeing masculinity on a spectrum between hegemonic and subaltern, or glorification and demonisation, allows us to break out of the Eurocentric habit of separating and categorising, and puts us more in line with indigenous epistemologies of interconnectedness, particularly pertinent to Pasifika ways of thinking. The space between these categories is where Pasifika meaning is best understood as it relates to the concept of vā, and while we can bring to light the destructive and limiting aspects of rugby league’s framing of Pasifika masculinity, we cannot ignore the joy, meaning and desire rugby league, and even ideas around masculinity can and do provide.

In the next chapter I take a closer look at the performative aspects of these arenas and how they are practiced by Pasifika peoples through the embodied habitus. I expand the discussion of the integrated nature of faith, family and football, incorporating more female perspectives. I take a closer look at how indigenous masculinity is perceived by female Pasifika peoples, and explore some of the effects of my own position as a female researcher and sports participant during this project. I analyse the three Australian diasporic Pasifika pillars of family, faith and football through the lenses of practice, performativity, and performance, running alongside a more intimate analysis of my own and my participant’s role in them.
CHAPTER SEVEN. FAMILY, FAITH AND FOOTBALL: PERFORMING THE VĀ WITHIN AND BETWEEN

In this chapter I look at ‘the three f’s’ – family, faith and football (rugby league mostly for Sydney, for Auckland a combination of league and union), popularly prescribed as three cultural pillars of Pasifika community. Family, faith, and football all carry vā within and between them as they take action by people to maintain and make harmonious and beautiful. As Ka’ili tells us, Tauhi vā is the Tongan art of mediating sociospatial relations, with similar terms used across the Pacific (Ka’ili 2017), and in this chapter I argue that each of these three things – family, faith, and football – allow diasporic Pasifika people a platform to do this mediating. In this chapter I introduce how each of the three f’s interact with the vā for diasporic Pasifika peoples, and then look at the connections and vā between them and how they interact with each other. I take a closer look at the pivotal role of family for diasporic Pasifika rugby league players, particularly the role of females in male player’s lives, and argue that the stereotypes that affect Pasifika men also affect Pasifika women. With this focus on family, comes the inextricable issue of faith, where family and faith are particularly connected for second and later generation Pasifika peoples in Australia who may not feel as personally connected to the Church but have faith for the sake of their families, and where another paradox is negotiated – that between shame and salvation. I connect this to my key arguments around identity – that identity too takes active nurturing rather than being tied to any sense of “authentic” cultural tenets for Pasifika peoples. I argue that participating in rugby league, whether it be spectating or playing, shares performative acts of service that maintain the vā in similar ways to practices within faith and family.

Tuagalu tells us that ‘the nurturing of vau relationships is a direct result of communal culture, where the individual is perceived in terms of the group’ (2008: 110). The supposed division between communal and individual focused cultures has been critiqued in the social sciences for some time (Josephides 1991; Sökefeld 1999; Wardlow 2006), and is a particularly salient criticism for diasporic communities who do not fit at all neatly into these divisions. The balancing of communal and individual interests is one of the many skillful negotiations Pasifika diasporas constantly engage in. The collective and communal nature of much Pasifika culture, particularly those in
the Islands, is however, a generally agreed upon characteristic, with the vā being a central part of this. As mentioned in Chapter Four, rather than the western Cartesian philosophy of ‘I think therefore I am’, being a central framework, Pasifika peoples work more within the framework of ‘I belong therefore I am’. Family, faith and football all share this communal nature where the need to work together in context with others and share in common goals is a basic necessity for any of these phenomena to work. What good is a preacher with no congregation? Who is a father with no child? And what sense does a forward, hooker or fullback make without a team of other positions? Nurturing and maintaining the vā – those spaces in between, that connect, where meaning is made – relies on active communal practice, whether it be preaching, parenting, or playing.

**Family**

I have hinged most of my exploration on the paradoxes of rugby league for Australia’s (and to a lesser degree, New Zealand’s) Pasifika diasporas around diasporic indigenous identity, masculinity and the limiting stereotypes that continue to frame Pasifika men in colonial tropes of hyper-masculinity, physicality and savagery. These stereotypes do not just affect Pasifika men however, as they are as much raced as they are gendered, and they have an equally profound effect on Pasifika women. The Pasifika women and girls I worked with during my fieldwork were just as likely to feel the pressure of negative stereotyping as their male friends and family, after all, whatever pressures and challenges the men faced, emanated through their communities, such is the nature of Pasifika relational personhood. In the survey I conducted, in response to the last question ‘Is there anything else you would like to add about your culture, family, sports or anything at all? Any experiences you would like to share, or any thoughts you have on this study?’, a second-generation Tongan woman in her early twenties, shared the following experiences she had at school in Australia:

*There are a lot of stereotypes people have upon Pacific Islanders, some see us as only talented people with sports and music. In my experiences other people from different races have mentioned to me that we are criminals who always get into trouble with the law and that we are not smart, to even know our timetables. I’ve heard people say hurtful things, our education levels are low.*
A girl in my class said that we are the worst people on the planet. Another even said we have a big family but can’t afford to buy food.\textsuperscript{26}

Another second-generation female, of Fijian heritage said ‘it’s limiting to see Pacific Islanders as ‘role models’ in sports related fields only’ and saw this emphasis on sports as detrimental to educational goals, ‘In my tertiary studies, Pacific Islanders constitute a very small component of the student profile, and there would be many reasons behind this, but the mainstream ideas for Pacific Islanders isn’t one conducive to a career outside of sports’. While rugby league may not present the same career opportunities for Pasifika women, they feel the pressure just as much, and suffer from the stereotypes that are perpetuated in the name of sport. They are also often just as likely to feel expectations to be good at sports, whether it be a football code, or more often, netball, volleyball or dancing. Another second-generation Samoan woman in her early twenties shared this feeling in the survey:

\begin{quote}
I think there's the idea that a minority of PI [Pacific Islanders] have that sport is the only pathway we have to success in life. I see a lot of sports mums and dads pushing their kids to their breaking point and that’s when you start seeing kids going down the wrong path, and it’s either “become an endorsed athlete playing for blahblah” or work in the factory or settle and have kids. I feel like it really does suck when I’m at uni and there is such a small minority of PI’s that attend.
\end{quote}

Even if they are not directly impacted by sports and sporting expectations, the stereotypes of hyper-physicality and criminality historically leveled at Pasifika men have affected the contemporary expectations on Pasifika women who are underrepresented in tertiary education and, as per the above, told they are not smart, and unable to provide for their families.

A number of younger Pasifika people I spoke with saw a dissonance between their individual goals for a career and professional growth, and their older family member’s belief that a job is purely for income and to serve the wider family unit, as a Sydney-

\textsuperscript{26} For purposes of clarity, written quotes from the survey have been edited slightly to reflect standardised spelling.
born Pasifika woman in her twenties said to me, ‘it’s hard to pursue a career when our families only see work as the source of income’, adding that this is a downside to communal values as opposed to being ‘encouraged to build ourselves individually’ which she saw as a more western value. After discussing education for some time, I asked her why she thought the Pasifika levels of high school drop-out were higher than national averages, and she shared a common conception, that while Pasifika families valuing of western education is increasing, financial struggle still plays a key role:

> It’s funny how I’ve seen, in different pockets, that more parents are investing more resources in bringing their children up in education, however there is still an overwhelming sense that we need our children in the workplace as fast as they can, to help relieve them of financial pressures, and that’s the sad reality that we live, and they miss out on opportunities, you know, of developing really critical skills and thinking, when we’re expected (and it’s hard because we don’t get a say), we’re expected to help home, that’s number one. So I feel that that pressure to help the family is number one, it’s the number one reason [for dropping out of high school].

If for Pasifika peoples, ‘I’ always infers ‘we’, then what affects parents affects children, and what affects males affects females. It is also important to acknowledge that this goes the other way as well – what affects the women, affects the men, and the expectations and desires of female family members are often the driving force behind male determination to do well in rugby league. The common expression ‘to give back’ often starts with a strong Pasifika mother and the desire to give her something in return for her years of sacrifice and care (closely followed by fathers and extended family, especially siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins). In each of the women’s stories shared so far in this chapter, is a perception of themselves through the eyes of others. Despite a large majority of Pasifika peoples seeing sport as an important part of their life, they also acknowledge its limitations and potential dangers. For many of my female participants in particular, these revolved around family dynamics. It is not enough to have only sporting role models and a sports career as the only fathomable and desirable future for young Pasifika men, there needs to be other educational and career options.
In my survey I asked about both family and religion. In response to the multiple choice survey question: ‘How important is family to you?’ there were 33 responses, with 22 answering: ‘It’s the most important thing in the world’, and 11 answering ‘It’s very important, but so are my personal hopes and dreams’. Of the 33 who answered (12 skipped the question), 30 identified some form of Pasifika heritage, with 18 identifying as female, and 12 male. Of the 18 female Pasifika respondents, 12 (or approx. 67 per cent) said family was the most important, while of the 12 male respondents, nine (or 75 per cent) said it was the most important. This means that six female and only two male respondents said it was not the most important thing, but was still very important. Nobody chose either of the other two answer options which were ‘It’s pretty important’, and ‘Not as important as other things’. While this is only a small sample, it is worth noting that a higher percentage of Pasifika men thought family was the single most important thing in the world. This could perhaps be because of their desire and expectation to look after or provide for their families, but it also shows just how important family is for Pasifika men, and why they play such a large role in any sporting related decision. Of the nine Pasifika men who answered that family was the most important thing in the world, seven of those also ‘strongly agreed’ that sport was an important part of their life.27

Figure 8. Responses from multiple choice survey question ‘How important is family to you?’

27 This was a likert scale question, with the statement reading ‘Sport is an important part of my life’, and the answer options being ‘strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, or strongly disagree’.
These results were also reflected in my face-to-face interactions with Pasifika people where family was often presented as the most important part of life, but with an increasing focus on personal satisfactions playing into this, particularly for younger second and later generations. A lot more women than men mentioned health as a main reason for engaging with sports and encouraging their male family members to do the same and there was a palpable sense that obesity and related diseases were gaining more awareness for Pasifika peoples, especially for women who are often the ones in charge of what the family eats and what activities they engage in. Some boys said they struggled when moving to sports camps or away from home for trials and contracts because they missed their mother’s cooking too much, which often formed part of larger conversations on how moving away from family would be the hardest part about a rugby league career if it came to that. One boy said he would never move to England or France for rugby no matter how much money he was offered – unless he could take his entire extended family – to which he and his friends all laughed, presumably because there are so many of them. There are some popular ideas around Pasifika mothers being overbearing, however, in my own experience in Sydney and Auckland, I found that mothers were incredibly encouraging of their childrens’ interest in sports, and showed the utmost pride when they found even just a little bit of success. An Auckland rugby league employee I interviewed said in his 22 years with the organisation, it was the Pākehā parents who they had the most trouble with on the sidelines, and who were the most aggressive and pressuring of their children. Every family is of course different, and every woman who is part of a family has different perceptions and acts in different ways, what is common however is just how inextricable Pasifika women are from the masculine sporting dream and their role in the Pasifika rugby league habitus. While their experiences with sport may be inflected differently due to their different positions within families, such as their perceived role as provider/feeder/cook, the ways Pasifika masculinity is framed by both outsiders and their own communities affects them just as much as it does their male family and community members.

Faith

Family, faith and football are inextricably connected for much of the Pasifika diaspora, and together form a significant part of their habitus. A common sentiment among my participants was ‘faith before football’ which, by extension, meant a
commitment to your duties not just to God, but to family. Despite trends across Australia showing increasing secularisation (ABS 2016), and my own survey showing a similar trend across the small Pasifika sample it dealt with (Figure 9), religion remains a central pillar of Pasifika life, and as the following examples will demonstrate, comes to Pasifika people at different times, much like their emergent indigenous identities can. Figure 9 shows how many Pasifika respondents said religion was ‘very important’ to them personally (42 per cent), a small increase in how important they said it was to their families (very important = 52 per cent), and then a marked increase in how important they believed it was to their culture (very important = 73 per cent). Most of the survey participants were second or later generation Pasifika people living in Australia or New Zealand, showing that while they perceived the majority of Pacific Islanders and their own families to hold religion in high importance, they themselves were less religious.

Figure 9. The decrease in importance of religion across Pasifika culture, families, and individuals, taken from survey results, 2016.

![Chart showing the decrease in importance of religion across Pasifika culture, families, and individuals](chart.png)

Organised religion still plays a very important role however in many of the young diasporic Pasifika peoples lives I met in Sydney and Auckland. A second-generation Cook Island man shared how he used to resent the sentiment of faith before football
his parents held as a young boy but has since come round to respecting it. He had to switch from union to league when his family moved to Western Sydney and the only union was played in private schools which he did not attend, but when he turned 15 he had to give up league as it clashed with his Sabbath and he had to go to church. He said league at the time ‘was part of me’ and he found it very hard to be without it but eventually came to respect his parents’ decision. He came round to the view that faith comes before football, suggesting that implicit in this idea was that family comes before football – going to church for him as a young man meant serving family. This young man also constantly referred to a ‘we’ during our dialogue, rarely saying I or me, especially in regards to beliefs. I had to stop him and ask who he was referring to when he says ‘we’, and he explained he meant his sister and him and apologised that he did not explain that first. It was so natural to him that he and his sister are a unit who have the same beliefs and who talk about everything together and have many of the same experiences, he did not think to have to explain this to a stranger. Family and faith for him were indeed inextricable. Another Pasifika man in his twenties living in Western Sydney, this time a New Zealand born Samoan, expressed that it takes time to understand faith as a young boy:

Participant: Because we’re young were not like 100% involved in religion, but now I’m grown I understand what my parents were trying to say about playing on a Sunday, because my faith has grown...An example is [well known NRL player who publicly stood up for his religious beliefs], I go to the same church that he does, so his example to me pretty much speaks volumes of what my parents were trying to say. So as a man I understand now, but as a teenager all you want to do is play sports, there’s no ifs or buts, you just want to play, it’s just the love of the game, but as you grow older you sort of see and understand where your talent comes from. But Sunday is a big, especially for basketball, and I [was]... the only Polynesian kid, since I was 15, and never played a game, I would practice, but my parents would never let me play a game.

Gina: Because they were all on Sundays?

Participant: Yeah. I understand now, but back then I didn’t.
This sentiment that one must recognise their talent as coming from God and act accordingly came up a number of times in my fieldwork. A Samoan father said ‘faith before football’ is very much his attitude with his five children who all play rugby league and that his children understand and respect this. He also expressed that education comes before football, despite his close connection to the game, having worked for the NRL and New South Wales Rugby League for many years and having all his own children playing. He said the desire to be a rugby league player is obvious in his youth group where one boy just got signed to one of the NRL club’s Under 18’s squads and asked him for his advice, ‘he [the boy] asked “should he get a manager etc.” I said “do your damn homework, get an education”’.

Despite this, rugby league is still ‘the first horse out of the blocks’ for a majority of young diasporic Pasifika males. Despite the discussed limitations this can enforce, and the opportunities it presents in what we may consider to be western ideals like individual wealth, media presence and status, part of its desirability for Pasifika boys is that it can also effloresce traditional customs, not just maintaining the vā through active service, but even more practically (Gregory 1982; Sahlins 1992). Things like fa‘alavelave, the Samoan system of gift giving, and other remittances and gifts, can increase with a rugby league career as it means you can afford to give and remit more. When you live in a diaspora, you are often expected to remit generously and give large gifts, including cash, at births, deaths and weddings. This is an important part of having a successful career with a good income for Pasifika peoples, and one of the reasons Pasifika men often “code-hop”, taking up deals where they can in other sporting codes like union or Australian Rules, or play for and in other nations like England where the money is lucrative. Lakisa et al. in their Australian Pasifika rugby league study, argue that ‘the cultural and familial motivations of their strategies to maximise income from sport may be misinterpreted by those who do not understand the importance of family, faith, and culture for Pasifika athletes’ (Lakisa et al. 2014: 352). When Pasifika athletes are condemned for ‘chasing the money’, such as Samoan-New Zealander Sonny Bill-Williams who has played for nine clubs in two codes, and been publicly condemned frequently in the media (Sportal 2018), what is often ignored is the large amount of people they are supporting and how unknown and limited any athletic career can be. In other words, you take what you can while you
can to support as many as you can. A lot of my participants talked about the overwhelming nature of this and that the potential to make money in sport can make these obligations less daunting and bring great joy and pride to both the giver and receiver (although many people expressed that the more people think you make, the more they will expect).

One of my second-generation Samoan friends thought the expectations put on diasporic Samoans was unfair and that Samoans in Samoa are actually far better off as they have land they can grow food on, unlike him and his Samoan family and friends who rent small apartments and have lots of expenses in Sydney. For others though, the ability to give generously to their church and family communities back home was their greatest pride and inspiration to succeed and often this was couched around the spiritual church-based belief that with God-given gifts (like a rugby league career), comes obligations and responsibilities of service. A career in league was not always framed as a gift from God however, or even if it was, it was often paired with recognition of hard work, sacrifice, and even luck. It was however always seen as something that required a giving of something to one’s people, which ties in both with ideas around maintaining the vā through active service, and the Christian belief that human beings are the keepers and custodians of the Earth.

As one of my second-generation Tongan participants expressed, football, or whatever it may be that you enjoy and are good at, is a way of thanking God and serving others:

\[I \text{ think faith in a way, it is our relationship with God, and I feel that in this relationship with God – the way that he shapes our thinking, the way that he shapes our motives and our gifts – and I think whether it’s through arts or football, this is our way of thanking him. This is our way of serving others, if this is something they enjoy or appreciate, this is a way of loving them and loving God at the same time, so it’s all very interconnected.}\]

Here we can see the potential for rugby league, even with its capitalist, business-oriented and individualistic framework, to effloresce cultural values such as Christian faith and the vā for Pasifika peoples. This goes beyond simple performative gestures such as those made when scoring a try, or writing religious words on one’s strapping
tape, or even praying together after a match, which are all common amongst Pasifika players, but into the very idea of why one plays rugby league, as a service to God and family.

Unfortunately over the years of this project, there have been a high number of young Pasifika men commit suicide in Sydney, often with a combination of pressures and misunderstandings being suggested as possible reasons. As discussed in earlier chapters, second and later generation Pasifika peoples can struggle with feeling like they do not belong either with their first-generation family members, or the wider Australian public. Support workers in Pasifika mental health in Sydney I worked with often discussed the distance between parents born in the Islands and their Australian born children as a common cause for mental health problems, and even suicide for Pasifika youth. Feelings of not being able to talk to one’s parents openly or be understood by them were common themes. At times this was put down to religious differences, with increasing secularisation amongst second-generation youth distancing them from their parents, however at other times it was about the changing nature of faith, where the younger generation are just as passionate about God, but have a different relationship to spirituality. A young Pasifika woman I spoke with expressed the sadness and confusion her and others feel about the fact that Pasifika people are one of the most religious in Australia, but also one of the most incarcerated:

_We were part of a prison ministry, we got to spend time with the juvenile justice centre and spend time with Islander boys and, I don’t know if you know, but we’re very over-represented – 40 per cent are Pacific Islanders, and we got the opportunity to sit down with both the Aboriginal and Pacific Islanders and got to hear their stories, but it wasn’t until we left, one of the officers told us; “all our Islander boys, we get so many. They come in every day and when they fill out the form, tell us who they are, they all tick that they come from a church. What are you guys teaching? Why are they here?” It’s like, this is my quest. I feel like God has placed me here to find out what is our role, and how we can better this for future generations? So, that’s been my personal quest._
For this twenty-five year old Pasifika woman, a relationship with God was paramount to her life, but she saw the churches as failing Pasifika youth and could understand why many move away from the Church. For her though, it made her determination to strengthen Pasifika faith even stronger,

*I’ve had a negative experience with the Church and I know that a lot of young people do as well, and I feel the Church has neglected a lot of my spiritual development, and because of this, I feel like this is why a lot of young people disconnect from their faith and they shouldn’t have to blame God for the faults of the Church.*

A number of other second-generation Pasifika peoples I spoke with shared a similar sentiment, although they took it further to not considering themselves having faith at all. Two male Samoan friends were brought up very religiously by Samoan born fathers heavily involved in the Seventh Day Adventist and Catholic faiths respectively, but both considered themselves atheist. While one made no effort to go to church or stay connected to the Seventh Day Adventist faith in any way, the other attended church regularly for the sake of his mother and the diasporic community of Catholic Pasifika peoples in Sydney. For him, church was about family and culture and a way to serve his obligations as a Samoan Matai, the other friend has very little knowledge of Samoa and does not see it as a core part of his identity. A female friend of mine, born in New Zealand to a Samoan mother and Pākehā father inherited her own atheism from her parents, and even her Samoan grandfather, who had already removed himself from the Church when it was very irregular to do so. She is proud of these decisions but often feels judged by other Pasifika people. This shows the great difference between diasporic Pasifika peoples in Australia where their views are particularly heterogeneous compared to the islands. As another of my participants, a second-generation Fijian, expressed in the following excerpt:

*Look I profess, I am very, I have a very strong faith myself, my background is grounded in that, but the Church needs to be more proactive and somewhat progressive in the way some of those traditional roles [pause] are reinforced... there’s some certain church practices that may occur that deter financial resilience to be part of a family’s wellbeing. So you know those sort*
of things need to be addressed as well. And I think that comes from some of those core traditional beliefs that haven’t evolved within the setting that our diasporas exist. It works in the islands, because it’s the islands, and you are able to rely on your neighbour for a cup of sugar, you know, you can see it in Samoa…but it doesn’t work in New Zealand and Australia [giggle] so it can be very hard, and then that theory or concept of strategic essentialism, I don’t know if you’ve heard of it before, but it’s the idea, or in this context, that people will come from a particular culture into the diaspora and maintain levels of traditional practices that enhance and maintain power for that individual, it then doesn’t evolve according to some of the contemporary cultural practices that occur in the islands. That’s when you’ve got a lot of practices that might evolve in New Zealand or even Australia, that haven’t evolved with the island culture.

For him, the reality of living in multicultural and comparatively large population nations like Australia or New Zealand, meant that there were going to be more changes for the people living in those areas. Life on the islands is more homogenous and therefore change happens at a slower rate. This does not necessarily mean that faith disappears, but rather its shape continues to change and be negotiated in connection with a myriad of other phenomena involved in diasporic Pasifika life.

In 2016 I volunteered at a suicide awareness march, organised by the then Samoa Victim Support Group (SVSG, now Alofa Connections) to raise awareness among the Pasifika community in Sydney about the high levels of suicide amongst the community, and the taboo that continues to surround mental health within Pasifika families. As mentioned previously, both the small amount of statistics available on this, and the anecdotal evidence suggest that this is a major issue for both Australian and New Zealand Pasifika diasporas. I was humbled by the stoicism, humour and warmth of the people I met that day, people who had suffered unimaginable pain – losing a son to suicide, a brother, a husband. Most of the suicides discussed or being remembered with imagery were of young men. One woman however told me of her mum committing suicide when this woman was a young girl in Samoa and how many in her family still do not acknowledge the existence of her mother. She said there is ‘such shame’, that many see suicide as willfully destroying God’s work, and therefore
her family do not acknowledge her mother. Another woman told me she had been waiting all year for this particular event, after moving from New Zealand where she had regularly attended the SVSG New Zealand organised events of the same nature. She said her son had ‘passed away’ five years ago, implying he had committed suicide. She said it was a very healing day for her because of the people that come together through their grief and the hope that it will help someone else who is struggling with mental health issues. It was indeed a somber but hopeful day with a combination of songs, prayers, a march, laughter, food, and play – kids kicking around rugby footballs being a common scene of course.

Shame can play a large role in Pasifika culture, as well as in sports and religion. It is connected to moral ideas of what is good and what is bad. A bad man, a bad footballer, a bad Christian – to be described as, or feel like one of these things is couched in shame. They can be very intricately connected where feelings in one will leak into feelings about the others, as demonstrated for example, by faith often being inextricable to family with many young Pasifika peoples in Australia going to church for their families rather than themselves. In 2016 on one of my fieldwork trips to Auckland, I attended Destiny Church, popular amongst Māori and Pasifika peoples, and highly controversial amongst the greater population. Notions of what was right, good, and masculine were prevalent here, and I share now an extended excerpt from my diary of that trip before discussing footballs’ connection with faith and family in more detail, including shame and its supposed opposite, salvation.

Excerpt from my fieldwork diary, Auckland, November 2016:

At the Pasifika fest it was a little drizzly, smaller than I expected, a small fest in a park, a big stage with nice music, Che Fu’s Dad was one of them. A lot of kids and people dressed in traditional clothing, along with the more common New Zealand Pacific dress of stretchy pants or jeans and cheap looking hoodies or t-shirts. I saw a tent called Man Up, it was black and red, with bold writing, and a Māori looking man attending it. I asked him what it was and he began to tell me that they help men become better fathers, especially men recently out of prison, that it’s important for men to have support and become their true potential. It was all sounding great, until I questioned the inclusion of Bishop Brian Tamaki on their advertising material, who I knew from
controversies in the media that very week where he apparently blamed gay
people for the recent New Zealand earthquakes. He went on to explain that
Man Up was set up by Tamaki and is part of the Destiny Church movement.
This lead (unprompted) into his beliefs that there are men and women and
nothing in between and that we need to protect our children from ‘these
people’ who are only increasing because the government is letting them. He
referred to Destiny as ‘The Truth’ and said how it saved him after he got out
of prison. He said no one grows up ‘wanting to be a rapist, or wanting to be a
child abuser’, it was unclear if he meant these were things he had done in the
past, or if he was conflating them with ‘these people’ he mentioned earlier. I
got the feeling he put homosexuality into the same category as raping and
abusing. He invited me to go to Destiny Church the next day. I was a little
wary but knew I should go, I said I would see. I didn’t challenge him too
much, only to say I had to disagree with him at one point about gay people,
but I didn’t push it as I was trying to be observant.

I decided the next day to go, to see what it is that people are attracted to,
especially Pasifika people. It was quite an experience. It’s an enormous
warehouse style building (which I later googled and discovered was valued at
$7.65 million in 2011) with adjoining gym, school, early childcare facility,
function and recording rooms. Two big security guards guard the front door,
then another at the inner door, I was worried at first they might smell the
atheism on me! I tentatively entered, walking past two small swimming pools
which I later found out are for baptisms. I was about ten minutes late and
there was a lady doing introductory-type things on the stage, and I could see
people walking around with donation buckets. I found a seat towards the back,
in front of a couple who looked to be Pākehā and in their forties. It’s an 864-
seat auditorium with the service employing massive production values. It’s
dark and the stage is lit with constantly moving, quite hypnotic visuals –
purple and blue lines that swirl around on New Zealand’s biggest permanent
LED wall, a 24 metre screen (again, googled later). Either side of the stage
are two enormous screens, with another two screens set about 30 or so rows
back. The band was big and energetic and had a Polynesian leading lady with
an enormous gospel-style voice. The song was catchy and easy to remember
with the words projected on the screen behind so everyone could sing along. Lyrics like ‘God the almighty, he is the best etc.’ This got everyone in an uplifted mood before the Pastor Kain Warren took to the stage.

My initial impression of him was that he was angry and aggressive, he was short and bald, but very fit looking, of Māori appearance with a big loud voice and nice kiwi accent. It came as no surprise when he mentioned he was a former boxer and runs the Destiny gym. I found his sermon difficult to follow at times, it wasn’t very clear despite being spoken with extreme conviction and passion, the likes of which I’ve never seen before. It’s slightly different to over-zealous political speeches, not as explicitly angry, but still quite attacking and just as aggressive, but with moments of worship and small moments of humility (which I found disingenuous). He openly contradicted himself at times which I wondered if anyone else picked up on – the way people were verbally and with their body language, agreeing with him, standing up, raising their hands and yelling ‘hallelujah’ made me think they did not. One I remember was him saying to avoid alcohol and how he doesn’t need an external stimulant, he has God to stimulate him, and then only a minute later saying how he needs his coffee before someone can speak to him in the morning. He spoke a lot about the media and stuck up for Tamaki. It was repeated throughout to not engage with ‘keyboard warriors’ who he unflatteringly mimicked on more than one occasion – as hunch backed troll-type figures who go ‘neeneeneenee’ – gibberish in a high pitched whine – as he pretended to hit keyboard keys. They are not worth one’s time or energy. He said the only time you need to fight someone is if they turn up in the flesh at your doorstep and threaten your family.

He was also very focused on recruitment and getting more people to the Church and particularly men to the upcoming Man Up event. He pushed people to convince their friends and family to come by any means necessary, again contradictorily saying that lying is ok if it’s a means to an end, and then saying it’s a major sin. This was pushed for a long time; ‘just one more’ was the repeated slogan, getting one more person along, and saving their soul. At one point we had to put our hand on the shoulder of the person next to us and
say ‘you are the one’. I had a Māori lady next to me, and then the lady behind me put her hand on my shoulder too. I stifled an uncomfortable laugh. The Pastor stood by Tamaki’s comments on homosexuality and the earthquakes, saying Tamaki predicted the earthquakes and that sexual perversion in the Bible is connected to the Earth. At times he was more convincing than at others, and I swung between disagreeing, confused, and seeing how people might find this persuasive/powerful. At the end, the lady behind me quickly tapped me on the shoulder and said ‘you’re new!’ I couldn’t believe she could tell with all the people there! Turns out she’d been going for over 25 years, and we talked with the other Māori woman too. Tina, the Pākehā, asked me if I’d accepted Jesus Christ into my life and I said ‘not yet’.

She told me how she had been a Christian for 40+ years and when she found Destiny she found the voice she’d been searching for and that if something here resonated with me then I may have found the voice I need to accept God. Teresa, the Māori woman had only been coming for six months and loves it but can’t convince her husband to come who was brought up Mormon. Tina said she didn’t know who I was when I came in but she could tell straight away that I had a good heart (a surprisingly common occurrence at places of worship I’ve found). It was powerful having two complete strangers be so open and warm and it was this experience that I found the most moving of the whole experience and where I can really see how people want this in their lives. Tina asked if she could pray for me, which I thought she meant later on by herself, but she meant right there and then. I said sure, and she and Teresa put their hands on my shoulders and Tina went on to ask God for his blessings on me, on my partner and our upcoming wedding and on my spiritual path. I actually got goosebumps as I tried to be open to the experience and play that role convincingly. I kept repeating to myself ‘You’re Louis Theroux, you’re Louis Theroux’, which actually helped, haha. I remained as open and nonjudgmental as possible while there, I wasn’t there to make anyone feel bad or challenge people in their place of worship, which they even call ‘the sanctuary’.
I thanked Tina genuinely and then walked along with Teresa for a bit. Both women were apparently well off, well rounded people. Teresa said she had a great childhood, a good job, nice family, but just felt like something was missing until she found the Church. I could relate to her story, I too feel like I am missing a spiritual side, but I don’t feel any driving need to fill it with an institutional religion, or even anything at all. I don’t know if I can. Perhaps one day that will change. I said perhaps I’d see them again one day, but even at the time I knew that was most likely a lie. I had assumed everyone there came from a difficult place and desperately needed a community, and was caught at a vulnerable moment. I still think this is true for many, but Tina and Teresa proved that it’s not the case for all. I definitely felt if I were somewhat less educated, and in a dark place, with no other community I would have been compelled to come back, just for that community embrace. I was also aware of my position as a straight woman that I was acceptable, and knew if I were gay or some other non-mainstream identity, it would have been a very different experience. I wondered if some of my more obviously gay and non-binary friends would have been so welcomed.

As is probably obvious by now, I am not a religious person, and combining this with doing Pasifika research has been, at times, a trying experience. But this is an analysis of the various roles of faith in diasporic Pasifika peoples lives and how it connects with football and family, it is not a judgement. My intention in sharing this personal fieldwork extract is not to offend those who think differently to me, or judge them in any way, but rather to put some of myself in the light I am casting on Pasifika peoples. I am as open and legitimate subject of scrutiny as those in which I study and as the above excerpt shows, I too make mistakes in judgement and learn as I go. I went into Destiny with preconceived ideas of who and what would be there and came out with an array of different thoughts. On reflecting on this experience, I have my second-generation Tongan participants words clear in my mind – that one cannot blame God for the faults of the Church, whilst at the same time wondering what it is about this church that people find ‘the voice they need to accept God’. Or what it is about any church that helps them find this voice. As mentioned, I believe part of it for diasporic Pasifika peoples specifically, is in its connections to family and the vā. It is an active service, which is about relationships and beauty. It makes me feel vulnerable.
sharing such unmediated observations, but this is part of the point. With this project’s focus on lived experiences, the va and decolonial practices, it would be disingenuous of me not to make public the space between my own lived experiences of doing this research and those of the people I am researching. Others have been vulnerable and open with me, so why should I remain a closed book? There is va after all between researched and researcher, which is the focus of the concluding chapter.

**Football**

So what is football’s connection to faith and family then? There is a growing body of literature that crosses a number of disciplines on the intersections between Christianity and sport. A recent book, *Sport and the Christian Religion: A Systematic Review of Literature* by Nick J. Watson and Andrew Parker (2014), addresses key works in this field from a Christian point of view, and there are a number of works based in the Northern hemisphere, such as *God in the stadium: sports and religion in America* by Robert J. Higgs (1995). These works are not ethnographically based however, and in Watson and Parker’s review their main call for future research is for it to be empirical and ethnographic. There is a small but growing body of literature on Pasifika religions and sport, such as the work on Fijian Christianity and rugby union, by Geir Presterudstuen (2010, 2015) and Niko Besnier (2014; Guiness and Besnier 2016). Most research on Pasifika sports addresses religion in some small way as does nearly all Pasifika research due to religion’s inextricable role in Pasifika cultures.

There has been very little done on the faith of Pasifika diasporas though, and the connections of their changing religious beliefs to sport. As I have argued, muscular Christianity’s effects on masculinity throughout the Pacific exist to this day. In contemporary Australian rugby league, religion is very visible, particularly amongst Pasifika players, with prayers before or after games, and gestures made at times of success, such as when scoring a try, as well as in tattoos, and imagery and words on strapping tape. Problems like playing on the Sabbath or leaving for religious service have been documented in the media, for instance, high profile player, Will Hopoate leaving the game in 2012 and 2013 to serve a two year mission for his Mormon faith (Hislop 2011). Hopoate was lucky enough to have the skills, profile, and the right people around him to be able to come back to the game and continue a professional career, but many do not. There have been some high profile cases in the media about
players negotiating into their contracts clauses to not play on Sundays, which is one of the main days games are held, with most of these cases eventually being dropped on the side of the player. Even Hopoate had to come to the compromise that he would play on Sundays but would not train or partake in any other activities such as media or community responsibilities (Australian Associated Press 2017).

A Fijian Australia man who helps the NRL with Pacific diversity workshops, talked about the complexity in uniting religious responsibilities with those of the business of the NRL:

*Part of my initial presentation that was rolled out to the clubs, was looking at how can we celebrate ethnic diversity in the club, part of the workshop, because it was a workshop with the players, first we did that, then a workshop with the staff. The feedback that we got from players was then fed back to staff about how can you implement strategies to assist the celebration of ethnic diversity, including Pasifka. Part of that feedback was on religious diversity, and sexual diversity. So I’ve been actively involved in how does the organisation, and also the club, deal with ethnic, religious, and sexual diversity. Which includes catering for when players need to be at church commitments, all that sort of stuff. But once again that needs to be broached by the individual who has those concerns regarding playing on a Sunday or needs to be at a bible study at five-thirty and training finishes at six. So those sort of things, yes I think need to be negotiated, and it should be negotiated as part of that approach, but regarding whether the responsibility should be with the NRL regarding the decisions made, it’s going back to what I said there before, how much responsibility should the NRL play for those individual choices and decisions? And I know that sounds, I’m not trying to be dismissive, I sound like a convert of the NRL!*

*Gina: [laughing], no no.*

*Participant: But having this many years sitting in this space, and seeing both the community, and the organisational perspectives, I can see that any of that media hype about, ‘oh my gosh that player’s being disrespected because he*
doesn’t want to play on Sunday so he’ll miss the games on Sunday, and not turn up’, that’s great, all power to him, I think that’s great. But how much responsibility should the game have in changing all their policies? Not obviously just to accommodate to that one player, but just, we’re talking about a business, we’re talking about a commercial entity, not a religious entity. Do you know what I mean? In some ways I’m intellectualising it, I’m trying to think of it more objectively, rather than with the emotion that goes with some people’s responses.

He then goes on to say that he thinks most clubs are very good with their flexibility around Pasifika responsibilities but that it is the media and general public who get upset about it and who need to understand the complexity and negotiations involved:

And I’ve seen that in practice, I’ve seen that a player needs to be in certain places or spaces, and the club completely understands. Completely understands, and then will assist in that process which is great, but then the hype that goes with this as well, I think it needs to be more critically understood. So as we said, its not binaries, there’s so many greys here that need to be understood.

Other men I spoke with in positions of power within both the NRL and New Zealand Rugby League shared similar views, that Pasifika involvement in the game should be celebrated and meaningfully engaged with due to their dominant position as players, but that the wider public and media interests also needed to be accounted for. What this means in practice is still unclear within these organisations, but thinking about Pasifika needs is undeniably growing.

Shame and salvation
Shame and salvation play a salient role in much diasporic Pasifika life, both in religion and in sports. Rugby league is no stranger to the familiar story arcs of shame and salvation, or disgrace and redemption as would be the more common phraseology in this context. Sports news and other television or newspaper stories often involve a human interest story about a player who has had to overcome some great personal obstacle or flaw to get to what is then couched as an admirable place. Andrew Johns
for example, who made the racist remarks during the 2010 State of Origin that lead to Timana Tahu walking out, as discussed in Chapter Four, was not only the protagonist of that scandal, but has been shamed and redeemed numerous times, with scandals involving racism, sexism (Sygall 2015), and drug abuse (Ritchie 2007). The common theme in these and stories like them are confessions and apologies from the men who often express shame or guilt in their behavior, through which they are then redeemed. Andrew Johns, despite his public failings, remains one of the most popular personalities in rugby league, and is one of only thirteen official ‘immortals’ of the game – the highest honour a rugby league player can achieve. When he was named as the eighth immortal in 2012, only two years after the Tahu racism scandal, he said ‘I feel like the game’s forgiven me’ (Sygall 2016). He was effectively salvaged, and continues to have a busy media career with the NRL to this date.

Shame can play a large role in sports, from the shame you feel when you let your teammates down through a simple error, to getting injured, or making some other mistake. You can experience a sense of letting yourself down as well as letting down your family, everyone who has believed in you or sacrificed for you, and commonly for Pasifika people – it can feel like you are letting down “your people”, ranging from your nation to Pasifika peoples in general, and even God. The pressure to perform can be stifling, and with this pressure there can often be shame in one’s feelings about struggling. Young Pasifika boys can feel ashamed of their mental health battles relating to injury or under-performance, and this can result in terrible outcomes. It is often after injury or missing out on a much-awaited selection when young Pasifika rugby league hopefuls have committed suicide (Horton 2014).

Shame is also a large part of most Christian religions, with morality being a central pillar of most modern denominations. The separation of mind, body and soul has been cataclysmically effected by colonisation and its associated Christian missions, with many of the world’s indigenous societies having a more holistic perception of the three as inseparable and connected. For British colonisation to work, the mind, body and soul had to be separated and moralised in order to control “the natives”, and ultimately get them to self-control. Sex had to be limited, and anything outside the limitations had to be morally inscribed as abnormal and wrong. This way, the racial and sexual hierarchy of white heterosexual man being the top of the patriarchal
society, as properly expressing manhood, and therefore, power, could be legitimised. Everything else had to be squashed and, most powerfully, shamed, so that the “good” and “proper” (hu)man does not even want to associate with them. For example, in *Man Up* – the Destiny Church run ‘man saving’ initiative – the “proper” man was framed by what he was not. He was not soft, feminine, or homosexual, but rather strong, willing to physically fight for his family, and faithful – a believer and follower of ‘the truth’. Tengan talks about this in his work on the feminisation of Hawaiian men’s practices, such as hula, which was used by white American powers to shame these parts of their culture and make them ‘less than’ the masculine ideals eschewed by American imperialism (2008; with Markham 2009).

Shame and salvation therefore can play a large role in Pasifika people’s lives in places like Sydney and Auckland as it is felt strongly in both sports and Christian religions. While it may be considered a paradox in western traditions, the binary notion of shame and salvation can also be approached through the concept of vā. There is meaningful space between the two states, and it is important that this space is celebrated and that Pasifika people have access to it, so that they neither drown in self -shame, or in the rhetoric of salvation. Having suicidal thoughts because of the pressures of rugby league, feeling ashamed of your perceived failures, and like you will never be able to redeem yourself – these should not be par for the course for Pasifika and other young indigenous men. These young men are already skilled at negotiating the vā, even if they do not know it; they do it every day as indigenous people living in settler states. A greater understanding of the vā when it comes to things like shame and salvation, as well as the other paradoxes of sport addressed throughout this thesis like oppression and emancipation, limitation and opportunity, would give these communities greater power to negotiate through the spectrum of emotions that come through both football and faith. As Ka’ili tells us, ‘vā is a space that is relational…the primary aim of tauhi vā [the Tongan art of mediating sociospatial relations] is to mediate conflicts and create harmony and beauty’ (Ka’ili 2017: 7). We must understand the relationships between paradoxes in order to mend them. Just as one does not have to be a hero or a dupe, one does not have to be ashamed or saved; one can live and indeed thrive inbetween, by acknowledging the relational connectivitity and communal nature of these spaces, and their holistic not categorical qualities.
Indigenous performativity and the \textit{vā}

While I cannot say how Pasifika people experience shame as a psychological condition, I can discuss the way it is performed. Shame, whether it be in sports or religion, often has a performative element to it, as does salvation. In the performing of sports or religious practice, there is a constant engagement with this spectrum. As this thesis has argued, Pasifika men are not naturally gifted footballers with some innate savagery or warrior-like characteristic. The language used to naturalise them has ignored the structural and cultural reasons behind Pasifika over-representation in rugby league in Australia, including how they have been affected by colonisation to pursue sports in lieu of other opportunities, and how the sport fits with their epistemologies of the \textit{vā}, particularly its aesthetic, spatial, and active qualities. The \textit{vā} requires active service, and harmony, but it also has a materiality to it, \textit{‘as if it were an Object itself’} (Bennardo 2000: 56). It is a form of \textit{‘sociality as well as materiality’} (Ka’ili 2017: 29). The materiality of rugby league cannot be denied. It must be done in a certain space, and at the very least you need something to throw and people to play. At the higher levels, it is most definitely active, aesthetic, and material. It is a spectacular form of service. This \textit{‘material spectacle’} is performative, much like preaching, or playing family roles. Spectating is also performative, especially live. It is even often spectacular.

At the 2018 Pacific Test in Campbelltown Sydney, Tonga played Samoa for the first time since the 2017 Rugby League World Cup where Tonga greatly exceeded expectations, topping their group ahead of New Zealand and Samoa, and only just missing out on the final against Australia by two points behind England. I had attended the Pacific Test the year before, prior to the World Cup, and it was a fairly even affair in the crowd between Samoan and Tongan fans, with a large cohort of Fijian fans, and a smaller group of Papua New Guinean fans, who are the four teams who competed in the 2017 and 2018 Pacific Tests. A year later and Tongan performative pride had taken a huge leap, I would estimate the crowd to have been 90 per cent Tongan.

Attending live sport is already a full sensory experience, the sounds of thousands of people cheering and reacting, the clashing of bodies on the field, the sights of the
lights, and colours, fans in their supporters gear, the skill of the athletes. Then there’s the smells – people, beer, hot chips, perhaps freshly cut grass or spray paint from the lines marked out only hours earlier due to other sports sharing the field. These are all common experiences at a rugby league match in Sydney, but add to this what you experience at a Pacific Test, and you take it to a whole new level of sensory spectacle.

In 2018, Tonga was the focus, and the supporters had taken this support seriously. Almost everyone was in red and white, including painted faces, with huge banners, and flags. The atmosphere was electric from the very beginning, even during the first game between Fiji and Papua New Guinea. When Tonga took to the field to perform the national anthem and *sipi tau* (Tongan war cry), I could hardly believe the energy. Then there was the singing, not the national anthem, which was beautiful and passionate, but official. As the game was being played, the crowd regularly started spontaneously singing Tongan hymns and almost the whole crowd would join in. I wish I had a way to adequately describe what being in the presence of 20,000 Pasifika people proudly singing a hymn in unison is like. The contrast between the solemnity and sweetness that is the singing, with the force of what is happening on the field is a contrast that is both beautiful and strangely harmonious. It is a bit like in a war movie when the most violent things are happening but there is a stunning soundtrack playing over it. I was genuinely moved, goosebumps and all. Tonga beat Samoa convincingly, but this did not seem to be the most important aspect of the game. The joy was continuous, and everyone seemed in high spirits. I was wearing my Samoan supporter gear and met many friendly Tongan fans. There were also a few people wearing something of both nations and that palpable sense of brotherhood between the Pacific nations was in full force.
The binary notion of winning and losing was perhaps most clearly challenged a few months later however, when Tonga took on Australia for the first time ever, after much encouragement from the Tongan team who were keen to sharpen their skills against the best team in the world and current World Cup winners. Only able to watch this game on television due to it being played in Auckland, I was still able to feel the familiar sense of performative pride shown at the Pacific Test. There were even more Tongan fans at this game, with the cameras struggling to find an Australian fan amongst the nearly 27,000 spectators to zoom in on during celebrations. It can be hard to hear anything specific from the crowd when watching televised matches, but the singing came through clearly, with regular bouts during the game. Tonga were beaten by Australia 34-16 but neither the team nor the fans, nor the commentators for that matter, seemed to pay much attention to this. It was all about the atmosphere and the joy and pride in Tonga even being able to compete at that level. As Ka’ili argues, the maintenance of social relations in the vā ‘is an artistic expression as well as a marking of indigeneity’ (2017: 112). The performance of the spectators at these games occupied this vā, full of artistic expression, and a clear marking of their indigenous
identity as Tongan. They transformed the paradox of winning and losing being the key objective of sport in these instances, and showed it could be about the vā – material, beautiful, harmonious, active, and inbetween, expressed through performativity and perceived by others as something truly special, as news headlines across Australia and New Zealand showed, such as the New Zealand Herald’s – ‘Atmosphere at Mate Ma’a Tonga’s clash against the Kangaroos unlikely to be felt in New Zealand again’ (Reive 2018).

**Conclusion**
The three f’s – family, faith and football – are intricately connected for Pasifika diasporas in Sydney and Auckland. There is vā within them and between them and understanding how they are similar and how they work together helps us gain better understandings of them individually. A person’s position within, and relationship with each phenomenon requires a performative active service which has its own materialities, socialities and understandings of what makes the “good” and beautiful. Faith and family are often put above football, but the sport also offers opportunities itself to serve family and God. While faith may be decreasing with later generations, it is still a major facet of diasporic Pasifika life, the shape of which is changing from traditional Christian frameworks to more meaningful spaces created by young Pasifika peoples. High incarceration and suicide rates have been linked to bad church experiences, shame, and the pressures that come from the perception that a highly improbable successful sporting career is one’s only hope to provide for large families of low socioeconomic status. A greater nurturing of Pasifika epistemologies, such as understandings of the vā, could lessen these pressures and help Pasifika peoples navigate better through the varieties of the vā within diaspora. Instead of the options of shame or salvation, which feed into the narrative of indigenous athlete as hero and dupe, spaces between these dichotomies could be embraced and better understood. It could also help change the narrative of diasporic Pasifika livelihood in Australia and New Zealand from one of surviving to thriving, to which the following chapter will now expand and combine with a discussion on the similar paradoxes and vā between researcher and researched.
CHAPTER EIGHT. THE PARADOXES OF THE RESEARCH ITSELF: BETWEEN OBJECTIVITY AND RELATIONALITY

Giving back and standing with
Kimberley Tallbear critiques the idea of ‘giving back’ which she argues still assumes a binary, where you take from the other, then give something back, and says we should try and ‘stand with’ our research subjects instead (2014). She argues that ‘giving back’ targets a symptom of a knowledge production disease but not the disease itself. The research process should be about relationship-building processes, ‘as an opportunity for conversation and sharing of knowledge, not simply data gathering’, which means that it needs to be ‘conceived in less linear ways without necessarily knowable goals at the outset’, she adds that ‘for the institutions that employ and fund us, we will articulate specific goals but these are only guideposts’ (Tallbear 2014: 2).

I found this critique of ‘giving back’ particularly relevant in connection to my research, both my own personal journey of learning about decolonial and Pasifika research methodologies, and in the narratives many of my participants used regarding ‘giving back’ in their rugby league careers. Men who had successful careers often framed their community work around ‘giving back’. Of course, this is different to an academic framework, but it is still worth considering the language and the assumed binaries it relies on. Do you have to take something in order to give back? Or do you simply acknowledge all that has been given to you and attempt to give something to people who need it in return? I believe for rugby league players using this phraseology, they see it as “a gift”, a gift to their people, a reciprocal exchange for what has been given to them to get there. As Mauss has taught almost every undergraduate anthropology student since the 1950s, a gift is a connector, not a separator (Mauss 1990, based on the teachings of Pasifika peoples). This is particularly true for Pasifika rugby league players, whose idea of ‘giving back’ was more in this sense of “a gift” that is not necessarily from one to another and back, but rather circular. They see their gifts as something that can be paid forward to their people. If you have the gift of having a rugby league career, you are obliged to give something of yourself to people in need, and for Pasifika people this is often their own families and communities. When asked if she thought sport was more important
to Pasifika peoples than other Australians, a second-generation Pasifika support worker replied:

_In terms of importance, I guess it’s more important, or Pacific families treat it as more important… I feel like particularly with sports, this is a way that sort of serves home, this is why we treat it with more importance and more priority._

In regards to research across ethnic and indigenous/non-indigenous lines, such as my own, Tallbear argues that ‘standing with’ is a better framework than ‘giving back’ as it relies on operating from the same place, rather than continuing a separation. She argues that ‘a researcher who is willing to learn how to “stand with” a community of subjects is willing to be altered, to revise her stakes in the knowledge to be produced’ (2014: 2), which was echoed at the numerous indigenous conferences I attended – that you let your research change you. She also states that she thinks a ‘multi-disciplinarist or someone eager to challenge disciplinary norms…will see many more opportunities to do this and is more likely to have the skills to carry it off’ (ibid), which I, for the most part, agree with. Giving back assumes two sides of a boundary that are ‘pretty much set’ (ibid) whereas ‘standing with’ requires flexibility and a commitment to working across traditional boundaries.

This introduces us to another paradox, that between researcher and researched and how thinking about them in relation to vā and the relational spaces between the people who research and are researched, can help put us closer in line with decolonial research approaches and Pasifika epistemologies. This is the focus of this chapter and subsequently the final focus of this thesis. In this chapter I explore how we, as researchers and participants, and sometimes both, can step over the edges of the binary and stand together in the spaces between. This puts us better in line with indigenous research methodologies that move beyond deficits and focus on positives – from ‘surviving to thriving’ as a common phrase in decolonial and indigenous studies has become. In Māori research, it is called _Mauri Ora_, which has the following framework:
There is a growing call within indigenous studies to move away from the common focus on deficits with the world’s indigenous peoples, and focus on higher standards for thriving, not just surviving (e.g. Durie 2016; Rua 2016). By focusing on the important relational aspects of identity, masculinity, spaces outside of the western paradigms of individuality and separated genders, identity markers and communities, as well as on the quotidian joys and mundaneness of diasporic life and sports, this thesis has tried to get closer in line with these indigenous research frameworks, particularly in the Pasifika realm, which reflects ōā as a sensibility of relationality.

Throughout this thesis I have tried to use decolonial frameworks championed by New Zealand based scholars such as Smith (1999) and Hokowhitu (2004, 2009, 2015, 2016), and postcolonial and subaltern scholars, combined with western analytical research paradigms, in order to best illuminate some of the complexities around indigenous masculinities in a settler state. In this chapter I extend these methodologies to explore the western analytical research paradigm more explicitly. This is a decolonial act and one that I believe is important in any methodologically focused work, especially on indigeneites or any form of modern identity as a global citizen. I have discussed many of the ambiguities and difficulties of being a Pasifika person in Australia in regards to having an indigenous identity – being double, between, whole – and refashioning the deficit language of hybridity to stake out a space that embraces the doubles not halves mentality of being Pasifika in a non-Pasifika majority society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>To Include</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixing a problem</td>
<td>Sustaining wellness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researching the determinants of</td>
<td>Researching the pathways to flourishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>languishing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous disadvantage</td>
<td>Indigenous strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislation that contradicts</td>
<td>Legislation that endorses Indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous rights</td>
<td>rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous models of treatment and</td>
<td>Indigenous models of wellness and safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past struggles</td>
<td>Future opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing disadvantage</td>
<td>Unleashing potential</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To stay true to the dialogical nature of vā, and decolonial methodologies, I now consider further the role of research in these conceptualisations, focusing on my position as the core research tool, and my subsequent positioning in this work. Focusing first on university research itself, I share a vignette from the early days of my project that explores the dissonance between Pasifika epistemologies and university research. I then move on to share some of the formative moments I had during this research in building my understanding of my own position as a non-Pasifika researcher exploring Pasifika cultures, and how this relates to other researchers and to my own self-identifying perceptions and practices. This is important in this study’s focus on framings and discourse because this thesis itself is a framing of ideas and the research process behind it should be interrogated. It is also important in talking about decolonial practice and indigeneity to explicitly address the continuing difficulties and dissonances between indigenous epistemologies and those of academia.

**What of the role of research itself? The spaces between university research and indigenous epistemologies**

Like indigenous Australians, Pacific Islanders living in Australia are classified as ‘vulnerable’ and ‘high-risk’ in the university ethics system, which often unwittingly ignores different ways of being by categorising all indigenous peoples as one ‘vulnerable’ group (National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007). As mentioned in my methodology chapter, in developing my research design, I deliberately aimed to minimise the use of structured formal interviews, which, particularly for young Pasifika men, can feel like police or welfare interviews. To downplay the power hierarchy of interviewer-interviewee, I explained in my ethics proposal the importance of having a more ethnographic approach, attending events and games, and striking up conversation in groups with other spectators, much like Pasifika people would do when talking with one another. I explained that I would be upfront about my research project with anyone I spoke with for longer than a few minutes and would get consent orally and record this through field notes.

Because my research involved ‘vulnerable’ indigenous minorities (Pasifika peoples), my work was considered to be ‘high-risk’ and in need of review by my university’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). This involved filling out a twenty-three-
page form with some ten extra pages of supporting documentation. The required details, however exhaustive, did not acknowledge, much less include, diverse forms of communicating with others. It favoured the written word, clear timelines, and other quantitative research methods, leading one of my supervisors to describe the ethics review process as a form of ‘epistemological violence,’ echoing calls from indigenous scholars on the need to decolonise learned epistemologies inherent in many university structures (Smith 1999; Uperesa 2016).

My proposal to the HREC came back with many notations – I had to change the word ‘chat’ to ‘interview’, which directly contradicted what I had argued for, and the reviewers wanted me to be more specific with the number of people I would be interviewing and what questions I would be asking them. Having made my case for oral and other informed consent, I was told by the committee that I would have to provide a Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF) and obtain ‘written consent’ from every ‘interview participant.’ Despite closely following the guidelines of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007), the flexible ethnographic approach I had put forward was simply considered too risky, which again makes one question whether the consent form is more for the participant or the institution. When I asked one of my more senior colleagues what other social researchers did in such a situation, he said, “They just lie,” a sentiment shared by many social scientists I have spoken with since, and what I cannot help but feel is a rather ironic flip of the moral code supposedly instilled by lengthy ethics processes.

In my ethics proposal, I outlined the impracticalities of getting everyone I would meet to read and sign a PICF. Not only would it be awkward but it could also taint the information people gave since there was a common suspicion among Pasifika people of such formalities (much like there are with many other ‘over-researched’ indigenous groups, see Smith 1999). For those with strong cultural and historical ties to oral traditions and the reciprocal nature of talanoa, I have found that a casual chat, one where both, and preferably more than two, parties ask and answer questions and share stories, is far more conducive to good research than a formal interview with set questions and a four-page information sheet to read and sign.

In the planned interviews I conducted, I met people willing and eager to read and sign
forms (these were mostly in higher education who are presumably aware of the formalities), but I have also been in situations where it felt extremely inappropriate to pull out the paperwork, to the point where I simply could not bring myself to do so. One example was an interview I conducted with two Samoan men working as community case managers in Western Sydney in 2016. When I arrived at their office, a large dark room loaned to them rent-free from their local council so long as they kept crime rates low (which they had quite incredibly and successfully been doing), we introduced ourselves, talked about some of the objects in the office, and eventually sat down in a circle of couches. They were fine with my audio-recording the conversation, but when I asked if they would like to read the participant information sheet, they both declined, preferring that I tell them about my research orally instead. Our meeting then moved on very naturally, the three of us sharing experiences from our own involvement in sports and with Pasifika communities. During the course of our conversation, the older of the two men became very emotional and was brought to tears when talking about the tragic suicide of a young Pasifika athlete he had known. There were long moments of silence and reflection, and I was conscious of letting him take his time to express his feelings. I offered him tissues and afterward made sure he was okay.

At this point, according to the HREC ethics process, I should have presented the consent form for the two men to read and sign, but I could not. The energy in the room was both charged and somber – we had spoken openly, personally, and at times passionately, and I had also shared some of my own stories, my experiences as a young athlete, and my family connections to Samoa. I was so grateful for their honesty that changing our casual conversation into a legal and formal one of paperwork not only felt inappropriate and disrespectful; it felt unethical. Asking them to sign a consent form in that moment would have negated the reciprocity of our dialogue, and I did not want to reinstate the bureaucratic ethics framework that deemed their knowledge as more ‘vulnerable’ and in need of regulation than my own. The two men expressed their gratitude for my work and their willingness to work with me again in the future, and I expressed my gratitude and my desire to work with them, inferring a mutual respect and understanding of what the other party was doing. These spoken exchanges, along with the entire process of our dialogue, was a more
culturally appropriate and context-relevant way of giving informed consent, despite the rigid directives of the university’s HREC.

This experience is just one from a recent article where my colleagues and I share stories from our university-guided research with indigenous peoples (Hawkes et al. 2017), and there is a small but growing field of Pasifika and Pasifika focused scholars looking at what a decolonial university ethics system might look like (e.g. Hennessy 2016; Thaman 2003), who are in turn drawing on decolonial movements in Pacific and other indigenous studies more broadly (e.g. Hau'ofa 1994; Smith 1999, 2004; Wesley-Smith 1995, 2016). My main argument regarding these particular issues is that cultural respect and epistemological flexibility in understanding different ways of communicating and consenting should be more highly valued within the university system, including in the ethics process.

“Objectivity” and connection

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Ty P. Kawika Tengan (2008) and Lisa Uperesa (2010a) are three indigenous Pasifika scholars who highlight the complexities of straddling the worlds of academia and their cultural and familial responsibilities. They remind non-indigenous scholars of some of the individualistic freedoms we often have. At times in my life, including in the early days of this research, I wished I was indigenous, to have some special claim to what I considered a deeper “culture”, to have a claim to a communal suffering, to feel the pride of survival and have a deep connection with my fellow group members. I share this incredibly naïve and embarrassing confession because I think it is a more common sentiment than many of us would like to admit, and the ignorance it implies is something that takes acknowledgment and understanding of the continuing historical legacy of indigenous oppression the world over. In other words, I share it because there is something deeply troubling and actually dangerous about the desire to co-opt what appear to be the positive parts of an indigenous culture without understanding the quotientian historical and structural racism your own position as the legacy of genocide and oppression privileges from.

When I was doing honours in anthropology at Sydney University one of our teachers told us that if you do not hate your informants by the time you finish your PhD then you are not doing proper anthropology. At the time I thought ‘Wow! That’s awful’
and we all kind of laughed it off as just another quirk of this particularly eccentric professor. For some reason it stuck with me though and I have wondered over the years what he really meant by it, especially as I have come to a better understanding of his, at times brilliant, if not somewhat off the planet, brand of thinking. He certainly says things most others would not dare, a sort of Malinowski’s diary in contemporary human form. Now nearing the end of my own PhD, I am able to reflect on my relationship with my ‘informants’, or participants as I prefer to call them, and ruminate on this comment that has stayed with me the past seven years.

At first I thought his comment is not true at all – it is prescriptive, limiting, belittling, and presumes the anthropologist is radically different to his/her participants. I thought what rubbish, people generally choose to work with people they have some sort of affinity for, even if it is just a fascination and desire to learn more, most anthropologists and other ethnographic social scientists I know have a genuine affection and passion for the people their work engages with. I myself chose to focus on Pasifika peoples for my PhD because of my family connections to Samoa, my husband’s Māori whakapapa, and my admiration for their tenacity and creativity through centuries of colonial oppression (among other reasons of course). In my first PhD year I immersed myself in literature on Pasifika culture, wrote proposals and literature reviews boldly projecting my intentions to “help” Pasifika peoples and I fantasised about when I could finally start fieldwork and engage with these brilliant people who were just innocent victims of colonial oppression. I was in love with my project and the people, but like so many young lovers, I was naïve.

The second and third PhD years turned out to be tougher than I had ever imagined, I was not embraced with the grateful and open arms I had longed for, I was for the most part welcomed, but often with suspicion, and a lot of trepidation, hesitation, and at times I was outright rejected or ignored. I started to question the love. I was not losing my admiration of Pasifika culture, rather, losing my confidence as someone who could help, as someone whose help was wanted, and what that “help” could even mean and look like. I desperately wished to be Pasifika, on a visible and spiritual level, to feel accepted, loved and not feel like such a fraud. I felt white guilt and trepidation at many turns, and it took a lot of will power to keep going and hassling people and turning up to events where I felt completely out of place. Other than the
Pasifika friends and family I already had, I was not making wonderful new friends like I had envisaged, I was simply going to events, working with people or interviewing and observing, and then going home to a separate world, one of writing and analysing and reading other’s work, most importantly, other Pasifika and indigenous scholars.

Over the two years of fieldwork I came to realise how naïve I had been at the outset, Pasifika people owed me nothing, I was different, I could never understand, and I had to make that an explicit part of my work. Not only that, but as a non-Pasifika person I had privileges many others did not (see Uperesa’s comments below). I also experienced white privilege in places despite my awkwardness at being one of the only *palagis*, such as at the Otara Markets in Auckland where some young Pasifika boys were being told not to stand so close to the jewellery stands while I was allowed to stand wherever I liked and touch and try on as many things as I wanted. I was barely looked at while these two boys were being watched like hawks, tssked and finger wagged at. I have become very aware of this in shops and buses particularly. Privilege is walking through a mall knowing no one is suspicious of you, looking at items without someone constantly looking over your shoulder. Not feeling like a constant threat. Knowing when you sit next to someone on the bus they are not uncomfortable. A highly respected Aboriginal elder my colleagues and I travelled to Hawai’i with said he is always followed around in shops, even to this day.

This was all rather early on in the story I must say, and a journey I am sure is familiar to many ethnographers, and one that I was somewhat cognisant of, if not fully aware of throughout – for example, I was always aware that the discomfort I felt at not belonging was only a small taste of how many Pasifika and other people of colour feel throughout their lives in a white-dominated western world – I was grateful for the experience of it because I knew it was helping me understand other people’s experiences even just minutely better. The next little trajectory however was somewhat less expected and made me understand my honours professor’s comment in a way I had never expected.

The marriage equality plebiscite was announced in Australia towards the end of my third PhD year and the side I had found, and continue to find, most difficult to
understand with Pasifika peoples, reared its head in a way that made me feel sick to my stomach. The fervor of Christian morality that emanates through much Pasifika culture was now at fever pitch. Issues around sexuality which I had only skimmed the surface of with my fieldwork participants were now screaming ‘no no no’. ‘It’s OK to vote NO’ became the slogan for those against the law change to allow same sex couples to marry, and from the social media pages of friends and colleagues in the field, this catch cry was significantly represented. Prior to this I already struggled with the zealous religiosity of much Pasifika culture, something that I thought was incongruous with their history of gender fluidity (fa’afafine for example), and their refashioning of decolonial methodologies, language revivalism etc. I thought when are they going to see Christianity for what it is? An introduced colonial framework aimed to suppress their true history and worship false gods? They were so friendly and smart and understanding in so many ways, and yet religion guided them to make moral judgements on people’s lives that had no effect on them, including on my wonderful best friend who had just proposed to her girlfriend and for who I wanted equality for more than anyone else. I started to learn more about Pasifika morality and the deeper I got into it, the more people opened up, and the more ugliness I saw.

There was no debating the issue for many, when it comes to religion there is nothing to debate, it is dogma. As someone brought up to question and question and question, I got frustrated, and while I would definitely not use the word hate, I started to understand more what my honours professor meant when he said ‘if you don’t hate your informants by the end of your PhD then you aren’t doing proper anthropology’. I now interpreted this as: We are all human, and we are all flawed, and if you do not dislike aspects of the people you work with, then you do not know them well enough.

This is not the end of the story though. During this part of my PhD I had to work hard to keep trying to understand, it was deeply distressing trying to understand something that was directly hurting people I loved. My friend was being verbally and even physically abused during the plebiscite, a petite young girl with a short haircut and a bow tie was being yelled ‘faggot’ at in public, and had things thrown at her, she was scared and what is worse, she was not even one of the worst affected. At the same time, Pasifika friends were sharing Bible verses online about the sin of sodomy next to pictures of them framed with ‘It’s OK to vote NO’ Facebook frames. The Prime Minister of Samoa expressed his views against same sex marriage, and Israel Folou,
one of the most respected Pasifika sportsmen in Australia, shared that he was against it. I was angry, but then it was over (and the YES vote won by a landslide), I continued to research, talk with people, work hard, and I began to realise that love and hate are very close cousins. My respect for Pasifika peoples had become something real, something complicated, and something that did not group them all as one. It helped me realise that cultural differences can only take you so far; individual human difference, human similarity, and human complexity exist everywhere, and I formed a more realistic and helpful view of my role in the lives of others. I was no one’s saviour, I was simply another scholar trying to create and articulate better understandings.

As this thesis has demonstrated, Pasifika people are heterogeneous and varied, just like everyone else. I have Pasifika friends who love and hate certain popular elements of their cultures, and certainly many that did not vote no. But what I have realised is that this is the case with everyone, and perhaps what my professor truly meant, was that with great understanding, there will be some hate, sure, but this also comes with love. Not a rose-coloured young love, but a weathered and strong love, one that sees the flaws but loves regardless. Pasifika peoples are all different, just like the rest of us, and what are often perceived to be the pillars of Pasifika culture are complex – at times admirable and abominable. Just like every culture that’s ever existed perhaps? I am no longer afraid to say that there are aspects of popular Pasifika cultures I do not like – it does not negate my commitment to my work with them and to aiding communication and understanding between Pasifika and other communities, in fact, it undoubtedly helps it. I have a respect and a perplexity at the actions I see taken by some Pasifika people. They are still recovering from structural violence, attempted genocide, and continuing racist policies and beliefs constructed against them and are undervalued and underestimated in many avenues, but as one of my participants said the other day ‘sometimes people are just assholes’, and I do not think it does any of us any good to deny this. Who knows, perhaps then we can question “why” together and the good will outweigh the bad. As Wendt said, no culture is perfect or sacred, to think so is to drown in self-love (2005).

During the early days of my fieldwork I dreamt about how much easier it would be if I were an “insider”, how I would not have to keep answering the ‘why the Pacific?’
question to others, and even to myself. I would feel legitimate in my pursuits, I would not feel like a fraud at Pasifika events, or wonder if people were suspicious of me. I would not stick out like a sore thumb in Mangare, Otara, or Mt Druitt, or feel like ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas 1966) at the indigenous and Pasifika rugby league tests. I could partake in that special self-deprecating but warm and contagious humour of Pasifika peoples that so often left me giggling nervously as opposed to belly laughing with my Pasifika friends, family and participants. I could talk about decolonisation with a passion and conviction that was not mired in the guilt of being a product of colonial success. These are of course incredibly naïve desires.

Here is one of my early fieldwork diary entries, from Samoa Day 2016:

*We met a 16-year-old Samoan boy who moved to Fairfield with his family when he was 8 and plays rugby for Cabramatta. He said he was surprised to get picked. He was a very big boy, height and weight. Nice kid, interested in what we were doing. I didn’t explain myself very well though, I stumbled through it when he asked what I do for a living. I haven’t had to explain it to someone so young before... I tried to justify the importance of it which I think came across as patronising. ... I continued to feel sillier and sillier about our interaction over the rest of the day and confided in Ash who agreed that I was hopeless! We had a good talk about it though. I’m not good at casually conversing about my work with the people I’m supposed to be working with. There’s a real anxiety about looking patronising, and having that white anthropologist gaze thing – I’ve written about that paralysis before and now I have actually experienced it first hand! It’s awful! NEED PRACTICE.*

Part of what I learnt in this and other interactions, and through the process of the research project, was that I was not there to be validated by anyone or to save anyone, and that I did not even have to explain my work in all its complexity to everyone I met. I found ways to tailor it to people based on what I thought they might be most interested in and if they were, we could talk more about it. My favourite approach of course was not to talk about it at all and simply observe and ask questions and learn as much as possible from others, but of course, I was always upfront and if anyone asked I told them what I was doing there and what I was interested in.
One night at my Samoan cousin’s house in Auckland, she and her brother were talking and laughing hysterically as they shared stories and memories about people they knew. My male cousin was laughing about a faʻafafine friend of theirs when my female cousin must have noticed the look of discomfort on my face. He kept referring to their friend as ‘it’ to which my other cousin would roll her eyes and say ‘you can’t call them ‘it’!’ but then fall into hystericis anyway. She took my hand, and said in a tone one only uses when saying something incredibly profound – ‘if you get Pasifika humour, you’ll get the Pacific’. I thought ‘wow’, but I was worried. I confided that I struggled with it at times, I told her how I laughed at different times at the cinema during Pasifika films than the majority Pasifika audiences, and how I feel like sometimes their laughing at each other, especially faʻafafine, seems mean. At this point I had not yet attended the Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga conference in Auckland where Justice Joe Williams said ‘kinship explains everything’ for Polynesian people and that ‘if you get this, you get the whole system’ (2016), but what I realised after hearing both of these variations on the theme – ‘if you get this, you will get it all’ – was that what my cousin was telling me in this moment was just as important. Kinship and humour are intricately bound and can each tell us a lot about Pasifika peoples. My cousin said that Pasifika people, especially Samoans, personify everything, and when something happens, they imagine ‘what if that was you or me or someone we knew doing that, or that this funny thing was happening to’. They relate seemingly inconsequential acts to their own kinship circle, and that is what they find funny. She said ‘Pasifika men can bring you to tears and fits of laughter like no one else’, and while I still do not feel completely comfortable belly laughing at many of the things my Pasifika friends and family do, when I am around Pasifika men telling stories of misfortune and mistake and then laughing uncontrollably and in unison, I cannot help but laugh. The power is so strong I am laughing as I reminisce and write these words. While this research is not about humour, these insights and the subsequent lessons I have learnt from listening and laughing with Pasifika peoples as they tell stories that swing high into hysterical joking and low into tragic tales of hardship in such swift and seamless bounds, have played an integral part in my understanding of Pasifika relational personhood and identity and my own odd position within-but-outside-of it.
As Tengan notes, drawing on Smith, ‘critical reflexivity must underpin every step of the research project, for indigenous and other “insider” researchers “have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities”’ (Smith 1999: 137 cited in Tengan 2008: 26). While critical reflexivity is important for all social researchers, for indigenous “insiders” it is inextricably and infinitely bound in ways not experienced by the outsider. As non-indigenous researchers, we may be criticised for carelessness within the academy and it may affect our professional reputation or employability, but ultimately it does not normally delegitimise us as people, as members of families, and to our past ancestors and future descendants. For many indigenous scholars, critical reflexivity is not only crucial for academic success, it is also central to personal and long-term relationships.

Uperesa sheds light on this in a recent blog where she compares her own plight to her non-indigenous colleagues, noting that

Some colleagues are unencumbered by expectations for care work, community work, and service work that are part of the reality for racialized minority and indigenous scholars. In addition to this care and service work, the legitimacy of minority and indigenous scholars’ research is often questioned because it does not fit neatly within canonized frameworks, or is suspect because it does not sustain the fiction of objectivity (2016: n.p.).

At the Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga conference in Auckland 2016 I was privileged to talk and listen with over 200 indigenous researchers over five days, and one theme stood out more than any other – the responsibility indigenous researchers have to their people and the core focus on ethics. With this too, came an understanding that research is not something you do in “bits”, or “projects”, it is a lifelong commitment where the connections you make through your research permeate other aspects of your life. It was a daunting, at times overwhelming experience, but ultimately one of the most enjoyable and rewarding weeks of my PhD (and possibly life). It helped me see that despite my awkwardness at being one of the only non-indigenous people

---

28 I acknowledge that this is not true for all non-indigenous or indigenous scholars, many non-indigenous scholars for example have other responsibilities including care and service work, however as a general rule Indigenous scholar’s academic and other duties more often coalesce, thus creating conflict with western ideas around objectivity.
there, I was in a privileged position and one that I could use to unpack these very uncertainties and discomforts in a way that could help the general ethos of decolonisation in the research and university sphere, taking at least a small fraction of the weight of responsibility off the shoulders of my indigenous colleagues.

Uperesa, in an article titled ‘A Different Weight: Tensions and promise in “indigenous anthropology”’ (2010a), explores the differences between an indigenous researcher studying one’s own community, and a non-indigenous researcher. She takes care not to delegitimise either position, and argues that it is not your position as outsider or insider that makes your work good, but how you do that research. She argues:

I do not in any way claim that being linked genealogically with the community in which you work means you are more capable, more suited, or more qualified to work in and write about that community than someone who is not so linked (Uperesa 2010a: 291).

She shows, however, how an expectation to adhere to protocol, and an awareness of one’s inextricability from the community on which she writes shapes her ongoing research. Drawing on Abu-Lughod, she states:

As indigenous anthropologists, we present ourselves when we present the Other, and that stimulates a different kind of investment in our scholarship as well as a keen awareness of how our intellectual products may travel and be received by various audiences (Abu-Lughod 1991: 142 cited in Uperesa 2010a: 286).

Unlike most non-indigenous anthropologists, Uperesa has a deeply personal awareness of her writing’s potential audience:

I work with the assumption that my work in and writing about my home community will be read, commented upon, criticized, if I am lucky praised or unlucky vilified by people I may know, I may be related to, I may have gone
to school with, or who know my parents or siblings or other members of my
extended family (Uperesa 2010a: 290).

Considering the thoughts and feelings of people we have grown up with and who will
remain part of our family history for years to come is not something most “Western”
researchers are forced to consider. This can of course change as you grow closer to
research participants, and in my case, I do have some family members who are
members of the communities in which I research and I always have them at the back
of my mind. For the most part however, my personal life is so far removed from my
research, that some of my family members and friends know little detail of what I do
and many will undoubtedly never read my work. Indigenous scholars often feel a
stronger sense of vulnerability in their research as when they are writing, they are
often writing about themselves, their families and communities.

**Vulnerability and strength**
The issue of vulnerability is also a big one for Pasifika rugby league players, or any
athlete for that matter but particularly in hyper-physical sports like league, because of
the need to **not** be vulnerable on the field. One cannot be vulnerable in sports, and in
rugby league toughness, strength and physical fitness are particularly important, as is
determination. This means that safe spaces where weakness and vulnerability are
supported are even more important. As indigenous Canadian scholar Shane Keepness
said at the 2016 NAISA conference, ‘you need courage to be vulnerable’ (2016). The
culture of strength cannot permeate everything, not in the western sense of strength.
This was proven in my study with the various mental health and community workers I
met in Sydney who talked of the great difficulties Pasifika men, both those in rugby
league and those outside of it, have with expressing their vulnerability – their fears,
sadness, pressures, for example. As mentioned earlier by an NRL social worker I
spoke with, there are ‘just tears’ by the time they see him, as they do not know how to
express what is going on inside. Another NRL worker expressed concern over
scrutinising young elite players without first teaching them how to make good
decisions and think things through for themselves. For Pasifika men, the combined
pressures often include large families of dependents, home sickness, a discomfort
with aggressive coaching styles such as swearing, not having Pasifika people in
positions of power to talk to, and white-stream media scrutiny as well as quotidian
racism such as increased police suspicion (like the boys who are followed and harassed by transport officers on public transport I spoke with, or the ones accused of stealing at the markets I witnessed), and more blatant racism from fans yelling out derogatory comments or comments made in the media, social and otherwise. With all these things it should come as no surprise to most that being vulnerable can feel unsafe.

Cultural safety is an important consequence of how understanding these things can help Pasifika men thrive. One must feel safe to be able to thrive (Frankland 2016). Cultural safety can of course be offered within sports, and is indeed a major objective of sports studies, but it does not come without pulling apart the learned frameworks years of postcolonialism and imperialism have ingrained in us. These frameworks need to be pulled apart in university research systems too, to create safe spaces where vulnerability and personal connection to research participants can be explored – this would be the vā, the space between researched and researcher, a connecting space, and one that should not be squashed by the glorification of so called “objectivity”.

I bring these issues of strength and vulnerability up here as they perhaps reflect one of the most complicated paradoxes of sports and Pasifika masculinity for diasporic Pasifika peoples. Vulnerability has not traditionally been seen as an admirable quality for either rugby league players, or Pasifika peoples brought up with negative reinforcement and corporal punishment, and it can be an act of survival to hide one’s vulnerability, whether it be on the field or in greater life. It is however not the opposite of strength when it comes to identity or masculinity, it is, as argued, a necessity. One must be vulnerable to be strong, and strong to be vulnerable. The space between vulnerability and strength therefore is another paradox where being between and double can help bridge the gap. If one can think of oneself as negotiating the doubleness between vulnerability and strength, such as the NRL players who go to counselling with my Pasifika participant, one can hold both strength and vulnerability simultaneously and draw on them when needed. Culturally safe spaces where people can share their betweenness through practiving vā are needed to do this, and rugby league in Australia has huge potential to provide this.
Conclusion

How have Pasifika identities and masculinities been framed in relation to rugby league in Australia, and how have these discourses affected the perceptions and practices of diasporic Pasifika peoples in Australia? This thesis has grappled with this and subsequent questions by centering the discussion around the indigenous Pasifika concept of the vā, which allows one to approach the paradoxes of sport for indigenous peoples through a decolonial lens and break down some of the binary assumptions in sport around masculinity, national identity and liminality. Drawing on two years of fieldwork in Sydney and six weeks in Auckland, an online survey, media analysis, and further reading, I have been exploring the tightly woven connections between family, faith and football for diasporic Pasifika peoples and how family and faith are connected to rugby league for these urban and often second or later generation diasporic communities. I have argued that contrary to popular depictions of the “natural” physicality and masculinity of Pasifika men in rugby league, the sport provides a space that shares similarities to Pasifika ways of being, such as the relational space of the vā.

With the vā being ‘that which is between, context, where meaning is made’ (Wendt 1999), and sport being similarly liminal – that which is between reality and fiction for example, or a serious form of play – I have provided a framework and exploration of the possibilities of sport in bridging paradoxes, such as its ability to transgress and solidify cultural norms, and its position in doing both concurrently for Pasifika and other indigenous groups who share a history of colonial degradation. The vā allows us to move away from the paradoxical notion of the indigenous male athlete as hero and dupe, and suggests there are places within rugby league and in settler states where the male athlete, or rugby league player, does not have to be either of these things, he can occupy a third space between them, much like the vā, which is altogether less limiting than the colonial categories he has been consistently forced into.

Pasifika peoples tend to think of social relations in a spatial fashion, hence the importance of understanding the vā as a space between – it is tangible. The concept of diasporic identity occupies a tangible space that can be perceived and practiced, acted upon, negotiated, felt and understood as a space between Pasifika and Australian or New Zealander heritage, it is a space of doubles not halves, a refashioned indigenous-
diasporic space. It is no accident that some of the core elements of this space are themselves material, such as church, family homes and football fields and paraphernalia. The acts of family, faith and football, whilst having plenty of private elements to them, also need performative and public acts of service to be recognised. To fulfill the nature of the vā, active service must be engaged with.

In Chapter One I introduced my research trajectory, from my own experiences as a young girl with sports, my kin connections to Samoa and New Zealand Māori, and my position as a woman who continuously negotiates an, at times seemingly incongruent, love of sports and arts and my desire to show how they are not so different. I introduced the key areas of focus for this thesis, that of the vā, decolonisation and paradoxes, and sport and masculinity, and how they would be approached through the thesis structure. I argued that like the content of this thesis, the structure would similarly reflect an inbetween space between traditional academic frameworks and decolonial and indigenous Pasifika practices. This included the explicit inclusion of my self as the core research tool throughout, showing my own vulnerabilities as an attempt to ‘stand with’ the vulnerabilities of my research participants and highlight the relational context between myself and my research group. It also included centering Pasifika epistemologies and methodologies such as talanoa, acknowledging the positives of sport, understanding where one’s feet stand, the vā, and using indigenous/indigenous-focused scholars where possible, more than relying on classic big-name scholars such as Foucault or Bourdieu.

This argument moved through to my methodological chapter, Chapter Two, where I explained in detail the methodological choices of this thesis, and argued for the high methodological focus. This thesis is just as concerned with how one researches diasporic Pasifika identity in sports, as it is the subject of diasporic Pasifika identity in sports. In this chapter I discussed how my research questions came about through my experiences watching rugby league as a child, my love of sports and arts, my kin connections to Samoa and New Zealand Māori, and literature reviews to identify where the best questions could be asked. I explained the methods used to answer these questions, and I reviewed and expanded on the key themes of diasporic Pasifika sports, joy and mundanity, an indigenous feminist habitus, and the vā.
Chapter Three was a contextual chapter, laying the foundation for the case studies and analysis to come. I provided demographic statistics, historical context of sports and Pasifika peoples in Australia, and elaborated on some of the key existing theories of sports as a broad scholarly subject of analysis. I demonstrated how the exceptions of sports have been the traditional focus of sports studies, whereas the quotidian experiences of sports, which are so incredibly pervasive across the world, are surprisingly neglected, particularly sports that are seen to be “lower-class” like rugby league. I touched on the role of muscular Christianity in bringing racial and sexual hierarchical categories to the Islands and Australia and New Zealand, focusing on rugby league’s connection with this, which led me to look at the vā further in Chapter Four, as a space between these categories, where Pasifika peoples can thrive in their relational contexts.

The Samoan concept of acknowledging where one’s feet stand was central to Chapter Four, and I discussed the ambiguity of indigeneity for Pasifika peoples residing on the land of a different indigenous group with whom they share some experiences and statistics, such as over-representation in sports and the judicial system, high levels of suicide, as well as shared pride and love, but with whom they do not share traditional ownership of Australian lands. I argued that this ambiguity can cause confusion around issues of agency, authority and hybridity and that the concept of ‘doubles not halves’, and refashioning indigenous identities, can help navigate through these complexities. It is by refashioning and emerging with a relational wholeness as a diasporic Pasifika person, rather than reclaiming some lost mythical purity or authenticity, where understandings of Pasifika identity are best understood – as not being tied to particular cultural pillars, but rather, as emergent, creative, and dynamic. Like identity, the vā is active, and both require action to maintain and develop. Central to this too, is the awareness of the vā between indigenous groups and recognising the similarities and shared experiences between Aboriginal Australians and diasporic indigenous groups such as those from the Pacific Islands.

This lead into the important issue of everydayness in Chapter Five – the quotidian, often mundane experience of sports in Australia for Pasifika peoples and myself. I expanded on the argument that while violent, spectacular, and mega events are often the focus of sports studies and sports media, most sporting experiences are far less
sensational. Sport provides people with joy, purpose and belonging, and for young indigenous groups and other minorities it can be one of the only places that does this. I argued that sport is not necessarily a means to an end, but can simply be practiced for the game’s sake. There is an immediate tangibility to sports, whether it be through watching or participating, making it a desirable space for many, including Pasifika peoples who may struggle with feelings of belonging, and even joy and purpose in a country historically leveled against them through racist policies and structural disadvantage. I went deeper into the notion of paradoxes and how the va can help us break free from their binary categorisations, such as occupying a space between hero and dupe, or Pasifika and Australian. I explored the lived experiences of sport, the feelings and sensations of sport, and the connections between sport and art, ultimately arguing that sport is like an art form, and much like the va, has aesthetic, harmonious, and material core elements. Sport opens up avenues for both powerful refashionings of the current position of the Australian Pasifika diaspora, at the same time as limiting it. As this is now the conclusion I think I can safely add that I hope this thesis and similar work can help push it more towards the refashioning and away from the limiting.

The framings I analyse in this thesis often put diasporic Pasifika peoples in a double bind instead of letting them explore the va between supposedly separate categories and celebrating the ‘doubles not halves’ mentality that ‘I belong therefore I am’ more accurately puts them in. They are presented as naturally gifted “warriors” who play with flair and a physical brutality, but they are rarely seen as reliable leaders or hard workers – they are lauded for natural not cultivated or disciplined qualities. Where I hone in on masculinity in Chapter Six, I show that these qualities are in stark contrast to what Pasifika men themselves see as important for a good rugby league player, which centered around teamwork, hard work, camaraderie, humbleness, dedication and other communal and discipline focused qualities. I explored some of the differences and connections between hyper, postcolonial and hegemonic masculinity for Pasifika peoples in Australia and to a lesser extent New Zealand, arguing that colonially introduced gender binaries continue to plague indigenous groups including Pasifika peoples where it is not just the men who are affected by masculine stereotypes, but the whole community. I argued in this chapter that popular understandings and rhetoric around Pasifika masculinity in Australia continue to
attempt to colonise Pasifika thinking and their bodies, by separating and labeling “appropriate” categories of masculinity, and shaming or ignoring others. These include what makes a “good” Pasifika man, and stereotypes about their bodies and interests. These are not just made by outsiders however, as Pasifika peoples can also be judgmental about what is appropriate for a good Pasifika person, especially when it comes to homosexuality and other moral and religious dogmas. Young Pasifika men and their communities often internalise wider Australian society’s perception of them as hyper-masculine and hyper-physical, which affects their perceptions of themselves and their cultures, as well as their practices. While rugby league is not yet a space of open sexuality or subalternity, it has certainly proven to be a space for the subaltern identities of indigenous Pasifika men to thrive, whilst showing there is much room for continuing improvement.

I moved from the perceptions to practices of these ideas in Chapter Seven, exploring how the performativity of service crucial to the vā is practiced in the popular Pasifika spaces of family, faith and football. I argued that the active and material elements of vā are highly visible in ‘the three f’s’ and can provide spaces to visibly and, at times, spectacularly, claim an indigenous identity, such as at the Pacific Tests in Sydney where Tongan performative pride involved worship, singing and playing. I discussed how the masculine sporting dream of a rugby league career affects Pasifika women and others just as much as it does men, arguing that the Pasifika relational worldview of ‘I as We’ means that what affects one affects many. The other people in a male rugby league player’s family play an inextricable role in his decision making and identity as a family member which in turn often affects his role in the Church and invariably his role/s on the field. The vā between faith, family and football is a complex space that diasporic Pasifika peoples are particularly adept at negotiating. These spaces, and the spaces between them, have beauty in them, they require active service, they have material aspects, and they only make sense in context. The vā is part of Pasifika diasporic habitus, and like the habitus, it is identity forming whether one consciously knows it or not.

This final chapter, Chapter Eight, brings the thesis full circle back to the methodological focus on Pasifika epistemologies and decolonial practices by exploring another key paradox – one that pertains not just to Pasifika peoples, but all
‘over-researched’ indigenous groups. That is the paradox of being over-researched but under-valued and minimally understood. I argue that the language of analysis, research, data collection and other academic and scientific tenets have had a tenuous, and at times, outright destructive relationship with indigenous peoples historically and many research methodologies continue to work within these limiting frameworks (even despite good intentions). Indigenous methodologies require closeness not distance, which goes directly against what one is taught in a western university education. I discuss my own journey of slowly removing my rose-coloured glasses from what we could call the very fashionable “neo-paternal collection”, and replacing them with a complex weathered view that sees flaws and incongruences, and most importantly, sees these within my own self and my own socio-cultural habits. I bring this chapter back around to sport by discussing one last binary, that of vulnerability and strength, and how we would all do well to recognise the relational connection between these states, and the need for both. Whether in the academy or sports, I argue that having both is what gives you the best access to each individually, and the va can help us see this.

Sports and other corporeal practices have been relatively ignored in social sciences up until recently and only became an area of focus due largely to the feminist movement. Before this “the body” was not largely considered socially or culturally practiced and perceived, it was natural, and sport studies suffered because of this. In drawing attention to the ways the intellectual and the physical are framed as ‘antithetical and antagonistic’ (Grainger 2009: 53) in sports, I am highlighting how despite the physical quality of sports, there are always intellectual, or socio-cultural components to it. These components are also often highly historically and structurally inscribed. The way Pasifika men are lauded for particular styles of play which are highly physical, natural, and biological, instead of styles of play that are smart, disciplined, and showing leadership, is a view that comes from a history of colonisation based on racial stratification and assumes the physicality of Pasifika peoples to be their greatest asset and in lieu of other capabilities. Quite simply, it is not.

I believe that the ways in which Pasifika peoples are popularly framed, and have at times internalised – as brawn over brain, as half-and-halves but authentically neither, as hyper-physical, hyper-masculine, warriors or undisciplined – are based on
categories aimed at colonising Pasifika bodies and minds. They rely on western binaries and taking things out of context in order to test them “scientifically”. What I have argued in this thesis is that this goes in direct contrast to Pasifika science which is based on context and connection. While I have argued for the importance of family, faith and football for Pasifika peoples, the beliefs shown to be of most importance to the Pasifika diasporas I engaged with in Australia and New Zealand, centered around the concepts of: ‘I is we’; ‘I belong therefore I am’; understanding where one’s feet stand and the different vantage points; and the connections of talanoa and the vā. Pasifika peoples understand the world, the people and the land, in the spaces between, in the vā. Being a diasporic Pasifika person in Australia requires skillful negotiation between seemingly disparate worlds which are in fact the same world, just one that has not had enough acknowledgement and understanding – a world of diasporic identity, of Pasifika relational understandings of kin, space, liminality, service, of the aesthetics and senses in life, and more often than not, the potentials for sport which too holds so many of these qualities and can, as we have seen in this thesis, effloresce them. Sport can also complicate diasporic Pasifika identities, it can limit them, and ruin them, which is why it is so important that sports are not passed over as frivolous, lowbrow, or just destructive. While sport can be and has been damaging and oppressive, it has also been a space of connection, belonging, and identity formation, and has ample potential in positively affecting the practices and perceptions of not only Pasifika peoples, but peoples across the globe.
REFERENCE LIST


Australian Sports Commission. 2016. AusPlay shows the sporting behaviours of a

Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

Bale, J. and J. Sang. 1996. *Kenyan Running, Movement Culture, Geography and

indentured labor trade.* Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.

University Press.

Barrowclough, A. 2015. Rugby league suicides: is the NRL doing enough for its
young players? May 3. *The Australian.* Available at:

Batley, J. 2017. What does the 2016 census reveal about Pacific Islands communities
in Australia? *State, Society & Governance in Melanesia, Coral Bell School of
Asia Pacific Affairs, ANU College of Asia & the Pacific.* Available at:

to mind.* Munich: Lincom Europa.

Doubleday.

Sex, Third Gender: Beyond sexual dimorphism in culture and history.* G.


--------- 2012. No Family is an Island: Cultural expertise among Samoans in diaspora. USA: Cornell University Press.


Hill, B. 2016. NRL backs calls for commentators to pronounce Pacific rugby players’


Pryke, J. 2014. “Pacific Islanders in Australia: Where are the Melanesians?”


Available at:


was-revenge-20081126-6ink.html. Accessed Feb 2017.


Stanton, T. 2018. NRL connecting youth to their culture through Pacific Youth
Summit. NRL.com. June 18. Available at: 


Vainuku, T. and E. Cohn. 2015. *In Football We Trust*. USA, IFWT Productions.


Demographic details

Below are some questions about your nationality and heritage

1. What is your country of birth?
   - Australia
   - New Zealand
   - Samoa
   - Fiji
   - Tonga
   - Cook Islands
   - Hawaii
   - Other (please specify)

2. What nationalities/ethnicities do you identify yourself with? Eg. Fijian only, or New Zealand Maori and Australian, or 2nd generation Kiwi-Samoan etc.

3. In what country were your parents/guardians born? (specify 1 or 2 countries, or leave blank if unknown)

4. In what country do you live now?
   - Australia
   - New Zealand
   - Other (please specify)
5. How old are you?

- 15-18
- 19-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46+

6. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Other
You will now be asked some questions about your involvement and thoughts on sports.

7. Please read each statement and then select how much you disagree or agree with it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>I strongly disagree</th>
<th>I disagree</th>
<th>I'm not sure</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>I strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sport is an important part of my life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love playing sport</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love watching sport</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel close to my teammates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like my coach supports me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport is an important part of Pacific Islander culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport means more to Pacific Islanders than it does to white Australians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. What sport(s) do you play?

- Rugby league
- Rugby union
- Soccer
- AFL
- Touch, oztag or similar
- Basketball
- Netball
- Volleyball
- I don't play sports
- Other (please specify)
9. If you don't currently play sports, have you played sports in the past? If so which ones?

10. Why did you decide to play this/these particular sports?

11. Do you hope to one day play professionally?
   - No, I do it just for fun or fitness
   - Yes

   If yes, who would you most like to play for? E.g. NZ Warriors, Sydney Swans, Richmond Tigers etc.

12. If you were to play at an international level in your sport, what country would you most like to represent and why?

13. Who is/are your sporting heroes and why?

14. What is your best personal sporting memory?
Beliefs and family

You will now be asked some questions about your religious beliefs and family.

15. Please read each statement and then choose how much you disagree or agree with it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Only a little</th>
<th>It's somewhat important</th>
<th>Yes, it's very important</th>
<th>I don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is religion important to you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is religion important to your family?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is religion an important part of your culture?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Optional question) What religion/s do you identify as? Is there anything else you'd like to add about religion/belief?

16. How important is family to you?

- ○ It's the most important thing in the world
- ○ It's very important, but so are my personal hopes and dreams
- ○ It's pretty important
- ○ Not as important as other things

Is there anything else you would like to add about family?
Final questions

**Just a couple more quick questions about your cultural and sporting engagements**

17. Are there any things in life that challenge your/someone in your family's ability to play sports as much as you would like? Eg. Financial problems, family or church commitments, racism, sexism etc?

18. What things have you been told you're good at? In life and/or in sports?

19. What things have you been told you're bad at? In life and/or in sports?

20. What are your hopes for the future?

21. Is there anything else you would like to add about your culture, family, sports or anything at all? Any experiences you would like to share, or any thoughts you have on this study?
Notice of Approval

Date: 15 February 2016

Project number: 19682

Project title: Sport as cultural practice: A transnational exploration of contemporary Samoan sporting engagement in Australia and New Zealand

Risk classification: More than low risk

Chief investigator: Dr Peter Phipps

Approval period: From: 15 February 2016 To: 31 March 2018

The following documents have been reviewed and approved:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19682 Phipps application</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td>3 March 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Information and Consent Form (Organisational leaders)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 March 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Information and Consent Form (Players)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 March 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview questions</td>
<td></td>
<td>26 October 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above application has been approved by the RMIT University HREC as it meets the requirements of the National statement on ethical conduct in human research (NH&MRC, 2007).

Terms of approval:

1. **Responsibilities of chief investigator**
   It is the responsibility of the above chief investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by HREC. Approval is valid only whilst the chief investigator holds a position at RMIT University.

2. **Amendments**
   Approval must be sought from HREC to amend any aspect of a project. To apply for an amendment use the request for amendment form, which is available on the HREC website and submitted to the HREC secretary. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from HREC.

3. **Adverse events**
   You should notify the HREC immediately (within 24 hours) of any serious or unanticipated adverse effects of the research on participants, and unforeseen events that might affect the ethical acceptability of the project.

4. **Annual reports**
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. Annual reports must be submitted by the anniversary of approval (15 February 2015) of the project for each full year of the project. If the project is of less than 12 months duration then a final report only is required.

5. **Final report**
   A final report must be provided within six months of the end of the project. HREC must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

6. **Monitoring**
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by the HREC at any time.

7. **Retention and storage of data**
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data according to the requirements of the Australian code for the responsible conduct of research (section 2) and relevant RMIT policies.

8. **Special conditions of approval**
   Nil.

In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title above.
Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)
Research and Innovation office
NH&MRC Code: EC00237

Prof Stephen Bird
Chairperson
RMIT HREC

cc: Dr Peter Burke (HREC secretary)
    Ms Gina Krone (PhD candidate)
    A/Prof Barry Judd (Co-investigator)