Aboriginality and rugby league in Australia: An exploratory study of identity construction and professional sport.

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ABORIGINALITY AND RUGBY LEAGUE IN AUSTRALIA:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION
AND PROFESSIONAL SPORT

by

Darren John Godwell

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of Kinesiology in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Human Kinetics at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1997

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0-612-30943-6
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this exploratory study was to better understand the relationship between Rugby League and Aboriginality. The prevalence of Aborigines within the ranks of professional Rugby League players exceeds their proportion of the overall population. Many journalists have therefore speculated about possible explanations for this trend. To date the most common response has been to credit "black magic" - an innate physical ability possessed by Australia's Indigenous peoples.

A qualitative interviewing technique was employed to generate specific data on this issue. Semi-structured interviews were completed with eight professional rugby league players who identified as Aborigines. The sampling of these subjects was drawn from four stages along the participation spectrum - a) players on the verge of full-time professional careers: b) players who were full-time professionals: c) individuals who had retired from professional rugby league. and d) individuals who chose to leave professional rugby league prematurely.

The primary question of this study was:- What is the relationship between Rugby League and Aboriginality? This question was divided into three sub-problems in order to focus the data collection and assist with data analysis. These three sub-problems were:

1. How are identities formed, fostered and challenged? - What social construction took place concerning athletic/football identity, Aboriginal identity and regional identity?

2. What is the nature of Aboriginal participation in rugby league? - This examination included three spaces on the participation spectrum including: all-
Aboriginal sporting carnivals. all-Aboriginal teams playing within mainstream sport, and lastly, individual participation within mainstream sport.

3. What is the relationship between identities within rugby league? - This section sought to examine the interactions which took place between differing identities in different places.

The major finding of this exploratory study is that there is a positive, direct relationship between Aboriginality and Rugby League. By incorporating their belief in 'black magic' Aboriginal men generated a positive cycle of confidence, performance and affirmation of Aboriginality.

A secondary finding was the importance of all-Aboriginal sporting carnivals in sustaining community pride and fulfilling Aboriginal cultural and social needs. These all-Aboriginal spaces provided invaluable opportunities for Aboriginal peoples to re-establish and maintain cultural ties within their community.

The significance of all-Aboriginal teams competing in non-Aboriginal competitions was also supported by the interviews of the eight men. All-Aboriginal teams provide an important counter to overt and institutionalised racism. These teams are most likely to be found/formed where Aboriginal players/supporters are being alienated by racism and cultural differences.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly I'd like to thank the eight men who allowed me the chance to speak with them and to begin this process of having more Indigenous voices heard. I can only hope that I have remained true to your intent and what is written here accurately reflects your experiences.

Thanks to my committee - Prof. Metcalfe, Max Hedley, Vicky Paraschak. Thank you Prof. for your patience, advice and frankness. These are all qualities I respect and seek to emulate. Max. thank you for your time and encouragement.

To my friend and wife, Rae - it's been a long time coming. Your support, friendship and love have kept me through the difficult times; this is another experience we can enjoy together.

For Vicky, who has also shared this trip with me - thank you. Your guidance never imposed and your suggestions always illuminated. This thesis is as much yours as mine and I trust you'll be as satisfied with getting this one out the door as I am. Thank you once again.

I would also like to recognise the support of the Indigenous Sport Program at the Australian Sports Commission, without whose contribution the data collection required for this project would not of been completed.
DEDICATION

I have sought to honour the trust that has been vested in me by those who have participated in this process and those who have placed their confidence in me throughout the last eight years.

For the duration of this degree a photo of three women has overlooked my work. These women were alienated by the same system which their child now seeks to excel in. This thesis is dedicated to one woman who was not allowed to go to school at all because she was black, to another woman who was told she'd do better elsewhere because she was black, and lastly to a woman and a man who made deliberate decisions so their son could get the best chance he could. This thesis is dedicated to Granny, Nanna, Dad and Mum - I love you all.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Sport was always more than a way out...it was a way to define who he was, and who he wanted to become.

(Olson. 1996: 42)

...it is rare for Aboriginal people to renounce their responsibilities and rights in their Aboriginal society.

(Eades. 1991: 98)

These two quotes encapsulate the phenomena to be investigated in this exploratory study. Eades (1991) and Olson (1996) are speaking of two distinct concepts which intertwine within the lives of the subjects who participated in this study.

In the last hundred years of non-Aboriginal colonisation of Australia, Aborigines have established an astounding list of achievements in sport (Tatz. 1995a). In Aboriginal life sport has provided one of the few avenues for positive life experiences. There exists no better illustration of this point than to consider the champions and stars who have played rugby league. Legends of the game like Eric Simms became so adept at kicking field-goals that the rules of the game were changed in an effort to minimise his impact (Tatz. 1995). Stars like Artie Beetson, Steve Renouf and John Ferguson stirred crowds and inspired backyard games of footy¹. These men and this game has held the attention of Aboriginal peoples in New South Wales and Queensland like no other sport. The same fervour can now be seen in other States where the corresponding Aboriginal stars of Australian Rules Football² dazzle
and dominate this code in the same fashion. Why have the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s seen a proliferation of these men in professional football? What makes people in some remote Aboriginal communities paint their houses in the colours of their favourite teams? This study sought to understand what happens when these two worlds, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, come together. This study will therefore examine the experiences of Aboriginal men who are professional rugby league players.

Specifically this study was undertaken to ascertain the relationship between participation in rugby league and the social construction of Aboriginal identity. Specifically how do these two concepts operate in relation to each other? How do Aboriginal men reconcile the two points of view presented by Eades (1991) and Olson (1996)?

Another purpose of this study was to document the Indigenous experience in professional rugby league from the perspective of the Aboriginal players. Too frequently these stories are omitted from discussions on sport and rugby league. It was my intent to speak with eight men and to represent their experiences in their lives, their sport, and their ambitions.

Definitions

This exploratory study will focus on Australian sport, interview Australian subjects and deal with Aboriginal relationships, values and meanings in Australian society. Subsequently any definitions and meanings will be primarily outlined within an Australian context and circumstance. Therefore, assumptions should first be made in the Australian context.
Langton (1994) outlines the current Commonwealth government definition of an Aborigine as someone "who is a descendant of an indigenous inhabitant of Australia, identifies as Aboriginal and is recognised by members of the community in which he or she lives as Aboriginal" (p. 97). A similar definition is applied to peoples from the Torres Strait Islands. Collectively these peoples constitute the Indigenous peoples of Australia. I will observe these definitions throughout this research and this paper. An important distinction though, is that this definition is 'social more than racial' and has its beginnings in an Australian 'colonial administration' which has always struggled to adequately respond to the country's indigenous peoples (Langton, 1994).

The word 'Aborigine' is a colonial definer and with the black power movement of the 1960's and 70's came to represent all the negative colonial connotations (Crick, 1988 as cited in Keen, 1991: Langton, 1994). Subsequently an increasing number of Indigenous peoples have begun to utilise descriptors adopted from Aboriginal languages. The words Murri/s, Koori/s, Goori/s, Noongar/s, Nungah/s thus became self-identifying words with geographic symbolism (Keen, 1991). Murris are identified as coming predominantly from Queensland and north-western New South Wales. Kooris are predominately from New South Wales and Victoria. Indigenous peoples who still practise, or are reviving, their respective languages are more likely to be identified by their language groups, e.g. Walpiri, Bundjalung, etc.

In the late nineteenth century the practice of slavery was institutionalised in Queensland and northern New South Wales in an effort to establish the Australian sugar cane industry. This slave labour was predominantly secured from nearby South
Pacific islands - Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides. Slavery was eventually legislated against and replaced with indentured labour, but conditions changed little for the South Sea Islanders. These people often established social and personal relationships with Aborigines. During attempts at forced repatriation in the early twentieth century many South Sea Islanders escaped at ports along the shipping routes, including Mackay, Cairns and the Torres Straits. There were many instances of marriages and relationships amongst Aborigines. Torres Strait Islanders and South Sea Islanders. Subsequently there are many people who identify as being South Sea Islander and share a heritage with either, or sometimes both, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Being black in Australia also meant that the experiences of South Sea Islanders were, and remain, very similar to those of Aborigines and/or Torres Strait Islanders. Although no subjects selected for this study are South Sea Islanders, many South Sea Islanders did in fact assist and in some instances pioneer 'black' participation in sport.

At times I will describe structures or actions as being "mainstream". In these instances I am referring specifically to those actions which occur within the dominant, non-Aboriginal, social structure of Australia. In the majority of cases this is a specific reference to the dominant, non-Aboriginal sport infrastructure.

At this point I would also like to say that I proudly identify as being Aboriginal, having been born in Mt. Isa, Queensland the son of Lynette Remfrey, the grandson of Alma Kerwin and the great-grandson of Topsy Kerwin.

**Aborigines in Australian Sport**
Specific inquiry into the sporting experience of Australia’s Indigenous peoples has been limited. In addition to the Australian-specific research I have drawn upon some Indigenous-specific research completed in North America. The generalisability of this material is not conclusive but in the absence of Australian-specific empirical work utilised this material to contemplate broader directions.

The most cited and researched aspect of Aboriginal socialisation through sport has been Indigenous contact with cricket in the late nineteenth century (e.g., Daly, 1994; Blades. 1982; Howell & Howell. 1986; Mulvaney & Harcourt. 1988) and boxing in the early twentieth century (Broome. 1980). In earlier research it was reported that the introduction of cricket by the Missionaries and Reserve Managers was a direct attempt at inculcating English values of the day (Howell & Howell, 1986). In the end though, Howell & Howell (1986) conclude that "cricket did more to reinforce the oppression of the Aborigines than to overcome it" (p. 1). This historical analysis of Aborigines and cricket continues with new discussion being suffice to fill a feature issue of Sporting Traditions (1994). Ironically though, all this discussion has failed to offer an explanation for why contemporary Indigenous participation in cricket remains negligible. Similar discussions surround the function of boxing and its colonising ambitions. In boxing, as with cricket, it was concluded that Aborigines were merely exploited through the sport (Broome, 1980; Tatz. 1995b).

These two sports did, however, provide Australia with two substantial and symbolic firsts - the first ever Australian cricket team to tour England (1867-68) and a century later the first Aboriginal world champion - Mr. Lionel Rose (Bantamweight, 1968). The achievement of Lionel Rose in Tokyo is often cited as a powerful symbol.
of what Aborigines can do when they set their mind to a task. Another equally as powerful symbol would come from the most unlikely of sports - tennis.

The efforts of Evonne Goolagong have been much heralded (Tatz, 1987 & 1995a; Harris, 1989). Goolagong won Wimbledon twice (1971 & 1980) and was runner-up three other times - 1972, 1975 & 1976 (Vamplew, Moore, O'Hara, Cashman and Jobling, 1992). These achievements have yet to be rivalled by any other Aboriginal tennis player. In fact, aside from Goolagong's appearance, no other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander has competed and achieved similar performances in tennis.

The general nature of material published on Australia's Indigenous peoples and sport has been of a biographical or historical nature (e.g. Tatz, 1987 & 1995a; Harris, 1989; Saunders, 1992). The best summary of these historical approaches on the subject of Aborigines and sport, to date, can be found in Cashman's (1995) book Paradise of Australian Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia. Other published articles include pieces which consider the individual coaching peculiarities or requirements of Indigenous peoples (e.g., Keelan, 1995; McCallum & Haines, 1992). Kickett (1993) has tried to substantiate this biographical base by examining psychological and, to a lesser extent, sociological influences associated with Indigenous participation in sport. Recently Kickett (1993) has outlined the need for coaches to be sensitive to the existence of cultural differences when coaching Noongar children. She is currently completing much needed research as part of a doctoral dissertation which will further expand upon these concerns.

Drawing on this sociohistorical foundation, the work of Paraschak (1991,
(1992a & 1994) is offering an alternative perspective on events, relationships and issues surrounding the interaction of Australia's Indigenous peoples and the institution of sport. This work is unique because outside of these examinations little research has sought to further understand the nature of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander experience within mainstream sport from an Indigenous perspective.

At the end of the twentieth century many facets of Australian society are changing to meet the challenges of the next millennium. Yet some colonial remnants persist. Racism in sport has periodically received prime coverage in the pages of Australian newspapers or on television news. It must be stated very early on that the highly publicised instances of racism do not represent isolated pockets of extremism. The discrimination and racism of everyday life doesn't often rate as front page stories but its occurrence is tracked and noted. Predominantly in the shattering of personal esteem, the destruction of self-confidence, and in the hardening of attitudes. This may seem a harsh characterisation but for most people of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent it is a common experience. As repetitive and familiar as these accounts are, a large proportion of Australian society fails to appreciate the insidious effects racism has on those communities, individuals and peoples it targets (Godwell, 1996). Recently racism has resurfaced on the Australian political agenda but in 1995 and 1993 its was making appearances in the rational sporting arena (Gordon, 1995; Stapleton, 1995; Tatz, 1995b). Racism in sport has again been identified in 1997 (Cockerill, 1997; Davis, 1997; Linnell, 1997).

It is through the handling of this venting of latent bigotry that we best glimpse the simmering tensions of underlying, ingrained attitudes. It is during these outbursts
that we have the opportunity to consider our collective situation in a more conscious, more deliberate light. This research is a deliberate attempt to give audience to the voices of those who are the objects of such racist attention.

Harry Edwards (1969) noted in his examination of the African-American experience in sport within the United States that you cannot have sport existing in a racist society and not also have racism in sport. Australia's most recognised academic on Aborigines and sport, Colin Tatz, has also made this assertion on numerous occasions regarding the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander experience in Australian sport (Tatz, 1987 & 1995b).

For some people in Australia the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes in football and on the athletic track appears to provide ample evidence that racism in sport isn't really all that bad. But then there are others who hold a different opinion: Weaver (1991) writing on the issue of racism in Australian sport said: "Anyone who doesn't know there is racism in Australian sport hasn't got their eyes open". Many assessments of the issue fail to take into account the hundreds of instances where racism results in individuals walking away from the game forever or means having their progress denied beyond a certain level. Simplistic denials of racism in sport diminishes the tremendous efforts of those who do succeed, often in spite of the system and not because of it. Furthermore, this superficial assessment fails to recognise the choice of some people to seek satisfying and fulfilling experiences in sport outside of the mainstream sport experience. Racism does persist in Australian sport and it does have an impact on the nature of the interaction between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples, organisations and infra-structures. It is this
impact which offers a partial explanation to the creation of All-Blacks.

Throughout Australia there is an alternative sport structure which has been established by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and South Sea Islanders to facilitate continued sporting participation. This alternative structure is created, maintained and, sometimes, competes with the mainstream sport infrastructure. Paradoxically, most of the respective mainstream sport governing bodies, or relevant government departments, are not aware of such activities. This alternative sport infrastructure has its beginnings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Aborigines were discriminated against, confined or imprisoned, and eventually placed under the direct control of the state'. Within this racist, paternalistic context, Indigenous peoples devised ingenious ways to participate in physical activities which were meaningful to them and met their needs. They thus created their own "spaces" (Paraschak. 1996b). and predominant amongst these spaces were sporting spaces. These spaces are now filled with teams, clubs, competitions and carnivals which remain "all black". Sometimes organised within short periods of time, by people with any specific sport management skills. these All-blacks carnivals have grown to be some of the largest events on the Indigenous calender.

The creation of this 'racialised space' (Paraschak. 1996b) by Indigenous peoples is not unique to Australia. In Canada and the United States Indigenous peoples have also sought to create avenues for participation in physical activities - carnivals, championships and pow-wows. Paraschak's (1991, 1992a, 1996b & 1997) and Cheska's (1988) critical analysis of these activities reveals that Indigenous peoples assign different and alternative meanings to these activities, as compared to what
mainstream authorities sometimes deem desirable or preferable.

The sporting carnival becomes an entirely black domain, with black language. music [and black] muscles supreme. The event becomes a reason for being, an affirmation that it is worth being.

(Tatz, 1994, p. 40)

This quote identifies one role of sporting carnivals in Aboriginal communities. This statement and the sentiment that it reflects are not peculiar to a Koori Knockout or Island of Origin (both of which will be explained shortly). Comments of this type are made whenever Indigenous peoples gather in the spirit of life and a celebration of culture.

Although I will only discuss three examples, further details can be found in Tatz's book Obstacle Race: Aborigines and Sport (1995a). The largest basketball carnival in Australia occurs in June of each year in Geraldton (Western Australia). It is an Aboriginal basketball carnival. At times this event attracts up to seventy teams from as far afield as the Kimberleys and the Western Desert. There are accounts of games being played into the night under the lights of car headlights. Remarkably this event took place until just recently, without the knowledge of the national sporting organisation for basketball.

In New South Wales each October long weekend every Koori in the state knows the Koori Knockout is being held. This fine tradition has been developed as an alternative space where Koori teams from across the state gather for the 'Knockout'. Up to fifty teams have been attracted to compete over the three day weekend. The carnival attracts up to ten thousand Kooris to town for this major event. In the past four years this event has been broadcast on national television and attracted the
interest of professional rugby league talent scouts. Once again, though, this extraordinary feat of organisation has been completed by a dedicated, under-resourced group of volunteers. Although, the New South Wales Aboriginal Rugby League Association (NARLA) has paid some expenses associated with the officials' participation, the overwhelming number of people who contribute are volunteers. At various times local Councils or Shires have proved difficult in co-operating with the organisers of the Knockout but as the economic value of the event is being realised pragmatic considerations are prevailing. There has also been occasion when the Police presence has been oversubscribed, readily drawing criticism from leaders of the Koori community as another instance of non-Aboriginal overreaction founded on racist stereotypes. Koori leaders have proclaimed "the Koori Knockout the modern day corroboree" (NARLA, 1995).

The "Island of Origin" held on Thursday Island, in the Torres Strait is another remarkable community sporting event. Once again this event is organised primarily by Torres Strait Islanders specifically for Torres Strait Islanders, drawing together up to twelve teams from respective island groups to compete for the prestige of being the best team in the Torres Straits. The 1996 Island of Origin was the first ever organised by trained sport administrators. Mr. Wally Shibasaki and Mr. Warren Wilson, both Indigenous Recreation Officers (IRO), dedicated two months preparing and organising the event.

These are not the only All-Blacks carnivals in existence. In North Queensland, a carnival is rotated around Mt. Isa, Townsville and Cairns. Significant carnivals also occur in Victoria and South Australia. Numerous smaller rugby league carnivals occur
in Canberra, along the South Coast of New South Wales, Wagga Wagga, Newcastle, the North Coast and Tweed Heads. The most famous Aboriginal events in the Northern Territory are the Yuendumu and Barunga Sports Festivals. Yuendumu has been nicknamed the 'Aboriginal Olympics' (Robson 1990). Numerous additional sports activities range from rodeos to Australian Rules Football and Softball to Basketball and Touch Football carnivals: these events happen in the Kimberelys and South Australia and Brisbane (Davis 1994). As recognised and promoted by the organisers of the Koori Knockout, these carnivals are much more than just sporting events (NARLA. 1995: Tatz. 1995a). "Inter-community festivals...play important roles in social and cultural exchanges between communities, and in developing group identity and pride" (Atkinson. 1991: 50).

The number of these events has recently begun to increase as the work of Indigenous Recreation Officers (IRO's) take full effect within the Indigenous community. These officers are funded through two Federal government initiatives - the Young Persons Sport & Recreation Development Program (YPSRDP) and the Indigenous Sport Program (ISP). The IRO's are facilitating the development of sport management skills throughout the Indigenous community. These individuals then assist with the organisation of events within the Indigenous community.

A motivation for hosting these carnivals is cultural considerations. These carnivals represent an instance where Indigenous identity is celebrated and reinforced (Atkinson. 1991; Tatz, 1994). The revitalisation of community and individual spirit are a respite from the subtle discrimination or overt prejudice black people experience in mainstream Australian society. Carnivals become an opportunity for people to re-
establish friendships and links with members of family and community. This contact is essential for the maintenance of Indigenous kinship networks and to effect social and cultural responsibilities and roles (Beckett. 1991). Sports carnivals are not the only site though where these needs are met. In remote areas traditions are still primarily maintained through ceremony. Alternatively. Indigenous peoples living within rural or urban situations often take advantage of social gatherings such as birthdays, weddings or funerals.

Another avenue used by Indigenous peoples to participate in sports are All-Blacks sporting clubs. These clubs nominate and field teams for competitions in mainstream sport. As with the All-Blacks carnivals, these teams and clubs were established as a strategy to address racial discrimination within mainstream sports. This collective approach to participation offers some support for individuals but it's not a shield from racism. It has been suggested that these teams actually attract increased expressions of racism - from administrators, officials, spectators and competitors (Mead, Roberts & Rijavec. 1988: Godwell. 1996). This targeting by non-Aborigines reinforces perceived differences and further strengthens the boundaries between Indigenous peoples and other Australians. Understandably this targeting reinforces a collective sense of Aboriginal identity (Allison. 1979 & 1982b; Cheska. 1988; Duda. 1986).

The creation of these 'racialised spaces' enables Indigenous peoples to continue participation in sport on their own terms (Paraschak. 1996b). Racialised space, like 'gendered' space. is identified as those places 'on the margin'. bell hooks (1990) restates her thoughts on marginality in her essay "Choosing the Margin as a Space of
Radical Openness" when she says

...... to be in the margin is to be of the whole but outside the main body.... we looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center (p. 149).

hooks (1990) adds. "these statements identify marginality as...the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance" (p. 149). For Aborigines this space is sought to avoid the racism within the mainstream sporting experience. The 'racialised' space thereby fulfils needs which the mainstream cannot. At its most misunderstood, this space is characterised as reverse-discrimination - 'a sporting apartheid'. This characterisation fails to accept the original assault - racism. To maintain their participation individuals seek to create spaces which are free of discrimination.

In other instances individuals persist within the mainstream yet they resist dominant attitudes and discrimination in more subtle ways. This continued participation often involves some modification or adaption of the activity. This adaption accommodates broader differences within a formerly narrow space of participation. For example some players are said to be 'adding an Aboriginal flair to the game' or introducing a sense of style or approach which is uniquely theirs. This development of unique playing styles has been labelled "black magic" (Harris, 1989: Ray, 1991; Mead et al. 1988; Attwood. 1989).

The modification of mainstream sports is readily found within Indigenous communities (whether they be in urban or remote or rural situations)\textsuperscript{13}. For example, whilst on a visit to a remote community I noticed some teenage Aboriginal males playing what appeared to be half-court basketball. Thinking that this is something I am
familiar with. I moved to the side of the court to watch, to show my respect by
providing distance and not forcing my involvement. After watching and fielding
several loose balls. I couldn't understand which players formed the respective sides.
The departure of a player signalled an opportunity to enter the game. Still not too sure
of the sides I decided to simply attach myself to a 'team' of two players who
previously appeared to be working closely together. After several seemingly
unnecessary passes amongst 'my' team and some 'reckless' shots it became apparent
that this was not 'half-court'. These young men were playing something totally
different. I retired until I could figure the game out. In the first instance scores were
not being kept. The object of this game was to make the most spectacular shot. A
spectacular pass was as valuable as a good shot even if the pass did not go to your
teammate. Although there were preferred partners. set teams did not exist. This was a
modification of basketball. In the remote community where this experience took place
the Walpiri are traditional people. which I believe influenced the nature of the activity.
I observed a similar game on four separate occasions.

Faced with overwhelming interest and limited physical resources people often
alter sport activities to fit the situation. This modification is not only the scaling down
or expanding of the teams. It can mean changing the object of the activity, altering
principle rules or abandoning definitions of win/lose. These alterations aren't peculiar
to Indigenous peoples. Many teachers can recall such activity occurring around school
playgrounds. A difference within the Indigenous context is that these alterations also
reflect cultural accommodations. These cultural considerations are often absent from
mainstream sport. Generally mainstream sport is simply not capable of addressing
these considerations to the satisfaction of the Indigenous peoples (Paraschak, 1982b).

The structural incapacity of mainstream sport is the fundamental flaw in the 'sporting apartheid' generalisation. Any philosophy which advocates that one system is capable of meeting every need is fanciful. The fundamental assumption being made is that everyone is the same and therefore everyone has the same needs. The corollary is that the mainstream sport infrastructure can be developed to meet the 'Indigenous community's sporting needs'. Aborigines are not the same as other Australians. This sameness does not exist. The requirement for a single program or single agency delivery approach is often argued by governments or bureaucrats on the grounds of a co-ordinated service delivery. But when these practices systematically disadvantage Aborigines it's institutionalised racism.

Mainstream and Indigenous specific organisations have been designed to meet particular requirements and demands which can, at times, be mutually exclusive. Subsequently, it is no longer conceivable that one organisation can take the same approach to servicing these two different client groups. In some instances the organisation or institution in question is barely capable of responding to the needs of its current participation base, so it is ridiculous to suggest the expansion of this client base to individuals who are culturally distinct.

This is the challenge which befalls national sporting organisations, the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and the State/Territory departments of sport in Australia as they continue to encourage Indigenous participation in sport. As many State and Territory government agencies re-examine their links to mainstream sport they should also examine their place in Indigenous sport development. The debate
regarding the funding of national sporting organisations is being delineated as Olympic sports versus non-Olympic sports\textsuperscript{14}. This issue is also couched within a broader debate about the role of government funding for sport on elite versus community based policy objectives. The resolution of this debate will implicate the Indigenous Sport Program (ISP) at the Australian Sports Commission (ASC).

Historically the majority of sports activities occurring in Indigenous communities are recreational in nature, as opposed to organised sport and associated competitions. Atkinson's (1991) definition of recreation in an Aboriginal context says:

recreation is the involvement of all as participants, either active or passive, in activities or pastimes that promote refreshment of health or spirit, in all areas of language, culture, fields of sport and survival, through interaction, covering all ages (p. 2).

Any policy shift towards further concentrating funding for organised, elite, or Olympic sports will have a detrimental impact on current ISP initiatives. Without a diverse, flexible, community-focused engagement with the Indigenous community mainstream sporting initiatives lack relevance, credibility and applicability.

A Theoretical Framework

"Recent research in cultural studies has begun to view sport less as a totally incorporated aspect of popular culture and more as an arena in which values, ideologies and meanings may be contested" (Donnelly, 1988: 69). Whitson (1984) also supports the critical analysis of sport within the field of cultural studies.

"It is our purpose...to argue that a conceptual framework incorporating the
ideas of 'hegemony'. 'structure of feeling', and 'dominant, residual, and emergent' cultures, offers significant analytical advantages over frameworks based on more straightforward notions of socialisation and social control" (Whitson, 1984: 64).

"By viewing sport as contested terrain, several aspects of the sport/culture relationship, previously considered to be problematic, now become more amenable to interpretation" (Donnelly, 1988: 69). When applied to Aboriginal sporting experiences this approach recognises the power of individuals to assert control over their own participation. This includes All-Blacks carnivals and to some extent All-Blacks clubs and teams as examples of Aboriginal sporting participation which occurs independent of the mainstream. These 'alternative spaces' of sporting practice are not predicated upon non-Aboriginal involvement. The modification of mainstream sporting practices by Aborigines is another example of Aboriginal agency and instances of 'resistance'.

"What we are confronting instead, in the hegemonic order, is an 'official' system of meanings and values operating at the level of feeling as well as thought, in terms of which existing ways of doing things are experienced as sensible and right, or at least unchangeable" (Whitson, 1984: 68). The research of Cheska (1984), Allison (1979 & 1982), and Paraschak (1994, 1996a & 1996b, 1997) has identified the intent of Indigenous peoples to challenge the 'official system of meanings' through their own sport practices. Tatz (1987 & 1995) and Atkinson (1991) offer Aboriginal specific research which identifies similar practices in Australia. "It is possible that the birth and growth of black teams has been to enable [Aborigines] to make their own decisions and selections; to be winners, for a change; to provoke - if possible, to evoke
- a sense of respect for them as people" (Tatz, 1987: 5).

Donnelly (1988) shares Williams' (1977) contention that people are engaged in a continual process of negotiation with the dominant ideology and this ideology only remains hegemonic whilst these various interests can be guarded against or 'incorporated'. It is within this process of negotiation and resistance that All-Blacks activities take place. Concluding his examination Donnelly (1988) offers a taxonomy consisting of three categories:

a) self conscious political protests15:

b) opposition to colonial rule, i.e., persistence of some activities despite sanctions of Colonial administrators16, and

c) cultural opposition: which includes the majority of imperialist/colonised sporting competitions or the appropriation of certain activities to represent alternative cultural meanings and expressions17 (p. 71).

This final category helps to explain how Indigenous sporting activities can be expressions of 'popular resistance'. This perspective is substantiated by Allison's (1979 & 1982b) research which established that Native Americans actually adapted the specific mainstream sports to best suit their cultural values. Allison (1982b) reports that "cultures within the United States transform the nature of typically 'American' sport forms to fit their own cultural schema and that the value orientations of the ethnic minority student-athletes reflect the values of their mother culture, rather than those of the mainstream society" (p. 167). This research challenges the plausibility of the 'cultural melting pot' theory. In reality the space of sport provides an opportunity
for Indigenous agency and resistance.

Birrell's (1989) theoretical examination of race relations and sport provides a useful framework within which research on Australian Aborigines and sport can be categorised. Birrell (1989) articulates four broad categories: Bias models, Assimilation theories. Materialist theories and Cultural theories.

Bias models seek to describe or consider instances of discrimination predicated on race or ethnicity. Hallinan's (1991) study on Aboriginal stacking in Rugby League is a good example of such research. Tatz's (1987 & 1995b) seminal research which examines the instances and implications of racism in Australian sport are also examples of work which falls within this Bias model.

Assimilation theories assume sport is simply part of a broader socialisation process for peoples of different ethnicities. Assimilation theories believe that eventually these people will be 'mainstreamed' into the 'cultural melting-pot' of society. This category is typified by Park's (cited in Birrell, 1989) model which proposes stages of contact, conflict, accommodation and assimilation. As discussed earlier. Allison's (1979 & 1982b) research findings challenge the sustainability of these theories. Cheska (1984) has also reported that 'ethnic differences' and 'social boundaries' are reinforced and maintained through Indigenous contact with non-Indigenous peoples. Cheska's (1984) conclusion is that sport can, and in some instances clearly does, become an avenue for Indigenous peoples to continue to create and celebrate Indigenous identities through and within mainstream interactions. To some extent Cashman (1988) echoes the conclusions of Cheska (1984) and Allison (1982b) when he talks of the "grey area" in Australian colonisation between
proselytisation and resistance/domestication, where values are subtly resisted and changed almost imperceptibly (p. 262). Cashman (1988) also outlines that "quite clearly, while games are an effective vehicle for the proselytisation in some circumstances, they can be subverted in others" (p. 88). Howell & Howell's (1986) and Blades' (1982) examination of cricket and Broome's (1980) consideration of boxing are probably the most recognised efforts to analyse Aboriginal sporting experiences in this manner.

Materialist theories predominately utilise 'class based' analysis. The assumption in this analysis is that racism and discrimination is primarily a matter of economic conditions and capitalist ambitions: i.e., in order for production of goods to be low, cheap labour is required and some people are subjugated for this purpose. This perspective may be pertinent to the African-American and South Sea Islander experience but a broader theory is required for other colonial experiences. This research approach was adopted to examine race relations in the Australian sugar cane industry of the late nineteenth century (Thompson, 1994) and the pastoral industry (Brendt & Brendt, 1987). To a lesser extent this analysis is applied in Tatz's (1995a) concept of "stadium sports" as representing exploitation of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in pedestrianism (professional footraces), boxing and the professional football codes of Rugby League and Australian Rules (p. 18).

Cultural theories reflect the most insightful approach when considering the Indigenous experience with sport in Australia. Birrell (1989) states that "the culturalist approach focuses upon cultural suppression and cultural hegemony on the one hand...and cultural regeneration. cultural survival, or cultural nationalism on the other"
(p. 219). In spite of "cultural domination...the forces for nationalism and cultural survival have endured" (Birrell, 1989: 220).

The strength of Birrell's (1989) final theoretical grouping is the connection it makes back to the broader theoretical body of cultural studies. Consequently theoretical arguments and concepts proposed by Donnelly (1988), Gruneau (1988), Messner (1996), Paraschak (1996a, 1997), hooks (1990), and Kirby & McKenna (1989) can all be employed in an effort to better understand the interaction between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples and structures in sport.

Birrell (1989) also suggests future directions for the sociohistorical analysis of race relations and sport:

(a) discussions of examples of resistance:

(b) tracking of specific time periods:

(c) examination of the 'absences' from the pages of research; and

(d) consideration of some of the anomalies in sport.

My research will reflect an 'examination of an absence', namely Aboriginal athletes and their perspective on their experiences within Australian rugby league. Secondly this research will consider one example of how 'resistance' has been expressed in sport.

**Aborigines in Rugby League**

As the British colony of New South Wales developed through the nineteenth century a number of British sports were transplanted, notably horse racing and cricket. This same Imperial connection brought rugby league to Australia in the first decades
of the twentieth century. ¹⁸

This new sport had its origins in the northern districts of England (Vamplew et al. 1992). Rugby league's conception and formative years in Australia were closely associated with a challenge to the hegemonic ideal of amateurism. The beginnings of rugby league are directly attributable to the expansion of the code of rugby union and the shift away from "private schools and the middle class" (Vamplew et al. 1992: 304).

In 1909 J.J. Giltinan arranged for some Australians to play a visiting New Zealand team of 'professionals' on their way to England. An Australian, H.H. Messenger, joined this tour of England and returned a year later just in time for the start of the first Australian rugby league season. Messenger's exciting play cemented interest in rugby league in Sydney and his place in rugby league history.

A 'colonist's' selection to an Australian representative team in rugby union could mean several months of unpaid leave. Some Australian rugby union representative players were willing to accept being paid for the absence so rugby league began to attract a player base (Vamplew et al. 1992). This persuasion, coupled with the right amount of anti-establishment attitude and Irish, Catholic and colonial disregard for British tradition, ensured a start for the new code in Australia (Scott, 1985). From this start has grown one of Australia's most fervent sporting pursuits.

Rugby league began and remains in opposition to rugby union. In the 1990's the rugby codes are in competition for television audiences, spectators, players and corporate sponsors as opposed to the ideological high ground of the early twentieth century. Yet these two codes still ostensibly reflect the differing interests of two broad
classes in society. Rugby league has been characterised as the working man's game whereas rugby union has been typified by its application in the private schools as a socialising tool intended to instil good character and leadership in young men (Cashman, 1995). It was within this context of class distinction that Aborigines, South Sea Islanders and Torres Strait Islanders first came to rugby league instead of rugby union. Aborigines. Torres Strait Islanders and South Sea Islanders were assigned manual labor and menial tasks in the economy of Australia of the early twentieth century (Thompson. 1994; Broome. 1982; Brendt & Brendt. 1987). Their ascribed social standing ensured that 'blacks' in Australia, in the mid and late twentieth century, were closer to the working class end of the socio-economic scale and thus more likely to be exposed to the code of rugby league than rugby union. As always there were some exceptions to this case. Australia's first Aboriginal university graduate, Lloyd McDermott, attended private school in Brisbane and was the first Aborigine to represent Australia in rugby union (selected in 1962). It would be sixteen years before another Aborigine would play for Australia in rugby union. In fact three players from the same family would achieve the honour of wearing the green and gold19 - the Ella brothers, Mark, Gary and Glen (Harris, 1989). During this time rugby league had established itself and many more Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were playing rugby league. Rugby union has yet to bridge the head-start which rugby league has had (Harris. 1989).

The class foundation underlying rugby league was not necessarily its most appealing feature for Indigenous men and boys. Structurally rugby league is predisposed to accommodating the interests of Indigenous peoples. Tatz (1995a)
characterises these features as belonging to the "stadium sports" (p. 18). Firstly the sport required very little equipment - either personal or venue requirements. Unlike cricket, tennis or golf, rugby league players did not need expensive equipment. Nor did they require access to exclusive grounds or venues. Furthermore they didn't need to pay for the time to practice in these venues or facilities. Aside from the ball and an open, relatively flat stretch of ground people were pretty much ready to go.

Secondly, rugby league is a professional sport. If an athlete performed well enough he would be paid (Harris, 1989). This was appealing to Aboriginal men who were often denied employment because of racism. Alternatively when an Aborigine was employed it was often at a rate less than that of other workers. With the prospect of gaining some extra money it made sense to play rugby league.

Aborigines could also earn sizeable prizes in sports other than rugby league. The best documented instances were foot races (or pedestrianism) and boxing (Broome. 1980; Tatz. 1987 & 1995a). These codes provided Aboriginal men the hope of gaining enough money to finance the purchase of a house, land, or maybe just enough money to look after their families (Harris, 1989). Tatz (1995a) has characterised this professionalism as representing a way out of the debilitating circumstances of Aboriginal life in Australia. Boxing and running promised the path to a better life in the nineteenth century. Rugby league would come to represent another avenue in the late twentieth century as player payments increased through the 1960's and 1970's (Harris, 1989). Even marginal financial rewards were enough to attract Aboriginal boys and men. With the doors to other life options closed Aborigines were effectively "channelled" into a limited number of activities such as
sports, and only a limited number of sports at that. Rugby league would benefit handsomely from this "channelling".

The preponderance of Aboriginal football players soon yielded talent and in the case of Eric Simms, Lionel Morgan, Larry Cowra, Arthur Beetson and John Ferguson considerable talent at that. Harris (1989) writes that the achievements of these men were proclaimed far and wide amongst the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community thus offering ready-made role models and inspiration. Eric Simms was so talented that the governing body of the rugby league was forced to change its rules to contain him. Ultimately other Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders such as Steve Ella, Cliff Lyons and Steve Renouf would follow and dramatically alter the way the game was played. These heroes provided rare role models in the Indigenous community. The absence of Indigenous achievers in other fields of endeavour, or the failure to recognise other non-sporting achievers, meant that the outstanding efforts of these Aboriginal men created a positive cycle of 'trailblazers/ice breakers', high achievers, role models and support networks, cementing greater Indigenous participation in rugby league.

This context of positive reinforcement is one of rugby league’s greatest assets over other sports seeking Indigenous participation. This process has continued to deliver unusually high participation rates from within the Indigenous community. But this asset can easily be mitigated if it is taken for granted or abused. The best illustration of this possibility occurred with Australian Rules Football and its governing body’s handling of racism through the Nicky Winmar/Collingwood (in 1993) and Michael Long (in 1995) incidents.
There are additional reasons which made the sport of rugby league\textsuperscript{24} appealing to Indigenous peoples. These reasons are grounded not in the associated fiscal or equipment costs but with the capacity of the sport to accommodate culturally specific requirements. One of the most broadly recognised and studied features of the cultures of Australia's Indigenous peoples is their extensive, complex and tight kinship based on social and personal networks (Beckett, 1991). This network is the primary means for social support and interaction. The influence of this feature is evident when Indigenous people engage in activities in non-Aboriginal society, such as sport.

Barring overt discrimination, Indigenous peoples are more likely to continue participation in an activity which can accommodate their cultural needs as well as their social, personal or sporting ambitions. Therefore it is not surprising that historically Australia's Indigenous peoples have readily accepted, and in some instances modified non-Aboriginal sports or physical activities for their own cultural purposes. Conveniently rugby league could accommodate broad participation of entire Aboriginal communities or families.

It is not uncommon for separate Aboriginal families to field complete football teams consisting solely of blood relatives\textsuperscript{25}, such as brothers, first cousins, fathers and uncles\textsuperscript{26}. With this degree of active participation rugby league could also accommodate and encourage passive participation - spectators, crowd support and team affiliation. Accordingly, younger siblings, girls, women and elders could also participate. This passive participation is not seen in a patronising light, for the attendance at these games represents an opportunity to maintain cultural and social associations and affiliations. David Peachey, a professional koori rugby league player.
talks of the nature of this experience when he comments "we'd travel to Melbourne to play in comps there. It was fun, but it also gave us a sense of belonging in a community. Sport made us feel like we were valued as people?" (Olson, 1996). In fact, Tatz (1994) suggests that these All-Blacks carnivals represent contemporary corroborees\textsuperscript{27} - and in some respects they do.

In the Torres Strait, the Island of Origin provides an annual opportunity for island groups to nominate and enter teams entirely constructed of men with familial or residential ties with a respective island. This is a significant time to revitalise community identity and pride. Another obvious example of this cultural gathering and revitalisation of community identity is the Koori Knockout, in New South Wales. These communal gatherings can also provide an opportunity to continue or conclude cultural business\textsuperscript{28} amongst respective individuals or communities.

In light of these factors it is not surprising that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men have played rugby league and achieved some success. It is plausible that if these environmental circumstances are altered there would be a decline in the proportion of Indigenous men in this sport. This shift is already underway as young Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander men seek out pursuits which are more aligned with their interests, ambitions and opportunities. This process, for example, is being encouraged by the availability of new avenues of support such as the federally funded Indigenous Sport Program\textsuperscript{29} (ISP) and the Olympic Training Centre for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders\textsuperscript{30} (OTCATSI). A specific example comes to mind where a young man had secured a rugby league scholarship from a professional club to complete high school. As with many young athletes this teenager
had additional sporting interests - in this instance athletics. With the inaugural awarding of OTCATSI Scholarships he decided to opt out of a rugby league career and instead pursue ambitions as a sprinter. He told me that the biggest factor influencing his decision between athletics or rugby league was his eventual success in applying for the OTCATSI Scholarship. Some sports are starting to attract Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders away from rugby league but the availability of alternatives for most Indigenous peoples remains limited.

Rugby league offers more to Indigenous participants and their communities, in many ways, than do sports such as swimming and snow skiing. As a sport, rugby league can accommodate mass active participation (albeit largely male), reinforce kinship networks, enable broader passive participation and provide an opportunity for a gathering which will maintain cultural ties, provide an outlet for developing community pride and reinforce community identity. This activity also has the potential to reinforce certain expressions of individual identity. The development of this sense of identity will be examined in this research.

**Rugby League and Aboriginality**

Gilbert (1992) states:

Aborigines today are the product of two hundred years of colonisation during which alien conquerors tried to impose their techniques, way of life, and values upon the Indigenous people and to disrupt the Aboriginal way of life and to break down the Aboriginal identity

(p. iii)

The solidifying and celebration of a pan-Aboriginal identity was an extremely important feature of the black power movement of the mid-twentieth century
(Broome, 1982; Howard, 1982; Keen, 1991). For the first time in modern history a
common identity was being formed which attributed membership to Indigenous
peoples regardless of shades of skin. This unity was in partial response to political
goals but generally it was grounded in demands for social justice for people who were
being discriminated against (Suter & Stearman, 1982; Howard, 1982; Paraschak,
1996a).

Primarily this research project was concerned with a closer examination of the
fluidity of Aboriginality, as an expression of identity, by Aboriginal men through the
institution of sport, specifically, rugby league participation. An element of
Aboriginality is defined by Langton (1994) as "a social thing...it arises from the
subjective experience of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who engage in
any intercultural dialogue" (p. 98). Langton (1994) adds that "Aboriginality only has
meaning when understood in terms of intersubjectivity" (p. 99). Another development
follows: that "Aboriginality...is a field of intersubjectivity in that it is remade over
and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and
interpretation" (p. 99). From these assumptions Langton (1994) presents three broad
categories of cultural and textual construction of Aboriginality:
• Aboriginal person interacting with other Aboriginal people in social
  situations located largely within Aboriginal culture:

  • the familiar stereotypes and the constant stereotyping, iconising and
    mythologising of Aboriginal people by white people who have never had any
    substantial first-hand contact with Aboriginal people; and

  • those constructions which are generated when Aboriginal and non-
    Aboriginal people engage in actual dialogue (p. 100).

In addition to these social components Aboriginality also incorporates a genetic
component. To be Aboriginal, irregardless of your social construction, is to be a
descendent of an Indigenous person of Australia.

In this research project two of these categories were examined: firstly, in the all Aboriginal interaction, namely All-Blacks sports carnivals; secondly, in examining the concept of Aboriginality at that point where Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal dialogue is most likely to occur. It was hypothesised that the conscious expression or existence of 'Aboriginality' would be most palpable at those times where 'intersubjectivity' is greatest. In Australia, this engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal is more likely to occur in sport than in any other aspect of Australian culture (Cashman. 1995: Godwell. 1996). And within sport "[rugby] league has been more accessible to Aborigines than any other sport: it has certainly been the most generous of the major sports [Aborigines] play" (Tatz. 1995a: 188).

Cashman (1995) notes that "for better or worse, sport is central to the business of being Australian" (p. vii). Carroll (1982) makes a similar assertion. although from a different perspective. when he states:

[Australian] rites are sporting ones...sporting rites however. can never be more than half-hearted for they do not tap any of the metaphysical or transcendental yearnings and terrors that truly move men. They do not connect us with the infinite and the eternal. with the great questions of human existence. As a result they are a rickety basis on which to build any sense of identity (p. 220).

Carroll was writing with some literary palaver and his argument may hold in a world where sport is only a minor preoccupation but what of those instances in Australian society where sport does 'tap' those 'yearnings'? What of those places where sport does make connections 'with the great questions of human existence'? Tatz's (1994) research identifies such a place - the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, especially the remote Indigenous communities. Tatz (1995a) offers the following

31
assessment after thirty-four years of observation:

...sport can, and does, have more important functions in Aboriginal societies than it does in the lives of other Australians....sport, or the absence of it, is a factor in sustaining and nurturing group identity. Sport is a key to several existential issues...In many Aboriginal communities sport:

- provides, however temporarily, some purpose and meaning in life;
- enhances (diminishing) social cohesion and togetherness;
- emphasises ritual and attracts loyalties;
- enables a few moments of total empowerment and sovereignty;
- occupies time in the absence of real employment;
- reduces serious internal violence and juvenile delinquency;
- helps overcome, however temporarily, chronic ill health; and
- provides an avenue for successful competition against mainstream society [amongst others listed] (p. 318).

This being the case, the 'rickety basis on which to build any sense of identity' certainly begins to firm up and it is at this place that I monitored the nature of the 'dialogue' from an Aboriginal perspective.

**Research with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders**

At the white man's school, what are our children taught?
Are they told of the battles our people fought.
Are they told of how our people died?
Are they told why our people cried?
Australia's true history is never read,
But the blackman keeps it in his head.

-Poem from Bunji, No 4, December 1971
(cited in Suter & Stearman, 1982: 17)

These words recount a history which few have recognised. The same absence prompted Kevin Gilbert to write a book "because a white man'll never do it" (1994).

Both of these authors recognise the voices of Australia's Indigenous peoples. This thesis shares the same ambition. Similarly Parashak (1995) urges sports historians to
adopt "a subjective, social activist approach - focusing on giving voice to marginalised groups" (p. 3). I provided eight male, rugby league players of Indigenous descent with an opportunity to share their experiences and insights. I investigated the intersections of athletic identity and Aboriginality as found in their experiences in rugby league.

Before outlining the methodology of this research project I will discuss some issues regarding research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. When analysing the extent of colonisation and socialisation occurring in Australian cricket Cashman (1988) outlines the process of working "from below" as being without:

...individuals, institutions or clear and convenient ideological statements of alternative views on the game ideology or of the reaction to the proselytisation. Worse still subversion has mostly to be inferred from behaviour which is often reported through the eyes more attuned to the proselytisers (p. 263).

Although Cashman is specifically commenting on imperial England and colonial Australia these concepts and applications are relevant to the Aboriginal sporting context.

I disagree though with the point that there is an absence of "individuals, institutions or alternative views" from which researchers can draw. As an Aboriginal person I can testify to the readily present "alternative views" which are promulgated through Indigenous communities by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. But in the non-Aboriginal context Cashman (1988) is probably right in saying that these perspectives are not "clear and convenient". Nevertheless these points of view do exist. Gilbert (1994) offers some explanation for this oversight when he notes that "for what the blackman says is one thing, what he feels is another and the white interpretation is generally yet another" (p. x).

I support Cashman's (1988) observation that behaviour is often reported
"through eyes more attuned to the proselytiser's" (p. 263). This acknowledgment of the researcher's desensitisation to the supposed objects of the conversion is timely. With the generation of research in Indigenous affairs most projects proceed without recognising how this bias affects their findings. Cashman's (1988) and Gilbert's (1994) comments accentuate the importance of having Indigenous researchers and authors produce examinations into those instances of conflict, resistance and adoption which occur within the Indigenous experience in Australia, whether it be their own or simply the experiences of their people.

Having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people completing such research is likely to yield more accurate and insightful testimonies than have been previously afforded. One advantage associated with having Indigenous peoples complete research includes the fact that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are "bicultural" (Eades, 1991). Being raised an Aborigine who has to live within a non-Aboriginal world means that an individual must not only be familiar with their own world but also the other world, the one in which the interaction occurs. bell hooks (1990) remarks that "we looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both" (p. 149).

In addition to Cashman's (1988) acknowledgment of 'desensitisation' comes the issue of researcher/subject trust. Indigenous peoples have a history of denying, distorting or retaining knowledge from non-Aboriginal people (Morris, 1991). Eades' (1991) essay on the syntax of Aboriginal languages in South-east Queensland is particularly thorough on the implications of this issue. The primary Aboriginal consideration in this process has been and remains one of protection, both of the
knowledge and of the individual. It is not customary for Aboriginal people to yield information to someone who is not deemed responsible or worthy of its maintenance. Subsequently Aboriginal people may employ avoidance mechanisms to abstain from answering direct requests when approached by non-Aborigines (Eades, 1991). Any overt or persistent questioning on the matter can further signify the undeserving character of the individual making the demands. Through the years of formal assimilationist policy Indigenous peoples have learned that to have knowledge was to be singled out as 'special', and thus deserving of 'particular treatment', in the pejorative sense. Hence there is a reluctance among most Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who grew up or lived through these years to make their knowledge readily available to whoever may come along and ask.31 Lastly this familiarity with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal spheres during my life has produced the capacity for greater understanding. Aboriginal people can appreciate multiple meanings according to context, circumstance and relations. This understanding of these potential meanings is a critical step in the process of research with the Aboriginal community (Eades, 1991).

Methodology

One of the main objectives of this exploratory study was to give voice to the experiences of the men interviewed. To achieve this objective it was imperative that in-depth interviews be used as the mechanism for data collection. Because the subjects were Aboriginal, data collection had to be sensitive to cultural differences which may influence perceptions of research, questions asked and interview technique. In this regard I enjoyed the advantage of being Aboriginal.
interviewing other Aborigines definitely assisted in the process. For example, when subjects used some phrases and spoke in different tones I was able to note the difference as "Doug" did -

Aunty - Yeah I'm going to say something here and you [Doug] might get a bit hairy, but it wasn't all your fault that you changed. You had another influence.13

Me - Who that?

Aunty - I can't say (softly)

Doug - She's talkin' about my wife (straight)

In this instance Doug was being straightforward in his response but was saying so in a manner which was mindful of his Aunt's status as an Elder. This deference and respect for Aboriginal Elders is very important.

The overall interviewing process proceeded through several stages: choice of interview format, construction of the interview guide, deciding on sample selection, developing rapport with subjects, conducting the interview, transcription of data, and lastly, data analysis.

Firstly, I decided that the most appropriate form of data collection would be through semi-structured interviews. This qualitative methodology was adopted because it allows the "study of selected issues in depth and detail" (Patton, 1990) and it was an approach which allowed flexibility with the direction and sequence of the questioning. The next step was the development of an interview guide. The purpose of the interview guide was twofold - to ensure a degree of consistency across interviews, and to assist the interviewer whilst conducting the interviews. The interviews were intended to be very informal. A formal interview situation is difficult and too rigid an
environment when dealing with Aboriginal people. Culturally this type of situation is foreign and it would have clouded the responses and interaction of interviewer and subject. The interview guide was also expected to keep the interviewer from straying into superficial 'talk about football'. Messner's (1992) discussion of the methodology employed in his research commented on the willingness of subjects and himself to 'talk sport'. This talk omitted discussion of the affective responses to certain events, activities or relationships, thus leaving the researcher without an in-depth understanding of the whole experience. This outcome was possible in my research so the general interview guide served as a safeguard.

The interview guide was important for another reason - it contained the questions which each subject would be asked. Therefore this document ultimately reflects my biases, assumptions and preconceptions about the issues and the subjects. Acknowledging this inevitability, some precautions were observed. Firstly the broad theoretical problem was set for the research - "What is the relationship between sport and racial/ethnic identities?" From this a more specific question was defined - "What is the relationship between Rugby League and Aboriginality?" Therefore the purpose of the interviews was to collect data which would answer this question. To assist in this process three sub-problems were determined:

1. How are identities formed, fostered and challenged?

2. What is the experience of Aboriginal participation in Rugby League?

3. What is the relationship between identities within Rugby League?

Within each sub-problem the question was detailed further to explore possible issues which may arise. For example Sub-problem 1 was divided into three possible areas of
investigation:

a) how is an athletic identity formed, fostered and challenged in sport?

b) how is a sense of Aboriginality formed, fostered and challenged in sport? c) how is regional identity formed, fostered and challenged in sport?

Within each section, a related hypothesis was developed. The hypothesis posed in the section pertaining to Aboriginality read - "Aboriginality asserts a priority over all other identities and roles." In some regard these hypotheses are also indicators of bias and preconceptions and, in this light, it is better that they be stated openly before the research takes place rather than hidden within the researcher's thinking on the issues.

From this point, specific questions were created to illicit responses which would answer the associated hypotheses. These questions were difficult to create, but their specificity was advantageous in the subsequent analysis of the data. After this stage a guided interview format was drafted with the assistance of my adviser, it was given to two Aboriginal people with some experience in Aboriginal sport for feedback and comment. This feedback step removed the instrument from the academic confines and influences of the interviewer and helped make the guided interview more grounded. Some alteration of specific questions occurred in an effort to make the interview more informal and to avoid subject discomfort with the questions asked. A copy of the Interview Guide is included as Appendix A.

The next critical step in the data collection was determining the subjects to be interviewed. For this research project I enjoyed a number of advantages. Firstly I am an Aborigine completing research with other Aborigines which will certainly increase the comfort level between the subjects and myself. Secondly, I have been involved
with the sport of rugby league most of my life - either as participant, administrator, or spectator. This familiarity was important in establishing a rapport with participants. Thirdly, I have already established contacts, friendships and associates within the ranks of professional Aboriginal football players. On the other hand this familiarity was not the same across all subjects. This unevenness meant that my rapport with each subject was not consistent - I knew some subjects better than others and vice versa. Being so close to Indigenous sport for as long as I have also tends to enable thoughts and ideas to form and be shaped. In this sense I was not a researcher with a sense of objectivity derived from researching totally impersonal subject material.

The practice of "purposive sampling" was employed in a deliberate effort to diversify subjects and thereby the range of experiences examined (Patton. 1990). The sample selection was made against the following criteria:

- being of Aboriginal descent:
- level of career:
- contracted club:
- age:
- availability: and
- geographic proximity.

The most important of these criteria was that of career level. Because this study's particular interest was the nature of the engagement between Indigenous players and the non-Indigenous context of professional sports, it was imperative to draw subjects from along the continuum of this engagement. I selected subjects representing four types of experiences within professional rugby league: (a) those on the verge of full-
time professionalism\textsuperscript{34}: (b) those individuals who are currently full-time professionals; (c) individuals who have retired from full-time professional rugby league; and (d) those individuals who left full-time professional careers\textsuperscript{35}. A summary of these sampling categories is at Appendix D.

Frequently in qualitative research potential subjects who match desired categories are invited to participate in a study but decline. As Henderson (1991) cautioned, this possibility means that you are unable to ascertain the exact number of subjects to be interviewed prior to the completion of data collection. When I was unable to secure initial subjects selected. I used the "snowballing" technique to locate additional potential subjects to be interviewed (Patton, 1990). Doug, "Peter" and "Erne" were subjects obtained in this manner.

My prior relationship with "Leon", "Barry" and "David" was very important. Not only did these men introduce me to the other five subjects but their participation in the study was straightforward and comfortable for them and myself. Their interviews were certainly the easiest to complete. In short, my credibility and their trust had already been established, which facilitated the interviews immeasurably. This openness allowed them to express reservation, confusion, uncertainty or to question the intent of some query without fear of recrimination or embarrassment. For example, when David was considering issues on Aboriginality his uneasiness was clear and he challenged me by asking "three reasons?? - the other boys give you three reasons? (laughs) I never been asked these type of questions before". In another interview Barry joked "that's why I'm starting to get confused now because I'm starting to contradict myself (chuckles) with what I was saying before (laughs)". I do not
believe either of these responses would have been offered if the subjects did not trust me. This trust also enabled these subjects to recommend that I speak with other Aboriginal footballers. Introductions and references were made on my behalf with Peter, Erne, Larry and Doug. I also quickly acknowledged personal associations I had with relatives of each of these men. Peter and Larry both had close relatives who worked in the sport program which I managed. Erne's Uncle and I had looked after junior Aboriginal football teams together. And I was personally introduced and accompanied by a life long friend of the family when I went to interview Doug. These personal associations, along with being Aboriginal myself, were very important factors which influenced the rapport between those subjects who I had no prior association with, and myself.

With the participant's knowledge and consent each interview was taped on audio cassettes for transcription purposes. The Permission to Interview Form signed by each subject is in Appendix B. Formative notes were also taken to help facilitate and guide analysis (Patton, 1990). Notetaking protocols were derived from both Henderson (1991) and Kirby & McKenna (1989). Consistent with advice offered by Henderson (1991) a laptop computer was used to detail fieldnotes post-interview and before transcription. The first step in the "description" of the data was the audio taping of all interviews. "In addition to increasing the accuracy of data collection, the use of a tape recorder permits the interviewer to be more attentive to the interviewee" (Patton, 1990: 348). This was especially pertinent because Aboriginal culture is an oral based culture which demands that verbal communications entail an individual's full attention. From these tapes transcriptions were generated. In order not to distract the
subject. I deliberately placed the tape recorder in a position off to one side - not in the centre of the conversation. I also refused to respond immediately to the recorder when it completed taping on one side of a cassette. Both of my actions were intended to reinforce to the subject that I wanted him to be the centre of my attention, not the audio taping of the conversation. Although I missed some sentences, and the transcriptions appear disjointed at those instances where the cassette tape was full, my attention to these men and their stories was rewarded.

Once an interview had been completed I asked the subject for feedback on the type of questions asked and the format of the interview. Most subjects offered little comment on the structure and type of questions, other than positive statements about how the questions made them think, or that they were happy with the way the interview went. Only two subjects discussed specific matters. These two subjects wanted to return to specific issues or to discuss other matters which hadn't been raised in the interview. and so I did this. Overall the subjects were positive about the whole process.

The evening after the interview I usually noted my impressions of the respective interview. These comments included any unusual reactions to questions, extra issues raised by the subject, and my general impressions of the interview.

The last step of the data collection process was the transcription and coding of the interviews. Transcription of eight interviews ranging in duration from 40 minutes to 90 minutes took approximately three weeks. The transcripts range in length from 14 to 32 single spaced, typed pages. Each subject was assigned a pseudonym. The texts consulted on how to code and manage transcriptions focused on hard copy, typed
transcriptions (Hessler. 1992; Kirby & McKenna. 1989; Patton. 1990). With the increasing presence of word-processors and computers I was surprised not to find detailed discussion and advice about suggested protocols for managing research data on computers. The storage of this material is easier to do on computers than the creation of hard copies (typed transcripts) but pitfalls exist, such as the copying of files and the creation of master documents. The principles of research management are the same but the methods should be adapted to the new media within which most academics work. In this project I transcribed the audio taped interviews on a laptop computer. These originals were stored on the computer's hard-drive. Whilst entering the data the material was saved both automatically and manually at regular intervals. When entering this material the subjects were only identified by their respective pseudonyms. Within each transcript automatic page numbering was set, as was a footer which noted the interview number and the subject's pseudonym. Once individual transcripts were completed hard copies were printed immediately. Furthermore copies were made to a separate computer disk. The transcripts on that disk were treated as the original data and were not altered in any way. Nor were these 'masters' used in the analysis of data. The transcripts on the hard-drive were available as complete copies of each interview and used, when required, for reference. The printed hard copies of each interview became the working documents during the analysis.

The printing of the completed interview immediately after transcription is imperative. I unfortunately had a computer disk corrupted during the transcribing of the seventh interview. This failure deleted all prior transcriptions and post-interview
impressions from the disk. My only saving grace was the fact that I'd printed off each transcription and all post-interview impressions as they were completed. It is much easier to scan in completed transcripts than re-transcribing this data from audio tapes again. Another safeguard used to maintain subject confidentiality was the creation of only one document which identified the subjects and their pseudonym. This document summarised the interview schedule for the data collection. The schedule represents a legend for the data collecting process. This document was saved on another file within the hard drive completely separate from the original file created to store all other related research material - including the proposal, thesis drafts, presentation summaries, transcripts and post-interview impressions.

From here the formal data analysis proceeded. The transcripts were read from start to finish. As I read the material I noted when issues were raised and where I perceived they were linked to any of the hypotheses. As I read more transcripts, particularly clear and succinct quotes were marked. The coding system used noted the number of the interview, the page number of the transcript and then the number of the paragraph where the comment was recorded. After coding all the transcriptions the next level of analysis involved the listing of all the issues commented on. These issues were then correlated to the three broad theoretical questions - Aboriginality, playing and/or fluidity. Most issues were pertinent in multiple locations. Each section was then separately examined and the total list of issues ranked in an order of most logical sequence. This ranking was repeated for each of the sections. The analysis was then compared amongst the subjects on similar questions and responses.
Some Reflections

As this was an exploratory study, comments intended to improve the methodology are pertinent. Two features must be maintained in similar research with Aborigines - informality and establishing a quick rapport. In the first case any research with Aboriginal peoples should be sensitive to differing cultural norms which dictate behaviour and interactions. Aboriginal culture is based on oral traditions and the delivering of these traditions is through informal, unrestricted social channels. The few instances which are strictly formal and whose interactions are dictated by the lore\textsuperscript{36} are not open to non-Aboriginal people or uninitiated peoples anyway. This type of research did not cross those bounds so this issue is not relevant in the thesis. What is relevant is the need to put the interview into as light-hearted, and informal a sense as possible. To this end I assured the subjects that all I wanted to do was to have a yarn\textsuperscript{37} about their experiences in football. I also minimised any talk about a 'thesis' or 'research'. Instead I talked of needing to talk with Kooris and Murris in the community for a major assignment which I was doing at uni\textsuperscript{38}. I was particularly straightforward about the intended usage of the material collected and their rights to withdraw or alter their participation at any time without any recrimination.

The second critical success factor was being able to make a link and build rapport with each subject. Without this personal association these interviews would have been more difficult and the data obtained quite weak. Being Aboriginal helped immeasurably to gain this rapport. I was also assisted by my prior association with rugby league and Aboriginal rugby league. The personal introductions by previous subjects also contributed to establishing my credentials and the legitimacy of this
study. For researchers without such connections, I would recommend deferring data collection until they have personal associations and can move between prospective subjects freely and comfortably.

Although it was unusual for the data collection to occur before the formal research proposal, this sequence of events was not a disadvantage. The fact that this research was completed as an exploratory study is highly beneficial. The framing of the questions and working with this methodology has provided invaluable experience and insight into the completion of a full scale research project of this kind. For example the following items should be altered in any full scale research project - revised interview guide: conducting two interviews per subject, and having the subject's first interview conducted with another person present.

The interview guide should be revised and some questions omitted. On occasion questions appeared redundant or confusing to the subjects. Questions about 'athlete identity' were difficult for subjects to respond to so maybe they should be reduced and/or asked in a different sequence. The last section on 'identity fluidity' was ideally placed at the end of the interview. No subject had any reservation about being able to comment on this matter once they had discussed the preceding material. The revised interview guide should also contain just the intended questions and broader subjects headings. On nearly every occasion when the guides were offered to the subjects prior to commencement they invoked feelings of confusion and reservation. The detail contained within the guide, which was intended to prompt the researcher, overwhelmed the subject. About fifteen minutes was required to explain the material contained within it. This openness and sharing may have been beneficial for the
interview but it was time consuming. A draft Revised Interview Guide has been attached as Appendix C.

Each subject should be interviewed twice. The first interview should also be completed with another person present. Interviews with Doug, Barry, David, and Mike to a lesser extent, were all completed with other people present. Invariably as the comfort of the subject rose, his confidence in responding to questions increased and his talkativeness also increased. The presence of the second person enables the subject to interact and discuss issues more fully. This approach also placed less pressure on the subject by not 'being the only person being interviewed'. The second interviews should be completed as follow-up interviews. These second interviews should be completed after the researcher has had the opportunity to listen to the audio tapes of the first interview. The purpose of listening to these tapes before the second interview is to focus and revisit issues which have been raised or omitted. These second interviews should be completed alone with the subject. This process occurred with Barry and his responses in the second interview were much richer and more pointed. When I asked Barry about this he said "I'd had a couple of days to think about some of things which you'd asked me". This time for reflection is highly beneficial.

All subjects coped with the questions and the issues raised but the application of the interview guide and the rapport between researcher and subject which facilitates this is critical. Patton's (1990) caution that "the researcher is the instrument [and] validity... hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigour of the person doing the fieldwork" (p. 14) is true but what Patton fails to recognise is that not all researchers start from the same place when it comes to interacting with research topics.
or potential research subjects. In spite of attempts to prepare uniform research I accept that "in depth interviews are hard to pretest, have unpredictable results...and are difficult to standardise and replicate" (Henderson, 1991: 72).
Notes:

1. 'Footy' is used to describe many sports in Australia, including Rugby League, Rugby Union, Touch Football, Australian Rules Football and the more internationally recognised, Soccer. In this instance footy is used to describe Rugby League.

2. Australia has three professional winter sporting codes. In the States of New South Wales and Queensland the sport of Rugby League dominates. In Western Australia, Northern Territory, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania Australian Rules Football is dominant. But with the expanded professional national leagues franchises have been developed in all of these States/Territories. The third football code is Rugby Union. Rugby has firm support in most States/Territories but the premier competition is located in Sydney/Canberra.

3. The euphemism "blackbirding" was utilised to describe this period of Australia's colonial history but unfortunately the term fails to accurately represent the activity in question. Subsequently the Australian descendants of these South Sea Islanders prefer that true recognition be paid to the practice in a manner which is consistent with the Commonwealth Government's recognition of South Sea Islanders in 1992.

4. Specific mention should be made here of the achievements of Lionel Morgan, Kevin Yow Yea, George Ambrum and Mal Meninga. Their combined efforts and achievements in rugby league opened the doors for all men of colour into the sport. All these men proudly identify as descendants of South Sea Islanders but at times, and sometimes against their wishes, have been incorrectly labelled Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

5. In late 1996 a Federal Parliamentarian sparked public debate with her maiden parliamentary speech which focused on three issues - Aboriginal affairs, Immigration and free speech. Specifically this Member challenged the belief that Indigenous peoples were socially disadvantaged, questioned continuation of immigration of people from Asia, and lastly suggested that the 'political correctness' of the last ten years was masking free speech.

6. In 1993 and 1995 two separate Aboriginal professional football players were the targets of racial vilification. In 1993 Nicky Winmar endured a tirade of racial slurs from the supporters of the opposing team. At the end of the game Winmar walked over to the most vocal section of the crowd, raised his football jumper, pointed to his chest and made the comment that he was black and proud of it.

In April 1995 another Aboriginal player, Michael Long, was vilified for being Aboriginal, this time by another player. Two years after the public debate about Nicky Winmar's statement the Australian Football League (AFL) believed it had addressed the matter. Entering into the AFL’s grievance procedure Long was not offered an apology nor was any sanction enforced against the offending player. Completely dissatisfied with the outcome Long went public. The ensuring public scrutiny forced the AFL to alter its procedures, forced the offender and his club to make a full and complete public apology, and provided the impetus for a new Federal Government initiative to confront racism within Australian sport.
7. There were some instances where Protectorates or Missions introduced and encouraged sports primarily for the purpose of socialisation. See Blades (1982), Cashman (1995), Tatz (1995a) and Mulvaney & Harcourt (1988).

8. For the location of towns mentioned throughout this thesis, refer to Appendix E. a map of Australia.

9. The Labor Day public holiday falls on the second Monday of October each year.

10. The term "Knockout" is a reference to the standard competition format adopted for the event. The competition draw is structured so that only the winning teams from each round proceed to successive rounds. Eventually, through this process of elimination, two teams vie for the ultimate title. In recent years the financial prize for the winning team has been $50,000. But the real prize comes with the right to host the Knockout in the following year which is secured by winning the Knockout.

11. This is the author's estimation of people. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. in Moree for the 1995 Knockout. The precise number of people associated with the event is difficult to ascertain. Although admission tickets are charged these numbers are rarely accurate. A fairer indication is obtained by make an assessment based on the number of teams attending. A management consultant's report on the hosting of the 1996 Knockout recommended preparations be made to host 10,000 people.

12. City or Shire Councils are the local government tier within the Australian democratic system.

13. Over the course of the last three years as Manager of the Indigenous Sport Program (ISP) for the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) I have travelled extensively throughout Australia. In excess of seventy trips have been concluded during this time, covering visits to remote areas, rural and urban communities. Often I made specific visits to where the Aboriginal Sport Development Officers (ASRDO) delivered their programs in the community. It was at these times that I was given ample opportunity to observe what happens at a local level. And no matter where I was there was always occasion where local children had modified activities to be more inclusive and open.

14. The Board of the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) is due to consider a review of Olympic sports funding levels under the federally funded Olympic Athlete Program (OAP) at its December 1996 meeting. Smaller and non-Olympic sports have already incurred reductions in funding levels following Federal government reductions in overall ASC funding levels in the 1996/97 financial year.

15. An example of overt political protests offered by Donnelly (1988) was the "Black Power" protests at the 1968 Olympic Games. In the Australian context, the protests surrounding the 1982 Commonwealth Games or the opposition to the South African Rugby Union (Springbok) Tour of Australia in 1971 are illustrations of overt political protests in sport.

16. In this instance Donnelly (1988) offers the persistence of cock-fighting in Balinese communities as an example.
17. An Australian example of 'cultural opposition in the imperialist/colonised' would be the 1932-33 MCC tour of Australia infamously known as the "Bodyline Series" (Cashman, 1995). In the latter case activities such as surfing or the new "extreme" sports offer 'alternative cultural meanings and expressions'.


19. This term denotes the Australian national representative team and the national colours.


21. Lionel Morgan identifies as South Sea Islander but has accepted that his achievements have offered some inspiration to all black people. Morgan has always tried to assist and encourage other black players whenever possible. In 1991 Morgan was appointed Coach of the QRL Under 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representative team. I was Assistant Manager of this team.

22. For a more in depth explanation of this decision see Harris (1989) or the Oxford Companion to Australian Sport (1992).

23. In 1993 and again in 1995 the Australian Football League (AFL), the professional national Australian Rules Football competition, was embroiled in public displays of racist behaviour and subsequent media and public scrutiny. Both incidents involved the racial vilification of Aboriginal players. In the earlier instance the supporters of an opposing team were responsible. In Michael Long's experience the offensive behaviour was directed by an opposing player.

The AFL sought to contain the issue of racism, particularly the matter of racism directed at Aborigines, by internally administrative matters. A fair degree of scepticism greeted the eventual initiatives adopted by the AFL following this incident. The initiatives included the outlining of an internal process of reconciliation and the creation of a part-time Aboriginal Liaison position to be filled by a professional footballer.

The inadequacy of these efforts was made apparent in April, 1995 when another Aboriginal player was the target of racist comments from an opposing player. Not willing to accept indecision and ambiguity on this issue any longer, all the Aboriginal players of the AFL banded together and demanded a coherent set of strategies designed not only to educate but also to punish offenders, in the case of repeated violations.

24. This explanation is not peculiar to the sport of rugby league because I believe that the same explanation fits for a historically high participation rate amongst Indigenous peoples in other parts of Australia in similar codes i.e., Australian Rules Football and now Touch Football.
25. In traditional communities where the Lore is maintained kinship ties often encompass more than simple genetic kin and would be defined by respective skin names or totems with these relationships and subsequent obligations bound by the Lore.

26. It is often a great source of pride and prestige when a family can field a team consisting solely of blood relatives. In remote areas, carnivals consist predominantly of traditional peoples, and much politicking and controversy can develop while establishing who talented players are obligated to play for, based on traditional kinship ties and marriage responsibilities. Similar disputes also occur with carnivals or competitions which consist primarily of Indigenous peoples in rural or urban circumstances.

27. The word 'corroboree' has become a colloquial reference to any large gathering of Aborigines for social or cultural purposes. In traditional Aboriginal societies this word was probably reserved as a specific description of cultural ceremonies.

28. This may be of an informal or formal nature. Although there has been occasion when some ceremony business is resolved at the time of these carnivals, this practice is being discouraged by the organisers. Aboriginal people of the respective carnivals on the basis that it is an inappropriate time and place to complete such business.

29. The Indigenous Sport Program (ISP) is being developed by the Indigenous Sport Section of the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) as a special measures initiative designed to both encourage the continuation of Indigenous expressions of recreation and sport and to facilitate greater Indigenous participation across a broader spectrum of sports.

30. This ASC initiative is being jointly funded by the ISP and the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) in the years preceding the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. Its primary objective is to increase Indigenous participation in Olympic sports, as both coaches and players.

31. I draw this understanding from experiences with my own Grandparents and great-Grandmother primarily, and secondly from my associations with other Murri Elders of the same generation. Having lived and survived these forms of government policy Murri Elders of this generation are very suspicious of any government officials or persons claiming to represent official agencies.

Outside of the non-Aboriginal experience though certain behaviours are also maintained within Murri culture. For example my Grandfather explained to me that some people within traditional Murri society have certain roles to fulfil. Unlike going to university, he told me, and coming out to take up a job simply because you had a piece of paper, things worked differently in traditional times. These positions and the individuals who filled these roles were determined by external spiritual forces, circumstance and internal capacity and application. Subsequently the required knowledge to fill these roles was deemed sacred and only made available to the 'right' person at the 'right' time.

In the contemporary sense if someone was to persist in trying to obtain information from an individual it could be deemed that this person was not supposed to be told because maybe
they are not the 'right' person or maybe this isn't the 'right' time.

32. The pseudonyms for each subject will be placed in quotation marks when they are first used and typed without quotation marks thereafter.

33. Any comments made which aren't the author's will be typed in bold.

34. In the context of this study I will define "full-time professional" as those players who are regular season starters (i.e., named in the first fifteen) in the A-grade sides of their respective national competition for over half of the regular season.

35. During the course of the study I sought an alternative expression to the word "dropout" from the respective participants. One subject suggested the phrase 'those who left'. This appeared more sensitive and captured the agency of the individual to make a decision about their football career so I agreed. Therefore "some one who left" was defined as an athlete who was formerly in a full-time professional career, or on the verge of such a career, when he decided to leave professional football thereby opting out of this career path.

36. The 'lore' is the set of rules and principles which dictate formal, ceremonial, social and personal obligations and responsibilities in traditional Indigenous cultures within Australia.

37. 'Having a yarn' means having an informal talk.

38. A colloquial Australian reference to 'university'.
CHAPTER 2

Data Summary

Identity Construction

This study examines the construction of identity in professional Aboriginal rugby league players. The connection between sport and Aboriginality has often been a topic of speculation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, but how firm is this link? Through interviews with eight professional Aboriginal football players I sought to ascertain the nature of identity construction through participation in rugby league.

All subjects were aware of and talked about the perceived link between Aboriginality and the capacity to perform in sports.

I think that Murriss no matter what - what football - they've got that flare. Every now and then I can do things that me mates, me mainstream mates, they come up, like last year - you have that black magic coming out in ya. Like all Murriss, like the Ewen McGrady's, the Ellas, all them, they had bloody excellent ball skills and that. They tried the little chip kicks and that. I, I think if you played in an All-Blacks carnival and you see a dark fella in rugby league - they bring that sort of stuff into this sort of football. And you can see that carnival football come back.

- David

As far as sport goes, that sort of - because you're black, people think that you're going to be good at sport anyway.

- Barry

This 'innate' ability was at times used to explain a player's success in professional sport. Even more significant though was the perceived direct relationship between good performance in sport and Aboriginality. Some subjects believed that a positive cycle of reinforcement was created between football performance and affirmations of
Aboriginality. subjects believed that they had special talents because they were Aboriginal and when these talents were applied to rugby league and they were successful they then saw this as an affirmation of their belief. Consequently this affirmation strengthened their Aboriginal identity and further contributed to the belief that Aborigines had innate physical talents.

I used to believe that all Kooris were good at sport. I don't any more. I just think that Aboriginals believe that Aboriginals are the best sportspeople, I really do. I really do. Yeah and believing in something makes a difference. And if you believe then - I always say believing is half way to getting somewhere.

- Barry

This perceived innate ability has colloquially been called 'black magic'.

...it's just Murri instinct, you were just going and - 'Hoya! Got that' and there'd be someone there. Once you know someone you just sing out - 'hoy' and you know it. They just throw the ball and the blokes got the ball, and he's underneath the goal post.

- Doug

It was a lot easier when you're playing with all black fellas. It's a lot easier, you all know what you're doing. No need to, no need, really no need to rehearse anything. Like it'd work. Just up an' over. It just comes natural...whatever happened it happened.

- Jack

Footballers are said to bring a touch of 'black magic' to clubs they play with and the games they participate in. Unusual displays of ability by Aboriginal players are called 'black magic'. Not surprisingly, most Aboriginal footballers believe and support this concept. Perhaps because of the positive connotations associated with Aboriginal identity most Aboriginal players are happy to accept 'black magic' as an explanation for their physical skills. In most instances subjects of this study cited 'black magic'
when trying to explain exceptional performances by Aboriginal footballers. The style of play preferred by most Aborigines is also called 'black magic'.

This play is characterised by free-flowing, running, quick passing and quick moves. It entails a fluidity which uses all the field and is marked by spontaneity, individuality, imagination, freedom from rules and set moves, quick thinking, intelligence, vision and total awareness of the game. Many subjects noted the differences between how Aborigines play football versus how mainstream clubs dictated the game be played.

...oh yeah heaps. Just pop your head around here, when we're playing around here. When ya playin' footy out on the field whatever happens just happens. When you go down there, trying to do this and do that, you move here and you move there [Murrays play like that all over?] yeah, yeah, whatever pops into your head.
- Mike

Some subjects commented on how Aboriginal players brought this type of play to teams when they played. These players were credited with adding an attacking dimension to the club. Some subjects commented on how non-Aboriginal players who developed Aboriginal-like games skills were perceived as 'being black' or as wanting to be black:

...but I also believed that I played with two players that were like that - Edward Gates and Cornell Hooks¹. [...they played like...] like black - blackfellas. Well I reckon Edward is a black man in a white man's body (laughs). And I kept telling him that too [and he says] yeah I should of been black (laughs).
- Erne

This Aboriginal playing style is also characterised as a 'naturalness'. subjects commented on how it 'just happened'. This style of play is perceived to be just a 'natural' way to play. This naturalness enables players to gain a level of enjoyment
from the game and allowed them to enjoy the best of both worlds - Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. If this playing style was 'bred-out' then the enjoyment gained from playing football was lessened.

...when you come down here you're not an individual any more. You're very much part of a group and therefore you play that way, therefore they, I believe, they sort of take away a lot of your individual brilliance. And for Aboriginal players I think they rely upon individual brilliance. And by playing in a very structured team they take away that...well I call it breeding-out and they call it controlling...

- Barry

With some players this has meant not considering lucrative contracts to play with certain clubs that were not noted for playing this open-style football. This 'naturalness' is a very important factor for Aboriginal players seeking to play professionally. Where a player can match his preferred playing style with a club, or be given the freedom to play his style of football, then the satisfaction of that player increases.

subjects made some comments on the social status and prestige of playing with certain teams or at certain levels.

...but you want community prestige, you gotta go uptown haven't ya? You can't compete... - Marla

When asked about the role of All-Blacks carnivals Barry responded:

Huge! They have - huge - and they have to be because they're - how many large get togethers are there? - There's not many and to have the community identity put out in front of you in football jumpers - and pretty new ones (chuckles) - that goes a long way too you know...And that sort of goes with the whole image of your community...

This social status is one of the few instances in black life which offers the chance to
mark yourself out. It becomes an identity marker and carries with it a deeply invested sense of worth and of self. The prevalence of other Aboriginal people wearing clothing associated with sporting teams around the community is high. The affiliation of relatives and friends with teams or clubs is common. Football clothing becomes prestigious. The more genuine the article, the greater the prestige. Official playing jerseys issued to players are the most sought after type of sport gear.

...the jumpers and that are useless down here, I reckon. I can’t wear it, and people pester ya too. But, honestly, I don’t mind giving my brothers and Dad and Mum - they can have whatever they want. First cousins are on the outer. Second cousins don’t stand a chance (laughs) but gear is, gear is a big thing.

- Barry

There is an affirmation of identity through the labelling of football clothes. This prestige is not directly correlated to the level of representation though. For example, an Australian representative team jersey may not mean as much as a club jersey or a jersey from a successful All-Blacks team. There appears to be an affirmation of identity through the labelling derived from sharing clothes or uniforms.

On another subject Barry makes the comment that:

If you’ve got an Aboriginal footballer with you then you’se can be both - ’hey brother!’ and this sort of thing on the field...you can’t be black by yourself, you know. How are you going to do it?...I don’t think you can go to footy and be black by yourself.

This sense of ’being black’ required someone to share it with or someone else who could relate and understand it. ’Acting black’ is important for Aborigines who have voluntarily moved into the all-white world to pursue football careers. Behaving as you would in your community becomes an important coping strategy. Having other
Aborigines in the team is also very important for overcoming feelings of isolation.

One fella come down from the Gold Coast actually... he walked in and you know, his head was down, sitting in the corner, end of training and he'd just took off at the end of training. So I watched him for the first session... and I said 'Hello' to him. As soon as he walked in for the second session I went up to him and grabbed him and said 'Come on brother, you stick with me', sort of thing. And as soon as I said that he kinda picked up a bit. And I said 'Don't worry about these white fellas, us black fellas stick together'. And Henry Messner was there too see, so Henry's come over and we've sort of - he felt more at home because Henry and I were with him...
- Erne

One of the tenets of Aboriginal culture is the extended family and Aboriginal life is characterised by gregariousness. In some way Aboriginal football players try to replicate this environment by having other Aboriginal players around.

There is no greater illustration of this collective sense of self than All-Blacks sports carnivals - whether they be multi-sport or just one sport. subjects talked of the comfort and affirmation. esteem and confidence generated by being around so many blacks. These carnivals represent repositories of black self-esteem and self-confidence.

[They] take the carnivals pretty serious I think. Well it's probably - the main reason I do play is that it's the only chance I sort of get to play with my brothers and that...that's the only opportunity I get to play rugby league with them...I'd know just lots of people I suppose. Lots of Aboriginal people - like millions of them (chuckles). It's just an awesome sight I suppose.
- Larry

For the Aboriginal football player these carnivals also represent the best opportunity to play their preferred style of football and enjoy the accompanying personal, social and cultural benefits.

Oh I think they're the best competitions. The best ones I've played in...Like when I was playing the schoolboy comps - not playing against men, playing against schoolboys - but it's just a lot more robotic type of football...When you go to an All-Blacks comp...they
don’t care. I like that sort of football. That sort of open style football. From just your normal football, your competition football to the All-Blacks comps - I’d say they’re a lot more exciting, that’s what stands out in my mind. A lot more attacking.

- David

Although All-Blacks carnivals do have their disadvantages and some social pitfalls these are not enough to overshadow the enjoyment of playing. These carnivals also offer the chance for Aboriginal people to personalise their culture and their traditions.

In everyday life Aborigines are contrasted against the non-Aboriginal world which encompasses their lives. In these all-Aboriginal spaces differentiation is made not by skin colour but by tribal, geographic lineage and Aboriginal heritage. This process very much personalises being Aboriginal by redefining the importance of Elders, geographic boundaries, cultural differences, languages and tribal affiliations. In this sense the carnivals provide a rare contemporary chance to reaffirm such connections.

I think because you get to know all different, Aboriginal people - Aboriginal people are different in every race, aren't they? Like there's different tribes and different people you know, you just get to meet different people. I'm fascinated by meeting...

It's the biggest event on the Aboriginal calendar. People love to hang out for that three day week-end. They get together and see their people, and it brings the community together.

Just seeing the people come together, you know. Like it's exciting stuff - it's fast, exhilarating, I just like watching 'em play and I love listening to the women (laughs). You know what it's like. I just wander around listening to the crowd. I mainly watch the crowd than the football, it just, you know, it blows me away.

- Leon

At a more symbolic level what activity better represent community identity than having two brightly uniformed teams competing against each other in a decisive competition - a knockout where only the winners move to the next round? At all levels
these carnivals offer something for Aboriginal people. Surprisingly though these benefits are largely unconscious yet distinctly emotive.

In comparing the all-Aboriginal carnivals and competitions to mainstream rugby league the subjects made a clear distinction in favour of 'the real' football of the mainstream.

Well carnivals are the best thing - like everyone's able to show what they got - their ability and that. Like you - none of this team patterns and that - you just get on the field and if you've got a chip kick - you can do whatever you want. Just fun. Playing for All-blacks teams in Townsville it was mainly all my mates just getting together. All the Murris getting together - it was good. That was mainly the mateship really. And the mainstream - just the level of football. Like it's the best football you can get. It's good to know that I can, I can get - oh well, hopefully, I can get up there to the top level and stay there.

- David

Here's my opinion on playing in Koori teams versus mainstream - they're not [the same as] the State teams - I've been on State teams that's better than [All-Blacks] ones...It's either mainstream or - I don't see the Aboriginal State team as being equivalent.

- Barry

It is understandable how individuals who have invested sizeable personal efforts over at least ten years, and have created concomitant identities in football would be loathe to diminish the worth of mainstream football. These players also refused to admit that some Aboriginal players may be highly talented yet decide to abstain from mainstream football. I do not know why these subjects would not accept this possibility.
...there's a lot of talented Murris out there and if they're willing to make that break then they'll go a long way. Yeah well - get away from their mates - actually go down to Sydney and try...

I just moved to Sydney - I had that decision in '82. Canberra came up to sign me up. And the bloke told me, he said 'Oh your brother-in-law said you wouldn't work', I said 'Oh fuck him, I'll stay here and proved him wrong', otherwise I woulda went down to Sydney in '82. '83 I was signed up for.

- Doug

Well I'll go out on a limb and say it - while that might sit out in the community, someone tells me that 'They can make it in Sydney but don't wanna come', don't hold water with me - because it doesn't, it doesn't! I'd be very surprised if it holds water with anyone.

- Barry

Views about training were used to mark off a cultural difference between Aborigines and non-Aboriginals in the same manner as playing styles did. To be Aboriginal meant to train infrequently and without organisation or structure - "Natural talent, you ever seen a blackfella train?", "they want me to coach this here side - but they won't show up for training - typical Murris umm", "All they'd do when they come home is go up the road and play touch every afternoon. Yeah that's the only training they'd do." Larry is a notorious 'lazy trainer'. When I interviewed him he was finishing an extra fitness session for those members of the team who were not up to standard in pre-season training.

I just, I just - most of it all's just natural - it just comes natural to me. Like readin' the game and that. And training really hard (laughs). It's gettin' a bit harder now. It was alright when I was a kid, I could do it on one leg. It wasn't something a trainer could do - a trainer could condition ya but other things just come.

Yet the transition to professional football is most typified by increases in training
workload and intensity. Some subjects were concerned that even when this training
increased the coach could still get angry at players for not performing at a high enough
standard.

...yeah he had a good 'blow-up'. Done something wrong - he'd go
off his head. Start swearin', yeah. Just doing ball work he'd just
blow up at anything - [he'd] swear! (Make you fellas nervous?)
Yeah, that's what I was talking about earlier (chuckles). Don't want
to go to training (laughs). Just ball, just ball work. Oh when I go to
Easts I asked [the other players] (laughs). [The coach] he would
blow up (chuckles).

When I was playing with [the All-Blacks] they're lucky to
train...they used to, all they used to do is go run, do a couple of laps
hey. Sometimes they just played touch! (laughs) Do a bitta ball
work.

- Mike

Two subjects commented on how they developed a different training ethic through
their early experiences.

Well my cousin played Grade for Easts and he just - it was just
excitement to go an' watch him play. And seeing the crowds and
that, you know. And seeing what he could do - he's quick. My
Father used to train him and that's how, I think - that's how I got
interested in wanting to be a professional [When you 'trained him'?]
Well he, he coached him, well [He coached a club?] No. He coached
him. He wanted to be fit and Dad was a fitness expert an' so he
used to come 'round the backyard, and see him sweat his ass off for
two hours a day - every day! An' he trained hard. And I used to get
out there and do it with 'em, you know. I'd run and all that sort of
stuff. That's how I think I got into, you know - off him.

- Leon
...I snapped the cruciate and medial, and a lot of nerve endings. Yeah it was a pretty severe injury...So it was pretty severe at the time and when [the Doctor said I wouldn't walk again, when] he said that. I said, 'Well I'm not going to accept that'. And that's when I know I sort of said to myself - 'I'm going to work my ass off to get, to get back'. So umm I when I could start training, I was training every day. That's when I started to learn to train every day.

- Erne

These instances are important because for each player it marks a conscious decision to train harder and they still remember it clearly enough to recall the moment in detail. decades after it happened. This probably indicates a decision of some personal significance. Aborigines have been stereotyped by white Australians as being lazy and not willing to work hard: this race-based stereotype is probably sustained by football coaches who believe all black players are lazy and don't train well. All these subjects noted that there was a difference in the attitude most Aborigines had towards training when compared to non-Aboriginal players. For the Aboriginal player, being disciplined for breaches of training ethic is perceived as an affirmation of Aboriginality. At its most severe this discipline may be seen as further evidence of racism within mainstream sport.

Some comments were made by the subjects about making transitions between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds. In particular they talked about moving between mainstream football and community life. In most instances these players move away from home, family and community to play with a professional football franchise. Some subjects talked of coping with differing expectations and adapting.

I suppose, about one thing - there are expectations through all of it. Yeah at each [stage]. They change, they change, they change. The Aboriginal expectations of - you have community expectations
ummm right through it umm, whether you're playing for the 'Rangs or whatever - right through. Even, you know, when you're playing down here. You mightened see it but there's community expectations you know. But umm there's also individual expectations. And your pride - it plays a big part in it. And that goes all the way through. I suppose. Yep - individual's probably more important when you don't have that support - so in mainstream, you don't have your mob there telling ya, you know - 'you're good and that'.

- Barry

When asked about making the choice between family and football all subjects said family comes first. The follow-up question asked whether they had ever been placed in the position to make this decision - none said they had. A comment from one of the subject's partners was very important. She added

I think that everyone - no one like, puts you into that position. Like, mostly I thought [his Mum] and I would always step aside rather than put him in that position.

You don't really talk about it. Like one night at the [football club] we had one night where we had all the girls. It was specifically to talk about that sort of stuff, and what we could do to - like cooking dinner and making sure it's ready when they come home and that sort of stuff. But I don't know - I suppose it depends on your relationship.

This particular issue is deserving of further research. The day after this comment I spent four hours talking with this woman about her professional football experience as the partner/spouse of a player. Some of her insights were exceptional and suggest a life in total contrast to the perceived glamorous, high profile world of professional sport. The sacrifices made by partners and their ability to cope with player mood swings is emotionally demanding; perhaps too demanding for some relationships to survive. One subject commented on how his relationship with his first partner and now
his marriage can be defined by his post-football life. When asked about his marriage and football Leon replied:

...didn't even know what I'd done or who I was. She didn't - yeah she took it on because she thought I was a nice person I suppose. One of the guys that introduced us said 'This guy is a famous footballer'. she said 'Oh I'm sorry, I don't know anything about football'. And I said 'That's the way I like it.'

It appears that the construction of the footballer identity is an unreflective act. Most subjects commented that they never really made any decision to become professional footballers - it just happened.

The question about regional identity was a difficult one for subjects to address. I believe this difficulty was caused because as individuals they had never considered such an issue. When Erne was asked when he most shared a State identity he responded:

When they were throwing cans at me at the State of Origin! (laughs) - 'What the fuck am I doing here?!!' (laughs) I was in that game actually; in Queensland when they threw all the cans - I was ducking and weaving (chuckles). Probably the only time you feel that is when you play State of Origin. That's because - not after the game, after the game it's great - but in the lead up to the game you got - not so much in NSW^2 but in Queensland - in Queensland you got a whole State hating you. There's a lot of pressure on you but you don't let it get to ya. When you go into the game you've got so many people abusing the shit out of ya. Oh they just give it to ya. And then that particular time when we were on the field and they were throwing cans at us - or they could be throwing oranges at you - 'What am I doing here?' (chuckles) Yeah that's when you start to feel it.

One thing I did know, I did notice - and it comes back to being a blackfella again.
You alright?’ Not once - and I remember it clearly - not once did a blackfella abuse me, criticise me for being a NSW player. As far as they were concerned I was a blackfella. It didn't matter...They didn't like the jumper but 'You're a brother'.

Another subject did talk about the significance of regional identity when at All-blacks carnivals but the remainder linked regional teams to mainstream experiences.

Above all these experiences and common to each one is the prevalence of racism. Racism is as much a part of the Aboriginal experience as being Aboriginal.

The only other topics which rated as many responses as racism within the interviews were that of family and football.

...well this club over here, it never give the Murris a fair go. All the, all the [starting positions went to whitefellas] - I know that's why they started their own team up.

- Doug

And this bloke in the crowd he was mouthin' off, and this fella was only small, and I had my girl with me and Doug's wife. And he was calling Doug everything and I said 'Look I've had a fuckin' 'nuff of you! You rednecked asshole!' And it was packed and I just turned around and said 'Why don't you just shut your mouth! If you could do any better then get out there an' have a go.' Well he sat down and never said another word. (laughs)

- Aunty

Yeah they used to jump on us, kick us, punch us. Everytime you'd go to tackle [the referees] used to rule offside and when we give it back to them [the referees] would send us to the sin bin.

- Mike

No one is always on a winning note. I mean umm there's always a win after a loss somewhere and umm, like it was unfortunate for me...it had to come sometime. I sorta took it in my stride but umm there's always racial things [on the field] not a lot of people hear about it, like I was saying, doesn't sorta - depends on how they put it.

- Peter
Interactions with mainstream football are assumed by most Aborigines to involve racist behaviour on some level. Mainstream football is often spiked by racist comments made flippantly by coaches, other players, referees or spectators. All these Aboriginal players wanted to be known for their football ability and performance first and foremost - not by their skin colour. This is not a denial of their Aboriginality but a wish to be recognised for their ability. On field racism is greatest at the local level and most subtle at the professional levels. Although the racism was a constant the manner in which the subjects coped and continue to cope with racism differed. Some approaches were total opposites but each player offered their own explanations for how it worked in their situations.

...we copped a bit of racism - well I did - I copped a fair bit of racism...a lot of years ago there was a lot of sledging going on. And if you were a blackfella you really copped a lot of shit when you were playing. Some players let it upset 'em but we'll taught - I was taught just to wear it. Don't let it - because the people who are doing that are not doing it because they hate ya, they're doing it because they want to upset ya. So you'd, you'd know the difference. So I never let it worry me. I never had any real bad racism.

- Erne

I think what I - you want to be accepted as a footballer player and a good football player. And it does make you feel slack to have someone saying, 'I've got the boong or I've got the black, I've got the big coon', or whatever it is. Because you want to be seen as a footballer first, and a good footballer first, and not as the 'big coon', whatever it is that they'll call ya. And that's probably what will make ya slack the most. And not to mention the fact that when ya growing up it's not acceptable for people to call you that, if ya did it in the school ground it's - 'Fine! 3.30 it's up the back', no big deal. So it wasn't acceptable then, it never was acceptable, and it's not acceptable to have someone saying that to ya from a distance either, you know. So I suppose it's been bred in ya from when you were a kid, you know. You don't let - and that's drilled in ya by your parents - 'You don't let any people call you that, bud. Stand up for yourself.'

- Barry
Racism offers a counterpoint to ambitions yet it strengthens the subjects' Aboriginality. This confirmation of 'blackness' provides some individuals with a sense of security within their Aboriginality. They then seek to exercise other identities and seek other experience independent of this identity because they are safe in the knowledge that they are Aboriginal no matter what they do.

Participation

Questions in this section were asked to ascertain the nature of the playing experience for these Aboriginal men in rugby league. Questions crossed a range of activities from All-Blacks carnivals to All-Blacks teams in mainstream sport, to local mainstream football to the professional ranks. Within the interviews more time was spent on this subject than on any other. In a sense these discussions were 'talking football' and easiest for the players to relate to me.

The biggest connection across their experiences was family. It was family members who introduced these men to rugby league and it was these early experiences which nourished their interest. The place and influence of family is critical.

When I was younger they used to be my role models. Uncle Glen and Uncle Darren, they were always making rep sides and all that, and they got offers from Sydney clubs but they didn't go. Even Luke and Dean, they used to play all the time and they let me play in the backyard and that. That's how I was influenced to play footy and that. I was always around it - that's all they played.

- David

The place of sport within a positive family environment was important. Subjects recalled regular time spent at football fields watching relatives, or dreaming of the day when they might be able to join family members on the field. The inclusive and highly
positive nature of these family outings lasts with these players as some of their most
cherished memories of growing-up. Nearly all players could recollect who was a good
player and who was just average. The fact that they remember anything important.

[Dad] had two left feet I think (chuckles). I had all me uncles, all
my Mum's brothers...they all played. And a lot of them were good
players. Charlie Gould was one of them. Yeah Uncle Charlie, he's
one of them, he was a good player Uncle Charlie.

Well they, they used to pump football into us all the time, all the
young kids...They used to come an watch, we used to go an' watch
them play. 'Cause I was brought up playing footy...yeah but they
were always around footy. The ol' man¹ and Mum used to stay an'
watch Souths play all the time, so they were always down there
around the blackfella crowd from La Pa². Yeah it was a lot of fun
actually, looking back all those years ago. It was a lot of fun, what
we used to do [all the family]...

- Erne

Most times my question about an individual's first touch of the football was
answered just in conversation. But when I did have to specifically ask the question all
subjects were pleased to recollect this moment. Not surprisingly these players had
begun playing at very early ages - one as young as four years old. These first touches
occurred within the safe surrounds of the family and more than likely took place in the
backyard. The first touch also marked a time when these players could firmly
remember themselves being happiest playing rugby league. The influence of male role
models is also mentioned.

These role models do not take the form of television or media personalities.
The role model is not a creation of a slick media campaign. Role models were uncles,
brothers, fathers or cousins.
...everyone enjoyed the week-end because you had the week-end off umm that's what I enjoyed. I could play football on a Saturday and go watch my Uncles play on Sunday. And I sorta - that's where I got my skills from. If I did something wrong I could sorta sit down and watch my Uncles and sit down and talk with them...they used to come down and - not all the time but every now and again - and watch me play. I remember them watching me play when I was younger and that's was sorta...for me that was them on Sunday and me play on Saturday, that's what I enjoyed most.

- Peter

...when we were going to the Knockouts at Redfern Oval - they used to have the Aboriginal Knockouts there - I used to look up to those guys that played there, when I was a young guy.

The Redfern All-Blacks - oh mainly the All-Blacks, sort of everyone went for them in those days. It's changed a bit now (laughs) yeah I used to just look up to the Aboriginal All-Blacks. I'd know I was only 15 or 16 then. It used to be very exciting to watch...I used to know a few of 'em - I'm not sure if they were my Uncles or not? - and they used to be good, used to win everything.

- Larry

These role models were positive influences originating from their families and communities, not derived from some media campaign. The role model was close to home and, at regular times, in the subjects home. These role models didn't necessarily have to be mainstream successes. I would speculate that family conversation and story telling would magnify the achievements of these men to heights which out did television. The tangible presence of these men is important. subjects talked about going to games regularly to watch these players. subjects also talked about mimicking these role models and other stars of the game. The proximity of these men was highly influential. Their example was the lead followed by most of the subjects.

Although rugby league was their predominant sport and has become their occupation the subjects did play other sports before advancing with rugby league.
Some subjects did mention how rugby league was not their first choice nor their best sport. But because rugby league came through and offered a contract which was going to pay, it took centre stage.

...yeah [I played] rugby league and Aussie Rules - not too bad at [Aussie Rules] either. I used to play Aussie Rules on Saturday and rugby league Sunday. And when it came down to it rugby league was my way to go.

- Larry

The community is also influencing this participation. The place of rugby league within the Aboriginal community is unique and high profile. Many communities are home to fervent supporters of particular teams and stars. This enthusiasm is shared by children and it shapes their preferences. Even though some subjects succeeded in other sports their achievements were not as esteemed as performances within rugby league.

...see if you're going to play in Indigenous football then that's fine, you've proved yourself to the Indigenous community. But mainstream's still mainstream, you haven't proved yourself there.

- Barry

This status was also closely associated with regional All-Blacks teams and teams which played in Knockouts or carnivals.

When asked about differences between these three playing places the subjects noted the differing playing styles. This factor was more frequently cited than any other perceived difference. As discussed earlier the Aboriginal playing style offers a way to distinguish one's self from non-Aboriginal players. This distinction also - when played well - bamboozled and stunned non-Aboriginal teams to the delight of the Aboriginal spectators and supporters.
Speaking from the spectator's point of view it was fantastic, especially when they were wailing the piss out of 'em (laughs). We had a few fights but it was just, just made you proud.

- Aunty

The connection with identity cannot be overlooked. This style of play made the players feel more Aboriginal and helped the spectators and community assert their self-worth within the non-Aboriginal world.

The proving ground for this playing style and the reservoir of this Aboriginal identity are the All-Aboriginal knockouts and carnivals. These places allow players to be their most Aboriginal in their football. Players talked about how pleased they were to go out and relax, and enjoy their football.

I think there's two different styles. Like I think when you're playing in them Aboriginal carnivals and that, like all the boys off the Missions and that. They've always been together, like the McGrady boys and that, and they would of played a lot of football against each other and that - backyard football and that, and they'd flick the ball behind their backs and that. Like I did all that with me uncles in the backyard and like, I, I think just doing that like - you're going to have an advantage over - like if you play that kind of style at All-blacks carnivals. Like you'll never see that sort of style ever, any where else - I think that if you haven't played in that sort of football - like I was brought up in mainstream football but when you gonna learn football all they do is pass back and forward and that. Just learn the basics and that, but they don't try things. Like if you flick behind the back you don't - at those carnivals you might see that 20 times in the whole carnival. Where you don't see it in normal football and they bring it - when Aboriginals play in the big time football they try those sort of things. You know it looks like magic, 'cause no one ever really sees it - they've never tried it. [Murris] aren't scared to try those types of things.

- David

Football in these places is seen as being the most natural and unhindered. Doug talked of feeling 'safe' in these All-Black teams. The atmosphere is decidedly low key and the expectations, although high, are manageable. Carnivals provide these professional
players with the opportunity to pick up new tricks or moves. In this sense these
carnivals become a source of inspiration. The sheer enjoyment of playing their style of
football on their terms is enhanced by familial and cultural factors. The carnivals
exercise a hold over these men and football is the grip through which it is applied. A
couple of subjects indicated - they started playing at these carnivals as young as
sixteen.

I think they're very important. I think that's where they sorta toughen you up - toughen me up! Like being a kid playing against
grown men. That's when I really got a taste of what football was
going to be really about. And umm played against so much talent
when I was young, it was unbelievable - yeah, I enjoyed it. Like I
said, the mainstream and the Knockouts was sorta connected but
they're on different paths but umm I think that's one way the
blacks can get into the mainstream...

- Peter

To the same extent All-Blacks teams competing in the mainstream offer
something to the Aboriginal community. But few of the subjects were able to explain
why. One player discussed how these teams offered the best of both worlds - being
able to play on black terms yet play regularly. One subject also raised the possibility
that these teams were a chance for Aboriginal people to assert their worth and
capabilities within the non-Aboriginal world. Most subjects had participated in these
type of teams at one time or another. Not surprisingly most subjects were not
impressed by their poor organisation and lack of resources. David mentioned how he'd
made himself "too professional" to ever return to such a side. This type of statement
may indicate that there is a point of no return for him. Some subjects mentioned how
they return to All-Blacks sides but that this experience just doesn't compare to the mainstream. All-Blacks teams are not seen as being fair dinkum and therefore not worth the effort.

...we always got flogged...no one took us seriously. We never hardly ever had any strapping or anything. They never showed up for training and that. I played a couple of games and went training with First Grade - went along to training at the start of the season. We'd have 8 bloody players there having a game of touch! This was two days before the game and that so - they weren't going to have a serious effort. I was mainly involved with schoolboys - but it wasn't football for me.

- David

In few instances were players able to recall when they made a conscious decision to move into mainstream football. In fact the most likely response was - "it just happened". This might mean that these subjects drifted along on natural ability. But at some point these subjects do recollect a change in their motivations for playing rugby league. For most, this shift in motivation was a move away from playing for the enjoyment to playing to be paid. Although I was not able to get closer to this issue I believe that follow-up interviews could certainly prove fruitful. Leon moved into the big time ranks rather quickly and he was surprised by this shift. He described this time in the following response:

I said, 'What am I doing here!? You know I used to look at these blokes from the, in the stands, you know and now I'm sitting next to Colin Howard saying - yeah, 'Pass me, me autograph book', you know (laughs) That's the way I've always been. I still look back at those blokes that way. It's like, it's like a dream...

- Leon

The unreality of his experience is understandable considering he grew up on a riverbank and used to go hunting daily with his Father to catch dinner.
As mentioned before, one distinguishing feature of the experiences of these players into the professional ranks is the slight shifts in their motivations. With the increase in professional contracts and the concomitant pressure to train, conform and perform, players note a time when they don't enjoy the game as much any more. This lack of enjoyment is closely tied to a realisation that the game is no longer about what you want. The game loses its fun, you're separated from your community therefore the status is detached so why are you there? The easy answer is - the money. As long as the clubs are paying these men good money then they stay\(^7\). They shift their wish for fulfilment and enjoyment in rugby league to total professionalism, subjects accepted that this was a job and it is probably the best way they can provide for their families, so they stay.

*Oh yeah, it's been good every way, you know. It's got me more or less my family set-up for life and just you've - kept in that average bracket so they're not missing out on things. Their education is goin' to be right, you know all the way through...Oh if I didn't play football it'd be a lot harder I think - for sure! Probably be 50% harder I reckon - just to maintain a job and do it maybe six days a week. I'd know it'd be pretty hard to look at that side of it you know.*

- Larry

But once they feel they've made enough money they are most likely to leave.

Professional football fails to hold any significance therefore they see no reason for staying.

*...not getting paid has sort of made me leave but that's sort of - now that I've got a job is sort of different I suppose. Before when I was at uni it was cool getting $10 000 but now it's not cool to get $10 000...because the effort I've put in are worth more than that.*

- Barry
The phenomena of highly talented Aboriginal professional football players leaving the top level on little or no notice is well known. When asked for explanations clubs or coaches simply respond with the racial pejorative - 'they've gone walkabout'.

Probably just stereotyped I suppose, you know - 'Oh he's gone, gone walkabout' I suppose, an' not sorta getting down to the real point he went home.

I don't just think it's Aboriginal people, I've heard of a few, I know of a few country boys who've come down here and get homesick and after a month they've gone home again. So it's not segregated or nothin'.

- Larry

Little attention is ever focused on the conditions or environment they were expected to play in.

...if you want to be successful in sport you've gotta be able to sacrifice, if you can't sacrifice you're not going to make it. I mean a lot of fellas can handle it but a lot of 'em can't. Get itchy feet and have to go. I've seen so many blackfellas that were really good at something but after a while they get itchy feet and they gotta go - they go walkabout and you don't see 'em for a while. But when they come back they seem OK.

I don't think they - I don't think it's got to do with being an Aboriginal and a football player - I think it got times - the sacrifices they got to make to be a football player and I think a lot of times they don't understand what they're getting into at the start and as they start getting into it - 'Oh hang on I wanna go with these fellas but I can't because I got training - I'll train tomorrow'. But tomorrow never comes.

- Erne

I believe that these players assess their reasons for playing at the top level and decide the benefits do not outweigh the costs. These individuals then decide that professional football is really not that important to them and they decide to leave. Some experience or realisation shifts the cost/benefit equation and the player decides he doesn't have to
stay where he is. It is quite possible that this trigger is an incidence of racism. This type of comment makes a clear distinction to the player that his treatment as a member of the team is not based on his performance and efforts, but rather stereotyped by the colour of his skin. Barry recounted an incident where the team was performing badly. All the players were having an off-day. At the half-time break the coach was justifiably angry and tried to spark the players into a bigger effort. In this motivational tirade the coach singled out the three Aboriginal players who played in the centres and wing positions: "What do you think it's a black holiday? What the fuck is going on out there with you guys?". This instance, in which racism was used to differentiate these players from the rest of the team, was very distinct and hurtful. Barry thought the whole team was performing badly and to single him and his Aboriginal team members out was divisive and racist. For Barry this public humiliation triggered a re-assessment of his playing ambitions. Barry was not ever going to be a good footballer as long as his coach publicly labelled/identified him in this demeaning way.

Barry's decision and the subsequent action is very closely aligned to the coaching and coaches of professional clubs. For many reasons, some more obvious than others, coaches have a significant impact upon whether these players remain satisfied with their playing careers or decide to leave. The manner in which a coach treats those Aborigines in their team is critical. The position of authority which coaches hold is highly significant. I had initially thought that as athletes become more professional and assimilate into the culture of their particular sport then 'cultural' differences might reduce. Comments made by the subjects supported this belief.
I just think a lot of fellas feel more comfortable with other blackfellas around them. I know myself - I always been comfortable if there hasn't been any blackfellas there 'cause I'd grown up in areas where there wasn't many blackfellas, but see - I grew up in Sydney and at that time, when we were out there, there wasn't that many blackfellas around. It didn't worry me just being around whitefellas 'cause I was used to it. But when I used to go back to La Perouse - most weekends - all the, all the - the only people were blackfellas. And I was comfortable there so I was comfortable in both situations, so it didn't worry me.

- Erne

But if an event suddenly jolts the Aboriginal athlete out of this identity then the consequences can be dire. After the 'black holiday' quip Barry said all the Koori players lost respect for the coach. One player was so offended that later in the day he challenged the coach to a fight. This player was released at the end of the season. The subjects believe that their athletic performance qualifies them to be recognised solely by their athletic persona. They become deeply resentful of any blatant racist outburst which detracts from this perception. It is at these times that Aboriginal players realise that no matter what they do or how well they do it they will forever be typecast 'black'. With this dose of forced perspective, these men re-appraised their situation. The emotional fallout can be long-lasting - all subjects could recall similar types of racist experiences.

This experience highlights the fact that these subjects know racism is prevalent and they try to respond and cope with it in different ways. It seems that racism is most protected in the most public of places - such as on the playing field. At the top level players are aware of their professional status and abstain from the direct violent reprisals normally dealt to racists. Instead the players accept that this is a 'white world' and for the time being they are operating within it.
...there's a lot more to football than just going out on the weekend being a good footballer. When you've gotta go to training week-in, week-out, I know it's a different life. That's - I think there's a difference. That's where sometimes you have to put on your other hat you know, you have to be white so to speak, you know. And you just go and do it.

- Barry

To not incorporate this ethic would be to open yourself to criticism of being undisciplined or unprofessional. The consequences for such labelling could be dire - suspension, team ostracism, financial penalty.

Like you get some racist comments on the field. But these days you can't just punch 'em in the head - you've got to be professional. If you give away that penalty you might be giving away the game. So you just take it on the nose.

- David

All these signals send the message back to the Aboriginal player that institutionalised racism is well protected under the lights of national TV coverage. The response to racism is most violent at the point where All-Blacks teams compete in mainstream competitions. A combination of many factors place these games and competitions at their most volatile. The mixing of overt racist behaviour by local spectators and a personal history of discrimination is combustible.

It was never the - the Murris used to get the blame for it but we had a lot of foul-mouthed, arrogant, racist whitefellas around the ground that used to call 'em everything. Well you can guess the rest, once you start there. And of course we all used to get the blame for it.

- Aunty

On the field this situation is fuelled by inexperienced and or blatantly racist referees.

When the referee is also perceived to be racist then the authority of that position disappears. A large part of having All-Blacks teams in mainstream competitions is to assert a degree of collective esteem by defeating the 'system' at its own game - on its
own ground. When this is thwarted by biased referees, rules are changed in mid-stream, then the frustration explodes. These factors make All-Blacks teams the most volatile places in the sporting infrastructure. Accounts of 'all-ins' abound throughout the Aboriginal community. In some sense these sporting disputes let some steam off tense race relations in towns and regions. These bad experiences are then countered by the very positive All-Aboriginal sporting places.

All-Black Knockouts and carnivals become places which accommodate all-Aboriginal expressions of identity. In these places Aboriginal players personalise their Aboriginality and perform on behalf of their mob. When asked about the differences between the three places Barry replied:

Yeah heaps of differences. Your mainstream, your mainstream I think you're by yourself, you're by yourself. So you're just not - this'll go I think - you're by yourself when you're playing in err mainstream competition but when you're playing in an Aboriginal team it's 'us against them'. Not only us against them but 'us against the system'. So you don't have that in the [mainstream] because it's just you playing in a team. You're not up against - you're not fightin', you're just playing in that team. But it's 'us against the system' in the next one. And then I think down in the next level - in the All-blacks [carnivals] - it's just 'us against the next team'. You're not fightin' the system. Yeah - because you've got the coaches, it's an Aboriginal system you know, it's run by Aboriginal people.

- Barry

Free of the burden of racism these carnivals are happy times. yet they remain highly competitive. In the pecking order of tribal affiliations, communities and individuals try to maintain and improve social standing and bragging rights from one Knockout to the next.

Some issues were raised which don't fit neatly into ordered discussions. These issues include drinking, injuries and managers. The place of drinking was occasionally
offered in conversation, but since no specific question was asked about this matter, little can be generalised. David and Peter did mention the pressure on them to conform with the mainstream expectation to 'be mates and have a beer'. This social context is in keeping with football's reputation for heavy drinking. Unfortunately for David this weekly partying led to increased body weight and related injuries as his body struggled to cope with the extra weight. Conflict would also occur as these young Aboriginal men tried to avoid fulfilling negative racial stereotypes associated with alcohol yet remain 'one of the boys'. The individual would be in a very difficult situation as they try and reconcile these conflicting demands. Closer examination of this issue in subsequent research would be desirable.

Without exception, all the subjects had suffered serious injuries directly attributable to playing rugby league. As their careers progressed it seems the primary goal became injury and pain management and seeking to prolong their careers. Several men had experienced life debilitating injuries with which they are still learning to cope. The list of injuries incurred includes a broken collar bone, a broken arm, six tears of the same hamstring muscles, three major shoulder constructions, four major knee reconstructions, broken bones in the foot, several accounts of concussions, broken noses, dislocated shoulders, and a hairline fracture of a vertebrae. The physical toll of continuous training and playing is extensive. Not surprisingly the subject of injuries is very closely associated with perceived masculinity. Once again this issue was not an intended subject of discussion and was not raised by a specific question in the interview but because each player mentioned it, it seems highly significant and worthy of further examination.
Also noteworthy is the fact that none of the players had a Manager or Player Agent advising them when they made their first contract decision with a professional club. Some continued their entire career without an agent. Others sought help when they had made it to the 'big time' - meaning the elite of the elite. It seems they should have been receiving better advice in the years preceding this time. Every one of these players recognised the value of a manager after signing with one - they saw it in the size of their contracts. The manner in which clubs take advantage of Aboriginal players is another example of institutionalised racism.

**Relationship Between Identities In Rugby League**

This was a difficult section to discuss with most subjects. In most cases it was the first time these men had been asked that issues such as the relationship between Aboriginality and identity. To go beyond this question and directly inquire about the transitions or perceived shifts in identity was inappropriate with most subjects. I've no doubt that if these types of questions had been asked, both the subject and I. would have felt uncomfortable. At a later stage, when the subjects have had an opportunity to consider such thoughts, I think they would be better prepared to respond. I also think that when my relationship with these men is better then it might also be better to ask more of these questions. Barry and I have had numerous discussions on related topics so we did breach these issues in his interview. This more in-depth discussion can be contrasted, for example, by Mike's and Larry's comments, which were restricted to one word answers. David was at ease enough to jokingly ask if anyone else had been able to answer these type of questions yet.
When talking about Aboriginality most of the responses were the same. The subjects were proud of their heritage and aware of the leadership role that they were expected to show within the Aboriginal community. This role model expectation was not perceived to be a burden. Instead these subjects perceived it to be a natural step in their football careers which was very much linked to them being Aboriginal.

I think that if you're really successful you - no matter what it is, no matter what career it is - and you're Aboriginal you have a responsibility to umm to the Aboriginal community - as a role model because how are the kids going to aspire to do something if you don't identify?

- Erne

Erne and Barry, in earlier comments about playing in the Knockout, claimed that these activities maintained their links with the Indigenous community. This maintenance is important to ensure that players who were separated from their families and communities for long periods of time could still maintain their ties 'being Aboriginal'. subjects said that Aboriginality made them feel comfortable and familiar. This is something which they feel being around other Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal people that deny their heritage are despised by the Aboriginal community.

Because I made a name for myself I might be in a position where I can do some good in some areas. And the third thing - I'm just proud. I'm proud of my race and I never, never - I don't like people - this, this, this what makes me feel angry - I don't like people who are Aboriginal and don't say they are.

- Erne

Erne and Barry discussed this issue at length. Erne talked of the responsibilities of successful black footballers back to Aboriginal people. He felt that a collective sense of identity is significant among Aborigines. Some subjects tried to explain how they
have multiple identities yet being Aboriginal seems to override these. The primacy of Aboriginality enables these men to be anything they want because there is never any question of their Aboriginality. This sense of freedom is selective though and can only be exercised with the appropriate social skills. The most critical of these skills is the ability to make transitions across identities.

The notion of transitions is integral to Aborigines operating within non-Aboriginal environments. Leon made the following reply when I asked about moving between the different worlds - white and black:

> No I think we're all here, aren't we? I think...it's hard to say if it's white or black. I know I'm Aboriginal. I know people who are not Aboriginal but I communicate to them at their level and I communicate to the Aboriginal people on their level. [Do you have an appreciation for both worlds?] Yeah of course - because I lived in both worlds. Yeah definitely.

subjects talked about being able to relate to both black and white worlds, about being familiar with blacks and whites. not being afraid of being in all-white company, knowing how the system worked. fitting-in, acting white, and knowing that there were differing expectations at all levels. All these comments are related to issues about shifting between circumstances and changing identities accordingly. subjects talked about having plenty of practice in this. They talked about being capable of discerning between racist comments and non-Aboriginal people simply having a joke. All these experiences, perception skills, social skills and personal ability to shift makes 'fitting in' easier for these Aboriginal players. It doesn't stop them from being Aboriginal. It does help them learn how to operate within a white world.

Without exception these subjects privileged the mainstream professional
sporting competition over any other. Subjects' comments about the "real" football, or "fair dinkum" football were quite consistent. Yet in the same interviews subjects recognised the importance of other sporting experiences. Subjects noted how they enjoyed and looked forward to all-Aboriginal sporting events even though they knew it wasn't the same as mainstream football. The reason these subjects have no hesitation in privileging the mainstream over other sport settings is because the comparison, to them, is not of similar experiences or similar places. The comparison between All-Blacks carnivals and professional football is a comparison of apples and oranges. The apparent contradiction occurs because rugby league is played in both places. But the common occurrence of rugby league is the extent of the comparison. Football is the vehicle, but the nature and intent of the experience in both places is totally different. For players who have proceeded through regional and club levels into professional football their preoccupation has been playing at the top level. Outside of the mainstream competition all-Aboriginal football occurs but these subjects do not participate in these competitions for football reasons. Their motives include family reasons, cultural reasons, maybe even reasons of masculinity. For example:

I don't know, I've been going to it since '83. That came to be by being the ball-boy. Carrying the bags so other [players] can rest. And you look forward to seeing the good players and you sit and you watch, an' watch, an' watch. So you sort of do your step in the chain and you - well I was - you're always bustin', waitin' til your turn. Wait until you can play. You're always bustin' you know, you're the person - you know the kids playing footy on the sidelines - one of the first playing experiences to be seen as a man - that's probably it - to be seen as a man in your community. You're not a kid any more. Yeah when you play with your A Grade team you're not a kid - you're accepted as a man. You're given that responsibility, you know what I mean - that was really big for me.

- Barry
...take the carnivals pretty serious, I think. Well it's probably - the main reason I do play is that's the only chance I sort of get to play with my brothers and that, you know they sort - well, I don't know, Dick doesn't play now but Keith and Darryl still play and ahh, that's the only opportunity I get to play rugby league with them.

- Larry

The comparison between the mainstream and All-Blacks carnivals can become confusing. Understanding the differences helps explain the overall insignificance of regional mainstream identity like that associated with regional representative teams and State teams. These representative sides are nothing more then the next level of competitive mainstream football: the next step along the path to professional football.

Creating a mainstream identity and coping with this shifting between identities is often the prime reason for leaving. subjects noted that other Aborigines couldn't cope with the shift - 'the move from the bush was too much'. All subjects noted having someone else, another Aborigine, around when they were first starting out.

This mentor or mate is very important. The presence of this mentoring relationship is a factor in determining whether an Aboriginal player will make a go of it in professional football.

That was one of the main things. There was Les Highland, he played together at home with my Uncles and that - he's getting on and that, knows what's it's all about him being white and me being black. And Matty being there was another good thing.

- Peter

...but not only having a winning team but to have blokes that matched with me. We played a brand of football that I liked playing err I had me mate beside me in Patrick, who was blacker than me (chuckles) and cool. And he used to come and hang out with me so I had a buddy type thing you know.

- Barry
Well actually I just went over to see a mate - Alan Gould - I went to school with his wife, and I just dropped in there. And there was another mate there - Dennis Packard. So I just started training with 'em and Norths signed me up.

- Doug

This mentoring relationship is common to all their experiences. The two subjects who I spoke with that had 'decided to leave' commented on how personal experiences influenced their decision to go. In Doug's case he and his wife were concerned about raising their family. In Mike's case he was suffering from serious injuries and the club released him. At a time when professional franchises supposedly espouse the importance of loyalty, it appears that neither player was shown any. This reality is stark in Barry's words:

...'stick with the brothers' - because in the end they're gonna be the only one to look out for ya. That's what I reckon...

As their mainstream identity is fortified it most likely becomes their football identity. Subjects talk of their wish to be perceived "as footballers, good footballers first". Yet at the same time they were at pains not to deny their Aboriginality. Within the mainstream world, where these men now spend most of their time, it is understandable why they want to be footballers. With extensive training regimes, playing schedules and travel requirements, and coaches/captains urging greater social contact to build team morale, these men spend more time together with the team than anywhere else - they can't help but become a footballer. For Aboriginal players, though, this identity seems confined to the club/team. Out of the football world these players quickly revert to their Aboriginal identity.
I made a decision when I said I was going to retire that was it. I said I didn't want to be involved within it unless I was working in it and I enjoy doing that...like [I do the] sponsorship and do that and be involved with the team and that. They do their thing and I do my thing. I sorta keep my distance.

- Leon

Oh I might of got a bit uppity but not that much.

- Doug

The football identity is a temporary one. Because these men spend so many hours in training this site became one where they could shoulder being black and a footballer. The training paddock thus becomes a testing lab for these men: a place to test their new identities whilst maintaining their Aboriginality. It also becomes a place of resistance when players refuse to accept the non-Aboriginal practices as being the best training ethic. Players challenge "the way things are done around here".

Closely aligned with the creation of this football identity and the shifts to it, are associated changes in motivation for playing. All subjects found it difficult to describe their motivations for playing in professional football. But when asked what it would take for them to leave professional football, all responded "not getting paid". At this level these men are being taxed at a personal level (not just physically) and the only reward that's keeping them going is the financial renumeration. The Aboriginal experience in the Australian workplace has not been a pleasant one - it has included discrimination, slave labour, and the highest unemployment rates in the country. Aborigines have generally faced very poor work prospects. Similarly educational possibilities are also limited. These men have invested so much time into football anyway that their high school years were nothing more than week-day hobbies as they
prepared for the weekend's footy game. Of the eight subjects interviewed only two had
been to post-secondary education and only one had graduated. Therefore if you're
getting paid over $100,000/year you're going to stay with it as long as you can.
Notes:

1. All identifying names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

2. New South Wales (NSW).

3. His Father.


5. A colloquial term for winning by a particular easy manner.

6. Australian term describing genuineness.

7. An average contract for a player in the junior development teams ranges from $10 000 - $25 000 per annum. These younger players are usually still in high school or completing some post-secondary education. In this sense these players not full-time professionals.

Once a player has been 'Graded' they are playing regularly in the Reserve Grade team and likely to be considered for the First Grade team. Players in Reserve Grade receive at least $30 000 per annum. Once players move into the First Grade team their salaries are negotiated into a contract.

Many factors can increase a player's contract. Incentives, bonuses and performance bonuses can substantially increase a player's salary for a year. Because of these possibilities a player is at a distinct disadvantage by trying to negotiate a contract without a Player Manager or Agent.

At this top level a base salary would be $40 000/$50 000. Top professional players earn in excess of $100 000 per annum. The elite of these players garner contracts just under $1m per annum. Only three players are reputed to be on $1m contracts, none are Aboriginal.

8. An 'all-in' is a euphemism for a brawl involving both teams.

9. The word 'mob' denotes your family and community and close friends.
CHAPTER 3

Analysis

Having presented some of the major findings from the interviews in Chapter Two, this chapter will reflect on these findings in light of the literature relating to the three subject areas - identity formation (particularly Aboriginality), Indigenous participation in sport, and fluidity between identities. This exploratory study sought to investigate the nature of the Indigenous male experience in rugby league. In doing so the study confronted some familiar issues - All-Blacks carnivals, 'black magic', All-Blacks clubs/teams and racism. To maintain consistency with the previous Chapter each problem will be discussed separately. The respective hypothesis for each subject will open the section.

Aside from Tatz (1987, 1994 & 1995a) and Paraschak (1992a & 1994), work on the subject of Aborigines and sport has been shallow. Most articles confine themselves to the issues of racism or the achievements of an exceptional few. With this study I sought to generate a better understanding of the factors which shaped the sport experiences of eight Aboriginal footballers. Their words were the predominant source of data and their experiences were the focus of this study. I have relied on their accounts to better understand certain experiences within the Indigenous sporting world. I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that I have been considering this topic for the last six years. This contemplation, coupled with being able to work in Indigenous sport development for the last three years, has influenced my views on this topic immensely. As I am not independent from this research process my views are unavoidably part of this research as well. This exploratory study is intended to lay
the foundations for a more thorough examination but nevertheless it has produced some new findings. These new findings are now open to discussion and further examination, both of which I would welcome.

**Identity Construction**

This section of the interview was covered first. It was designed to explore how identities were formed, fostered and challenged. Three specific identities were questioned - athletic identity, Aboriginality and regional identity (akin to Provincial identity). These three were selected because it was thought they would be the most likely to be encountered and their formation and adaption was critical to answering the central hypothesis.

Because the subjects were all professional athletes, at some level, it was hypothesised that:

*The more the individual participates in a sport the greater the likelihood this person will adopt the persona of their sport's perceived identity.*

This hypothesis was posed after considering research on identity construction within sporting sub-cultures (Donnelly & Young, 1985 & 1988). This hypothesis was supported by the subjects of this study. These men did adopt the persona of being a professional, rugby league player as they progressed through to the elite ranks. When David talks of being *"too professional to return to All-Blacks teams"* he is directly referring to a shift in expectations he has of football and of himself. Barry also commented on being perceived as being *"uptown"* and the difficulties of having a new car or flash clothes. Peter commented on how he wanted to be the best player he
could - in the mainstream - and to prove to people back home that he could do it.
Larry tried to come to grips with being both Aboriginal yet also wanting to be a
footballer before deciding that he could be both. Each of these men showed signs of
being able to recognise both worlds i.e.. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, yet being
happy enough to move between them.

The next series of questions focused on Aboriginal identity. This hypothesis
stated:

**Aboriginality asserts a priority over all other identities or roles.**

This section was one of the more interesting (and for some more difficult) questions to
answer. Most subjects had little or no prior discussions of the type I sought. Thinking
and talking about such a thing as Aboriginality was too existentialist for them - and
maybe in retrospect, it is for me too.

Unfortunately there was no research or literature available which directly
addressed this issue. This hypothesis was thus based more on related material on
Indigenous peoples in North America and the researcher's experience. Aboriginality
has both an essentialist element and a degree of social construction. Being Aboriginal
requires that a person be a genetic descendant of an Indigenous inhabitant of Australia.
Apart from of this requirement, though, the social construction of Aboriginality is
open to interpretation and analysis.

An illustration of this construction in action and the complexity of this issue
emerged when Erne described being a professional footballer:

*When it comes to being a footballer - yeah I'm a footballer and I do
what I do 'cause I enjoy doing it umm, but I enjoy it because I'm
good at it. And I believe that I'm good at it because, a lot of times I
do believe I'm good at it because I'm a blackfella. Because a lot of*
blackfellas have got that natural gift like that and err a lot of people say, 'You've got a lot of skill', and I say 'Yeah I have but blackfellas are like that'.

- Erne

This construction creates a positive cycle of reinforcement which links Aboriginality with professional football identity and performance. This type of construction is common with these eight men. Only Barry took exception to the causal link inferred between Aboriginality and performance, but he still recognised the power of this belief to influence performance.

Although each subject could offer at least one factor which they believed made them Aboriginal, only two offered three factors as requested. Factors offered included family, family relationships, skin colour, tribal affiliation, genetics and moral obligations. After being asked when they were most happy to identify as Aboriginal, subjects listed times with family, growing up, when they were with a large group of Aboriginal people, hanging out at home with other Aboriginal friends, or times when other Aborigines are being recognised for achievements. Upon being asked for instances when they felt most uncomfortable to be Aboriginal, subjects didn't recall instances in which they personally felt embarrassed. Instead, comments were provided about times when other Aboriginal people behaved in stereotypic ways, i.e., public drunkenness, obscene behaviour, drawing public attention to oneself or doing something which would reflect badly on the group. This sense of shame came not from personal indiscretions but from instances which were perceived to reflect badly on all Aboriginal peoples. This shame was mild though, and each subject was very careful to state that they had never denied being Aboriginal, nor ever wished they weren't Aboriginal. In fact, they reacted strongly against the idea that anyone would
deny their Aboriginality. These adverse reactions are common throughout the Aboriginal community.

This type of response framed the hypothesis. To answer the hypothesis of this sub-problem I would say that Aboriginality does assert a priority over other identities. It does so in the same way that a person's sex influences identity though. People acknowledge that gender roles are not genetic and do not have to restrict behaviour. Changing your roles in life does not change your sex. In a similar way, subjects realised that they could be professional footballers, they could move away from home, they could spend extended periods of time in a non-Aboriginal context, yet still remain Aboriginal. This perspective and the confidence to act on it was most prevalent amongst those subjects who were a little older in years and who appeared more emotionally mature. Larry, Leon and Erne all talked about this subject in a self-assured, experienced fashion. Both Leon and Erne were subjects from the retired category so it is plausible that this experience had affected their views. The decision and effect of retirement on Indigenous athletes are issues which deserve closer investigation. It might be relevant for younger players or for young Aboriginal people seeking professions within non-Aboriginal society to develop this confidence to cope with operating within a culturally distinct, and at times hostile, environment.

The last set of questions considered regional identity. Particularly I was hoping to locate a place where the subjects might not see themselves as either Aboriginal or as athletes but as the hypothesis stated:

At those times when Aborigines most share in parochial occasions, or feel least difference with the dominant society, they identify as being a Queenslander or a New South Welshman.
This site was selected because it was an instance most likely to be available or within the range of personal experiences of all potential subjects. This section garnered the most straightforward answers. On very few occasions did these subjects identify with this regional persona. Barry said the only times he ever has or ever will perceive of himself in this way will be in the mainstream rugby league sport system. For Leon, Larry, David and Erne these occasions occurred when they were playing in their respective representative sides. For Doug, Peter and Mike they couldn't recount ever feeling this way. The related hypothesis can not be supported. These men did not share in those parochial identities. i.e., they did not identify as being a Queenslander or New South Welshmen beyond the immediate membership of these football teams. This may occur for the same reason that most Indigenous peoples refuse to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Queen of England and the Commonwealth of Australia. Most Aborigines, although they live in Australia, feel that they do not enjoy being full citizens of Australian society (Minority Rights Group, 1982). In most cases, moreover. Aboriginal people do not want to be a part of Australian society (Gilbert, 1994; Keen, 1991). In keeping with these sentiments, why would these subjects identify as being Queenslander or New South Welshmen other than when they compete in the football teams representing these States? These are the few instances when being a Queenslander matters to them and to the non-Aboriginal society around them.

In this study I asked questions about the social construction of identity - athletic, regional and Aboriginal. This approach has not been used to examine the Aboriginal, male experience in sport before. Not surprisingly, the literature reviewed
offered non-Aboriginal descriptions of Indigenous experiences within non-Aboriginal sport. To balance this I tried to draw from Indigenous perspectives as much as possible (Adams & Dixon, 1991; Atkinson, 1991; Godwell, 1996; Langton, 1994; and Mead, Roberts & Rijavec, 1988). Unfortunately, the material written by Indigenous people is limited. Substantiating these sources though is the aforementioned valuable work of Tatz and Paraschak. Outside of these works, previous articles typecast the Indigenous experience as being one of racism, or provided the stories of people who have achieved against the odds, or were even anthropological recordings of some games and pastimes. Examples of these works stretch from Broome's article (1980) on boxing and Howell & Howell's (1986) work on cricket through to Edwards' (1996) treatise on traditional games and Harris' (1989) recital of great Indigenous athletic exploits. In the popular press the overwhelming number of articles are written in the same vein. This work is sensationalised to catch the 'black issues' of the day. This means an abundance of stories on racism and Aboriginal athletic heroes and heroines. In recent years, though, some more thoughtful pieces have entered the pages of the popular press - including pieces by Weaver (1991), Olson (1996) and Gordon (1995). Hopefully these articles are indicative of a shift in the representation of Indigenous affairs in the popular media.

Most authors write about the Aboriginal sporting experience from a socio-historical perspective (Blades, 1982; Broome, 1980; Daly, 1994; Hallinan, 1991; Howell & Howell, 1986; Mulvaney & Harcourt, 1988). Whether it be socialisation, acculturation or assimilation, Aboriginal peoples are represented as being subject to broader sociological, political or ideological forces but never the agents of their own
existences. Little work recognises the agency of Aboriginal people in these experiences. Paraschak's (1994, 1996a, 1996b & 1997) research is the exception. subjects of this study indicated that they were aware of issues and made deliberate choices on occasion. These men are active participants in the events and interactions of their careers in sport. Others publications written by Aboriginal authors also support this Aboriginal agency, albeit in other facets of Indigenous life (e.g. Gilbert, 1994; Langton, 1994).

The affirmation which football offers these subjects was also a feature of their interviews. This point was consistent with the interviews presented within the work of Adams & Dixon. 1991; Atkinson, 1991 and Mead, Roberts & Rijavec, 1988. The strongest proponent of the positive influence that sport offers for Indigenous peoples has been Tatz (1987, 1994 & 1995a). Tatz (1987) concluded the following about the purpose of all-Aboriginal sporting spaces:

It is possible that the birth and growth of black teams has been to enable Aborigines to make their own decisions and selections; to be winners, for a change: to provoke - if possible, to evoke - a sense of respect for them as people (p. 5).

In a subsequent report Tatz (1994) stated:

My conclusion is that sport has ramifications well beyond the matter of delinquency, and has a far greater significance in Aboriginal life than in that of any other sector of Australian society. (p. 4)
I support Tatz's conclusion and the subjects of this study reinforced this reality.

It's the biggest event on the Aboriginal calendar. People love to hang out for that three day week-end they get together and see their people, and [it] brings the community together. That's something that's got to be looked at for all sports you know, it gives you a wider base to bring [the] Aboriginal population in from all over together.

- Leon

For people within the Indigenous community, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, this may be commonsense but it isn't understood outside of the Indigenous community. The previous literature makes limited recognition of this fact of Indigenous life. Whilst there remains limited avenues for positive life experiences, sport will always remain a priority and favoured experience within Indigenous life (Tatz, 1994 & 1995a).

**Participation**

Questions in this section were intended to allow the subjects to talk about their "experience in rugby league". This participation is stretched along a continuum which contains three spaces - a) mainstream sport; b) All-Black teams playing in mainstream sport, and c) All-Black sporting carnivals. Questions were asked about each of these places. A fourth set of questions sought to understand any similarities or differences between these spaces.

While subjects are in the mainstream sport system I hypothesised that:

*Aboriginal participation in mainstream sport is mediated by* Aboriginality

The interviews confirmed that Aboriginality does mediate the participation of Aboriginal people in mainstream sport. But this only occurs because of the existence
of racism, which differentiates Aboriginal footballers from non-Aboriginal footballers. At the elite level, these subjects preferred to be recognised for their ability. This is consistent with Donnelly & Young's (1985 & 1988) work on identity construction.

But at various times racism interjected and shattered any illusions that these men may have had about being accepted just as footballers. At lower levels, i.e., lower representative teams, local and regional competitions, this 'football' identity was not developed fully. Subjects maintained their primary identity as being Aboriginal. At some point, though, these subjects made a transition from a primarily Aboriginal identity to that of being a footballer. When this footballer identity was challenged by racism, they then made an assessment on whether or not to maintain it. The site of this initial transition is still unclear. The analogy of a parabolic curve can be used as these men played football along the representative pathway to the professional and elite ranks. Somewhere along this path, these subjects decided, or may even have been coerced, to shift identities and become the 'pro footballer'. But the shift out of this identity is marked by at least two events - racism and retirement. When racist behaviour was directed at these subjects, it asserted their Aboriginality as their primary identifier. This occasion marks a time of introspection. Barry talked about how his feelings towards the club changed after this type of racist instance. Erne and Leon talked about how they coped with the racism in a different fashion, but the effect was the same - they were set apart from the other footballers on the basis of race. Even though the transitions between the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal contexts occur this exploratory study was not able to ascertain any firm answers on when or how they occur.
The second hypothesis examined the nature of All-Black teams which participate in the mainstream sporting infrastructure:

These sites lessen the contradictions between Aboriginality and a wish to participate in mainstream activities.

The second hypothesis proposed that All-Black teams in the mainstream acted as a bridge between the mainstream and the Aboriginal community. This was not supported by the subjects. Rather these teams were described as oppositional initiatives designed to counter racism. Barry best explained their function when he described such teams as representing a fight of "us against the system". This would suggest that the 'contradictions between Aboriginality' and the mainstream were in fact more forcefully promoted. Aunty also mentioned how these teams generated a sense of pride. "especially when they were wailin' the piss out of 'em". Explaining this situation requires trying to understand the circumstances under which these clubs and teams are formed. Most of these initiatives occurred due to the oppressive presence of racism within mainstream clubs and teams. This racism forced Aboriginal players to look elsewhere to get a fair go in rugby league. These All-Black teams/clubs thus were formed in opposition to racism, both overt and institutionalised.

Yeah a bad experience. They have a negative experience - yeah and those bad experiences that they may have, they last forever you know - you know, whether they got ripped off in the Grand Final, or whatever. And it comes back to, "These bastards are doing it again! And they're doing it to us again!"

- Barry

From the onset, the objective of All-Blacks teams is both overt and subliminal. On the surface these teams/clubs simply want to join and participate in mainstream football competitions. Beneath the surface, these Aboriginal athletes feel more comfortable
playing with their own people and/or are seeking to prove that they are as good if not better than the non-Aborigines. These teams however, are limited in achieving their objectives by lack of resources, poor organisational skills and the rebuttal of institutionalised racism. This racism seeks to detract from the ability of players, deny their achievements, and ultimately seeks to remove these clubs/teams from competition altogether. The immediate benefit of this outcome is the removal of another team from the competition and the distribution of their playing talent.

These All-Black teams/clubs also fulfil a very important role in their Aboriginal communities. These subjects provided the community with Aboriginal role models in action. These subjects didn’t talk about high profile mainstream players when they cited their role models, they spoke of week-ends watching Uncles or cousins play (e.g. Erne and Larry). These teams and clubs are the breeding ground for inspiration and motivation, as illustrated by Peter’s comments about playing at school on Saturday and going to watch his Uncles play on Sunday. These week-end games were what Peter remembered most about school.

The second function of All-Black teams was touched upon by Aunty when she talked about "community pride". For one day a week the Aboriginal community could reverse the tables on racism and enjoy being participants for the duration of two forty-five minute halves of a footy game. As well, if their team lost, they could share with others the injustice of a racist system which was being enforced by the referee. But when these teams won the Aboriginal community could celebrate the heroic efforts of it’s footballers over "the system". Tatz (1995) has discussed this community-building function in detail in ‘Obstacle Race’. The only other source of comparable
bursts of sanity-saving esteem are All-Black carnivals and knockouts.

This last series of questions were designed to elicit responses about all-Aboriginal sporting spaces - the All-Black carnivals and knockouts. This hypothesis acknowledged that sport in these places was created and maintained for different reasons than sport in the mainstream. Tatz (1987 & 1995a) talks at length about the cultural significance of these spaces, as did the subjects of this study. The hypothesis proposed was:

These carnivals are a site of affirmation where Aboriginality is the accepted cultural context and expression.

This section set out to examine perspectives on Indigenous experience in sport beyond the historical or the biographical material presented in most articles written to date. The significance of these carnivals shifts as the subjects progressed in their football careers. At the beginning of their careers, these places are seen as proving grounds; places where playing signifies a rite of passage as both a player and (in Barry's and Peter's case) as a man. As these men established themselves within the professional ranks, all-Aboriginal carnivals became places which offered not football, but cultural 'top-ups'. Their motivation for participating changed from playing to refine skills, to playing to reinforce personal and cultural links (as cited by Larry, Erne and Leon). In between these two extremes, carnivals were places where younger professionals developed new skills and perfected personal moves and plays (as David sought to do).

At a more social level, these carnivals are one of the few instances in Aboriginal life where Aboriginal people represent the controlling interests. Barry, Leon and Doug noted, even though people grow dissatisfied with poor organisation
and dishonest organisers. Aboriginal people return every year. If it was just about football these subjects could get that elsewhere. What people can't get elsewhere are the feelings that Larry and Leon described: being with "millions of black people". The scale of the Aboriginal presence cannot be reproduced at other events. nor can the atmosphere. Smaller gatherings may occur in more formal settings like theatres, galleries or official functions. but the overwhelming informality of all-Aboriginal carnivals demand interaction at every step. Nods. winks. smiles and acknowledgments must be handed out liberally. as are handshakes. introductions and chit-chat. This type of personal interaction is positive and constructive and most importantly it is black. These are the experiences of the All-Black carnivals of Yuendumu. Townsville. Cairns. Murraybridge, Geraldton and the Koori Knockout. These are also the experiences of each of these subjects and this author.

When I shifted to ask about the links between these various spaces in the fourth section. responses varied. Most subjects thought there was some connection but couldn't quite verbalise what it was. Peter mentioned "how they're not on the same path" but they all have football in common. Given more time to consider these type of questions. or an opportunity to answer at a second interview. I'm certain that responses to these questions would improve. When asked which space they preferred. subjects invariably indicated the All-Blacks carnivals. but couldn't quite explain why. Doug talked about how it made him feel "safe". David indicated how he could play the football he liked most at these carnivals. Peter. Mike and Larry talked about playing with family. Barry and Leon both wanted to just go and be around as many blacks as they could. Each of these responses reflects the various needs which
carnivals fulfil. David has devoted himself to playing mainstream football. In doing so he commits himself to the discipline and structure of mainstream football. David also then sacrifices his freedom of expression of his preferred style of football. Both Barry and Leon have either completed their education and/or begun careers within totally non-Aboriginal circumstances. Both men played professional football at the top levels for long periods of time, also within non-Aboriginal circumstances. These carnivals represent that "one-time a year when you can be around all blacks" as Barry phrased it. Those times are a chance to totally immerse themselves in the Aboriginal world, for a change.

Three further points need to be made about the Indigenous experience in sport. Firstly, Indigenous participation in physical activity is closely tied to a broader issue which overshadows Indigenous affairs in Australia. This broader question is about the place of Indigenous peoples in Australian society. The central question in race relations in Australia is whether Aborigines should be integrated into mainstream Australian society or whether some alternative co-existence is feasible.

Secondly, irregardless of political shifts and formal policy announcements, Aboriginal people are expected to subscribe to the mainstream sporting infrastructure. Institutions such as governments, national sporting organisations, and sporting agencies like the Australian Sports Commission, have decided that the only place where physical activity (organised or unorganised) will be legitimised, and thereby supported, is in the mainstream sporting infrastructure. This seeks to confine
Indigenous participation to physical activity on non-Aboriginal terms. This has meant trying to integrate Indigenous peoples into non-Indigenous activity, i.e., modern sport (Blades. 1982; Broome. 1980; Howell & Howell, 1986; Tatz, 1995a; Paraschak. 1992a & 1994). This integration, however, is limited by both overt and institutionalised racism. This process of integration is colloquially called 'mainstreaming'.

The final aspect of this debate involves the right of Aboriginal people to create their own spaces and to participate in these All-Black spaces on their own terms. Herein lies the significance of all-Aboriginal spaces in sport. These spaces are evidence of Indigenous peoples' dissatisfaction with the mainstream sporting infrastructure and testament to the power of Indigenous peoples to create and sustain their own spaces. This practice occurs independent of the mainstream sporting infrastructure.

Australian governments have been trying for over two hundred years to resolve the Aboriginal problem. For at least one-hundred and ninety of those years Australian society has been trying to ignore the Aboriginal problem. Tatz (1987) writes that "sport is not separate from life. Where there is racism in political, social, legal, and economic life, so there is racism in the sporting one" (p. 3). The accounts of every subject in this study confirm that Australian society remains a racist society. Unfortunately, though, this issue is not an easy one to fix. But Indigenous peoples across Australia have tried. When racism precluded or curtained participation in mainstream sports Indigenous peoples created their own spaces. Paraschak's (1992a, 1996a, 1996b & 1997) work identifies these 'racialised spaces' in North America. The
same response has occurred within Australia. Persistent racism has forced the creation of two separate sport systems - one all-Aboriginal and the other mainstream.

It is in these all-Aboriginal places that Indigenous people have developed their initial interests in sport. Some sports are privileged in this place over others and at the moment rugby league is the favoured activity in Queensland and New South Wales. Contemporary Indigenous society is not free of sexism and this bias is reflected in organised sports. This study does not examine the Indigenous woman’s experience in sport so it is not appropriate to extrapolate these findings beyond rugby league and men. In some instances, sport and activities intended for women have been incorporated within All-Blacks carnivals. Alternatively, some women-specific sports are being organised in All-Black carnivals of their own. At present the most likely arrangement is that both male and female sports are being offered at the same carnival. More research needs to examine the Indigenous woman’s experiences in sport.

The subjects of this study were all familiar with All-Black sporting places and all had, at one time or another, played in these carnivals. However, aside from Paraschak (1992a, 1996a, 1996b & 1997), Tatz (1987, 1994 & 1995a), and more recently Godwell (1996), few articles acknowledge these all-Indigenous sporting places. Excluding the occasional story posted from Yuendumu or the Koori Knockout, these carnivals and this system remains invisible to mainstream Australian society.

When this all-Aboriginal system threatens to encroach upon non-Aboriginal interests, for example, when Aboriginal players break away from their current clubs to form an All-Blacks club, the response from the mainstream sport administrators has been blunt and can be severe. Conflicts of this nature are most likely to occur at the
local level. It is at this point that mainstream sporting clubs are most dependent upon Aboriginal sporting participation. These clubs take special precautions to guard their prized performers. Sport administrators employ a range of sanctions to discourage the formation or sustainability of these all-Aboriginal clubs and teams. These reprisals can include refusing entry of new clubs into competitions (Clements. 1991); racist referees and officiating; or even banning of key players or entire teams (Tatz. 1995b).

The mainstream sporting system maintains that any all-Black spaces are not acceptable because they discriminate on the basis of race. The term 'reverse racism' is frequently employed as a clever, although unsubstantiated, description of efforts to form these clubs. This term fails to recognise that Aboriginal participation is constantly being restricted by racism in the first instance. This discrimination has become so stifling that it forces Aboriginal people to form their own clubs and spaces to get a fair go. This background forms the context of the 'mainstream/apartheid' argument in Indigenous sport development.

The mainstream/apartheid assessment of Indigenous sporting intentions is polarised in this manner because it is easy. Either you're in the mainstream or you're not. Either you're Black or you're White. Aborigines who move into the mainstream are expected to deny their heritage, thereby removing the associated political and social consequences. Furthermore, these athletes are expected to endure ongoing racial barbs or stereotypes about Aboriginal people. In return these select Aborigines can be like white Australians, but they are never quite the same as white Australians.
It is this subtle distinction which is revealed from time to time in the words or actions of non-Aboriginal people. It was these types of racist comments which jolted the subjects of this study on occasion. It might entail a comment made in the heat of a dressing room pep talk, or a referee playing dumb to a racist remark, but the lesson is the same - you'll always see me as being black first, and human second. In the end the only safe course is to follow Barry's advice and "stick with the brothers".

The mainstream/apartheid argument is a smoke screen for the real issue. The real issue is the right of individuals to make any choice they feel is right for them. For some Aboriginal people this choice may mean minimising potential exposure to racism and its dehumanising effects. To avoid racism means withdrawing from those places where racism is protected and proliferates. Tatz (1987) has already established that this means withdrawing from Australian society. The current inability of professional sporting leagues in Australia to eliminate racism from their codes is a good example of how institutionalised racism is being perpetuated. The administrators of these sports are preoccupied with the symptoms of racism rather than addressing the root cause.

Peoples' choices are not confined to the binary of either the mainstream system or the all-Aboriginal system. The subjects of this study realised they had more options available to them and they exercised their right to choose between them. subjects benefited by moving from one place to another and back again to develop their skills and to increase their self-esteem. They also took advantage of the rewards afforded in both places - cultural, social and personal returns in the All-Black system and financial rewards in the mainstream sport system.
Relationship between Identities in Rugby League

This section was designed to ask about the transitions these football players made between their identities as Aborigines and as footballers. At the most practical level, the ability of an Aborigine to successfully negotiate these transitions will affect whether or not they are effective in the different spaces of mainstream and Indigenous life. The hypothesis states that:

Those individuals who are secure in their Aboriginality will have develop a fluidity between their various identities in order to feel at ease with total emersion in another system i.e., a professional football career.

It was not possible to confirm or deny this hypothesis from the data collected. Barry, Leon, Erne and Larry commented on how they were confident in their ability to operate in both worlds - Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Erne recollected his childhood, where he spent the weekdays in an all-White situation, going to school, and then weekends in an all-Aboriginal world with family; his memories were very similar to Barry's and Larry's. For these subjects, growing up with the non-Aboriginal system was an advantage and generated a sense of familiarity with non-Aboriginal society - the white world. This sense of understanding helped them make the switches or transitions between these differing worlds as their careers progressed, requiring them to spend more time in the non-Aboriginal situation. This is also my experience. Further research on the details of this 'switching' or transition is required before firm explanations can be offered.

For many years the 'cultural melting-pot' theory held sway when interpreting cross-cultural experiences. In the sporting context, the work of Allison (1979, 1982a & 1982b) and Cheska (1984 & 1988) have debunked this theory. Allison (1982)
concluded that "assimilation need not be viewed as a normal, necessary, or even inevitable state" (p. 173).

Indigenous peoples and different ethnic populations have used sport not as a means of assimilating, but rather as an opportunity for strengthening differences (Allison. 1979 & 1982b; Cheska. 1984). By capitalising on the 'ideologically free' spaces in sport these peoples have adapted mainstream sport activities to replicate and reinforce their own dominant values and beliefs (Allison, 1982b). Donnelly's (1988) article considered the possibility of using broader social theory to explain the significance of some of these activities in sport. The possibility of 'resistant' or 'oppositional' or even 'alternative' cultures, being developed in conjunction with the 'dominant' culture (Williams. 1977) of the society is highly plausible. Paraschak (1996a, 1996b & 1997) has extended this theory to Indigenous sporting experiences.

Consistent with Donnelly's (1988) arguments, All-Black carnivals are celebrated as clear instances of 'alternative' culture. All-Black teams operating within the mainstream are 'oppositional' - by default, not by design. To some extent the 'oppositional' characterisation is unfounded because these teams play within mainstream competitions, under mainstream rules and they actually play mainstream games. It also raises the following: What is valuable in the sporting experience that makes it worth fighting for? What benefits does sport offer which cannot be accessed elsewhere in society?

A partial answer lies in an assessment of what life opportunities are available to the average Aboriginal male in Australian society. Sadly, racism precludes many pursuits and possibilities. But sport offers an avenue for self-esteem, self-worth and
community recognition. Sport is one of the few positive life experiences available to young Aboriginal males. The eight men of this study also believed this and they invested at least ten years of their lives in participating in rugby league.

All-Black teams operate in highly 'contested terrain' which is figuratively and literally fought over every week-end. Barry commented that

...when you're playing in an Aboriginal team it's 'us against them'. Not only 'us against them' but 'us against the system'. So you don't have that in [mainstream] because it's just you playing in a team. You're not up against - you're not fightin', you're just playing in that team.

Throughout this study subjects indicated that their ability to move between the two systems was their best measure of success in either place. When subjects noted vivid experiences, they were invariably instances where these transitions were not smooth. Complications usually resulted in memorable, sometimes painful, sometimes long-lasting experiences. At times racism was the spark, at other times it was triggered by being labelled a 'coconut' or 'uptown'. These types of experiences are celebrated by bell hooks (1990) because she believes they are sign-posts of individual power. For these men, though, such experiences just represented painful lessons on how to get along as an Aborigine operating in a non-Aboriginal world.

Paraschak (1994, 1996a, 1996b & 1997) has started to map out these alternative spaces, and in doing so argues for the legitimacy of these spaces and the right of people to occupy them. This sensitivity was absent from most of the accounts offered by this study's subjects. Whilst recognition of all-Black spaces was frequent, the mainstream was undoubtedly privileged by the subjects with legitimacy.
...see if you're going to play in Indigenous football then that's fine - you've proved yourself to the Indigenous community. But mainstream's still mainstream - you haven't proved yourself there. Like succeeding in an Aboriginal team in a mainstream competition then you've proved yourself in the mainstream, and by playing in the top level then - so I think it's a transition stage that you go along.

- Barry

This privileging of the mainstream sport system occurs because subconsciously all-Aboriginal racialised spaces and the mainstream are not perceived to be related.

Superficially they are claimed to be about football, but at another level only the mainstream sporting experience is about football. At the top level, though, the mainstream league is equated to being a profession and therefore only about money.

The All-Blacks carnivals, on the other hand, are about a celebration and reaffirmation of culture and community. All-Blacks teams, meanwhile, become an assertion of dignity and the right to be black in a non-black world.

Every community cries for acceptance, don't it? Acceptance from the mainstream and that's - you can have a team but you can only have acceptance if you compete with other teams. [Acceptance or assert?] I think assert might be a better word - there you go - 'that we are just as good if not better than youse!'

- Barry

It is these differing objectives which remain below the surface of Indigenous participation. This is the world of the 'unsaid's' and the 'commonsensical':- the perfect place for a sociologist to go challenging unsuspecting football players. Unfortunately, these were issues which were far too complex for first time interviews. Barry is quoted at length in this section because he had the opportunity to participate in a second
interview. Although unintended, it was this second interview which yielded these ideas.

This exploratory study yielded possibilities which should be related to other facets of Indigenous life. It is important that this material not be confined to the sport context. Potentially, Indigenous participation in sport may be a truer reflection of race relations than any other sector of life. Sport may be one of the very few instances in Indigenous life where Aboriginal people are in control of some part of their life, fighting the non-Aboriginal system and yet at other times, making concessions and buying into the mainstream system in other ways.

As I mentioned in the methodology, an exploration of fluidity required more in-depth discussion than these initial interviews could provide. But the signs are encouraging. A full scale research project on this issue would be fruitful. The opportunity for follow-up interviews, and prior explanation offered to subjects on some of the interview topics, would be productive in this area of study.

**Relationship Between Rugby League and Aboriginality**

Even after breaking this question down into its constituent parts and asking more detailed questions about these sub-problems, the answer is predictable and unimaginative - the relationship is highly complex. For the subjects of this study a connection does exist between rugby league and Aboriginality. That connection is a positive and direct relationship founded on a belief in innate Aboriginal physical ability. This phenomenon has been described by these subjects as "natural ability", "black magic", "special skills" or a "sixth sense for sport". For these men, Aborigines
are naturally gifted with physical skills beyond the average. This belief supports a
certainty which is further enhanced by environmental conditions. This in turn
creates a positive cycle of confidence, performance and affirmation. The better these
men are at rugby league the firmer their Aboriginality. But at the elite level this
creates some inconsistencies. How can these men adopt athlete or footballer identities
if their ability is attributable to their Aboriginal identity? For most subjects this meant
being Aboriginal first and foremost and layering other identities over this core.
Confounding this approach, though, were the instances where these men sought to be
recognised for their footballer identity not their Aboriginal identity. The times when
this ambition was shattered by racism stand out as particularly painful and long-lasting
memories for these men. But why should being reminded of your Aboriginality be a
traumatic experience? The negative connotations of these racial remarks is the telling
factor. When race is perceived in a negative context, remarks become divisive and
hurtful. Within a racist society like Australia, most references to race are pejorative
and demeaning. To some extent this helps explain how Aboriginal people can attach a
positive meaning to the concept of 'black magic' even though this label has apparent
Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race has discussed this issue at
length.

Outside of this 'footballer' identity these men did not identify any other roles
which may have been located within the mainstream. For example, when asked about
'regional' identities most subjects indicated that if they did identify in this manner it
was only for the duration of the game. It is not surprising that these Aboriginal men
did not feel part of their regional communities to create identities in these spaces. In
opposition to this were the All-Black carnivals and the All-Black teams/clubs.

In terms of participation, the cultural, social and personal significance of the
All-Black carnivals was supported by this study. From the perspectives of these
subjects all-Aboriginal sporting spaces fulfil a dual function. For younger Aboriginal
men with ambitions for professional football careers, these spaces foster and develop
football skills. For men who are already professionals, All-Blacks carnivals are an
opportunity to reconnect with "being black". What this study didn't ascertain is why
men who are neither going up the ladder nor down the ladder are there.

The militant objectives of the All-Blacks teams/clubs which participate within
mainstream competitions was not expected. Originally it was hypothesised that these
teams act as a bridge between the all-Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal sporting
systems - clearly they do not. These teams/clubs are as much about race politics as
rugby league. The respective Aboriginal communities are prepared to bear
institutionalised racism for the weekly opportunity to defeat the "system" at its own
game, under its own rules, on its own fields, in front of its own supporters. No other
activity offers such an opportunity. Sport is unique in this sense.

This study examined the male experience in Indigenous sport; further research
should consider the Aboriginal woman's experience in sport. Consideration should
also be given to the intersection of masculinity and Aboriginality in these sporting
circumstances. Whilst rugby league provides ample, well rewarded and easily
recognised expressions of Aboriginal masculinity, the opportunities for females in
rugby league are much reduced. This is a very important matter, because whilst sport
may be a highly positive experience for Aboriginal men. If this institution is
maintaining hegemonic gender relations, then it is oppressing Aboriginal women. In
this regard Indigenous sport may be just replicating the inequalities of mainstream
sport.

The extent to which these subjects moved between identities was clear. These
men did indicate that transitions occurred and that these switches were most distinct
when moving between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal context. For this study the
sporting contexts were specifically examined, but the subjects' experiences of
transitions went across the breadth of their daily interactions. What was not
ascertained was when, and on what basis, these transitions were instigated. But this
study did highlight the importance of these transitions in being able to cope within
either system.
Notes:

1. 'Black magic' can be described as that innate quality which Aborigines are supposedly gifted with. It gives Aboriginal players a sixth sense when playing sports. Black magic can be seen in the quick step and move or the unsighted pass of the ball or the unimaginable combinations which Aboriginal players can put together. I don't believe this ability is innate to Aborigines.

Aboriginal children are encouraged when growing up to be more physically adventurous and inquisitive. What's more, Aboriginal children are placed in the day care of older siblings, thereby playing with children who are more co-ordinated and physically developed. These factors promote the fast development of motor learning skills. When these children are then confined to their own age group, as they do in sport at school, they perform at a much higher level than their peers. The result is that this individual is rewarded and receives positive recognition for their physical skills, whereas in other parts of their life they may only receive negative feedback - racism in the playground, teachers using stereotypes to assign attention to students, etc. But in sport they can excel; sport is their time to be somebody. This is then reinforced at home by parents, older siblings, Elders, Uncles and Auntyes.

The resultant of all these factors is the creation of a positive cycle of physical experimentation, performance, positive reinforcement, family support, identity construction, affirmation and increased confidence, leading back to greater experimentation and it's outcome "black magic".

2. Particularly well-dressed.

3. These are pejorative terms are used within the Indigenous community to describe an Aboriginal person who is perceived to behaving like a non-Aboriginal.
CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

Summary

The primary hypothesis of this exploratory study was to determine what relationship existed between rugby league and Aboriginality. To facilitate the interview process and subsequent data analysis this problem was divided into three sub-problems:

1. How are identities formed, fostered and challenged? This sub-problem examined the three identities of athlete/footballer, Aboriginality and a regional (provincial) identity.

2. What is the experience of Aboriginal participation in rugby league? There currently exists a participation spectrum for Aboriginal involvement in sport in Australia. This spectrum stretches across three predominant spaces - all-Aboriginal sporting carnivals, all-Aboriginal teams competing in mainstream sporting competitions, and lastly, individual Aboriginal participation within mainstream sport.

3. What is the relationship between the identities discussed in Sub-Problem One with the participation spectrum of Sub-Problem Two? This section was intended to ascertain the nature of interactions in these instances: that is, if any occurred at all.

The qualitative method employed for data collection used guided interviews. The sampling of subjects was designed to obtain individuals who spanned the experience levels of professional football. There were four categories of subjects: a) those on the verge of full-time professionalism, i.e., not regular members of A Grade
squad but with the potential to be at this level in the near future: b) full-time professionals, i.e., regular members of A Grade squads: c) men who had retired from professional rugby league: and lastly d) individuals who had left full-time professional rugby league prematurely, i.e., these men did not retire but choose to leave professional rugby league for some reason without seeing out their careers.

The intent of drawing from this variety of personal experiences was to have access to a depth of experiences. Having a diverse sample selection offered as many different perspectives on the issues raised by the research as was possible. This diversity was sought on other variables as well, including age, professional franchises the subjects played with, and where they were raised as children, i.e., across the range of Aboriginal communities from remote Aboriginal communities to rural and urban contexts.

The findings of this study indicate that there is a direct and positive relationship between rugby league and Aboriginality. For these subjects a positive cycle of self-confidence, participation, performance and identity affirmation develops with rugby league participation. The lynch pin of this cycle is a belief that Aboriginal peoples have innate physical talents. Most Aborigines believe that, as a race of people, they are gifted with special physical talents, i.e., improved vision, endurance, co-ordination and a spatial imagination and awareness. When applied to sport, the confidence of possessing these talents provides an edge and led to improved performances. These above average performances 'confirmed' special talents. These special talents are then attributed to Aboriginality, as opposed to merely the self-confidence associated with the belief.
This overall finding is supported by the examination into specific identity constructions which occurred in Sub-Problem One. The construction of the subjects' athletic identity was predicated upon their Aboriginality. Only at the elite levels did their athletic/football identity take on a more significant role. But in most instances subjects either identified as being Aboriginal footballers or being both Aboriginal and a footballer. The footballer identity, however, is very specific - confined to those times when an individual is playing or training, the primacy of Aboriginality is never denied and additional identities are accommodated around this core.

When examining the spectrum of Indigenous participation in sport in Sub-Problem Two, one novel finding was emerged. Those all-Aboriginal teams playing in mainstream competitions are not bridges between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sporting systems. These spaces are sites of opposition and conflict. The all-Aboriginal team has been founded on Aboriginal dissatisfaction with the persistent overt and institutionalised racism of the non-Aboriginal sporting system. These all-Aboriginal clubs and their teams are thus created by Aboriginal peoples in a sincere effort to encourage non-discriminatory participation in sport. Prior research by Cheska (1988), Allison (1982b), Parashak (1992a, 1994, 1996a & 1997), Tatz (1987 & 1995a) and Donnelly (1988) has documented the existence of these spaces. Whilst these previous studies have sought to interpret the significance of these 'racialised spaces' (Parashak, 1996b) this study has provided a potential motivation and suggested intent behind the formation of such places. The all-Aboriginal sporting club/team is a counter assault to the oppression of racism.
The last sub-problem tried to examine instances of interaction between those created identities and the individual's participation in various contexts. At some level every subject acknowledged moving or shifting identities when participating at various points along the participation spectrum in sport. Even though all subjects recognised such shifts in their own lives, not all were able to expand beyond this recognition. Some subjects did discuss how their transitions were efforts to move back and forth between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds. As professional footballers they lived as Aboriginal people in non-Aboriginal worlds with non-Aboriginal careers. At times these transitions were slow or misguided and the subjects recalled being out of place on these occasions. When in the mainstream this glitch was labelled 'acting like a real blackfella'. If this misreading occurred whilst in the Aboriginal world, the individual might be labelled by other Aborigines as 'going uptown'. Unfortunately this study was not able to explore this issue in more depth. But by knowing how and when to facilitate transition between Black and White worlds, we can help Aboriginal people to develop coping skills. One of the least understood features of Aboriginal interaction within the non-Aboriginal world is 'going walkabout'. This phrase has been used as a pejorative racial stereotype for decades but little is really known about why some Aboriginal people cope within the non-Aboriginal context and others overload and need to escape. This study has only found that this coping is related in some way with these transitions. As long as Indigenous youth experience the lowest retention rates at schools and Indigenous athletes walk
away from lucrative professional athletic careers. not finding answers to this question about transitions will continue to have dire consequences for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

**Recommendations**

This exploratory study does indicate that Aboriginality and rugby league participation are positively and directly linked: that racism is rife within Australian sport; and, that currently two separate sport systems exist - one all-Aboriginal and then there's the mainstream sport system. What are the practical implications of these findings? Firstly, professional rugby league clubs need to take some time to better understand how these factors influences the nature of the Indigenous experience in their clubs/teams. If coaches and CEO's want to retain their Indigenous players they must look at factors other than the size of playing contracts. Although professional franchises are primarily interested in the end product of years of athletic development they should not dismiss the likelihood of cultural factors being present. As with any athlete, personal dissatisfaction breeds discontent not improved performances. When Indigenous players are involved within the non-Aboriginal world of professional sport, some sensitivities must be displayed: otherwise these players are likely to drop-out, leave or go missing at anytime - as many have.

At a policy level the existence of all-Aboriginal sporting spaces is evidence of two features - racism. as in the case of all-Aboriginal teams competing within mainstream sporting competitions, and secondly, places of social and cultural significance, e.g. All-Blacks sporting carnivals. To reduce racism in Australian sport
necessitates that the issue move beyond the philosophical mode to equality and fair play for all. At some point words and high principles need to materialise into unequivocal standards and sanctions. For everybody to be confident in this process the application of these sanctions should be swift and clear. What's more, racism in Australian sport affects everybody - not just Aborigines. Accordingly any anti-racism initiatives must not be restricted to any one particular sector of Australian society.

The third recommendation concerns the significance of these all-Aboriginal sporting spaces. Until Australian society can come to grips with the right of its Indigenous peoples to control their own lives and destinies then the issue of all-Aboriginal sporting spaces will be inconsequential. These places of Aboriginal identity, community and cultural revival are contemporary manifestations of processes with ancient traditions. These All-Black sport carnivals have less to do with sport than they do cultural survival (Tatz, 1995a). In this regard these events should be supported and their organisers assisted where appropriate.

When I considered Birrell's (1989) suggested future areas for socio-historical analysis of race relations and sport. I saw this project as responding to an "absence from the pages of research" (p. 221). There were negligible publications authored by Indigenous people on Indigenous sport. This project sought to bring to "the pages of research" the voices of Indigenous men and their experiences in sport. The completion of this project has fulfilled this objective.

On a theoretical level this project has supported broader research directions being pursued by Parascak (1994) e.g Indigenous peoples, agency and resistance; Tatz (1995a), e.g. the significance of all-Aboriginal spaces in sport; and Donnelly
(1988), e.g. places of resistance in sport. In addition to documenting Indigenous experiences in sport, this project has tried to explain these experiences. The next step for this type of project is to observe another of Birrell's (1989) typologies by "considering some of the anomalies in sport": for example, how Aboriginal athletes perceived themselves as being both Aboriginal and professional athletes. As well, researchers of race relations and sport should respond to Messner's (1996) urging and "study up". Examining what it means to be 'mainstream' may offer important insights into how experiences in the "margins" (hooks. 1990) are as much like mainstream experiences, in some respects, as they are different in others.

This research, as an exploratory study, is invaluable for similar full-scale research projects on the topic of Aborigines and sport. The experience of completing interviews and the subsequent analysis of this raw data offered several lessons worthy of further consideration. The first of these lessons underscored the importance of being totally attentive to subjects. Not being a full participant, holding an interview is quite difficult. The use of tape recorders frees the interviewer/researcher to interact with the subject. If this interaction is absent the interview becomes very formal and could deteriorate into a question/answer session. The choice of a semi-structured interview is appropriate: the flexibility is critical, yet the common questions and structure are indispensable for keeping excited. nervous. inquisitive researchers on track. The instigation of follow-up interviews with subjects would be mandatory. The content of these interviews surprised subjects and they are more likely, given time, to better consider some of the issues raised.
Effective analysis of this data is imperative. The best coping strategy is not a computer program, nor hard copies of transcripts, nor multiple files of transcripts: the most valuable tool of analysis is the researcher and an adviser who is equally as interested in the thesis topic. On projects which investigate novel research problems there is little in the way of previous literature or research to guide analysis and research directions. In this situation a sense of perspective, offered by a colleague or adviser, and the researcher's thoroughness become crucial. Initially, at least, researchers must place their confidence in their experiences and intuition. This project was about humans and human experiences; so in spite of their shortcomings, limitations or inadequacies humans must complete the data collection and analysis. It is the researcher who sees the clues and locates the insights within any data. This information cannot be extracted in any other fashion.

At a practical level, every effort must be made to keep the researcher on track. This requires a substantial amount of self-discipline, perseverance and acceptance. Due to the inherent demands of qualitative research, time management is the most important skill of all. Wherever human skills can be supported, these measures should be incorporated: i.e., use of laptop computers, audio tapes, time and space to think etc. Being able to recognise the limitations of any process is in part being able to acknowledge your own limitations. The true benefit of this project has been that I've accepted these limitations and sought to exploit my strengths.
Conclusion

This project completes the latest step in my understanding and contribution to Indigenous sport development in Australia. Although five years in development, the circumstances which existed in 1991 and prompted this study remain unchanged in 1997. Yet again the headlines of Australian sports beat out a familiar tune about racism and its insidiously dehumanising effects. My response in 1997 restates my response in 1993 - until sport administrators in Australian sport get fair dinkum about confronting and removing racism rather than employing public relations exercises, then it will remain. Eventually those individuals who are the targets of such discrimination will register change within their teams, clubs and professions. This change may be subtle and personal or it could be explosive and public. In some limited capacity this project makes a contribution to documenting the causes of these possibilities.

Beyond this exploratory study lies the completion of a full-scale research project. Theoretically this project makes some contribution to a growing field of study which is looking into the experiences of Indigenous peoples in sport and physical activities.

In the final analysis, this project demonstrates that in spite of many hurdles and in the face of oppression, humanity can prevail, albeit for short bursts. And where the circumstances stifle this humanity, people create their own spaces free of such discrimination. Indigenous peoples have become adept at creating and redefining these
spaces on their own terms. Sport is an easily accessible example of this capacity. The most unpredictable factor with sport, though, is the experience - the fun, enjoyment and pleasure associated with playing.

No, sport's the main thing around here...what I've seen anyway

- Aunty
Appendix A

Guided Interview: Aborigines in Rugby League

Thesis Problem: "What is the relationship between Rugby League and Aboriginality?"

Sub-problem 1: How are identities formed, fostered and challenged?

a) How is an athletic identity formed, fostered and challenged in sport?

Hypothesis: "the more the individual participates in a sport the greater the likelihood this person will adopt the personae of their sport's perceived identity"

- when did you first think/ or see yourself as an athlete/sportsman?
  - what does this include? does it change over time or by sport?
- at what times do you see yourself as an athlete?

- what has helped you be successful as an athlete?
- what has been your best experience in sport?

- when have you most felt like a (football player)(athlete)?
- when have felt that your identity as an athlete was challenged?

- what has been your worst experience in sport?

- how do you think being an athlete affects other areas of your life?
- do you stop being other things when you're 'an athlete'?

- which sports are most supported at home?
- where do you think sport fits into the community?
  - if sport is number 1 what is 2, 3?
- which is more important community or footy?
  - have you ever had to choose?

b) How is a sense of Aboriginality formed, fostered and challenged in sport?

Hypothesis: "Aboriginality asserts a priority over all other identities or roles"

- what made you first think that you were a Koori/Murri?
• what type of influence has/does community had/have on you?
• what place do you think role models, support networks, participation in other sports has had in your life?

• at what times do you feel happiest to be Koori/Murri?

• when do Kooris/Murris make you slack?
• how do you think racism matters?

• what are the top three things that you feel makes you, personally, a Koori/Murri?
  • at what times do you see yourself as an athlete?

c) How is a Regional identity (Qld or NSW) formed, fostered and challenged in sport?

Hypothesis: "at those times when Aborigines most share in parochial occasions or feel least difference from the dominant society they identify as being a Queenslander or New South Welshman"

• in what situations would you/do you identify yourself as (Qld or NSW)?

• when are you most proud of being (Qld or NSW)? why?

• do you always see yourself as a Qld or NSW?
  - when are you most likely to consider yourself a Qld or NSW?
  - when are you least likely to consider yourself a Qld or NSW?

• is there any difference between being Koori/Murri and being (Qld or NSW)?
Sub-problem 2: "What is the experience of Aboriginal participation in Rugby League?"

a) What is the experience of Aboriginal participation in mainstream rugby league?

Hypothesis: "Aboriginal participation in mainstream sport is mediated by Aboriginality"

- how long have you been playing in mainstream rugby league teams?
  - is it important to you to play at the top level?
    - what do you want from being here?
    - or why wasn’t it important?

- why do Kooris/Murris like playing rugby league?
- why do some Kooris leave football even if they’re good?
  - what would make you leave?

- what are some of the differences between home footy and here?

b) What is the experience of Aboriginal participation in All-Black teams in mainstream?

Hypothesis: "these sites lessen the contradictions between Aboriginality and a wish to participate in mainstream activities"

- have you ever being asked/or played for an All-Blacks?
  - what do you remember most about playing in this team?

- are these teams different from mainstream teams?
  - what do you most look forward to when playing in these teams?

- what is the worst part of playing with these teams?
  - were there any instances of racism? how did this make you feel? how do you think others in the team felt? how do you think the other teams/coaches/referees feel?

- why do you think there are All-Blacks teams?

c) What is the experience of Aboriginal participation in All-Blacks carnivals?

Hypothesis: "these carnivals are a site of affirmation where Aboriginality is the accepted cultural context and expression"
- what do you remember most about your first All-Blacks carnival?
  - how many have you been involved with?
  - in what ways have you been involved?

- what's the best thing about these carnivals for you?

- is there anything that you don't like about the carnivals?
  - if you could, what would you change?

- how important do you think these carnivals are for fostering community and individual identity - Aboriginality?
  - how important are they to you?

**d) What are the differences and similarities between these three places?**

**Hypothesis:** "these three places exist along a continuum of engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society; with carnivals operating in an All-Black context. participation in the mainstream reflecting a degree of reproduction and the All-Blacks teams negotiating, challenging and resisting the dominant value system whilst still wishing to participate in the activity."

- list the best thing about each of the three types of footy

- where would you say you felt the most comfortable and enjoyed yourself the most?

- what's the worst thing about each type?

- are the three types of experiences similar? are they connected in any way?
  - which do you prefer? why?

- how do you feel you fit into each one?
  - what is it like socially? athletically?

**Sub-problem 3: What is the relationship between identities within Rugby League?**

**Hypothesis:** "those individuals who are secure in their Aboriginality need to develop a fluidity between their various identities in order to feel at ease with total emersion in another system i.e. professional career"

- can you remember if or when you decided to play footy full-time?
- did you have to get fair-dinkum or has it just happened?

  • how do you feel about being there? do you fit in?
  • how do you think your family and the community feels about you being here?
  - in what ways do they show it?
  - is this important to you - why?

• when have you felt most uneasy in sport?
  - did this just go away or did something else happen?
  - how would you tell another young fella how to deal with this?

• what connection do you think exists between you as a Koori/Murri and you as a football player?
  - which is more important to you?
  - how can you be both or can you only be one at a time?
Appendix B

Permission to Interview Form

I. I, _________________________________, upon signing this form give my consent to be interviewed for the research project entitled "Why are Blacks so good at football?: Aborigines and rugby league" which will be looking at my experience with rugby league and is being completed by Darren Godwell. Candidate, Masters of Human Kinetics at the University of Windsor (Canada). It has been explained to me that this research project is trying to understand the experiences of Murris and Kooris in rugby league. I understand that this research is being completed by interviewing Aboriginal rugby league players who are at various stages of their football careers.

By signing this form I also give my consent to the recording of this interview on audio cassette tape, knowing that later on written notes will be copied from these tapes.

I understand that once all the interviews are completed all the tapes, comments and notes will be separated and filed in such a way that only Darren and I will be able to identify my interview and my comments as being made by me. I am also aware that some of the material coming from this interview, including the audio recording, written notes and field notes. Darren may discuss with Dr V. Paraschak, Associate Professor at the University of Windsor (Canada), but these discussions will never identify me. Aside from this one exception, all the research material will remain
anonymous and will never be given to any other person in its complete form without my written permission.

I know that I can withdraw from this study at anytime, for any reason and this will not be held against me nor revealed to anyone else. If I have any questions or any queries I know that I can speak to Darren Godwell. on (06) 252 1820 in Australia or 011-1-519-972 1794 in Canada, at anytime to explain things for me.

By signing this form I'm also agreeing that I have read and understand this form.

Interviewee: ______________________________________

Interviewer: ______________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________
Appendix C

Revised Guided Interview

Sub-problem 1: How are identities formed, fostered and challenged?

a) How is an athletic identity formed, fostered and challenged in sport?
   - when did you first think/ or see yourself as an athlete/sportsman?
     - what does this include? does it change over time or by sport?
   - at what times do you see yourself as an athlete?
   - what has helped you be successful as an athlete?
   - what has been your best experience in sport?
   - when have you most felt like a (football player)(athlete)?
   - when have felt that your identity as an athlete was challenged?
   - what has been your worst experience in sport?
   - how do you think being an athlete affects other areas of your life?
   - do you stop being other things when you're 'an athlete'?
   - which sports are most supported at home?
   - where do you think sport fits into the community?
     - if sport is number 1 what is 2, 3?
   - which is more important community or footy?
     - have you ever had to choose?

b) How is a sense of Aboriginality formed, fostered and challenged in sport?
   - what made you first think that you were a Koori/Murri?
   - what type of influence has/does community had/have on you?
   - what place do you think role models, support networks, participation in
     other sports has had in your life?
   - at what times do you feel happiest to be Koori/Murri?
   - when do Kooris/Murrirs make you slack?
   - how do you think racism matters?
   - what are the top three things that you feel makes you, personally, a
     Koori/Murri?
   - at what times do you see yourself as an athlete?

c) How is a Regional identity (Qld or NSW) formed, fostered and challenged in sport?
   - in what situations would you/ do you identify yourself as (Qld or NSW)?
   - when are you most proud of being (Qld or NSW)? why?
   - do you always see yourself as a Qld or NSW?
     - when are you most likely to consider yourself a Qld or NSW?
     - when are you least likely to consider yourself a Qld or NSW?
   - is there any difference between being Koori/Murri and being (Qld or NSW)?
Sub-problem 2: "What is the experience of Aboriginal participation in Rugby League?"

a) What is the experience of Aboriginal participation in **mainstream rugby league**?
   - how long have you been playing in mainstream rugby league teams?
   - is it important to you to play at the top level?
     - what do you want from being here?
     - or why wasn't it important?
   - why do Kooris/Murris like playing rugby league?
   - why do some Kooris leave football even if they're good?
     - what would make you leave?
   - what are some of the differences between home footy and here?

b) What is the experience of Aboriginal participation in **All-Black teams** in mainstream?
   - have you ever been asked/or played for an All-Blacks?
     - what do you remember most about playing in this team?
   - are these teams different from mainstream teams?
     - what do you most look forward to when playing in these teams?
   - what is the worst part of playing with these teams?
     - were there any instances of racism? how did this make you feel? how do you think others in the team felt? how do you think the other teams/coaches/referees feel?
   - why do you think there are All-Blacks teams?

c) What is the experience of Aboriginal participation in **All-Blacks carnivals**?
   - what do you remember most about your first All-Blacks carnival?
     - how many have you been involved with?
     - in what ways have you been involved?
   - what's the best thing about these carnivals for you?
   - is there anything that you don't like about the carnivals?
     - if you could, what would you change?
   - how important do you think these carnivals are for fostering community and individual identity - Aboriginality?
     - how important are they to you?

d) What are the differences and similarities between these three places?
   - list the best thing about each of the three types of footy
   - where would you say you felt the most comfortable and enjoyed yourself the most?
   - what's the worst thing about each type?
   - are the three types of experiences similar? are they connected in any way?
   - which do you prefer? why?
   - how do you feel you fit into each one?
   - what is it like socially? athleticism?
Sub-problem 3: What is the relationship between identities within Rugby League?

- can you remember if or when you decided to play footy full-time?
  - did you have to get fair-dinkum or has it just happened?
- how do you feel about being there? do you fit in?
- how do you think your family and the community feels about you being here?
  - in what ways do they show it?
  - is this important to you - why?
- when have you felt most uneasy in sport?
  - did this just go away or did something else happen?
  - how would you tell another young fella how to deal with this?
- what connection do you think exists between you as a Koori/Murri and you as a football player?
  - which is more important to you?
  - how can you be both or can you only be one at a time?
Appendix D

Sampling Categories

The subjects were drawn from four potential subject pools. Each of these pools reflected participation in rugby league from along different places on the participation spectrum.

a) Players on the verge of full-time professionalism - these players have been contracted to professional franchises (contracts are probably less than $CAN25 000). Although contracted these men do not earn enough to live just from playing. Professional franchises encourage these players to maintain other activities outside of football i.e., a part-time job, attending post-secondary education, apprenticeship etc.

   It is likely that these players play in under age development squads or the Reserve Grade team for the club. These players are rare First Grade players but they are being prepared to make this step up.

   David and Barry were the subjects drawn from this category.

b) Full-time professionals - these players have signed large enough contracts to enable them to live off their rugby league earnings alone (contracts range between $CAN55 000 - $CAN1.2 million. with an average salary being
$CAN110,000). These men are the core of the First Grade team and train in the First's squad.

Larry and Peter belonged to this group.

c) **Retired full-time professionals** - these are full-time players which have played many years in the First Grade squads and have decided to retire.

Erne and Leon matched this playing profile.

d) **Individuals who decided to leave full-time professional rugby league** - this sample group represented the men who had reached membership in First Grade squads and were playing at this level regularly. At some point though these men decided to leave full-time professional football before they had reached their full potential.

Doug and Mike were men who had made this decision to leave.
Appendix E

Map of Australia
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