

'Pre-season' preparation:  
Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage players and their experiences in  
Auckland Rugby Academy

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## Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Ashley Stanley

15 September 2020

## Abstract

It is no surprise that Māori and Pacific rugby players make up a high percentage of players in Aotearoa New Zealand and around the world (Ryan, 2007). As audiences of these athletes, we are given little insights into their experiences and perceptions within a provincial union's rugby academy. It is in these stories and through their voices that their lived experiences can be heard and honoured.

This thesis aims to 'level the playing field' for these players, as their stories and anecdotal experiences add to the study of rugby communities and the sport psychology field by exploring rugby players' experiences within a rugby academy in Aotearoa New Zealand. The 17 participants (ranging from year one to year three academy players as well as the wider Auckland Rugby contender squad) identify as having Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage. The research questions relate to understanding their overall view of the academy and then, more specifically, around what or who influences those experiences and how can they be improved.

The research methodology and data collection method used was Talanoa, and the data analysis method was thematic analysis. To honour both Māori and Pacific worldviews and participants, similar underpinning values were chosen from both and used to help guide how the research was practically undertaken. The three key areas of research findings revealed how internal and external relationships impacted the overall experiences of the players; how content and communication went a long way in sustaining relationships; and the importance of understanding the person beyond the player, both from an organisation's perspective as well as the players'.

This research is of significant interest to a wide range of fields in Aotearoa and abroad, and assists existing and future academy staff in learning more about players in a way that can benefit both the players and the organisation in the future. The study also gives a heightened understanding of the multiple identities that rugby players in the

academy hold in relation to rugby and the changing makeup of Aotearoa which can help prepare for long-term development.

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As mama/nanny says, always in my heart x

# Chapter 1 – Introduction

## Overview of the research

This research project is an analysis of rugby players of Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage and their experiences in a high-performance athlete development environment, specifically the Auckland Rugby Union (ARU) Auckland Rugby Academy. The exploration identifies and analyses the players' experiences in terms of their overall view of the academy, including who and what influences their experiences and suggested areas of improvement.

The main research question that underpins this study is “What experiences do players of Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage have in Auckland Rugby Academy?”

There are also two sub-questions:

1. What internal or external forces influence the overall experiences of the players in the academy?
2. In what ways can these experiences be improved?

The remainder of Chapter One consists of three sections. The next section presents the origins of the study. The subsequent section is a discussion regarding the rationale for the research and the research questions, and the final section concludes the chapter by outlining how the thesis is organised and how each chapter aligns with the purpose of the research.

## The origins of the research

The appreciation for rugby has been a significant part of my life with deep roots through my whakapapa (ancestry), as my whānau (family) have grown up around rugby and, as a result, we have been afforded benefits in life because of rugby's cultural significance and importance in Aotearoa New Zealand (referred to as Aotearoa for the remainder of

this thesis). As a result of the way rugby has been ingrained in my life, it was only natural for me to want to examine and understand rugby in more detail and to unpack experiences that others have in relation to the sport of rugby. My father and brother have represented Aotearoa at an international level and played and coached rugby overseas for several years. For this reason, my siblings and I were blessed to live in Japan as part of our childhood, to travel the world and experience the privileges of members of our family playing for the national men's team, the All Blacks.

My parents emphasised the importance of education on top of rugby and sport, so seeing the worlds of education and sports intertwined saw my siblings and I strive for more in our tertiary education, such that my older brother is currently an orthopaedic surgeon. Unfortunately, he may be considered an exception not the rule when it comes to players with Pacific Island heritage pursuing a rugby career. This is not ideal and raises a few questions of interest for me which have, in turn, inspired some of the reasoning for pursuing this research.

On a general scale, if male athletes pursue a career in rugby, there is a common perception amongst the rugby community that certain milestones or markers along the 'rugby pipeline' in Aotearoa will put them on a positive trajectory to achieving that goal (Innes & Stanley, 2020).

In saying this, the common term used is 'pathway.' I have adopted the term 'pipeline' as not all players are successful in gaining support along a pathway, which the term suggests. The term 'pipeline' suggests a constantly flowing supply of water, leading to a designated destination, much like the number of rugby players within Aotearoa's rugby landscape.

The pipeline milestones or markers are age-grade representative teams, provincial rugby union academy programmes, national representative teams, Mitre 10 Cup teams, Super Rugby franchises and, as the pinnacle, the All Blacks.

From my lived experience, I have always had questions surrounding what development opportunities are available throughout the above-mentioned pipeline for those who are fortunate to be selected at certain stages. The main questions I mull over are: If a player does not achieve any of the perceived markers, does he still get supported or encouraged to carry on working towards his rugby aspirations or does he leave the sporting code all together? What if he achieves one stage but does not carry on to the next 'level', for reasons outside of his control (family, selection, coaching)? What happens to the players who are recruited at a young age within Aotearoa and abroad but do not make it professionally/make a living out of rugby? Do families encourage education as much as sport in case their relative does not progress further along the pipeline? What does success look like on and off the field for athletes and families?

ARU is the largest provincial union in Aotearoa. 2018 data shows 60% of all registered players are either Māori or Pacific (49% Pacific, and 11% Māori) and just under 45% of Mitre 10 players are either Māori or Pacific (26% Māori, and 17% Pacific) (New Zealand Rugby, 2018).

Reflecting on the pipeline stages, I decided to focus my energy and research project on the beginning of the pipeline for several reasons:

- 1) There may be a larger group of players who are still involved in rugby at this stage in comparison to later in the pipeline, as there are limited contract positions and franchises in a professional organisation.
- 2) A much smaller group of players will transition into the elite level so support and development services are only available for those who are successful.
- 3) Players are still at a developmental age where they can potentially be influenced with experience from the in-group and out-group.
- 4) There is research on the later stage – the transition out of rugby – from a Māori and Pacific perspective but there is not so much research at the earlier stage in the pipeline – coming into professional rugby.

- 5) The current research suggests what skills are needed to transition beyond rugby. Hypothetically, if organisations apply this knowledge, at the right time and in the right way, then they could potentially develop those skills for a larger playing group coming into the rugby pipeline (or earlier). This point speaks to the questions I had around development and wellbeing. If players do not carry on to the next level, then they will hopefully have the understanding of what skills can potentially be applied in any other career path.
- 6) Other research involving Māori and Pacific people in sport focuses on specific skills and how they process them and how athletes perceive certain skills regarding their pursuit of their chosen sporting code (Keung, 2018; Marsters, 2019). From the exploration above, the positioning of my research focuses on experiences players have in relation to part of the rugby system.

For those reasons, I decided to narrow the focus down to examine the systemic points in the rugby pipeline, as early in the development stages as possible, and located in a provincial union's rugby academy (an athlete development environment). By doing so, I would theoretically reach more rugby players than focusing on a later stage, i.e., professional players (who already have substantial support services in place at that level). If I focused on rugby players who did not make the academy level or dropped out (for whatever reasons – personal or as a result of not meeting academy standards), locating participants who meet that criteria would be difficult as I would not be able to easily identify them, and it would also require asking former athletes to recollect their experiences, which is not ideal.

Although the findings of this research project cannot be generalised, as it is a qualitative study, by choosing this topic, I am allowing athletes to discuss experiences relating to a systemic part of the pipeline which could help make changes to the structure and has the potential to impact more (academy) players in the future.

As mentioned above, from an academic point of view this research cannot be generalised, but other sporting clubs and programmes that have the involvement of a high percentage of Māori and/or Pacific people may be interested in the wider benefits of this research and the potential that it has for aligning with their own initiatives. This point would also cover players who do not make provincial union academy programmes, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, the underlying question I have chosen to manifest throughout my research is: “What experiences do Māori and/or Pacific rugby players have in an athlete development environment?”

In this case, the development environment is the Auckland Rugby Academy, and the question is asked from the players’ perspectives, as opposed to the institution’s. Much of my curiosity stemmed from my past work experience while serving on the Ponsonby Rugby Club senior committee for three years. That time on the committee opened my eyes further to the processes and issues involved in running grassroots rugby clubs and the activities players go through in the pursuit of higher honours. From these experiences, the research topic took shape.

### My standpoint

In full, I am exploring this topic from an Aotearoa-born urban Pacific Island woman’s perspective. My cultural identity may be similar to some participants but I cannot assume an ‘insider’ stance based on that alone (Palaamo, 2018). I note this as I may be considered an ‘insider’ (Prescott, 2008) because I share the same heritage as some of the participants in this research, being of Samoan and Niuean descent. As there are participants who derive from different places around the Pacific, I may not necessarily know all the cultural norms of different ethnic groups. These factors may impact my viewpoint in terms of not being fully aware of how to navigate different intricate cultural norms amongst all participants.

I am proud to represent my belonging as part of the Pacific diaspora, having been born and raised away from my ancestral homelands (McSweeney, 2019), and having grown

up in an urban city, Auckland – the largest city of Polynesian people in the world – with no understanding of my grandparents’ native tongues. On top of these points, I’m a female who does not play rugby. All of these factors mean my lens for exploring this research project comes from the position of an Aotearoa-born urban Pacific Island woman which may have biases, including a motherly approach. However, most participants of Pacific Island heritage and myself are in the same boat – we are Aotearoa-born – which also shapes our opinions, viewpoints and experiences, making them potentially different to those of people who were born in the Pacific Islands and have moved to Aotearoa recently. This is a point raised and discussed in Chapter Four (findings and discussion).

I have designed the research to involve participants and consult with them throughout each stage of the research process in order to help build trust and relationships. This has hopefully removed barriers and substantiates the research from an academic standpoint.

The research findings will hopefully encourage ARU and, potentially, other rugby development academies to consider discussing and reviewing their existing programmes with players – making changes if necessary or undertaking further research in regard to development, based on their players’ experiences and responses.

### Research fields

As the primary focus of this research is the experiences of players of Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage, at face value there are a number of fields in which this research project could be situated, for example, sport psychology as well as Pacific studies (Diaz & Kauanui, 2001) or Māori studies (Mead, S., 1983).

The research question is “What experiences do players of Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage have in Auckland Rugby Academy?” With this in mind, there is the need to analyse the players’ experiences in an interdisciplinary manner in order to achieve the

overall purpose of the research and, more importantly, to centre the participants' experiences.

Without outlining and understanding the importance for this project of the connection between sport sociology and sport psychology, the research could lack credibility amongst the rugby community including the participants. Therefore, I present key themes from sport sociology and sport psychology in Chapter Two (literature review) and explain why they are both needed for a consideration of the research question – even though, on closer inspection in Chapter Two, it becomes clear that the research question relates to individual experiences within athlete development so sport psychology is more fitting for the research area.

### Sport psychology

Sport psychology literature is explored further as part of Chapter Two but a brief overview of the field is outlined here.

There are a number of definitions for sport psychology. Alderman (as cited in Horn, 2008) captures the idea of sport psychology as the effects of sport on human behaviour while Cox (as cited in Horn, 2008) states it is the principles of psychology applied to sport environments (Horn, 2008). Both definitions imply sport is seen as adding to existing fields of study as opposed to being a research area in itself – for historical reasons surrounding the legitimacy of sport and its effects in and on society (Dunning, 1999). This point shows the need to look at research areas in an interrelated manner and not in isolation.

As talent/athlete development is a research topic within the area of sport psychology, it provides a micro-level lens when analysing data to answer the research questions. Refer to Chapter Two for definitions on talent/athlete development.

Given the research question is analysing the participants' experiences within a high-performance environment, literature involving and analysing sport

academies/development programmes is required. The main themes surrounding athlete development are: the misguided early identification of 'gifted' children based on unidimensional factors; early specialisation is not encouraged (for most sport); and the lack of a holistic approach within athlete development models. Similar to Māori and Pacific Island worldviews (Hart, 2010; Mo'a, July 2015), the idea of everything being connected is fitting for the interdisciplinary approach of this research project, whereby sport psychology is the research area but sport sociology is also outlined as part of the literature review to provide a wider context on Māori and Pacific people playing sport, specifically rugby union.

The relational aspect of space/va/things (Wendt, 1996) continues beyond the fields of research, and into methodologies and methods for this project, which is discussed further in Chapter Three (methodologies and methods). In a Samoan worldview, va is loosely defined as 'the space between two places, things, people'. For Samoans, the va is not considered empty space, it is the betweenness of things. The va is relational and connects things together, providing context and meaning. If the va changes, so too do the relationships. Therefore, the saying 'ia teu le va' ('care for the va') is critical to Samoan and similar communal cultures (Tuagalu, 2008). This belief is examined further as part of Chapter Four (findings and discussion) as it applies to one of the themes in this research project.

Most of the literature involving Māori and Pacific Island people has noted the limitations and disservice of applying dominant eurocentric methodologies, methods and frameworks to understanding Māori and Pacific Island participants' perspectives and worldviews (Health Research Council, 2014; Kovach, 2009). Therefore, talanoa, the chosen methodology and method (Vaiioleti, 2006), is best suited for the group of participants involved in this research project, from an academic point of view but also on a cultural level as it centres the players and their experiences in relation to an athlete development programme. Although talanoa was chosen as the methodology and method, an integrated approach drawing on similar values from Māori and Pacific

worldviews was chosen to help provide a combined overview and guide on how to navigate and undertake the research, in a literal sense.

This decision was made to honour both Māori and Pacific worldviews and participants (as talanoa was created by Tongan academics, Vaioleti and Halapua), again from an academic perspective but more importantly from a cultural point of view and for the personal alignment of values. Refer to Chapter Three for an examination of the common values used to guide this research project.

Group talanoa sessions and one-on-one talanoa sessions were the chosen methods of data collection because they allowed me to collect a number of diverse stories from the participants in a relaxed, conversational manner. This selection was the most sensible as the setting and communication style allowed a sense of exploration which aligned with the design and purpose of the research project (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2012, December). However, the data analysis method used – thematic analysis – is considered an eurocentric method but it was deliberately chosen for two reasons. First, the type of thematic analysis I chose is fluid and can be used with different epistemologies and ontologies (Braun & Clarke, 2006); and, secondly, thematic analysis categorises the data into themes, which is similar to Māori and Pacific wellbeing models where ‘themes’ are present (i.e., spiritual, mental, physical), related and make up a whole. Talanoa can also be seen as triangulation due to the many different layers of perspectives involved with the participants (Stewart-Withers, Sewabu, & Richardson, 2017).

Other activities that can be seen as triangulation and, for me personally, are more like ‘ia teu le va’ included attending different gatherings and trainings with the participants throughout the year to help build relationships and learn more about and from them in informal settings (as well as to indirectly meet and engage with other personnel involved with the academy to see how they fit into the environment).

Although the research is focused on the experiences of the players, I also met with members of the rugby community who are involved with academies across Aotearoa to informally chat about the findings from this research project to see if they were similar to what was being experienced across the country and to find out what they thought of the findings. The informal talanoa sessions were not meant to act as triangulation; again they were more about 'ia teu le va', to keep relationships, as I had met with the same rugby community members at the beginning of the research project when I wanted to share what I was hoping to carry out and needed to ensure I was doing the right thing by the participants and their wider communities. Refer to Chapter Three for the more on the type of talanoa that was undertaken.

Combining a Pacific and eurocentric method to collect and analyse the data means it reflects the participants' worldviews as well as being relevant for both parties – ARU, who is responsible for Auckland Rugby Academy (it has the ability to make changes/decisions around the athlete development programme and environment), and more importantly the participants. The 'ia teu le va' concept also applies to combining a Pacific and eurocentric method as it brings two different but similar notions together and cares for the space/va as they are interdependent in the context of Aotearoa (Anae, 2016).

The participants are registered with Auckland Rugby Academy and are of Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage. The participants range from year one to year three of the academy and the wider pool of Auckland rugby players. The difference between the registered years and the ethnicities/ancestries means a richer picture in terms of data and provides commonalities and variations in experiences.

### *Sport sociology*

Most sport sociologists agree the discipline studies sports as parts of social and cultural life (Coakley, 1998). Sport sociology poses questions around why particular groups are more prominent in certain sporting codes and why sports in particular

groups and societies are created and organised in certain ways. It is no secret that rugby players of Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage are prominent in rugby teams around the globe – and the numbers are increasing each season (Clever, 2018). Within sport sociology there is a common theme around the exploitation and commodification of Pacific Island rugby players in the professional era (Uperesa & Mountjoy, 2014).

The narrow and deliberate casting of the Māori and Pacific male body as violent and warrior-like is also a common theme in existing literature (Hodge, Sharp, & Heke, 2011; Hokowhitu, 2008; Wall, 1997). As rugby was introduced as a tool of the colonisation of both Māori and Pacific people (Hokowhitu, 2004; Horton, 2012), there is also a dominant narrative relating to power relations. Therefore, by choosing to focus on rugby players with Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage within Auckland Rugby Academy, it would be remiss of me not to consider the research question at a macro level as it relates to specific ethnic groups and their experiences of an institution's business activities. For this reason, an outline of sport sociology literature is necessary and is included in Chapter Two (literature review).

## Rationale for the research and the research questions

The purpose of this research is to identify and analyse the experiences of players with Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage in a high-performance athlete development environment.

ARU has been the most successful union in Aotearoa rugby history, having won a record of 17 provincial titles (Auckland Rugby Union, 2020). Most provincial rugby unions in Aotearoa have a development academy. Auckland Rugby Academy's objective is transitioning players into Auckland's Mitre 10 Cup team. Ideally, ARU would prefer to keep players in Auckland, but their measurement of success also includes academy players transitioning into other provinces' Mitre 10 teams. This research

project seems to be a first in Aotearoa as it focuses on athletes' experiences in a high-performance athlete development programme in one of Aotearoa's rugby provincial unions.

Similar research focusing on experiences of athletes on a development pathway has recently been completed. Keung's (2018) research focuses on Māori and Pacific Island athletes in a rugby league high-performance environment. Keung focuses on the perceived psychosocial skills required to transition from the development pathway into being an elite professional rugby league player. She finds reciprocal relationships are key to navigating the high-performance development pathway and a holistic approach underpinned by trust is necessary when working with Māori and Pacific Island rugby league players. A similar finding arises from this project and is discussed further in Chapter Four (findings and discussion).

Keung's (2018) research has many other similarities to this project, including participants' ethnicities and the environment chosen, i.e. age/early stage of a development pathway, but the different aspects are in the rugby code studied, and the focus area, i.e., Keung explores individual skills (psychosocial skills), and this project examines a programme/environment.

There is also another research project focused on emotions and mental wellbeing of young rugby and league players (Marsters, 2019). This project took players from a similar age range to those in Keung's study (16-24 years old) and in this research project, but again was specific in focusing on the perception of pre-determined skills relating to the wellbeing of athletes rather than focusing on a specific development environment and programme implemented by an institution. The findings of that study illustrated the complexities of mental wellbeing and again highlighted the need to implement a holistic approach to understand Pacific male athletes' experiences of emotions and mental wellbeing (Marsters, 2019).

Although there is research on and with Māori and Pacific Island rugby players, as previously mentioned there is limited research on an athlete development environment specific to Māori and Pacific Island rugby players' experiences. Keung's (2018) research is closer in scope to this project but, in combination, both research projects add to the literature involving Māori and Pacific Island athletes. Therefore, this research has significance in that it may contribute to greater knowledge in sport psychology in regard to Māori and Pacific Island rugby players and raises questions around possible future research projects in both sport psychology and sport sociology.

This research project also has the capacity to provide further support for and knowledge of Pacific methodologies and mixed methods in terms of using eurocentric methods with Pacific methods to collect and analyse data – a necessary approach to reflect the lived experiences of participants navigating multiple worlds/worldviews.

### Research questions

The research area is sport psychology (while acknowledging literature from the sport sociology field) and the research topic is talent/athlete development in high-performance environments, specifically rugby academies.

The general research question is: "What experiences do players of Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage have in Auckland Rugby Academy?"

There are also two sub-questions:

1. What internal or external forces influence the overall experiences of the players in the academy?
2. In what ways can these experiences be improved?

### Organisation of the thesis

The structure of this thesis is organised to flow consistently from one chapter to another. This first chapter, which has served to ground the research in its own history

and in the philosophy of the researcher, has also included a brief outline of the general research background.

Chapter Two, which gives a more detailed background to the research, begins to frame the response to the research question: “What experiences do players of Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage have in Auckland Rugby Academy?” This frames the players’ overall view of the academy.

Chapter Two is also the literature review which outlines broad themes from interdisciplinary fields, sport sociology and sport psychology, as both complement each other to fulfil the purpose of the research project. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a foundation for the later discussion about the experiences of players of Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage in a high-performance environment. This discussion is found in Chapter Four – findings and discussion.

Chapter Three deals with the methodological foundations of the study, exploring indigenous and Pacific methodologies and how they can be applied to research with Māori and Pacific Island participants.

This chapter also discusses the approach of integrating similar values from Māori and Pacific worldviews to inform and guide the design and the manner in which I conducted this research project. It also explains the process of the research, explaining the use of a mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis in terms of using a Pacific method for data collection and an eurocentric method for data analysis (as opposed to mixed methods in terms of using qualitative and quantitative methods).

Chapter Four is the findings and discussion chapter. This chapter examines and discusses the key themes emerging in this research project from the talanoa sessions. The themes are based around answering the main research question and sub-questions. Existing literature is included in this chapter to support the findings and add to the discussion.

Chapter Five, the conclusion, summarises the research project and each chapter, and reiterates the key findings. This chapter draws the project together by succinctly providing an overview of what has been accomplished and how each chapter adds to answering the research question. It also outlines the limitations of the research and suggests useful areas for future research.

## Chapter 2 – Literature review

The literature review outlines and discusses both the sport psychology and sport sociology research fields – two interdependent research areas that encapsulate the research question and project. As mentioned in Chapter One, the research question has the potential to be situated in several fields due to participants' ethnicities. The idea to outline, consider and connect two research areas for this literature review aligns with the research design and objectives, and the worldviews of participants.

### Sport psychology

Like most research fields, scholars have presented and debated a variety of definitions when it comes to sport psychology (Rejeski, 1988). Horn (2008) defines sport psychology in the most generic sense as “the psychological study of human behaviour in sport settings” (p. ix). The European Federation of Sport Psychology loosely defines sport psychology as “the study of the psychological basis, processes and effects of sport” (Jarvis, 1999, p. 1).

Both definitions capture the idea of behaviour related to sport and sport environments (Martin, 2017) – an individual's account dependent on surrounding factors, much like the experiences of Māori and/or Pacific players within Auckland Rugby Academy. This point is discussed in more detail as one of the findings in Chapter Four.

The sport psychology field focuses on individual behaviour, in comparison to sport sociology which is concerned with examining groups within sport and the role sport plays in societies.

A common research topic within sport psychology is talent/athlete development, which includes talent identification and talent development and the misguided early identification of 'gifted' children based on unidimensional factors. This supports the need for a holistic approach when it comes to long-term athlete development. Other

common topics found in the sport psychology field that relate to this research project are influential relationships in sport and how they affect athlete development, and discouraging early specialisation, but this latter theme is not closely related to this project.

Understanding an individual's experiences within a system at a micro level is required to answer the research question. However, in line with Māori and Pacific worldviews, understanding the different parts of a bigger picture from a macro level should be acknowledged and examined to see how things are interconnected. By doing so there is a richer picture of how each area contributes to making up the whole.

Put another way, in order to provide a holistic account, sport psychology is explored first to situate the research in an existing academic field but sport sociology is also outlined and examined in this chapter to provide a deeper understanding of and background to rugby involving Māori and Pacific Island rugby players.

There is extensive literature on talent identification and development within the sport psychology field. Talent identification (TID) is described as “the process of recognizing current participants with the potential to excel in a particular sport” and talent development (TDE) is “providing the most appropriate learning environment to realize this potential” (Vaeyens, 2008, p. 703). Ashton (2019) supports the idea of talent not being static, and a misleading factor in determining who will become elite athletes is a common misconception amongst people tasked with identifying ‘talent’ for sporting organisations. This usually leads to issues later down the development track for a number of people and groups including the selected ‘talented’ players, the organisations and other athletes who were excluded earlier as they were not identified as having ‘talent’.

For these reasons, Abbott, Button, Pepping and Collins (2005) reiterate the importance of combining TID processes and TDE processes, as an isolated unidimensional approach does not consider the ability to grow and develop at a later stage and only

captures a snapshot of an athlete's ability at one given time. Abbott et al. also propose a new TID model which integrates Bloom's (1985) stages of development model. The proposed model takes into consideration more than just physical components, and includes for example the psycho-behavioural aspects of athletes.

Most research within the sport psychology field relating to high-performance environments, more specifically rugby academies, has occurred in South Africa and is more focused on the physical testing aspect of rugby players development.

A major project in South Africa over a period of 12 years involved research relating to TID and TDE for rugby players and programmes (Spamer, 2009). The research project was also extended to New Zealand and England. The main reason for the research was to identify a profile that predicted potentially talented and elite youth rugby players. Hundreds of elite rugby players were involved (Spamer, 2009) but the author noted that, even after 12 years, little was known about several variables that could play a role in TID – they were not examined as part of the research because physical components of athletes were favoured. By using Salmela and Régnier's (1983) model of TID in the research design, the study resulted in unidimensional results. Salmela and Régnier's model emphasises two main components in the identification of talent – first, generic variables like anthropometric, physical/motor, and biomechanics; and, secondly gene specific variables (Salmela & Régnier, 1983). The projects were lacking additional factors that can help or hinder athlete development such as family support and understanding the person beyond the player – points discussed further in the findings and discussion chapter of this thesis.

By focusing on the person, and understanding the skills required to assist in achieving their desired goals, the organisation puts itself in a better place to review whether the purpose of their programme is being met through current processes and programme content. The research projects undertaken in South Africa, New Zealand and England still highlight the limited knowledge that exists, specifically in rugby, for TID and TDE.

Within the sport psychology field, athlete development articles fall into two categories. Talent development (five models) and career transition models (two models) – models which are psychology-bred. These topics are interconnected, and even though Bruner Erickson, McFadden, and Côté's (2009) citation analysis does not show that explicitly, these authors stress the importance of 'bridging' the two topics together to provide a more holistic approach to athlete development. Athlete development models which focus on strategic long-term development as opposed to early TID selection are encouraged (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004) but are not guaranteed to successfully predict those who transition from development into being an elite athlete (Gonçalves, 2012). Although it is not an athlete development programme, Hokowhitu's programme teaches youth life skills through rugby including drug and alcohol abuse and is delivered using Māori values (Heke, 2001).

This is an approach that could be considered by the ARU when discussing their current development programme and is another point discussed further in the findings chapter (Chapter Four). The role of influential relationships for athletes is also well researched. Coaches and families play important roles (Côté, 1999).

Côté (1999) presents a model in which three distinct chronological categories, named 'stages of sport participation', indicate the role of families and family environments in TDE in sport. The stages are sampling years (6-13 years old), specialising years (13-15 years old), and investment years (15 years old and over). The model provides a basis for making more accurate generalisations about the development of talent in sport in comparison to Bloom's (1985) three phases of learning (early years, middle years, and later years) which focus on general TDE in young people. The models differ in two other points: first, Côté's particular study is specific to sport. The second difference is the time span of models – Côté's model is from around the age of six to approximately 18, in comparison to Bloom's model which includes a person's entire career and so removes the aspect of the TDE in sport. Côté's theoretical stages, which

note the importance of family in supporting development in sport, also apply to findings in this research project (as mentioned in Chapter Four – findings and discussion).

Coaches also play an influential role in TDE in sport. Mills, Butt, Maynard and Harwood (2012) also support the need to combine TID and TDE processes in sport. The authors say TID models are outdated and focus on age-specific stages instead of individuals' maturity levels (physical and mental). Even though their research is on football coaches' perceived skills to transition a player into an elite athlete, they note the need for development programmes to be sport-code specific and focus on multidimensional factors to be effective.

The coaches understand the importance of and need to use sport psychology to assist athlete development, but implementing it is harder as they themselves are not too familiar with the topic. Mills et al. (2012) also support the idea that athlete development is not necessarily a linear pathway. They mention the lack of research on elite academies and development programmes and the potential for investigating these environments further, something this research project is attempting to do.

In another study (closer to the rugby union code), rugby league coaches note cognitive skills rank highest across all playing positions for them when it comes to the skills required to perform at an elite level, i.e., communication skills (Cupples & O'Connor, 2011). The need to understand and have game skills/knowledge is also ranked highly and coaches suggest using these skills when identifying potential athletes to develop. Physiological attributes are considered to be of lesser importance and should not be the only aspect focused on when recruiting players.

Similar to the concept of 10,000 hours of deliberate practice (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993), Gagné's (2004) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) states how natural 'gifts' can lead to expert skills at an elite level with systemic and strategic influence. DMGT also emphasises how intrapersonal and environment factors are interconnected in the development of talent.

The model has three types of components that may help or hinder the transformation of 'gifts' into skills:

1. Interpersonal – personality and self-awareness.
2. Environmental – socio-economic status, influencers (parents and friends), or development programmes like Auckland Rugby Academy.
3. Chance (injuries).

This is another point that is discussed further as part of the findings chapter (Chapter Four).

Early specialisation in a sporting code does not necessarily lead to becoming an elite athlete (Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007). There are some sports that do need early specialisation such as gymnastics but rugby is considered a late specialisation sport so Balyi's (2001) five-stage model of athlete development can be applied when generally looking at pathways (1. FUNdamentals; 2. Train to train; 3. Train to compete; 4. Train to win; 5. Retirement/retaining).

Early diversification of sporting codes is encouraged to provide a variety of experiences for children. There needs to be more research on specific sport contexts for relevant TDE programmes and longitudinal studies incorporating a holistic approach as well as using qualitative and quantitative data to add more to the topic and field.

Balyi (2001) also supports the importance of long-term athlete development and the need to consider scientific research relating to child development as guidelines to assist with the possible changes and implications each development stage presents.

On top of the limited research specific to rugby athlete development programmes and environments, there is even less research on Māori and/or Pacific Island rugby players' experiences relating to sport. Research on former athletes' experiences are relevant but not ideal as they are recollecting events (Coutinho, 2016). There is much more research on football and other ethnic minorities in certain sporting codes such as American football.

Surprisingly there is not a lot of research from athletes' perspectives relating to their development. There is research which is discussed later in this chapter, under sport sociology, relating to student athletes and former athletes but not much relates to current athletes. This is heightened in terms of research relating to rugby and then more so with Māori and/or Pacific players. This may be due to players not wanting to discuss their own experiences with outsiders as it may be seen to affect their chances of being selected in teams, or it may not be considered important to aspiring athletes. Whatever the reasons are, more research projects focusing on these topics will not only add to the research fields but hopefully to the practices of sporting organisations with a high percentage of Māori and/or Pacific people among the sport's athletes. This, then, is how this research project adds to the sport psychology field: the participants are current aspiring athletes sharing their experiences within a current athlete development environment.

## Sport sociology

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, although sport sociology is not the field in which this research is situated, it is an area that should be acknowledged as part of this research project as the participants are from minority groups in the general population, but form a majority in the sport of rugby.

Sport sociology is a sub-discipline of sociology. Theodorson and Theodorson (1969, as cited in McPherson, 1975) define sport sociology as the study of "processes and patterns ... that explain social behaviour and that may under specified conditions predict or aid in understanding behaviour" in a sport context (p. 56). Sport sociology emerged as a discrete sub-discipline in the 1960s (when the annual journal, *The International Review of Sport Sociology* was created to support the growing body of knowledge) and aimed to understand the role of sport in social and cultural life through the application of sociological methodology. It was driven by a recognition that sport and physical education are social practices that are historically and culturally relative

(Chandler, 2007). Beedie and Craig (2010) note sociologists and sport sociologists aim to constantly invent, develop and refine their theories, concepts and terms. As with most research areas, definitions are provided but they should not be seen as fixed or definitive as they are merely given as a starting point for further study, debate and criticism.

The ideas and common definition of sport sociology indicate it would be careless to not include a sport sociology summary in this thesis. By learning about Māori and/or Pacific Island rugby players' experiences within a high-performance environment, a wider social context should be considered as Māori and Pacific Island people are part of minority groups, Māori accounting for just over 16% of Aotearoa's population and just over 8% of Pacific people in the 2018 census (Statistics New Zealand, 2019). Māori and Pacific Island people statistically rate poorly in most indicators of inequality measures (Marriott & Sim, 2015), but make up over 60% of rugby players in Auckland and just under 45% of Mitre 10 rugby players (New Zealand Rugby, 2018).

How participants experience a high-performance programme and environment through a rugby union's academy could lead to more research projects relating to the sport sociology field. Examples of such research projects may include asking why there is a disproportionate number of Māori and/or Pacific Island athletes selected in athlete development pathways/pursuing a career in rugby or what does this mean socially and culturally for these communities.

From a sport sociology perspective, the similar key themes for Māori and Pacific Island rugby players include exploitation, commodification, race, identity, masculinity, colonialism, diasporic communities and the reluctance of some to keep with traditional Pacific norms, i.e., sending remittances to the Islands (Besnier, 2012).

Relevant themes for this research project are discussed further in this section. They include exploitation, commodification, power relations and the deliberate casting of their bodies as violent and warrior-like.

To provide context and paint a picture of the rugby landscape in Aotearoa, figures provided by NZ Rugby (NZR)<sup>1</sup> are noted below. The number of rugby players identifying with Pacific Island heritage registered to NZR continue to increase each year (Grainger, Falcous, & Newman, 2012).

In Auckland, the playing numbers have been increasing over the last 10 years, with the exception of 2013-2015 where there were minor decreases but since then they have increased every year (D. Gainsford, personal communication, November 28, 2019).

To understand and appreciate the research project and question thoroughly, the history of the sport and the introduction to Aotearoa needs to be noted. Rugby was introduced in New Zealand in 1823 by European settlers (Te Rito, 2007). At first, the idea of rugby or sport in general was not understood by Māori. The idea of leisurely activities was not comprehended as Māori saw it as pointless, given that they would normally use their time and resources to prepare for war or survival.

Over time, the physical aspect of rugby started appealing to Māori as it requires speed, agility and aggression, and similar traits required to prepare for war were easily transferrable to the game of rugby. Playing in teams to reach a common goal was also attractive due to Māori society having a collective approach to survival and being.

Historians say, on one hand, that rugby provided a level playing field as men of all classes and races could play against and with each other, a concept that was not previously considered the norm when settlers arrived and colonised Aotearoa. Māori were seen as equals on the rugby pitch and were considered better at playing the game than their European colonisers. On the other hand, MacLean (1999) and Park (1983, as cited in Te Rito, 2007) say rugby was never egalitarian as it was still controlled and administered by Pākehā.

<sup>1</sup> New Zealand Rugby, or NZR, is the national rugby sporting organisation in Aotearoa, formerly known as the New Zealand Rugby Union, or NZRU.

Hokowhitu publishes extensively in the area of the role of Māori in society, mainly in the physical education research field, but his work is applicable to this research project. He captures and supports a key theme of power relations and commodification throughout his research. Hokowhitu (2008) comments on how Māori and Pacific bodies are looked upon as only suited for physical activities. This is not an idea that has been born out of isolation. He states that colonisation and deliberate decision-making involving policy and legislation has contributed to this 'idea' of Māori and Pacific bodies only being suited for physical roles and led to the lack of representation in administration roles seen today (Hokowhitu, 2008).

MacLean (1999) argues rugby participation for Māori men did not paint them as muscular gentlemen, as it did for Pākehā, but instead reaffirmed the framing of Māori as savages and warriors. The introduction of rugby to Māori was just another tool in the process of colonisation. It was introduced as it was a popular pastime amongst settler nations and their people, and was used to justify and disguise power relations and inequality (Calabrò, 2014). Making a point that is relevant to this research project, Hokowhitu (2008) says the introduction of sporting academies in secondary schools is concerning for Māori and Pacific students for several reasons. The introduction of sports academies occurred at the same time as the professionalisation of rugby in Aotearoa. This reflects a model of sport similar to that seen in the United States (US). "In other words, educational institutes become sites that not only produce elite athletes but are also locations where their positioning within the marketplace is dependent on the marketability of their athletes" (Hokowhitu, 2008, p. 87). Because of this development, secondary schools create environments that encourage the needs of sport academies, so aspiring sporting students become commodities, used to market their school further.

Tristram's (2002) master's research findings add to Hokowhitu's research as participants also shared their concern that some secondary school academies' practices favoured keeping students on to help their top sports teams but with limited

educational benefits. These practices and environments increase the likelihood that students believe professional sport is viable pathway, when in reality only a very small percentage succeed as a professional athlete (Hokowhitu, 2008).

News coverage of the banning of St Kentigern College from the Auckland rugby competition broadly echoes Hokowhitu's concerns about secondary schools sporting academies (Cleaver & Paul, 2018). Although a review found the school could still participate in the First XV competition, the idea of poaching players from other locations (the Pacific Islands and other Auckland schools) shone a light on the power relations of certain schools and (re)opened debate on the practices adopted by schools to compete and win rugby games ("St Kentigern College Cleared to Play", 2019).

Although this research project focuses on a provincial rugby union's academy, secondary schools are a big part of the rugby 'pipeline' in Aotearoa and are interconnected at a macro level. They are also the 'step' before representative teams at a provincial union level and secondary schools are known to recruit players from the Pacific Islands, unlike the provincial rugby unions. The Auckland Rugby Academy is indirectly affected by these practices as some of those recruited/poached players will continue into high-performance athlete development pathways like the academy. The exposure of secondary school practices raised a variety of questions including the migration of Pacific Island people to Aotearoa for rugby purposes/scholarships. These points are another topic worth considering for future research in the sport sociology field.

To fully understand and appreciate Pacific Island people's influence on and contribution to rugby around the world, but more specifically in Aotearoa, for this research project, the history behind the migration of Pacific Island people to Aotearoa is outlined here. The influx of Pacific Island people, namely Samoan people, into Aotearoa commenced in the 1950s because of the countries' historic ties and the decision by the New Zealand Government to look abroad in order to fill the low-skill labour shortage (Misa, 2010). Many Pacific Island people migrated to Aotearoa with the dreams of creating a

better life for themselves and their family in the land of the long white cloud. Across oceans also came the love of rugby union. Introduced by British and French colonisers in Pacific Island countries, including Samoa, Fiji and Tonga, the sport slowly but surely became more than a leisurely activity – according to Horton (2014), it became more a sign of national identity. The code became a positive pastime for Pacific Island communities and was embedded in cultural norms and daily life right next to religion in countries such as Samoa, Fiji and Tonga (Gordon, Sauni, & Tuagalu, 2013).

As the game evolved and professionalism was introduced in 1995, the globalisation of rugby transformed the playing field again, much like when it was introduced into the Pacific Islands and Aotearoa. Professionalism brought commercialisation, which meant the activity once seen as an essential cultural element among Pacific Island people and countries shifted towards a highly organised economic structure with all the benefits and detriments in tow (Dewey, 2010). The original purpose of rugby reared its head in the Pacific with professionalism turning the beloved activity into a tool of colonisation again with Pacific players seen as subjects to be purchased and controlled in the sports labour market (Molnar & Kanemasu, 2014).

As mentioned above, there is limited research on athlete development environments specific to rugby academies within Aotearoa. However, a dominant discourse within sport sociology is of people from certain ethnic backgrounds being targeted for their sporting prowess for economic gain. Examples include African-American males for American football, African males for football and Pacific Island males for rugby. Common tools used to attract Pacific Island rugby players in the recruitment process are academies, and career and financial opportunities (Hokowhitu, 2004).

With this structure, processes including recruitment and tools such as academies with tailored programmes emerged. The recruitment pipeline of Pacific Island rugby players within Aotearoa and from the Pacific Islands is anecdotally and informally known amongst the rugby community; however, research relating to institutions (including

secondary schools) actively targeting their recruitment, and using athlete development pathways such as rugby scholarships, is limited within an Aotearoa context. Although there is limited research on the role of rugby academies, similar pathways and tools such as scholarships commenced in the 1970s for Samoan males being recruited into US colleges to play American football. Uperesa (2014) also describes the commercialisation of the code and the changing landscape meant the demand for Samoan males increased and the 'Polynesian Pipeline' emerged from American Samoa and into the US West Coast and further afield.

Another study looking at the benefits and detriments of certain ethnic groups in sport looks at the experience of African-American players who were recruited into a college football programme in the US (Singer, 2008). Findings highlighted and reiterated the commodification of certain races in sport and the importance placed on the scholarship recipients focusing on football at the expense of academic achievement. The players noted the benefits of attending the college and it was found that the main purpose for them in taking the scholarship was academic advancement; but, unfortunately, they were unable to take full advantage of those offerings as the institutions saw the players as economic collateral (Singer, 2008).

Sport migration also poses a number of benefits and concerns for the host and home country. One concern is that when academies and programmes are created by or in conjunction with western institutions, they continue the structural discrimination and exploitation of labour migration of minority groups such as Pacific Island people for rugby, West and Southern African people for European football and Dominican Republic people for baseball (Besnier, 2015). Besnier (2015) argues that athlete migration from the 'South' to the 'North' (i.e., from historically colonised to coloniser countries) needs further research, but by way of a bottom-up approach so as to capture the finer details of a system designed to oppress minority groups so that power relations remain intact post-colonisation. Only then can questions of inequalities and the identification of 'new elites', those who have replaced the coloniser's roles, be

raised and researched in more detail. This research project is looking at the rugby pipeline from the bottom up. Rugby players are moving to large developed countries with the goal of securing financial benefits. Pacific Island players have become “key units of production in this specific dimension of the global sports labour market”, like the racialising of certain ethnic groups being targeted for other sporting codes (Zakus & Horton, 2009, p. 68). When players are successful and need to relocate, there are continued pressures to perform in the rugby arena to provide for families. Sometimes this can lead to a number of unfavourable outcomes including suicide attempts if injuries occur, or if they do not progress further, are not selected, or are not re-contracted.

Carter (2007) argues sport migration studies surrounding the ‘push-pull’ structural factors of global sport migration miss many factors of agency, especially family. Zakus and Horton (2009) note Carter’s belief about the importance of considering agency in the sport migration literature but mentions that agency is a foreign concept for Māori and/or Pacific communities. Agency is intrinsically tied to the wider family group and should be considered when trying to understand Māori and/or Pacific athletes and their cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, diasporic communities start to emerge in host countries, grounded in family and faith. Zakus (2009, as cited in Horton, 2014) suggests understanding and appreciating that these diasporic communities and different cultures, such as Māori and Pacific cultures, will assist in maximising sporting potential but also benefit the host countries’ societies overall (Horton, 2014).

There are research projects involving Pacific rugby players transitioning out of professional rugby (Leilua, 2019; Tipi, 2013) which is also another area that needs to be researched and understood. An issue post-rugby for Māori and/or Pacific rugby players is the systemic and social barriers that reinforce negative stereotypes (Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). This usually limits their opportunities and options after sport and is not helped by the dominant discourses reported in mainstream media which are racialised when it comes to Māori and Pacific rugby players. Rodriguez and

McDonald (2013) emphasise the need to understand the collective approach of Māori and Pacific athletes and the need to involve, learn about and understand Māori and Pacific cultures and worldviews as this will help with addressing issues and outcomes. By doing so, sporting organisations could inform decisions around the environment and the design of programmes on offer. This point is further discussed in the findings chapter (Chapter Four).

As seen in the historical accounts, Māori and Pacific Island players, both at the introduction of rugby and in the current landscape, have many similar experiences. Māori are indigenous to Aotearoa, but both groups have similar historical grievances about their experiences in society as a whole. Therefore, research projects involving Māori and/or Pacific peoples' experiences in sport are vital to achieving better understanding of these groups of people.

This research project adds to the conversation as it focuses on Māori and/or Pacific Island rugby players' experiences within an academy's development environment. This is much needed research as it is an important piece of Aotearoa's rugby pipeline.

## Chapter 3 – Methodology and methods

Summarising Chapter Two, the literature review, there is a huge amount of research in sport psychology in regard to TID and TDE. Most models focus on stages either in terms of skill maturation (i.e., physical testing) or age-based development. Generally, the literature provides a theoretical overview of what a ‘successful’ talent/athlete development pathway looks like instead of examining a particular part or programme along the pathway.

As mentioned, existing research within rugby academies tends to focus heavily on physical testing outcomes. In comparison, my research focuses on experiences at the beginning of an athlete development pathway – within an institution’s high-performance rugby development academy – where existing research is limited. Even more limited is the amount of research in sport psychology focusing on Māori and/or Pacific rugby players and using Pacific methodologies and methods.

The limitations and disservice of applying western methodologies and frameworks to understand Māori and Pacific perspectives is well documented (Fa'avae, Jones, & Manu'atu, 2016). Most literature involving indigenous and Pacific people recommends using methodologies and methods relevant to their worldviews (Chilisa, 2019). As a result, the decision was made to use a Pacific methodology and mixed methods approach (in terms of using Pacific and eurocentric methods instead of qualitative and quantitative) for this research project. Specifically, talanoa was chosen as both the methodology and as a method for data collection, and thematic analysis was chosen as the data analysis method.

A major factor for choosing to use a Pacific methodology and a mixed methods approach was to ensure the research design centred the participants’ experiences in a way that was more reflective of Māori and Pacific worldviews – a relational, interconnected and spiritual philosophical base (Thaman, 2003). For this reason,

common sport psychology approaches, models or frameworks were not selected to examine the research question. However, this research project design and approach can still contribute a different perspective and knowledge to the sport psychology field and add to the growing literature on Pacific methodologies and methods.

This chapter is organised into two sections – methodology and methods. Both sections explore the decisions made throughout the project which contribute to the overall design, approach and findings. To get a better understanding of how the methodology and methods were chosen, the background to what has occurred during this research journey is also necessary and is outlined throughout the chapter. This is in line with indigenous knowledge creation practices (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

## Methodology

When I decided to staircase from a Postgraduate Certificate in Communication Studies to a Master of Communication Studies, I was not too familiar with academic research processes. Completing the required research methods paper as part of the change in qualification was a helpful foundation to start the research journey.

My original supervisor steered me in the direction of what to think about in order to help narrow down what I actually wanted to explore and achieve for a master's project. He recommended some readings and texts to get me started on the fundamentals of academic research. Looking back now, the majority of academic literature he suggested was grounded in dominant ways of thinking, being and doing, i.e., a western or eurocentric worldview. I have used some of this material and explored further for this research project, and I have not applied other elements because they were not relevant in this case but I will keep them as part of my life-long learning kete (bag).

According to Wilson (2001), a paradigm is “a set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that goes together to guide people's actions as to how they are going to go about doing their research” (p. 175). Wilson says there are four aspects

contributing to a research paradigm. The first is ontology or a belief in the nature of reality – our way of being, what we believe is real in the world. Second is epistemology, which is how we think about that reality. Next, when we talk about research methodology, we are talking about how we are going to use our way of thinking (our epistemology) to gain more knowledge about our reality. A paradigm also includes axiology, which is a set of morals or a set of ethics (Hart, 2010).

From the original readings of research fundamentals, ontologically, the research would fit under constructionism as it is the idea of understanding a social actor's reality and how they have come to know that reality (Bryman, 2016). This is achieved by undertaking qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research.

Epistemologically, interpretivism was applicable, considering the alignment with theoretical traditions and their dimensions (David & Sutton, 2011). As the project is not focused on generalisation, interpretivism would have provided a better understanding of the participants' individual experiences, similar to talanoa.

To design a robust enquiry, I then considered applying one of the six main theories (functionalist theory, conflict theory, critical theory, feminist theory, interactionist theory and figural theory) used in sport sociology (instead of theories from sport psychology, as I wanted to try to 'bridge' the two fields together for this project) (Coakley & Pike, 2009).

I thought functional theory would be an appropriate lens to use as the theory assumes social order is based on shared values and different parts of society contributing and working together to make society continue harmoniously (Craig & Beedie, 2008).

However, it soon became apparent that I had naively assumed all parties directly or indirectly involved with the rugby academy work together to reach the same goals, much like how Māori and Pacific communities work together to achieve the same goals in village life. Functional theory overstates the positive factors of sport, negating the idea of sport being socially constructed and benefitting certain parties more than others

(Coakley J. J., 2009). The power relations between rugby players and an institution heavily advantage the latter, without adding an extra layer of consideration toward the players (e.g., in terms of identity and/or ethnicity) so my original intention to apply functional theory had to be discarded. I started to feel quite overwhelmed by the amount of literature that was not the right fit for this project based on the chosen participant groups.

After searching further afield and reading more about decolonising indigenous methodologies and Pacific research, I started to think more critically and openly about using an approach from 'outside' of the sport psychology and sport sociology 'norms'. The indigenous and Pacific ways of thinking, being and doing also resonated with me personally as an Aotearoa-born, Pacific Island woman, and in theory they were also more relevant to participants' backgrounds. Given that realisation, it was clear that the dominant methodologies, theories and methods from sport psychology and sport sociology were not appropriate for exploring the research question. With the aim of the research project being to centre the participants' experiences, a paradigm and approach which gave power to and honoured Māori and/or Pacific rugby players experiences from their worldviews was paramount.

### Honouring Māori and Pacific players' experiences – common values

As with most academic concepts, there is a variety of definitions for key terms.

Indigenous scholar Anaya (as cited in Corntassel, 2003) refers to indigenous peoples as:

the living descendants of pre-invasion inhabitants of lands now dominated by others. They are indigenous because their ancestral roots are imbedded in the lands in which they live, or would like to live, much more deeply than the roots of more powerful sectors of society living on the same lands or in close proximity. Furthermore they are peoples to the extent they comprise distinct communities with a continuity of existence and identity that links them to communities, tribes or nations of their ancestral past. (pp. 78-79)

Māori are the indigenous people of Aotearoa. Although Māori and Pacific people have shared histories, there are distinct differences between cultures which should be acknowledged. Māori are tangata whenua (Teaiwa & Mallon, 2005). 'Pacific peoples' is a collective term used to describe the diverse cultures of people from Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesian countries (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2018). As mentioned in Chapter Two, in the mid-20th century, Pacific peoples, particularly those from Polynesian countries, developed strong cultural, economic and political ties with Aotearoa. This was the beginning of a culture of migration, mainly from the Polynesian islands of Samoa and Tonga to Aotearoa. Aotearoa citizenship and rights of residence have also encouraged the migration of Cook Islanders, Niuean and Tokelauans. The term 'Pacific peoples' does not imply Pacific unity and homogeneity: each ethnic group has their own cultural customs, norms and traditions (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2018). However, for Māori and Pacific people, what is real and how they know things to be real is underpinned by similar belief systems and values. Māori and Pacific people see the world as an interconnected, collective reality based on relationships – relationships to family, land, space and spirituality. Reality is based on knowledge shared through traditions and customs, passed from generation to generation through stories and oral histories, (re)creating shared meanings (Henare M. , 2001).

Originally, this master's project was focusing on Pacific rugby players' experiences within a rugby academy. This was decided as I am an Aotearoa-born Samoan and Niuean, and I did not want to assume it was acceptable to also include indigenous people, Māori rugby players, in the project as I am not Māori. This changed, along with the research project, during one of the initial interactions with potential participants. In one of my first presentations to the year one rugby academy class, one of the players who identified as Māori questioned why I did not want his contact details after the academy's Personal Development Manager (PDM) said only Pacific players could participate in the research. It felt completely wrong to decline his request as the player had shown interest and asked about participating, so I quickly remedied the situation

and said he was welcome to participate – Māori and Pacific players were welcome to participate. Not only did excluding him feel wrong on a personal level but it felt wrong in an academic sense too. In the academic literature involving Pacific people in research, many researchers emphasise trying to level the power dynamics between researcher and participants. An example of putting this in practice was letting go of control and allowing participants to lead the project (Smith, 2013).

I needed to discuss the implications of the change with the University Ethics Committee as I would do whatever was required from a university point of view to include Māori participants. I met with staff from the School of Sport and Recreation and Te Ara Poutama Faculty, two former Māori academics from two different tertiary institutions who were now involved in rugby, an ethics committee member, and friends and family to discuss what path would be appropriate given the change.

At one point, I thought mixing methodologies and methods (in terms of indigenous and Pacific method/ology) would be necessary so I started reading literature on indigenous methodologies. Indigenous worldviews and paradigms are not universal, but they share common values including passing down histories orally from generation to generation. They also tend to encourage reflection on methods and approaches, and on the researcher's biases and perspectives when trying to incorporate indigenous principles and western academy (Loppie, 2007).

Indigenous paradigms are usually borne as a result of reclaiming self-determination from past and continued grievances of colonisation. For example, kaupapa Māori research (KMR) was created by the indigenous people of Aotearoa for this reason, as an indigenous methodology made by Māori, for Māori and with Māori (Grant & Giddings, 2002). KMR is both a set of philosophical beliefs and a set of social practices (tikanga). These beliefs and practices are founded on the collective (whanaungatanga), combining the interconnection between mind, body and spirit, and form the foundation of traditional Māori ontology and guide Māori epistemology "which in turn shapes our

perceptions of what is ‘science’ and how we do it” (Henry & Pene, 2001, p. 238). KMR emphasises interdependence and spirituality as a fundamental component of knowledge (re)creation.

The Māori worldview holds that a natural order to the universe exists – meaning there is a balance between all living things. The interconnectedness means if a part of the system changes, the balance is affected (Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013). Because of this, Māori want to understand the whole and not just parts of it (Barlow, 1991; Best, 1924; Buck, 1950; Henare M. , 2001; Marsden M. , 1988). This is why the research design for this project outlines literature in the sport sociology field next to sport psychology – because they are interconnected parts of a whole system.

Mātauranga Māori is the foundation of the Māori worldview, and includes philosophical, beliefs, language, methods, technology and practice (Durie, 1998). Māori values are informed by mātauranga Māori (Barlow & Wineti, 1991). Values are a set of tools Māori use to make sense of experience, and to interpret their environment (Marsden M. , 1988).

Important Māori values include: tikanga (customary practice, values, protocols); whakapapa (ancestral lineage, genealogical connections, relationships, links to ecosystems); tino rangatiratanga (self-determination); mana whenua (authority over land and resources); whanaungatanga (family connections); kaitiakitanga (environmental guardianship); manaakitanga (acts of giving and caring for); whakakotahitanga (consensus, respect for individual differences and participatory inclusion for decision-making); arohatanga (the notion of care, respect, love, compassion); and wairuatanga (a spiritual dimension).  
(Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013, p. 275)

Despite Māori having thousands of years of exploring the world and knowing their own ways of philosophy and knowledge (re)creation, KMR has not always been accepted in western institutions, but there is a growing body of work that is ‘legitimising’ Māori knowledge in mainstream spaces (Pihama, Cram, & Walker, 2002). KMR scholars understand that mixed methods are required in certain research situations but the

chosen methodologies and methods should be aligned with the underpinning philosophy – in other words, a collaborative approach to research design and practice with a collectivist underpinning.

However, not all research involving Māori needs to be KMR. If the research question does not intend on making a stand for tino rangatiratanga (self-determination), KMR is not suitable. In saying that, appropriate practices should definitely be considered and applied if Māori people are involved in research, regardless of the methodology used (Walker, Eketone, & Gibbs, 2006). Therefore, a major difference between KMR and Pan-Pacific methodologies is that Māori are tangata whenua of Aotearoa and are actively trying to regain tino rangatiratanga on top of advancing and contributing positively to their communities when using KMR (Naepi, 2015). Therefore, the political reasoning behind the creation of KMR, and the kaupapa being for Māori, by Māori with Māori, meant it was clear that KMR would not be an appropriate methodology for this project as the research question is not directly attempting to gain tino rangatiratanga. Naepi (2015) also notes it is difficult to use both indigenous and Pan-Pacific methodologies in one project but more research into the area is needed, especially as size of the New Zealand population which identifies as both Māori and Pacific increases.

On the other hand, there is a need to consider mixing Pacific and eurocentric methodologies and methods to get the best 'recommendations' for Pacific communities as they too are becoming more diverse because of migration. Botha (2011) also emphasises and supports mixing methods to help view and understand indigenous perspectives. In doing so, there is the potential to create 'new' indigenous methodologies. That does not necessarily mean researchers need to create new paradigms all the time in their research but rather that they should add to the knowledge in existing fields by using a different lens (Botha, 2011), which is very much what this research project is doing. For these reasons, I decided to use talanoa as the methodology. Talanoa has similar underlying philosophies to KMR but is more

culturally appropriate for this research project as there are Māori and Pacific participants and the project does not set out to gain tino rangatiratanga.

I chose to design the research with a similar approach to Keung's (2018) research on rugby league players' psychosocial skills, in which she explored the research topic using overarching values from both Māori and Pacific worldviews. Approaching the research design by integrating and underpinning shared values means there is a different perspective being brought into sport psychology and the participants' experiences are being seen through a lens they are familiar with.

The shared values from an indigenous and Pacific worldview guided this project in all aspects to honour both Māori and Pacific participants. The core values were:

- Placing importance on family, relationships, respect and reciprocity.
- Relationships (in all areas, including land, space and time) are kept for the benefit of family and communities with the knowledge that the spiritual realm is connected to the physical realm.
- Everything is interconnected.

These core values are present in both ontologies and epistemologies, and are the values that were chosen to guide me in undertaking this research.

### Talanoa methodology

Talanoa methodology is used extensively instead of dominant eurocentric methodologies and methods when Pacific people are involved in research (Gordon, Sauni, & Tuagalu, 2013). Talanoa as a research methodology uses a one-on-one or collective gathering approach where people share their stories, experiences and thoughts in a conversational manner in a Pacific context, creating Pacific knowledge and realities.

The key to talanoa as a methodology is knowing the interrelationship between people, time and place. Talanoa as an epistemology overlaps with other collectivist worldviews

that seek to align different levels of energies, not just in the physical world but in the spiritual realm also. This also means aligning relationally in a balanced way with cosmic, natural, or environmental energies and rhythms (Tecun, Hafoka, 'Ulu 'ave, & 'Ulu 'ave-Hafoka, 2018). Talanoa as a methodology and method is fluid and is able to centre collectivist participants' worldviews. The talanoa research methodology was created to form a theoretical and philosophical base that is collective, and spiritually based on contextual ancestral and fonua (loosely translated as land/people/community) considerations. In using talanoa as a method, there are different types of talanoa that can be applied practically in different situations, which can create further knowledge; some types are more appropriate than others depending on the time, space and energy (Vaioleti, 2013). For example, talanoa faka'eke'eke (the closest to an interview) was applied in initial talanoa sessions with participants; but, throughout the year when I would go into the gym or training sessions, talanoa vave was more appropriate because of the good relationships formed over time since it is a more polite way of acknowledging each other briefly (participants would come over to say hello and give me a hug/kiss and vice versa in these situations).

As discussed above, Māori and Pacific worldviews are collective in comparison to dominant eurocentric worldviews which are underpinned by individualism. They are driven by spirituality, relationships, land and space. Although I chose to use talanoa methodology for a research project in the sport psychology field, other disciplines have also used talanoa as a method and/or methodology which ties disciplines together based on research design. This helps in creating a more connected academic world, similar to Māori and Pacific realities. Ioane (2017) emphasises cultural context is vital when working with Pacific youth and provides practical steps and points to consider when engaging with them. Vaioleti (2006) provides more details on the application of talanoa. He suggests that even though talanoa is a Tongan concept, most components have similarities and common implications for most other Pacific communities in Aotearoa. He discusses how Pacific values influence how Pacific peoples in Aotearoa

see the world and has combined talanoa with another Pacific methodology, kakala, for a more 'robust' methodology and set of ethics. This is another approach that can be utilised in research projects if combining Māori and Pacific methods and/or methodologies is appropriate (Vaiioleti, 2006).

There is a large body of research using Pacific methodologies and methods for work with Pacific peoples in the education field (Mayeda, 2014) but those research findings and recommendations can be applied across other disciplines, such as sport psychology. They are applicable for the rugby academy environment as the development programme is essentially a teaching and learning context for selected athletes.

Although there is a significant body of work on the Pacific, most of it represents the perspectives and interpretations of outsiders or non-Pacific peoples (Baba, Mahina, Williams, & Nabobo-Baba, 2004). Similar to the need that drove the development of KMR, there is a growing need for Pacific people to shape, conduct and share Pacific histories. The desire for Pacific indigenous interpretations of our own history, heritage and development is emerging as a significant movement in Pacific studies and Pacific research (Gegeo, 2008, April). This movement is not restricted to Pacific people living in the Pacific Island region but also includes the Pacific diaspora around the world (McFall-McCaffery, 2010). Ontological limitations are expressed when non-Pacific people are involved in carrying out research, as ontology relates to realities (Vaiioleti, 2006).

Some limitations of talanoa have been noted. Major concerns relating to talanoa among academics and researchers are based on the opinion that it is just an informal open-ended questions method. Talanoa is much more than that. Researchers need to understand participants' worldviews to empathise with them and make change. Talanoa allows the 'flow' and direction of the research to be shared equally with participants. This idea is hard to comprehend for researchers who are used to

controlling the research design, and do not understand how these choices are sometimes made to decolonise research and make it more reflective of collective worldviews.

Talanoa is an oratorical art form where 60% of communication is non-verbal so the skill to observe, listen and learn to try and understand participants' lived experiences is crucial, but it is difficult for researchers to empathise with participants if their epistemologies are different (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2012, December). There are also noted difficulties putting talanoa into practice as a method because there is a lot of literature in terms of talanoa as a methodology but limited material on its use as a research method. Fa'avae (Fa'avae, Jones, & Manu'atu, 2016) also suggests the research method poses questions in applicability as, when he was conducting his research, he was always comparing his actions to what he had read about certain aspects of the method and what he knows. His reflections state that it could be the way he felt 'torn' as an Aotearoa-born and non-island-born Pacific Islander, as his experiences are 'westernised'. Fa'avae et al (2016) encourage more students to be open and critical of talanoa in order to help other novice researchers. For this reason, I have given a step-by-step account of how I applied talanoa as a method in the next section of this chapter.

(Re)learning and emphasising Pacific methodologies and methods is vital to ensure Pacific worldviews are understood and examined by the wider academic community. Decolonising research means not comparing Pacific ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, methods and theories to existing concepts to legitimise Pacific ways of knowing and being against dominant paradigms. Decolonising research means creating spaces for Pacific research to stand on its own and/or to add knowledge to different disciplines. This does not mean that Pacific approaches should not be discussed and critiqued vigorously; it is more about making the point that a eurocentric approach should not be used as a benchmark or reference point (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). For example, there is not much difference in terms of how talanoa

and another Pacific methodology, *fa'afaletui*, are practically executed but the main point to be aware of is the conscious values and/or the approach taken are at the forefront of actions when researching with and/or talking to participants and people within a Pacific paradigm (Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea, 2014). This is why the research design used in this study was so deliberately selected as an approach with overarching values from both Māori and Pacific worldviews.

## Methods

Johansson-Fua (2008, as cited in Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2014) says *talanoa* is a method described as an open and informal discussion which is “resistant to rigid hegemonic control” (p. 16).

In this section I will outline the details of *talanoa* as a method for data collection and how it was mixed with thematic analysis for data analysis.

### First contact with potential participants

It is crucial to reiterate that although there are many similarities between Māori and Pacific cultures, researchers who identify as Māori and/or Pacific should not assume an automatic ‘insider’ point of view (Naepi, 2015). I certainly felt I could not assume this when going to meet the Auckland Rugby Academy players because I am an Aotearoa-born Pacific Island female who does not play rugby, so on the surface there was very little I could do to try to connect with the group in the first instance.

My first presentation to the year one academy group was in February 2019. I made sure to take food to offer the group as a small sign of appreciation for their time and in line with my own values and the research project’s guiding values. After the Academy Manager’s welcome, I introduced myself and my family villages in Samoa and Niue before explaining what the project was about. There were no questions asked after my presentation but I left the Participant Information Sheets for further reading for anyone

who was interested in participating. My contact details were also left and I asked those who wanted to be included in the project to email, call or text me.

Unfortunately, by the third week following the original presentation, no-one had made contact. Understanding that I had not created enough of a relationship with the potential participants to justify them reaching out to me, I tried another way of approaching them. In the next 'admin' session<sup>2</sup>, I explained that no-one had made contact and that it was fine, but I said if anyone was slightly interested in learning more about the project, or just wanting to talk, then they could leave their contact details on a piece of paper that was passed around the group but they did not have to do this. Some boys left their details but not all of the group did. At this point I also reiterated the reason for wanting to carry out the research project and explained their participation could help the next generation of academy players.

The Participant Information Sheet was also displayed on the notice board in the Auckland Rugby Academy gym and I was introduced to some potential participants (from years two and three) to go over the project details and get an idea on whether they were interested in participating. Those who were keen to learn more added their contact details to the initial list. From that list of contact details, I text messaged everyone individually to give more information and asked if they were interested in participating. Most of them replied to say they would and so I confirmed dates and times to meet up for the talanoa sessions. I was conscious that I had not built any type of meaningful relationship with them yet so it would probably not be the best to only offer one-on-one talanoa sessions at this stage, as they may not have felt comfortable or trusted me.

<sup>2</sup> 'Admin sessions' are classes held once a week, usually every Monday evening, where contractors or guests come to teach the year one players a variety of skills. For example, nutrition, and mental skills are just two of the admin session topics.

Not everyone was available to meet in a group setting so the remaining participants were asked if they were comfortable to meet one-on-one, in a location that suited them. Four players took up the offer of one-on-one talanoa sessions. In between holding group talanoa sessions and one-on-ones, I also attended gym sessions, admin sessions and rugby-specific skill training sessions to help build trust with players throughout the rest of 2019. It also felt like the right thing to do, personally. I expressed the need to do so to players and staff who would ask why I was still attending sessions when my data collection had been completed in March. I explained that I wanted to ensure they felt comfortable with me when I had to present their findings back to them in a year's time. I did not want the participants to have the same experience as has occurred with other research projects where researchers came in to get what they wanted and then would leave again. It would not be right to come and 'collect data' then leave, and then show up again the following year to say 'this is what I found'. The experience and process needed to be collaborative and carried out in a collective and community-based manner – in line with the talanoa method, my own values and the project's guiding values. I reiterated this to the participants throughout the year and said that, if they were willing, it would be a collaborative approach – I would consult with and be guided by them, at each stage and at every opportunity, on research decisions as it was their research. I said this because it is their research project and the only reason why I would have a qualification at the end of the process was because they were willing to give their time, energy, thoughts and space to me. I needed to honour that trust and give as much as they did, especially when one considers that the power dynamics that exist between researcher and participants are usually in favour of the former.

### Data collection

There were three group talanoa sessions and four individual one-on-one talanoa sessions held over the months of February and March 2019, resulting in 17

participants. The first group talanoa session had eight participants, the second had two and the third had three. One player attended both talanoa sessions one and three. Four players were unable to make a group session so opted for a one-on-one discussion, at a location suitable for them. It was mentioned that the players could include family in the sessions if they wanted to.

Although it is common practice to open and close with a prayer/mihi with Māori and Pacific people, similar to not assuming an 'insider' perspective, I did not want to assume the players were religious so we opened the sessions a little differently.

Again, in line with the talanoa method (and my own personal values), I wanted to build up the discussion first instead of getting straight into the research questions. I was also interested in learning a little more about the players themselves. I mentioned that some people opt for ice-breaker activities in group settings to help with introductions, but did not want to do something like that as the boys were already familiar with each other. Instead, I asked the players to introduce themselves (so I could learn their names) and say what they would like to be doing if they were not investing in a rugby career pathway. I also participated in the introductions. This would allow the players to think briefly about life beyond rugby and, at the same time, the rest of the group could learn something personal about their interests or goals outside of rugby. We opened each talanoa sessions and one-on one-discussion with that introduction. I also made sure to bring a variety of fruit to the talanoa sessions as they were held after the players' morning gym sessions, and I bought food when meeting one-on-one offsite, again to show a small sign of appreciation.

After this introduction, I explained again what the research was about, how much time it would roughly take throughout the year and what we were hoping to achieve by doing it together. At each stage, the key message of the project being theirs was reiterated. I would only put forward data and final findings that they were happy with and approved.

At the end of each session I outlined the next steps which in the first instance involved transcribing the conversation verbatim and then coming back to them with a copy to ask if they wanted to change, add to or remove any part of the conversation before approving they were happy with it and that the next stage could proceed.

Due to rugby season starting, and other commitments, I started to give back transcripts to the participants from August through to October. Up until and during this period, I was still attending sessions when it was possible. Practically, this meant attending weekly admin sessions, rugby-specific training sessions, testing sessions, and gym sessions throughout the year. I was aiming to be at one session every week – this was possible after the initial data collection but, as the year went on, extra workloads for both the participants and myself meant my attendance was more often once or twice every month.

Coming in to the sessions allowed me to be a part of some of their journey within the academy, which helped with maintaining relationships as I could talk with them between sessions. Even the players who did not participate in the research still came over to say hello and talk. I noticed players who were initially stand-offish with me also started to stop, talk and exchange a kiss or hug when we saw each other. Another staff member mentioned he noticed that the players stopped to acknowledge and chat to me in the sessions, and asked how I got to that position. It also meant watching or staying familiar with what was happening in the wider rugby space so that I could speak to them about their rugby milestones, i.e., Auckland U19 games and tournaments, club rugby achievements, injuries and rehabilitation. I was caring for the space (*ia teu le va*). Doing this meant I was looking beyond the academy to chat about wider aspects of the world they were involved in – I was wanting to look at them as whole people, as more than just Auckland Rugby Academy players. This was also mentioned by several players during the data collection stage – they appreciated staff asking about their families or putting in more effort to get to know them personally.

### *Returning transcripts*

Transcripts were given back before and after admin sessions or testing sessions and, on one occasion, at a local café, as I wanted to work around the participants' schedules. This was another small way of showing appreciation to the players for participating in the research. Understanding their rugby commitments and schedule on top of their lives outside of the academy meant I wanted to create as little disruption as possible, so I always offered to meet them at a place they were comfortable with and which suited them. Each participant received the relevant transcript and received an explanation of what it was, what they could do with it, and what would happen after they had approved that they were happy that it was accurate.

A koha (gift) was also given at this time for participating in the research. It felt like a better time to give it than the beginning of the research because I had spent more time in their environment and with them. It also marked the 'half-way' stage of the research project. The next steps were also mentioned and players were made aware that the process would still be ongoing and that I would be in contact again for the next stage following completion of the data analysis. Before finalising and publishing them, I would present back to them to confirm the preliminary findings/themes, to double check that they were what they had meant during our discussions.

### *End-of-year presentation of draft themes*

In December 2019, I attended the year one and two end-of-year get-together. I had asked the Academy Manager if there was a time where most players would be together in one location, as I knew how hard it was for participants to come into Eden Park for additional meeting requests. The Academy Manager kindly extended the invitation to me to attend their end-of-year training session which led into go-karting and a BBQ. I was able to present the draft themes to the players then. I also made peanut butter and chocolate chip cookies and brought fruit to contribute to the BBQ.

Unfortunately, not all of the participants were at the event, but I had already text messaged all of them prior to the day to say we were in the final stages and that I would not proceed without their approval. For those participants who were not able to attend the presentation, I created a video of my presentation and sent it to them for their feedback. I then followed up with each participant to see if they were happy with the draft themes. They were all happy, so I started to write Chapter Four, findings and discussion.

### Data analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was chosen to analyse the data. There is a limited number of Māori and Pacific methods for data analysis in academic literature. Therefore, it was necessary to choose a method that aligned with talanoa methodology and still centred the participants' experiences. TA was chosen for a number of reasons which will be outlined in the following paragraphs.

TA is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) in data. It allows researchers to organise and describes data sets in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke have added more over the years in terms of the progression in their thoughts surrounding TA. Each iteration has added further insight and clarification to the point where, in 2013, the authors were at a stage where they could offer advice on the challenges TA presented when teaching the method to novice researchers (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Most recently, in a 2019 paper, Braun and Clarke reflect on TA and have termed a new extended method 'reflexive thematic analysis'. The main difference is in terms of the need for researchers to reflect on the choices they make when designing and undertaking research – a point already encouraged in Māori and Pacific methodologies and methods. The authors encourage researchers to be curious, methodical and deliberate with their choices to ensure these choices do not undermine the findings and qualitative methods (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Similar to talanoa, TA is under-appreciated due to criticisms of its fluidity by some research disciplines and researchers. Vaoleti has also continued to tweak and clarify talanoa as a methodology and method following critiques, which has meant a more robust debate on Pacific knowledge creation and how it is applied.

The most basic level of TA is 'flexible TA'. Unlike other TA options, flexible TA does not have any philosophical assumptions associated with it. The advantage of this is that it can be used across a number of research questions as the fluidity allows different researchers to apply it in a way that is suitable and in line with their overall research design and question (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016). Flexibility was one of the main reasons I chose this method for data analysis. This decision met university requirements but it also fits well with Māori and Pacific worldviews because all parts of the research design are interconnected and add to the whole. TA also allows the researcher to categorise the data into themes similar to the ways in which Māori and Pacific wellbeing models are divided into different areas that contribute to the whole. Examples are Te Whare Tapa Whā and the Fonofale model, wellbeing models in which the various areas of the model are all interconnected to the overall wellbeing of a person.

With the decision to use TA, a framework or theory was not selected, in order to allow inductive research to occur. Participants were able to construct their own realities with little restriction by sharing their experiences within a rugby academy athlete development programme and environment. It is also not appropriate to read participants' responses against a theory or framework that was not used to create or underpin the academy and the development programme which the research question is examining.

As mentioned previously, the purpose of the research project is to centre the participants' experiences in relation to a rugby academy, not to determine whether a framework was used in creating the academy or to measure the programme's

effectiveness against the framework or theory. For example, using NZR's six-pillar development model (Auckland Rugby Union, n.d.) as a framework to analyse the data would cause issues as the research was focused on players' experiences within a rugby academy – it was not designed to see if the academy programme was being effectively delivered in line with the national development model.

Similarly, using a Māori or Pacific framework in the analysis would cause issues as the academy/programme is not underpinned by these frameworks. The main reason TA was chosen is because its philosophical assumptions are fluid, so it can align with talanoa.

#### *How thematic analysis was applied*

Following the first of the six steps of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006) (see Figure 1, below), I first printed all seven transcripts and re-read them twice, highlighting responses as I read. This helped with becoming familiar with the data. Secondly, I went through each transcript and re-wrote the responses to each question in a notebook so that I had an even better idea of the data. From there, I went through each transcript and cut out each question and glued it at the top of a piece of A3 paper. All responses from across all transcripts relating to the question at the top of this paper were added to it. This was another opportunity to re-read the transcripts and familiarise myself with the data.

After that, I grouped the questions based on what part or stage of the academy the question was asking about, such as recruitment, the programme, or areas for improvement. I then went through every A3 paper (27 in total) and under the 'stage' groups (15) I wrote the relevant responses from all talanoa sessions, instead of keeping them in the single question groups.

From there, I started to look for common responses in each group of questions and marked each response with a 'code'. For example, "*overall I enjoy the academy*" was marked with one code. Going through each A3 paper again, the first set of codes

identified against each response was re-examined to see if a 'high-level code' could be used based on similar shared meaning, similar thoughts, or similar responses.

The next stage was using the high-level codes to create themes by further grouping them together, again based on shared meaning. Following step number five of TA, a description or summary was written for each of the themes, to explain them further.

### Phases in doing reflexive thematic analysis

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The approach to TA that we developed involves a six-phase process for *doing* analysis.

Although these phases are sequential, and each builds on the previous, analysis is typically a *recursive process*, with movement back and forth between different phases. These are not *rules* to follow rigidly, but rather a series of conceptual and practice oriented 'tools' that guides the analysis to facilitate a rigorous process of data interrogation and engagement. With more experience (and smaller datasets), the analytic process can blur some of these phases together.

1. **Familiarisation with the data** | This phase involves reading and re-reading the data, to become immersed and intimately familiar with its content.
2. **Coding** | This phase involves generating succinct labels (codes!) that identify important features of the data that might be relevant to answering the research question. It involves coding the entire dataset, and after that, collating all the codes and all relevant data extracts, together for later stages of analysis.
3. **Generating initial themes** | This phase involves examining the codes and collated data to identify significant broader patterns of meaning (potential themes). It then involves collating data relevant to each candidate theme, so that you can work with the data and review the viability of each candidate theme.
4. **Reviewing themes** | This phase involves checking the candidate themes against the dataset, to determine that they tell a convincing story of the data, and one that answers the research question. In this phase, themes are typically refined, which sometimes involves them being split, combined, or discarded. In our TA approach, themes are defined as pattern of shared meaning underpinned by a central concept or idea.
5. **Defining and naming themes** | This phase involves developing a detailed analysis of each theme, working out the scope and focus of each theme, determining the 'story' of each. It also involves deciding on an informative name for each theme.
6. **Writing up** | This final phase involves weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts, and contextualising the analysis in relation to existing literature.

*Figure 1.* The six steps of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This was the process undertaken to obtain the preliminary themes that were shared with my supervisor for discussion. Before finalising them and expanding on them in Chapter Four, I took the themes along with the A3 papers back to the participants to give an overview of how I reached these findings, so the participants could either confirm that the themes are what they meant or ask to change them to capture the experiences accurately.

I decided to sort the data manually. Other methods such as analytic software were not considered. Computer analysis of qualitative data is common in sport studies but it

comes with limitations. Putting data into a program may seem faster but it removes the opportunity to go through the data manually to get a 'feel' for it (Dey, 1993).

Most software categorises or codes by keywords that researchers need to identify and put into the software, which usually removes context which is important in some cases (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Context is important in this research project. This is why, for the first step of data analysis, I kept the responses to the original questions together so that they were not taken out of context. The next step in the analysis meant I could start to group that set of data by the stages in the development programme, and that was done across all data instead of within individual questions. Following the end-of-year get-together, the themes were finalised with the participants' approval. They are outlined in more detail in Chapter Four.

#### *Reliability and validity*

Māori and Pacific worldviews do not see reliability and validity the same way dominant discourses do. Subjectivity is not seen as a limitation, it is a strength because this approach takes into account the constructions of one's reality based on cultural norms (Vaiotei, 2006). Subjectivity allows the researcher to acknowledge and understand the differences in experiences between participants (and ethnic groups) by attending, talking with them, and interpreting their responses individually but at the same time in relation to one another and their worldviews. Therefore, problems can arise if the talanoa research methodology is examined using conventional definitions of validity and reliability.

Reliability is about consistency. The talanoa research methodology is unlikely to give similar results over time as ideas about an issue or topic will change. This is also true for other types of qualitative research; participants involved will be the most suitable and knowledgeable for that particular time, and if they are not, they will most likely suggest who is.

Despite the issues related to reliability, TA is still the most useful data analysis method for capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) and for this research project. Similar to reliability, triangulation would not align completely for this research project as the overall question is seeking experiences from participants. The project's objective is to centre the participants' voices and worldviews, so seeking a triangulated position would be going against that objective. However, a common way of triangulating data in most research using indigenous and Pacific methodologies and methods is achieved by the researcher creating and consulting with an advisory group of experts from different disciplines/subject areas – people who are seen as knowledgeable/credible in regard to the chosen topic – to assist with data analysis. This includes the clarification and further examination of data when questions arise. For example, the 'Give Way Rule' has been implemented in cases where Māori and Pacific people have been involved in a research project and the researcher was unsure on how to proceed at any point. The advisory group members would offer their opinion and guide the researcher (Naepi, 2015).

For this research project, I wanted to ask the participants themselves if I had analysed the data correctly to get the themes they were trying to express in our talanoa sessions. Going in to the academy throughout the year and building relationships with them would, I hoped, create a space where they would feel they could ask questions and/or request to change sections before approving the preliminary findings, or at any time during the project. This would be considered a reliable process as they could clarify and confirm the data since it came from their expressed experiences.

Another way I integrated TA with a talanoa method approach, in place of having a dedicated advisory group, was by talking with people from different organisations and perspectives within the rugby community. This was not done to validate the participants' experiences but, again, was more in line with trying to understand the rugby pipeline as a whole, as the participants' experiences are interconnected with the

macro-level environment. I met people face to face and I spoke with others over the phone or communicated via email due to them residing outside of Auckland. The vital idea of creating, building and maintaining relationships was a core value, regardless of whether people were participants in the project or not.

Members of the rugby community came from NZRPA, ARU and NZR. Connections were made in a similar way to snowballing – people I had existing relationships with would suggest others for me to talk to and put me in contact with them by way of introduction.

Meeting and dealing with people outside of the participant group was important to help provide context for understanding the 'whole' picture, in line with Māori and Pacific beliefs, to clarify what other aspects potentially affect the participants indirectly or directly, and how other people who are involved within the rugby community in different ways view rugby academies in general. Again, this was not necessary in terms of fulfilling a qualification requirement but it gave me a better understanding and appreciation of the wider rugby community and environment which, in turn, could affect participants. Understanding that Auckland Rugby Academy sits within ARU, the largest provincial union under NZR, meant I gained more in-depth knowledge of how each part or level affects another or fits together in relation to other parts.

Staff from NZRPA were also included in initial meetings and in discussions throughout the project as they manage the development of age grade representative players (New Zealand Rugby Players Association, n.d.), an area some of the participants would also be experiencing, and approval from a players' perspective was needed from them.

NZR staff were able to speak to the six-pillar development model used (and altered) by provincial unions as well as the overall rugby academy space in Aotearoa. This was important in order to get an idea of how ARU fits into the wider NZ rugby pipeline and what is available and offered in other academies.

It is important to note, as I explained to each person outside of the participant group, that the research is focused on and centres the players' experiences. Their time and expertise were much appreciated but it was made clear that it would most likely not be included in the research and was more about helping to provide wider context as well as informally alerting them to my research project. All of the rugby community members accepted that their input would most likely not be included but were interested in reading the research findings on completion.

It is also important to note that the identification of key themes applying TA was "not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). These research themes are outlined and discussed in the next chapter, the findings and discussion.

## Chapter 4 – Findings and discussion

This chapter outlines and discusses the three main findings from this research project in relation to the research questions:

Main question:

What experiences do players of Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage have in Auckland Rugby Academy?

Sub-questions:

1. What internal or external forces influence the overall experiences of the players in the academy?
2. In what ways can these experiences be improved?

The three main themes emerging from this research project are:

1. Relationships rule everything around me – relationships with staff, contractors and academy boys are important in shaping experiences.
  - Relationships with academy staff and contractors (coaches, PDM, Academy Manager, admin session presenters, and contractors).
  - Relationships between academy boys.
2. Content and communication sets the (game) plan – programme content and delivery (verbal, non-verbal), along with actioning the same standards (honesty, practicing what you preach, and having a genuine two-way communication channel), influence experiences.
  - Quality, purposeful content including more rugby skills.
  - Communication between and among players and staff, i.e., coaches, PDM, Academy Manager.
  - Communication with external organisations, i.e., the Blues and rugby clubs.

3. Understand the person beyond the player – more understanding of the person and his life outside of the academy to help inform decisions around the programme and the initiatives being implemented.
- External commitments, i.e., study, work, implications of being island-born.
  - Players needing to understand the person beyond the player (self-awareness).
  - Long-term development and goals, i.e., admin improvements, development with purpose.

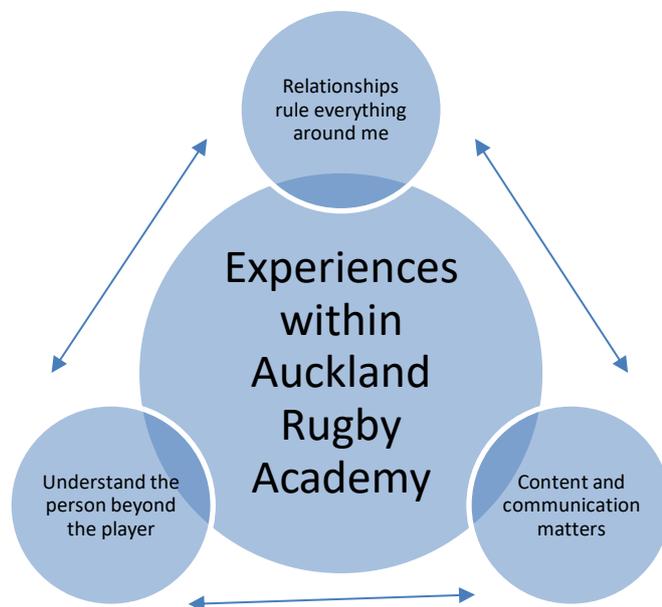


Figure 2. Summary of main themes.

## Answer to main question

Overall, players have positive experiences within Auckland Rugby Academy.

Participants' main reason for wanting to be in Auckland Rugby Academy was the idea of having access to an environment they feel is designed and set up to help them achieve their long-term goals of making representative teams and achieving higher honours:

The academy is kind of just like another step, in terms of progressing up into the Mitre 10, then Super Rugby and then further. So, getting in here was just kind of like, okay now you've got to work a bit harder to get to the next side – next step, and then work up. Yeah, that's what my goals are; go all the way.

There were also comments about improving as people and players on and off the field, now and in the future, but ultimately the players are here to excel and progress through the 'rugby pipeline' ranks:

The reason why I want to be in the academy; because I want to be better. So, I reckon the academy helps me develop more, to be a better player and be a better person. Yeah, I want to get a better future and the academy is helping.

A common statement was that they would rather be in the academy than not be in the academy, as it provides extra support and guidance towards attaining their goals:

It feels good. It just feels like you've got a bit more support, and these people are rugby-focussed and if that's what you want to do – and it's something that I want to do – then, they push you towards that path, and it's sort of on that way to becoming the best version of yourself, really – just being the best player on the field. Whereas, I know some boys who are not in the academy, but they still work hard, but I just don't feel like they get the support that they need, and if I can compare it, I'd say we've got so much. Everything is better; facilities, support networks. They teach us all that nutrition and whatnot.

The players believe that by being in the academy their chances of reaching their long-term goals of representing higher level teams increases. They are more likely to be looked at or focused on and supported more than other aspiring club rugby players.

I think it's like a gateway into new opportunities, and those kinds of things, because I think the Super Rugby franchise – they look more into the rugby academies and everything, more than people that aren't in it.

It's probably an easier pathway than not having the academy contract at all, compared to those who don't. So, you get more perks – more advantage to this kind of stuff – trainers, gym. Whereas, if you're not contracted or not registered into an academy, you find it much harder. You do a lot more individual stuff, and it takes a lot more motivation. I guess that's one of the main reasons. Probably the other reason is for my family. Mainly for family.

The above comment also indicates a key motivator for being in the academy and pursuing rugby – family. This point is explored further under theme one, “Relationships rule everything around me”.

The players are also well aware of how the rugby pipeline and the rugby landscape operate and what is required to put their best foot forward to assist in making teams:

When you're in academy, they push you forward a lot more. So, that will hopefully be helpful at some point, but before being in the academy, it sucked.

Yeah, almost like you have someone who picks favourites [coaches] – finally you become one of them, just because you're in academy.

Overall, the participants have positive experiences within Auckland Rugby Academy.

The excerpt below summarises the participants' feelings of being in the academy:

Participant 1: I love it.

Participant 2: Yeah.

Participant 3: It's good, yeah.

Participant 1: I really enjoy it. Like we said before; you get to meet new people – you get the best training. Yeah, what's not to like?

Most literature relating to sport covers the transition when leaving sport but few researchers have studied the transition period 'into' elite sport. One study which does look at this topic reports similar themes to academy participants' experiences

recounted in this research. Overall, the rookie athletes in that study liked their experiences but there were areas for improvement, i.e., coaches' feedback affects performance (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008). This point is covered in theme two, "Content and communication sets the (game) plan".

These statements and experiences differ from a very similar research project in the UK exploring former rugby league players' experiences of professional academy environments (Rothwell, Rumbold, & Stone, 2018). That study wanted to understand participants' reasons for dropping out of the sport, and their recommendations for improving future TDE environments. The findings suggest that players' TDE experiences and the reasons for dropout could be explained by a number of complex interactions of micro (e.g., negative academy experiences), meso (e.g., education), exo (e.g., player pathway structures), and macro (e.g., transitions to other clubs) systems. It was suggested that TDE pathways which lack a long-term focus, and emphasise early success, are likely to result in increased risk of burnout, de-motivation, and subsequent dropout. This point is similar to examples provided in theme three ("Understand the person beyond the player") and matches key themes in existing athlete development literature (as outlined in Chapter Two).

This UK study also suggested understanding the many interconnected variables that play a role in developing athletes so pathways and environments are effective in working towards long-term goals. Supporting the extensive amount of sport psychology research on discouraging early TID and ensuring all variables are considered to develop potential was also noted in the study. This is another point covered in Chapter Two (literature review) of this dissertation.

Although the present project and the UK study, and their findings, are similar, differences include the sporting code of the participants and the academy status of participants (i.e., in the UK study the participants are former rugby league academy players), but more important to note is the focus on certain ethnicities of academy

players for this project. It is an important point of difference as the numbers of Māori and Pacific rugby players are disproportionately larger than the numbers of Māori and Pacific people in Aotearoa's population.

For this reason, questions relating to sport sociology were considered and the field was included in the literature review. However, the research question situates this project in the sport psychology field. This was a deliberate choice as participants' experiences could be potentially used to reflect on, review and make changes in the academy space, if necessary. Based on minority groups studied in sport sociology, I thought the experiences of participants within the rugby academy would be unfavourable and mirror themes of exploitation, commodification and negative effects of sport migration. This was not the case. The participants enjoy being in the academy. Perhaps the findings may have been different if I too had asked former academy players, like the research project in the UK had done, or had talked to players at a more mature stage of their rugby career to retrospectively explore their academy experiences. Either way, the findings align with the research design and questions for this project but leave room for further research from either a sport sociology or a sport psychology perspective.

Overall, though, this project adds to the limited amount of research on sport development pathways, programmes and worldviews for Māori and Pacific Island people.

## Theme 1: Relationships rule everything around me

This theme covers the different type of relationships participants have that shape their academy experiences. These include relationships:

1. with academy staff (coaches, PDM, Academy Manager, etc.) and contractors; and
2. between academy boys.

The participants' experiences are heavily influenced by the people involved in the academy and (indirectly) the participants' families.

This theme acknowledges the importance of relationships for Māori and Pacific people and participants. The naming of the theme is a play on a 1990s song by iconic hip hop group Wu-Tang Clan, titled *Cash rules everything around me*, which focuses on survival through hard times – keeping in line with the idea that relationships are vital for participants in their pursuit of competitive rugby goals and life in general.

The types of relationships mentioned throughout the talanoa sessions were relationships with ARU staff, academy boys, and contractors/admin presenters. Indirectly, relationships with family were mentioned in regard to the motivation of wanting to be a part of the academy and reasons for investing in a rugby pathway.

#### Relationship with academy staff (coaches, PDM, Academy Manager, etc.) and contractors

There are several ARU staff the academy players interact with throughout their journey. These include coaches, Academy Manager, PDM, physiotherapists, contractors, ARU management, and team managers. The players' experiences are dependent on their relationships with these people. Some are positive and some can be improved. These interactions influence (positive or negative) experiences. By understanding the idea of relationships holding a central part in their worldview, the development programme could be designed and implemented to reflect this and ensure personal and professional outcomes are achieved for the players but also for the organisation.

When the experiences are positive, the players usually respond well and remember these interactions:

He cares for not only you as a rugby player, but you as a person as well. So, he organises things around you, and he talks to me a lot. I'm sure he talks to the boys a lot; how do you feel? He's constantly asking you questions, and then sorting your plan around you. You're not just a number in there. You're sort of –

you're looked at as a significant figure – not just a number, like some other places that I've been involved with.

He works out with us, sometimes. So, he'll jump in and do a set with us, and he'll show us first-hand; retract your shoulders. Little things, he'll teach us, and he'll demonstrate. He won't just use his words. So, he'll physically get in there with us and put in work. I think that's what's made me gain a lot of respect for him as well. He can lift so much for his weight.

X; he's different aye. He really – I don't know – he makes me want to go to the gym. He makes me want to wake up early and go learn from him. ... It's hard to find people like that, because not many people are in tune with how people want to interact with other people – how they want to be treated and stuff. I feel the same with school teachers and stuff.

He doesn't just hand us a paper and tell us to complete these things; he follows it – he sort of – not babies us, but he's like – I don't know. I sort of compare him to like a sensei. He sort of guides us on our journey, every morning in the gym. You're always learning something new from him. You're not just like the same cycle every day, yeah.

In contrast, when experiences are not positive, players tend to not want to listen or it affects their behaviour. The way in which contractors/presenters engage with the group sets the tone in determining the willingness to listen and learn.

I don't really like some of the ways that the people teach the admin sessions, like we were talking about before, how they just sort of get what they're trying to say out, and then leave. They don't try to interact with us, and they don't try to sort of – I don't know – take action on things that are disturbing the class.

Taking action could be like, telling them, come on man – this is really important for you – talking to them outside and getting something that brings everyone – engages everyone at the start. Instead of just getting into it – no-one really likes school and sort of teaching us like a teacher, you sort of just tune out straight away and talk to your mates, because that's what heaps of us Pacific Island boys are used to. I think if someone sort of changes the direction that we're going in, I think that will be very cool.

They do get really angry sometimes, no names but you know that guy – he gets really angry. He's not very compassionate. Sometimes he's a bit like a robot.

It's not me personally [affected]. I can just see how it affects others around that may have bigger troubles. Then, his job is to sort of support us, but he sort of adds onto those problems, sometimes. Sometimes – not all the time. He's a really good guy. I'm nit-picking.

Players all mentioned wanting to make higher teams and mentioned the importance of people around them in getting there. Participants are also aware that there are certain 'levels' within the academy space that can help or hinder their next step. Macro and micro levels are at play here.

Relationships are contexts of learning. There are two types of significant relationships: transitory, where a key person is helping with transitions through different stages; and existential, where a key person is supporting beyond sport over a period of time.

Establishing relationships between athletes and influential figures along their sport journey is not just about learning technical skills, life skills and values; it is a matter of building up environments and creating reciprocal relationships (Storm, Henriksen, Larsen, & Christensen, 2014). This is essentially what Auckland Rugby Academy acts as – a transition point between secondary schools and a high-performance pathway. The findings within the article by Storm et al. (2014) highlight the importance of the interrelationships, networks, and dependencies of different 'actors' in realising the athletes' goals. The learning environment and key people assisting players within this environment are pivotal in the participants' (rugby) trajectory.

### Relationship between academy players

The other boys within the academy significantly influence participants' experiences:

I guess my parents and all that [influence on how you are in the academy], but I think definitely all the boys around me, is pretty big. ... Yeah, or even I feel like where I'm slacking, then – yeah, I guess if they kind of come in mucking

around, I'll probably join in and stuff, but then if they're going hard, then I'll be going hard, too.

I think bonding with others as well; I think that's pretty important, especially if we're going to end up playing together at the end of the year. So, what's that kind of – just like creating relationships with people.

I agree with X, being around all the people here and even though you're training against your competition every day. They're like pushing you through and it makes you even better. And just for that it's been pretty fun since I've been in here. I like training with these guys.

The academy was likened to school in terms of being surrounded by your friends, which was seen as a positive:

I think the best thing about this is it's pretty much like school; you get to see your mates every day. I know heaps of guys who finish school and they're on their own, and get pretty bored, but at least you get to still see your mates every day. It's why I pretty much came to school and hanging out with each other.

In other talanoa sessions, the school reference was discussed in terms of not enjoying the teaching style of some presenters, which is discussed further in theme two, "Content and communication sets the (game) plan".

The participants are keen to learn more and have fun with each other but boundaries and standards are equally important, meaning that when it is time to train or be present in admin sessions, they want to take it seriously and not waste time:

It's only early stage, but I'd say the skills [part of the academy could be better]; I'm not too sure if that's the academy, because there are boys from outside the academy that came in as well, but some of the academy people are there like X, and like X and that, so I think they could be better there – just more – I don't know. It's just different to the gym. It's just not as organised. It's just more laid back – not as serious. ... They pretty much just sort of piss-take a little bit.

Yeah, it can be. I wouldn't mind a little bit more admin, or if they just hammered down on the admin. Heaps of boys miss homework and that, and there's kind of not a good reflection. So, if they were like more strict around that, I think that would teach us more than – at some point in life you're going to have to handle

something like this, and if you don't do it, then just be prepared to face consequences or whatever, but if they gave us either more admin or just be real strict on it, I feel like it would just sink in a bit more – but less nutrition.

These comments show the participants are committed to getting the most out of the academy time and do not want it to be all fun and games.

### Relationship with family

As previously mentioned, the participants' families indirectly influence their experiences within the academy. They are not physically there to train but they are one of the main motivations to aim for a rugby career. This point supports Schaaf's (2006) research examining motivational reasons for playing rugby amongst Pacific Island rugby players in Auckland. Schaaf's research found motivation factors to play sport differ from a eurocentric worldview, as religion, family and education are big motivators. The research also highlighted the need to understand Pacific Island cultures, that people are not homogenous, and that there are differences between Aotearoa-born and Pacific Island-born people which need to be highlighted. This point was also evident in this research project and is mentioned as part of theme three, "Understand the person beyond the player". There are economic gains if athletes are successful in reaching a certain level but with that achievement comes huge responsibility and pressure to support family. Athletes are motivated to uphold and repay family for making sacrifices and moving to Aotearoa.

Schaaf's (2006) research also notes that academies and organisations should have a degree of responsibility to nurture and provide academic opportunities for athletes. For Auckland Rugby Academy there is a requirement for participants to be employed or studying on top of being a part of the academy.

Although the motivations for playing found in the present study were similar to those found by Schaaf (2006), this project focused on experiences within a rugby academy so responses did not explicitly address cultural or religious perspectives as well as

motivational factors. Côté (1999) indicates that the influence of family in the development of talent can be categorised into three distinct chronological stages named the 'stages of sport participation': sampling years (6-13 years old), specialising years (13-15), and investment years (15 and over). The academy and the participants theoretically fall into the stage of the investment years. Findings suggest that at around 15 years old the athlete is generally committed to wanting to achieve an elite level of performance. The strategic, competitive, and skill development characteristics of sport emerge as being the most important elements of the investment years. This is the case for the participants in the present study as well, as suggested through their comments around wanting to learn more rugby skills, awareness of who makes strategic decisions, and being comfortable with working with the 'competition' in their playing position at the academy.

Côté (1999) suggests further studies should be undertaken to understand family influences on TDE at each stage of a child's development.

### Indirect influencers

One of the stages where further research might be carried out could be the secondary school stage, since another indirect factor of influence is the secondary schools the participants have previously attended. The level of investment from the school may influence the academy players' expectations and preparation for the academy. This was seen in the following comment:

I think for most of us, we've come out of pretty good schools for rugby, like take rugby seriously and training and stuff, so we're also used to the early wake-ups and the hard trainings and stuff, but I think for some, in my year when I first started academy, there was a few boys that came from 1B schools. They're good players but they came from 1B schools so they weren't playing in the First XV competition, and they sort of struggled with the load. I don't know. Maybe it might be a bit difficult for them, and just a big step-up from what they're used to. So, it might make it a bit difficult. I think for – oh well, for me, my expectation was it's going to be similar to what it was like in First XV but obviously a bit

harder. Transitioning in to that I was alright. But yeah some of the boys struggled.

The many pitfalls of TID and TDE are discussed throughout the literature (as outlined in Chapter Two, literature review). This could be another area for further research as pre-academies and the recruitment process for Auckland Rugby Academy were briefly mentioned in talanoa sessions and, as previously mentioned, TID and TDE models should be integrated to assist with smoother transitions and better connections for athletes and organisations. Although the participants enjoy the academy overall, there is room for improvement. One of the areas for improvement is in the relationships the academy boys have, both with academy staff and contractors, and with each other.

Hiring staff and/or contractors who are culturally aware but also able to deliver content to the players effectively would be ideal. The participants will give more and warm to people more if they are relatable and understand their commitments and their lives outside of the academy. The relationships do not need to be overly-friendly; they can be more respectful where staff/contractors are sharing their expertise as well as being open to learning from the players. Positive experiences will make them want to invest more in the academy and the academy's goals. Better relationships create better experiences, as noted by Tuagalu (2008). Tuagalu explains *va* – from a Samoan perspective – specifically within social and worship spaces. Individuals are always seen in relation to their social groups so understanding and tailoring experiences to this idea may create more benefits to the athlete and their communities, and to the organisation. By creating relationships and learning from these experiences, the programme can be influenced to incorporate this knowledge. In an academy sense, relationships do not need to be deep but must at least be genuine and reciprocal, as the participants see the environment as one in which they can learn more about rugby. Participants know they are there for rugby so that is what they would like to learn about through relationships with coaches, staff, and experts:

Yeah, if more All Blacks or more people who have been through the academy – and rather than – it doesn't have to be mental skills – it doesn't have to be nutrition or whatever it is; even just him talking about it – experience coming through – I enjoy those the most, just because I know what they've been through and their way to get to where they are. It's kind of interesting when you think about it. Some people find it boring, but just to see where they are in life, and how grateful they are – good on them.

This theme has summarised the relationships and influences participants have within and outside of the academy which can affect their experiences, as well as their eagerness to learn and develop more. This was also briefly mentioned in regard to the way in which presenters engage with participants, and leads into the second theme of “Content and communication sets the (game) plan”.

## Theme 2: Content and communication sets the (game) plan

This second theme addresses content and communication is key. What this means is that the players would prefer quality over quantity when it comes to content, and the way in which content is communicated influences their experiences. The points covered in this theme are:

1. Content:
  - Quality, purposeful content including more rugby skills is preferred.
2. Communication:
  - Between and amongst players and staff, i.e., coaches, PDM and Academy Manager.
  - With external organisations, i.e., the Blues and rugby clubs.

The quality of the training and admin sessions could be improved to alleviate the feeling of time being wasted – possibly for all involved including the academy staff:

I'd prefer to be like once a month (admin), because they're every week, it's heaps. If they do it today, then this week – next week they're going to be doing the same thing, but wasting people's time. They'd rather go home and go for a run, or talk to their family – do something else, but they have to come here every Monday and do the same stuff. But it could be like once a month, to do it, like you know get all the stuff, and make it if they want to go all the time, go to 9:00 – go to 9:00 because there's only one a month."

I don't mind admin. I'll come in, and the stuff we did on this Monday just gone – that was all good. Just if it comes to X with his nutrition, I just – had enough of that one.

Oh, I think he does (do the same things). I've seen his presentations like four times, but he's just kind of altered them a bit. It's like, you're just telling us the same stuff. We might not be experts at it, but I'm sure we just know the basics and what's good enough and what's not.

From the improvement suggestions, the underlying point was utilising the time with quality sessions rather than quantity. Sessions should be strategic and thoughtful and working towards achieving their goals, and not provided just for the sake of putting on another session (for whatever reason), as attending the programme sessions in itself takes a lot of commitment from participants.

That's what I mean; some things we're just here because we have to be there. There's not actually anything coming out of it. That was like this morning's session; we just go because we have to and we get ripped into if we don't. So, we're kind of wasting time.

So, there would be like a mountain of soil here, and we have to take it over here with wheelbarrows. It's just sort of like mindless labour; is anyone getting anything out of this, or is just for the team bonding? It's not really bonding, but it's like it's sort of pointless. I don't feel like I'm helping a cause, whereas if I was interacting with actual humans – not just soil and shovels and wheelbarrows, it would be better.

Another common suggestion was the need to teach and learn more rugby skills.

Participants are aware that the skills taught in admin could be transferrable to other

areas in life but they are more interested in learning more tactical and technical skills at this stage of development.

Oh, I'd rather more of the rugby skills than the mental skills kind of thing. ... I feel like I could learn some of the other skills outside of that. I've learned a few, too just growing up with my parents and stuff. They kind of drilled it into me.

I would like to develop more of a running game, if I could. Yeah, just learning more about maybe kind of keeping the game at pace, so the offload game – develop around that area a little bit more, and the collision area, with dominant tackles and just trying to get those sorts of skills around. Kicking; I want to be a lot better at kicking – what kind of kicks – all the different types, and kicking off the other foot is something that I want to develop.

Oh, definitely try and learn more about the rugby side of things, yeah.

These comments highlight two crucial points. First, players do not come into the academy as blank canvases, meaning they already have their own beliefs, attitudes and worldviews/behaviours – they know what they want from the academy. Secondly, they come with support systems in terms of family who have and/or continue to influence them. How the content is designed and delivered should consider these points when thinking about long-term athlete development and player experiences.

The preference for learning more rugby skills could also be a result of more emphasis being placed on strength and conditioning by academy staff, coaches, influential figures, and decision-makers within the union. Godber (2012) argues there is a need to have specific training and skills programmes for student-athletes. Even though participants are no longer secondary students, some are university students and the majority of the rest of them are in employment, which is similar to having a school schedule (Godber, 2012).

To add another layer to the findings in Godber's (2012) student/athlete article, there is the need to specifically understand Pacific peoples (there are commonalities between Pacific people but they are still heterogeneous group of people), their motivators and perspectives, to help with designing appropriate development programmes. The

success and pressure of professionalism goes beyond the athlete for Pacific people. Their family name and village are also uplifted (or disadvantaged) through their experiences, which should be considered in talent/athlete development pathways (Lakisa, Adair, & Taylor, 2014).

### Long-term athlete development and goals, i.e., admin improvements (development with purpose)

When asked how things could be improved, changes to admin sessions were common in every talanoa session. This included what was taught, how it was taught (as previously mentioned in the opening paragraphs of theme two), when the sessions are held, and the frequency of the sessions:

They need to change the admin, too because some people don't work, and if you live far away, and you have training in the morning, and you have a meeting in the afternoon at Eden Park and then admin at the same time, and you come back, it's a waste of gas. It's not a waste, but it's commitment but you have to be smart about it and understanding. It should be once a month.

I think having admin on another day, because I think the Monday – the first day of the week is the hardest, because you're struggling to get money from the weekend.

Yeah, and just because it does cost a lot. I was really excited because I was finally getting paid to train – do what I love, kind of thing, but then when it works out – it's nowhere near what you should be paid, just to show up to trainings. It's a lot more of an expense than an income.

Another perspective was one of being appreciative of the opportunities with the motivating driver being family, again.

Well, I just always think about my parents – their parents – my grandparents; these are the first world problems, you know. It's not a big deal – a privilege to be doing these things. I can't complain about getting these opportunities, so I've got to make the most of these for the people before me that didn't have these opportunities. So, I feel like I have a ... obligation; I have a lot of purpose – I always channel my family, and things like that, and my friends as well.

Getting to know some of the participants' details before starting the academy is possible by using the information or data collected in the TID processes (this idea crosses themes two and three):

We do a fair bit of it [admin] in Year 13 and at camps and stuff, we do a lot of work on stuff so when we come to admin in academy most of it is stuff we've already done. So it's just us revisiting it and refreshing it.

These comments indicate there are a number of points to consider. One, some participants (but not all) have been introduced to skills in other settings, i.e., with the Blues, and some have 'less rugby experience' coming from 1B secondary schools, so there are layers of experiences. Two, most participants are familiar with the 'rugby pipeline' and rugby landscape in New Zealand. And three, families have instilled values throughout their upbringing which can also influence how experiences within the academy are perceived by players.

The participants are coming into the academy wanting to improve as rugby players but understanding a little more of their backgrounds could help in the long run. If the All Blacks are the pinnacle in terms of rugby achievement in Aotearoa, then their mantra of good people make good All Blacks would suggest the pathway leading to the top should in some way reflect that thinking and that environment.

To be able to create experiences where the person is centred, academies and initiatives will need to invest in relationships and an environment where relationships can flourish. Mental skills make a big difference in succeeding and then continuing as an elite athlete. However, these skills are not always ranked as important by participants:

Yeah, I think I would like to do that a bit more; talking to maybe young people that are hopeful rugby players or something – teaching them about mental skills earlier than they would, or that they would ever be taught, because a lot of – especially Pacific Islander/Māori boys don't get taught that sort of stuff. That probably doesn't answer, what could be done better – but what could be added.

They sort of go through your physical goals and your goals of rugby, and then you have a meeting with X who's the counsellor sort of thing, and she talks about your overall wellbeing and what your plans are, and just how things are at home, which I think are really good, but I don't think – I think everyone has too much pride to sort of tell her. So, I think maybe a bit more emphasis on the mental side would be beneficial, and would allow the boys to gain more trust with their coaches and stuff, so that they can talk to them about things that are personal. Whereas, at the moment it's sort of just like a – I don't know – not a job, but – you're benefiting from it, but not mentally that much.

There is the other side of the coin, where mental 'toughness' is perceived as a necessity for athletic success. But is it being used to treat athletes unfairly and cause harmful effects (as previously mentioned in the opening paragraphs of theme two, where participants explained how they just carry on when staff are not always communicating in an effective way, because they understand the importance of the status of those staff). Kerr and Stirling (2017) recommend strategies that are more consistent with healthy psychosocial development and learner-centred educational practices to advance both the personal and the performance success of high-performance athletes. These authors also look at other disciplines to inform healthy teaching and learning practices, i.e., the educational setting, which has produced a lot of research with Māori and Pacific Island people. This point also fits in with the expectations of players to attend different organisations and do a variety of tasks set by them (Kerr & Stirling, 2017).

### Communication between and amongst players and staff, i.e., coaches, PDM, Academy Manager

The style (verbal, and non-verbal) of communication as well as the values and standards underpinning communications – for example honesty, genuine two-way communication channels, and practicing what you preach (same standards) – influence participants' experiences within the academy. Communication is emphasised as key in the academy and the players are expected to communicate their whereabouts and

progress on a number of activities to the relevant staff member or contractor daily or weekly.

Yeah, they'll be sweet, but if you don't, then yeah – that's probably one of their biggest things; communication.

The communication of the coaches is especially valued as the players believe the coaches make the calls for selection and they are seen as experts and as gateways to higher honours. Even if the style of delivery of communication is not ideal for participants, they justify the behaviour because of the person's status. The excerpt below supports this notion:

Participant 1: [In regard to angry staff members] No, I think it's just real 'old-skool' and how he was raised I guess.

Participant 2: They've got high expectations, aye?

Participant 1: Yeah, they've just got high expectations, anyway so –

Participant 1: Which is bloody good, but –

Participant 1: It's good in a way, but sometimes it can mentally affect your play, in a way. Just think it's their way. You can't change it –

Facilitator: Do you feel like, though if they had communicated it in a better – in a different way – that you guys would take in onboard more?

Participant 2: Yeah –

In another talanoa session, participants discussed how they are influenced by and listen to staff members due to them having more insider knowledge about what decision-makers are interested in:

I think sometimes your personal goals and needs are different to what they're looking at – what they want. So, you might want to shred, but they need you to get bigger or whatever. So, either way, whatever you're doing, whether it's what you want it's always in the best interest of you.

Yeah, but I guess they're the ones getting more feedback from the higher coaches in other teams and stuff, so you're building what you need to do.

The comments above show the players are aware of coaching influences and power, and are willing to listen to staff as they believe it will benefit them in the long term, even if it differs from their own personal goals or values.

Other comments include the style of communication by staff, in particular staff talking in a way that is condescending and babying of players, which does not help:

And on that, that's like from admin – I feel like they're talking to us like we're five, sometimes. It's like, come on ... You're an adult now. You kind of on your own two feet. So, coming to sessions and they're telling you, do this – do that, and acting like you're a little kid, it's like – I'm running my own life, now – settle down.

A genuine two-way style of communication is preferred which includes sticking to the same standards for participants, staff members and the organisation, i.e., practice what you preach. Having clear expectations and open communication both ways would help in creating better experiences:

Participant 1: When I come in, he always asks me, how do you feel – upper or lower? So, I just tell him how I feel, and he'll say, oh you can come in later. To X the communication is very important.

Participant 2: Yeah, and he makes decisions around that. Some of the others go, how do you feel? You're like, oh my legs are bugged. They're like, oh well just try and do legs today. It's like –

Participant 1: Why did you ask? Yeah.

On top of having a genuine two-way communication channel, keeping to the standards they set the participants would help create better experiences:

Last year it was way harder for us because we had Under 19s, and then had training for top-side and then after that, they talk about time, but we had double-trainings. We got in early-as in the morning, like on Monday morning to have like admin in the afternoon, and then finish like around 8:00, and they talk about

time and say they'll finish at 7:00 but then they finish at 8:00, but Tuesday they expect us to come early to do training. By the time I get home in X, it's pretty far – by the time I get home it's going to be around 10:00 – go shower, come out, have dinner but it's too late to go to sleep and then talk about waking up in the morning so tired, start training, and then they expect us to do more, but they tell us time commitment but it's like, to me it feels like bullshit.

I just want the coaches and them to be honest with the players. Some players – they expect more if they've been in academy for a while, and then they expect them like, oh they tell them, you're going to start, and all this stuff, but come to the day, you don't and it's so hard.

Another point to consider is players for whom English is not their first language who have been recruited through the secondary schools and made it into the academy. The amount of content and learning these players are absorbing is questionable – even though they are still required to attend all sessions. It raises questions around whether this is the best way to engage this group of players – or can an alternative be provided to get benefits for all involved? Further research could be undertaken focusing on this group to help understand their experiences and needs better:

I didn't know that [staff were being condescending] because when I was doing admin I didn't understand more [English is his second language], and it was just like ahh. They'd ask me a question and like – no idea.

There is more teaching and learning research in the education field on Māori and Pacific people than there is in sport psychology (or sport sociology), and this knowledge can be applied to this research project. The academy is essentially development through teaching and learning (Anae, 2010). Anae (2010) further outlines and summarises *va/spaces* and the importance of actively nurturing these spaces (*ia teu le va*) in teaching and learning environments.

Overall, the findings show that creating relevant content and communicating it in an environment that encourages further development and learning will create better experiences for participants.

## Communication amongst staff

The same standards as are discussed above apply for communication amongst staff members. When participants discuss issues with one staff member and another staff member dismisses them, it causes frustration for participants. Communication between staff members to set standards and expectations when different areas of expertise coincide can help resolve contradictory situations.

With the number of moving parts and actors in the academy, being clear on what everyone's role is, how it fits into strategic goals and how it is communicated to staff and players would influence experiences:

Yeah, that's exactly it [the programme is rigid]. When we're doing the trainings for Mitre 10 contenders, and we're doing a training, we would cover like 11k, and then show up the next morning and we get told we have to do legs, and it's just; it sucks."

Pay more, or train less, and kind of be more understanding about that. It's like I talked to X about that, and X was all good, but then I missed the training last week, because I was living out at Y – I couldn't make it out there, and I missed just one of the morning sessions, and did my own session, and they weren't too happy about that. They sent me a text saying, it's all good, but then when I saw them this morning they were like, oh you've just got to do your own programmes now. So, I was like –

## With external organisations, i.e., the Blues and rugby clubs

Maintaining relationships with Super Rugby franchises, such as the Blues, and rugby clubs could create better experiences, as better communication channels were suggested in talanoa sessions. This will allow better communication in relation to participants and their activities so they are not overworked or over-exhausted and initiatives are aligned to long-term goals and/or overall wellbeing:

It was digging. The other day – last Wednesday, 6:30am digging for an hour and a half until 8:00. Then, we had Blues training at 8:30 until 1:00. It's just like there's a disconnect there, that I was talking about this morning. So, the

communication between the two was not very good. So then, we had a lot of overlap and overloading.

This quote touches on ARU needing to form relationships to communicate with the Blues or other parties to understand what has been undertaken with players prior to coming into the academy and then understanding players as people to create a programme that is beneficial and relevant (discussed further in theme three) to help create efficiencies between processes and positive experiences for participants and organisations.

Cleary's (2008) research reiterated the efficiencies experienced as part of open organisation relationships (for his research it was a more formal agreement) and also found that, when different sporting organisations have transparent communication, communication channels are formed over time between staff from both organisations and add to maintaining positive relationships.

Communicating amongst the different organisations involved in the Aotearoa rugby pipeline may not be occurring well at the moment for a number of reasons, including different organisations having different goals for players, but the lack of communication between organisations can cause issues for participants which can affect their goals, and ultimately organisational goals in the long run, i.e., by causing injuries and burnout due to an excessive workload, as found in the UK study on rugby league academy players (Rothwell, Rumbold, & Stone, 2018).

One thing that I heard second-hand from X – because I was just thinking about your knee – is that a lot of the academy boys always get injured, because they overload them during the season.

Despite potential conflict and competing agendas, open and honest communication from inter-organisation relationships can lead to varying perspectives being shared to help suggest solutions to existing issues. Doing this may have positive effects as parties need to work together to achieve beyond their own prerogatives – in this instance, for the game of rugby (Shaw & Allen, 2006).

What is communicated and how it is communicated has implications, and it matters to the academy players and should be considered by ARU, because teams who are able to practice healthy communication styles are more likely to perform better (Sullivan, 1995).

As mentioned, players are willing to give more respect and effort to people who do the same for them. Encouraging a genuine two-way communication channel between players and staff will eliminate the players' feelings of being babied or treated like they are inferior.

Good communication practices for Pacific students include asking for their perspectives, affirming their actions, and being open (and not defensive) with their input (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). As previously mentioned, most of the research relating to Māori and Pacific people sits within the education field. As the academy's purpose is around development, teaching and learning findings could be considered for academic purposes, i.e., this research, but also from ARU's perspective.

Research by Ryan and Deci (as cited in Hodge, Lonsdale, & Ng, 2008) with rugby players found that, if their basic needs are met, they will experience positive psychological effects. In contrast, depending on the extent of frustration, they will experience negative consequences, i.e., burnout (Hodge, Lonsdale, & Ng, 2008).

One crucial communication channel, as seen in participants' responses, is the coach-player relationship. This is supported by research findings (Andrew, Potgieter, & Grobbelaar, 2007) that emphasise the importance of building good coach-player relationships and team spirit for positive impacts. Andrew's findings suggest other psychological skills such as communication should be researched further within the sport psychology field. (Andrew, Potgieter, & Grobbelaar, 2007).

If the players' experiences within the academy are not positive with staff and contractors, then they are not open to optimal learning opportunities (Reynolds, 2017).

This could mean players are not developing to their full potential, which may have a knock-on effect for the academy and ARU strategic objectives.

Overall, sport psychology research on communication within sport teams is scattered and limited. Communication is known to be crucial in existing literature but there is limited research or definition on what is good communication (Sullivan & Feltz, 2003). On top of these limitations, there are very few research projects focusing on nonverbal communication.

According to Barnes and Mabry (1980, as cited in Sullivan & Feltz (2003), nonverbal messages may be divided into three categories – proxemics, kinesics, and paralanguage. Proxemics refers to how people use space. Personal spacing and distance between sender and receivers is in itself a part of the message and communication is also context-based. Although Barnes and Mabry refer to the physical space, the idea of space/va in a Pacific worldview can be applied and adds to literature regarding communication in the sport psychology field.

For this research project, I could not find specific communication theories, models or frameworks relating to Māori or Pacific people. Although my search was not fruitful in terms of having research to draw on for this project, the type of communication used by Māori and Pacific people is implicit in the what we know and how we do things, i.e., the values we collectively share such as respect, love, and reciprocity. In a practical sense, it is the relationships we form and how we 'ia teu le va' between them, the customs, protocols and traditions we upheld. By caring for the space through action, relationships are positively influenced. Therefore, Māori and Pacific values provide different perspectives on what constitutes effective communication.

This point connects the first theme of understanding that relationships are key in Māori and Pacific worldviews and the third theme of understanding the person beyond the player. By learning more about players and how they are affected by different communication styles and channels, they can be influenced, positively and negatively.

The communication styles within the academy influence relationships both internally and externally, i.e., with family. For this reason, I invited the participants to involve their families in the research, if they wanted to. No-one took up the offer. This may have been because participants saw the research project as part of academy work so thought their families did not need to be involved. Nevertheless, the gesture was extended to acknowledge the significance of whānau (family).

Theoretically, there is an increasing amount of research discussing Māori and Pacific values. However, putting the values into practice can be difficult (Suaalii-Sauni, 2017). However, there are step-by-step guidelines (Anae & Mila-Schaaf, 2010; Inspiring Communities, 2018) on how to do this appropriately, but these should not be used as blanket responses for a number of reasons including the variance in communication styles amongst ethnic groups (O'Toole, 2012). These resources are more entry level learning opportunities for those wanting to understand different perspectives.

### Theme 3: Understand the person beyond the player

This theme covers getting to know players and their lives outside of the academy. Understanding the person beyond the player may help inform decisions around the programme and initiatives being implemented to aid in effective development. By doing so, anecdotally, the academy's purpose of converting academy players into Mitre 10 players and achieving the players' long-term goals of making higher teams may be more likely to be achieved, as focusing on a holistic approach aligned to a purpose is more beneficial than short-term 'wins'.

#### External commitments, i.e., study, work, and implications for Pacific Island-born players

In most cases, participants mentioned the difficulty of maintaining a busy schedule but they are capable of adjusting to meet expectations most of the time. This is because, overall, they would much rather be in the academy than not.

As the programme is only allowed to operate during set times, players still need to maintain work and/or study commitments on top of their academy requirements, which can be difficult physically, logistically and economically.

Yeah, that's mostly it, but on top of that you've got to balance it with uni, so sometimes on a Tuesday for example, I'm over the bridge, then I'm back over to study, then in the afternoons you've got club trainings, so I'm back over one more time, and then I got back home. So, that is kind of hard on the Tuesdays and Thursdays when I do have to go over the bridge, travel to and from twice a day. Today – Wednesdays are cruisy-as; I usually just stay home and study and that.

They don't know how much, travelling is hard. It costs a lot of money, aye. Especially when you're not working, and you're a student. You end up spending \$100 a week just on gas.

As previously mentioned, the impact on Pacific Island-born players can be different from that on Aotearoa-born players and, as a result, additional aspects need to be considered.

Oh yeah, they need to change about the scholarship and stuff; people like me, when I come from the Islands, we don't work, and they expect us to work but I don't know how things here work. When I first start, like – I don't have a visa so I didn't work, but they tell me to go and find a job, but it's too hard for me. Yeah, I can't work. They need to change the rules a little bit for people like us to come here and then find a job outside of rugby.

### Understanding oneself – person beyond the player

As part of this theme, it is important to recognise that centring athletes' own perceptions of themselves and performances may influence their experiences.

Applying this knowledge in a way that is in relation to the team may be better suited for Māori and Pacific participants. For example, by creating reciprocal relationships (theme one) between athletes and coaches, power can shift to athletes such that they are able to take ownership of how certain aspects of their game, and their lives, are constructed,

personally and/or professionally (Butler & Hardy, 1992), as the following participant quote shows:

I've really enjoyed it (academy), like I said, meeting new people, but I feel like if I wasn't mentally on-track or wasn't too sure of my goals, I don't really know if it would be that beneficial for me. Just being honest, because there's just not enough emphasis on the mental skill side of things. Yeah, but for me it's been really good. I've got a lot of support from family and stuff.

With the number of Māori and Pacific Island rugby players in their programmes, the academies within the provincial rugby unions (and, potentially, NZR) may want to consider teaching or emphasising how to reflect on oneself as a person beyond rugby, which may in turn help with success in rugby, i.e., in regard to the mantra that better people make better All Blacks.

There are commonalities between Hokowhitu's Positive Youth Development programme (Hodge, Sharp, & Heke, 2011) and the All Blacks' mantra – the idea of creating tools to develop people as opposed to players is at the forefront for both. The reasons for the approach in these two instances may differ but both are interested in developing people. Hokowhitu's programme is also unique in that it is delivered using an indigenous approach and methods (Hodge, Sharp, & Heke, 2011). This approach could be considered in rugby academies, and could be done in a holistic way with a cultural lens for athlete development pathways and initiatives by drawing on, for example, how Indigenous and Pacific frameworks and models of wellbeing are organised and considered in other disciplines such as health. Considering a wellbeing model like Fonofale or Te Whare Tapa Whā may create more engagement with participants and develop them personally as well as professionally for careers beyond rugby. The wellbeing of participants might not be the main priority, objective or purpose of a rugby academy but, as mentioned by one of the participants in the talanoa sessions, achieving higher honours "is more a long-term goal" so initiatives and interactions should reflect that.

The Fonofale theoretical framework is a well-known model of health used in health research and the health industry. Although my research is not directly connected to a health discipline, the experiences of rugby players in the academy are at the forefront of this study, and understanding the development (personal and/or professional) of the players is vital to understanding their experiences. The Fonofale framework is derived from the idea of the Samoan fale (meeting house) – an important part of life. The image describes and represents central elements in healthy development from a Pacific point of view (Agnew, et al., 2004). The six components are family, culture, physical, spiritual, mental, and other (sexuality, gender, age, socio-economic status). There are also three direct and indirect components surrounding the fale: time, environment and context. See Figure 3, below.

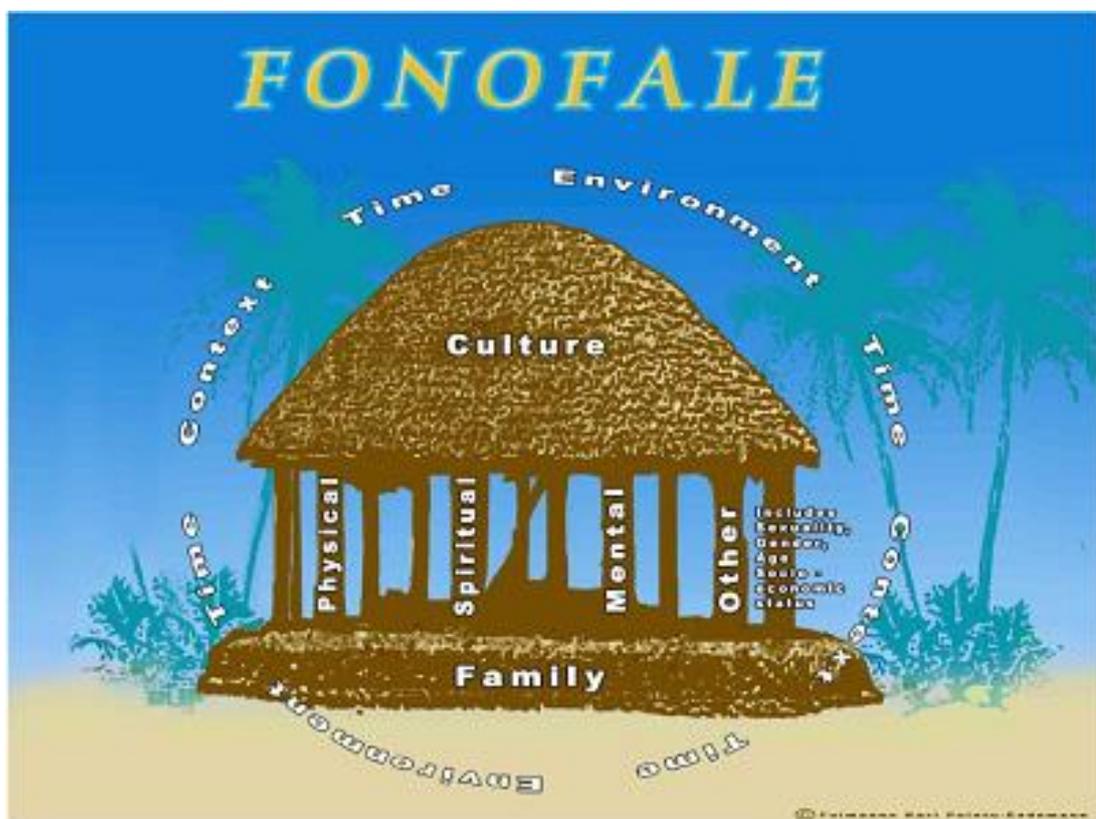


Figure 3. The Fonofale model of health (Pulotu-Endemann, 2001).

A similar framework to the Fonofale model is used by Pacific Rugby Players – an organisation established by rugby players in 2013 to look after the collective welfare interests of both male and female national representatives of Fiji, Samoa and Tonga as

well as Pacific Island professional rugby players worldwide (Pacific Rugby Players, 2020). Their personal development model is also based on a fale, with each component of the meeting house representing a vital component of development, from a Pacific point of view. The six areas are: individual, personal skills, finances, career and education, rugby standards, and family and faith. The ethos of their development model is 'developing better people and building better rugby players'.

Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 2001) is a health and wellbeing model underpinned by Māori philosophy. Similar to Fonofale, the model consists of four walls that represent the whare in Te Ao Māori and symbolise the aspects of wellbeing – physical, mental/emotional, spiritual and family/social. Both models represent Māori and Pacific worldviews where each component needs to be 'in balance' with all the others in order for harmony to occur (McNeill, 2009).

Most rugby unions within Aotearoa have development programmes within academies, which are based on NZR's six pillars of development. This development model focuses on technical, tactical, physical, nutrition, mental skills and holistic leadership development skills, and was created by NZR staff based on experience and research (B. Fisher, personal communication, August 2, 2019).

Auckland Rugby Academy could consider applying a holistic wellbeing model such as Fonofale and/or Te Whare Tapa Whā, or aspects of them, to underpin their academy programme framework, especially with the high number of Māori and Pacific participating in their development programme pathway.

## Summary

All three themes involve the participants. Therefore, it is important to involve the athletes throughout their development journey. Encouraging a genuine two-way communication channel can lead to athletes taking full ownership of their journey and feeling valued, which in turn could lead to better experiences and, possibly, better

performances as well. Like the Māori and Pacific worldview, everything is connected. The themes are main overarching themes but they are interconnected. Some experiences fall into more than one theme, and that is fine. The themes are not separated by restrictive boundaries; rather, they are moving parts making up a whole.

## Chapter 5 – Conclusion

### Overview of the research

This research project is an analysis of the experiences Māori and/or Pacific Island rugby players encounter in a high-performance environment, specifically Auckland Rugby Academy. The main question is “What experiences do players of Māori and/or Pacific Island heritage have in Auckland Rugby Academy?”

The sub-questions are:

1. What internal or external forces influence the overall experiences of the players in the academy?
2. In what ways can these experiences be improved?

As mentioned in Chapter Four, overall, the participants have positive experiences within Auckland Rugby Academy. The main reason for this is having access to an environment they feel is designed and set up to help them reach their long-term goals of making higher teams and achieving higher honours.

I chose to use a Pacific methodology and method alongside thematic analysis, a more eurocentric method, to analyse the data. The values used to guide the research project were common values found within Māori and Pacific worldviews. The core values were:

1. Importance of family, relationships, respect and reciprocity.
2. Relationships are kept (in all areas including land, space and time) for the benefit of family and communities, with the knowledge that the spiritual realm is connected to the physical realm.
3. Everything is interconnected.

In total, 17 participants shared their time and space with me for this project. Three group talanoa sessions and four individual talanoa sessions were held to collect ‘data’ on their experiences.

There were three main themes that emerged after using thematic analysis to analyse the data collected from all talanoa session. The three main themes from this research project are:

1. **Relationships rule everything around me** – relationships with staff, presenters/contractors, and academy boys are important in shaping academy experiences.
2. **Content and communication sets the (game) plan** – experiences are influenced by quality content and delivery (verbal, non-verbal), along with the same standards being followed by both participants and staff (honesty, practicing what you preach, and having a genuine two-way communication channel).
3. **Understand the person beyond the player** – more understanding of the participants and their lives outside of the academy can influence experiences. This theme also applies to the participants knowing themselves beyond rugby. The more the player and academy know each other, the better the academy can be in terms of informing decisions around the programme and initiatives being implemented.

To summarise the chapters:

**Chapter One – Introduction.** Chapter One consists of three main sections. After a brief overview, the first section presents the key themes of the study from an interdisciplinary perspective involving sport psychology and sport sociology. The second section is a discussion regarding the rationale for the research and the research questions, and the third section concludes the chapter by outlining how the thesis is organised, and how each chapter aligns to the purpose of the research.

**Chapter Two – Literature review.** This review chapter was approached in an integrated manner – both sport psychology and sport sociology are mentioned in this chapter, in line with Māori and Pacific worldviews.

**Chapter Three – Methodology and methods.** An overview of the choice of methodology and methods is outlined and discussed in this chapter. The idea of creating values from common Māori and Pacific worldviews to guide the project is different to most research projects. Mixing methods in terms of using Pacific and eurocentric methods to collect and analyse data is also explained in this chapter.

**Chapter Four – Findings and discussion.** The main themes aligning to the task of answering the research questions are presented and discussed in this chapter.

**Chapter Five – Conclusion.** This chapter summarises the key points in the research project.

### Limitations and further study opportunities

As with most research projects, this one also has limitations. Although there are definitely similarities between Māori and Pacific cultures, they are not homogenous and there are rich differences between them. Therefore, further studies could concentrate on specific ethnic groups (based on data from ARU or NZR) or even segmented differently in terms of where they were born and grew up, i.e., Aotearoa-born or Pacific Island-born.

Another potential limitation is the time of year data was collected and the length of the study. I collected data at the beginning of the year as I was conscious of their rugby schedules, but I realised some participants had only started the academy programme late in the previous year so they may not have had many encounters within the programme, which may have skewed their responses. The participants are also at the beginning of the high-performance development pathway so further research could include people who have recently completed the academy programme, both those who went on to compete at a higher level and those who did not. This study could be applied across a longer period, instead of one season.

This research also focuses on the development stage of a high-performance pathway. Future research could include examining stages across the rugby 'pipeline'. This could be, for example, the transition from the high-performance environment to the next phase, life beyond sport – similar to Hokowhitu's development programme for youth (McDonald, Belanji, & Derham, 2012, November). It could also be at the start of the 'rugby pipeline' – the recruitment process into academies and development pathways, or secondary schools which feed into the academies.

Another research project could focus on whether what is outlined for the academy programme and players is aligned with what is implemented and practiced. This is because the skills players noted they would like to learn more of were the 'admin'-type skills and that is where most of the improvements were suggested. Whether these types of skills are emphasised and practiced (and needed) is another area for research.

More high-performance rugby environments could be researched instead of just one. Are there any similarities between the high-performing athletes in two (or more) different high-performing rugby environments, e.g., Auckland Blues and Canterbury Crusaders? What kind of environment encouraged better performances from accomplished athletes, and at what cost? Were they successful in achieving long-term goals, both for the organisation and athletes?

Overall, the various parties involved are competing for different reasons. Athletes are at the centre of competing forces. They are also competing against themselves and others for a living and a career. This can mean short-term gains at the expense of long-term growth and development. The differing goals of athletes and organisations, and how both athletes and organisations manage that dynamic, could be researched.

At the time of starting this project, there was no set women's development programme at ARU. With the growth of and investment in women's rugby and in women's sport

more widely, more research can be done on female experiences within a high-performance development programme.

In conclusion, the findings of this research will be beneficial to those who are in the athlete development space and are wanting to know more about what can be done to improve experiences.

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