

The Makings of a Meaningful Sporting Experience for Young Pasifika Girls in Junior Rugby

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Abstract

Involvement in Sport and Active Recreation (SAR) is known to offer a host of possible benefits to engaged participants over time. These participants may engage for a range of reasons, attaching different meanings to their involvement. Within Aotearoa New Zealand, SAR pursuits are endorsed as an integral part of the nation's culture and way of life, resulting in strong social encouragement and facilitation from an early age. Given the numerous physical, mental and social developmental outcomes associated with positive sporting participation, more scholars in sport have turned their attention to the methods and approaches which most effectively engage youth in quality SAR opportunities. Within the last decade, research has shifted from focussing on understanding motivations for participation to considering the underlying meaning attached to participation. Meaningful sporting experiences are likely to lead to sustained participation and positive holistic development, not only in sport but in life more generally. Literature on this topic has largely been drawn from youth and youth SAR facilitators in Western sporting contexts. Some studies have more recently been published drawing from indigenous youth coaches and youth SAR deliverers, however, there is a notable lack of the indigenous youth participant voice.

This study sought to explore the makings of a meaningful sporting experience for young Pasifika girls in rugby, and was grounded in a Pasifika paradigm, ethic and methodology, known as talanoa ([Vaiolleti, 2006](#)). Data was drawn from multiple talanoa (free-flowing sharing / story-telling sessions) with three groups of Pasifika girls who are actively engaged in secondary rugby. This data was then processed using reflexive thematic analysis ([Braun & Clarke, 2021a](#)). The talanoa were oriented by research sub-questions that explored the girls' own definitions of meaningful experiences, along with their current experiences of their rugby contexts, and their perceptions of empowering interactions in the sport. The subsequent findings provide an insightful perspective at both a conceptual and practical level drawn from the talanoa with indigenous youth SAR participants. Specifically, the findings of this study present a deeply integrated relational perspective by highlighting that relational connections (past, present and future) form the heart of meaningful sporting experiences for young Pasifika girls in rugby. The most significant connections that were highlighted by the girls were firstly, with family, secondly, with rugby community in the forms of friends (peers, old girl role models) and coaches, and finally, connecting more with oneself. Other key factors of meaningful experiences (such as fun and enjoyment, increased self-confidence and self-esteem, identity formation) may be considered by-products of the quality, tenor and strength of the relational connections developed through rugby participation. This study makes a conceptual contribution by amplifying Pasifika youth voices and presenting an insider Pasifika perspective to a Western-dominated body of literature. Overall, this knowledge serves decision-making adults with helpful insights to interact and engage Pasifika girls with greater understanding, which may have significant implications for Pasifika youth, families and the evolving state of SAR engagement and participation in Aotearoa.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	2
LIST OF FIGURES.....	5
LIST OF TABLES	5
ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP.....	6
ETHICAL APPROVAL.....	6
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	7
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTIONS	9
RESEARCH CONTEXT.....	9
RESEARCH INTENT AND QUESTIONS	12
RESEARCH AIM	12
METHODOLOGY	13
<i>Considering worldviews, paradigm, and analysis approach</i>	<i>13</i>
EXPLAINING THE INTERCHANGEABLE USE OF I'S AND WE'S	14
RESEARCHER BACKGROUND – INTRODUCING 'I'	14
CHAPTER SUMMARY	15
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	16
CONSIDERING FEMALE YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN SPORT AND RECREATION GLOBALLY	17
SOCIALISATION INTO YOUTH SPORT AND THE ROLE OF FAMILY	19
MOTIVATIONS FOR YOUNG GIRLS IN SAR	21
CONSIDERING MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES, POSITIVITY AND INSPIRATION FOR YOUTH IN SPORT	23
CONSIDERING SPORTING ROLE MODELS.....	24
WHAT IS MEANINGFUL?	25
<i>Social connection and relationships</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Enjoyment and fun.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Diverse challenge and progress.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Relevant learning and ownership.....</i>	<i>31</i>
PASIFIKA IN THE AOTEAROA SPORTING CONTEXT.....	32
<i>Pasifika youth experiences in sporting/physical recreation contexts.....</i>	<i>34</i>
CHAPTER 3: METHOD	39
PARADIGM AND PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH	39
POSITIONING	39
HONOURING DIFFERENT WAYS OF BEING	40
INTRODUCING TALANOA	41
GROUP CONNECTION THROUGH TALANOA.....	43
DATA GENERATION	44
PARTICIPANTS.....	45
REFLEXIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS	46
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	47
RESEARCH LIMITATIONS.....	48
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	50
UNPACKING “MEANINGFUL” IN THE GIRL’S OWN WORDS.....	51
RUGBY ENHANCES COMMONALITY AND RELATIONAL CONNECTIONS WITHIN BLOOD FAMILY.	52
<i>Originating with family interest and support.....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Enhanced connection with older influential family figures</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>A neutral supportive zone for families.....</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Playing for more than just themselves</i>	<i>57</i>
RUGBY CREATES RELATIONAL CONNECTIONS AND A NEW SISTERHOOD THROUGH SHARED EXPERIENCES.....	60
<i>Fun socialisation with new friends</i>	<i>60</i>

<i>“The dark place”; where you develop bonds and grow together through formative challenge.....</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Visible and accessible big sister peer role models are strong influencers</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Coaches who care.....</i>	<i>64</i>
RUGBY PROVIDES A UNIQUE SPACE FOR SELF-EXPRESSION AND SELF-DEVELOPMENT ALONGSIDE OTHERS	67
<i>The rugby environment as a cathartic outlet for self-expression.....</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Developing self-awareness and self-confidence.....</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>Normalising and accepting mistakes in the learning process</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Empowering interactions and their effect.....</i>	<i>73</i>
IN SUMMARY - LINKING “MEANINGFUL” AND RUGBY EXPERIENCES TOGETHER.....	75
CHAPTER 5.....	77
SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS	78
THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS	80
PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS	83
GAPS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES.....	85
CONCLUSION	87
REFERENCES	89
APPENDICES:	101

List of Figures

Figure 1. Venn diagram illustration of the overlapping components influencing female youth SAR participation, with meaningful experiences at the heart of the why. (p.37)

Figure 2. Conceptual image visually representing key potential factors that make up meaningful experiences for young Pasifika girls in rugby, which has shaped research design. (p.38)

Figure 3. Interrelated elements of a meaningful rugby experience for Pasifika girls. (p.83)

List of Tables

Table 1. Synthesis of key findings of larger studies into factors for meaningful youth SAR. (p.28)

Table 2. Pasifika contribution to synthesised key findings of larger studies into factors for meaningful youth SAR. (p.82)

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.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was gained from Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 7th September 2021, ethics application number: 21/266. Amendments for the same but adapted study (in light of Covid-19 fall-out) were approved on 2nd March 2022 (See Appendices A and B).

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Chapter 1: Introductions

Research Context

Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) is an island country located in the South Pacific Ocean, home to an increasingly diverse population of just over five million ([Stats NZ, 2021](#)). Over the past 150 years, people of Pacific ethnicity from neighboring island nations have immigrated and settled in Aotearoa for work, study and a higher quality of life ([Auckland Council, 2019](#); [Horton, 2012](#)). The seven largest Pacific people population groups in Aotearoa include those who identify as from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, and Tuvalu ([Marsters et al., 2020](#)). In 2018, Aotearoa's largest city Auckland recorded Pasifika as their third largest ethnic group, most of whom were born in Aotearoa and sat under the age of 24, situated in highly urbanised contexts ([Stats NZ, 2018](#)). According to Sorenson and Jenkins ([2017](#)) the Pacific population in Aotearoa is youthful and growing, “a dynamic and diverse community made up of over sixteen distinct ethnicities, languages and cultures” (p.6). Matika et al. ([2021](#)) explain the term ‘Pasifika’ as a “Pan-Pacific Island label encompassing those who are from Pacific Island nations” (p.396) but are distinct from one another through language, culture and geographical differences. New Zealand-born Pasifika, or those who migrated across from the islands at a young age, must quickly learn to straddle multiple worlds in their schooling, extracurricular, home and church contexts, which often clash due to cultural differences. Their experiences are particularly interesting as “multi-ethnic” or “intra-ethnic” individuals with mixed heritage, and are informed by a powerful and diverse range of inputs, including Pasifika, indigenous, Western and “global” sources ([Marsters et al., 2020](#)).

There are many unique nuances across the different Pasifika cultures dispersed and gathered outside of their home nations, and as McDonald et al. ([2019](#)) found in their study with Pacific Islanders in Australian rugby spaces, it is important to acknowledge “the varied and complex migratory pathways, experiences, and histories of participants and their broader communities” (p.1920). It is very easy to oversimplify and wrongly conflate the experiences of these distinct Pacific groups as identical with another, which can produce unhelpful stereotypes ([Marsters et al., 2020](#); [McDonald et al., 2019](#)). However, at the same time, many existing similarities may be drawn on “to build a body of Pacific thought” that may better guide interactions and engagement with Pasifika peoples ([Huffer & Qalo, 2004, p.88](#)). For example, there are connective tenets and values that are shared across Pasifika collectives including; family, spirituality, hospitality, respect, and service ([Gordon et al., 2013](#); [Sorensen & Jenkins, 2017](#)). These cultural values inform how communities engage with different social practices in Aotearoa, such as church or faith expressions, celebrations, and sport and recreation (SAR).

The professionalisation of sporting codes such as rugby union football, ingrained in the cultures of many colonised South Pacific nations, has led to the establishment of attractive advancement pathways for

Pasifika through sport ([Horton, 2012](#)). Sport has become more than purely a pleasure or entertainment pursuit but a means by which families and communities may gain greater financial wealth, pride, cohesion, well-being outcomes and educational/developmental opportunities ([Lakisa et al., 2019](#), [Uperesa & Mountjoy, 2014](#)). In this, sport has evolved to mean many different things to individuals and communities but remains closely tied to family and church (spirituality) in Pasifika contexts; Pasifika participants are often keenly aware of their role in representing the collective and giving glory to God in their chosen sporting activity ([Gordon et al., 2015](#)). However, cultural roles and responsibilities to the collective also play a key part in determining decision making around meaningful commitments and engagement, in addition to living by a different set of values or expectations to the more dominant New Zealand discourse ([Suaali'i-Sauni et al., 2009](#)). Considering this, there is a need to better understand how young Pasifika in Aotearoa perceive meaningful experiences, how they perceive their sport and recreation contexts and how their experiences are positively shaped (such as through empowering interactions), in order to sustain positive engagement.

Across Aotearoa, SAR pursuits are endorsed as an integral part of Kiwi (New Zealander) culture and way of life. This is demonstrated by high national participation levels according to recent Sport NZ (SNZ) surveys and substantially increased investment into sport at the grassroots levels, youth sport, and especially women and girls in sport ([Sport NZ, 2019a](#)). Youth in Aotearoa are encouraged to engage in a broad range of sport and recreation pursuits for their many physical, physiological, mental and social benefits ([Sport NZ, 2019a](#)). However, Aotearoa's latest 2019 national participation survey pre-Covid found that youth participation levels in organised SAR in schools and clubs (i.e., at the grassroots level) have been declining. Moreover, there is a particularly marked decrease in people from high deprivation areas ([Sport New Zealand, 2019a](#)) that are largely populated by Māori and Pasifika peoples ([Sorensen & Jenkins, 2017](#)). These groups located in higher deprivation areas are considered to be more vulnerable, and continue to encounter greater challenges and barriers to engagement in SAR, with females encountering increasingly more barriers than males over time from as young as the age of 11 ([Sport New Zealand, 2019a](#)). These barriers were identified as busyness, fatigue, motivation and lack of resources as well as lack of confidence and poor fitness. In response to this, a number of Aotearoa's major National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) have signed Statements of Intent to "change the way young people experience sport" through adapting delivery models, leagues, formats and game education foci such as enjoyment and effort over performance ([Kirkness, 2020](#)). It is imperative that sports scholars and managers understand the contexts and perspectives of the young people that they seek to serve in these times of change. In a report by the Ministry of Pacific Peoples ([2020](#)) in Aotearoa, a Tuvaluan high school leader Logoleilei spoke of how "Our voices are not being heard. The youth have a voice and critical things to say, but if no one is listening how will we ever secure our future? We are the voice of change because we are the future. Our voices must be heard." The findings of this research

will engage and elevate young female Pasifika rugby girls' voices to better understand their perceptions of their experiences and contexts, in a way that may insightfully engage key decisionmakers.

While some local studies have explored the generic barriers, enablers and competition to youth sports participation in Aotearoa (eg. Sport NZ's 'Active NZ Surveys' from 2017-2019) the focus appears to be largely quantitative, as reflected in the broad surveys and large sample sizes yielding generalisable results which quantify the population's changing behaviors. The top three barriers to young female participation in SAR were summarised in surveys as "being too busy, being too tired and being unmotivated" (Sport NZ, 2021; Sport NZ, 2019a). However, when further explored in smaller qualitative research studies, these were in fact revealed to be more closely related to environment and performance concerns (Sport NZ, 2021). Whilst helpful to a degree, these studies have not enabled the voices and experiences – the stories – of the more vulnerable (e.g., young Pasifika girls from lower socioeconomic, higher deprivation areas) to be heard, nor has there been discussion of the meaningfulness and relevance of existing SAR options according to the more vulnerable youth they are targeted towards. As such, there is a gap in the literature and a lack of insight around how sporting experiences are made meaningful for female Pasifika youth in Aotearoa.

The process of meaning making is shaped by many co-creators and collaborators, given weight and form by human experiences, culture and history (Kretchmar, 2006). Youth engagement in SAR around the world is influenced by a huge range of factors, which technology has both diversified and increased (Gould, 2019). Several larger global review studies conducted by Beni et al. (2017) and Willis et al. (2021) explicitly identify common characteristics or criteria of meaningful youth experiences in SAR across empirical research, painting a broad universal picture for consideration. However, both studies acknowledge that "the interplay between criteria is of crucial importance, as are the particular cultural and community values placed on physical activity in the contexts in which participants are situated" (Beni et al., 2017; p. 306). While these more global studies offer valuable insights into meaningful youth experiences more generically, the reality of the European Western predominance, in the study contexts, their methodologies and data analyses means that there may yet be important findings and knowledge to be found, particularly in non-Western, indigenous and collectivist contexts.

Recent community-based participatory research by Nesdoly et al. (2021) with indigenous First Nations peoples contributes related but distinct characteristics of meaningful physical activity and physical literacy, influenced largely by cultural values and narratives. In this, they emphasise the importance of understanding the culture and situation of indigenous youth in creating inclusive, meaningful means of physical engagement. Aligning with this kaupapa (key idea), we (Susana and supervisors) suggest that a study formed within a Pacific worldview and ontology, utilising a culturally familiar and relational Pacific methodology of talanoa with young female Pasifika participants, may serve to both contribute

findings with largely unengaged cultural minorities and also consolidate a valuable indigenous way (research methodology) of gathering knowledge. The value of this study therefore is multi-fold; in that there is value both locally and globally, for community and professional practitioners as well as researchers and educators. It is time for some of the diverse groups within the “young 13-18-year-old female” category to have their insights heard, shared and considered, through a culturally relevant qualitative exploration of their worlds and perspectives.

Of the different organised sport forms, rugby in its various formats (union, league, tag and touch) tends to have high participation and engagement of Pasifika peoples (Horton, 2012; Keung, 2019; New Zealand Rugby, 2020). The traditional format of rugby union has been experiencing its greatest growth in the women’s game, especially with junior girls (New Zealand Rugby, 2020). This comes following the elevated profiles of the Black Ferns 15s and 7s teams and establishment of contracts (i.e. financially supported pathways) for female players in the lead in to major pinnacle competitions (2016 Rio Olympics for 7s, 2021 RWC for 15s). The female rugby space boasts a high representation of Māori and Pasifika players and managers, with growth enabled as new financially supported pathways and development opportunities are becoming established and championed for female engagement (O’Connell, 2019; Richie, 2021). However, the experiences and perspectives of female Pasifika youth in rugby contexts remain largely unexplored. This knowledge is vital for successful engagement and the creation of healthy, sustainable environments and meaningful practices that encourage ongoing participation of young Pasifika peoples (especially girls) in rugby, and SAR more broadly.

Research Intent and Questions

The overall intent of this study is to ultimately provide an insightful perspective at both a conceptual and practical level that is drawn from participants’ contributions. This will benefit educators, coaches, parents, managers, leaders, volunteers, and communities seeking to engage their Pasifika girls in positive, meaningful sporting experiences. By creating an environment of sharing together in fun, play, storytelling and eating, with familiar cultural practices of welcome, prayer and blessing, we seek to establish a safe and homely context of belonging for teenage Pasifika research participants, who have been actively involved in their own Auckland rugby situations. We want to give these participants a space and voice to share their experiences together in ways that may inform future practice.

Research Aim

To explore the makings of a meaningful sporting experience for young Pasifika girls in rugby.

Sub-questions

- A. What makes for a meaningful rugby experience (to them)?
- B. How are engaged female Pasifika youth experiencing their current rugby contexts?
- C. What kinds of interactions are positively empowering?

Methodology

Considering worldviews, paradigm, and analysis approach

A Pacific worldview tends to be highly integrated, connecting multiple dimensions of physical (including cultural), spiritual and relational (including social) spaces to make sense of reality (Anae, 2010; Ofe-Grant, 2018). In this, people and context are inherently connected rather than separate or distinct, a concept embodied in the introductions of identity as connected to land and other people including ancestors (Ofe-Grant, 2018). This indigenous worldview shapes an interpretivist approach, which understands reality in different ways through social interactions and symbolism (Wood, 2006). Using culturally appropriate methodology for research with Pasifika, which honours traditional knowledge and upholds Pacific worldviews by centralising participants in design and amplifying their voices, is necessary to truly benefit communities of the Pacific (Marsters et al., 2020; Ofe-Grant, 2018). In this, it is vital to understand the context, environment and responsibilities of Pasifika research participants to support meaningful engagement together (Sport NZ, 2019b).

Accordingly, we connected with key knowledgeable Pasifika and Pākehā figures involved in the female girls' rugby space in Auckland (both formally and informally involved with grassroots and high performance development) in the early stages of this research formation, to develop and discuss the *kaupapa* (core concepts) in collaborative fashion. We chose to employ a cultural methodology of *talanoa*, grounded in a Pasifika paradigm (Vaiotei, 2013), to engage the target participant population of young female Pasifika rugby girls. This methodology befits the historic oral nature of Pacific cultures, acknowledging and celebrating the importance of relationships in building anything meaningful towards Pasifika engagement (Vaiotei, 2006). A *talanoa* method may be considered a kind of in-depth, unstructured dialogue according to a Western interpretivist paradigm. *Talanoa* as a methodology bridges core Pacific indigenous values and the more contemporary Pacific worldviews shared by many Kiwi (New Zealander) Pasifika youth growing up in Aotearoa (Marsters et al., 2020).

This study involved 23 participants, the majority of whom were 13 to 18-year-old Pasifika girls with a love of rugby, as well as two 35 to 45-year-old Pasifika *talanoa* facilitators who also contributed as research participants. The research touchpoints were conducted over two consecutive days during the girls' preseason rugby camp in April, integrating cultural practices of welcome, prayer and blessing, sharing food and fun play through ice breakers games around the 35 to 55 minute long formal research *talanoa* (three in total) in focus groups of seven. The *talanoa* were guided by a central topic and two opening questions, which the facilitator and girls then explored and discussed in depth using various visual/artistic aides along the way. These *talanoa* were digitally recorded and transcribed, with written / drawn pieces in these also retained as data for later reflexive thematic analysis.

Explaining the interchangeable use of I's and we's

As this research is grounded in a Pacific collectivist paradigm, the process or the knowledge is not considered to be owned by the student researcher, or supervisors, but is instead shared collectively among each participating contributor and collaborator. Whilst the responsibility for the completion of this project and written piece rested upon me as an individual, Susana Sotutu, I am highly cognisant that this could never have reached completion without the 'we' – that is, the 'we' of myself and my two dear supervisors, the 'we' of our AUT trio and industry partners also, the 'we' of the research facilitator sisterhood, and the 'we' of all research participants involved. It is important that they receive due acknowledgement throughout, for this is theirs also. There are moments in which differentiation is required, for example with the reflexive thematic data analysis, in which my own personal reflections and interpretations significantly shape the form of the findings. In this I assume the role of the final master weaver, with various checks and moments taken for consultation. For clarity's sake, I use 'we' in the first three chapters with reference to myself, my supervisors, and facilitators. To conduct meaningful research with Pasifika girls, experienced and well-connected local female industry practitioners were invited to join the research team, as both participants and facilitators. Without them, this research would be severely diminished and stunted in rich knowledge gathering and nurturing of the vā. Together, we may clarify and highlight perspectives of our Pasifika girls for the betterment of future programs, events, environments, and sporting experiences created for them.

Researcher background – Introducing 'I'

Kemuni na turaga kei na marama

Ko yau e dua na lewe ni yavusa ko Tavea

O yau ko Susana Sotutu, e dua vei ira na makobui Tui Tavea

This abbreviated Fijian *i vakatekivū* (introduction) speaks of my place and situation as the granddaughter of the [recently passed] chieftain of Tavea, and my membership in the head family of the yavusa of Tavea, the warrior tribe in the province of Bua, located in the northwest of Vanua Levu. I also hail from the rural plains of the Waikato, where my English Pākehā grandparents served their communities faithfully in education, healthcare, chaplaincy and pastoral care. Born in South Auckland, I am a child of the Pacific, a multi-ethnic mix of Fijian collectivism and Kiwi innovation, navigating the two worlds daily, as many young Pasifika in Aotearoa do.

I come from a line of sport lovers and gifted athletes who embedded in me a deep love for sport. We share a particular passion for rugby, despite it being a most “unladylike” and predominately masculine code in the Pacific. I have played, refereed, coached, spectated, and managed in rugby contexts starting at the age of seven, with the dream of representing my family and my nation on the world stage one day. Successive ACL ruptures and ongoing knee complications have halted these aspirations, and since

then my involvement with NZR and ARU has shifted from elite athlete performer to junior coach and program developer. Pain and loss, rehab and discipline, and community and commitment are major lessons from sport that have shaped my journey immensely to this day.

Mention must also be made of the strong line of learned matriarchs whose educational endeavours have paved the way for me to pursue higher learning. Several were the first females in their respective regions and families to graduate from universities, and they determinedly applied their knowledge and skillsets for the good of their chosen sectors. They were highly adaptable and resilient in adversity.

This is my contribution to their legacy. In Luke 12:48 of the Good Book, it is written that “to whom much is given much is expected”. I’ve been blessed in sport, in education, experiences, with connections and my rich mixed heritage. Now it is my turn to give back. I hope to amplify the voices of young women in a once-forbidden space of physical sport, and I humbly seek to offer a current snapshot into a dynamic reality of Pasifika girls in Aotearoa. This thesis aims to offer voice to a quiet group and to provide findings that may aid our educators, coaches, parents, managers, leaders, volunteers, and communities to form stronger connections and positive, meaningful engagement opportunities through the vehicle of sport and recreation.

Chapter Summary

This introduction establishes the grounds for this study by discussing the growing young Pasifika population in NZ and high levels of engagement in the sport of rugby, despite notable drop-offs in organised youth SAR more broadly. While female rugby is in an exciting growth period, there is a marked deficit in the corresponding understanding of how, why and what makes for meaningful experiences for junior females in this space. Unless their voices are given space and weight, our changing sport models and systems will continue to miss the mark as youth may tune out to engage with other outlets that meet their needs and wants for meaningful engagement. This research is not a comprehensive, all-encompassing or authoritative picture of the young Pasifika rugby girl’s perspective in NZ. Rather, it may serve as a springboard for further research and empowering interactions with our Pasifika peoples, to expand understanding and better serve our youth and communities in co-creating meaningful SAR experiences. As a young Kiwi Pasifika woman, who grew up navigating the complexities of different worlds and found a place of belonging and purpose in sport, I am passionate about enabling other young girls to also experience the joys of SAR, in its many different forms. From a young age, “giving back” in loving service to the community was ingrained as a beautiful and necessary part of our connected life, particularly as one develops the capability to do so. The following chapters outline the theoretical (Chapter 2 literature review) and practical (Chapters 3, 4 and 5) outworking of this.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to paint a picture of the current research landscape by exploring and discussing existing relevant sport and recreation literature, as it pertains to meaningful youth experiences in sport and active recreation (SAR). The literature review begins with the broad-brush strokes of discussing youth in SAR internationally, including involvement as active participants, spectators, and fans. The review focuses more on active engagement as a youth participant, albeit with some supporting discussion and expansion on SAR involvement as a consumer engaging with SAR in broader capacities. Following this, I discuss female youth participation in SAR, exploring the motivations and more specific influencers to their sustained engagement. Then at the heart of the review, I explore the concept of meaningfulness in youth SAR, and the different key factors identified across international studies to contribute to meaningful youth experiences in SAR throughout adolescence generically.

The synthesis of literature then shifts to consider the local Aotearoa sporting landscape, which Pasifika people play a strong role in shaping. In this, I highlight particular gaps in understanding around meaningfulness in Pasifika female youth experiences in grassroot sports, such as rugby union. There is a need for more studies “using indigenous cultural approaches, where concepts and theorising are developed from cultural insiders’ own meaning systems [that may build] towards a more culturally competent perspective sensitised to cultural diversity in the ‘why’ of sport participation across the globe” (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2018; p. 49). Accordingly, the present study seeks to add to the picture of an evolving, diverse youth sport research landscape.

Considering youth in sport and recreation

SAR have been shown to provide a multitude of physical, psychological, and social health benefits for participants, as well as positive promotion and education of useful skills transferrable to other areas of life (Gould, 2019; Merkel, 2013; O’Reilly et al., 2018; Wankel & Berger, 1990). While a positive experience is not guaranteed, SAR have been identified as unique vehicles with huge potential for profound micro and macro-level development (United Nations Office On Sport For Development And Peace, 2020). Considering one’s early experiences in SAR is especially important as according to youth sport psychologist Gould (2019), childhood experiences in different pursuits strongly influence the formation of perspectives and beliefs, which then inform experiences later in life. Early sport involvement and positive socialisation in sporting contexts have been noted as predictors for ongoing SAR participation for adolescents as they age (Eime et al., 2010). Aligning with this idea, there is a strong emphasis on facilitating positive experiences for children in SAR, as researchers and practitioners alike acknowledge the importance of positive youth experiences and engagement in order to achieve long term goals related to sustainable participation and healthy developmental outcomes

(Potwarka et al., 2020; Potwarka et al., 2016). Fundamentally youth SAR may be defined as “all forms of physical activity which, through organised or casual play, aim to express or improve physical fitness and mental well-being” (The Aspen Institute, 2016; p.3). However, the role that SAR may have in broader development has become more visible, as providing an “inherently meaningful and relevant setting in which youth can learn valuable lessons and skills... promoting the overall development of its youth participants” (Newman et al., 2018; p.281).

Youth sport engagement and consumption (including participation) is known to be influenced by many factors including geography, access to competition, resources, time, school or club capabilities, enjoyment, coaching, alternative options, social support, and social settings (Gould, 2019). Additionally, modern shifts in underlying social values and priorities have been found to influence how younger generations respond to engagement efforts from sport and recreation providers (Bradish et al, 2001; Craike et al, 2012). Sport engagement today is rapidly developing through the establishment of global online and digital platforms as well as in-person opportunities, which maximise on the increasing levels of independence, technological literacy and high social media use among youth (Gould, 2019; O'Reilly et al, 2012). Youth today have unprecedented access to SAR engagement, in one form or another. On the other hand, competition to sport engagement is shown to be heightened as youth have increased online and physical access to alternative behaviours (or experiences and activities) outside of sport that may satisfy their perceived needs (Bentzen et al., 2021; Craike et al, 2011). In our changing times, there has been a noted decline in adolescent participation in organised sport forms, particularly of girls, despite efforts to establish pathways, programmes, environments and technologies to enable and encourage female SAR participation (Craike et al, 2011; Dixon et al., 2021; Eime et al., 2013; Hanlon et al., 2019).

Considering female youth involvement in sport and recreation globally

The last decade has seen a rise in the number of studies conducted to identify factors influencing female youth participation in SAR, especially at key transitional life stages (Cairney et al., 2015; Craike et al., 2011; Eime et al., 2013; Eime et al., 2010; Hanlon et al., 2019; O'Reilly et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2019). This may, in part, be driven by the increasingly visible gender inequity gaps highlighted in the strata of the SAR sector (Lebel et al., 2021). The larger body of existing research appears to identify and develop understanding around the motivations, constraints and barriers to female participation and engagement in SAR. These are revealed to have nuanced differences across sexes, ages, socioeconomic status and geographic location (Cairney et al., 2015; Craike et al., 2011; Eime et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2004).

As females age and priorities change into adulthood, there is a notable shift from structured team sport in school and club contexts to unstructured individual physical activity pursuits (Craike et al., 2011;

Eime et al., 2013; Eime et al., 2010; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Thomas et al., 2019). This may be attributed to changing priorities, responsibilities and alternative options available that otherwise satisfy participant – or their family’s – needs, and better accommodate their changing lifestyles. For example, in Eime et al.’s (2010) study, 15 to 16-year-old female participants from rural Australian schools identified time pressures and the inflexible demanding nature of structured team sports as causal for their shift in SAR engagement. The following year, Craike et al. (2011) found in their cross section of metropolitan and rural Australian female youths aged 10 to 16-years-old, that if their basic human needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness were more easily met elsewhere in alternative leisure activities, female commitment to SAR decreased. According to Dixon et al. (2021), sport managers must engage with more entry points, of different forms, across the lifespan “particularly with entry points for adolescent girls, since they are the most subject to dropout in adolescent years” (p.296). As the needs, interests and values of girls develop, so too must the programmes and opportunities established to engage them.

Young female sport consumers and participants (eg. fans and players, involved to different degrees) appear to be more heavily influenced by parental figures and peers (social support) than their male counterparts, with a greater perception of a lack of opportunity or social responsibility from sport providers (Bradish et al., 2001; Craike et al., 2009; O’Reilly et al., 2018). In other words, it seems that female youth tend to engage more conscientiously in SAR, with a greater need for personal and interpersonal alignment in order to continue engaging. According to Craike et al.’s (2009) qualitative study with adolescent young women in Australia, their physical activity is largely influenced by social factors on both micro and macro levels, through close social circles and dominant social gender discourses. Their study highlights how the participant’s close community, and the messages reinforced by their wider community, hold strong sway in their decision making around SAR involvement. Mullenbach et al.’s (2020) quantitative findings of American female competitors in the male-dominated Kanza bike race support this idea that females appear to be more heavily influenced by social pressures to conform to gender norms and social responsibilities such as caring for family. Historically, sport and recreation pursuits in many cultures across the world were frequently considered to belong more exclusively in the male domain, ingraining hegemonic cultural rhetoric that, while certainly shifting, still continues to shape perceptions around SAR (Jeanes et al., 2021; Lebel et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2004).

Hanlon et al. (2019) found in their systematic review that female engagement is increasingly influenced by the accessibility, physical safety and amenity suitability of their physical sport and recreation environments. Jeanes et al. (2021) in their exploration of gender relations, gender equity and community sport spaces highlight the importance of spatially inclusive practices beyond merely “fitting women in” to existing sport systems, as they are perceptive to how they are received and supported in spaces. The social and relational dynamics presiding over sporting spaces play a key role in the experiences of

females. This builds on O'Reilly et al.'s (2018) conclusion following their multilevel analysis of the Canadian sport system, that structural and behavioural constraints must be addressed by multi-level actions where all stakeholders (the system, organisations, groups and individuals) need to engage in change to support a sport environment that is diverse, welcoming and fun for female participation. A 2020 Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) qualitative study found that “young women who are disengaged or moderately engaged are more likely to be influenced by environmental and social factors [such as enjoyment and support] when it comes to maintaining their activity levels” (Sport NZ, 2021; p.10). This research collectively underlines how, particularly in the transitional aging process, female sporting behaviour and ongoing participation are heavily influenced by sociocultural and socioecological factors that holistically shape their experiences.

Socialisation into youth sport and the role of family

Family and parents in particular have been noted throughout the literature to play a huge role in the socialisation and participation of children in SAR (Burke et al., 2021; Clarke et al., 2016; Côté, 1999; Dorsch, 2017; Knight, 2019, Knight et al., 2016, Knight et al., 2011; Sampol et al., 2019; Stein et al., 1999; Strandbu et al., 2020; Weiss & Hayashi, 1995). Family sport culture is suggested to have an enduring and relatively consistent influence on young people's sport participation, from childhood through adolescence (Dorsch, 2017; Strandbu et al., 2020). According to Knight et al. (2011), parents are primarily responsible for initiating children's engagement in sport, with a unique influence as role models and guides in understanding and interpreting their sporting experiences, considered “the linchpins” in youth sport (Knight & Newport, 2011, p.313). Dorsch (2017) refers to youth sport as a bi-product of parental involvement in sport, “especially salient in the earliest stages of youth sport” (p.106) as they offer leadership initially and then evolve to a follower / supporter role in latter adolescent years (Côté, 1999). Parents provide an important range of key supports that enable participation, including informational, practical (or tangible) and emotional support in the development of youth athletes (Burke et al., 2021; Clarke et al., 2016, Côté, 1999; Stein et al., 1999). In Knight et al.'s (2016) survey with American parents, many children were actually involved in the same sports as their parents (i.e. in sports that their parents had history playing or lived experiences in), which parents perceived to influence a greater quality of their own involvement and support. Those who had enjoyed positive past experiences were motivated to encourage and provide similar positive experiences for their children in sport, because of existing beliefs of the benefits and development that sport provides.

Strandbu et al. (2020) assert that, in order to truly understand the value of sport in families, “one must take into account reciprocal processes between youths' own participation in sports and the general role that sports play in the family” (p.939). This resonates with an ecological perspective where cultural values are passed on through family practices over time and embodied through tangible actions in response to one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cunningham et al., 2022). The idea of reciprocity

within families through sport involvement has been developed over the last three decades, where social interactions, preferences and ideologies have shaped both child and parent, and family more broadly (Clarke et al., 2016; Knight et al., 2016; Snyder & Purdy, 1982; Strandbu et al., 2020; Weiss & Hayashi, 1995). Sport participation has been perceived to have a profound impact on family cohesion, influencing the dynamics of family interaction with the power to draw members closer together or separate them (Clarke et al., 2016; Dorsch, 2017; Weiss & Hayashi, 1995). To truly understand the youth participant requires a more holistic perspective of the individual in the context of their entire family, with whom they are interconnected and interdependent (Dorsch, 2017). Family systems theory suggests that “individuals are best understood not in isolation or separate from one another, but as a part of a larger whole: the family system... Here family interests and issues can impact all aspects of sport performance and vice versa sport interests and issues can permeate the family” (Dorsch, 2017, p.108). This perspective of family socialisation resonates powerfully with individuals from collectivist cultural contexts such as Pasifika peoples, where identity or the self is not formed in isolation but is deeply anchored, shaped and oriented by sacred relational spaces or connections shared with family (Thorpe et al., 2020). As such, success may be seen as “the fruit of a collective effort”, achieved through the strong support of coaches, peers, family and community (Cunningham et al., 2022, p.128). Reciprocity and relationship are key values and important supports or enablers for Pasifika youth in their developmental journeys towards success (Cunningham et al., 2022).

Dorsch (2017) summarises the key dynamics or levels of key social interactions including the parent–child relationship (microsystem), the parent–coach relationship (mesosystem), the league or community sport mission (exosystem), and society’s imperative on youth sport participation (macrosystem) as all highly influential for a young athlete’s sport experience (p.109). Notably, activities that take place within the microsystem may “reinforce key messages and practices dependent on the family’s culture and value systems” (Cunningham et al., 2022, p.129). Sport may strongly inform identity for different families and cultural groups (Clarke et al., 2016; Marsters et al., 2020; McDonald et al., 2019), in which case, sharing in a sporting identity together enhances connection and commitment to one another (Clarke et al., 2016). It is worth highlighting that a variety of individual adults may be involved in the care of children including step-parents, grandparents, older siblings and other family members (Clarke et al., 2016). This is particularly relevant for Pasifika families where a village or communal approach to caring and raising children is often adopted (Boon-Nanai et al., 2022).

In studies with collectivist groups such as Pasifika in Aotearoa, Chinese and Jewish families, grandparents were expected to be step in as guardians and caretakers of children, particularly if they resided in the same home (Boon-Nanai et al., 2022; Duflos & Giraudeau, 2022). Elder relatives, as knowledge holders and sages, play a key role in Pasifika families in childminding to strengthen cultural knowledge and practices including language maintenance, heritage and traditions (Boon-Nanai et al.,

2022). Pasifika youth have expressed gaining a sense of connection and strong motivation to do their best from the stories of their parents and grandparents (Cunningham et al., 2022). In this time of co-residency or close proximity in shared caregiving, intergenerational solidarity and closeness may develop in families (Duflos & Giraudeau, 2022). Intergenerational solidarity is a concept of broader family cohesion comprised of a number of individual, familial and cultural determinants, which may find expression in any combination of six key elements including normative expectations or obligations, consent (agreement), affection (emotional attachment), structure, association (contact) and function (Roberts et al., 1991). Pink (2022) in her autoethnographic piece explains intergenerational solidarity in layman's terms as "how much the generations like each other, how much time they spend together, and how much help they offer one another" (p.80). This is an important consideration particularly for this study, given the shifting features of modern living for Pasifika families in Aotearoa. It would appear that the contemporary evolution of "dual-career families, and intergenerational and interethnic living, has impacted upon traditions and quality of life for Pacific peoples" (Boon-Nanai et al., 2022, p.1600), placing grandparents and other family figures (such as aunties, uncles, older siblings) in more intensive caregiving positions. The participants in this present study are likely to come from a range of family caregiving structures, navigating split homes, living with aunties or uncles, older siblings, co-residing with grandparents, with authority figures other than parents acting as caregivers and key supporters.

The community, team and broader family contexts that surround the athlete must also be considered as key contributors to the youth's sporting experiences and development, as the 'sport family' does not exist only at training and competitions, but carries over into other areas of life (Dorsch, 2017). While more scholars are noting the importance of a more holistic consideration of key familial figures and context, there is marked lack of diverse data on family make ups, their socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnicity, with the majority of parent-child in sport research evidently "dominated by Western, white, two-parent, moderate to high-earning families" (Knight, 2019, p.256). To counter this, Knight (2019) suggests that research is needed "on the demands that single parents encounter when attempting to support their children, attitudes and beliefs of parents from different cultures toward sport and their expectations for their children, and the parenting style associated with more positive outcomes in young athletes from different cultures" (p.256). This present study hopes to provide some insights into the distinct family structures of different Pasifika cultures, in considering how this affects youth in sport and their sporting experiences.

Motivations for young girls in SAR

Various national and regional sport providers worldwide have invested into ascertaining the key motivators of young females in sport and recreation participation. While there appears to be widespread understanding of the value of physical activity, this does not lead to the practical translation of knowledge and intentions in young girls to behavioural lifestyle changes (Sport New Zealand, 2021;

Victoria Health, 2015; Youth Sport Trust, 2017). Sport NZ, through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research, highlighted key motivations of fun / enjoyment, social connection, physical and emotional safety, physical fitness, confidence and convenience in their latest report with young females in sport in NZ (Sport New Zealand, 2021). Australian health researchers found several coinciding motivators for females under 18 in SAR; these include having fun with friends and improving body image or confidence, with additional motivators of improving their skills and family activity (parents involved in physical activity) (Victoria Health, 2015). Knight et al. (2011) noted that positive parental involvement was one of the main sources of enjoyment for girls in sport. UK based researchers with Youth Sport Trust found in their 2017 quantitative youth survey that fun, social connections, competition and self-confidence were key motivators for females between 11 and 16-years-old (YST, 2017). Ryder et al.'s (2019) quantitative survey of American new college entrants also highlights enjoyment and fun as key factors in motivating ongoing female participation, which diversification of engagement (i.e., involvement in various forms and roles in SAR) further encourages. Across these different studies with young girls, and with children more broadly, Côté's (1999) foundational motivations of enjoyment and play are strongly evident. These insights into the generic motivations of young females are very helpful for providing baseline indicators for what young girls want, although there remains scope to understand how and why these aspects of SAR serve to engage them.

While sport and exercise psychologists have amassed research around motivations for both adult and youth participation, there is a far smaller field of research into the underlying factors around what makes sporting or physical engagement *meaningful* to participants, particularly youth (Beni et al., 2017; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2018). Greater exploration into the meaningfulness of sport for individuals may offer insight into its potential to existentially improve quality of life beyond sporting constructs, informing motivations and perceptions of barriers and enablers (Kretchmar, 2006). This deeper exploration of meaningfulness below motivations potentially cultivates a more holistic development-through-sport perspective, allowing for "subjectivity, processes, values, and contexts – that is, human life – to be taken seriously" (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2018; p.45). Ronkainen and Nesti (2018) suggest in their exploration of meaning and spirituality in SAR, that a shift in focus from motivations to meanings would develop a richer understanding of *why* people may engage in sport, including considering deeper existential meaning in movement and cultural meanings that broaden understanding. This may also allow for a broader exploration of identity and how that ties in with one's ability and choice to engage in meaningful SAR activities.

Although two people may both be motivated by winning, they may attribute very different meanings to winning. Winning may mean many different things to individuals, for example, personal achievement (I'm the best), the reward of one's own hard work (I can achieve great things), honouring one's family or supporters (this is for them/us) or positive representation of one's personal or collective values

(behold world, this is us), or any combination of these. To some, winning may hold little meaning if there is no enjoyment, or element of competition, in the game. In a similar vein, the most commonly highlighted motivator for youth SAR involvement, fun / enjoyment, may mean different things – “this is fun because... I belong, people care about me, I’m capable, I’m learning, I feel connected, I feel good about myself”. Meanings derived from experiences then may inform youth perceptions and motivations for ongoing involvement (Gould, 2019). Thus, when grounded in a perspective of meaningfulness, we may be able to better see how sport forms have served and may continue to serve as vehicles for human growth and change, through associated meaningful experiences (Ronakainen & Nesti, 2018).

Considering meaningful experiences, positivity and inspiration for youth in sport

Scholars emphasise the importance of meaningful youth sporting experiences for positive engagement, growth and learning (Beni et al., 2017; Verkooijen et al., 2017; Willis et al., 2021). As youth are in dynamic developmental stages, sport managers and marketers may benefit more from exploring the meaning attributed to sports by youth, and their sociocultural contexts rather than employing an external psychological perspective (drawing conclusions based off outside cognitive assessments) to understand youth sport consumers (Craike et al., 2009; Light et al., 2013). This kind of understanding may be best explored through qualitative research, connecting with youth and giving them space and opportunity to share their perspectives, which may ultimately shed greater light into the whys and hows of their perception of their sporting experiences. The construction of these experiences, where the meaning of the sporting activity is established, is therefore critical in aiding or derailing managers’ efforts in facilitating meaningful engagement and participative opportunities.

Merkel (2013) discusses three fundamentals underpinning positive youth sport including fun, focus and fuelling the basics (participant-driven and focussed, with effort rewarded rather than outcomes). In this, positive experience and ongoing development are of greater importance than results, or talent identification and acceleration towards a representative status in an organised competitive sport form. According to Potwarka et al. (2020) the design of physical sporting experiences for youth ought to be “vicarious, immersive and inspiring” as engaging in a novel sport event “can increase youth participants’ motivation as well as spectators’ intention to participate in the sport offered and on display” (page 200). This demonstration effect that Potwarka et al. (2020) and Teare et al. (2021) explore, whereby inspirational events act as catalytic turning points for changed behaviour, has been discussed for decades. There is little empirical evidence to consolidate a clear causal relationship between engaging with an event or experience as the key trigger for measurable behavioural change or positive wellbeing impacts in youth, although several recent studies have identified positive shifts in youth spectator intentions (predictors) towards participation post-event exposure (Bakhsh et al., 2019; Cleland et al., 2020; Potwarka et al., 2020; Teare et al., 2021).

Establishing a relational and psychological connection seem to be key to determining one's level of continued engagement (Funk & James, 2006; Tsioutsou, 2013). A meaningful connection or sense of loyalty develops when self-expressive value, trust and attachment develop in relation to a sporting team or experience (Funk & James, 2006; Tsioutsou, 2013). It would appear that the early exposure and subsequent quality of offered youth programmes and support (beyond one off events) may have a more profound influence on shaping youth experiences and ongoing behavioural engagement in sport (Bean & Forneris, 2019; Teare et al., 2021). This would suggest that the development of meaningfulness and engagement requires ongoing connections to be made for sustained youth SAR participation. Smith's (2005) practical discussion of positive junior sport development highlights that "youth sport programmes should encourage the involvement of parents, peers, coaches and teachers, focus on providing positive information rather than control over participants, involve a minimum of rules and complex structures, promote social interaction among participants, reinforce participant autonomy and be undertaken in a pleasant environment" (p.56). In this he presents a case for the need for social supports and interactions, modified options with customisation capacity and environment establishment, as major factors that have a large influence on positive participation of Australian youth in SAR (Smith, 2005).

Considering sporting role models

Another major influencing factor on participatory experiences may be exposure and engagement with role models, who can serve as positive sources of social influence towards new or renewed goals through enhanced motivation and inspiration (Morgenroth et al., 2015). Industry practitioners and scholars acknowledge that positive sporting role models may have an important impact on youth physical activity and engagement with sport (Lyle, 2013; Ronkainen et al., 2019). This general belief that sporting role models inspire younger generations has led to the creation and facilitation of numerous sport development programmes that specifically seek to connect successful sporting athletes as role models with youth (Armour & Duncombe, 2012). These role models may stimulate the development of identity (inspiration, motivation, persistence and adaptability in daily life and chosen pathways (Ronkainen et al., 2019). However, the relatability of role models and the perceived accessibility of their achievements, influence the impact upon youth causing either inspiration or self-deflation (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Sport England, 2016). Older siblings as highly accessible and proximal to child athletes, are seen to "often act as a role model for work ethic for young child-athletes" (Côté, 1999, p.407). Their involvement and example may encourage sibling co-operation in the family environment that may enhance skill development and a strong sense of relational and sporting connection (Côté, 1999).

The low visibility, or the very absence, of visible female sporting role models historically has been explored in international studies, strategies and reports considering the development and empowerment

of females in sport and recreation (Meier, 2015; Sport England, 2016). The ‘availability’ hypothesis of sporting role models has become more accepted, which posits that female youths tend to choose male sporting role models due to a lack of available and relevant female sporting role models (Ronkainen et al., 2019). One may find distinct foci held by male and female youth “aspirants” in their consideration and selection of sporting heroes for themselves. Young males often focus on the sporting prowess, performance, skill set and accolades of their sporting role models. However, females are more likely to be drawn to sporting role models who demonstrate empathy and partly reflect their situations in their own sports (Meier, 2015; Ronkainen et al., 2019). This suggests that for females, having a sense of connection to sporting role models through overlapping aspects of their narratives is of greater importance than a purely objective performance review of an individual. Where young males are often inspired primarily by the delivered performance (the what), young females may be more inspired by the holistic story of the individual (who and how) which has brought them to their current place of performance (Ronkainen et al., 2019). That is not to say that boys don’t appreciate the story of individuals, or that girls don’t enjoy and highly value the performance abilities of sporting figures. However, the relevance and genuine resonance with narratives of sporting role models seem to be especially important factors for inspiring and creating meaning for girls (Lyle, 2013). This is noteworthy for coaches, managers, administrators and scholars who seek to engage their girls in meaningful sport and active recreation experiences, and seek to draw upon past or existing examples of success as sources of inspiration.

What is meaningful?

Attaching meaning to an experience is understood to be highly subjective to each individual, with broad variation around what youth perceive and interpret to be meaningful as over time meaningful activities are fluidly renegotiated (Beni et al., 2017; Bentzen et al., 2021). A social constructivist perspective explains these as personal to each person, where interpretations of personal meaning are constructed and understood by the individual whose interpretative processes are simultaneously influenced by affective and sociocultural dimensions (Light et al., 2013). This is strongly evident in Mikalsen and Lagestad’s (2020a, 2020b) smaller qualitative studies with 13-year-old girls, in which they found that positive interplay with their sporting environment (persons included) can facilitate self-fulfilling, joyful, and competent interactions that may promote a physically active life. As young females are especially sensitive to these affective and sociocultural dimensions (Bradish, 2001; Craike et al., 2009; Hanlon et al., 2018; Mullenbach et al., 2020), sport managers would benefit from developing their understanding of the wider and overall nuanced contexts of young girls, in which they make meaning of their experiences (Mikalsen & Lagestad, 2020b).

Kretchmar’s (2006) research on meaningful physical education has been utilised as a springboard in recent studies of meaningful youth engagement in sport and physical activity. In this he suggests that

meaningfulness is co-created and shared by collaborators, grounded in the full range of the human experience, history and culture (Kretchmar, 2006). As such, one size does not fit all, due to the interplay of various factors in overall meaningfulness that shifts according to life stages (Beni et al., 2017; Bentzen et al., 2021; Fraser Thomas & C  te, 2009 Middleton et al., 2021). For example, sex/gender, family and cultural background as well as cultural context are noted to influence meaningful engagement in physical activity and sport (Beni et al., 2017; Crisp, 2021; Martins et al., 2021; Nesdoly et al., 2021; Smith, 2005; Willis et al., 2017). These in combination with a range of person-based elements, other environment-focused elements as well as activity-related elements, highlight how meaningful experiences may be achieved in many different ways for each person (Beni et al., 2017; Willis et al., 2017). While human experiences are highly individualised, complex and subjective, sport researchers and sport delivery practitioners have in recent years begun to map common connecting factors across meaningful youth experiences in SAR (Beni et al., 2017; Martins et al., 2021; Nesdoly et al., 2021; Willis et al., 2017; also see Appendix D). This relatively young area of empirical study could add important insights to the existing literature and practice, as the more we understand of meaningful youth sport experiences, the better the development of our programmes, spaces and places to engage and sustain youth participation in quality SAR opportunities.

A meta-literature review by Beni et al. (2017) of meaningful experiences in physical education and youth sport illuminated key connections across individual experiences, by “identifying elements of participation that promoted meaningful experiences in ways transcending the social and cultural differences inherent in various physical education and youth sport contexts” (p.292). They formed a framework of five key criteria for meaningful experiences including; social interactions, fun, challenge, motor competence development and personally relevant learning. Significant crossover and further elaboration of these meaningful components is corroborated by Willis et al.’s (2017) expansive study exploring meaningful SAR participation with youth with disabilities, in which ten key factors were identified (Appendix C). These included having fun, authentic friendships, experiencing success, belonging, experiencing freedom, developing an identity, the opportunity to participate, role models, family support and learning (Willis et al., 2017). These findings also aligned with past research defining meaningful experiences in leisure through an interconnected framework of the four F’s; friendship, fun, freedom and fulfilment (Powrie et al., 2015).

While these reviews sought to transcend social and cultural differences, it must be acknowledged that the cultural context is, to varying degrees, highly influential and sometimes crucial in creating meaningful experiences for youth in SAR. As Kretchmar (2000) and Ronkainen and Nesdoly (2018) agree, although meaning is unique to each sport participant “it is always bound to a cultural horizon of understandings and practices, and will, therefore, look different in different socio-historic contexts” (p.48). A recent qualitative study by Nesdoly et al. (2021) conducted with Indigenous First Nation

Canadian sport managers and coaches found that the vital components of meaningful youth physical activity and literacy programmes consisted of wisdom sharing, being mindful in teachings, youth-centered approaches, understanding physical activity's role in culture and spirituality, and relational support. In this, a distinct emphasis was placed on reinforcing the identity and heritage of individuals and the relevance of physical activity not only to their individual lives, but also their collective way of being (Nesdoly et al., 2021). Such is the power of culture in certain collectivist or tribalistic contexts, where the individual experience is connected to and grounded in a collective story. Considering cultural values as an important influencer in shaping meaningful engagement with youth from collectivist contexts is also reinforced by a Belize study by Wright et al. (2016), in which themes of connection, identity, visible progress and relevance are evident. In these instances, sport programmes may perceptively and purposefully 'engender a meaningful integration of culturally dissimilar youths' (Middleton et al., 2021, p.8), where a sense of connectedness, acceptance in integration (belonging) and safety are vital in establishing a positive meaningful sporting experience for youth (Middleton et al., 2021). Cultural competency and a growth mindset is essential in positive and meaningful engagement for indigenous and collectivist peoples in SAR spaces (Hippolite & Bruce, 2013). By better understanding the cultural narratives and practices within which personal meaning is created or discovered, we may better understand why people engage in sport (Ronkainen & Nesdoly, 2018). This study accordingly seeks to engage Pasifika participants in cultural narratives and relevant practices to explore meaningfulness in their rugby sporting contexts.

Across recent studies in establishing meaningful experiences in youth SAR contexts, there is a strong consistency in five themes of; social connections and relationships, enjoyment, progressing, with diverse challenges, and relevant learnings (Beni et al., 2017; Bentzen et al., 2021; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Martins et al., 2021; Middleton et al., 2021; Nesdoly et al., 2021; Verkooijen et al., 2017; Willis et al., 2017), as pictured in the summarised synthesis of Table 1 below. No single theme or element has been highlighted as the "King" trump, rather they may fuse to varying degrees in unique interplay to create meaningful experiences. The complex, interrelated nature of these elements highlights how creating meaningful experiences is not necessarily a formulaic equation but fluid and dynamic according to the youth, their life stage and the contexts within which they mature (Beni et al., 2017; Bentzen et al., 2021; Mikalsen & Ligestad, 2020a; Willis et al., 2017). While these contributors have risen to the fore as important across cultures, nations, and youth life stages, it is worth noting that contextual or situational factors will significantly influence the *expression* of the contributors to meaningful youth experiences in sport (Crisp, 2021; Nesdoly et al., 2021; Beni et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2016). As such, stakeholders involved in facilitating positive sporting and recreation experiences may benefit greatly from carefully consideration and planning the expedition of these contributors for maximal effect in their own distinct contexts with their youth.

Table 1. Synthesis of key findings of larger studies into factors for meaningful youth SAR.

Beni et al., 2017 (global review, predominantly North American)	Willis et al., 2017 (global review, predominantly North American)	Powrie et al., 2015 (predominantly North American review)	Nesdoly et al., 2021 (Indigenous Canadian study)	Wright et al., 2016 (Indigenous Belize study)	Common threads
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social interaction • Fun • Challenge • Motor competency • Relevant learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having fun • Authentic friendships • Experiencing success • Belonging • Experiencing freedom • Developing an identity • Opportunity to participate • Role models • Family support • Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun • Freedom • Fulfilment • Friendship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wisdom sharing • Mindful/adaptive teaching • Youth-centered • The role of physical activity in culture and spirituality as part of their way of life • Relational support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection • Identity • Visible progress • Relevancy to life beyond the program/ sport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social connections and relationships • Enjoyment and fun • Diverse challenge with progress • Relevance and ownership

Social connection and relationships

Across the literature, social interactions, interpersonal relationships and relational connections were identified as essential components in establishing meaningful experiences for youth in sporting and physical recreation spaces (Beni et al., 2017; English, 2018; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Nesdoly et al., 2021, Wright et al., 2016). Meaningfulness may be facilitated in many different ways by influential figures such as coaches, managers and parents, as well as informal influencers like peers (Beni et al., 2017; Clarke et al., 2016; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Nesdoly et al., 2021; Verkooijen et al., 2017). Human interactions and relationships with youth established in compassion, empathy and patience were noted to lead to meaningful social connections that may develop youth beyond the sport field (Crisp, 2021; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). The investment and support of the family must not be underestimated in enabling and empowering youth to engage in positive sporting experiences throughout their adolescence and teenage years (Clarke et al., 2016; Knight et al., 2011; Martins et al., 2021; Nesdoly et al., 2021; Willis et al., 2017).

Sport in its many forms offers a powerful mode of connection for otherwise dissimilar, disconnected individuals (Middleton et al., 2021). Through the creation of engaging activities and supportive environments, authentic friendships, belonging and connections may be formed with other individuals as well as groups in the forms of teams, families and wider communities (Beni et al., 2017; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Middleton et al., 2021; Nesdoly et al., 2021; Verkooijen et al., 2017). Indeed

friendship was widely identified as a vital aspect of meaningful youth experiences (Beni et al., 2017; English, 2018; Martins et al., 2021; Willis et al., 2017), especially for more vulnerable youth navigating adversities in the form of unstable home life, forced immigration and disabilities (Crisp, 2021; Middleton et al., 2021; Willis et al., 2017). Friendships in an inclusive, safe and mastery-oriented environment enable fun, enjoyment, belonging and a form of positive peer pressure to try out new challenges (Martins et al., 2021; Middleton et al., 2021; Willis et al., 2017). These studies' findings align in presenting a strong case for the necessary role of supportive relationships, connections and environments in creating positive meaningful experiences and outcomes for youth in sport and physical activity. The expression and extent to which relationships influence the meaningfulness of experiences for youth of collectivist cultures (eg. Pasifika) remains an avenue worthy of exploration. This study may offer some insights from individuals drawn from strongly collective and community-oriented cultural contexts, where personal autonomy, connections and relationship building may be more determined by others.

Enjoyment and fun

Youth engagement in sport is often synonymous with fun and enjoyment. According to Verkooijen et al. (2018), "having fun was one of the most cited reasons to join a sports club, as well as having fun in getting better in your sports discipline" (p.201), also noted as the number one reason for drop off when absent in youth SAR contexts (Vissek et al. 2015). Beni et al.'s (2017) findings concur, also citing that "while fun appears to be necessary in a meaningful experience, it does not necessarily reflect an unstructured or undisciplined approach by the teacher or coach" (p.300). An environment where learning and mastery is encouraged serves to enhance enjoyment of youth, connected to challenge and growth (Beni et al., 2017; English, 2018; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Martins et al. 2021; Willis et al., 2017).

Fun opportunities to engage in a range of stimulating, challenging and enjoyable activities where youth can try, fail and learn with friends contribute to meaningful experiences (Beni et al., 2017; Martins et al., 2021). Engaging in a range of fun sport forms, such as unstructured play as well as structured youth sport and recreation, also serves to bring together youth and communities in meaningful ways (Bowers & Green, 2013; Martins et al., 2021; Ryder et al., 2021). The use of humour and fun has a significantly higher impact in creating positively engaging physically active environments for youth (Beni et al., 2017; Nesdoly et al., 2021). A quantitative study by Ryder et al. (2021) with 254 female college athletes in the United States exploring their youth sport experiences revealed that enjoyment did not only influence participation but also discontinuation with sport, such was the impact of enjoyment and having fun in determining their experiences. Collectively these studies demonstrate that genuine enjoyment and having fun contributes substantially to making sporting experiences meaningful and

worthwhile for youth. In saying this, fun itself is a very subjective and elusive concept that may be expressed in different ways, which Visek et al. (2015) captured through a mixed methods concept mapping procedure identifying 81 fun-determinants. In this American study with young participants, parents and coaches in football, a divergence of opinions was apparent across the three groups, highlighting that what children value and deem as ‘fun’ may not actually be what their influencing adult figures perceive to be fun for their kids. Drawing upon this with local application, Putt (2021) conducted a mixed methods Aotearoa study with teenage boys in rugby union, finding that fun according to them consisted of four core elements including physical contact, ball play, brotherhood and game highlights. This present study with young teenage girls in rugby may offer flipside insights to this, in exploring meaningful experiences through fun engagement together.

Diverse challenge and progress

As meaningfulness is renegotiated throughout an individual’s adolescence, there is increased need for diversity of activity, challenge and opportunity (Beni et al., 2017; Bentzen et al., 2021; Fraser Thomas & Côté, 2009; Middleton et al., 2021). Youth today enjoy a plethora of alternate leisure activities to engage in, which may provide meaningful outlets outside of sport (Bentzen et al., 2021). As such, there needs to be diversified kinds of challenges that can cater appropriately to different individuals in the forms of non-competitive, competitive, unstructured, structured, unusual, adaptive and traditional activities (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Martins et al., 2021; Middleton et al., 2021). This ensures that youth are able to access and engage with SAR in accordance with their interest levels, capability and competency (Dixon et al., 2021).

Middleton et al. (2021) assert that through e-sport, ethno-centric, informal, and formal sport opportunities, youth can develop and maintain meaningful connections. This is supported by Bowers and Green’s (2013) conclusion that participating across multiple sport settings can culminate in shaping a more holistic and integrated meaningful experience participating in sport. According to Ryder et al. (2021), a diversification of youth participation in sport creates engaged youth who are “more likely to continue participating, meet age appropriate aerobic and resistance physical activity guidelines, and enjoy physical activity—at higher levels than those who specialised” (p.133). These findings suggest that diversity in activities, sport and forms of active recreation is more engaging for youth. Another form of diversification of sport is through challenge.

Beni et al. (2017) found that an emphasis on the challenges that are “inherent in the process of competing rather than on the outcome, that is, winning and losing” (p.302) contributed to a meaningful engagement for youths. Verkooijen et al.’s (2017) study with socially vulnerable Dutch youth in sport clubs also found that “an increased understanding of the game and the strategies to improve performance

was a source of forming positive experiences, not necessarily related just to competition and winning, but also to mastery and improved (sports) skills” (p.202). In this, progressing through challenge appears to be an empowering exercise of growth. Through challenge, risk and developing motor competence in being able to execute skills and understand game strategies, youth may develop self-confidence and greater investment towards committed ongoing participation (Beni et al., 2017; Verkooijen et al., 2017; Willis et al., 2017).

Verkooijen et al. (2017) identified three key interconnected themes linking the positivity of experiences with the extent of their visible skill progression, confidence and enjoyment in challenge, according to youth participants. The idea that visible progress is positive and enhances meaningfulness for youth was also noted by Wright et al. (2016) and Willis et al. (2017) who in their studies explain how skill exposure and acquisition gained from engaging in and overcoming challenges enabled important self-discovery and increased social awareness. As youth engage with adaptations and modifications to rules and equipment that may facilitate these learning experiences, youth are enabled to both learn and have fun at the same time (Willis et al., 2017). Through diverse challenges and visible progress, encouraged and affirmed by coaches, facilitators, parents and peers, youth may enjoy richer meaningful experiences where growth and learning in the sport space may be reapplied elsewhere in life. This present study may expound on the different kinds of challenge that young Pasifika girls in particular appreciate and prefer in SAR engagement at the 13-14 year old transitional life stage.

Relevant learning and ownership

Relevance of skills and sport learnings to other areas of life was identified as a major theme across this area of study as a contributor to meaningful sporting experiences for youth. Verkooijen et al. (2017) and Beni et al. (2017) note that when youth can identify the importance of what they are learning in their sporting settings in connection to other areas of life, their experience and engagement is enhanced. As such, these contexts of sport, physical activity and active recreation are not only places of sport-specific learning, but places where youth can participate in meaningful activities with support, development and an appreciation of a wider transferability in life (Verkooijen et al., 2017).

This connection or relevance between current sport experiences and the wider world transforms a superficially fun experience into one of greater depth of meaningfulness and growth. For example, the crossover influence of engaging in different sport and activities that serve to enhance one another was seen to play a key role in shaping the overall perception of the value and meaning of sport participation for youth in Bowers and Green’s (2013) qualitative study. Youth will choose to engage in activities that satisfy their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, evaluating their activities accordingly (Bentzen et al., 2021). The relevancy and applicability of sport learnings (i.e. life skills) to other areas of life appear to become increasingly important to youth as they age and engage

with more ‘real world’ and adult considerations such as work, careers, social networks and community (Bentzen et al., 2021; Crisp et al., 2021; Nesdoly et al., 2021).

There is building evidence to suggest that youth-centered approaches, where the individual’s distinct preferences and needs are mindfully considered, enable greater relevance and connections to be made, thus enhancing youth experiences (Nesdoly et al., 2021). Understanding youth’s broader background contexts and adapting interactions and activities accordingly has been shown to enable more meaningful connections, leading to more meaningful learnings beyond purely sport strategy and skill (Crisp, 2021; Nesdoly et al., 2021). Being given the opportunity to participate and shape their own sporting experiences enables greater levels of meaningfulness to be invested into these experiences (Martins et al., 2021). Free self-expression and having space to voice their own wants and needs in sporting contexts enables a sense of ownership to develop within youth (Martins et al., 2021; Willis et al., 2017). This sense of ownership is also gained by providing youth with choices to select and collaboratively create their own sporting activities or environments through willing self-investment (Beni et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2016). It is evident in these studies that relevant learning with high transferability and opportunities for ownership contributes to more personally meaningful experiences for youth in SAR contexts. Relevance and transferability, as well as ownership, may look different contextually and from group to group. As such, this study may provide insights into the expressions of these for young Pasifika women actively involved in rugby in NZ.

A number of further avenues of future research were identified including; longitudinal studies journeying with youth as they experience the renegotiation of meaning in sport over time, exploring the different expressions or forms that key contributors may or should take to best cater to certain age groups and genders, the differences in meaning making processes for youth in organised sport versus physical activity versus unstructured play, in both solo or team capacities, and how different [indigenous] cultures influence the interpretation and creation of meaningful youth sport experiences. This study seeks to offer a contribution to the latter point, in using an indigenous methodology with a diverse group of young Pasifika girls, to gain insights into their meaningful sport experiences.

Pasifika in the Aotearoa sporting context

Pasifika peoples play a large part in the ongoing survival and success of many SAR forms in NZ, especially rugby formats (Lakisa et al., 2019). Rugby as a sport has been identified in Pacific scholarship as a “site for sociocultural expression” (McDonald et al., 2019, p. 263), holding a unique place in the identity of many Pacific peoples (Grainger, 2009; McDonald et al., 2019; Uperesa & Mountjoy, 2014). According to McDonald et al. (2019) “rugby has been constructed both by dominant culture and Pacific Island culture as a legitimate and ‘natural’ space where Pacific Island boys and men can exist” (p.1927). Kanemasu and Molnar (2017) agree with this, explaining that rugby provides an intensely physical and

combative modern alternative within a collective team sporting context. Through this, rugby may “embody the essence of indigenous cultural ethos through its embeddedness in the precolonial martial and masculinist traditions, the chiefly system and Christianity” (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017, p.434). In other words, rugby as a sporting code appears to have evolved from its colonial roots, assimilating into Pasifika culture and evolving to reflect and reinforce key ethea (multiple ethos) and traditions in its expression.

According to scholars Horton and Lakisa, “Pacific Islanders have become the most prodigious and prevalent ethnic group of rugby sports migrants globally”, with thousands of players competing overseas in top competitions and sending money back to their families and villages in the Islands (Horton, 2012; Lakisa et al., 2019). There is now greater opportunity for income and social mobilisation (provision of a better life) through sporting success (Uperesa & Mountjoy, 2014). However, for the general Pasifika population in NZ more broadly, lower levels of physical participation in SAR in combination with dire health statistics has sparked great concern (Sorenson & Jensen, 2017). This is in spite of the increasing access and visibility of Pasifika in sport and recreation at the highest levels of sport, broadcasted playing, commentating and coaching at the top levels of their sport, including in rugby union, rugby league, rugby 7s, netball, swimming and shot put.

A recent Samoan Participant Profile developed by Sport NZ (2019) sought to clarify the constraints, motivations and needs of NZ’s largest and fastest growing Pacific group by undertaking qualitative research with small sample sizes. This research was premised on the Samoan *fonofale* model of wellbeing, which acknowledges the significance of family (present and historic) as foundation, and cultural values and belief as the roof, held up by spiritual, physical, mental and other pou. This yielded a considerable number of insights into the nuances of factors influencing participation including accessibility challenges, cultural roles and beliefs around family responsibilities and spirituality and church. This builds upon Gordon et al.’s (2013) qualitative study employing Pasifika talanoa methodology to explore the role that sport plays within NZ Pasifika communities. Here Gordon et al. (2013) found that for many participants, while sport itself was conceptualised in many ways, “spirituality, family and friends, the developing of life skills, fitness and health, and the release of aggression were all seen as important outcomes from participation in sport” (p.49). In this, sport participation appears to have many connective functions that serve both individual and collective purposes.

In a high performance context, motivations in the forms of faith, family and culture-based attachments have been identified as key drivers for Pasifika NRL players, although these are reportedly often misunderstood by non-Pasifika coaches and management who are unfamiliar with important cultural values and practices (Lakisa et al., 2019). The collective is vital in this. Faleolo’s (2020) preface to her

discussion of Pasifika diaspora connectivity and continuity with their Pacific homelands reinforces the role of the collective, “Pasifika notions of wellbeing can be better understood when seen from a point of solidarity; as the collective aspect of a Pasifika worldview anchors Pasifika wellbeing behaviours” (p.67). Family may be a tremendous source of social and emotional support for young athletes, particularly in shaping their development of “athletic identity, life skills, self-esteem, and coping mechanisms” (Marsters et al., 2020, p.61). As such, it is vital that parents and family affirm their children, without making their love contingent upon sporting success or performance (Dorsch, 2017; Marsters et al., 2020). Furthermore, Marsters et al. (2020) found that young Pasifika men’s wellbeing and drive were more broadly influenced by key sociocultural factors of “a balanced athletic identity, the cultivation of support networks with other Pacific athletes, love and support from family, meeting family and cultural obligations, and being able to access support from teammates, team staff, and the church community in times of distress” (p.62). Family, cultural knowledge, practices and values, language, church and community were identified by Pasifika youth in the Ngā Tau Tuangahuru (2019) survey study as key conduits for a sense of cultural connectedness. Cultural connectedness in and of itself was identified as highly important to the youth, foundational in informing identity and pride (Ngā Tau Tuangahuru, 2019).

By exploring and understanding these values and factors, one may better understand and engage the Pacific Island way in sport and recreation, which tends to be community and collective oriented (Ferkins et al., 2021; Marsters et al., 2020). Gordon et al. (2013) affirm this, stating that “a shared understanding of what sport means and how it is situated within Pasifika life is required in order to identify and meet Pasifika needs when developing policies and/or working in practice” (p.50). Ronkainen and Nesti (2018) also agree asserting that “using indigenous cultural approaches, where concepts and theorising are developed from cultural insiders’ own meaning systems would be extremely important in moving towards a more culturally competent perspective sensitised to cultural diversity in the ‘why’ of sport participation across the globe” (p.49). The present study seeks to contribute to increasing understanding of Pasifika values and their expression for young Pasifika girls in rugby, in exploring what factors makes for a meaningful sporting experience and why these are important to them.

Pasifika youth experiences in sporting/physical recreation contexts

Researchers have more recently begun to undertake studies with Pasifika youth related to positive learning experiences, PE and physical activity in NZ school and community contexts (Dickson, 2018; Eldridge, 2018; Firestone et al., 2021; Fitzpatrick, 2013; Greene & Stewart-Withers, 2018). Notably, a strengths-based, collaborative and relational qualitative approach has been commonly adopted across these studies, aligning closely with sociocultural Pasifika values and worldviews and enabling researchers to gain rich valuable insights into participants’ worlds. The strengths-based approach

identifies and builds on existing strengths or successes as the starting point for commencing the research within a positive paradigm (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). This approach has been advocated by Pasifika scholars, as it counters a deficit-focus and emphasises the value of cultural knowledge, history and family practices, drawing on success that is already achieved by Pasifika peoples (Cunningham et al., 2022). Another notable commonality across these studies is the highly relational qualitative approach embodied by the Pacific narrative practice of *talanoa*; sharing stories, perspectives, opinions and experiences through relaxed, humorous and free flowing conversation (Vaiote, 2006). This is gently guided by the researcher but highly flexible, enabling meaningful relationship and exchanges to develop (Boon-Nanai et al., 2022; Cunningham et al., 2022; Faleolo, 2020; Vaiote, 2006).

Foci of these studies have included Pasifika empowerment, the importance of cultural appropriateness and responsiveness and the role of the family/community as key influencers in SAR involvement. For example, a study conducted by Greene and Stewart-Withers (2018) exploring the empowerment of Pasifika females aged 15 and 16 in their South Auckland school Physical Education (PE) contexts, highlighted the importance of building a safe social space in which the individual is valued and nurtured holistically (beyond their skill acquisition competencies), which builds confidence and a sense of empowerment. Connection with peers and a positive mentor (teacher/parent) is vital in this. As such, it would appear that the quality of the vā relationally established between participants and their sporting environments and those within / related to them is hugely influential in determining the quality and meaningfulness of their sporting experiences. Dunlop-Bennet's (2018) study with young Samoan children and Eldridge's (2018) strengths-based perspective of Pasifika school leaver experiences support Greene and Stewart Withers's (2018) findings, reinforcing the importance of participants feeling able to connect with their learning spaces, which is largely influenced by the approach and quality of relationship with their facilitators of learning (such as teachers and coaches). The tenor of these connections with space, peers and authoritative figures impacted the experience and success of engaging Pasifika youth. Additionally, acknowledgement of individual cultural identity, language and customs in teaching were highly appreciated by participants, enhancing their sense of being seen and known and consequently, their active involvement.

Firestone et al.'s (2015) study attracted participants from the community motivated by the accessibility and the 'collective action' of the youths' co-designed and co-developed prediabetes intervention program. Their culturally relevant and resourceful approach in an open communal context was identified as a key enabler to positive participant engagement in their intervention. In Dickson's (2018) study with young disabled Pasifika girls, various enablers and inhibitors to SAR participation were identified. The enablers included enjoyment, self-esteem (feeling good about oneself), having range of PA options available and accessibility to these, visibility of others like them and social supports especially from friends, teachers/coaches and parents. This aligns with the earlier meaningful youth

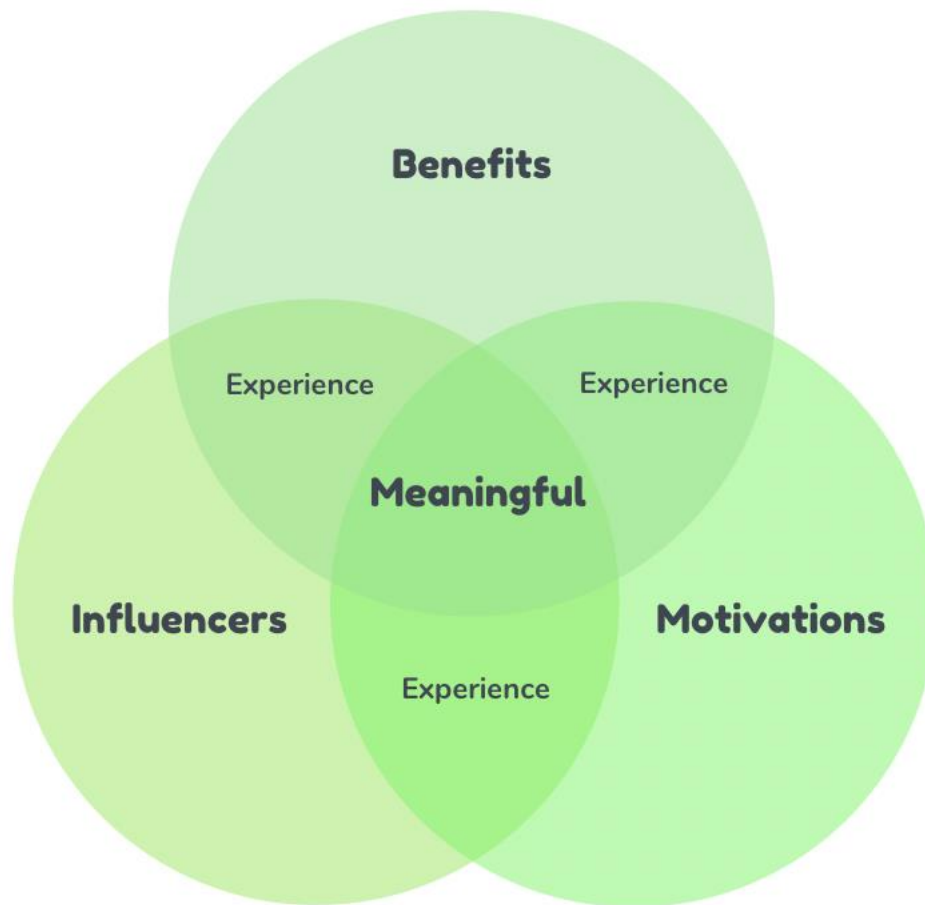
SAR participation literature discussed, and their common factors of social connections and relationships, enjoyment and having access to a range of diverse challenges (Beni et al., 2017; Bentzen et al., 2021; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Martins et al., 2021; Middleton et al., 2021; Nesdoly et al., 2021; Verkooijen et al., 2017; Willis et al., 2017). The ease of access to SAR forms in terms of financial accessibility, transportation, time was noted as highly impacting on girls' involvement. Additionally, Dickson's (2018) participants spoke of having access to culturally valued forms of active recreation such as Island dancing, and access to seeing other athletes/role models like themselves as key enablers, highlighting the importance of relevance and resonance with their own unique life narratives. Inhibitors to their engagement were related to physical limitations, a lack of availability of accessible opportunities, requiring additional supports, feelings of inadequacy or embarrassment, parental attitudes and lacking intrinsic motivation. These studies present a case for the importance of cultural customisation and resonance, wider inclusivity and early youth input to maximise relevance and ownership of Pasifika youth participation, in making SAR experiences more meaningful and sustainable for participants.

Young females have been noted to demonstrate higher sensitivity to affective and sociocultural dimensions in determining their SAR engagement (Bradish, 2001; Craike et al., 2009; Hanlon et al., 2018; Mikalsen & Lagestad, 2020b; Mullenbach et al., 2020). These recent studies with young Pasifika girls align with existing literature around characteristics of meaningful sporting experiences whilst offering insights into some of the cultural nuances around the importance of space, relational connection and support, and relatability and relevance of offerings. Exploring the affective and sociocultural dimensions experienced by young Pasifika girls in sport (specifically rugby) in this present study may further contribute to understanding their nuanced contexts and perspectives, to better engage them in resonant, meaningful experiences. The potential findings then may build into the existing body of literature whilst expounding indigenous perspectives, drawn out and woven together using a culturally appropriate Pasifika methodology and fitting analysis method.

Summary

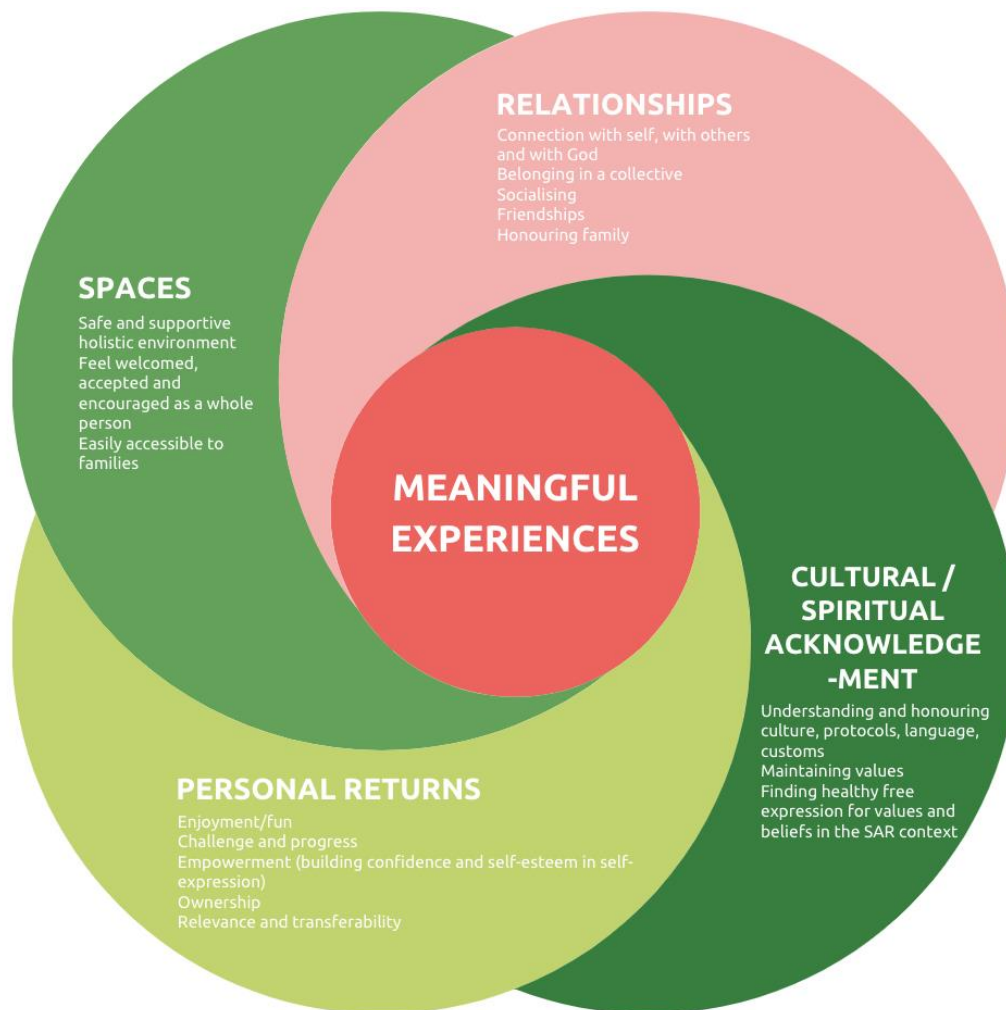
This literature review has provided a broad picture of the status and rationale for youth SAR engagement and participation, according to researchers with youth, coaches, families as well as industry practitioners. The review explores the nuanced motivations and influencers for female youth in SAR, given the increasingly promoted widespread benefits of participation in SAR. Despite the growing body of research in these areas, a lack of research into the underlying 'why' or meaning below the motivations is apparent, in exploring what makes SAR experiences meaningful for young girls.

Figure 1. Venn diagram illustration of the overlapping components influencing female youth SAR participation, with meaningful experiences at the heart of the why.



While there are different key factors identified across international studies that contribute to meaningful youth experiences in SAR throughout adolescence generically, there is scope to further explore how these are expressed and prioritised by sexes at different life stages, in addition to how indigenous collectivist cultures experience SAR contexts. The lack of knowledge around meaningful experiences and thus meaningful engagement for young females in SAR reveals a gap in literature and in informed practices. In Aotearoa, there is very little known around young Pasifika girls' sporting experiences, although existing research with Pasifika elite male athletes, communities and families reveals a greater emphasis placed on family, faith and cultural-based engagement (Firestone et al., 2015; Gordon et al., 2013; Lakisa et al., 2019). Based off this and Table 1's previous summary of findings in the literature, a conceptual image of the key factors that make meaningful experiences for young Pasifika girls' participation in SAR may look as follows (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Conceptual image visually representing key potential factors that make up meaningful experiences for young Pasifika girls in rugby, which has shaped research design.



There appears to be a dearth in sport and recreation studies “using indigenous cultural approaches, where concepts and theorising are developed from cultural insiders’ own meaning systems” (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2018, p.49). Accordingly, the present study seeks to offer a unique contribution with female Pasifika youth perspectives of meaningful experiences in rugby to the wider picture of an evolving, diverse youth sport landscape. Given this, my study will explore the following questions in seeking to better understand *what contributes to a meaningful sporting experience for young Pasifika girls in rugby* with sub-questions:

- A. What makes for a meaningful rugby experience (for them)?
- B. How are engaged female Pasifika youth experiencing their current rugby context/s?
- C. What kinds of interactions are positively empowering for them?

Chapter 3: Method

Paradigm and philosophical approach

Pacific worldviews are founded through connections, nurtured over generations, tied to land, water, legendary historic tales, and ancestry (Ofe-Grant, 2018). A foundational perspective of these can be described by the Samoan ethical framework of *teu le vā*, which is also held in Rotuman, Tongan, Cook Islander, Tahitian and Hawaiian culture (otherwise known as *va* or *wa*) with related sibling forms in other Pacific nations (eg. Fijian *vanua*). Although each nation will have its own variations in expression of this ethic (which has also been enacted as a Pacific methodology), it preserves the core values of reciprocity and relationships threaded through Pacific ways of being. *Teu la vā* refers to nurturing and protecting “an always-existing relational space between people and things, which is founded on a common spiritual origin through a shared creation” (Reynolds, 2018; p.2). The *vā* considers both spiritual and secular aspects of connections that impact on personal and collective wellbeing (Airini et al., 2010). It is known as the space that relates, simultaneously affecting and affected by our physical, mental, spiritual, genealogical, and historical connectedness (Anae, 2016).

This ethic holds that as humans we are always connected; our actions serve to promote closeness and harmony, or distance and sometimes even discord. Faleolo (2021) describes *vā* as “a way of sharing knowledge... reciprocal and two-way, free flowing and transparent, sometimes light-hearted, built on honesty and upon the understanding that both participants—the knowledge-gatherer and the knowledge-owner—will gain benefits from the reciprocity of dialogue in the knowledge gathering process” (p.130). *Teu le vā* embodies and reveals the huge value that Pasifika peoples place on relationships; relationships between people, people and their environment, and also people and their spirituality or values and principles (Reynolds, 2018). The correlating expression of this in an indigenous *iTaukei* (Fijian) ethic is the *veiwekani* relational framework, in which Vunidilo (2015) highlights the importance of the foundational 3Rs (or 3Vs) for healthy thriving: relationship (*veiwekani*), reciprocity (*veisolisoli*) and respect (*vakarokoroko*). These two conceptual frameworks formed the basis for the research project’s overall design and plan. At the heart of these Pacific research ethical frameworks, the presence of the participant/s is valued “not just for the insight and data contributed to the research but also intentionally valued as an individual, as a contributor to the research process” (Havea et al., 2020, p.132).

Positioning

To collectivist Pasifika societies, the self is not separate or isolated; individuals are orientated and anchored by these sacred relational spaces or connections, an integral part of the whole (Thorpe et al., 2020). A Pasifika youth’s identity is established in relation to their family, and community (Le Va, 2021). This value of relational and cultural identity adds important layers of complexity for sport

managers and scholars to consider if they are to engage Pasifika people with cultural sensitivity and relevance. Pacific ways of being may also be expressed differently in the research world, where qualitative research may have distinct expressions according to cultural paradigms, ethics, and worldviews. Some examples of these may include the integration of cultural norms or protocols such as prayer, consultation with indigenous authority figures as well as indigenous experts, the valuing of strength based approaches, the importance of subsequent benefit for the research participant and their community, scope for ongoing relationship with participants beyond the formal research structures (Ponton, 2018).

Honouring different ways of being

Qualitative research is known as the exploratory and subjective engagement of people, calling upon inductive and deductive logic to gain participant insights into their experiences and derived meanings which then influence social perspectives, attitudes, behaviours, and processes (Zina, 2021). Emotional intelligence (EQ) is key in qualitative research, that is, the researcher's capability to recognise and manage their own emotions as well as perceptively navigate social circumstances through self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Goleman, 2020). In addition to emotional intelligence, however, researchers benefit from activating cultural intelligence (CQ); connecting across cultures and divides of generations, sectors and tribes, and building bridges between them in a heterogeneous world (Middleton, 2004). The application of CQ enables perceptive understanding and insights into the wider environmental / cultural context on a macro level, while EQ enables more micro level consideration of self and immediately connected persons, both of which inform perceptions, interpretations, and behaviours (Middleton, 2014). These are important considerations given the unique dynamics of engaging Kiwi-born (New Zealand-born) Pasifika youth, whose contexts are influenced by the fusion of Pacific tradition and modern Kiwi youth culture. Through creating opportunities to explore the why and how in qualitative research, these youth may offer us critical insights that would otherwise remain unknown to academics and practitioners who work to engage them.

Many Pacific cultures see the sharing of stories through dialogue as a gift and a relational event focused on people, who may inspire and encourage as well as challenge and teach through untimed exchanges (Vaiote, 2013). There is not always a clear agenda, structure, or time limit set to these relational exchanges, which juxtaposes the more semi-structured interview and focus group schedules common to Western qualitative data collection. These trellises provide helpful cues and guides for narrative relational qualitative approaches, and ensure the objective of the research touchpoint (interview or focus group) is achieved. A risk inherent in some Pacific qualitative methodologies is that research outcomes are less controlled or determined by the researcher, as broad and open scope for exploration is established in the vā. This could be likened to an ongoing reading of the wind and currents, with light

steering following the elements, rather than a heavy hand directing the waka to a fixed pre-determined point. However, researchers may learn of different priorities and key insights that they may not have thought of by allowing research participants to drive the talanoa, rather than fitting into an existing structure of question and answer. In any case, there is certainly transferability across all qualitative methods in the need for establishing safe environments, researcher empathy, ethical sensitivity, and respectful, perceptive dialogue. As a Pacific scholar educated largely in Western contexts, now based in Aotearoa, I sought to honour both worlds and ways by offering both some structure and flexible space for self-expression, acknowledging the unique social circumstances we find ourselves in with Covid-19 pandemic concerns / limitations.

Introducing talanoa

Pasifika scholars stress the importance of using culturally appropriate framings and methodologies that recognise Pacific world views, cultural knowledge, and epistemologies (Faleolo, 2021; Matapo & Enari, 2021; Ofe-Grant, 2018; Nabobo-Baba, 2008; Vaioleti, 2006). As Havea et al. (2020) discuss, there are an expanding number of research methods and methodological frameworks based on indigenous Pacific ways of knowing, including from; ‘Kakala’ (Thaman, 1993), ‘Kaupapa Māori’ (Smith, 1999), ‘Talanoa’ (Vaioleti, 2006, 2011), and ‘Vanua’ (Nabobo-Baba, 2008). Included in this list are ‘Faafaletui’ (Tamasese et al., 2005), ‘Tofa’aanolasi’ (Galuvao, 2018) and ‘Ula’ (Sauni, 2011), which have a distinctly Samoan origin. These offer unique approaches and forms of indigenous knowledge gathering, appropriate to distinct groups of peoples.

In seeking to naturally connect with young Auckland based-Pasifika girls, we (the research *aiga* or family) employed the more familiar and well-known (to many Pasifika peoples) methodology of *talanoa*. This involves negotiating the *vā* relationship between the researcher and participant/s in which the voices of some may be initially silent or unheard (Fa’avae, 2018). Talanoa is a qualitative methodology that embraces cultural protocols to nurture the shared *vā* between people, as well as co-construct meanings in dialogue (Faleolo, 2021; Matapo & Enari, 2021; Vaioleti, 2013). Vaioleti (2006) developed this academic conceptualisation of talanoa as a “member of the phenomenological research family” (p.25) with the goal of offering a culturally appropriate approach to researching educational and social issues of Pacific peoples in Aotearoa. Matapo and Enari (2021) relate phenomenology’s study of experience and subjective nature of interpretation with talanoa as “open to cultural experiences, interpretations of meanings and co-construction” (p.80). In this, authenticity, transparency, and cultural appropriateness in the research process with Pasifika is encouraged (Matapo & Enari, 2021).

Talanoa refers to the cultural practice of oral interactions between multiple persons for Tokelauan, Fijian, Tongan, Niuean and Samoan people (Cammock et al., 2021; Tunufa’i, 2016), which also corresponds well with the Pacific demographics of the Auckland based junior rugby girls (Hester,

2021). Culturally, talanoa is well known as an informal practice (with scope for formal engagement) whereby individuals talk for the joy of talking and connecting together, oftentimes weaving different topics into the conversation (Chand et al., 2021; Matapo & Enari, 2021). This could range from discussing your cousin's *tevutevu* ceremony (traditional pre-wedding showcase of gifts), to the rugby on the weekend, to your parents' health, to Mele's dress at church, and so on. Talanoa is not restricted to a particular number of participants; it may be conducted between two persons or in small to large group contexts. It is generally characterised by relaxed chatter, laughter, exclamations, and several cups of tea and biscuits shared as individuals relate to each other with trust and respect.

It is a form of oral communication without rigid structures. Applied in a research context, talanoa is collaborative and highly subjective as the researcher is fully immersed in sharing in the research process rather than removed or in control (Vaiotei, 2006). Faleolo (2021) connects talanoa as a methodology and *le vā* as an ethical philosophy, describing how "talanoa is an approach that creates a *vā* or relationship between the informant and researcher whereby free-flowing dialogue occurs" (p.128). Despite its growing popularity as a pan-Pacific approach in Pacific scholarship, it must be noted that talanoa does not automatically resonate with epistemological processes of other Melanesian and Micronesian cultures (Tunufa'i, 2016). Given it is not a universalised Pacific concept, researchers must take care to consider the "ethnic-specific ties to ontology and history of knowledge production at local levels" (Matapo & Enari, 2021). However, considering talanoa's role and familiarity within the cultural groups that this study seeks to engage, this is a good fit as a methodology.

As talanoa has become increasingly employed by Pasifika and non-Pasifika scholars, its status as either a methodology or as a method has been debated. This has resulted in a call to carefully and reflexively consider our research processes to maintain the ethical essence of talanoa (Faleolo, 2021; Tunufa'i, 2016). Although there has been robust contestation around talanoa's status, it is becoming widely accepted as a useful emergent Pacific methodology that affirms dynamic Pacific thinking, language, and culture (Fa'avae, 2021 et al., 2020; Faleolo, 2021; Matapo & Enari, 2021). In keeping with many Pacific cultures' high value for relationship, talanoa is a highly relational and reciprocal methodology that requires the establishment of trust and rapport between individuals, and an acute understanding on the researcher's part of the power dynamics shared with research participants (Cammock et al., 2021; Faleolo, 2021; Vaiotei, 2013). The approach acknowledges Pacific people as "the holders of the knowledge" and accordingly treats them as "knowers and participants of [co-created] research" (Chand et al., 2021, p.197). It is a two-way process of giving and receiving knowledge, which both nurtures and maintains Pacific social spaces (Faleolo, 2021). As older Pasifika women (with regards to myself and research facilitators), it is considered a privilege and responsibility to care for the upcoming generations, including younger Pasifika females entering into our rugby spaces. Through talanoa in our study, relational care is demonstrated, and intergenerational exchanges

may take place that benefit all participants in better carrying out their roles (for the elders, to create towards meaningful engagement and development in their rugby contexts, for the youths, to learn, to grow and to develop).

Group connection through talanoa

The scope for hearing vulnerable or marginalised voices is augmented in group settings, allowing for richer data exploration of complex issues than regular interviews traditionally allow (Carey & Ashbury, 2016). In culturally responsive dialogue, “all sides can be heard and one’s autonomy is fostered through gaining voice and perspective, and through the experience of engagement with others” (Anae, 2016; p.127). By capitalizing on group interactions and synergy, the knowledge gathering may be enhanced with broader, in-depth accounts of participants’ strongly held beliefs, values, and perspectives (Carey & Ashbury, 2016). The focus group context facilitates a talanoa story-telling environment, just as it enables the sharing of a diversity of experiences to produce with new data (Brinkmann, 2014; Carey & Ashbury, 2016; Morgan, 1996; Zina, 2021;). The non-linear, fluid, and inclusive nature of talanoa discussions encompass holistic approaches to perceiving phenomena (Cammock et al., 2021). This kind of shared qualitative data collection allows for individuals to express, in their own words and imagery, how they perceive their experiences and contexts, and draw meaning from this with others. Laulaupea’alu (2021) notes in his observations of *faikava talanoa* (organised kava sharing and connective talk spaces) at University of Waikato, that students benefitted from “opportunities for sharing ideas, raising issues, making jokes and meeting new friends” in a comfortable yet deliberately held space that valued Pacific knowledge, perspectives, and connections (p.117).

Other studies conducting talanoa with youth and young adults offered rich data for knowledge gathering from young Pasifika perspectives, with common themes expanded on in greater depth together (Cammock et al., 2021; Firestone et al., 2021; Keung, 2018; Ma’alo Faleolo, 2003; Tu’i Tagoilelagi Tima, 2013). This would suggest that the talanoa approach, in providing a safe and familiar kind of informal and relational context for the group, enables accurate and insightful revelation into Pasifika youth perspectives. The mixed methods approach of Sport NZ (2019) to gaining a broad overview of New Zealanders’ activity levels offered a few brief insights in generic age groupings but gave little to no scope for elaboration of perspectives. The contrast in the insights provided from several smaller studies that informed Sport NZ’s (2021) Young Women’s Participation Profile is significant, as various researchers across the nation conducted qualitative research to explore what the values, needs and perceived influences were to females in Aotearoa aged 12 to 18-years old (referenced briefly in Chapter 2). In this, it is evident that an appropriate methodology brings out more meaningful insights. The talanoa methodology may engage Pasifika participants more appropriately, by creating space for them to comfortably verbalise their perspectives. This will serve to further inform and fill knowledge gaps with regards to our actively engaged Pasifika girls aged 13 to 18.

Implicit in group research (e.g. focus groups), however, lie distinct challenges by way of ethical considerations, navigating sensitive topics, establishing group safety, trust and rapport which may affect data quality (Carey & Ashbury, 2016). As such, researchers must be well prepared and culturally well versed before adopting a talanoa methodology. Moreover, they must have strongly developed interpersonal and facilitator skills to navigate changing group dynamics and complexities. Within Pacific settings, there is a strong taught value of respect for elders, which may influence participant comfort (as they consider respecting power dynamics) and their responses (Havea et al., 2020; Suaali'i-Sauni et al., 2009). Youth may feel more comfortable, validated, and encouraged to speak freely in open conversation with peers than in one-on-one settings with a relatively unknown older researcher (Havea et al., 2020). However, in both contexts, there runs the risk of youth tailoring their responses to better fit what they think the researcher/s wants to hear, or according to what might be safest in the group context (engaging in groupthink) to maintain harmony (Faleolo, 2021).

A way of mitigating this possibility is to continue encouraging sharing, building trust through fun activities and play, interweaving relevant cultural practices (such as *masu*/prayer and *kai*/food), highlighting common connections, and inviting safe adult figures who are known and trusted by the participant/s to be present at points. These measures help establish safety in the new research space (Suaali'i-Sauni et al., 2009). The cultural dynamics in Pasifika contexts are such that welcoming and establishing relationship with participants' relatives or key figures (broader community engagement) may enhance the research. This may serve to honour participants and their collective and strengthen relationships as the researcher actively operates in acknowledgement of existing cultural structures, dynamics and values (Faleolo, 2021).

Data generation

In the context of this research, our talanoa involved connecting with three focus groups of seven participants, all members of an Auckland secondary schoolgirls rugby squad. Each mini group was led by an experienced female Pasifika industry practitioner, who had previously worked with Pasifika girls in junior rugby as a coach and manager, as well as rugby administrator (women with broad skill sets). They doubled as both a facilitator as well as a research participant themselves, contributing to research design (planning), implementation, and debriefing. The talanoa spanned over two weekdays of fun engagement in a predominantly female space (including a Pasifika facilitator team) during the girls' preseason rugby camp. Our shared experiences were communicated in a free flowing, explorative dialogue (known as talanoa) within mini groups, before shared back to the larger collective.

The dynamic of unity and connectedness was first established through the initial blessing, formal welcome, introductions and fun games as a large group, before breaking into mini groups for the talanoa. In these, research facilitators had various resources made available to them to draw out their participants' stories including butcher's paper and pens and post it notes. While we had clearly established topics for each talanoa (modified to three in total), with one or two established starting questions, from there dialogue was mostly generated by the research participants themselves, with occasional contributions from facilitators in the form of encouragement, invitation, clarifying questions or relevant anecdotes. This was an important part of talanoa, where participants were encouraged and given freedom to discuss the topics without a fixed interview schedule or clear end point, and where stories are given space to unfurl and grow as others add. While these talanoa had a clear topic to explore, these were framed as fun, inquisitive, and informal sharing times.

The talanoa were recorded digitally (this was the primary data collection point) with any creative writing, drawings and paperwork captured throughout also retained for analysis. Each talanoa varied fluidly between 25 and 50 minutes, depending on the energy levels, engagement and quality of dialogue with participants. At the natural or prompted conclusion of each talanoa, some time was given for sharing back to the bigger group, which was important for continuing to build group connection and encouraging sharing. We positioned our more intentional talanoa between fun play times or informal connection time over food with music playing, to continue to strengthen the vā and establish relational and environmental safety. We changed tack in our final talanoa, where the girls were tired, and words were not forthcoming. Rather than invite conversation we assigned scenarios where the girls could show us, rather than tell us, what empowering interactions sounded and looked like to them. In Pacific contexts, small talk, body language, and reactions in interactions (sometimes in between the "official" talanoa, or in games) often convey important insights that contribute to the knowledge gathering process ([Faleolo, 2021](#)). With this in mind, I had facilitators make notes of observations and comments as we went through the day's activities, and youth participants and facilitator participants alike debriefed at the end of the day on their interactions. Each talanoa was recorded, transcribed, and coded, using the transcription services of Debra Pugh from Any Type Xtra.

Participants

This research was targeted primarily towards Pasifika females aged 13 to 18 years old who are currently engaged in the wider Auckland rugby scene, at all levels of skill and experience. This age bracket has been noted to enter into a real participation growth space over the last three years, with a surge as girls transition into high school contexts but later drop off ([Hester, 2021](#)). Given that this is a strengths-based study that seeks to leverage existing positive engagement, this demographic aligned well with engaging research participants inclusive of the greatest growth window. A strengths-based approach is a collaborative process where the focus draws upon a person's strengths, past accomplishments and

existing resources such as social and community networks ([Duncan et al., 2011](#)). By capitalising on these, further positive change may be affected.

We drew on existing relationships that AUT and the researchers have with the rugby community, to engage participants within an existing school girls rugby program of 47 girls, comprised by 90% Pasifika and 10% Māori girls. Aligning with the kaupapa of the coaching staff in building team bonds, we integrated our talanoa and icebreaker games into the camp's structure, offering them a space for female input and sharing. I attended two trainings in advance to research engagement to speak with the girls and provide them with opportunities to ask further questions. The consent/assent forms and full information sheets were made digitally and physically available, via the squad's communication channels and at the training venue. As an incentive, the first 21 players to return their completed consent and assent forms received rugby goody bags and were then included in recorded focus groups. The remaining players at camp who didn't want to have their responses recorded / did not acquire the necessary signed consent from legal guardians engaged in mini groups led by old girls as team bonding exercises.

In the process of planning the research, we (the AUT trio) recognised the need for experienced industry practitioners, which led to drawing from the Pacific female rugby collective Ako Wāhine (AW) to assist in the co-creation, facilitation and debrief of the talanoa. We considered that such a contribution would enrich the strength of the data generated in the talanoa. This group of four were aged between 30 to 50-years-old, experienced in engaging Pasifika girls in rugby and participated as both research facilitators and active participants (collaborating in the design of the talanoa sessions, co-facilitating and debriefing).

Reflexive thematic analysis

To better understand the core connective themes and ideas from the data, I used reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to underpin the data analysis process. Braun and Clarke ([2021a](#)), renowned for their qualitative analysis expertise, describe RTA as “a theoretically flexible method” used for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset ([p.325](#)). This form of data analysis holds that the researcher's position and contribution is an integral part of the knowledge gathering process. In fact the researcher's subjectivity is considered a vital analytic resource, as they reflexively draw upon past experiences and formation to critically engage with the theory, data, and their own interpretations ([Braun & Clarke, 2021a](#)).

RTA shows respect for the uniqueness of perspectives shared and humility as the researcher does not presume to already know or understand the subjects' experiences, values, or beliefs in advance ([Braun et al., 2017](#)). Instead, through immersion and repeated reengagement with the participants' words, the

researcher may gain insights into the broader spectrum from semantic to latent meaning in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). As such, my coding process was highly subjective and organic, allowing for me to be creative in my analysis. Reflexivity in the analysis process then, enables the research to be insightful, questioning, intersubjective, and transparent on a number of different levels, as the researcher is aware of the shifting sense of self in navigating the tensions of being researcher and a participant ourselves in the research (Haynes, 2012). This fitted well with a more interpretivist, qualitative Pacific paradigm with its emphases on contextual meanings, subjectivity as valid and exploring multiple realities, which enable a more meaning-based pattern conceptualisation of the data (Braun et al., 2017; Faleolo, 2021). RTA, according to Braun and Clarke (2021b) “extends beyond a concern for experiential phenomena to social processes and the social construction of meaning” (p.6), again positioning this particular form of data analysis as an appropriate fit for analysing the sharing of meaningful experience, with the hope of gaining insights into the common shared perceptions, values and needs of the group in their meaning-making.

RTA allowed space for me to identify, interpret and produce themes, which I further developed through iterative readings of recorded and coded transcripts. The fluid, recursive process of six phases aligned well with a holistic, integrated Pasifika worldview, allowing for innovative co-creation rather than determining categories or structures in advance and giving meaning by frequency (e.g. content analysis). These phases included 1) data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes; 2) systematic data coding; 3) generating initial themes from coded and collated data; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) refining, defining and naming themes; and 6) writing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2021a), however this process was iterative and flexible rather than strongly sequential. As I developed preliminary findings which I then refined, I shared these with key research participants (supervisors and Ako Wāhine facilitators) along the way with an invitation for their feedback to validate the accuracy and robustness of the presented findings.

Acknowledgement must be made of my own positionality as a female Pasifika rugby aficionado in shaping this study’s design. It is relevant to participant recruitment (e.g. leveraging existing connections, engaging an age group I have experience working with), facilitation, interpretation, and thematic analysis. A talanoa methodology leverages my own background and experiences to establish relational rapport, gain an understanding of each participant’s environment and enable authentic discussions (Cammock et al., 2021).

Ethical Considerations

Careful ethical and cultural consideration was required as the majority of research participants were minors under the age of 18. These participants were junior high school females of Pasifika descent (including Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, and Tuvalu) aged 13 to 18 years old. This

has been identified as a key transitional life stage in adolescence, typically when females begin transitioning through puberty and navigating various life changes into and throughout secondary school education (Eime et al., 2013; Craike et al, 2011). As such, participant assent and parental/guardian consent were required pre-study. Research and researcher actions complied with New Zealand's Vulnerable Children's Act 2014, as well as the AUTEK Code of Ethical Conduct (AUTEK, 2019). To ensure the research was transparent and understandable for children, suitable (age appropriate and culturally relevant) language was used to establish vā, a safe environment and encourage dialogue (Aanae, 2010; Greene & Hogan, 2004), with trustworthy adults (including legal guardians) welcomed and present. Ethical approval was granted by AUTEK on September 8th, 2021.

Research Limitations

It was my fifth attempt that was successful in holding our research event and data collection with young female Pasifika rugby participants since the conception of the research question and study in June 2021. Covid-19 outbreaks and lockdowns in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland significantly impacted the accessibility of schools and clubs as well as the capacity of girls and their families to engage with a new study. This research event that took place over two days in April 2022 was something of a miracle, following a host of changes to the research design by necessity (including format, venue, dates). We simply had to adjust in order to be able to have any primary data collection at all.

This particular opportunity to engage with a secondary schoolgirls rugby camp was extended just over a week before the camp was to begin. This provided a very short window for informing participants and legal guardians, clarifying any questions and getting turnaround of their signed consents pre-research. Partnering with the girls' coaches enabled access to a large group of our target participants and also enabled an immediate baseline level of trust (transferred as a friend of respected coaches, and as pioneering Pasifika rugby women). However, our research facilitating team was also then constrained to working within their allocated windows and change tack according to their schedule (we had to can and condense our two talanoa and games to just one final talanoa connect on the last day of camp).

Ideally this research would have taken place over an extended period of time, with multiple touchpoints in place over time to organically establish relational rapport and trust as we explored these hearty topics together. It was a big ask for the girls to deep dive and share highly personal stories over just two days connecting with relatively unknown older Pasifika women coming into their rugby environment. It is likely that the rich, detailed stories would have come later in time, reflecting the trust and comfort gained through more familiar relational dynamics. Many of the girls were initially very shy and uncomfortable to speak openly to their experiences of meaningfulness and empowerment in rugby (which were highly subjective and individual). As they wrote, doodled and played with miscellaneous

items (which they focussed on, rather than the intensity of eye contact in dialogue), the participants relaxed somewhat to share snippets of their own rugby stories.

This study was conducted with a squad of rugby girls, all connected to one school context and team. It is possible that the existing team dynamics and culture influenced the girls in their choice of sharing. For example, they may have withheld more critical or negative sharing, for the sake of positivity and fitting in with the group. Groupthink and keeping the peace by maintaining a behavioural uniformity can be a challenge to navigate in Pacific settings, as these may support a strong sense (albeit a superficial one) of unity and oneness (does this need a formal ref?). To speak out against or in critique of an existing context, system or leadership may be seen as arrogant, disrespectful or ungrateful, highly undesirable traits in Pasifika culture (ref?). This may lead to unpleasant repercussions for individuals within the collective, such as shaming, distancing or exclusion altogether from the group. As connection to others plays a huge role in one's identity and wellbeing, maintaining positive and strong relationships with teammates is essential, which conflict or criticism may threaten if leadership and culture isn't robust and welcoming of respectful challenge or differences in opinions.

It could have been beneficial to have had a more diverse mix of participants in terms of having young girls drawn in from a range of rugby contexts to share accordingly (rather than from one schoolgirl squad). However, connecting with girls who already knew and felt quite comfortable with one another in their own rugby camp context may have allowed for a more relaxed research vā. As such, the research team (myself and the Āko facilitators) benefitted from the pre-established "good vibes" and engagement levels of the girls who were enjoying their camp.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents and discusses the findings and key themes derived from the three talanoa that took place with young Pasifika girls for this study. In seeking to understand what makes for meaningful rugby experiences, each talanoa was oriented by a research sub-question. Each of these related to defining meaningfulness and their rugby beginnings, current experiences of their rugby contexts, and empowering interactions in rugby. The key themes of meaningful components of participants' rugby experiences are initially outlined, composed of various subthemes (contributors to meaningful rugby experiences), each of which is introduced descriptively and further explored with supporting quotes and relevant literature to discuss and explain the findings. Three key themes were developed, each establishing how rugby participation builds relational connections which facilitate meaningful experience. Within each of the three key themes, there were four related sub-themes that provide more explanation and insight into the key theme statements.

It must be explicitly acknowledged that these findings are not necessarily representative of the perspectives or realities of *all* young Pasifika girls actively involved in junior rugby, instead giving voice to the experiences of twenty-one girls currently involved in a strong schoolgirls' rugby context. Each participant has been given a Polynesian pseudonym to maintain anonymity and protect her identity, although several references such as from post-it notes remain generic e.g. Participant from Group 2, as I could not always be sure who specifically wrote which notes on the posters. While these findings are not wholly conclusive for this minority group, they offer insights that may help coaches, parents, sport managers and coordinators to better engage and support the girls towards positive meaningful experiences in their sport contexts. These findings may also add to a body of academic knowledge that appears to be quite slim around the experiences and perceptions of young Pasifika girls in Aotearoa sport.

The first and perhaps most significant theme that was drawn from the talanoa discusses the finding that rugby participation enhances commonality and relational connections for the young girls within blood family. This theme is explained further through four sub-themes exploring family input, dynamics and influence. The second key theme explores how rugby facilitates shared experiences that encourage the formation of new friendships with peers and a rugby sisterhood. Associated sub-themes explore how rugby enables fun socialisation with new friends, the development of strong bonds and culture through overcoming [sports-based] adversity together and the influence of caring, authoritative rugby role models in creating meaningful rugby experiences. Finally, the third key theme highlights how participation provides the girls with a uniquely supportive space for self-expression and self-development in rugby. This is also supported by four sub-themes, which explore how meaningful rugby experiences facilitate greater self-connection and identity formation. Before discussing the main themes and sub-themes of the makings of meaningful rugby experiences, I begin with establishing the baseline

definitions that orient the talanoa and our understanding of ‘meaningful’ experiences as conveyed by the girls.

Unpacking “meaningful” in the girl’s own words

The girls were invited to break down what meaningful experiences and meaningfulness meant to them generally, before sharing their meaningful rugby experiences more specifically. In this early conceptual discussion, three key characteristics of meaningful experiences were identified. These included having a significantly positive impact on holistic individual well-being, encouraging a sense of purpose and resonance, and building connections. “*Meaningful experiences connect to a deep place in your heart*” or “*what touches the fatu [heart]*” (written post-its, participants from Group 3). Another participant elaborated on this, saying that “*they [meaningful experiences] impact you massively like emotionally, physically, mentally, spiritually... In a way that affects your wellbeing, your conscience, positively*” (Laisa). In this, the girls conveyed an understanding of meaningfulness relating to affecting their whole being, where meaningful experiences are expansively impactful, enhancing one’s understanding of life, of self and of their connectedness. Meaningful experiences were also described as purposefully impactful on one’s life, with general associations of positivity or an uplifting nature (in a kind of empowerment). “*It’s [a meaningful experience] like something that has a purpose in your life, that uplifts you.. It’s important.*” (Participant from Group 3). This particular quote conveys a belief that meaningful experiences hold strength and purpose in a way that then encourages individuals towards a more fulfilled and positive life. Thus, such experiences affect the heart, tapping into or furthering enriching one’s beliefs, values and passions. As several researchers expressed, a meaningful experience is closely tied to an enhanced sense of personal well-being (Beni et al., 2016) or developing a conscious self in positive youth identity formation (Willis et al., 2017). The all-encompassing nature of this definition speaks to an awareness of meaningfulness as holistically significant and essentially positive.

“*Meaningful experiences are important... It’s building meaningful connections*” (Participant from Group 3). Building real connections with others makes the experience meaningful, as these relationships allow for key needs and wants to be met (Bentzen et al., 2021). The kinds of connections formed may strongly influence one’s perspective of themselves in relation to others and their environment, which also informs one’s experience. As the talanoa continued, it became apparent that the key connections that the girls valued building in their meaningful experiences fitted within three distinct relational realms – firstly with family, then with teammates and coaches, and finally with self. As Bean and Forneris (2019) and Teare et al. (2021) explain, meaningfulness is developed through actively building ongoing quality connections, which may encourage and facilitate sustained youth participation in SAR. This emphasis on active collaborative connection-making with others also embodies the Pasifika ethic of teu le vā, which value and nurtures sacred relational spaces that exist between living entities

(Reynolds, 2018). This relational and connective emphasis leads into the first of the key findings or pillars that substantiate meaningful rugby experiences, which is the enhanced sense of relational connection and commonality shared within family (solidarity), by way of the girls' participation in rugby.

Rugby enhances commonality and relational connections within blood family.

Originating with family interest and support

The first key theme related to meaningful experiences in rugby explores how family commonality, relationships and cohesion may be impactfully enhanced by the girls' involvement in the sport. This theme is supported by four sub-themes, beginning with the family's role in socialising or sparking and supporting the girls' interest in rugby. In this study, family involvement is seen to have played a strong part in influencing participants' early engagement with sport in general, and in many instances, with rugby in particular, as the girls often spectated games of their older brothers. *"I saw him [my older brother] on the rugby field and he looked like he was having so much fun, and I got really jealous so I asked my dad if I could play"* (Karo). *"I had my brothers who played and yeah like Karo said, it looked really fun playing rugby"* (Asenate). *"My family always would say I'd be so good at rugby and all my brothers always played"* (Ditaufa). As the girls continued sharing their early origin stories of how they got into rugby, a strong connection to rugby via existing *aiga* (family) affiliation became increasingly evident. This was particularly notable in connection to brothers and fathers, who were actively engaged in playing or following rugby. In previous studies, older siblings are frequently seen as role models for work ethic for young child-athletes (Côté, 1999, p.407), and may strongly influence their siblings' subsequent perceptions of the sport.

The girls also spoke of becoming involved in rugby due to the influence and love of parents and grandparents who continue to follow rugby closely. *"My family's really sporty... It's only my second year playing rugby but yeah, it's one of the sports I've grown up watching"* (Lasalle). Keresi shared that *"I come from a family that has been playing rugby for their childhood and all that"*. This personifies existing literature holding that youth sport is often a bi-product of family (particularly parent) involvement, who are especially influential in childhood and adolescence (Dorsch, 2017; Knight, 2019). This early family involvement and exposure is a form of socialisation into rugby, where the girls have learnt that rugby is an important family and / or community activity that shapes their collective identity. While rugby was not originally something that many girls were involved in, they became increasingly interested as they engaged with their families by watching together. *"My family all comes from league and netball, the boys always played rugby league and us girls played netball... Then I watched the boys play school first fifteen, and it just looked like something I wanted to play"* (Marama). For virtually all participants, there is a clear causal link between an existing family rugby culture and their subsequent involvement, showing a high prioritisation of rugby for many girls and their families. It appears that

this connection or affinity with the sport of rugby comes due to its status as celebrated and embraced by the family. By playing rugby as well, the girls make their own contribution to their existing family sporting culture which values rugby, and so can strengthen their sense of connectedness with their blood brothers whom they have grown up watching.

Although mothers, grandmothers and older sisters were attributed by a few participants as key influencers for getting them into rugby, the majority of girls referenced one or more key male figures as their main influencers / authorities for their rugby participation. This correlates with the known widespread cultural preference of Pasifika men towards rugby especially as a desirable sport ([Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017](#); [McDonald et al., 2019](#)). Rugby union has been noted to have played a strong socio-cultural role in Pacific nations with high engagement levels particularly amongst the male population ([Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017](#); [Uperesa & Mountjoy, 2014](#)). As opportunities for female participation arise in Aotearoa, this beloved and hearty space is something that the girls want to be more actively a part of too. Rugby appears to serve as a cultural nexus for the girls with key Pasifika men and older figures in their lives. It seems that most of the girls maximise on an existing family love for rugby as a way of joining in and contributing to a collective passion, which strengthens connections. As strengthening and building family and cultural connections is inherently meaningful, experiences that promote these connections also take on meaningfulness. As such, youth sport may play an important role in fostering the child's relationships with both parents and family ([Dorsch, 2017](#)), where the sport is the vehicle for diversified meaningful connections.

Across the participant groups, the majority of girls' involvement in rugby was birthed through familial exposure and positive connections to the sport in a form of early socialisation. Family is known to be hugely influential for both Pacific as well as non-Pacific youth sporting development, as Marsters et al. (2020) note, stating that "family, namely parents, largely shapes the development of athletic identity, life skills, self-esteem, and coping mechanisms for young [elite] athletes" (p. 61). The significant impact of family on rugby involvement and the quality of their experiences also corresponds with overseas studies that have found young female sport consumers and participants to be heavily influenced by parental figures and peers (their social supports), more so than their male counterparts ([Craike et al., 2011](#); [O'Reilly et al., 2018](#)).

Enhanced connection with older influential family figures

To further explain this key theme of strengthened familial connection and commonality via rugby involvement, I discuss the girls' sharing around their anchoring home contexts and these critical social / relational dynamics that shape their worldviews. In Pacific culture, family is integral, involving both immediate blood family and extended family ([Bell, n.d](#); [Faleolo, 2020](#); [Marsters et al., 2020](#)). This family emphasis was reflected in the broad referencing in written post-its of family (parents, siblings,

grandparents, aunts and uncles) as meaningful to the girls, in life and in rugby. Oftentimes, the big passion and enjoyment of their relations in rugby inspired the girls to give it a go too. *“I also play rugby for my nana, because she was a big rugby fan. She would always watch the All Blacks, Black Ferns, Blues and all that”* (Keresi). *“I play for my grandad, and for inner peace”* (Azahlia). This tracing back of involvement to playing on behalf of or for family members highlights how influential blood relations are, and how sport may play a key role in family dynamics.

As Clarke et al. (2016) also found, parent-child relationships evidently have the potential to be enhanced through a shared experience of sport, as shared identity and goals serve to reinforce a commitment to one another. This second sub-theme of strengthened connections with older family members is evidenced as participating in rugby may enable a different kind of connection to form with other family members who love the code, notably older respected relatives, enhancing what Robers et al. (1991) refer to as intergenerational solidarity. The girls’ rugby involvement appears to effectively nurture numerous dimensions of intergenerational solidarity including: affectual solidarity (or emotional closeness and mutual affection through shared love), associative solidarity (observed through frequency of contact and shared activities, in this case rugby watching, training and participating), consensual solidarity (sharing in and reinforcing embedded family values, beliefs and identity) and normative solidarity (adhering to familial expectations or a sense of obligation to the family) (Duflos & Giradeau, 2022; Roberts et al. 1991). These dimensions of intergenerational solidarity are nurtured with uncles, siblings, grandparents and parents through the girls’ rugby participation. In other words, rugby participation appears to powerfully promote and enhance the vā between the girls and their family members, enhancing intergenerational solidarity, commonality and cohesion. Duflos and Giradeau (2022) found in their scoping global review that intentionally fostering multiple dimensions of intergenerational solidarity appears to be especially meaningful and important for grandparents and grandchildren from collectivist contexts such as Israel, China, Portugal and Thailand. Discussion of this first key theme in the present study demonstrates that this intergenerational emphasis may also be found among Pasifika youth and families, as embodied through rugby participation.

The affection and approval of elders appears to carry huge weight in influencing one’s initial and ongoing involvement in rugby. *“Rugby wasn’t really my sport, but my dad wanted me to do it so I did, I started doing rugby for him”* (Lasalle). Rugby, as a point of commonality, may also provide an opportunity to honour and please elders in a form of giving back.

I haven’t grown up with a dad figure, but my uncle has always been there for me and always pushed me and encouraged me to be the best at what I do... He is always wanting the best for me, he wants me to play rugby sevens at the Olympics. Knowing that he’s come from nothing and was able to avoid the gang life other family members take makes me want to push hard and make an effort to go pro for rugby. (Written note from a participant in Group 2).

These quotes convey a strong sense of inspiration and motivation for rugby participation derived from older family members. Such is the strength of the girls' desire to stand in solidarity (strongly connected) and enjoy greater closeness or intimacy with key older family figures that their own preferences for sporting participation are shaped by their elders' preferences. Tima spoke of how her involvement in rugby, an aggressive contact sport, allowed her to *"show my love though rugby, you know, the contact"* for her nana, a big fan of WWE. In a similar way, Karo chose to play rugby league and union for her dad (a rugby lover) as a way of making him proud and thanking him as *"my mum left us and my dad's always there for me, so yeah, you know"*. In engaging with the passions of these key family figures, the girls get to share in their enjoyment and develop mutual interests that consolidate connection within their family.

This reciprocity of sporting engagement within families reflects cultural values such as shared identity and relational connection through sport, and demonstrates the dynamic socialisation influence of family (Clarke et al., 2016; Knight, 2019; Strandbu et al., 2020). Scholars have claimed that rugby is hereditary to cultural identity among many Pacific groups (Grainger, 2009; McDonald et al., 2019; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017), and is highly valued and broadly accepted in many Pasifika families. One participant in Group 3 wrote of how playing rugby is meaningful as it allows her to "connect with origins", indicating a strong sense of meaningfulness in relation to participating in something that has long been important to her roots. This also expresses how Pasifika well-being (and identity) may be better understood through a lens of solidarity which Faleolo (2020) discusses, where the collective aspect of the Pacific worldview that spans generations informs perceptions, beliefs and life choices. Rugby is an access point to increased engagement (generally positive) and enhanced relational connection with loved ones (the girl's key anchoring collective), which makes their rugby experiences meaningful.

The girls' rugby involvement creates opportunities for specific talk, for advice, practising, input and encouragement, and for time together with blood family bonding. *"Afterwards [post-game], I'd sit with my dad and we'd talk about my game, what I did, what I can do better"* (Asenate, affirmed with nods around the table). This kind of direct relating and connecting may allow for other aspects of familial relationship and dynamics to develop, including more time speaking, relating and playing together. The socio-economic realities of many Pasifika families in Auckland may require that both parents and sometimes their children have to work big hours, making leisure time that much scarcer and more valuable (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2020). To be able to enjoy quality time discussing or practising a shared interest together is precious, this builds associative solidarity across generations (Roberts et al., 1991). What is shared together belongs to both and connects them in a meaningful way. Rugby serves as a vehicle for family conversation, connection and support, which may strengthen connections and consolidate family unity.

Clarke et al. (2016) suggest that their finding of increased familial closeness through shared and embodied experiences of sport is unique to elite youth academy football. The findings of the present study would suggest otherwise, demonstrating that heightened family cohesion through shared sporting experiences may also be seen in Pasifika schoolgirl rugby. This finding also builds upon existing research asserting that girls are especially sensitive to their affective and sociocultural dimensions (Bradish, 2001; Craike et al., 2011; Hanlon et al., 2018; Mullenbach et al., 2020) that the family formatively develop in childhood and adolescence. Not only are girls especially sensitive to these dimensions but they appear to be highly perceptive to maximising on opportunities (in this case, rugby) to enhance connection and solidarity with the key family figures who shape these dimensions.

A neutral supportive zone for families

The first two sub-themes of enhanced relational connection and commonality within blood families discuss the unique space that rugby occupies within Pasifika families, and the role rugby appears to play in enabling more connections between participant and family members. The third sub-theme pertains to the unique space and growth that rugby may create for wider families around the girls i.e. facilitating interpersonal dynamics related to the girls, but not directly with them, which is seen when families relate to one another on the sidelines as spectators and fans. Interestingly, the rugby context can create a neutral space for seemingly dysfunctional or less connected families to gather in support of their girl. Additionally, this third sub-theme explores the reciprocal and inspirational influence of family presence or engagement at rugby events on the girls themselves.. Keresi explains how:

They [my family] are not very connected... So we're not really together when we do these kinds of things, even with like family holidays and all that, we've rarely got together... It's between like all my uncles and aunties and my mum and all that, they don't get along very well and I don't get to see my dad. But when all of them came to watch my game and they left all like their dramas and that aside and they all just came together and watched my game, that was really meaningful to see them all together to watch me... It made me want to cry, because like they've rarely ever been together but like when they just came to watch me and—that was like the best 40 minutes, when they were together for me.

In this case, where otherwise existing relational rifts, feuding and squabbles would make reunions painfully volatile, for the duration of rugby games, this family was able to sit together on the sidelines, united in love and support. This is an embodiment of the enhanced family cohesion and drawing together of family that youth sport participation may bring about (Clarke et al., 2016; Dorsch, 2017; Weiss & Hayashi, 1995). In this, rugby may enhance relational connections and commonality within combatting blood family. This is particularly interesting given the highly aggressive and combative nature of rugby as a collective sport (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017), where passions often run at a high.

However, in this context for some of the girls, rugby allows for a channeling of existing family (collective) emotion and passion to go towards a positive supportive expression, that is, encouraging and cheering for her and her team, rather than arguing with one another. In this, the girls' involvement in rugby may additionally serve their families in providing contexts of relational respite together. This is a strong reflection of sport socialisation in action, where family members who may have initially acted as key figures in their girl's early socialisation process are in turn influenced and impacted by her involvement (Dorsch, 2017; Knight et al., 2016). This experience of harmonious solidarity or togetherness of family (created through rugby) is highly meaningful to the Pasifika girls.

Tima also shared *“our family's separated as well... It's just hard when it comes to family functions. Seeing my mum on the sidelines... It tells you someone actually cares”*. This was a strongly meaningful aspect of the girls' rugby experiences, having the presence of parents and family at games watching. Marama spoke of how simply having her mum there watching empowers her, *“I play better, knowing she's there, supporting”*. These quotes reveal how presence speaks volumes of being cared for and loved, conveying a worthiness of time, and energy to physically support. Tima was very aware of the sacrifices and time challenges that her family – in particular, her solo mother following a family breakdown - manages to provide for her. *“You see the strength that she [mum] powers through every single day and see the challenges that she's faced and the obstacles she's been through, makes you like want to grow up as a strong woman as well”*. In response to family presence and support, the girls are driven to play hard and to make their family proud, by performing well. *“Yeah I want to make my family and team proud”* (Ditaufa), *“I want to make my [older] sister proud of me”* (Fehi). This conveys a strong motivator for many of the girls, honouring their family and team by playing their part well, and avoiding “letting them down” (Post-it note, participant from Group 2) through poor performance. Boon-Nanai et al. (2022) also found this in their study, noting that inspiration and motivation is drawn by youth from the lived examples and stories of older family figures. Thus playing rugby is transformed from simply playing sport for fun to a meaningful opportunity to also publicly reciprocate and honour the care and sacrifices of older or past generations.

Playing for more than just themselves

The fourth and final sub-theme of the overarching theme of enhanced familial commonality and connection through rugby relates to a sense of broader contribution, representation, reciprocation and connection to the wider family, including deceased relatives. Legacy is an important cultural value for many Pasifika peoples, who find identity, orientation, and purpose within a larger picture of a multi-generational collective (Faleolo, 2020; Gordon et al., 2013; Marsters et al., 2020). As such, playing is not only an individual pursuit or effort made for a coach and teammates. For example, several girls made reference to rugby providing a unique form of connection with a late-grandparent, who is no longer with them. *“I also connect with my grandpa who was a very big rugby fan, so yeah, now that*

he's gone it's easy to like try and connect in some other perspective" (Elisapeci). Keresi spoke of how her grandmother *"would always want to see me play professional and all that, but then she passed away. So that's why I want to keep playing for her, so she could see me"*. Through playing rugby, the memory of grandparents and their passion for rugby is kept alive, and their legacy may continue on in the present. In Pasifika settings, often grandparents fulfil an important role in childminding and sharing knowledge of culture and heritage with young generations (Boon-Nanai et al., 2022). Rugby participation represents a form of remaining in solidarity with elders' values, beliefs and passions, which may have been passed on to or shared closely with their grandchildren. As shared in the talanoa, this sense of relational connection with them is highly meaningful and enhanced by the girls' ongoing involvement in rugby.

To those from collectivist societies, the self is not separate or isolated; instead individuals are orientated and anchored by these relational connections held across time and space (Thorpe et al, 2020). Playing often also carries an element of representing and honouring one's wider family, community, and past figures, as demonstrated by Keresi, Lasalle, Tima and Karo's sharings. By gratifying and honouring the collective, connections are strengthened and the individual may experience greater purpose and fulfilment, which is highly meaningful. This is perhaps a unique nuance for children of collectivist cultural contexts, in contrast with youth from more individualistic family or cultural contexts who may choose to participate primarily for their own sense of self-gratification in participation. This could be an area of future study, engaging a non-Pasifika cohort from a collectivist context with the same research sub-questions. In Nesdoly et al.'s (2021) study with indigenous First Nation Canadians around meaningful youth SAR engagement, the relevance of the sport form (e.g., the activity itself) to the collective's way of being and identity was seen to carry a distinct emphasis for youth's subsequent involvement. This is also evident for Lasalle and other girls who play the sport for others in alignment with family expectations or preferences.

While playing for more than just one's own personal enjoyment but for others also may enhance the meaningfulness of rugby experiences; it may also introduce another dimension of perceived pressure and stress. This is not uncommon among Pasifika athletes, who *"can put upon themselves a significant and often self-imposed pressure to attain sporting success as a means to "serve" their family"* (Marsters et al., 2020, p. 63). As one represents the collective, they shoulder the hopes, desires and opinions of many. Feeling the weight of expectations (from family, team, coaches, and self) and the need to perform well was an ongoing challenge recorded by several participants in the written post-its. However, the increased opportunities and professional pathways – the very developments that publicly raise the stakes – for females in rugby were referenced on post-its with excitement (rather than trepidation or pressure) under what the girls loved most and/or found inspiring about playing rugby. This excitement was indicated with stars next to the written point, and smiles, the Islander raising of both eyebrows and nods

when it was verbally presented to the group. While the pressure and expectation to perform well was identified as a disliked component of rugby participation, this appeared to be more in the context of family pride (an emotional and mental reality) as opposed to family provision (a tangible social financial reality) or proving oneself. The stakes seem to be quite distinct for these young female rugby players whose involvement has largely relational repercussions with older beloved family figures, whom they want to make proud with their performance.

The girls did not speak of any sense of obligation to financially provide or create opportunities for their families through code, which young male Pasifika athletes have communicated in past studies ([Field, 2013](#); [Lakisa et al., 2019](#); [Marsters et al., 2020](#)). Unlike their male counterparts, young girls and women in Aotearoa have only recently within the last decade begun to access to formalised or professional rugby opportunities ([Knowles, 2020](#)). As such, females have engaged with rugby for the relational connections, for the sisterhood and love of the game, not for money (bonuses, employment), social mobilisation or improved education and lifestyles enabled by rugby, which have been identified as major drawcards for male Pasifika rugby players in previous studies ([Field, 2013](#); [Knowles, 2020](#)). The primary motivation for these girls' participation appeared to be related to connecting and developing relationships in new ways, rather than achieving financial or performance-focused outcomes. This would be an interesting area of future study to follow the cultural perceptions of provision and familial expectations in relation to the burgeoning professionalism of women's rugby. For example, as professional rugby opportunities emerge for females, will there be a shift in the relational and enjoyment focus of participants toward outcomes and provision as seems to be the case for their Pasifika male counterparts? How might increased female provision and commitment in a highly physical and professionalised sports domain (i.e. roles and spaces traditionally reserved for males) affect Pasifika family structures and culture? In any case, a common thread across this study and past Pasifika rugby studies ([Gordon et al., 2013](#); [Lakisa et al., 2019](#); [Marsters et al., 2020](#); [Uperesa & Mountjoy, 2014](#)) is a desire to make family (including immediate blood, extended and rugby adopted) proud.

The girls' widespread explicit acknowledgement of family and playing for or because of them illustrates how Pasifika youth may engage with a more collective lens, playing for the sake of others' enjoyment and connection as well as their own. The Pasifika orientation manifests as an interconnected and interdependent family system, which is known to both impact and be impacted by sporting involvement ([Dorsch, 2017](#)). Accordingly, this sense of shared commonality and reinforced togetherness with relations makes their experience of rugby more meaningful. Performing well may translate to a sense of payoff for all the hard work of family and the girls, demonstrated in an attractive sporting spectacle of flair and success. On the other hand, playing poorly or making mistakes may reflect poorly on family and team as having wasted their time and efforts. Feeling positively connected appears to form the heart of motivations, inspiration and enjoyment in meaningful rugby experiences. As such, family solidarity

is seen to hold great weight for the girls, as they want to reciprocate family investment and passion. By doing this they can honour the family and enjoy greater pride and relational proximity to loved ones through their participation. This reflects key Pasifika cultural values that Pasifika sport and health researchers have emphasised related to unity of family, community, honour and hard work (Gordon et al., 2013; Lakisa et al., 2019; Marsters et al., 2020; Uperesa & Mountjoy, 2014).

Rugby creates relational connections and a new sisterhood through shared experiences.

Fun socialisation with new friends

The second key theme drawn from the talanoa reveals how meaningful rugby experiences for the participants of this study involve creating new relational connections and a sisterhood through shared experiences, which are both fun and challenging. Although blood family was generally the main driver for getting the girls into rugby (as seen in the discussion around the first key theme), relationships with teammates and coaches appeared to take over precedence as the key influencers for then keeping them engaged in rugby. This embodies how in Pasifika culture, family can be continually grown based on new relationships formed around shared heritage or important experiences, that is, the church family or the rugby family (Gordon et al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2019). As such, the first sub-theme of this overarching theme relates to how fun socialisation in an alternate or expanded family with new friends in the forms of peers shapes their perceptions of rugby and their own rugby experiences.

Specifically, the team culture, fun environment and friendships formed were important factors in meaningful rugby experiences *“I love the vibes and the energy, the sister bonds”* (Participant in Group 3). Various participants wrote how their girls’ rugby context has been a *‘safe space’* and *‘getaway’* from challenging *‘home or school dramas’*. *“I feel happy about the rugby team environment because it helps distract me from all the stress that goes on at home and at school”* (Post-it note from Group 2). Numerous girls spoke or wrote of difficult situations at home, at school or in other sports where culture or relationships were fractious and toxic. *“It wasn’t just school [academic work], it was also like the [school] girls just picking on me for no reason...”* (Abi). *“Over the last two years I played netball, it was my number one sport... But the team culture and environment was really s***, so I came over to rugby”* (Marama). Rugby provides an alternate space where they can feel good and enjoy a positive, high energy environment with other girls. *“This rugby team is like a fun community to be around, like it lifts the spirit up, whenever you’re down. It’s very good, nice to be in a place that’s happy always and together, yeah”* (Tima). Rugby participation is a powerful connective coping mechanism and outlet. The influence of environmental and social factors (fun, enjoyment, support, friendships) in the rugby context aligns with existing literature (Craike et al., 2011; SNZ, 2021; YST, 2017; Willis et al., 2017) which emphasise how female sport participants’ close community and the messages reinforced by their wider community, hold strong sway in their perceptions of meaningful experiences.

In their rugby contexts, the girls can connect and socialise with different peers their own age (predominantly Pasifika or Māori), with whom they find strong commonality, empathy and connection as demonstrated by the following:

Rugby's meaningful to me, because I can make new bonds with people that like at school I'll just walk past or – yeah and like connect with the girls my age (Zoe).

No other sport compares to rugby, like we have such a special bond... Everyone's just so inclusive (Nala).

These relationships seem to provide support, resonance and needed ‘*distraction*’ from problems in other areas of life. As Agee et al. (2012) note, “early adolescence is a critical time for self and identity development, as teenagers negotiate their place among social groups and the racial-ethnic categories they encounter in society, particularly at school... Navigating the dominant culture is complex” (p. xx). In this period of adolescent negotiation, the rugby team’s celebration of Pacific culture and heritage, and a collective understanding appears to facilitate team togetherness and safe spaces of respite to be and learn negotiation skills. “*I really like everyone being Poly and encouraging... It's a good support system*” (Fehi). Having one’s culture embraced and being surrounded by it are key support factors for Pasifika youth in Aotearoa (Ministry of Pacific Peoples, 2020), providing a supportive context that may enhance meaningfulness. This is considered an important part of identity formation, linking Pasifika youth to their cultural roots in a way that promotes pride and connectedness (Ngā Tau Tuangahuru, 2019). Previous US based studies have established that a sporting environment or more specifically, a sports team, gains meaning and personal importance when they resonate with an individual’s own inner and social self (Funk & James, 2001, 2006). This may be even more nuanced in the Pasifika collectivist context, where one’s inner and social self is significantly molded by their cultural heritage and relationships, through whom the ‘self’ is established. The girls’ shared experiences in rugby may both create and highlight commonalities between individuals, which strengthens relational connections. Through these shared experiences and increased resonance, new relational connections (team sister bonds) seem to have been deepened and a sense of safety through a support network is established.

“The dark place”; where you develop bonds and grow together through formative challenge
Rugby can facilitate meaningful experiences through the creation of relational connections and a new sisterhood. A second sub-theme conveys how this happens in the forms of bonding and progressing through formative challenge together, best embodied in “*going to [and coming out of] the dark place together*” (Keresi, Marama, Dimere, Fehi), which many girls described or wrote of. As they intimated, this refers to the fitness sessions and clutch moments in games where teammates push themselves way beyond their comfort zones into the realm of uncomfortable lungs-heaving, gut-busting, leaden-legs for the sake of physical and mental endurance in the game – and then come out together. Throughout this process, they are picking one another up and spurring each other on with encouragement. This particular

sporting space allows for a very visceral and intense physical experience of challenge, learning and encouragement within a family-oriented support system. *“It’s [the dark place] definitely easier with people, yeah, because everyone encourages... Sometimes you struggle together, you can be in pain together and learn. If you just feel like giving up and then you listen to your people, it’s easier to hold yourself accountable”* (Dimere). Tighter bonds form through enduring challenge together. In absolute expenditure and ‘*putting it all out there*’ together the girls become physically and emotionally vulnerable with their fitness levels (physical status), character and resilience on public display. *“Knowing that your other teammates are probably doing the same amount of work as you, they’re also in the dark place, so when you see them going, like you keep going”* (Nala). In their study of female tackle football in the United States, Liechty et al. (2016) also found that self and social awareness can develop among players as they intentionally engage with uncomfortable challenge together, in a form of collective empowerment.

In the present study, the girls’ progress is visibly validated through ‘*high fives, hugs, chants, laughter, songs and encouragement*’, as well as noted results of improvement in fitness and in games. These mini celebrations and affirmations facilitate team connection. *“The [team] chants make me feel connected with the girls, or like we’re on the same level...”* (Participant in Group 3). These celebrations also inspire a sense of achievement and team cohesion. The girls are united in their common collective purpose of pushing for improvement (with winning as the ultimate goal) and backing one another. However, as Liechty et al. (2016) also found in their study with female footballers in the US, these girls “come for the sport but stay for the team.” (p. 311). *“I wanted friendship”* (participant from Group 3). It is the building of connections together, the holistic empowerment and encouragement, the sense of collective purpose and enjoyment that makes their rugby experience meaningful. *“Our team’s real close, we crack jokes with each other and laugh at each other, and just got on like really fast”* (Dimere). Humour and fun are known to have a significant impact in creating positively engaging physically active environments for youth (Beni et al., 2017; Nesdoly et al., 2021), and appeared to be a must for these Pasifika girls. When discussing their favourite experiences of their rugby contexts, the girls highlighted the role of laughter and fun banter between teammates, and with coaches. *“The best rugby environment... sounds like loud laughter and a lot of good comms [communicating] and encouragement... looks like smiles, good vibes, tight bonds”* (written post-its from across the groups).

Through their “*family-oriented environment*” (Marama) founded by coaches, the girls can invest in actively forming their own new sisterhood culture, where they “get” one another and have each other’s backs. *“In your team you get to create like a sisterhood, where each individual can grow, as well as like as a team”* (Raijeli). This collaborative creation of their environment through individual and collective investment seemed to develop a sense of ownership, enhancing personal meaningfulness. The importance of a sisterhood in youth rugby also mirrors Putt’s (2021) brotherhood theme as a key

dimension of fun, in his study with Pasifika teenage boys in rugby union in Aotearoa. However, while his study with young rugby males went on to highlight physical contact, ball play and game as core components of fun, the girls appeared to emphasise less game-specific components such as “*good vibes*”, connected participation and learning new things together in forming fun rugby experiences. “*I like the good vibes, feeling secure around them [team], and having fun with teammates*” (Post in note from Group 3). This highlights a high value placed on social dynamics for fun and collective skill acquisition or progress. It is a secure connectedness, a stable shared vā as a sisterhood, that allows for the creation of meaningful experiences together.

While everyone in the sisterhood has a slightly different story and brings different skills and attributes to the table, everyone can bring value in some way. “*Everyone comes from different backgrounds but when we come together, everyone just connects well and there’s no one left out*” (Nala). In this diversity is celebrated, also referenced in post-its as wanted and good for making a great rugby environment. Rugby union as a team sport may be more accessible to a wider range of body shapes (e.g. larger and heavier females) and skill sets to compete together and against others. Interestingly while diversity was acknowledged, the girls spoke more emphatically with warmth and excitement about really loving the sense of oneness in their team’s way of being and doing together, which seems to strongly reinforce their sense of togetherness and belonging. The greatest celebration appeared to come from having deeper commonalities or overlaps (such as shared Polynesian culture, faith, family dynamics) that connect the girls. “*We’re all saying the same things, we’re doing the same thing, so it makes me feel like oh, I feel comfortable*” (Participant in Group 3). In this environment, sameness seems to enable positive feelings of being safe, comfortable, known and understood, which inspire confidence and connectedness in rugby.

Visible and accessible big sister peer role models are strong influencers

This second key theme of creating relational connections and forming a new sisterhood involves various key figures. While the first two sub-themes elaborate on the horizontal peer relationships formed through shared experiences, the third sub-theme introduces somewhat elevated influencers in the forms of big sister-like peer role models, whose sporting and life stories may instill greater meaning into the younger girls’ rugby experiences. Connecting with alumni ‘*old girls*’ who have since entered and excelled in the open women’s rugby space was identified as impacting and highly inspirational for this study’s participants. “*It’s so cool to see them make it and they still have time for us*” (Asenate). These old girls have “made it” to different levels; named in the playing 23 of a premier Auckland women’s rugby club, starting for said club, making the provincial Auckland NPC squad / team / starting to the higher levels of playing for the newly formed women’s Auckland Blues and finally, the national Black Ferns side. They continue to come back and invest time and effort to support their secondary school

team in coaching / big sister mentor capacities, offering access to the younger girls to learn from and with them in their rugby journeys.

The relevance, attractiveness and accessibility of the role model are important, as peer role models supply a bridge between the elite role model and stepping stones of progress (Lyle, 2013). While many of the girls had older brothers as impactful role models initially in their early sport socialisation process, this transition of role model focus to other older girls allows for a unique identity development and sense of connectedness to form as female athletes. Female role models are noted to be important for girls, but in order to resonate as inspirational they need to be relevant figures who can empathise with and partly reflect the situations of younger girls in their own sports (Lyle, 2013; Meier, 2015; Ronkainen et al., 2019). In conjunction with relatability of role models, youth athletes benefit from “longer-term and supported / mentored exposure than single exposure events” (Lyle, 2013, p. 27). This also resonates with the Pasifika ethic of *teu le vā* and a high value placed on reciprocal relationships, which are built over time with consistency and care (Faleolo, 2021; Reynolds, 2018). The situation of these study participants, interacting with, learning from and seeing the example of female role models (literally considered “their own”, from their wider community) who are now succeeding in the women’s space is a powerful encouragement and motivator in creating meaningful rugby experiences, as the girls develop over the season.

Coaches who care

The final sub-theme of creating relational connections and a new sisterhood through shared experiences discusses the role and contribution of caring coaches. While these sporting relationships may not have the same established vertical power distance and authority as between parent and child, or within blood families, this relational connection is more vertical than horizontal (e.g., between peers and equals) in its dynamic. Numerous studies have found that coaches play a highly influential role in the holistic development of their youth athletes (Fraser Côte & Thomas, 2009; Willis et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2016). This holistic care allows for meaningful engagement and development through sporting journeys. “Patient and knowledgeable coaches” were raised in the talanoa as important in making rugby meaningful for the girls (written post-its and discussion). The girls consider these figures to be “*the source of team culture and values you know, they like set the vision*” (Nala). They also set the tone or “*the good vibes*” (Fehi) for the girls to then develop. Several girls in Groups 3 and 1 mentioned that they returned this season or played because of their relationship with the current coaches, having left other codes or set-ups due to an unpleasant environment and culture (which the girls appeared to believe is largely established by the coaches). The return of the old girls was also largely attributed to coaches as well as a sense of wanting to give back, as the coaches encouraged them to stay around and assist as active successful role models. This demonstrates the unique interplay of influence that coaches and role models have on youth athletes, to the point that youth athletes want to return and for those who have

technically graduated, they feel compelled to stay involved by moving into a role model peer coaching role as an ‘old girl’. These relational connections established through rugby encourage ongoing engagement and inspire younger up-and-coming players.

Another variation of this sub-theme is encapsulated by Mele, *“The best rugby set-up is like prepared, where coaches are all organised and supportive... Having a plan already set up, not having to spend a lot of time deciding what to do...”* She emphasises here how coaches demonstrate value and care to their players through forethought in planning sessions, camps, having guest facilitators and preparing for games. Intentionality in preparing spaces aligns strongly with Pasifika values of respect and love, in actively nurturing le vā for the group’s benefit (Anae, 2016; Reynolds, 2018). Le vā is also nurtured through patient and clear delivery of instructions with opportunities for questions to guide players’ learning in a fun, shame-free way together. The coaches establish an *“open space for new learning”* (post-it from Group 2). These relationships cultivated in compassion, empathy and patience with their players were seen to lead to meaningful social connections that develop youth beyond the sport field, as aspect also emphasised by the work of Crisp (2021), and Fraser-Thomas and Côté, (2009).

The coaches speak into the girls’ in-the-moment rugby-related experiences as well as off-field realities as they develop self-awareness, confidence, resilience, and social / communication skills. Through their open and connective facilitation, the girls are supported to learn. *“I think the coaches, they set the foundation for us [team culture and environment]. Like they’re really open and they always talk to us. They’re always talking in the group chats and making jokes”* (Nala). Humour and frequent communication serve to build relational rapport and connections in youth sport (Nesdoly et al., 2019). The girls identified that their current coaches seemed to really care about them, not only their playing performance. *“We said our coaches [are meaningful], because they care more about just the rugby, like they care about our wellbeing and our personal lives and what happens at school”* (participant from Group 3). These coaches cared about their stories, their home lives and about them as people. Their education trajectory and life stories mattered to the coaches and inspired a sense of gratitude and connection in response. This is deeply appreciated and highly meaningful to the girls, linking back to the girls’ earlier definitions of meaningful experiences as having a massive positive holistic impact on wellbeing and building connections.

The coaches acknowledge key aspects of Pasifika culture in their language and engagement of the girls and their families. They were highly cognisant of family responsibilities and realities (financial hardship, accessibility difficulty, fear of injury for their girls), keeping guardians in communication loops and even enlisting them for camp and game catering needs. This integration of native Pasifika language and cultural values is meaningful in this context as it guides an indigenous way of being, embodying what indigenous scholar Keung (2019) describes as “lived principles that are rich in

meaning and purpose” (p. 71). This cultural sensitivity informs rugby relationships, culture and context, shaping them towards meaningful engagement for youth from collectivist contexts as well as their communities (Nesdoly et al., 2021; Wright et al., 2016). Local studies with Pasifika youth in Aotearoa have found that specific acknowledgement of their nuanced cultures, values and ways enables meaningful experiences for Pasifika youth (Dunlop-Bennet, 2018; Eldridge, 2018, Greene & Stewart-Withers, 2018). Examples of this cultural acknowledgement may include employing language and enlisting the active practical support of parents in particular, and wider blood family, which may lend itself to greater team connection and belonging.

As facilitators understand their youths’ broader background contexts and adapt interactions and activities accordingly, they may establish more meaningful connections. Crisp (2021) and Nesdoly et al. (2021) found in their studies with disadvantaged and indigenous youth respectively that these meaningful connections born of empathy then lead to more meaningful learnings for the participants beyond purely sport. The vehicle of sport allows for coaches to customise learning opportunities through a range of created experiences, which also impact relational connectedness. This present study found that a number of the girls’ key meaningful learnings, related to connection, identity, [holistic] development and understanding of the relevance of soft and hard skills learnt in rugby, were very much facilitated through their connection with coaches. This also aligned strongly with Wright et al.’s (2016) indigenous Belize study with youth sport coaches, who were seen to play a significant role in holistically shaping their participants’ sporting experiences.

In a flow chart styled post-it, one participant in Group 3 wrote how the coaches’ “good leadership” led to “good vibes” which led to the girls “feeling comfortable” enabling “trust”. The understanding and care of coaches beyond performance establishes a deeper trust and receptivity within the study participants to their coaches’ input, not only as rugby coaches but as trusted figures. This trust is birthed by their demonstrative appreciation and care of their players beyond the sporting field, affirming the girls as having value beyond their rugby performances or playing potential. For example, the coaches appeared to emphasise character and effort as prerequisites for rugby belonging, rather than natural aptitude. This has created a more supportive environment for learning, where the girls experience feeling welcomed and celebrated in their ongoing development and so feel they can each contribute. “*We all bring something*” (Ditaufa). This supportive approach to rugby learning, as embodied by their coaches, appears to inspire effort and a sense of connection to the team and sport. Greene and Stewart-Wither (2018) in their research with high school girls in PE, also found that the youths’ relationships with coach facilitators serve to determine connection to a space or collective. “Lasting bonds, connections and memory making” (written post-its, Group 3) may develop in this space, which resonates with a meaningful experience, as defined by the girls. The formation of their team

environment (physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually) is strongly influenced by coaches' lived expression of values and actions (in culture).

Their open and communicative relationship with the girls was a noteworthy aspect of a dynamic that they really enjoyed in their rugby contexts, also written in post-its as “having understanding and supportive coaches” and “having accountability” (Group 3). The clear expectations, utilised communication channels and social understanding from the coaches as older authority figures contrasts against family contexts where mistakes appear to not be so easily accepted, or discussion encouraged. As some girls have tumultuous relationships with departed or distant parental figures, the encouragement, stability and consistency of their coaches over the course of the rugby season/s may meet their needs for positive validation from trusted adults. “*My dad’s not a supportive person, yeah*” (Tima), “*my mum left... Yeah me and my mum don’t talk anymore*” (Karo). In a way coaches may fulfil parent-type roles as the leading facilitators in their rugby girls’ sisterhood, or alternative rugby family, who support the girls. As such, their relational connection, leadership and input may contribute impactfully to meaningful rugby experiences for their girls.

Rugby provides a unique space for self-expression and self-development alongside others

The rugby environment as a cathartic outlet for self-expression

The third and final overarching theme contributing to meaningful rugby experiences introduces rugby as a unique space for self-expression and self-development alongside others. This key theme highlights how participative rugby experiences may enable meaningful self-connection and identity formation to occur, in a supportive learning context. The first sub-theme introduces the rugby environment or context as a cathartic outlet for self-expression, physically and sometimes verbally, facilitating experiences of meaningful self-development. Throughout the opening talanoa, it became evident that rugby participation allows for establishing more common grounds within families and with peer groups, who are known to be hugely influential in shaping sporting perspectives and engagement of Pasifika youth (Marsters et al., 2020). Often, direct personal dialogue from child to parent about their feelings or challenges seemed to be avoided by the girls. Marama spoke of how her family generally “*isn’t that open about feelings and don’t like talk, like meaningful with each other, so it’s quite hard to express that to other people*”. Abi also reinforced this family challenge, conveying her own reluctance to speak to her family “*I don’t like to vent to my family, I’m not the type to do that*”, with a heightened sensitivity to how they might respond “*because they’d just laugh about it or bring it up with others and compare me to them*”. This indicates a deep concern for the opinions and responses of family members especially. The girls’ desire to be accepted and not shamed appears to inhibit their honesty and vulnerability around sharing their emotions or stories with family. Profound emotions tend to be shut down quickly, rather than expressed in dialogue; they tend to be channeled demonstratively through

actions instead. This may perhaps reflect a social stigma which considers showing emotional vulnerability as weakness that will discredit the individual or present a chink that others will painfully exploit. However, when rugby is the active focal point, rugby-related talanoa and other non-rugby related learnings about self, development and relationships can take place. Rugby opens up conversation about powerful experiences, thoughts and emotions, which usually may be kept under wraps. Having another practical, tangible focus seems to help facilitate discussion and learnings in the less tangible realms of personal development.

It appeared that these Pasifika girls and their families are more practically demonstrative than verbally articulate with one another. In the third talanoa involving playacting, the girls powerfully showed us (rather than verbally told) something of their realities, struggles and hopes around difficult scenarios. Often displays of deep or strong emotions in dialogue were swiftly stifled or shifted into the safer realm of humour. *“I want to cry, I want to laugh... Like if I go deep I’ll start laughing (Laughs)”* (Nala). While effusive words of validation are not always forthcoming from Pasifika family, actions of service and consistent presence with brief expressions of affirmation through physical contact appear to serve as powerful (and empowering) communication of loving support from the family (Cunningham et al., 2022). It would seem that in rugby contexts, it is more acceptable to show and channel emotion in training and performance for the [rugby] collective’s benefit. Self-expression is not limited purely to playing, however the playing field and playing experience do allow for self-expression and self-development. After big games or events (such as camps or trips), tears of gratitude, love, remembrance, disappointment are often given space or allowed to be. In saying that, there was still a reluctance in the study participants to intentionally verbalise thanks and appreciation to family in particular because *“that’s awks as”* (Marama), *“I don’t even know what to say”* (Abi). Rugby involvement offers a safe space for self-expression, less through words and more through action and performance.

The rugby space evidently provides a cathartic outlet where the outward self-expression of strong emotion may otherwise be considered disrespectful, inappropriate, or socially unacceptable. *“You’re able to hit [tackle] someone as hard as you can and want without needing to say sorry”* (Mele). While this conveys a potentially dangerous and destructive mentality, it also communicates a unique aspect of rugby for the girls, permitting the intentional use of force in a competitive context. In the rugby set-up, aggression and competitiveness are not only permitted but encouraged and celebrated in positive physical contact play. It’s okay to be fiercely confrontational and to channel that in the game context. This is an unusual opportunity in the daily life of a young Pasifika girl. In traditional Pacific roles, the female youth serves her family, particularly through assisting her mother or parents in caring for the home (cooking, cleaning, contributing financially through working) and for family. For example, the oldest daughter is expected to care for her elders and also younger siblings, holding strong familial responsibility (Bell, n.d.). Her role in the collective is to uphold family values and behave obediently

and graciously, quietly keeping the peace and “basically just listen, listen, listen” (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020, p. 108). “*I was kind of raised to just keep the peace*” (Karo). The sport of rugby may be seen by some to strongly oppose these traditional values and understandings of Pasifika femininity. Notably, the roles and lifestyles of Pasifika families in Aotearoa are evolving in modern times.

As human development and family studies researcher Dorsch (2017) explains, no two families are ever exactly the same and this is also reflected in distinct expressions of how traditional homeland values / practices are maintained in the Aotearoa context. It would appear when considering literature from Kanemasu and Molnar (2017) that the lived social reality for Pasifika females in Aotearoa may be far more accepting and supportive of their involvement in rugby than in other Pacific nations. For example in Fiji, “many [young women] have experienced verbal, psychological and/or physical punishment and abuse in their homes and communities for playing rugby” which has led to them forming “one of the most disenfranchised social groups in Fiji” (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017, p. 442). The evolving social structures and supports in Aotearoa may allow for Pasifika female youth to enjoy engaging in a traditionally male-dominated sport in ways that have not been celebrated in the traditional indigenous Pacific contexts.

In the rugby context, whilst rules must be adhered to, girls are allowed to shatter the peace and aggressively serve a different objective – to actively place themselves and their team in the best position to win a competitive contest. They may resist their culture’s traditionally passive feminine stance to express themselves freely in the physicality of rugby, which can be empowering (Kanemasu & Molar, 2017). Questions, challenges, directives are exchanged between one another as well as with coaches in a distinctly more flexible power dynamic. “*Having supportive and understanding coaches in a two-way relationship... It includes communication... And calling and checking up on each other [teammates]*” (Nala). Through learning tackle technique and how to engage or disengage in contact, the girls are given permission in a safe space to physically self-regulate their more “negative” emotions. “*I can take out my frustrations from whatever in training or games*” (Josifini). The collective nature of rugby as a sport also emphasises the importance of each person playing their part. This aligns strongly with a Pacific perspective of contributing to the collective, however rugby offers a very different scope for how this contribution (physical, aggressively competitive, strategic) may physically play out in this different setting. As in Liechty et al.’s (2016) study, this contact sport provides “a social environment in which females feel supported to pursue an activity that is oftentimes considered masculine” (Liechty et al., 2016, p. 312), which appears to be an empowering form of individual self-expression. Additionally, rugby allows for collective expression as a group, where the girls are able to express themselves, their values and their culture together in a team sporting context. This provides scope for enhanced individual identity formation within a collective as well as enhanced self-esteem, wellbeing and connections, which contribute to meaningful experiences for the girls.

The rugby context also gives girls space to connect with others their own age socially, establish friendships and process other life events. When playing or life gets challenging, the team culture and environment of the rugby context can make such a difference in positively helping the girls. *“It’s [rugby] helped me when I’m real in a dark place or something like that, just cheering me and helping me in all that”* (Keresi). Through playing rugby, the girls may receive impactful emotional and tangible support to manage difficult thoughts, emotions and events in life more generally. In other words, in this expressive rugby environment, the girls may be encouraged and equipped to further develop self-regulation and motivation for navigating challenges.

“I’m talking about team culture and environment [as meaningful], because I think that’s very important in terms of like girls being able to feel comfortable, I guess... Two years ago, I never would think environment and team culture was that important. But maybe when you go through something that like hits you at your darkest points, then you really realise.” (Marama)

Numerous studies have found that safe environments and positive inputs are especially important to girls as they navigate increasingly challenging changes through adolescence (Craike et al., 2011; Eime et al., 2013; Hanlon et al., 2018; Mikalsen & Lagestad, 2020). The connections formed and the positive impact of the rugby team culture and environment on their wellbeing, with a sense of purpose and support reinforced by rugby connections in dark moments, make rugby experiences deeply meaningful.

Developing self-awareness and self-confidence

The second sub-theme relates closely to the first, exploring how rugby participation not only provides a self-expressive outlet but also a space of learning more about themselves and actively shaping their own ways of thinking and being. The girls shared how rugby has helped them through “dark places”, not only in fitness but in life more generally. As the girls developed perseverance and mental skills in their training spaces they became more self-aware and self-disciplined. *“If you do it [really push yourself in the training dark place] consistently throughout the year then your mind gets used to it and then when it comes to training, you’re like oh yeah, I’m ready, let’s go. Training good habits”* (Participant in Group 3). *“I just got better over the years [at navigating dark places], like I got out of this mindset – I stopped letting fear rule my everyday life and started focussing on what I can do, and what I can do to get better”* (another participant from Group 3). The dark place facilitates learnings that are not exclusively about rugby but also about themselves and transferrable skills, through team exercises and interactions. *“You learn trust, perseverance, communication... And then even if you’re working, just to keep working hard”* (Dimere). These contexts are not only places of sport-specific learning, but places where youth can participate in meaningful activities with support, progression and an appreciation of a wider transferability in life (Verkooijen et al., 2017). Rugby participation is seen here to increase one’s awareness of their own mindset and normalise taking personal ownership for development. This is highly empowering, developing a stronger sense of self and social connections as

well as resilience to better navigate adversity (Liechty et al., 2016). According to Pasifika physician Fionna Bell (n.d.), “resiliency among Pasifika youth is associated with wellbeing maintenance and stems from connected social relationships” (p.1). Rugby evidently serves to enhance the wellbeing and social connection of this study’s participants, which enhances both resilience and their rugby experiences with greater meaningfulness.

Rugby was identified by various participants as a significant enabler for developing self-confidence. *“Playing alongside people who build me up and encourage me to do better and embrace my failure so that I can succeed, I’ve realised that just backing myself plays a huge part in my journey”* (Asenate). *“When I started playing rugby it helped me with my confidence in like life and all that, like meeting people”* (Keresi). The development of leadership qualities was also recognised as part of their learnings through rugby, such as *“confidence, love, loyalty, humility, understanding and respect”* (Nala). Other skills such as adaptability *“improvising or adjusting to what’s in front”* (Dimere), and communicating in a *“helpful and supportive way”* (post-it, Group 2) were also explored in the talanoa. *“It’s [playing rugby] changed my behaviour, like for good things. Yeah, really helped with like socialising me. I’ve made a lot more friends and bonds and found it easier to talk to people now than I used to”* (Ditaufa). The encouragement and sense of connection inspired within the sisterhood affirm that progressing through challenge is seen to be a highly empowering exercise of personal growth for youth athletes (Verkooijen et al., 2017). Strong relationships are created with teammates who both laugh and grind beside each other in physically / mentally taxing sporting scenarios as players work together towards a common goal of improvement. This ongoing rugby socialisation in a culture of cheering one another on makes their rugby experiences meaningful, as individuals are encouraged to express and back themselves, develop their weaknesses, and grow together. By way of rugby participation, identity is formed and consolidated, which inspires confidence and self-esteem. This reinforces how rugby involvement can stimulate broader development of the individual in relation to the collective, embodying what Newman et al. (2018) conveys as an “inherently meaningful and relevant setting in which youth can learn valuable lessons and skills... promoting the overall development of its youth participants” (p. 281). This holistic self-development through sport enhances the meaningfulness of the sporting experiences.

Normalising and accepting mistakes in the learning process

The overarching theme of empowered self-expression and self-development as key in meaningful rugby experiences is further fleshed out by the third sub-theme of normalising and accepting mistakes throughout learning processes. This response appeared to contrast with the girls’ norms outside of rugby and revealed their deep appreciation and longing for acceptance and encouragement in the midst of mistake making. To receive these, rather than embarrassment or shame, makes these learning experiences meaningful. In the rugby context, the girls can find acceptance irrespective of their current

skills, knowledge, or fitness levels. As long as they remain committed to improving, the mistakes and losses are accepted as a normal part of the learning process. “*Just get it on the next all goods*” (Asenate). This emphasis on learning from “challenges that are inherent in the process of competing rather than [solely] on the outcome” is shown to contribute to a meaningful experience for youths (Beni et al., 2017, p.302). The normalisation of mistakes in the learning appeared to be a powerful enabler for the girls’ engagement in their learning experiences and development. “*Our coach always says, ask questions, it’s okay to make mistakes here*” (Asenate). This is a really important message that the girls like and need to hear from coaches and teammates, as they learn to differentiate themselves from their performances.

The greatest fear or concern identified by the girls was to embarrass themselves, their families or teammates by playing poorly, which they wrote under what they disliked most in their rugby contexts. “*If I didn’t play good enough, that would really put me down and so then I started having a really bad mindset, thinking that I was letting everyone else down. But it was kind of just a me thing*” (Asenate). This idea of not playing ‘good enough’ reveals a pressure felt by some to play flawlessly, and also reveals a fear of public failure, shame and embarrassment, which may affect not only the girl but those associated with her. Such is the beauty and danger of a collectivist culture where one’s success belongs to all and is celebrated accordingly, and one’s failure is also more broadly worn. Embarrassing moments recorded included ‘*making mistakes, failing, losing, feeling lost, shamed or not understanding*’ which led to ‘*feeling like an outsider*’ or ‘*useless*’ by ‘*letting others down*’. This translation of natural and inevitable moments in rugby (losing a game, making a mistake, not always understanding what’s happening) into such intensely negative feelings is concerning. It conveys a precarious sense of wellbeing and worth hinging on a single [or string of] performance[s], which many factors will influence. To counter these moments, the girls spoke of how important encouragement and team support was. Marsters et al. (2020) affirm that strong peer and familial affirmations amid difficulty or poor performances are necessary for the wellbeing of young Pasifika athletes. “*Like being supportive of one another, like get – even if they are making your team behind or something, picking them up and keep trying to encourage them to keep going*” (Dimere). This highlights an intentional commitment to persevering and encouraging one another beyond mistakes or weaknesses, irrespective of the current performance. Although this commitment to growth together is not necessarily articulated so clearly (i.e. No participant said “Regardless of how bad you’re playing right now, I’ll encourage you and will persevere alongside you in these messy learnings”), it is embodied in a strongly meaningful way.

Making mistakes seems to be generally not accepted in the upbringing of these girls at home. As the girls acted out their parents in simulation scenarios, latently I heard a desire for parents and siblings to also acknowledge and accept that “*it’s okay to make mistakes*”, rather than mistakes being a cause of individual and group embarrassment, or shame. Additionally, more than being told “*good work*”, the girls really wanted to hear “*I’m proud of you*” (this was also written in capitals and circled on the

presentation poster of one group as a majorly empowering statement). In this, there is a longing to be acknowledged as worthy of pride, a source of delight to an esteemed adult (coach/parent/sibling), even in the learning. The girls appeared to have established a strong correlation between their rugby performance and their own worth in that performance space (and potentially more broadly as a defining factor of their holistic identity). This highlights the greater need for clear differentiation of the girls' worth as humans irrespective of their temporal performance.

The girls loved to have a space where the leadership (coaches, senior players) reassured, and teammates agreed that "*it's okay to make mistakes*". Permission to make mistakes normalises failure as necessary in learning and improvement. This also conveyed a desire for secure connection in learning to perform without the threat of exclusion or being ousted if they perform poorly – a challenge in any competitive team context where selection is involved. This is difficult because in any competitive sport, generally one's place in the team is contingent to a number of factors including consistency, talent and potential, effort, progress, coach / team rapport and of course, performance (Hanson, 2021). The reality is that repeat poor performances or errors may lead to substitutions, benching or deselection altogether. However, with clear constructive feedback and encouragement in a learning space where mistakes are allowed, players may improve their requisite skill sets to succeed where before they struggled. This sense of progress and accomplishment, as encouraged and acknowledged by others as well as self, contribute to positive experiences of their rugby contexts, and increases the overall meaningfulness of their rugby experiences.

Empowering interactions and their effect

The final sub-theme within the key theme of rugby as a unique space for self-expression and self-development relates directly to the third research sub-question. This sub-question asked "what kinds of interactions are positively empowering?", which led us to explore the specific kind of language and behaviour that the girls found to be positively empowering and encouraging in their rugby journeys, helping them to make sense of, and to draw meaning from, their rugby experiences. As "all actions and interactions cause [relational] reactions [which impact the vā]" (Bell, n.d., p. 1) the nature of interactions are hugely important for Pasifika youth, whose relationships anchor identity, and whose wellbeing and sense of self are accordingly deeply affected by relationships. Positive and encouraging communication was recorded verbally and in written format as a must for individual and team connection and empowerment, particularly after undesirable events (mistakes, losses, home dramas). The girls conveyed feeling empowered to continue participating through certain kinds of interactions, such as receiving "helpful or positive feedback". According to the girls this involves precise constructive identification and instruction on how to fix or improve errors where one is told "*what I did, what I can do better... How to improve on the next*" (Asenate). This feedback may take place in a conversational way where questions are permitted and encouraged, and the skills can be verbally described, physically

shown and repeated. While the girls appeared to prefer to convey themselves more through actions than speech, they identified via post-its that they highly valued receiving specific words and verbal instruction in the context of learning new skills, with opportunity to then practise (physically processing and outworking) in a fun learning space. This incorporates hearing, seeing and doing in the learning. In this, better understanding the game and strategies to improve performance is a source of forming positive experiences. As Verkooijen et al. (2017) noted, positive experiences are not related solely to competition and winning, but also to developing understanding, mastery and improved skills.

Other empowering interactions included “uplifting comms”, “encouragement” and “being supported and picked up by your teammates”. When asked to further elaborate in dialogue what this sounded like specifically, the dialogue died altogether. So we asked our participants in our third talanoa to then *act* out realistic challenging rugby scenarios together, bodily expressing what they considered to be empowering interactions with their coaches, parents and teammates. Throughout these fun dramatised simulations, certain phrases, behaviours, and physical postures were repeated, indirectly indicating strong preferences and desires around empowering communication from their key rugby support system.

Verbal feedback / sharing from the workshop session may be categorised into four fields of empowering communication including:

- **Validation**, communicating an acknowledgement of having appreciatively seen one’s effort and work ethic - *“You gave it your all, good work, we did well, I’m proud of you”*.
- **Affirmation**, conveying one’s support and empathy of the participant irrespective of result - *“I back you, I know how hard you tried, I’m in your corner, I’m proud of you”*.
- **Reassurance**, establishing that they are cared for and that they are okay. - *“It’s alright. What can you do better next time? It’s okay to make mistakes. I got you”*.
- **Pick ups**, short pithy instructional exhortations to persevere beyond the disappointing moment rather than crumble and give up there - *“Don’t give up, don’t worry you got this, next one, keep your head up, reset, come on bro”*.

Verbal interactions tended to communicate positively around making mistakes, acknowledging effort and presenting a broader perspective of how the mistake sits in a bigger future-oriented picture. This kind of encouragement develops a growth mindset, which sees mistakes not as absolute failures, but learning opportunities (Dweck, 2012). It also acknowledges our imperfections and humanity in learning, where we need time and repetition (numerous opportunities) to eventually gain mastery.

Empowering behaviours and physical postures included coming over to physically lift someone up from the ground with a hand up, a pat on the back, high fives and hugs immediately following disappointing or challenging events. A closing of space (i.e., not leaving the girl/s alone in distress) and leaning or

kneeling to get more on the same level and to establish eye contact was demonstrated time and time again as a way of establishing connection and a sense of closeness. In each of these situations where encouragement was extended, the encourager placed a hand on or around shoulders after physically and/or verbally picking up the discouraged individual. The girls modelled hugs from teammates and parents (notably not their male coach figures) as important in the empowerment process, accompanied by a verbal expression of reassurance and/or pride. Through demonstrating presence and proximity, the girls embodied a belief that the mistake or loss should never justify shame or disconnection of an individual from the rest of the collective.

Validation of their effort and character (the being and becoming), not only the final performance outcome (the doing) is hugely impactful and empowering for rising above sporting disappointments. This resonates with one of the three underpinning fundamentals that Merkel (2013) presents for positive youth sport, that is, focus with effort rewarded rather than outcomes. Marsters et al. (2020) also posit that in light of the inherent influence of family and the self-imposed pressures of Pasifika athletes, “it is important [for player wellbeing] that family members remind young Pacific athletes that they are proud of them regardless of their athletic success or sporting career” (p. 63). This allows for sport to enhance one’s sense of self and connection to others whilst avoiding one’s sporting performance to determine one’s sense of self and connection to others. In situations where parents or family are absent or disengaged, the coaches’ voices and team members can fill the void. Strong positive relationships and connections with others in rugby lead to enhanced well-being and identity for the girls, which make rugby experiences profoundly meaningful. Conveyed pride and affirmation reminds players that they themselves are seen, beyond their success or mistakes, and encourages ongoing participation.

In summary - Linking “meaningful” and rugby experiences together

When invited to share about their meaningful **rugby** experiences, all ten of Willis et al.’s (2017) key elements of meaningful youth sport experiences were expressed at some point verbally or in written format during the three talanoa. These include having fun, authentic friendships, experiencing success, belonging, experiencing freedom, developing an identity, the opportunity to participate, role models, family support and learning (Willis et al., 2017). In particular, the importance of family support, fun friendships with teammates, the input of old girls and coaches (role models), a sense of belonging within the team, experiencing freedom (through an outlet) and learning or self-development and identity formation were discussed by the girls as meaningful contributors to their rugby journeys. This also resonates with Powrie et al.’s (2015) four F’s of fun, freedom, fulfilment and friendships as key contributors to meaningful youth SAR. While initial descriptions of meaningful experiences appeared to be more self-referential (i.e. benefitting self, self-fulfilling) as the talanoa progressed to discuss meaningful rugby experiences, a collective-orientation became increasingly evident, whereby

meaningfulness is co-created together with substantial inputs from other people. Meaningfulness in SAR is both personally constructed and understood by the individual, and also co-created and shared by collaborators ([Kretchmar, 2006](#); [Light et al., 2013](#)).

The key factors of meaningful rugby experiences in the talanoa were broadly drawn to tangible people and relational dynamics, whereby experiences were largely facilitated by others (rather than self-made). This is reflective of the deeply embedded relational orientation of Pasifika cultures, where the status of the vā between individuals and within the collective determines wellbeing, identity and development. As such, the makings of meaningful rugby experiences seemed to be filtered through a lens of relationships, either directly connected to individuals or connected to what these individuals facilitated or created by their involvement. While the findings of this study agree with Beni et al.'s ([2016](#)) assertion that the interplay between key factors of meaningful youth sport experiences may look different for each person, relational connections (past, present and in the making) were clearly the greatest influencing factors in making meaningful rugby experiences across the board for the young Pasifika female participants, which is also a strong thread in other indigenous youth SAR studies from Canada, Belize and Aotearoa ([Dunlop-Bennet, 2018](#); [Eldridge, 2018](#), [Greene & Stewart-Withers, 2018](#); [Nesdoly et al., 2021](#); [Wright et al., 2016](#)).

Chapter 5

The purpose of the present study was to *explore the makings of a meaningful sporting experience for young Pasifika girls in rugby*, through exploration of the girls' own definitions of meaningfulness and "meaningful experiences". The two other sub-questions that the study sought to gain understanding into included how they were experiencing their current rugby contexts and what kinds of interactions were positively empowering. Grounded in a Pasifika paradigm, ethic and methodology, this study sought to offer a unique contribution with female Pasifika youth perspectives of meaningful experiences in rugby to the wider picture of an evolving, diverse youth sport landscape. Chapter 5 offers a summary of the key insights of 21 Pasifika rugby girls, who were distributed between three talanoa groups (seven participants per group) over two days of research. These summarised findings are based upon a reflexive thematic analysis of the girls' sharing in the three research talanoa that made up the study. Relevant theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed, with acknowledgement of gaps, limitations, and possible future areas of research. Theoretical implications consider how the relational orientation of the girls' Pasifika worldview forms the premise for all things "meaningful" and emphasises relational connections as the vital enablers for positively meaningful experiences. These are discussed with a visual re-presentation of Chapter 2's modified conceptual image and comparative table of key factors that make up meaningful youth SAR experiences, introducing these Pasifika findings

from a contemporary indigenous viewpoint. Practical considerations relate to insights for adults involved in facilitating rugby experiences (coaches, managers, parents, sports coordinators) towards building meaningful connections with empowering communication and actions.

Summary of key findings

Meaningful rugby experiences for these young Pasifika girls are attributed to making and strengthening genuine connections. The most significant connections that were highlighted by the girls were richly relational; firstly, with family, secondly, with rugby community in the forms of friends (peers, old girl role models) and coaches, and finally, connecting more with oneself. This is visually presented in Figure 3 below, which portrays the closely interrelated elements that, through relation connections, contribute to making a meaningful rugby experience for Pasifika girls.

Family connection

For the girls, rugby participation appears to enhance existing relational connections and intergenerational solidarity with their own blood family. This adheres and contributes to an embedded sport socialisation process from a young age with their family who love and rally around sport. Rugby in particular, has been acknowledged by scholars as a strong aspect of their shared Pasifika culture and identity (Granger, 2009; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2017; McDonald et al., 2019). Linked to sport socialisation theory, family systems theory, as explained by Dorsch (2017) offers insight into how a Pasifika girl may best be understood, as an interconnected and interdependent part of their whole family system, rather than in isolation or separate to other members. As Pasifika researchers have found in their education, social welfare and health studies, building connections is highly meaningful in Pasifika culture, where the individual's wellbeing and identity is oriented by relational connections, and purposeful actions in life are determined not by one's sole preferences but very much by what may best serve the collective that individuals are connected to (Bell, n.d.; Reynolds, 2018; Thorpe et al., 2020). As such, rugby experiences become more meaningful as connections are strengthened by consolidating shared identity and family cohesion through rugby participation. Participation also acknowledges and reciprocates family passion and values, in a way that honours the collective, which is highly meaningful. The rugby space serves as a nexus for relational connection and development with different generations of family, where family dynamics both influence and may be influenced by their girl's rugby journey. In this, rugby was seen to be a positive and uniquely uniting space for some fractious families, enhancing intergenerational solidarity and relations. Additionally, the girls' rugby participation serves to unite and connect the girls with their less-tangible origins and precious passed loved ones, powerfully promoting and enhancing the *vā* between the girls and their ancestry / heritage, which also serves to make their rugby experiences meaningful.

Rugby friendships and sisterhood connection

Rugby involvement allows the girls to create new meaningful connections within a rugby sisterhood as co-creators of their own environments and team culture with peers and coaches. Rugby was noted to provide an important getaway from challenging home and school contexts. Rather than drama and stressful arguments, the girls find fun camaraderie, empathetic understanding and acceptance among other Pasifika girls. Together they may build character and strong friendship bonds through the formative challenges that rugby facilitates in the way of fitness (the dark place), being physically active and pushing oneself, learning the game and team strategies, ownership, teamwork and communication. Shared experiences of challenge and progression with friends who consistently encourage are considered to be highly empowering for young women in rugby.

Through rugby involvement, alternative role models and influencers are made available in the forms of “big sister” or “old girl” peers and patient coaches. These additional or surrogate influencers can offer positive input as encouraging, communicative and caring authority figures, which may be lacking at home for various reasons as modern family structures and dynamics shift. Playing rugby provides a diverse mix of different girls (who may share strong familial or cultural commonalities) with a safe space and clear common purpose of growth together as a new unit. During rugby trainings, games, camps and social events, the girls develop their support networks and form an alternative sporting family where they may have more influence and permission to be highly expressive, owning their unique traits. Actively building connections together with peers and coaches, experiencing holistic empowerment and encouragement through adversity, and belonging to a co-created collective with a strong sense of purpose and enjoyment cumulatively make their rugby experiences deeply meaningful.

Personal development and self-connectedness

Meaningful rugby experiences provide opportunities for the individual self (and by association, their connected collective) to benefit, differentiate and develop within a supportive group context. Not only does rugby occupy a unique space in the life of many Pasifika families and communities, it creates a unique space for self-expression and holistic development of these girls. Whereas in traditional home and school settings, girls may fit into more submissive gender roles of service and quiet care, the rugby setting provides a cathartic outlet, celebrating competitiveness, challenge and physicality. This opportunity to express oneself outside of the traditional gender norms in tackle rugby (oftentimes considered to be a masculine activity) is empowering to the girls, leading to boosted confidence, sense of self, and social connections. This was also noted by Liechty et al. (2016) in their study with American women in tackle football. Positive differentiation and identity formation may be encouraged as connected rugby systems (people, environment, team culture) stimulate greater connection to self and to others in learning self-awareness, self-regulation, self-confidence and social skills (e.g. communication, empathy, leadership). Perseverance, trust, adaptability, work ethic and self-discipline

are key learnings that the girls identified they develop for themselves in rugby, as they engage in a space of mistake-making and supported problem solving.

The normalisation and acceptance of mistakes with constructive encouragement throughout the learning process strongly influences the experience of young Pasifika girls in rugby. Encouragement from peers and trusted authority figures (i.e. coaches, older family members) in a range of forms is needed to instil confidence and security in rugby's dynamic learning processes. Empowering interactions include a cross section of validation, affirmation, reassurance, and pick-up exhortations, communicated verbally and physically through encouraging dialogue and behaviour (such as maintaining non-threatening eye contact, hugs, pats on the back, arm around shoulders). These affirm that regardless of the girls' rugby performances, they are still valuable and cared for, a part of the connected developing whole. The belonging and acceptance that may be found in rugby appear to be hugely impactful and meaningful for the girls in their ongoing differentiation as young women in the making. Such empowerment and self-development in a fun and purposeful shared pursuit with others appears to enhance the meaningfulness of rugby experiences.

Theoretical Implications

As discussed in earlier chapters, there is limited literature exploring meaningful experiences for youth in SAR, and even more so for Pasifika girls' experiences in SAR in Aotearoa. This present study endeavoured to attend to a dearth in sport studies "using indigenous cultural approaches, where concepts and theorising are developed from cultural insiders' own meaning systems" (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2018, p. 49). These findings convey a significant nuance for this Pasifika group's perception of meaningful sporting (specifically rugby) experiences, as compared to other studies. While key factors such as fun and enjoyment, identity, challenge and progress, relevant and transferable learnings were indeed identified in key global scoping reviews (Beni et al., 2016; Powrie et al., 2015; Willis et al., 2017) as important in meaningful youth sporting experiences, this present Pasifika study found that these were first and foremost founded in **meaningful relational connections**. In other words, these other key factors may be considered by-products of the quality, tenor and strength of the relational connections developed through rugby participation between the participant and family members, with her rugby community and herself. Meaningfulness is drawn back to the positive impact of interactions and choices on wellbeing, identity and purpose, which for these Pasifika girls are evidently anchored in a bigger picture of relationships or connectedness.

This collective orientation is culturally embedded and given creative, physical expression through rugby participation, which appears to enhance connections to existing and new collectives as well as with the individual self. The enhanced relational connections that rugby enables make the girls' rugby experiences profoundly meaningful, and serve as the means for enjoyment, greater life learnings and

development. These are relationally founded, which resonates somewhat with Nesdoly et al.'s (2021) study with indigenous Canadian youth sport deliverers whereby mindful holism or a holistic understanding of cultural relevance, reciprocity and relational support in the active SAR form was considered to form the basis for meaningful experiences with their indigenous youth. Embedding culture and heritage (including legacy) into sporting involvement was also seen to enhance the meaningfulness of experiences as in this present study. This demonstrates how a collective cultural worldview and orientation (as introduced in Chapters 2 and 3) may both order the priorities and shape the perceptions of Pasifika youth around meaningful experiences, which are shared and connective.

The table below presents a summary of recent literature exploring key factors for meaningful youth experiences in broader SAR (including active leisure and free play as well as organised individual and team sport forms that may be social or competitive). The dark green column conveys my earlier synthesis of these studies' major findings (also present in Chapter 2's literature with further discussion), whereby four key pairings of synonymous factors were highlighted across the literature. The latest addition of a pink column to the far right of the table adds the key findings of this present study to this body of literature, presenting key findings from Pasifika girls' sharing. Three of the studies present a broader picture as they reviewed numerous studies exploring the perspectives of youth, (including disabled youth), parents, coaches and managers through interviews and surveys around meaningful participation. However, these were largely drawn from North America and UK, where a more Eurocentric or Western individualistic worldview may prevail and accessibility to quality youth SAR opportunities may differ. While the other two indigenous studies below were based in collectivist contexts, they were undertaken with youth sport deliverers and coaches around what they had perceived their youth to find meaningful and engaging. This present study makes a unique contribution as it amplifies the voices of the girls themselves (the youth participants) in unpacking and considering their own meaningful sporting experiences. This is an important distinction as we know that parents and deliverers can sometimes misconstrue their children's' preferences, evidenced by Visek et al.'s (2015) study of what makes fun, where parents, coaches and children collectively identified 81 very different determinants of fun for youth SAR participation. While there was some crossover, what the children identified as most important to them in having fun was not what their parents or coaches had predicted for them. This Pasifika study presents findings drawn directly from the girls' sharing around what was highly meaningful to them, both generally and in rugby, which then informed meaningful sporting experiences.

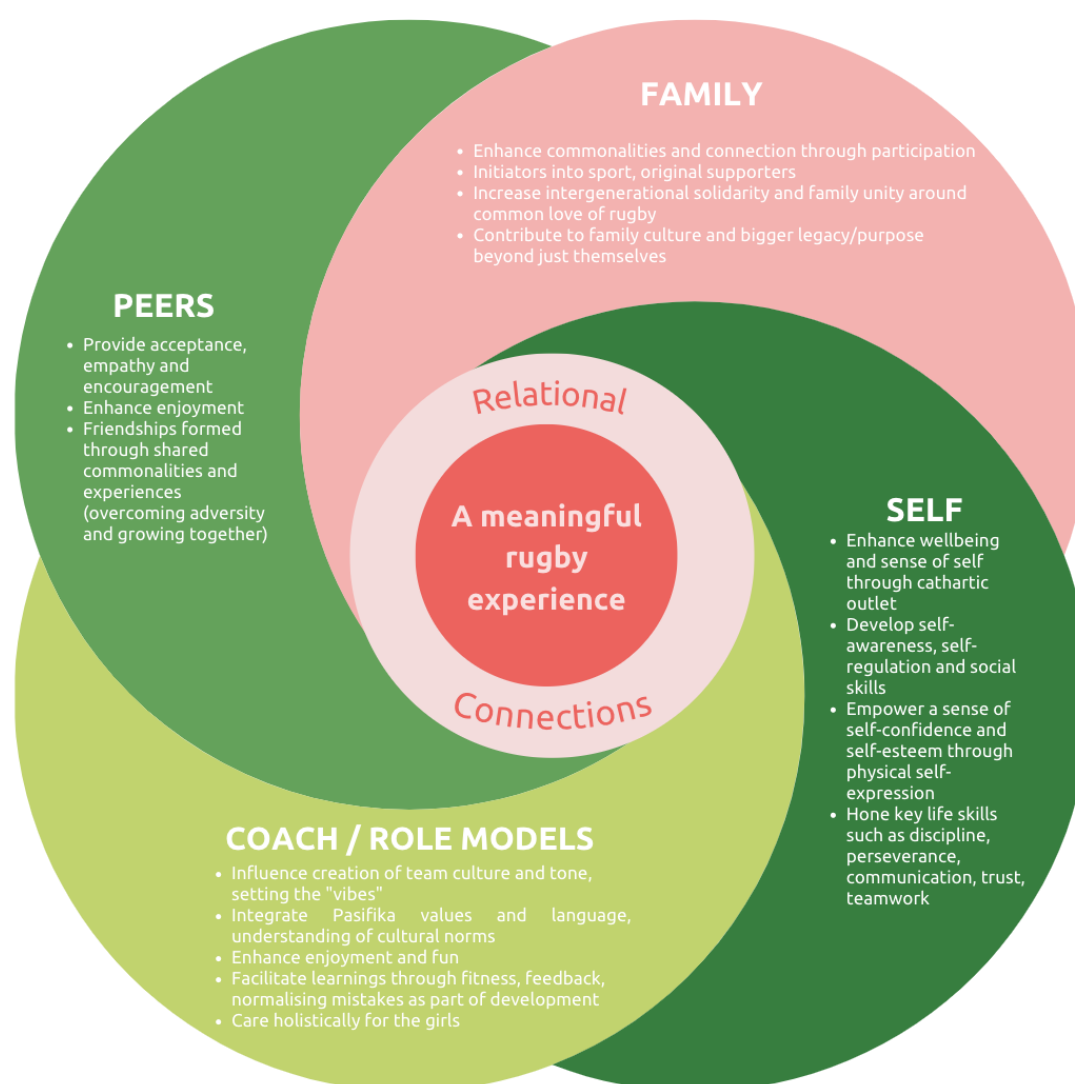
Table 2. Revised synthesis of key findings of recent relevant studies into factors for meaningful youth SAR.

Beni et al., 2017	Willis et al., 2017	Powrie et al., 2015	Nesdoly et al., 2021	Wright et al., 2016	Common threads in	Sotutu (2022)
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(global review, predominantly North American)	(global review, predominantly North American)	(global review, predominantly North American)	(Indigenous Canadian study)	(Indigenous Belize study)	existing literature	(Pasifika study in NZ)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social interaction • Fun • Challenge • Motor competency • Relevant learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having fun • Authentic friendships • Experiencing success • Belonging • Experiencing freedom • Developing an identity • Opportunity to participate • Role models • Family support • Learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun • Freedom • Fulfilment • Friendship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wisdom sharing • Mindful/adaptive teaching • Youth-centered • The role of physical activity in culture and spirituality as part of their way of life • Relational support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection • Forming identity • Visible progress • Relevancy to life beyond the program/ sport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social connections and relationships • Enjoyment and fun • Diverse challenge with progress • Relevance and ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of connection with family / culture / legacy (identity formation) • Friendships and peer support network (leading to fun / enjoyment / socialisation) • Ongoing input from caring coaches and female role models (leading to establishing safe learning environment) • Developed sense of self (identity formation) through self-expression and personal growth

The findings of this study present a deeply integrated relational perspective on meaningful experiences for youth in sport, neatly encapsulated in the quote “*meaningful experiences are about building meaningful connections*” (Group 3 participant). This is visually demonstrated in the revised model below (Figure 3), which presents the key findings or features that make for meaningful experiences for young Pasifika girls in rugby, made possible through developing / enhancing relational connections. These reciprocal relational connections then enable participants to access, develop, co-create and enjoy the many benefits that SAR may offer, both individually and collectively. Without these strong relational connections, sporting experiences are less meaningful and engaging, which may result in switching sports or finding connections that facilitate enjoyment, belonging, contribution and holistic development outside of SAR altogether. It’s worth noting that the relational connections shared between these different features may also affect one’s experience. This insight advances understanding of meaningful experiences in youth SAR from an indigenous collectivist perspective, founded in relational connections and nuanced by cultural values and expression.

Figure 3. Interrelated elements of a meaningful rugby experience for Pasifika girls.



Practical Implications

This study contributes to the youth SAR literature, adding to understanding about what makes for meaningful experiences in rugby for young Pasifika girls. In addition, this study presents various practical implications to consider. A key motivation for this research was to expand understanding and serve Pasifika youth and communities towards co-creating meaningful SAR experiences. It was important that the findings of this study offer practical insights that may aid coaches, parents, sport managers and coordinators in better engaging and supporting their Pasifika girls towards positively meaningful experiences in their Aotearoa sporting contexts. The following paragraphs discuss several concrete considerations related to approaching interactions and creating rugby environments with care in a way that intentionally enhances relational connections (and thus contribute more effectively to meaningful experiences).

Practically, adult decision-makers and influencers may benefit from carefully considering communication that is empowering particularly following challenges. These may be represented by four key P's, as embodied by the girls themselves in simulated scenarios, following disappointment or adversity expressed in rugby. These include considering **proximity**, offering reassurance that their connection still remains strong and demonstrating care through intentional physical presence (closing distance). Making kind eye contact and giving emphatic but brief skin-on-skin reassurance also provides empowering reassurance e.g., high fives, arm around shoulders, and hugs (although the girls didn't express a desire for or model hugs from male coaches as empowering for them following disappointment). Then following on from physical reassurances, the provision of **perspective** was seen to be important to the girls, vocalised as encouragement that validates and affirms effort and character, irrespective of mistakes or poor outcomes. *"I know how hard you tried; you gave it your all."* In this acknowledgement of the disappointment, the mistake/s and how this / these may be addressed going forward is helpful to the girls as it draws attention to a bigger picture of learning and development beyond the immediate current reality. With a realistic picture painted of what was and what could be in time with work, adults would do well to maintain **positivity** with encouraging communication and body language. This may look like highlighting progress points from over a period of time e.g., learning a new skill over the course of a session or a season. Providing emphasis on how this current moment of disappointment is not the be-all, end-all of their rugby forevermore but one of many valuable learning opportunities, normalises mistakes and discomfort in the learning process. Finally, the explicit expression of **pride** i.e. *"I'm proud of you, you didn't give up"* was considered to be very empowering and encouraging. This reiterates to the girls that they are okay, that mistakes are acceptable, and they are still valuable and valued.

Coaches and deliverers would benefit from showing holistic care and consideration for their Pasifika team members / participants as more than just performers or isolated individuals. They are intricately connected to a broader family system, which is then connected to a wider interrelated system of families that make up their community. It is important to understand that the sporting team is a new collective or community with a shared identity, which the girls need to have a say in somewhat shaping for themselves in order to gain a sense of personal investment and ownership. Embodying authentic care as one builds relational connections with intentionality and humour sets the tone for all future interactions through what is role modelled in the way of language and behaviour. This demonstration of care and empathetic engagement of young Pasifika girls in meaningful rugby experiences may be done through a range of different actions including:

- Acknowledging, incorporating and celebrating central aspects of Pasifika culture such as family, language, collaboration, hard work, respect and humour (laughter and banter). The integration of these values may serve to establish a welcoming environment that is familiar and fun with attractive "good vibes".

- Communicating frequently with patience and calm when giving (and repeating) instructions or advice as expert authority figures. Normalise mistakes as part of the learning process and offer specific constructive feedback that encourages or gives clarity for problem solving with the girls. Seek to make expertise and technical / tactical knowledge accessible by both verbally explaining and physically demonstrating rugby terms with space for questions, clarification and repetition.
- Beginning sessions with a clear pre-established plan of action and organised learning environment, where required resources are accessible and ready to use (functional, balls pumped, cones set up, bibs available). This forethought conveys care, respect and intentionality, inviting reciprocation from the girls to engage in learning in the same spirit.

Gaps, limitations and future research opportunities

Notably absent in our research was the theme of faith and spirituality, a sacred and weighty aspect of life for many Pasifika people (Campbell & Wilson, 2017; Gordon et al., 2015). One interpretation and embodiment of *teu le vā* as discussed by Sio (2020) presents the sacred relationship with the spiritual world (God and faith) as the primary consideration and the orientating basis of *le vā*, in which “although I am a mere speck in the created universe, I am still a part of this universe and I have a responsibility to shine my own light by serving others” (p.7). Given spirituality’s central importance to a Pasifika worldview, church and faith often play a key support role in the identity and functional life of Pasifika families and communities (Campbell and Wilson, 2017; Gordon et al., 2015), including for athletes as found in Lakisa et al. (2019) and Marsters et al.’s (2020) studies with Pasifika rugby boys and men.

In this study with Pasifika girls, church and faith were briefly mentioned throughout the first *talanoa*, however, following on from one girl’s teary sharing, was not explored further. Although the expression and engagement of faith spirituality in modern Pasifika families in Aotearoa may have evolved significantly in the last decade, I believe this lack of inclusion is not reflective of a dismissal or demotion of spirituality altogether in these youths’ lives. Rather, it may be reflective of a great respect and shyness to share deeply personal thoughts, feelings and experiences related to the sacred with strangers. For example, one participant’s meaningful experience of encouragement towards faith and connecting with God as a means of overcoming adversity resulted in deep vulnerability and tears. When this happened, the other participants appeared to rally around her with affirmation and encouragement (“*chur Abi*”, “*that’s cool Abi*”), and a brief hand on her shoulder. However, following on from this strongly emotional sharing the other younger girls exhibited uncomfortable body language (averting eye contact, tensed jaws, fiddling with pens or hands, doodling) and appeared to be reluctant to add to this particular vein of conversation. As such, we then changed the subject to less deeply personal or serious matters. In Pasifika culture, spiritual matters are *tabu* (sacred), inherently meaningful and oftentimes intimate to

each person, which can make sharing or staying in a space of deep vulnerability difficult if the individual is self-conscious or if relationships are not robust or mature enough to hold uncomfortable feelings.

Campbell and Wilson (2017) acknowledge in their qualitative research of effective counselling with Pasifika youth that spirituality is a key element of Pasifika identity and worldview, and so relationship building requires holistic and careful consideration of “spiritual aspects (as well as mental and physical) of the Pasifika youth in relation to their family (including extended family) and church” (p.92). They go on to explain how relational connection encourages deeper sharing which may be considered “an act of giving, and a matter of the heart” (p.92). Given the fact that we (the researchers and the girls) had very little time together to build rapport and trust and establish deeper connection, I am unsurprised that faith (as a profound and personal heart topic) was not shared much. This certainly would be an interesting area to explore further in future studies over more time, given its central role in Pasifika culture, family and community. For example, the integration and influence of faith or spirituality in Pasifika youth sport may be explored from several different angles, as considered by youth, coaches, sport managers and parents or family in a wider family-oriented or multi-level approach. It would also be interesting to explore whether (and how) Pasifika female engagement and integration of faith in sport may differ to their male counterparts.

The short-term nature of this present study and the lack of consistent touch points in building connection over time limited the depth and breadth of sharing. As such, opportunities for further research may include framing longer term studies using broadly inclusive family-oriented approaches to better understand how and why individuals from collectivist contexts engage in SAR as they do. Future research may, as Visek et al. (2015) did, engage Pasifika parents and coaches with the same questions as youth participants to gain a fuller understanding of how the current influencers and decisionmakers perceive and construct meaningful SAR experiences for youth, which may be contrasted with youth perspectives. Additionally, longitudinal studies that journey with the girls throughout a sporting season or multiple seasons may track how the girls’ meaning making and prioritisation of sporting experiences over time evolves. This study engaged a broader age range of 13 to 18-year-old participants, whose life realities and priorities may be quite distinct at different key stages in adolescence. As such, literature may benefit from further research in this vein of more closely exploring meaningful sporting experiences for Pasifika girls at different key stages.

Moreover, future areas of research highlighted by the findings of these study could include exploring how the changing family structures of Pasifika families in contemporary times are affecting youth SAR experiences in Aotearoa, and the role of sport in developing the different dimensions of intergenerational solidarity among Pasifika families. Another area worthy of consideration includes exploring the perspectives of Pasifika females more widely (13 through to 60) on the developing

professionalisation of female rugby in Aotearoa and globally, with consideration as to how this affects themselves, their families and their Pasifika culture. As identified in Chapter 4, exploring cultural attitudes and perceptions of Pasifika people towards the burgeoning professionalism of women's rugby would be an interesting area of future study, in light of cultural norms around provision and familial expectations. For example, as professional rugby opportunities emerge for females, will there be a shift in the relational and enjoyment focus of participants toward outcomes and provision as seems to be the case for their Pasifika male counterparts? How might increased female provision and commitment in a highly physical and professionalised sports domain (roles and spaces traditionally reserved for males) affect Pasifika family structures and culture? Orienting future youth SAR studies with a sport-for-development or development-through-sport lens may also offer greater insight into the holistic personal and collective development stimulated by meaningful sporting experiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, youth SAR experiences may powerfully stimulate and nurture holistic personal and collective development for those engaged. By applying indigenous Pasifika ethics and anchoring this study in a Pasifika paradigm and research methodology, insights were gained into the experiences of an often-unheard minority group in SAR in Aotearoa, that is, young Pasifika girls in rugby. Their meaningful rugby experiences were found to be firmly grounded in meaningful relational connections, which then enhance both their rugby and life (or non-rugby-related) development. These relationships with family, with team members and coaches and with self as pictured in Figure 3 are hugely significant in positively shaping the youths' sense of wellbeing, identity and purpose as well as broader learnings, which they consider to be deeply meaningful.

This study makes a conceptual contribution to existing literature by amplifying Pasifika youth voices and presenting an insider Pasifika perspective. This perspective roots meaningful female youth SAR experiences in relational connections, which serve as the rich soil that nourishes experiences to cultivate fruit in the forms of other important factors related to meaningful experiences such as enjoyment and fun, learning, personal development and sport and life-skill acquisitions. These findings also offer important practical insights for adults as they consider their approaches to interacting with and engaging young Pasifika girls in SAR in ways that may encourage, empower and build relational connections in co-creating positively meaningful experiences. Nurturing this *vā* (relational space) with intentionality and understanding has huge implications for our youth, family and the evolving state of SAR itself in Aotearoa. The findings of this study highlight that relational connections form the essence (or heart) of meaningful sporting experiences for young Pasifika girls in rugby. Meaningful sporting experiences are critical for positive and sustained participation and engagement in SAR. If this relational emphasis is not recognised and relational connections not deliberately cultivated accordingly, youth may not connect to the sport and sporting communities, leading to drop-offs in participation and engagement.

With this insight about the significance of relational connections, we (researchers, managers, facilitators, parents and whanau) may better tend to the heart in a way that nourishes the whole being, and those connected, to not only engage and remain engaged but to thrive in meaningful SAR participation.

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Appendices:

Appendix A. Initial AUTECH approval for study.



7 September 2021

Gaye Bryham

Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Gaye

Re Ethics Application: **21/266 Pasi-strong: The makings of a meaningful sporting experience for young Pasifika girls in rugby**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 7 September 2024.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Please send through the updated Information Sheet (appendix 3 not attached).

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTECH before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTECH in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTECH prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.
8. AUTECH grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTECH Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: susana.sotutu@gmail.com; Lesley Ferkins

Appendix B. Amended AUTECH approval for adapted study.



2 March 2022

Gaye Bryham

Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Gaye

Re: Ethics Application: **21/266 Pasi-strong: The makings of a meaningful sporting experience for young Pasifika girls in rugby**

Thank you for your responses to the conditions for the amendments to your ethics application..

The amendment to the recruitment protocol (inclusion of Ako Wāhine) and data collection protocols (additional Talanoa) has been approved.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Please provide an oral consent protocol. We recommend using the protocol in the Consent Form exemplar which can be found on the ethics website.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTECH before commencing your study, but once finalised please send through for file.

Standard Conditions of Approval.

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTECH in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTECH prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.
8. AUTECH grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted. When the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all ethical, legal, and locality obligations or requirements for those jurisdictions.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

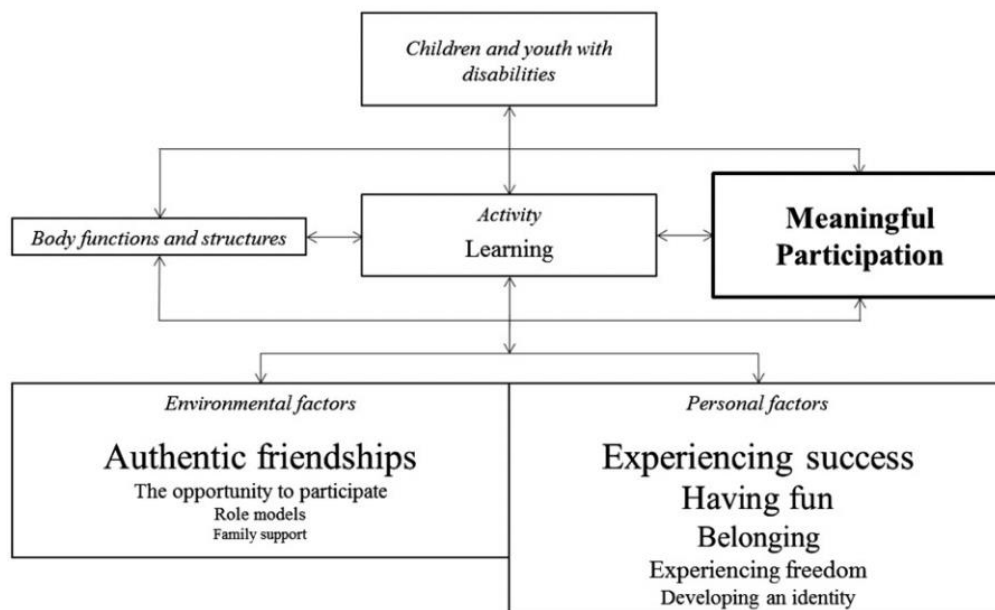
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The AUTECH Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: susana.sotutu@gmail.com; Lesley Ferkins

Appendix C. Willis et al., 2017.



Appendix D. Comparative table of global findings in meaningful youth SAR.

Author/s & Year of publication	Country	Aim	Method	Key findings
Beni, Fletcher & Ní Chróinín (2017)	Global review using online databases	To review the literature and understand the evidence concerning meaningful experiences in physical education and youth sport for young people.	Meta review of 50 peer reviewed empirical articles written in English (1987-2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies highly interconnected themes of social interaction, fun, challenge, motor competence, and personally relevant learning factors in creating meaningful experiences. While each criterion contributed to the meaningfulness of participants' experiences, the interplay between criteria is of crucial importance, as are the particular cultural and community values placed on physical activity in the contexts in which participants are situated.
Bentzen, Hordvik, Stenersen & Solstad (2021)	Norway	To through a prospective cohort design explore the complex interplay of psychosocial factors during the transition period from lower-to upper-secondary school of youth athletes, who decided to drop out of handball (an organised youth team sport)	Qual – ~10 individual interviews, focus group interviews and open ended questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One size does not fit all. Adolescents have individual perceptions, interpretations, and decisions of what they find meaningful and relevant in their daily life. As youth mature/transition contexts, they renegotiate meaningfulness, requiring sports managers to offer more differentiations in level of development, performance, and time spent on practice and in competition.
Bowers & Green (2013)	USA	To explore the experiences and attendant meanings derived from participation in both organised and unstructured youth sport settings within a community	Qual – 10 interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth sport participation is often framed in terms of its purported developmental outcomes without mention of the meaningful experiences that also result from participation. The boys in this study consistently experienced the crossover influence of playing in both structured and unstructured settings as a

				<p>determining factor in how they viewed the overall meaning of the experience of playing youth sports.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participating across multiple sport settings can coalesce to shape a more holistic, rich meaning of sport participation.
Crisp (2021).	UK	To understand whether sport itself has any transformative properties or core attributes that lend themselves to encouraging pro-social behaviours and wider community commitment and involvement in at risk youth.	Qual – 8 semi structured interviews w UK based senior sport development managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A meaningful understanding of human interaction, responses, and facilitation of youth relationships with compassion, patience and empathy is necessary to effect broader change with participants.
English (2018)	USA	To educate that youth sport participants should not be rewarded only for participation, but should be given opportunities for earning a variety of awards that reward sporting values too, beyond winning.	Argumentative piece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gaining meaningful experiences in sport through challenge and risk, and interpersonal relationships are essential parts of the youth sport project including relationships with both opponents and teammates.
Fraser-Thomas & Côté (2009)	Canada	To further understand and identify the processes that may contribute to youths' positive and negative developmental experiences in sport.	Qual – 22 semi structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The kinds of challenge and meaningful social connections (relationships with coaches, parents and peers) were key factors in determining what the overall experience of youth in their competitive sport setting was.
Martins, Costa, Sarmiento, Marques, Farias, Onofre & Valeiro (2021)	Portugal	To conduct an updated review towards further understanding how adolescents' perceived barriers and facilitators might be shaped by individual, social and environmental contexts, according to the youths themselves.	Systematic review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For promoting meaningful PA in diverse contexts several strategies were highlighted by adolescents, namely: listen to their voice, give them a choice; offer diversified, challenging appropriate, non-competitive/competitive, unstructured, unusual, meaningful, and transferable to different life contexts activities; provide fun opportunities where adolescents can interact with friends in a supportive, inclusive, safe, and mastery-oriented environment.
Middleton, Schinke, Habra, Lefebvre, Coholic & McGannon (2021)	Canada	To reveal the role of sport in forced immigrant male youths' acculturative journeys in different communities.	Qual – small focus groups with immigrant youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The meaning of sport, and what it means to be safe in sport, changes over the course of forced immigrant youths' acculturative journeys. Youth can develop and maintain meaningful connections through e-sport, ethno-centric, informal, and formal sport opportunities.
Nesdoly, Gleddie & McHugh (2021)	Canada	To explore Indigenous First Nations peoples' perspectives of physical literacy and activity through community-based participatory research	Qual – one on one interviews and focus groups with 11 indigenous educators, coaches, youth mentors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key components to meaningful physical activity/physical literacy: The findings are represented by five themes: (a) wisdom sharing, (b) being mindful in teachings, (c) youth-centered approaches, (d) culture and spirituality as part of being active for life, and (e) relational support. Understanding the culture and situation of indigenous youth is important in creating inclusive, meaningful means of physical engagement.
Ryder, Hsaio, Lower-Hoppe, Turner, Storti, Bayles & McKee (2021)	USA	To determine if females' sport participation, physical activity participation, and activity enjoyment was related to their youth sport experience as a specialised or diversified athlete	Quant survey of 254 female US college athletes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth athletes who diversified were more likely to (a) continue sport participation, (b) meet age appropriate aerobic and resistance physical activity guidelines, and (c) enjoy physical activity—at higher levels than those who specialised. These results show evidence of the importance of incorporating enjoyment and fun in the youth sport environment, which serve to promote youth athletes' continuation in sport and physical activity.

Verkooijen, Wentink, Koelen & Super (2017)	Netherlands	To investigate the positive and negative sports experiences of socially vulnerable youth participating in local sports clubs.	Qual – 22 one on one semi structured interviews with socially vulnerable youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sports setting is a place where young people can be engaged in meaningful activities and where they can have positive experiences of support and appreciation with wider skill transferability in life. • Three closely interconnected themes were discovered that were included in the youths' experiences: the extent to which they experienced visibility of their skills, the extent to which they felt confident while playing their sport, and the extent to which they felt sport was a nice challenge that they liked to take on.
Willis, Girdler, Thompson, Rosenberg, Reid & Elliott (2017)	Global review	To synthesise research literature describing elements of community recreation and leisure activities that create meaningful participation experiences for children and youth with disabilities.	Database searches for scoping review, 20 articles selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ten interrelated elements contributing to meaningful participation experiences were identified and organised into: person-based elements (having fun, experiencing success, belonging, experiencing freedom, developing an identity); environment-focused elements (authentic friendships, the opportunity to participate, role models, family support) and activity-related elements (learning). • The four themes core to the meaning of leisure (fun, freedom, fulfilment and friendship) were also identified as themes in this review (having fun, experiencing freedom, learning/experiencing success, authentic friendships/belonging).
Wright, Jacobs, Ressler & Jinhong (2016)	Belize	To present findings from a program designed to promote youth development and social change through youth sport in a Central American nation	Interviews, observations and artifacts from program facilitated by 8 coaches (research participants)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of the program and focus of the knowledge should emerge from participants themselves in collaborative co-design in order to be a truly authentic and relevant learning experience. • Key themes related to relevance, identity, seeing progress and connection.