Pick up the ball and run

Sport, civic engagement and young males

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For:

Dad, who handed down to me his love of sport;

Mum, who passed away during the writing of this thesis; and

Jesus, who makes all things possible
I would like to acknowledge the longsuffering patience of my principal supervisor, Professor John Macdonald, who gave me enough rope to work at my pace, make sense of the topic and still be creative. Thanks also go to Professor David Rowe, who joined my supervisory panel and provided a substantial dimension to the conceptualising and writing experience. I would also like to thank Dr Natalie Bolzan for her term as co-supervisor and assistance at various times of the researching and writing process.

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“This one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what is ahead,
I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Jesus Christ”

(Philippians 3:13-14)
Statement of authentication

The work contained in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, an original piece of work except as acknowledged in the text. It is the product of the author’s own work and is not a result of collaboration with others. The views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Western Sydney. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Signed:     Date:  27/7/2010
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Abstract

Academic debate about the nature and value of sport for young males has often involved a dualistic argument of either defending its social benefits or decrying its deficiencies, particularly in relation to negative associations between sport and hegemonic masculinity. Similarly contending positions have also been voiced in the youth service sector. Furthermore, much academic analysis of sport has been targeted at the (inert)national elite rather than local, grass-roots level of sport participation. In order to transcend such simplistic dichotomies and to broaden the range of work on young males and sport, the theoretical framework for this research incorporates a range of approaches, including: (i) Primary Health Care, particularly an understanding of the social determinants of health; (ii) Sport Sociology, especially relating to an analysis of sport as a reflection, reinforcement or resistance of dominant culture; and (iii) Social Work/Youth Work, with particular reference to anti-oppressive approaches to research and practice with young people. These approaches were blended since, taken individually, none could capture a sufficiently comprehensive picture of the positive and negative relationships between sport, youth, masculinity, health and well-being, and social participation.

This thesis explores the connections between sport and meaningful civic engagement by young males. In doing so, it focuses on young males’ participation in grass-roots sport in the Western Sydney region of Australia. The thesis draws together interviews with young Australian males that, within a phenomenological framework, give voice to their lived experiences of sport and civic engagement. Thematic analysis of their narratives indicates an understanding of sport that emerges as a synthesis (rather than as a set of mutually exclusive factors) of fairness, respect, competitiveness, effort, aspiration and controlled aggression. This thematic nexus, on further examination, also reveals a gender identity that blends aspects of hegemonic and alternative masculinities and, at the same time, contributes to an emerging civic identity, where passion, altruism and determination are seen as integral to community contribution, potential political activism, and resistance to dominant ideologies associated with gender identity and sports club culture.
It is the contention of this thesis that these significant roles of sport for young males have key implications for the ways in which they civically engage, and the ways in which human service workers and policy-makers engage with young males. The thesis uniquely contributes to the fields of youth research and sport research in the analysis of the complexity of the connections between local sport and meaningful civic engagement by young males, by finding that sport is both a source of, and a pathway into, such engagement. Finally, the thesis leads to distinct opportunities for further inquiry into the nature of sports club cultures, and an exploration of the broader range of engagement strategies, immediate and longitudinal, open to young males and, in fact, all young people.
Part 1: The Pre-match Warm-up
This chapter provides an introduction to the research and the researcher, tracking the gradual development of the topic and culminating in a statement of the question to be explored.

I am passionate about sport, having been a player, spectator, administrator, referee and coach in various sports on a voluntary basis for most of my life. I am also passionate about issues of social justice, and the process of community development in addressing social justice issues. In my twenty-one years of professional/vocational life, I have always been strongly committed to, and active in, working with young people (particularly young males) through inclusive community development processes in a bid to enhance youth participation in community life. I am a member of the Social Justice and Social Change Research Centre, and completed other significant research with young people in Western Sydney between 1999 and 2007. Prior to employment at the University of Western Sydney in 1996, I worked as a Social Work practitioner in street work, counselling, group work and community work with young people (with particular focus on support, development and inclusion of young males) for ten years, and also provided professional supervision to Youth Workers and Community Development Workers in the region. I have a good rapport with young people and a good knowledge of resources available in the community.

The research topic, ‘Sport, civic engagement and young males’, first began to take shape in 1995 as a component of my Masters thesis investigating perceived alcohol culture of UWS Hawkesbury residential students. Hall (1995) found that the ‘Aggie image’ and associations with sport (particularly rugby union) emerged as strong factors in the student culture. The Aggie image was conceived of as the appearance, attitudes and behaviours and sporting interests commonly associated with students studying agriculture, the traditional area of study of the Hawkesbury campus. These students were regularly residential students whose families lived in rural areas, and although there is now a wider variety of study offered, the ‘Aggie image’ was maintained at the forefront of residential student culture regardless of students’ chosen programs of study. Hence, sport played a major role in campus life and belonging amongst the residential students.
Development of the research topic was re-invigorated during the conduct of a two year action research study (2000-2001) of young people’s perspectives on community safety in a suburban context. Hall and Banno (2001) found, in the context of this project, that sport (particularly rugby union) and its associated values emerged as a key factor in a number of the participants’ experiences of feeling significant and feeling part of community life. Sport thus became a useful pathway for engaging young males in ground-up strategies to address issues raised as part of the action research process. As a result, a short-term project was funded in that area of Western Sydney to develop leadership in young males utilising the medium of sport.

The theme developed further during the implementation of this project, which engaged with a large cohort of young males that had never before been involved in community-based activities. Involvement in the project seemed to foster a strong sense of ‘participation’ and ‘contribution’ in the young male participants. In some instances there was a strengthening of existing characteristics, and in others they emerged for the first time. It may be of note that two young males involved in the project also became male School captains during the project’s two year lifespan. In any case, the researcher’s experience in this project showed that all the young male participants were enthusiastic about engaging with their community, and with community development initiatives, through the medium of sport, where they would not engage through any other.

This research aims to examine the notion that young males’ involvement in sport, including immersion in sports culture, contributes to aspects of civic engagement such as participation in community life, a formative understanding of reasons for participating, having a sense of being part of community life, community acknowledgement of that participation, a sense of belonging, and development of social networks/social cohesion.

Berkman and Glass (2003) establish a connection between people who are marginalised (for example, in terms of social cohesion and sense of belonging) and higher risk of poor health (e.g.
mental health and suicide). For this reason it is also important to consider these issues of sport, civic engagement and inclusion in the context of the social determinants of health and well-being. Macdonald (2005, 2006), for example, sees an understanding of the social determinants of health to be integral to any discussion and action related to health and well-being.

Some of the literature that explores the connections between young males and sport outlines the general benefits to the individual of sports participation (for example, higher self esteem, communication skills, learning to work in a team, conflict resolution), and the flow-on benefits in areas such as schooling and family or peer relationships. Some scholarship proposes a link between sport and the construction of gender identity in males. There is also some research addressing more negative aspects of sports culture and males, which is often related to body image, drug use or violence. To date, there has also been a small body of literature that explores notions of social capital and social exclusion in connection with young males and sport, as well as some that suggests links with a sense of belonging to community and a sense of contribution to community.

The civic engagement literature encompasses a broad spectrum of political positions, which makes it challenging to reach a meaningful and workable definition of it, since there are so many alternative views. On the other hand this broad spectrum accommodates a variety of forms of civic engagement. There is some research connecting sports and civic engagement, although the majority of it is North American and often relates to whether young people enrol to vote, a particular dimension that may not necessarily be relevant in a country with compulsory voting such as Australia, although there are still some applicable lessons to be gleaned from it.

The researcher, through his experiences of working with youth development organisations, has seen these organisations attempt to put into practice a fairly one-dimensional view of youth participation that provides opportunities for young people to contribute only through attendance at management committees or advisory groups. This formalised version of participation often served
to include the ‘already-included’, yet further exclude marginalised young people. Smith, Lister, Middleton and Cox (2005) show that young people are constructively active in their communities, yet a narrow focus on formal, organised types of participation is likely to obscure the extent of young people’s expressions of citizenship. Dwyer (1996) supports this observation with the notion of ‘winners-take-all’, where he argues that young people who are already connected and resourced tend to receive the majority of further support and resources from youth services, at the expense of those young people who are more marginalised. Williamson (2007) agrees and has coined the phrase “60/20/20” to describe this phenomenon. The 60% of young people who are doing well tend to also receive the bulk of the additional support, with 20% of the less well-off receiving less assistance, whilst the 20% of young people who are very marginalised receive little or nothing.

It is generally acknowledged within the youth services sector that working with young males is an increasingly vexed issue. Questions such as how to engage with young males, and have them engage in broader community processes, are regularly raised in youth sector forums. Significantly, much tertiary education and professional development is located within a critical framework in which feminist social analyses provide a prominent discourse. It is difficult to say whether this discourse has helped or hindered the attempt to engage with young males, but sports have tended to have a limited role in this regard. In my professional experience of youth development organisations, sport has sometimes been utilised to engage with young people, with skateboarding being the most common type of activity used. At other times sport, particularly male team sports, has been avoided for a number of reasons. First, because there is a perception that it would reinforce negative male stereotypes. Second, because it is considered to be representative of male-dominated social structures, and therefore, supporting or celebrating values/behaviours that reinforce violence, oppression or isolationism. Third, a sports focus excludes young people who are not interested in sport, or who seek to utilise youth services to pursue other interests and passions. Lastly (and pragmatically) a sport focus poses administrative problems in the area of workers’ compensation, professional indemnity and public liability.
insurance. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will have some significance for the conceptualisation and delivery of social and human services to young males, and the engagement of young males in community development and social action processes.

This thesis is interested in both focusing and broadening the understanding of civic engagement to a meaning that more effectively reflects the ways in which young people, and in particular young males, participate in the life of their community, together with an appreciation of the benefits associated with that participation. It is evident that, generally, Australian young males do not rate well on many measures of civic engagement, although participation in sport is quite high. A connection with sport and sport culture, therefore, is one of the ways in which an inquiry into young males and civic engagement can be undertaken. Rowe (2007) supports Crawford (2004) in showing that inquiry into sport is often related to out-of-the-ordinary phenomena (such as elite practices), and laments that little attention has been paid to people's everyday 'grass-roots' experiences of sport. It is young males' everyday experiences of sport that were explored here. An understanding of ‘local’ sport is hence integral to this study, particularly for young males participating in sport primarily as players at an amateur level. A further dimension raised in the study is the key sociological question as to whether or not sport actually has social benefits, encouraging a discussion that reaches beyond naïve and dualistic notions of the role of sport within society.

This doctoral research, then, sets out to examine the possible connections between local sport and meaningful civic engagement by young males. The thesis will add to the general body of knowledge available, relating to issues concerning young males engaging in their community. In turn, it will benefit youth work practitioners to enable them to more effectively tap into motivating factors for civic engagement by young males. Furthermore, the participants will benefit by having the opportunity to tell their stories of civic engagement, and by being listened to and taken seriously.
Young males and sport

In order to develop a sound knowledge base for exploring young males’ experiences of sport and civic engagement, this chapter outlines a broad range of literature which has been critically reviewed according to its relevance to the research topic. In attempting to make this review wide-reaching yet still focused and relevant, the various elements of the literature review to follow in this chapter include background information on young males in Australia, dimensions of young males’ social connectedness, insights into young males’ sports participation, and the nature of transitional life stages affecting young males.

Young males in Australia

Bessant (2006) explains that there is a range of apparently conflicting definitions of a young person. For example, most non-government youth organisations in NSW (exemplified by the Youth Action Policy Association, 2006) think of young people as being twelve to twenty-five years of age. Alternatively, NSW Youth Health Services target twelve to eighteen year olds. Furthermore, the Australian Bureau of Statistics utilises a demographic age category of fifteen to twenty-four. Adding to the range of possibilities, as pointed out by Bessant (2006), is the fact that young people over the age of fifteen can be provided with a separate Medicare card, but are not eligible to vote, drink alcohol, marry without parental consent, or buy and use firearms until the age of eighteen. She also exposes the contradiction for sixteen to eighteen year olds that ‘it is legal for them to receive less pay for equal work, but they are required to pay the same taxes as everybody else’ (2006: 52).

For the purposes of this study, young males are those persons of the male sex aged fifteen to twenty-five, constituting a workable synthesis between the differing definitions of young people existing across government and non-government policies and programs. For research purposes, participants recruited voluntarily through any procedure (barring State schools) must be aged sixteen and over to give informed consent without requiring parental approval. The diversity in
definitions presents difficulties in terms of age boundaries for service provision, and in terms of young people accessing service provision. The 15-25 inclusive age range of this study was an endeavour to avoid these kinds of problems in accessing young males in the research context.

The age range of this study bridges the legal division between ‘child’ and ‘adult’. Conceptually, then, this span allows some exploration of the path that young males take in the transition to adulthood, which some theorists (e.g. Eriksson, 1967) propose to be an identifiable and distinct life stage. This transition may include the process of moving away from secondary education and either into the workforce or unemployment, or pursuing further education such as TAFE or University. The age range also provides for an element of reflection on previous years. For example, a 25 year old male who may not necessarily be as fully civically engaged or as fully involved in sport as in earlier years will still be able to provide key data on a significant time from his later teenage years.

To assist in gaining an understanding of the socio-cultural context in which the study was set, the first part of this section provides some background information about young males in Australia. Other specific elements of the background data have been chosen to aid in exploring a range of variables that in some way represent an element of connectedness to community for young males, including religion, employment, family, internet usage and volunteering.

**General demographic background**

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006 Population Census, there were 1,377,449 males aged 15 to 24 in Australia, with over 80% born in Australia or in English speaking countries other than Australia. This figure alludes to the existence of a dominant anglicised Western culture, although there were 272,673 people age 15-24 years who spoke a language other than English at home, and has implications for young males in terms of their connectedness to a range of peers with backgrounds broader than the cultural background of their family. Their ability to speak English as well as their familial language may also have implications for the type and place of civic activities in which they could engage.
Worsley (2005) and Bolzan (2003) propose that religious affiliation is also an indicator of resilience as an element of a young person's connectedness to community. Smetana and Metzger (2005) also suggest that religion is an antecedent of civic involvement in some adolescents, although Bolzan, Gale and Skelton (2004) found no emerging information about religion as a network in which social capital might exist. Despite this disparity, there is some justification in acknowledging the place of religion amongst young people as a possible basis for civic engagement.

The ABS (2006) data pertaining to religious affiliation was available for 15-24 year old persons (but not by sex). 55.3% of the age group reported a religious affiliation with Christianity, whereas 22.5% reported no religious affiliation. Buddhism (2.4%) and Islam (2.3%) were the next two most common responses. Despite the reported affiliation with Christianity, these numbers are not representative of actual regular attendance/involvement with a local church or Christian organisation. The National Church Life Survey (2001) estimated that while 71% of Australians had attended one religious service in the past 12 months, only 19% were frequent church attendees. Of those 15-29 year olds who attend church on a regular basis, 78% attend church services or mass weekly, 30% attend study or prayer groups and 35% attend social groups. Over all age groups, 50% of church attendees (38% for Catholics and 63% for Anglicans/Protestants) have some kind of leadership or voluntary role in their local church. It is unclear, however, whether this form of voluntarism is represented in volunteering statistics.

Employment also provides a means for young people to be socially and economically engaged in the functioning of society. In the 2006 Census, there were 336,775 males 15-19 years old in the labour force, with 86.3% of these employed in some capacity (mostly part-time), while 319,775 males 15-19 reported not being in the labour force. There were 526,725 males 20-24 years old were in the labour force, 91.1% of whom were employed in some capacity (mostly full-time), while 102,446 males 20-24 reported not being in the labour force. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that a large proportion of young males are economically engaged at this basic level, although
differences across age groups and types of employment suggest significant diversity in their capacity for engagement.

Connectedness with family is another significant dimension of indicators of well-being and overall social connectedness. Without entering into a lengthy critical analysis of the definition or role of the family in contemporary Western society, the 2006 Census data provided a description of family type and relationship in household by age. These data have not been broken down according to sex, but they highlight that almost half of those persons aged 15-24 years lived in households with couple families with children. 54% were regarded as dependent students, and 38% as non-dependent children. One in seven persons aged 15-24 years lived in households with one-parent families. 46% were regarded as dependent students, 40% as non-dependent children and 10.0% as the lone parent. One in seven persons aged 15-24 years lived in households with non-family members. 58% were reported as being a group household member, 25% as being a lone person, and 17% being an unrelated individual in a family household.

These figures indicate the diversity and complexity of family arrangements and relationships, and demonstrate the changing nature of family and living arrangements. These are important factors in the context of this study, as Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett (1982) articulate some of the strong interactions between family and school experience, while Smetana and Metzger (2005) highlight family ties as an antecedent of civic involvement. Furthermore, although Weston and Hughes (1999) showed that children who live in families that have not experienced separation, divorce, or repartnering have the highest rates of well-being, White and Wyn (2008) argue that the key factor for young people is more concerned with negotiating the meaning of family relationships, belonging, and flow of resources (material and non-material) in a constantly changing world where ‘the meanings of family are less defined through tradition’ (2008:137).

Internet usage is arguably a sign of social connectedness. Canada25 (2005) suggests that there are positive and negative sides of virtual engagement for young people. There are strong
concerns, for example, about the ‘digital divide’ between countries that are rich or poor in Information Technologies (IT), the construction of false identities by which to communicate, and the tendency for IT to reduce rather than enhance the sense of community, exemplified by the plethora of websites devoted to racism, violence and other forms of discrimination and social exclusion. Conversely, White and Wyn (2008) point out that IT contributes to the making of identities by creating new (virtual) social spaces which offer a wider range of options for communicating and connecting with others. They also argue that digital communications provide a means for marginalised young people, ‘who are not necessarily connected in physical space, [to] create a sense of belonging and identity’ (2008:217) through new technologies. Canada25 (2005) shows that volunteering online is increasing, and online communities were able to mobilise significant opposition to the 2003 Iraq war, proclaiming that ‘the internet is touted as a powerful way to reach out to a disengaged younger generation of citizens’ (2005:18). In Australia, White and Wyn (2008) summarise some key literature (Vromen, 2005; Atkinson and Nixon, 2005; Fyne and Wyn, 2007) to conclude that, while the politically engaged used the Internet in their activism, there was no evidence that IT were the central focus of political action, and that politically engaged young people use digital communications to ‘support critical discussion and action alongside more traditional forms of political engagement’ (2008:220).

Given these parameters, according to the ABS Population Census (2006), 57.5% of 15-24 year old males (61.7% of 15-19 year olds and 52.9% of 20-24 year olds) used the Internet either at home, at work, both, or elsewhere. Lloyd and Bill (2004) confirm that, although people under the age of 25 are the greatest users of the Internet (40%), those aged ten to nineteen have the highest rate of use (60%), declining from the age of twenty.

Volunteering is another potential indicator of civic engagement and can be defined in a number of ways. Canada25 (2005) sees it as a planned form of helping others for which the volunteer expects no direct compensation. Ruston (2003) distinguishes between a formal type of volunteering, through an organisation, and informal volunteering outside an organisational
context, for example in helping neighbours. In the context of trying to establish that volunteering could be regarded as a leisure pursuit, Arai and Pedlar (1997) assert that in the leisure studies literature volunteering focuses on activity in services that are professionally defined and based on workers’ perceptions of community need. All these facets have some value in attempting to understand the nature of volunteering. Whilst it is important to acknowledge the place of informally helping neighbours or other people within social networks, this phenomenon has been difficult to measure. The concept of social capital has been developed to attempt to quantify this style of volunteering, but in terms of empirical information the bulk of the data relates to volunteering through formal methods in constituted or incorporated organisations.

In Australia, the 2006 population census indicates that 12.5% of males aged 15 to 24 identified as having been involved in some type of voluntary work. According to the ABS Volunteer Work Survey (2000), 18-24 year olds had the third lowest rate of volunteering (with only 65-74 and 75+ rating lower). Across all age groups the highest type of volunteering was in fundraising activities, followed by management committee involvement and teaching/instructing/providing information. Sports coaching and/or refereeing was rated 8th on the list of types of volunteering, with approximately 22% of volunteering activity being of this nature. However in terms of the types of organisations for which people volunteered, 34% of organisations were sport/recreation related, rating second behind community welfare organisations (35%). Education/Youth organisations were the third highest (20%) category of agency in which people volunteered.

Volunteering Australia (2004) report that between 1995 and 1999 men volunteered on average for slightly fewer minutes per week than women (41 minutes compared with 49 minutes). It was also shown that 78% of Australians surveyed perceived volunteering to be of greater importance than they had five years ago. They argue that “the community benefits of volunteering are undisputed, with volunteering long identified as an important contributor to social capital, a measure of the connectedness and well-being of communities” (2004:12). This type of phenomenon can be seen across the demographic characteristics of Australians, with 44% of
surveyed males, 48% of females, 50% of marrieds, 42% of singles and 54% of children reporting some type of volunteer involvement. What motivated those surveyed to volunteer included a combination of altruism and a realisation of the benefits to the volunteer. Specifically, 90% of respondents named ‘helping others’, 81% ‘doing something worthwhile’, and 71% ‘for personal satisfaction’ as motives for volunteering.

Ferrier, Roos and Long (2004) found that participation in community work activities is widespread across all categories of young people aged 16 to 24, but that they were more likely to participate if they: were from the highest fifth of socio-economic background; had a more positive self-concept; were from families with both parents born in Australia; were female; and in part-time work or study. Volunteering Australia (2004) estimates that approximately one third of adult Australians had completed some form of volunteering during 2002, which represented an increasing trend towards volunteering (in comparison with international trends which see a decreasing rate of volunteering). It believes that, among other factors, Sydney’s hosting of the 2000 Olympic Games, and the naming of 2001 as International Year of the Volunteer, have played significant roles in producing this increasing trend, and lends further weight to the potential connections between sport and volunteering as a means of civic engagement.

Overall, young males don’t rate a very great mention among the different facets of volunteering. There is, however, sufficient information to begin to mount an exploration of the relevant connections. Together, the background data on birthplace, religious affiliation, employment, families, internet use and volunteering trends of young males indicate a range of factors that is in some way integral to a young person’s social connectedness. Young males haven’t figured strongly in the discussion and data on volunteering and engagement, but it is important to examine the matter, especially through the key area of sport. This analysis sets the scene for exploring the rates and meanings of sport participation of young males in Australia and beginning to uncover the elements of the transitional life stage in which the research participants are situated.
Participation in sports by young males

In order to broach the topic of connections between sport and civic engagement for young males, it is useful to understand how young males participate in sports in Australia. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007), nearly two-thirds of the Australian population aged 15 years and over reported that they had participated in sports and physical recreation at least once during the 12 months prior to interview. Approximately 29% of the population aged 15 years and over participated in sports and physical recreation activities twice per week. The number participating in non-organised activities was almost double that for participation in organised activities. The two highest participation rates for frequent and regular sports (both organised and non-organised) were males aged 15 to 17 (51.6%) and males aged 18 to 24 (45.1%).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004) Survey of Involvement in Sport and Physical Activity estimated that 4.3 million persons aged 15 years and over (approximately 27%) reported that they were involved in regular organised sport and physical activity. Those involved in organised sport and physical activity included 3.7 million players (23% of persons aged 15 years and over), as well as 1.5 million persons (10%) involved in non-playing roles (e.g. coach, instructor or teacher, referee or umpire, committee member or administrator, scorer or timekeeper, medical support). Of the 1.5 million persons with a non-playing role, 6% also had a playing role.

For persons with non-playing involvement, 67% had one non-playing role, 21% had two non-playing roles, and 12% had three or more non-playing roles. 54% of those with a non-playing role were associated with school or junior sport for at least some of their non-playing involvement. Of those involved as a coach, instructor or teacher, 71% had some association with school or junior sport. In contrast, only a relatively low proportion (44%) of those involved as a committee member or administrator did so in association with school or junior sport.

The survey measured different characteristics of persons involved in sport and physical activity, comparing sex, country of birth and age. The survey reported that a higher percentage of males (31%) than females (23%) was involved in organised sport and physical activity, in both player
and non-player roles. The most common non-playing activities for males were coach, instructor or teacher (4.7%) and committee member or administrator (4.3%).

Levels of involvement in sport and physical activity also varied according to country of birth. Persons born in Australia and in predominantly English speaking countries had participation rates of 31% and 27% respectively, compared with 12% involvement for those born in other countries.

In terms of age, the 15 to 24 years age group had the highest rate of involvement with 39% of people participating in organised sport or physical activity, with player participation rates dropping progressively in older age groups. Among non-players the peak age groups for participation were 35 to 44 years and 45 to 54 years. It could be suggested that this non-playing age group might represent the parents of the age group 15-24 with the high player participation rates.

Whilst the 15 to 24 years age group in this ABS survey reported the highest rate of involvement, the breadth of the age range could be misleading. Cale and Harris (2005) and Wright, MacDonald, Wyn and Krilfik (2005) note that there are declining levels of physical activity in the senior years of schooling and beyond. Gorely (2005) confirms that during adolescence, there is a decrease in physical activity with age. Wright et al (2005) argue that competing demands lead a young person to shape who they are by their choices and priorities, and it is this competition that leads to decreases in physical activity in the late teens and early twenties. The first and most obvious factor in having less time for physical activity is paid employment. Employment becomes a priority because young people need income to sustain lifestyle choices such as cars, mobile phones and going out (even for those young people who are passionate about sport). Their conclusion is that what young people do at one point in their lives (in relation to physical activity) does not necessarily predict what they will do at later times, as priorities, social relationships and interactions with social structures are changing.
Sinclair, Hamlin and Steel (2005) support this argument in detailing a decline in physical activity participation of students since commencing tertiary education. Obviously, sport and recreation club membership was found to result in increased physical activity. Interestingly, and contrary to other findings on adolescent sport participation, they found some evidence to suggest that an increase in peer support is linked to a decrease in physical activity. Even though moderate and vigorous physical activity declined, there was an increase in strength-building activity, which suggests perhaps for the New Zealand university students in their study that physical activity was more commonly engaged in at an individual level. They also found that an increase in other life activities correlated with an increase in physical activity (compared to the decrease found by Sinclair et al), suggesting that perhaps ‘activity begets activity’ (2005: 41), with the possibility that students develop better time management skills and also become more interested in participating in university life in general.

This phenomenon leads to the question of young males’ reasons for participating in sports. Allison, Dwyer, Goldenberg, Fein, Yoshida and Boutilier (2005) reported on the factors involved in motivating young males’ participation in sport, describing both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. They found that for the males aged fifteen and sixteen that they spoke to, intrinsic motivations for sports participation included enjoyment and the challenge of acquiring new skills. It seems that for these young males, enjoyment took precedence over winning – not that they didn’t want to win, but they didn’t want winning to be their sole focus. The extrinsic factors that Allison et al (2005) found included the opportunity to socialise (particularly where team sports were concerned), and for the range of physical and psychological benefits that ensued from their sports participation. Gorely (2005) broadens these factors into a framework she calls an ecological model for explaining behaviour that incorporates intrapersonal, interpersonal, physical and policy/legislative layers. She argues that this model is useful in ascertaining correlates (but not causes) of physical activity, reporting that - even from a young age - males are more active than females. She asserts that on the intrapersonal level, children are more likely to participate where there is intention, availability of preferred sporting choices, and where there are fewer perceived barriers. For
adolescents, factors that correlated positively included achievement orientation (rather than ego orientation) and perceived competence. In terms of interpersonal factors in adolescent sports participation, she cites Sallis, Prochaska and Taylor (2000), who found positive correlations with parental support, support from significant others and sibling activity, but not perceived peer support. In contrast, Allison et al (2005) found that the opportunity to socialise was an important external factor in sports participation for young males. Gorely (2005) acknowledges these conflicts in the literature and calls for further inquiry into the influence of social variables. Finally, she nominates environmental factors to be related to access to facilities and programs, and opportunities to exercise. She argues that changes in the urban physical environment that encourage car use, for example, may reduce opportunities for young people to engage in physical activity.

Allison et al (2005) provide particular insight into barriers to physical activity. In the same way that they discussed intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for participation, they identify barriers of either internal or external origin. The first cluster of internal barriers involved factors related to physical characteristics including age, height, weight, strength, disability, injury and actual skill level. The second cluster of internal barriers was of a more psychological nature, and included laziness, boredom, lack of confidence, wanting to avoid conflict/stress, and level of perceived competence (either of others or self). Furthermore, the priority placed on sport by young people and their parents was an important consideration, particularly where academic performance was seen as more important than sporting prowess. Mulvihill, Rivers and Aggleton (2000) also discuss the transition from primary school to high school as posing additional barriers, particularly when young people become self-conscious or embarrassed about their bodies or altered gross motor skills during pubertal changes.

Allison et al (2005) identified that parental and peer influence were also external barriers to sport participation. They found that decisions to play or not play sport are sometimes made on the basis of what a particular young person’s friends do, or on the basis of avoiding other people who
intimidate them. Other external barriers included cost, lack of access and time to participate due to competing demands such as jobs, homework or other interests. These findings – consistent with those of Wright et al (2005) and Sinclair et al (2005) – represent a key set of determinants in the place of sport and physical activity amongst young males.

Whilst the discussion of barriers to sport is an important one, the language of the arguments can imply that all young males want to participate in sport and it is only the existence of easily surmountable barriers that are stopping them from doing so. This proposition is an obvious fallacy and, regardless of the researcher’s own passions about sport, consideration needs to be given to non-participation in sport as a legitimate and valid choice. Similarly, sport is not the only non-sedentary activity. Where Gorely (2005, p94) identifies ‘correlates of sedentary behaviour’ – which to a large extent reinforces the deficit model of thinking around this issue – Allison et al (2005) discuss reasons for non-participation with less value-judgement. They found that personal preference was often a factor in this regard, with some young males opting to engage in technology-related activities such as computer games, internet, television or talking to friends on the phone.

On a broader, more critical level, Plummer (2006) explores the associations between sport and homophobia as a factor in male non-participation. He found that the association draws parallels between a young man’s lack of sporting competence and public accusations of homosexuality, i.e. ‘physical incapacity and being a poofter’ (2006:126). On the other hand, the participants in his study who were homosexual found it equally difficult to escape vilification even when they had an interest and high skill level. On this basis, Plummer (2006, p127) argues that ‘sports participation has a complex relationship with homophobic stereotypes irrespective of actual physical capacity’. Accordingly these experiences of sport during adolescence lead many men to hate sport as adults, and that this antipathy can be a key reason for ongoing non-participation in sport.
A somewhat connected historical phenomenon drawn from Victorian Britain is encapsulated in the term ‘ludism’. Huggins (2004) describes ‘ludism’ as a pursuit of the pleasurable and social accoutrements of sport without necessarily being involved in actually playing the sport. Tefler (2004) suggests that one impetus on the part of British Victorian men for their membership of sporting clubs was more for the purposes of male conviviality, social interaction, and the status and associated pleasures of club membership rather than any connection with the virile masculine image of the sport itself. At the same time, it provided a homosocial experience that reinforced masculine identity and, discreetly or not-so-discreetly, fostered a homophobic sporting environment. It is difficult to determine whether this phenomenon is still current in contemporary male choices to join sporting clubs but not actively participate in sports. There is some evidence to suggest that male camaraderie, sociability and the consumption of alcohol still play a part in the sporting experience of males. Hall (1995), for example, in discussing the alcohol culture of residential university students, found that they commonly associated rugby with drinking and the traditions of the agricultural college from which the university grew. The College song celebrated this association, as did the slogan on a T-shirt worn proudly by one student which stated: ‘It’s not whether you win or lose, it’s the piss-up after the game that counts’. The experiences of these students, although demonstrating an enjoyment of the status and social nature of club membership, still indicated a strong commitment to playing the game as well. Contemporary versions of ludism may find their incarnation in the Australian obsession with being sports-spectators, but again there is insufficient literary discussion to establish any strong connection.

What is more useful to this discussion is the encouragement from Wright, MacDonald and Groom (2003) to look beyond simple sports participation rates, triggers and barriers to reach some understanding of the meanings that young people themselves associate with their sport participation. They argue that because much health promotion research is based on large scale quantitative surveys, it does not account for ‘the social and cultural contexts, local, national and global in which young people participate in physical activity except as variables with which to compare groups’ (2003:18). Their qualitative study provided a means of situating the relationship
between young people and physical activity in terms of the cultural resources available to them. They argue that young people’s engagement with physical activity as a cultural resource enables them to make sense of their social world and their identity within it. Their study found that location was a key factor contributing to cultural practice. In comparing young people’s experiences across geographical areas of distinctly different socio-economic status, involvement in sport depended largely on opportunities, resources and material advantage, and the sporting ethos of the particular school they attended. The study also seemed to suggest that the construction of identity based on sport, particularly for males, also varied across socio-economic indicators, with those whose families/suburbs were in the lower socio-economic brackets attaching a more intense or significant meaning to sport for identity formation.

In discussing the Norwegian experience relating to meanings of sport, Seippel (2006) identifies seven common reasons associated with participation in voluntary sports organisations. In order of importance to people in his study, these ‘meanings’ were joy/fun, fitness, mental recreation, social factors, achievement, expressivity, and body/appearance. Within this analysis, like Wright et al (2003), he found that social background appeared to be more important than any features of the activity itself in determining the particular meaning associated with the sport. Additionally, for many of the meanings, gender and age are particularly important for understanding how sport matters to people, but so also is the type of sport (i.e. individual or team) and the competitive level of the sport. For example, males rated achievement and competition highly. Young people had more reasons for sports participation than older people whose main reason related to mental recreation. Joy/fun was clearly the major reason for sports participation identified in this study, agreeing with Holt’s (1989, p347) assertion that ‘conviviality lies at the heart of sport’. However, Seippel (2006) found that a higher level of competition correlated with higher scores on fun, expressivity and social relations. These findings present something of a paradox: that while higher competitive levels provide a barrier to broader grass-roots sports participation, it also seems to heighten the social benefits of sport to the participant. These findings are not
straightforward and accordingly the meanings and benefits of sport for young males need to be further explored.

The direct physical benefits of health and fitness arising from sports participation have been sufficiently summarised and documented elsewhere (e.g. WHO, 2003), and highlighted by the existence of State and Commonwealth Government health priorities targeting, for example, physical activity and childhood obesity. Cale and Harris (2005), though, point out that there is no strong evidence that physical activity in childhood predicts a healthier adulthood. Neither does there seem to be any literature that suggests a correlation between better physical health and fitness (as opposed to sports participation) and an increased likelihood of civic engagement, either in youth or adulthood. Therefore, the discussion here will be limited to other emerging aspects of the meanings and benefits of sport to young males such as psychological health, education and the associations between sport and gender identity. The discussion of the social and community benefits of sport will occur in the next chapter.

Cale and Harris (2005) provide a brief overview of some literature that links physical activity with psychological health. They cite research (e.g. Calfas and Taylor, 1994; Biddle, 1995; Mutrie and Parfitt, 1998; Tortolero, Taylor and Murray, 2000) that shows associations between physical activity/fitness and increased self-esteem, positive self-concept, improved self-efficacy, greater perceived physical competence, lower levels of stress, anxiety and depression, and greater perceived health and wellbeing. Daley (2002) reports similar results in terms of sport contributing to a higher sense of physical self-worth. Pertinently, boys reported significantly higher scores than girls on sports competence, attractive body adequacy and physical self-worth. Coalter (2005) cites other research that suggests that these psychological benefits can result from both long-term participation (e.g. King, 1989) and one-off involvement (e.g. Raglin, 1990; Steptoe, 1992), and that different psychological conditions respond to differing forms of exercise. He also emphasises that there are some negative psychological aspects of sport, particularly related to overtraining and exercise addiction. Furthermore, Boone and Leadbeater (2006) studied the
effects of team sport involvement on depressive symptoms related to body dissatisfaction and low social acceptance. They found that for both boys and girls, participation in team sports partially mediated the risks for these depressive symptoms. It is fair to conclude that, in terms of these aspects of psychological health, resilience is seemingly enhanced by participation in sport and physical activity. An additional aspect of resilience discussed earlier related to spirituality and religious affiliation (Worsley, 2005; Smetana and Metzger, 2005). Resilience, in relation to religion and sport, has been discussed by Carpenter (2001) in the context of enhanced social interaction. He found simply that social activities are important to continued church involvement and that the value of sport lies in its capacity to promote social interaction.

The role of education in promoting resilience and connectedness is also an important one, as Worsley (2005) and Connell et al (1982) point out. Consequently there are some findings that link the fields of sport and school. Fitz Clarence and Hickey (1998, p3) state that ‘sport constitutes an important social context outside education but which forms significant links with educational practices’. Coalter (2005) describes educational benefits of exercise as being related to somewhat improved cognitive functioning in the areas of reaction time, perception, sharpness, memory, reasoning and mathematical ability. There is also some evidence (Sallis, McKenzie, Kolody, Lewis, Marshall and Rosengard, 1999) to suggest that allocating increased amounts of time in the school timetable to physical education and sport does not have a negative effect on academic performance. Furthermore, Corbitt and Carpenter (2006) conclude that for children with reading difficulties, a motor-kinaesthetic learning activity may be an effective tool to teach complex concepts. Coalter (2005), however, proposes that the main benefits of sport to schooling are more likely to be indirect. For example, he argues that the importance of sport to young people infers that sport-based or integrated school activities may be more likely to maintain students’ focus or enhance motivation, especially for ‘educational underachievers’ (2005:16) or ‘disaffected students’ (2005:17). Munns, Arthur, Downes, Gregson, Power, Sawyer, Singh, Thistleton-Martin and Steele (2006) seem to confirm this point by describing effective educational interventions for boys that are generally characterised by their physical and ‘hands on’ nature,
and that provide opportunities for reflection, enhance connections with the local and broader community, and have an out-of-classroom or off-campus orientation. An integration of sport and education certainly meets these criteria.

West (1996) draws out some less positive implications related to boys, sport and school. He found that sporting involvement was more of a distraction from academic achievement because there was a greater perceived reward from sport (e.g. large trophies, high popularity). He raises the opinion that fathers are more likely to get involved in their sons’ sporting endeavours than in their schooling, saying that this relationship may be a factor in boys’ lower motivation to achieve at school if it is assumed that boys are looking for affirmation and role-modelling from their fathers. However, this process is not solely based on the father-son relationship or on mentoring relationships with other older males, but is often part of the values base and structure of the school. Wright et al (2003, p30) found that ‘certain sports were valued as contributing to the ethos of the school and the school’s purpose of producing particular kinds of citizens’. Connell et al (1982) also discuss cases where schools, through policies and programs, intentionally develop differing constructs of masculinity and femininity, quite often based on sport. West (1996) also found that sport was seen as a forum for learning what it was to be a man, conducted in the company of males (both same age and older). This connection leads the discussion into the role of sport in the formation of gender identity.

There is little doubt that sport has a significant role in forming gender identity for young males, regardless of whether they are participants or non-participants in sports. The difficulty in discussing gender identity is being able to incorporate understandings of gender that reach beyond the socially constructed stereotypes formed in a sport-loving culture like Australia. Therefore, much of the literature uses the term masculinities as opposed to masculinity. Fitzclarence and Hickey (1998, p3) place this discussion in a cultural context where sport is seen as ‘a traditional guardian of masculinity’ and yet more broadly a context where men are under an increasing expectation to adapt to contemporary gender politics.
Giddens (1994, p80) states that ‘identity is the creation of constancy over time, that very bringing of the past into conjunction with an anticipated future’. In researching the construction of identity amongst young people in Ireland, O’Connor (2006) found that their lifestyles were mapped by gender-differentiated patterns, with boys being much more likely to refer to sporting activities. He noted that boys formed their sense of self in terms of their hierarchical position, with their narratives focused on competitive sports but also more broadly on ‘their presentation of themselves as authoritative interpreters of a wide range of economic, political, social and cultural phenomena’ (2006:120). This finding is clearly tied into the development of hegemonic masculinities (to be discussed later in this chapter) but does beg the question as to what else contributes to development of gender identity in young males.

A cross-section of literature seems to suggest that the formation of gender identity is multi-dimensional, incorporating processes across the fields of family, school, peers, media, location, religion and socio-historical context as well as sports. Prain (1998) and Connell et al (1982) clearly indicate the interplay between family and school. Additionally, Swain (2006) makes a strong case for the idea that schools, particularly non-state schools, are key drivers in the construction of masculinities. He found that the school culture promoted a range of sports, which were inextricably entwined as part of a competitive, masculine regime. He notes that ‘the leading form of masculinity embodied was the sporty boy, which was sanctioned by the school, and this gave it a powerful cultural and social authority’ (2006:317). Brown (1998), in her research with tertiary students of physical education teaching, and Hall (1995), in his study of residential students in a campus traditionally associated with Agriculture students, found similar processes, although it was driven and sustained by peers rather than the institution. It could, therefore, be argued that this process has broader socio-historical determinants. Pringle (2004) confirms this idea in relation to New Zealand and rugby union, by tracing some of the values and stereotypes as derived from England in the nineteenth century.
The historical influences on sport, and of sport, are considered further in the next chapter, however it is feasible that dominant cultural male stereotypes have some historical basis in British colonialism. If the bases of these images are partly historical, it may also be fair to say that the maintenance of them is partly related to the widespread influence of the mass media. Both Rowe (2004, 1995) and Connell (1995, 1998) chart the connections between sport and the media (and these too are further discussed in the next chapter), but it is evident that accessible images of male athletes are influential on how young males perceive and define themselves. Rowe (2004) argues that, through the media, sport has become a major social institution which has resulted, as Connell (1998) also proposes, in media images of sportsmen having become a dominant symbol of hegemonic masculinity.

Clearly, this relationship has positive and negative implications. Allison et al (2005) highlight some advantages that sports provide such as developing peer networks, and feeling good about oneself through activity, recognition, and acquiring new skills. These advantages help to form the basis of a positive self-identity and fulfil a role for young males that might otherwise be missing, which Prain (1998) links with the development of identity as an embodied experience. That is, the corporeality of bodies must be acknowledged when considering how boys' sense of masculinity is formed, sustained and possibly altered. A converse argument (e.g. Burstyn, 1999; Fitzclarence and Hickey, 1998; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), in terms of negative implications for gender identity, is related to aggression and violence. Connell (1998) laments that the sports most likely to gain attention, in schools and the media, tend to be competitive and violent, and makes an association with the development of competitive and violent masculinities. Fitzclarence and Hickey (1998) similarly argue that elite sportsmen, whose on-field and off-field aggressive, violent and inhumane behaviours are overlooked, serve as a model for younger males searching for a masculine identity. Furthermore, Brown (1998) adds the dimensions of sexism, sexual harassment and alcohol-fuelled behaviours as negative characteristics associated with sport. Burstyn (1999) agrees and asserts that this association has led to a widespread ‘hypermasculinity’ which is synonymous with misogyny, aggression and violence.
Despite the negative implications of these dominant images of maleness, there are some theorists and researchers who argue that sport has also become a place where a variety of alternative masculinities have emerged. For example, Smith (2007) proposes that men do not think and act from a single form of masculinity but rather embrace a diversity of masculinities that are contextually dependent, and which may represent either dominant or marginalised images. Along these lines, Beal (1996) documents the development of a non-hegemonic masculinity amongst a group of young skateboarders. With the premise that skateboarding was an alternative to collision sports such as rugby, she found that young males in this sub-culture were more disposed to self-expression, participant control and open participation without displays of violence or discrimination. They were, however, still prone to segregating the sexes and preserving skateboarding as a male sport. Additionally, Rowe (1995) discusses the slowly growing acknowledgement and acceptance of homosexual athletes, even among the traditionally ‘masculine’ sports. Lastly, Prain (1998) reflects on the changing ethos of some sports, particularly where codes of conduct are being introduced at junior levels, that seek to develop alternative values such as cooperation, respect and fair play. These efforts are often combined with senior level players trying to instil honourable behaviours, which, he says, may result in development of alternative masculinities, but admits it would be a struggle to do so, given the dominant cultural and societal images of masculinity constantly in play.

The complexity of these associations returns the discussion to the area of hegemonic masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p832) outline some of the main principles of understanding hegemonic masculinity, having traced its development through the last few decades. They show that, originally, hegemonic masculinity was seen to be ‘the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue’. Although hegemony did not necessarily equate to violence, Connell (1995) believed that violence reflected an endorsement of hegemonic masculinity, which could be supported by force but was more related to achieving dominance through culture, institutions, and persuasion. The concept was also applied to the study of male media images and the synonymy of sports and
war imagery. However, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is not equivalent to mere social reproduction of identity, and is one that strives to understand how dominant forms of masculinity influence and negotiate their position of power.

In relation to particular sports and masculinity, different codes of football appear to be the main focus in the sports literature. Hughson (2000) analyses soccer and examines how a hegemonic masculine image of misogyny and violence has been perpetuated through players, coaches, supporters, history, ethno-cultural context and administration of the game. However, he stops short of arguing that there is a universal dominant masculinity. Instead, he proposes that this masculinity is representative of a specific group of young males. Similar analyses (e.g. Burgess; Edwards and Skinner, 2003; Light and Kirk, 2000; Pringle and Markula, 2005) have been applied to rugby union, which has been labelled as portraying a masculine image of violence, misogyny and homophobia. Light and Kirk (2000) see this process as being embodied through playing and training, especially in the top grade rugby players. The analysis calls into play all the same historical, cultural and structural factors that contribute to a culturally idealised form of masculine character and also incorporates the social history of the game in terms of its origins in the British public school system. Burgess et al (2003), however, tease out some of the complexities of this hegemonic masculinity in high school rugby players, in that whilst it gave them status and credibility, it joined them – sometimes unwillingly – to narratives which were in conflict with other expectations, both personal and school-derived.

Pringle (2005) goes on to dissect the process in terms of the broader power base underlying the formation of hegemonic masculine identity. Interweaving Gramscian and Foucauldian theories, he explains how power can be a force for reproduction or a force for resistance, and the intricacies of power relations, especially in terms of gender, need to be acknowledged in understanding hegemonic masculinities. Kenway (1998) likewise argues that the hegemonic process is not clear cut, and that it is difficult to see how hegemonic masculinity can be dominant when it is not actually, as mentioned earlier by Prain (1998), embodied in a specific male person. This
argument is pursued by Pringle and Markula (2005), who found that sport did provide an arena for young males to negotiate their masculinity, but did not unequivocally or automatically reproduce a culturally dominant masculine image. Similarly, Burgess et al (2003, p210) believed that exhibitions of:

- toughness and violence in sport are not evidence of a pre-existing masculine condition but are the constituents of a reiterative process that equates sporting prowess with a particular typology of self. Consequently, involvement in sport is not a guarantee of an oppressive presentation of self, but sport’s signifying logic makes such a presentation of self a realisable and accessible option.

After review and re-evaluation of the developments in hegemonic masculinity analyses, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) propose that to understand and examine gender identity, it is important to hold on to concepts of multiple masculinities, the concept of hegemony, and the emphasis on change, but reject a one-dimensional analysis of hierarchy and trait conceptions of gender. To do so means reframing a more complex model of gender relations that incorporates an understanding of the agency of women. The model should also recognise the interplay between local, regional, and global levels, and embrace a more specific treatment of embodiment in contexts of privilege and power.

The concept of hegemony is discussed further in the next chapter, which outlines the theoretical/conceptual framework of the study. However, the connections between these perspectives on gender identity (i.e. hegemonic masculinity and multiple masculinities) and the health and wellbeing of young men are not straightforward. The Profeminist stances still appear to place men as either ‘oppressors’ or ‘victims’, which is rather limiting. Macdonald (2006) stresses the importance of understanding the social and political determinants of men’s health, and promotes an understanding of men that is ‘salutogenic’, i.e. that acknowledges men’s strengths and resilience. Whilst this notion of salutogenesis does not necessarily hypothesise about the
formation of gender identity, it does offer a perspective that is less accusatory and more celebratory, the implications of which are also discussed further in the next chapter.

An understanding of the various meanings, benefits and roles of sport for young males, outlined so far in this chapter, particularly in relation to identity formation can be advanced by further discussion that incorporates some analysis of age and transition. Therefore, an extended understanding of the dimensions of sport and civic engagement by young males can be found by delving into the various facets of the transitional life stage commonly known as adolescence.
Young males in transition

The fifteen to twenty-five age range for participants in this study overlaps a life stage most often referred to as adolescence, which represents a path of transition from childhood to adulthood. Eriksson (1968) describes adolescence as a life stage where, apart from struggling with the physical and hormonal changes associated with puberty, young people experience the turmoil of youth that he calls the ‘identity crisis’. He says that this turmoil is most commonly experienced during the teenage years, and proposes that the primary tasks to be resolved during adolescence are those of seeking identity and moving towards independence. Unlike Eriksson, Hegel (1971) does not set any age limit on the life stage, stating only that the onset of adolescence occurs at puberty. He agrees that during this period young people begin to see themselves as independent, both separate from and opposed to their surrounding universe. He describes youth as regarding themselves as representing all that is true and good while the rest of the world is contingent and accidental. That is, they are caught up in their own subjectivity. At the same time they recognise that they are no longer a child but not yet an adult. Consequently, they are dissatisfied with their immature development and disgusted with a world that does not meet their ideals.

As a result, both Eriksson (1968) and Hegel (1971) maintain that during this life stage peer relationships often become more important than family relationships. In striving to achieve success in the tasks of adolescence, young people often become egocentric, more likely to test limits and engage in risky behaviours. These risks may be greater if children and young people have been exposed to harmful or underdeveloped environments such as poverty and social exclusion. However, not all young people that have been raised in adverse circumstances fare badly. Atwool (2002) identifies several key factors that contribute to a young person’s capacity for overcoming adversity during this transition. First, there are individual characteristics such as high self-esteem, self-confidence, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, cultural pride, easy temperament, and a sense of belonging. Second, a supportive family plays a strong role, and third a supportive person, network or agency outside the family also contributes to resilience. Worsley (2005) adds that any kind of skill that a young person has learned (and can rely on)
contributes to their ability to survive adversity, and can include creative and performing arts, technical and manual skills and sports skills. She also includes education, community connectedness (often seen in church involvement where young people can hold on to spiritual values), and money as factors contributing to resilience. Finally, she argues that the peer group is an important dimension, and even when the peer group is characterised by conflict it still provides an environment in which young people can learn social cues and subtleties.

Atwool (2002) and Worsley (2005) both agree that young people in transition who experience more of these protective factors are more likely to avoid or overcome adversity. Atwool (2002) argues that in addition to striving for independence and identity, young people are also struggling with the process of retaining attachments to parents and forming new attachments. These changes add to the turbulence of adolescence, which she believes can sometimes be smoothed when young people engage in the process of forming attachments to significant adults outside the immediate family system, including extended family, family friends, or adults in leadership roles such as those found in schools, church youth groups, sports teams or youth work services.

Despite the common ground established by a general understanding of adolescence it is, however, a flawed assumption to generalise the experiences of all young people as identical through this life stage. To begin with, there is a broad range of demographic differences in age, gender, (dis)ability, ethnicity, cultural background, and length of settlement in Australia. Additionally, there is a broad variety of interests, hobbies, appearances, and values. Whether these differences can be classified as a general 'youth culture', or as a collection of 'youth subcultures', is a moot point. Bessant, Sercombe and Watts (1998) point to research that indicates that, even though young people may look and dress differently from their parents, their values, political ideas, beliefs and aspirations have a lot in common. White (1990), in contrast, argues that subcultures (i.e. groups focused around a particular 'look', 'sound', or activity/interest) are an attempt to win space from the dominant culture and express/resolve contradictions that they
experience. However, most research points to the fact that the majority of young people are not that different from the preceding generation.

Young males in Australia, as in many Western cultures, currently face the prospect of negotiating a transition to adulthood and developing a sense of belonging and contribution to their community in an environment where the meaning of community is becoming increasingly uncertain. It is well established that when young people feel that they belong (to a family, to a community or to a youth space/service), resilience is built which enhances their transition to adulthood. According to Wyn and White (1997), developmental approaches to service provision (i.e. providing young people with skills, resources and knowledge, and operating through a process of consent rather than coercion) enable young people to engage in programs conducive to their development and self-worth. Matthews (2000) believes that this kind of participation not only enhances a young person’s likelihood to proceed on a pathway of pro-social development, but that when young people are civically engaged, in a non-patronising or non-tokenistic way, it provides the opportunity for an entire community to be strengthened.

Traditionally, young males generate and affirm their sense of worth and sense of manhood through rites of passage. Matthews (2000) has reported that the notion of ‘ceremony’ is still very relevant to life transitions for young males. The problem that confronts them is that contemporary Western culture has to a large extent lost or forgotten these notions of rites of passage for young males approaching adulthood. In the absence of culturally derived rites of passage many young males will, therefore, generate their own contests, and these will often involve alcohol and cars, which result in greater risk-taking behaviour. Biddulph (1997) agrees that it is in the absence of community driven rites of passage that young males seem to generate their own risky ones. Van Gennep (1908) identified the rite of passage as a threefold process of segregation, transition and incorporation. In other words, there is a natural separation of child/adolescent from the community, followed by a time of trials, and completed by the return to community in heroic
adventures. Rites of passage, therefore, have two key functions: proving maturity/adulthood and reintegraction into the community as an adult.

During a participatory action research project in Western Sydney, Hall (2004) identified that the separation process occurred for young males, but that there were no community-derived tests or trials of manhood, and rarely any concept of heroic return. Hence, young males devised their own tests such as courtship, fighting, drinking behaviour, testing driving skills, and vandalism. In these cases, young males were maligned and marginalised by the adult community, and only in extremely rare circumstances were they reintegrated into their community. Therefore, the purposes of the rite of passage, as explained by Van Gennep (1908), remained unfulfilled.

It is an apparent problem in Western cultures that the adult community, outside of the sporting arena, tends to denigrate youth and masculinity rather than respect it. The ‘anti-social behaviour’ (for want of a better term) of, predominantly, young males continues to exacerbate this negative community attitude. Admittedly, there is correlation between men’s sport and negative factors such as violence, pursuit of stereotypical body images, and other forms of ‘anti-social behaviour’. Accordingly, some feminist analyses suggest that it is necessary to redefine notions of masculinity (with sports included) for the purposes of a more positive civic engagement. Burstyn (1999), in particular, is adamant that sport is an arena in which male violence is sanctioned, and correlates sports with ‘hypermasculinity’ (exemplified by sporting heroes) which embodies lack of compassion, aggression, hyper-competitiveness and sexism. She argues that this association is central to the defence of male dominance, but her argument seems to deny the plurality of masculinity without taking into account hegemonic processes. A profeminist perspective (e.g. Pease, 2003) counters that there are multiple forms of maleness and that male sexism, in fact, also oppresses males. From this perspective, it is plausible that a celebration, rather than denigration, of masculinity (even the ‘traditional’ understanding of it) can lead to positive prosocial development in young males. This point has particular relevance when considering the role of stereotypical male pursuits such as sport.
Finding a pathway for young males to being engaged and participating in community life continues to prove a difficult task. Findings by Hall and Mason (2000) and Hall and Banno (2001) reinforced the social and participatory nature of ‘hanging out’. They found that parks, shopping centres, car parks, and street corners were places that older teenagers chose to socialise, feel safe together, and feel part of community life. Young males, particularly, achieved benefits attributed to civic engagement primarily from being with their ‘mates’, and by being noticed by other members of the community. They voiced that young people need and want to be part of community life, and to have a say in things. Young people, however, seemed to see community participation differently to many community workers (e.g. via committees or advisory groups, on an ongoing basis, with a commitment to full participation and democracy). They described, for example, being able to ‘hang out’ in public places as a form of participation; or being able to do performances or other activities in places central to the life of the community rather than being pushed to the periphery. When they do participate in community-based activities, their satisfaction of their participation may range from one meeting (or even just one comment) to ongoing involvement and organisation. They also referred to being able to travel outside their ‘home’ area in safety, and to feel part of a world that is bigger than their surrounding streets and neighbourhood. This feeling often occurred for young males because of participation in sports teams, which provided one of the few opportunities to travel in this way.

The transition to adulthood is a complex path and young males are presented with a diverse range of alternatives, of which sport is one, for building resilience in order to negotiate the transition smoothly. To explore these issues further as a basis for this study, it is important to begin to refine an understanding of the meanings of sport and the diverse meanings of civic engagement, and subsequently to identify any links that may already exist between them in the literature. The following chapter will take up these challenges.
3

‘Finding touch’

Following the previous chapter’s overview of young males and sport in Australia, this chapter addresses areas that cover the defining facets of sport, the meanings of civic engagement, and an analysis of the connections between sport and civic engagement.

*Understanding sport*

In coming to an understanding of sport, it is important to find a working definition of it. Hill (2002:10-11) cites Mason (1989:4-5), who defines sport as ‘a more or less physically strenuous, competitive, recreational activity … which might involve team against team, athlete against athlete, or athlete against nature, or the clock’. Coakley (2003:21) considers this definition to be reasonably traditional, thereafter adding a view of sport as ‘institutionalised competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by internal and external rewards’. Here, sport is seen as competitive, as opposed to cooperative or individualistic, and as a physical activity rather than a cognitive one. It is an institutionalised and standardised activity, with regulatory agencies taking over rule enforcement. The organisational and technical aspects of the activity have importance, and learning game skills are formalised. Sport involves two sets of motivations: intrinsic – involving expression, spontaneity, and joy of participation; and extrinsic – involving the display of skill in public, and gaining status or material rewards from success.

There are many difficulties with these definitions. For example, it seems fairly arbitrary as to how much physical exertion is required to qualify an activity as a sport. Second, the distinction of sport as an institutionalised physical activity excludes many types of non-formalised activities in which people engage. For example, the ABS (2000a) reported that significant proportions of children and young people regularly undertake rigorous physical activities such as skateboarding, rollerblading and bike riding outside school hours. In addition, Hall and Mason (2000) found that young people in rural/urban fringe areas were particularly concerned with leisure and recreation options that were informal or self-organised. Coakley (2003) does acknowledge the trend in youth sports
towards increased participation in unstructured, participant-controlled sports, but in much of the theorising on sport these non-organised and individualised sports (such as skateboarding, biking and surfing) – because they are not institutionalised – do not necessarily fit under the umbrella term of sport. Some texts do offer ‘leisure’ or ‘play’ as an alternative definition of these activities, and make the pragmatic distinction based on the extent to which the activity is formalised or competitive in its nature.

McPherson, Curtis & Loy (1989:15) define sport as being ‘a structured, goal-oriented, competitive, contest-based, ludic physical activity’. The multiple dimensions of this definition warrant further exploration. Sport is structured in that it is in some way governed by rules, limited in time and space, with codes of conduct (written or tacit). Sport is goal-oriented because it involves achievement and offers various forms of contest and self-testing. Sport is competitive in any of three ways. First, in direct competition, sports participants are pitted against other participants in the same area (e.g. rugby, boxing). Second, in parallel competition, participants take turns or contest in separate areas (e.g. swimming, golf). Third, in competition against a standard, participants are scored against some form of benchmark (e.g. archery, gymnastics). Sport is contest-based in that it focuses on honour or prestige based on performance/superiority in speed, endurance, strength and accuracy. Finally, McPherson et al (1989) describe sport as ‘ludic’ (from the Latin ludus, meaning play or game) because it involves an uncertain outcome and a sanctioned display, which is what makes sport ‘fun’.

In bringing a human movement perspective, Volkwein-Caplan (2004) argues that it is important to be aware of the cultural and linguistic differences in the usage of the word sport. She compares the Latin term ‘deportare’ (which means diversion) with the German use of prefixes according to the orientation of the activity (e.g. health, fitness, rehabilitation, elderly or elite). Her understanding of sport seems to be an all encompassing one which ‘captures all aspects of human movement and physical activity, and ... embraces the health aspect of regular engagement in exercise as well’. (Volkwein-Caplan, 2004:12).
Calloway (2004) takes a similarly universal view by defining ‘youth sport’ as any activity in which youth engage that requires a level of skill, and contributes to general health and well-being. Significantly, he points to the importance of voluntary participation, and the inclusion of structured and unstructured contexts, which some of the traditional definitions ignore. A further, although somewhat circular, argument from Calloway (2004) is that sport should enhance the general health and well-being of not just the individual, but of society as well. While not typical of the definitions of sport, this interpretation has great relevance to the connections between sport and civic engagement.

In seeking to add a further dimension of critical analysis to the understanding of sport, Coakley (2003) argues that a definition of sport can be found through what activities are identified as sports by people in a particular group or society, and whose sports count the most in a group or society when it comes to obtaining support and resources?

This approach acknowledges that views of sport may be relative, varying across people, time, place and culture, and will inevitably lead to struggles over whose ideas count as more important. The irony is that if sport is contest-based, then even the act of defining sport is a contested activity. McPherson et al (1989:20) also emphasise the interaction of sport and culture. They see sport as bearing distinct similarities to traditional Western theatre, with play divided into periods, the wearing of costumes/uniforms, alternative intermission entertainment, and fandom, and discern origins in early pagan festivals which celebrate seasonal change, bring people together to emphasise similarity and common heritage, and ‘contribute to their thinking, feeling and acting alike’. They argue that the meaning of sport in any given society is influenced by current economic and political conditions, and the espoused values of that society. Hence, over time, the values, purpose and meaning of sport may change significantly, although the set of norms, beliefs and values that encompass sports culture is transferable to other societies.
Hill (2002) agrees that the concept of sport has changed with historical circumstances and that, culturally, sport is experienced in different ways. Despite this diversity, he argues that there are two axes underpinning all activities classed as sport: participation/spectating and elite/mass performance. He asserts that British sport has usually been bound up with social class and gender, and has therefore been an arena in which complex social relations and status are generated. Through the continual emphasis on the positive aspects of sport participation (e.g. respect for rules, playing fair, carrying triumphs modestly), social bonds have helped to create loyalties to class, nation and empire. In this sense, Hill (2002:12) argues that ‘sport becomes part of a broader social process which we describe as culture’.

In distinguishing sport from play, Burgess et al (2003) summarise the historical development of modern sport, arguing that sports that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Britain and America were reinventions of games of the Middle Ages in an attempt to control the character of white, ruling class boys. Not content with just controlling character, they argue that schools sought to use these forms of sports to inculcate conservative ideological values through which young males could maintain their ruling status, and to ‘control’ the poorer classes and women. With British colonialism and immigration, this process was then replicated in Australia to maintain class, race and ethnic divisions, whilst also nurturing the dominant ideology of ‘manliness’. Swain (2006), Pringle (2005) and Light and Kirk (2000) pursue a similar line of argument in noting that sport has been used by dominant cultural forces to replicate a traditionally British social order in which patriarchy was central. Not only has sport affected Western colonies in this way, but Giulianotti (2004:358) argues further that, historically, Western sports institutions have directly contributed to ‘colonial subjugation of non-Western cultures’. The British military, Christian missionaries and other institutional representatives of imperialism have at times used sport as a means of eradicating indigenous cultural practices and identities. Huggins (2000) also notes that this practice carried through to the Victorian era, where sport and leisure continued to be associated with ‘respectability’ and the ongoing division of the social classes. It would be
reasonable to contend that all of these repressive practices and processes have in some way left their mark on Australian sport.

In trying to further understand the Australian context, Kell (2000:9-10) states that ‘Australians are, to a remarkable extent, obsessed by sport … Australians have a powerful belief that sport is one of the few social institutions where everyone gets a fair go’. However, he - like Hill (2002) – believes that sport in Australia has always involved division and exclusivity. Kell (2000) argues that sport forms social hierarchies based on class, race, gender and ethnicity, which reinforce and perpetuate social inequalities. Contrary to popular belief, he believes that Australian sport is far from representing a culture that is inclusive and celebrates diversity. Giulianotti (2004) broadens these arguments to embrace the global issue of how sport does, and does not, respect human rights and dignity. He cites examples of sports organisations and celebrities working on various human rights partnerships, but contends that sport can not be unquestioningly considered to be a mediator of human ‘goodness’ and social concern. Like Kell (2000), Hill (2002) and McKay (1990), Giulianotti (2004) argues that there is considerable evidence that sport also contributes to social dysfunction, intensifying social conflict and reinforcing prejudice. He further contends that ‘sports evangelists’ (i.e. those who uncritically promote the positive benefits of sport) are propagating a new form of colonialism, particularly amongst ‘problem young people’, with all the pitfalls and ineffectual outcomes of its former incarnations. In contemporary culture, young people appear to be more commonly targeted for sports interventions and resources at the exclusion of the elderly and women. There is, therefore, much to be achieved by maintaining a clear analysis of the effects of sport in advocating, and simultaneously working against, the protection of human rights and dignity in modern culture. Hallinan and Krotee (1993), and Hallinan, Hughson and Burke (2007), for example, discuss the complexity of ethnically-aligned soccer club members attempting to embrace both an ethnic nationalistic identity and citizenship of a largely Anglo-Celtic host culture.
This outline of the dual roles of sport raises the issue of the ongoing interplay between sport and popular culture, and the emerging conceptualisations of sports culture. According to Cashmore (2000: viii), modern culture is one in which sport plays an increasingly important role. He regards sports culture as determined not solely by the natural roots of the sport or by the sporting events themselves, but by a ‘panoply of innovations, articles, qualities, peculiarities and other characteristics that have developed around sport and the effects sport has had on us’. He draws on two broader definitions of culture in interpreting the meaning of sports culture: Tylor’s (1871) description of the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and other capabilities and habits; and Kerbo’s (1989) inclusion of the learned parts of human behaviour. It is vital to be cognisant of these underlying dimensions of sports culture, especially in seeing a mutual or perhaps even cyclical relationship between sports culture and the broader cultural milieu. In this way, Rowe (2007) conceives of sport as both a symptom and a cause of a larger socio-cultural shift, which must be taken into account in any sociological analysis of sport.

Most sports sociologists recognise that sport can be seen as a medium for three identifiable processes: reflection, reinforcement and resistance. McPherson et al (1989) explain that sport can reflect society and culture, reinforce social strata and inequalities, or provide resistance when sports participants and organisations are in conflict with common social norms/values. The first argument is that sport merely reflects the broader society, in that sport contains ‘the same values, beliefs and norms that exist elsewhere in society’ (McPherson et al, 1989:24). Since sports participants are also participants in broader society, their ways of thinking before they came to sport continue to influence them. In this position the influence is only in one direction – from society to sport. McPherson et al (1989) point out that seeing sport as a reflection of culture has in the past been used to demonstrate the positive aspects of sport and society, although logically it must also expose the negative aspects as well.

The second argument about sport is that it serves to reinforce existing social inequalities. In terms of access to sport and its resources, for example, literature discussed earlier (e.g. McKay, 1990;
Kell, 2000; and Hill, 2002) shows clearly that those people, or groups of people, who are disadvantaged within the broader society (e.g. women, the elderly, people with disabilities, or gay and lesbian people) also remain disadvantaged within sport. McPherson et al (1989) believe that this discrimination occurs because sport provides another social context for the persistence of the wider social values, beliefs and norms (such as self-interest and prejudice) that enable these inequalities. In this position, compared to the reflection thesis, the relationship of influence between society and sport is more symbiotic in that society’s inequalities influence sport and that their persistence in the sporting context serves to maintain the inequalities in broader society as well. Rowe (1995:132) supports this argument by demonstrating the continuing inequalities based on social class and gender. He argues that to believe in the myth of sport’s egalitarianism is a ‘romantic view (which) cannot be simply characterised as harmless, wishful folly’.

The action of hegemony (discussed in earlier and later chapters) is relevant here. Dominant groups within society have a vested interest in maintaining their dominance and so they engage in a process of influence that is aimed at having subordinate groups adopt their values and attitudes. As an example, Grainger (2006) documents the transition experience of people from Samoan background into New Zealand. He argues that in both employment and sport, despite the official policies of multiculturalism, they have experienced exploitation and exclusion of their specific cultural identity. Light and Kirk (2001) adopt a similar argument regarding the role of school sport in maintaining class differences in Australia. They insist that private school sports and sports associations have been formed to not only offer organised competitions, but to maintain their exclusivity from schools believed to be socially inferior. Furthermore, Coakley (2003) identifies agendas where governments influence sport in order to promote particular values and ideas among citizens of, for example, nationalism, but will also use it to garner both local and global political support. However, this process of reinforcement is not necessarily only an operation of the state, as power relations are too complex to make it a simple binary process of dominance and subjugation. Rowe (2004a) sees this process of reinforcement inextricably tied
to the televisualisation of sport, where the media continues to act as a tool for replicating social inequality.

The third argument about sport is that it is a form of resistance. If sport reflects society then it also reveals social conflicts. Resistance occurs when sport and sport participants oppose the norms and values of the wider society. McPherson et al (1989) discuss two variations of this resistance. The first concerns competing interests between groups within sports, where the disadvantaged group seeks to change the status quo, thereby redressing inequalities within their sport. The second concerns the influence of sport in pursuing change in the broader society. They emphasise that some subcultures within sport succeed in opposing wider social trends, and also that collective behaviour in sport has been a factor in initiating or fostering significant socio-cultural change.

Although Rowe (1995:140) outlines the undeniable effect of sport in reproducing social inequality, he maintains the Foucauldian argument that the agency of power that leads to dominance or oppression also ‘inevitably provokes resistance and subversion’. Budd (2001:10) describes resistance as an ‘elastic concept, extending across a range of actions from stubborn nonconformity to conscious opposition to prevailing social relations’. Although it is often proposed that sport has the potential to engage in resistance, actual resistance within sport has also been demonstrated in a number of ways, for example in the prominence of black athletes (Tatz, 1987, 1996; Carrington, 1998; Rowe, 1998; Coakley, 2003; McPherson et al, 1989), the growing acceptance of homosexual athletes (Rowe, 1998), the increased prominence of minority cultures (Bunzl, 2000; Grainger, 2006), and the development of youth-controlled sports such as skateboarding and downhill mountain biking (Hill, 2002; Coakley, 2003).

In terms of sport contributing to social change beyond the playing field, McPherson et al (1989) and Polley (1998) show how some equitable advances in sport for working-class, black and female athletes has preceded, and gradually influenced, society’s views, although admittedly
there is still much to achieve in this regard. Polley (1998) notes that, for the most part, sport in post-war Britain has been a white male preserve that particularly excluded women. Nevertheless, at the elite level, success in sport has provided a means of social advancement and inclusion not otherwise afforded to them. Tatz (1987, 1995, 1996) demonstrates this phenomenon for Aboriginal Australians who reach an elite level of sport (but not at the local level), though at the same time he acknowledges the ongoing effects of endemic racism both within and beyond sport. Hallinan, Bruce and Coram (1993) demonstrate the pervasiveness of racism by arguing that even the assignment of playing position within a team reflects commonly held stereotypes about Aborigines (e.g. positions that utilise speed and intuition but not leadership or strategic thinking). On this track, Hill (2002), Maclean (2000) and McPherson et al (1989) all highlight the sporting boycotts on South Africa and their contribution to the denunciation and eventual dismantling of apartheid, although it needs to be understood that there were many other social, political and religious factors in play.

Generally, as Polley (1998) and Horne, Tomlinson and Whannel (1999) confirm, the interplay between sports, politics, capitalist economies and governments is an intricate and often changing one. Horne et al (1999) explore the changing nature of sports interest and political ideology (e.g. gentlemanly amateurism), the overt promotion of nationalism, the growing free market economy of professionalised sport, and the complex politics of sports policy. Budd (2001:9) concludes that ‘state involvement in sport is shaped not only by ideology but also by the performance of capitalist economies’. Within a capitalist economy, resistance can occur in various forms, which he says can be drawn from the notion of agency as proposed by Anderson (1980, cited in Budd, 2001:10) as ‘conscious, goal-directed activity’. He proposes three types of goals: private, public and collective. Private goals are ingrained in existing social relations and are therefore not a form of resistance but of reinforcement. Public goals can be individual or collective actions not necessarily intended to advocate for broad social change, yet are opposed to the status quo in some way. Resistance here involves actions which are public or private, individual or collective, and are bounded by existing social relations yet oppose them at some level – a ‘non-
transformative resistance’ (Budd, 2001:11). Collective goals involve a deliberate strategy intended to lead to social change. Resistance in this form is action, which is public and collective, designed to transform or overthrow social structures.

The question remains, though, about the application of these sets of actions (reflection, reinforcement and resistance) to the sporting experience of young males in Australia. One of the unique features of this study is that these issues are taken up in the context of ‘grass roots’ sport, which can be taken to mean, as Rowe (2007) and Crawford (2004) suggest, the everyday sporting experiences of members of the general community, usually occurring at a local level. This approach contrasts with the analysis of sport and sport culture at the elite, professional or mass media level which tends to focus, as Crawford (2004) points out, on the out-of-the-ordinary, sensational or often controversial behaviours and statements of high profile sports people, or alternatively on the sometimes ludicrous extremes of fandom. The analysis of the grass-roots experience presents a further complication in comprehending the nature of sport because of the debates around the understanding of the concept of ‘local’ sport.

Giddens (1991) believes that, in a contemporary globalised world, locality is peripheral in the lives of young people, although Furlong and Cartmel (1997) argue that, in these conditions, location is more important than ever. Ohl (2007) explores some of the contradictory positions in trying to define locality in the context of sport, especially in Europe. He observes that ‘local’ sport in Europe can at different times refer to the street, club, city, state/province, nation or even in some cases Europe as a whole (for example in Ryder Cup golf). This ambiguity is often tied to local sport being engulfed by global marketing forces, for both players and spectators. Whilst pointing out the main trend for sport to be driven by the economy, Ohl (2007) also charts the resurgence of local, self-organised sports and cultural practices. In a study exploring connection to ‘the local’ for young people in Ireland, O’Connor (2005) concludes that, although many components of their lives were attached to global products, the young people in the study remained deeply embedded
within local contexts structured by age and gender, with lifestyle choices often based on sports such as Hurling or Gaelic Football a significant (but not central) ingredient.

The extent to which these analyses from USA and Europe can be applied to Australia, given its isolated geographical position in relation to the rest of the world, can be addressed first by the notion of layers. For example, the street, suburb, club, region, state and perhaps even the nation could all conceivably be thought of as ‘local’ depending on the context of the particular sport activity/event. Second, the force of globalisation and media-fuelled marketing is undeniably evident in Australia, and therefore must be acknowledged in understanding the meaning of locality. Third, the evidence of high player participation rates and spectator attendances, particularly attached to Australian Rules Football (AFL), is reminiscent of O’Connor’s study of Irish young people.

With the prior discussion of sport and sports culture as a background, the definition of sport, for the purposes of this study, embraces a number of different dimensions, including the notions of physically strenuous, competitive, organised, recreational activity, physical exertion that is both skill-based and a source of fun, and aspects of ‘leisure’ or ‘play’ that acknowledge the less formalised physical activities in which young people engage, and which is often not adult-controlled or organisation-based but still satisfies the first two dimensions. Calloway’s (2004) requirement of health and well-being has not been incorporated into this definition. Rather, its implications are considered to be complementary to the discussion of the benefits and meanings of sports for young people, and in the possible connections between sport and civic engagement, an analysis of which this chapter will now logically turn.
The meanings of civic engagement

As with most areas of study, the definition of civic engagement is an adventure in itself. The civic engagement literature seems to indicate slightly different foci across different countries and cultures. For example, much of the North American literature (e.g. Lopez and Moore, 2004; Kirlin and Kirlin, 2002; Ostrander, 2004; Wulff, 2003) incorporates questions of whether people vote, whether people are ‘good’ citizens in terms of respect for social conventions and social institutions, or whether they participate in decision-making about the life of their ‘community’, which seems to belie an inherent conservatism in its ideology and morality. Some of the UK literature (e.g. Blunkett, 2003; Bryant, 2001; Giddens, 1998; Ruston, 2003) is a little broader in its scope, referring to ‘taking a stand’ on a social issue, overcoming adversity to participate in broad public decision-making processes, or New Labor’s concept of ‘no rights without responsibilities’. Australian and New Zealand literature (e.g. White, 1990; Panelli Nairn, Atwool and McCormack, 2002; Hall, 2004; Hall and Mason, 2000; Hartley, 1997) often places the concept in the arena of what to do about issues of public space and community safety, or how people are involved in community management. Alternatively, some literature (Ashutosh, 1997; Barber, 1999; Habermas, 1987; Shomina, Kolossov and Shukhat, 2002) indicates a more pronounced political edge, suggesting that young people involved in resistance or public demonstration are not being anti-social but are actually politically and civically engaged.

Furthermore, there are attempts to identify and measure multiple dimensions of civic engagement. For example, Lopez and Moore (2006) identify a range of indicators related to civic engagement. Civic indicators include the level of voluntary work with not for profit organisations, attitudes about making a difference, working to solve a community problem and participating in fundraising events. Political indicators include registering to vote and actually voting. Voice indicators include writing a letter, willingness to speak in public meetings or sign petitions, and preparedness to boycott a product/service or to join a public demonstration. These dimensions emanate from the North American social and political situation, but their relevance to the Australian setting is not entirely convincing. Somewhat more expansive is the work of Flanagan,
Syvertsen and Stout (2007), who also attempt to chart civic indicators for young people based on student self-assessments, according to factors such as civic behaviours (e.g. organising a meeting, expressing political voice), impressions of elected officials and government, political efficacy (i.e. how effective young people believe they can be), notions of equality and injustice, parents’ civic engagement, frequency of political conversation with others, values and personal beliefs, media consumption and perceptions, the school climate, and knowledge of government and electoral processes.

Similarly, Rix (2007) summarises eight main modes of engagement as political engagement, social activism, volunteerism, religious and cultural engagement, play and expression, international engagement, philanthropy and virtual engagement. She considers political engagement to be a mode of engagement where young people connect with political processes and issues. As mentioned earlier, the North American literature, with its principal context of voluntary voting, links this connection mostly with young people enrolling to vote and then actually voting. Australia, unlike the US and Canada, has compulsory voting at the age of eighteen. Therefore, in some respects political engagement already represents a ‘step up’ for young males in Australia, although it could be argued that to be politically engaged in Australia, young people need to at least be aware of those representatives for whom they will vote and their reasons for that choice, rather than unquestioningly following parental choices. Social activism, on the other hand, occurs when young people connect with a social or public issue about which they are passionate. Rix (2007) does not appear to demand that the issue is one related to social justice or aligned to a particular political persuasion. Rather, the passion of the young person is what counts because that is what drives activism, and young people can’t be expected to get passionate about issues defined by older people – be they parents or youth workers – if they do not have some personal investment in it. Volunteerism, as a dimension of civic engagement, has been discussed to some extent already, suffice to say that it occurs where young people donate their time without expecting compensation, either formally through an organisation or informally with their neighbours. Religious and cultural engagement is a process of young people
connecting with church groups, or other religious and cultural groups. It is important to note that the ABS (2006) continues to record rates of religious affiliation because it is a key indicator of people’s social connections, even though the National Church Life Survey (2006) charts church attendance across Australia as relatively low. In a similar vein, play and expression is where young people connect with sport, music and/or the arts. According to Rix (2007), this type of engagement does not necessarily have to lead to another form of engagement to be of benefit, as simply playing enhances civic engagement and so enhances well-being. The process of young people beginning to appreciate the multicultural nature of their own communities leads to the mode of international engagement, that includes beginning to see issues on a global level, to understand what is happening in other countries, and to see themselves as part of a world bigger than their immediate social surroundings. This realisation can sometimes motivate young people to engage in philanthropy, where young people connect with issues financially, which is clearly a difficult process in which to engage when they have low income, but can be seen when they participate in fundraising efforts such as the 40-hour famine. Finally, Rix (2007) acknowledges virtual engagement as a mode of civic engagement. Despite concerns mentioned in the previous chapter, use of the internet has positive implications when considering how young people can engage. The Canada25 National Organising Committee (2005:18) proclaims that ‘the internet is touted as a powerful way to reach out to a disengaged younger generation of citizens’.

Despite the optimism of these perspectives, it would be a folly to assume that the actual experience of encouraging youth participation and civic engagement is a smooth and inclusive process. As Hart (1992, 1997) identifies, the process spans both inclusive and exclusionary practices, which can include manipulation of young people, ‘window-dressing’ and tokenism. Alternatively, there can be practices where young people are informed and consulted (but decisions are still made by adults), or adult-initiated action with shared decision-making. More participatory and inclusive practices rely on action initiated by young people, where adults have either a supportive or shared decision-making role. There is some debate over which of these inclusive models is the most meaningful or beneficial for young people, with the main contention
over whether young people are more empowered to develop their civic identity when there is shared decision-making with adults, or when they are making decisions without the influence of adults. The debate over these models may require rethinking notions of participation, particularly for young males who do not fare well on many measures of civic engagement.

Accordingly, Yates and Youniss (1999) point out that a discussion of youth civic identity requires a new conceptualisation of the socialisation process. They argue that the socialisation of young people needs to have a focus beyond the notion of being passive recipients of social norms and traditions. Socialisation in the contemporary context is now more complex because youth are actually active participants in it, parents and adults have a less clear and authoritative view of what society should be, and because socialisation is ‘grounded in doing and leads to habitual practices’ (1999:6). Their new concept of socialisation recognises cognitive activity rather than internalisation of common beliefs, acknowledges diversity in views on what society is or should be rather than assuming a homogeneous position, and frames social structures in terms of the practices that define, reconstitute and support them. This view allows for a range of social goals/ideals to be embraced by an understanding of civic engagement, and is the point from which an international exploration of youth civic identity can begin.

Trends in volunteering and community service have drawn the attention of a number of authors in framing youth civic identity. Ferrier, Roos and Long (2004) identify that a majority of Australian young people showed positive attitudes toward being involved in community activities (understood by them to be broader than most formal definitions of volunteering), and were influenced to do so through role models, previous volunteering experience, religious belief, advertising or compulsory community service. Young people generally looked for activities that would engage their passions, involved other young people, and where they could see they would have an impact. Roker, Player and Coleman (1999) found that altruistic British adolescents displayed broader forms of participation that included helping younger children at school, contributing voluntarily in sports clubs, and being involved with campaign groups. They also found
that boys were less likely to report certain activities as altruistic either because there was also an element of self-interest in it, or that they might have been embarrassed about admitting it to family and friends. Pancer and Pratt (1999:38), on the other hand, recount that altruistic Canadian adolescents were more likely to have ideals similar to their parents. They felt that this similarity was commonly related to parenting style as a strong determinant in the development of the socially responsible individual ‘who feels a sense of connection to those outside his or her circle … and feels an obligation to help those who are in need, and to share with those who are less fortunate’.

However, Pancer and Pratt (1999) acknowledge that there is a difference between potential and actual participation, agreeing that there is no simple connection between socially responsible thinking and actual behaviour. They (in agreement with Marta, Rossi and Boccin, 1999) conceived of factors that motivate action as instrumental (i.e. hoping to gain something from volunteer work), religious (i.e. commitment to personal, religious or moral values) and social influence (i.e. participating at the urging of others). In sustaining altruism, Pancer and Pratt (1999) found that a supportive family, social networks and early positive outcomes were major determinants, in contrast with barriers such as available time, frustrating tasks or an unfriendly environment. Roker et al (1999) add access as another barrier, with rural isolation, transport, ethnicity and, to a certain extent, lack of choice affecting participation. Takahashi and Hatano (1999) also point to lack of opportunity as a barrier but, more significantly, in a politically conservative society like Japan, a key barrier was insufficient knowledge about political and economic structures, which makes civic activities less effective and less geared toward the welfare of all. Despite these barriers, they found that civic involvement increases self confidence and gives a sense of meaning to people’s lives, which they argue is difficult to find in a rich, high-tech society like Japan. Similarly, Pancer and Pratt (1999:52) concluded that, for young people, volunteering had a ‘profound influence on their way of thinking about themselves and the importance of making a contribution to social welfare’.
Hofer (1999:124) essentially concurs with these findings, but adds that involvement in community activities – by providing interaction with people who represent distant but significant parts of societal structures – fosters a reflective process that enables understanding and connection between young people’s own experience and structural issues like inequality, justice and responsibility. This process of transforming concrete experiences into abstract concepts is known as *transcendence*, and occurs in three stages: reflecting on stereotypes about distant groups to see others as individuals; comparing situations and realising their good fortune; and searching for structural causes of these differences in order to think about solutions to social problems. The process ends in ‘the ability to think about societal principles in abstract terms and to relate themselves to principles of the society in general’.

This transformational process still requires some clarification, particularly for how young males sport participants (whose pursuits are primarily physical) engage in an intellectual exercise, and more generally raises the question of how young people become politically socialised. Political socialisation is interpreted by Whyte (1999:156) as ‘the process through which young people become aware of how power is distributed in society and acquire their orientations and patterns of behaviour as citizens’. His study amongst youth in Northern Ireland found that the process is channelled both formally and informally through family, government systems, ethnic-religious subcultures, recreational provision by young people and cross-cultural community relationships. He found that there was little connection between youth violence and youth political ideation, and that there was no evidence that youth in Northern Ireland were more approving of violence in interpersonal or broader social settings. His findings contradicted the traditional notion that those who see violence used for political ends will develop a ‘warped’ view of violence. Nevertheless, he concedes that political apathy ‘leaves a vacuum ready to be filled by the politics of violence’ (1999:175).

Barber (1999) presents quite a different perspective on the relationship between politics and violence in exploring the Palestinian youth experience. He argues that the Palestinian Intifada
(the uprising against Israeli military occupation of Gaza Strip between 1987 and 1993) is a prime example of the will and capacity of young people to engage fully in their society. Front-line incidents of stone-throwing, barricade-building and tyre-burning were common activities in which young people participated, and which frequently resulted in harassment, beatings, shootings, arrest, detention and imprisonment. Barber (1999:187) proposes that the motivation for participation by Palestinian youth was their strikingly good awareness of political issues. In determining that adolescents were capable of clear and sustained defiance against authority, he says:

Given the collective consciousness of long-term oppression and the frequency and intensity of experiences in which they felt their loved ones to be violated, it is not surprising that high numbers of them participated in the Intifada, which was clearly not an expression of a small, disgruntled minority.

In the same way that Takahashi and Hatano (1999) and Pancer and Pratt (1999) describe the personal benefits for the civically engaged, Barber (1999) shows that Intifada youth also experienced substantial personal growth from their political engagement. He concludes that the most impressive aspect of the young Palestinians’ participation was that they saw beyond themselves to the concerns and needs of the broader society. That this capacity resulted in defiant and violent political action was indicative of the intensity of the experience and their drive to redress oppression and inequity. He found that ‘these young people had made fundamental ideological commitments regarding social and political needs’ (1999:202).

Seginer (1999) provides insight into the experience of young people engaged in Israeli military service. She found that the three-year compulsory military service for eighteen year old males in Israel is part of their cultural understanding of mandatory and voluntary community service. Although it could be argued that conscription is a tool for politically socialising young people into reinforcing the values of the state, Seginer (1999) believes that military service as a form of mandatory community service has value for the provider. The extent of the value, though,
depends on the personal significance of the activity. She found that meaning was derived from a continuum of individualistic and collectivist gains including ideological commitment, group cohesion, happiness, and self-worth. In short, these are the same kinds of benefits and motivations highlighted by those who have studied non-military community service, which is often characterised by the concept “beyond the call of duty”.

This element of duty is broadly captured in the notion of the social contract. The role of the social contract in developing civic identity is discussed further by Flanagan, Jonsson, Bothceva, Csapo, Bowes, Macek, Averina and Sheblanova (1999:135). They refer to the social contract as ‘the set of mutual rights and obligations binding citizens with their polity’, and that the essence of the social contract is that there is:

- an intergenerational bargain implied in the process of social integration, that is, a promise that one will enjoy the rights and reap the benefits of the social order if s/he lives by its rules and fulfils the responsibilities of membership.

Clearly, the root of engagement is subject to the actions of social change, globalisation, political instability and the lack of a social niche for young people. However, Flanagan et al (1999) contend that, as they grow, children and young people develop an understanding about this bargain that makes society work. They found that the voluntary sector, which included youth and religious organisations, plays a key role in encouraging pro-social norms and stabilising political and social systems. The lack of enthusiasm amongst their research participants for political action may contribute to the apparent conservatism inherent in their analysis, but it is entirely possible that the notion of the social contract as played out in the voluntary sector can also provide a means for young people to explore their connection to the polity and be more deeply engaged in it. Flanagan (2003:260) supports this argument when she says that:

- By actively engaging in community affairs, younger generations reinterpret the principles of the social contract—the ties that bind citizens to their polity—for their generation. In so doing, they create both stability and change in the system.
These explorations add to a broader understanding of civic identity and participation but, despite the research on the social contract, seem to fail in accounting for a more intuitive approach by young males for finding their niche in the world.

Further understanding of civic engagement emerges from citizenship literature. Although the term ‘citizenship’ can be subsumed by political agendas seeking to promote morality and nationalism, there is sufficient diversity in the literature from which to draw a richer meaning. Manning and Ryan (2004) acknowledge that the definition of youth as 12 to 25 year olds poses problems in determining citizenship status. That some young people have legal status as adults and some don’t is a conundrum, and does not necessarily translate into the ability to exercise these legal rights. Economic inequality and lack of independence is significant here, but autonomy in citizenship for young people is much more than economic equality and legal and political rights. Manning and Ryan (2004) argue that this limited independence leads to an inequality in social rights which, as Bessant (2007) says, is often reinforced by policies based on the assumption that children are vulnerable, naïve, fragile and in need of protection. These assumptions translate into limited opportunities for political engagement because young people are assumed to not have sufficient civic knowledge. According to White and Wyn (2007), when young people have engaged in political action, they are either ignored, patronised or maligned to a greater extent than adults. Manning and Ryan (2004) argue that whilst young people do not have an in-depth understanding of parliamentary politics, there is evidence to suggest that their concern about a range of political issues (such as the environment, women’s issues, animal welfare and public space) has increased and sharpened, particularly in the context of digital technologies and globalisation, where the information available about social issues is greater than ever before. The process of globalisation also raises the meaning of citizenship for young people – that is, of what exactly are they citizens?

In moving beyond simplistic notions of legal status and eligibility to vote, which immediately excludes young people under eighteen, White and Wyn (2007:108) refer to a continuum of
minimal and maximal citizenship. Minimal citizenship refers to basic civil and legal status, whereas maximal citizenship refers to a shared participatory approach to civic and political engagement, defined as ‘a consciousness of oneself as a member of a shared democratic culture’. Maximal citizenship is developed through a learning process that encourages critical and reflective thinking skills and capacities for self-determination, and requires that young people are given real roles in the institutions and organisations in which they participate.

In further applying this analysis of citizenship to the experience of young males, Smith, Lister, Middleton and Cox (2005) found that young people ascribe to a number of different perspectives about citizenship and argue that some models of citizenship actually serve to exclude young people. In order for young people’s status as citizens to be better appreciated, they propose greater prominence for a constructive social participation model of citizenship, rather than a narrow focus on formal organised participation or employment-oriented models. They say that:

this model of citizenship refers to the practice of taking a constructive approach towards community, ranging from the more passive abiding by the law, to the more proactive helping people and having a positive impact (2005:436).

This model acknowledges that young people are constructively active in their communities, but not always in the way that adults tend to perceive it. It is a model that appears to better incorporate an intuitive sense of civic engagement, and also makes provision for the ways in which young males self-determine their joining with community life. Participation in sport can be one of those entry points.

In the context of the differences outlined in this chapter, there do seem to be some commonalities that can contribute to a working definition of civic engagement. In short, civic engagement involves some kind of participation in the life of the defined community. However, there is also a sense that civic engagement is a process by which people learn or understand the way in which their community/society works and then become involved in social or public activities based on
that new understanding. On one hand, there is an intellectual and emotional engagement, and on the other a more practical engagement. These learning and/or action processes may be carried out in collaboration with community workers or other people with previous knowledge and experience, and hence civic engagement can provide a forum for different varieties of mentoring to occur. The specific form that the practical engagement takes varies significantly from place to place, depending on needs, social structure, opportunities, and other factors. Similarly, intellectual engagement is not beholden to any single political or sociological perspective. In fact the civic engagement literature appears to range from the ultra-conservative to the ultra-radical in this respect. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) classify this diversity according to three types of citizen. The first is the personally responsible citizen, whose core assumptions are that to solve social problems and improve society citizens must have good character, be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community. The second is the participatory citizen, whose core assumptions are that citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures. The final one is the justice-oriented citizen, whose core assumptions are that citizens must question, debate, and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice over time. This classification does align neatly with political ideologies of conservatism, pluralism and structuralism, and is indeed reminiscent of the three possible dimensions of the relationship between sport and society. That is, civic engagement, like sport, can be seen as being a form of reflection of society, reinforcement of social values and norms, or a form of resistance to current and dominant ideologies. Therefore, to define civic engagement by incorporating multiple forms of participation in community life, and a multiplicity of conscious motivations, is to attempt to be as inclusive as possible by allowing for political/ideological variation (which may at times lead to contradiction), as well as encompassing forms of participation as defined by those ‘doing’ the participating.

In summary, the benefits and outcomes of civic engagement for young males are then to be considered. The most obvious is that young males are more ‘connected’ through social networks, either with peers or adults. The connection is enhanced by an increased awareness of activities,
support services and social structures in the broader community. The value of this connection is heightened by the fact that there is an established link between people who are marginalised (on dimensions of social cohesion and sense of belonging) and at higher risk of poor health (Berkman and Glass, 2003). Some form of recognition of the contribution of young males from the broader community will often translate into an affirmation of their worth and, consequently, as both Woodman (2004) and Wilkinson (2006) assert, an increased sense of health and well-being. Furthermore, this recognition can also often result in a more keenly developed sense of belonging, participation and ownership in decisions and social structures that impact on their lives (Easthorpe and White, 2006). Conversely, Saggers, Palmerm, Royce, Wilson and Charlton (2004) and Matthews (2000) note that the inclusion and participation of young people also makes communities stronger. All of these benefits contribute to resilience which, as Worsley (2005) points out, is a key strength in negotiating the transition to adulthood. McFarland and Thomas (2006) go on to say that civic participation in teenage years is an indicator of political engagement in adult life, so that it is fair to say that these benefits could carry over into adulthood as well.

It is important to note that, without trying to enforce any causal relationship, that some of the benefits gained by young males from being civically engaged match, overlap or complement the benefits gained by young males from participating in sports. These benefits, for example, include the enhancement of mental health and social networks, a sense of belonging, the fostering of resilience, and the opportunity to develop positive relationships with adults. Similarly, some of the drawbacks of civic engagement parallel those of sports participation. For example, youth participation activities may be overtaken by people, organisations or the State in order to fulfil a particular political agenda, or may be subsumed by the actions of ideological hegemony (in terms of class, ethnicity or gender). These aspects of the topic will be expanded in the following section which, having reached a point of understanding about the dimensions of civic engagement for young males, further explores the range of connections between civic engagement and sport.
**Sport and civic engagement**

The connections between civic engagement and sport, in recent civic engagement literature, represent a range of indicators emanating from the diversity of definitions across a broad social and political spectrum. Some factors are inconclusive, but some appear to make a stronger connection between sports participation and civic engagement. The first point that emerges is that participation in sport seems to be related to the likelihood of voting. Reporting on research originating in North America, where voting is voluntary, Lopez and Moore (2006) show that, where young people aged 18-25 were active participants in sport, they were more likely to be civically active by enrolling and then voting in elections. Female participation rates were higher than those for males, although there was still a significant difference for both sexes when comparing sport participants and sport non-participants.

Clearly, the correlation between sport and voting does not apply to Australia, which (as noted) has compulsory voting. Other factors, though, may overlap with American research. Lopez and Moore (2006) indicate that participation in sports increases news attentiveness. They found that young people who participated in sport also reported watching the news more closely, including sports news (obviously) but also general and political news. On this dimension, rates were higher for males than females. MM [sic] (2005) relates New Zealand research suggesting that physically active adults (in comparison to more sedentary adults) are more likely to participate in ‘passive’ civic activities such as reading the newspaper. Lopez & Moore (2006) make one further point that participation in sport increases the likelihood of making statements in public meetings. Defined as a *voice indicator* of civic engagement, females again rated more highly than males. Similarly, sports-participating females were more likely to enter into some form of boycott, but this indicator did not differ significantly between male sport-participants and non-participants.

There is undoubtedly a connection between civic participation, social capital and public health (e.g. Baum, Palmer, Modra, Muarray and Bush, 2000; Ziersch and Baum, 2004; Hyppä and Mäki, 2003), whilst other research explores the connection between sport and individual physical
health. Some health literature seeks to broaden this relationship in order to establish a connection between sport and public health. For example, in discussing the impact of civil society groups (CSGs) on public health, Ziersch and Baum (2004) report that the most popular form of CSG participation was in sport/recreation groups. They indicate that while CSG participation had a positive effect on community health, it sometimes correlated negatively with the physical and mental health of individuals, possibly stress-related. Alternatively, the World Health Organisation (2003:1) contends that ‘physical activity is for an individual a strong means of prevention of diseases, and for nations a cost-effective method to improve public health across the population’. They point to research that suggests that physical activity leads to economic benefits such as reduced health care costs, increased productivity, and healthier physical and social environments.

Fensham and Gardner (2005:15) argue that dancing – as a form of physical activity – enables a person to engage ‘of and with their bodies in all of their lived social, physical, spatio-temporal, aesthetic and otherworldly dimensions’. Dance classes are thus environments in which social skills can be learned and social capital developed, providing benefits that exceed economic considerations and so representing unique community capacity building opportunities. In terms of capacity building, Hall and Banno (2001) also found that public performance of activities such as dance (for young females) and exhibition games of rugby sevens (for young males) were effective both in developing a sense of belonging to community and in contributing to its vibrant life, where the adult community could recognise their contribution. Jarvie (2003), however, argues that it is unreasonable to expect sport to maintain a dimension of social capital or civic engagement without first addressing issues of ownership, obligations and stakeholder interests in sports at government, policy and market levels.

Townsend, Moore and Mahoney (2002) explore the contribution of sport to public health in relation to small rural communities in Australia. They support the idea that sporting clubs and organisations provided additional health benefits in the form of increased social capital. With
declining populations in rural communities, they argue that sporting clubs have become one of the last vestiges of social infrastructures. Whilst banks and other institutions have been closing down, sporting clubs are one of the few institutions that are still active in small rural communities and, as such, provide a focus for identity, purpose, community cohesion, and economic boosts to the townships. They are perceived to be essential for town and community survival. They also found that sports participation (player and non-player) was a key part of the physical, mental and social health and well-being of individuals, and the community as a whole. Baills and Rossi (2005), like Townsend et al (2002), found that rural towns unfortunately have a diminishing capacity to sustain sporting activities for their young people, and so the public health benefits are likewise diminishing.

The other element of this relationship between sport and civic engagement relates to sportspersonship. There is an enduring cliché in Western culture that ‘sport builds character’ and, although some literature supports it, there have also been corresponding arguments that sport detracts from, or is neutral in, fostering certain positive values or traits. Jones and McNamee (2000) are critical of much of this research, mainly on the basis of methodologies that equate ‘character’ with moral reasoning as a stage of cognitive development. They say that this mismatch lead no closer to an explanation. Joyner & Mummery (2005) agree that there are equivocal findings, just as there are equivocal beliefs throughout society, and that sport can promote immoral or unsportspersonlike behaviours just as much as sportspersonlike ones. They argue that sportspersonship is comprised of five dimensions: respect for the social conventions of the sport, respect for the rules and officials, respect for one’s full commitment to participation, respect and concern for the opponent, and the absence of a negative attitude to sport. They found, when comparing sport types (i.e. team sports and individual sports), that individual sports appear to encourage greater respect for rules and officials than do team sports, perhaps because of the absence of social pressure to engage in less respectful behaviour. There were no significant differences established for the other dimensions of sportspersonship. Second, they compared goal orientations referred to as task and ego. Task orientation is characterised by
players motivated by learning, improving, and skill mastery. Ego orientation is characterised by showing superiority, demonstrating ability (or ‘showing off’), and a preoccupation with winning. They found that a high task orientation combined with a low ego orientation significantly increased the likelihood of observable sportspersonship across all dimensions. On these dimensions, it could be argued, then, that there is a synchronicity between sportspersonship and citizenship (as outlined earlier in this chapter).

FitzSimons (2001) documents the life story of John Eales, former Australian rugby union captain, who is widely regarded in rugby circles as the epitome of fair play and sportsmanship. On the insistence of Eales, FitzSimons includes a public affirmation of a rugby code of conduct for parents, coaches and players that commits to the aforementioned dimensions of sportspersonship. This documentation alludes to the role of well-known elite players (sports celebrities or sports stars) in reinforcing sportspersonship for younger players. Andrews and Jackson (2001:14) see sport celebrity ‘as a product of commercial culture, imbued with symbolic values, which seek to stimulate desire and identification among the consuming populace’. Jackson and Ponic (2001) agree that, in this way, sports stars can often be a barometer of national identity, but can also be a ‘feeder’ into people’s preoccupations.

Given these parameters, it is still important to explore any possible connections between sport and the promotion of civic behaviour amongst young male grass-roots participants and enthusiasts. Rojek (2006) elaborates on the relationship between sports celebrity and the development of civic identity. He notes that the functions of sport in industrialised society include identity formation, collective definition, peaceful outlets of aggression and the breaking of routine. Social bonding is, therefore, an important part of the relationship between participant and spectator, which is intensified because of the broad presence of elite sportspeople through publicly broadcast sporting events, and the infusion into advertising of sport and sportspeople as commercial commodities. With this commodification, and the growing public concern about health and fitness, the sports star is seen as the embodiment of health. Furthermore, the prominence of
sport in popular culture elevates the celebrity to the vanguard of popular culture. On the basis of this sequence of arguments, Rojek (2006:687) proposes that sports celebrities ‘offer parables to modern men and women of how to live their lives’, and subsequently represent systems that contribute to democratisation.

There is sound logic in this argument, but whether the sportspersonlike and civic behaviour of celebrities actually plays a role in encouraging civic or politically oriented behaviour in young male fans is not clearly determined. Bush, Martin and Bush (2004) explore the influence of sports celebrities in terms of advertising and the purchasing power of young people. They found that the influence of athlete role models does not lie in product switching or complaining behaviour, but that it does correlate positively with favourable word-of-mouth communication and brand loyalty. This demonstration of actual influence of sports celebrities in advertising does have major implications for the role of sports celebrities and may bolster the argument that they can have an influence upon civic as well as consumer behaviour.

Given that some of the research has been inconclusive or is preliminary in its nature, it is often difficult to establish a causal relationship between the factors of sport and civic engagement. It is not definitely clear whether it is sports participation itself amongst young males that increases civic engagement, or whether there are other factors underlying their sports participation that also precipitate these dimensions of civic engagement. There are, however, some key themes that do emerge from exploring these links. These are belonging, contribution and resistance.
Sport and belonging

As mentioned earlier, Hall and Banno (2001) found that public performances of sport increased in young males a sense of belonging, where participants expressed feeling good about being publicly acknowledged and recognised by adults and peers from their local community. This finding is consistent with Wilkinson’s (2006) research, who relates being valued with improved health. Elsewhere, there is a strong affirmation of the role of sport in improving social cohesion, building social capital, and addressing social exclusion. Putnam (2000) defines communities that are rich in social capital as those in which there are strong community networks, a sense of local identity/solidarity, and high levels of interpersonal trust. Coalter, Allison and Taylor (2000) argue that (given that 33% of British people were involved in sports in some way) sport has great potential to facilitate such social participation. For young people in Australia, the argument that sport provides strong community networks and civic infrastructure is even stronger, as the ABS (2004) estimated that 39% of young people aged 15 to 24 were involved in organised sport and physical activity. As mentioned previously, Baills and Rossi (2004) and Townsend et al (2002) show how sport is integral to local identity, solidarity and interdependence. According to Putnam’s (2000) definition, sport is clearly a factor in developing communities that are rich in social capital.

Additionally, according to the different types of social capital outlined by Ruston (2003), sport plays a role in bonding, bridging and linking. Ruston adopts the outcomes of the UK 2000 Time Use Survey to identify social capital activities as volunteering (formal participation), helping (informal involvement) and socialising (informal sociability). He found that, compared with the general population, people who volunteer, help or socialise spend more time with others in the community. This finding varied with age but, for males, was more evident on the weekends where social or recreational clubs were a significant location. In Canada, according to Sport Canada (2005), 21% of organisations for which people volunteered were sport/recreation related. In the Australian situation, Volunteering Australia (2004) reports that 34% of organisations for which people volunteered were sport/recreation related.
Sport Canada (2005) also supports the argument that sport builds social cohesion and social capital because sports participants experience a high degree of interaction with others, which improves relationships, builds trust and teamwork skills. Notwithstanding some of the negative social features associated with sport (for example, unsportspersonlike parental behaviour, drug use, unfair judging and poor public conduct by high profile athletes), they argue that community-based sport programs build social capital by providing opportunities for volunteering, reinforcing relationships within families, neighbourhoods and across communities, establishing partnerships and networks between organisations, and strengthening relationships between various levels of government. This proposition is further supported by Lawson (2005:138), who argues that sport, exercise and physical education programs can make ‘contributions to sustainable and integrated social and economic development’. This outcome is achieved by producing and reinforcing social networks, contributing to the development of collective identities, creating health-enhancing environments, improving well-being, and contributing to human capital development. He proposes that the potential of sport to meet these ends is maximised in collaboration with helping professionals linked to empowerment-oriented community development.

On the other hand, Snow (1999) discusses the experiences of young skateboarders in their understanding and use of public space. He notes that the skateboarders, whilst having a sense of belonging to their own sub-cultural group, were less inclined to feel that they belong to the general community, and may indeed prefer it that way. Furthermore, Beal (1996) asserts that within the skateboarding subculture, a sense of belonging based on an alternative masculinity has developed to some extent, one not necessarily tied to the hegemonic male identity that seems to be connected with collision sports. These factors may also apply to other ‘counter-culture’ leisure pursuits such as surfing, where an alternative identity is formed, although Light (2006) argues that when young surfers take on surf club membership, it provides resources for developing understanding and cultural knowledge through growing involvement in the practices of the club.
There are clear links between sport and a sense of belonging for sports participants. Further to understanding this role of sport, though, is how it addresses social exclusion across socio-economic and cultural boundaries. Coalter et al (2000) outline many of the social benefits of sport, but are not convinced of the capacity of sport in itself to reach marginalised or excluded young people, or to reduce youth crime. They argue that sport will be effective in this regard when it is part of a broader community development approach to diversion. Hall and Banno (2001) and Morris, Sallybanks, Willis and Makkai (2004) found that sports programs have had a social control function in reducing the ‘anti-social’ behaviour of marginalised young people, although they propose that this may have been because they were simply activities that reduced boredom and reduced the amount of unsupervised leisure time, so that any such activity would achieve the same end. Donnelly and Coakley (2002), however, believe that sport must look further than initiatives based simply on social control. They say that sport and recreation may promote social inclusion if key issues such as accessibility, democratised participation, individual competence, continuity of programs, integration of youth from different backgrounds, and the development of sincere leaders and mentors are addressed.

There is a premise established by Tatz (1996, 1995, 1987) for the role of sport in empowering Aboriginal people particularly. Where they are excluded on so many other social, political and economic levels, Aboriginal men have used sport to negotiate their economic and social inclusion and have consistently been upheld and celebrated for their sporting prowess. Cairnduff (2001), mapping the Northern Territory sports experiences for indigenous communities, adds that, apart from the possible reduction of vandalism during the lifespan of sport and recreation programs, there was little evidence of sport producing any social or community outcomes for indigenous people. Unfortunately, despite the range of programs and talk about the potential of sport, there does not seem to be evidence to suggest that it has led to any broader form of social inclusion, or that it has really added to the progress of disintegrating ingrained prejudice within society. Carrington (1998), though, insists that addressing racism through sport is possible, citing the
experience of black cricketers in the UK forming a ‘black club’ and utilising it not only as a marker of their local community, but also as a means of resisting white racism.

Despite the vaunted potential of sport to address social exclusion, in actuality McKay (1990) found that Australian sport manifested the same social inequalities across class, gender and race that characterise other social institutions, which supports Kell’s (2000) argument that the egalitarian nature of Australian sport is a myth. Similarly, Hallinan and Jackson (2008) demonstrate the fallacy of sport being free of racial barriers, pinpointing many examples where cultural diversity of players, coaches and administrators have proved a stumbling block. Bryant (2001) found mixed results about sport development programs in the U.K. He found that traditional programs that provided ‘tasters’ and then identified participants who can ‘go further’ actually tend to further marginalise socially excluded young people. Sport Canada (2005) reports that sport and recreation services may help marginalised young people to reintegrate, provided that services are not isolated measures and that young people have input into the nature and provision of these services. Therefore, as a dimension of civic engagement, the role of sport in engendering a sense of belonging must be balanced with the ongoing exclusionary sporting practices to be found in the experiences of marginalised groups. A broader exploration of these connections needs to include an understanding of the role of sport in fostering contribution.
Sport and contribution

Belonging and contribution are closely connected, and there are many forms of contribution to community, of which volunteering is one form. As discussed earlier, sport and recreation organisations are the most common venues in which volunteering takes place across a number of different countries. Lopez & Moore (2006), as noted earlier, found that young male sport participants were significantly more likely to volunteer, either on a one-off or regular basis, than sport non-participants. Ferrier et al (2004) reported that young people had become involved in volunteering because of previous involvement in the organisation, such as moving into sports coaching having played the sport at a junior level, or who participated in sports-based youth development programs such as surf life-saving. Eley and Kirk (2002) researched young volunteers in fixed-term sporting programs and found that their volunteer involvement stimulated a desire to volunteer again in the future. They point out that volunteering activities were more common amongst young people from a higher socio-economic class, or among those whose parents had a volunteering history. Sport Canada (2005) emphasises the key role that sport plays in both being a venue for, and a path toward, volunteering. They say that for youth, recreation and sports facilities are places to learn about being active participants in the life of the community. Calloway (2004:36) argues that youth sport offers ‘a strategy for creating communities of achievement in which young people are active and valued contributors’. He found that contribution was defined in three different ways: by being partners in designing and delivering programs, by accessing training and skill development, and by developing relationships with supportive adult mentors.

In relation to other forms of community contribution, the connections are less clear. For example, Lopez and Moore (2006) found no significant differences between sport participants and non-participants across a range of measures, including whether they had worked to solve a community problem, joined a run/walk/ride to raise funds, participated in a town meeting, or written a letter. Similarly, Morris et al (2004) are non-specific about whether it is sport that reduces anti-social behaviour or whether the effect is related to any activity that simply reduces
boredom and the amount of unsupervised time that marginalised young people have at their disposal. On the other hand, Hall and Banno (2001) reported that young males believed that simply playing sport for their local team was an important aspect of contributing to their community. They also found that young male skateboarders in the area were highly motivated to participate in processes and decisions relating to the development of a skate park, not just for their own benefit, but because it would benefit the community.

Whilst not directly referring to a connection to sports, Saggers et al (2004) point out that active youth participation, at the policy level of the youth sector, is mostly a method to improve services and outcomes for young people. They warn that it is a contested notion, where some believe that the participatory process is overtaken by school leaders, or where there is a hidden agenda to create good ‘moral’ citizens. Earlier in this chapter, the development of citizenship was acknowledged as a component or even a synonym of civic engagement, but there is an ongoing tension between the dominance of ideologically conservative agendas (and the hegemonic processes used to maintain them) and the attempts at representing the voices of young people in policy and political decisions. This tension is often embodied in the exclusivity of the consultative processes undertaken. Saggers et al (2004) show how many people believe that, at a local government level at least, there is an element of social control or even ‘window dressing’ when consulting with young people. Council youth advisory committees are often comprised of those young people who are already consulted on other levels rather than the disconnected and marginalised. Furthermore, a community-based agency’s commitment to democratic participation in committee processes is often at odds with the way that young people themselves wish to participate, or how they see that they already participate in their communities.

These aspects of the discussion support the argument that sport forms the basis of a variety of ways for young males to contribute to their community, alluding to both the intellectual/emotional and practical axes of civic engagement. As can be seen, a sense of belonging and of contribution are two important factors emerging in the connections between sport and civic engagement. The underlying motivation to create change, and make a difference, leads to the final area of
discussion, which explores the possibility that sport is a pathway to activism, political engagement and resistance.
**Sport and resistance**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, resistance can be conceived of as a process of being in conflict with dominant social structures and values. Resistance can be an internal mental and emotional process, or an external verbal and practical process, although it is most commonly associated with the *act* of opposing inequitable and unjust systems, structures and hegemonies within the socio-political environment in which one is situated. Whatever form it takes, resistance is an important element to be explored in understanding the role of sport in civic engagement.

Numerous authors (e.g. Coakley, 2003; McPherson et al, 1989; Rowe, 1995; Light and Kirk, 2000; Pringle, 2005) warn that it is important to acknowledge that the State has been involved in sport as a tool for reinforcing the *status quo*. At times, governments have used sport to develop, maintain and reinforce conservative or patriotic values or to reproduce conservative citizenship traits. Hughson (2000) argues that this criticism applies not just to governments but also to corporate and sporting administrative bodies. Alternatively, other authors (e.g. Giulianotti, 2004; McKay, 1990; Kell, 2000; Grainger, 2006) show how sport is an arena that reflects the social structure of the time with all its inequities. Despite these criticisms, sport can also be shown to be a forum and a pathway for political activism and resistance.

McPherson et al (1989) talk of resistance both within and beyond sport to wider society. They point out that vying interest groups within a sport can strive to change the *status quo* of their chosen field. In terms of the effects of resistance beyond sport, they show among other things how sport subcultures emerge due to disaffection with organised social or sporting systems. Surfing, for example, has developed its own subculture that leans more toward an alternative lifestyle because, despite its growing popularity and corporatisation, it is seen by many surfers as a lifestyle rather than a sport. A pursuit such as skateboarding has to some extent developed in a similar way, particularly, as Beal (1996) reported, in terms of young male skateboarders forming alternative masculinities. However, McPherson et al (1989) argue that generally this development has had little consequence for the wider society. What has made a stronger contribution to social...
transformation has been related to African American and female athletes, who have crossed race and gender lines to compete in sports traditionally thought of as white or male, the implication of which has been that sport has become an avenue of mobility, for elite or professional sportspeople at least, which in some ways has redressed entrenched inequities and discriminatory attitudes. Rowe (1995) cites the growing acceptance of homosexual sportspeople as another form of social change. According to Collins (1998), a similar transformative process may have been in operation in the working-class backlash against rugby union in England and Australia, resulting in the formation of rugby league. Hill (2002) certainly sees class as a factor, but argues that sport and politics are overlapping more in contemporary culture because of the growing commercialisation of sport and a preoccupation with the standard of performance of elite athletes.

The commercialisation and professionalisation of sport has provided opportunities to address human rights issues on a global level, as outlined by Giulianotti (2004), although it is difficult to ascertain whether the elite sporting celebrities would have engaged in such acts of resistance if there was no public acknowledgement of their involvement. Anonymity in such endeavours is not usually a characteristic of this public side of sporting culture although it could still be possible, and is certainly a feature of efforts at the grass-roots level. However, globalisation and the expanding influence of the media has unfortunately, according to Rowe (1998:244), silenced many of the critical and resistant voices as ‘sports audiences have grown exponentially, and sport-based nationalism has found new, ideologically fertile sites’. Because of this outcome, he issues a call to sports sociologists to intentionally promote social justice within their field.

This relationship between sports nationalism and civic engagement is also an expression of the theses about sport as reflection, reinforcement and resistance. The first thesis provides an understanding of sports-based nationalism as a reflection of the nationalist values and ideals already extant in the surrounding culture. Therefore, it is possible that young people can become pro-social actors because of it. The second thesis leads to a view of sports nationalism as being
an intentional reinforcement of dominant beliefs. There is a sense that this position may be productive to the operation of society, but most critics are severe on the rise of sports-based nationalism, as it hearkens back to the imperialist origins alluded to earlier in this chapter. As Rowe (1995, 1998) and McPherson et al (1989) argue, the State plays a role in promoting nationalism through sport for the purposes of maintaining its power. Therefore, the third thesis stands in conflict with the rise of sports-nationalism and espouses a role for sport to resist this form of oppression.

The connection between sport and political engagement, specifically for young males at a grassroots level, is more difficult to determine, initially because research indicates that it is young women who are more likely to be social activists. Eden and Roker's (2002) longitudinal study of youth social actors in the U.K. found that young males were significantly under-represented in social action. Similarly, as already stated, Lopez and Moore (2006) found that while young female sports participants were more likely than female non-participants to boycott a product or service, there were no significant differences for young males. In terms of signing petitions, neither sex of sport participants showed a significant difference over non-participants. Nevertheless, Rix (2007) still lists ‘political engagement’ and ‘social activism’ as key modes of civic engagement alongside ‘play’. McFarland and Thomas (2006) explored the question of whether participation in voluntary activities, during a young person’s ‘pre-citizen’ years, increases political engagement in adulthood. In their research, adult political activity was measured by enrolling to vote, actually voting, community service, assisting in a campaign and becoming a party member. Whilst it was not stated whether ‘pre-citizen’ years referred to under eighteen or under twenty-one (given that it was a U.S. study), they found an unquestionable connection between a young person’s general involvement in extracurricular activities and political participation six to twelve years into the future. Specifically, participation in voluntary associations most encouraged a young person’s future political participation, but only because those voluntary associations provided opportunities for community service, representation, speaking in public forums and generating a communal identity. This relationship is untested in the Australian context, but it could arguably be
extrapolated that the correlation may be even stronger (given Kell’s (2000) reference to the Australian obsession with sport), especially where sporting clubs and associations provide the same kinds of opportunity described by McFarland and Thomas (2006).

In this regard, Donovan, Bowler, Hanneman and Karp (2004) found that New Zealanders, (where membership of sporting groups approaches 47% of the population in a nation comparable to Australia) who belonged to a variety of social groups show clear differences in how they are associated with ‘active’ (e.g. wrote to newspaper, called talkback radio, worked on a campaign, joined a protest rally) and ‘passive’ (e.g. signed petition, discussed politics, voted, boycotted) dimensions of political engagement, and that sports groups were generally associated with higher levels of passive engagement but not active engagement. They argue that, because of the sheer numbers of people involved in sporting groups across the nation, the political effect is twice that of those identifying as working class, and rivals the magnitude of effects of gender and Maori identity as factors in political engagement. However, there was a less significant correlation between these factors when it came to young males.

Clearly, sport as a component of contemporary Western culture does provide a basis for both the reflection and reinforcement of existing social structures. The existence of contradictory research about the role of sport in civic engagement for young males should not be surprising, given the diversity of definitions and ideological underpinnings of these terms. Despite the uncertainty about whether it is sport itself or some pre-existing factors and traits that lead to civic engagement, it is demonstrable that sport is a predictive factor in many dimensions of civic engagement. It can be argued that sports participation for young males increases the likelihood of voting, volunteering and speaking in public meetings. There are links between sport, public health and social capital, particularly in terms of social networks and community identity. A sense of belonging and a sense of contribution to community are seemingly enhanced by sport. Whilst sport does not seem to adequately address inequity and social exclusion, there is still evidence of sport being a forum for political engagement, social activism and resistance.
These findings, across a diverse range of research discourses (i.e. sport, youth, health and men's studies), continue to build an argument for further empirical and theoretical exploration of the connections between sport and civic engagement for young males, particularly in light of the apparent obstacles for Australian young males to positively engage in community life.
This chapter introduces the researcher’s theoretical and conceptual framework underpinning this study. As a contemporary social researcher it is important to acknowledge a theory/values base, because in accordance with literature on qualitative research (e.g. Walter, 2006; Alston and Bowles, 2003; Strauss, 1990; Somekh and Lewin, 2005; Strauss and Corbin, 1998), contemporary practitioners in qualitative social science research no longer hold to the traditional positivist approach that research can be value-free. Walter (2006:16) argues strongly that, in fact, it should not be value-free, because social science is part of a broader social context steeped in moral, political and cultural values. If the context is not value-free then the research isn’t either. She states that researchers need to:

understand and acknowledge that our research process, our research findings and
the theories we develop are not core truths, but rather are embedded in and viewed
through our cultural milieu, and steeped in particular paradigms and epistemologies.

Alston & Bowles (2003:10) affirm that qualitative research can not be value-free, and therefore, that researchers ‘should acknowledge their own values, biases and position in relation to the research’. This acknowledgement lays the foundation for being transparent and non-secretive about the issue of the researcher as human instrument. In the context of the human instrument, it is important to transparently acknowledge the researcher’s commitment to social justice principles that stem from a critical theoretical base. This position contains a number of different elements, which span an understanding of the social determinants of health, sociological approaches to sport and anti-oppressive approaches to practice and research. There are clearly some common threads which run through all of these facets of theoretical underpinnings, which will become evident as their relevance is outlined, both in this chapter and, to a lesser extent, in Chapter 5 (Methodology), which will also further reflect on the role of the researcher as human instrument.
Social determinants of health

Because of the connections between sport and health, the researcher’s critical perspective takes in an understanding of the social determinants of the health of men and boys, exploring the interplay between them. Health is a contested notion, but defining it can begin with the World Health Organisation (WHO, 1986:2), which considers health to be ‘complete physical, mental and social well-being’. This definition provides an alternative arena within which to discuss a definition of health that reflects more than just a medical or pathogenic model of health as the absence of disease. Wilkinson and Marmot (2003), in the European context, extend WHO’s definition by identifying ten main social determinants of health as social gradient, stress, early life, social exclusion, work, unemployment, social support, addiction, food and transport. At a conceptual level, Macdonald (2005) elaborates on this position by drawing on an example of hospital patients whose conditions may have causes lying in the ‘social, economic, cultural and personal emotional and spiritual context or environment’ (2005:8). This perspective draws a connection between health and a person’s or society’s environment, and understands health to be the successful interaction/relationship which individuals and communities have with their surrounding environment. This interaction gives rise to consideration of resilience and a salutogenic model (as opposed to a pathogenic model) of health, which will be discussed later.

Macdonald (2000) argues that a growing amount of research evidence lays the basis for an understanding of the social determinants of health to be integral to all discussion on the topic of the health of men and boys. This point is developed further by Macdonald (2006) in his analysis of men’s health policy and practice frameworks. He specifically underlines the importance of social gradient, stress, employment/unemployment and social inclusion/exclusion as vital to understanding the health of men and boys, rather than apportioning blame to ‘masculinity and men behaving badly’ (2006:456). Ignoring the social determinants of health leaves policy makers and practitioners stuck with the traditional medical model and individualistic framework which focuses on disease and apports blame. Easthorpe and White (2006) express concern that there is a perception in the current political climate that health choices are the exclusive domain
of individual responsibility. This perception would clearly serve the interests of a ruling party whose ideology was based on individualism and personal initiative. However, Macdonald (2005) says that health needs to be seen as being embedded in the social, economic and cultural fabric of people's lives. Wilkinson and Marmot (2003) agree that the empirical evidence no longer supports the idea that individuals are solely responsible for their health, when individual and public health is evidently poorer in whole societies that are poorer in an economic sense. The same principle applies to health being poorer further down the social ladder in each society. In the same vein, in Australia, Vinson (1999) has identified that people who live in localities with lower ratings across a number of social indicators will almost always have poorer health. Health across a population correlates with level of education, income and unemployment, crime rates and interactions with police, rates of child abuse, geographical isolation, transport and infrastructure, and environmental conditions. Contrary to the belief in an individual's sole responsibility for health, Vinson (1999:v) states that to 'blame the residents of areas for being disadvantaged is ill-informed and completely beside the point'. This stance stems from his understanding of the social determinants of health and well-being and the disadvantageous policy, planning and decision-making at the local, state and national level that has resulted in cumulative social deprivation. Furthermore, Wilkinson and Marmot (2003) point out that poverty, relative deprivation and social exclusion are major factors in health status. Social exclusion can result not only from poverty but also from unemployment, racism and discrimination.

Fletcher (1997) sees this same phenomenon operating with regard to the connections between health and gender, showing – without apportioning blame/responsibility – that on multiple indicators of mortality and morbidity as well as other dimensions, the health status of men is poorer than that of women. He states that 'there are quite remarkable gender differences in health status in this country ...These differences in health status largely reflect the prevalence of preventable factors. (Fletcher, 1997:2) In the ensuing ten years, there has been minimal improvement in the health status of men. For example, according to NSW Department of Health (2007) the rates of suicide and self-inflicted injury for men in New South Wales has steadily
decreased in the past ten years, but it currently remains substantially higher than the current female rate of suicide. Of further interest is the overall steady decrease of potentially avoidable deaths in males, although the rate is still higher for men of low socio-economic status.

These findings give prominence to some of the factors related to the health of men in general. In terms of young males, Sercombe, Omaji, Frew, Cooper and Love (2002) assert that based on mortality and morbidity rates young people are generally considered the most physically healthy section of the community in Australia. However, as already acknowledged, health is more than just physical well-being. Sercombe et al (2002) argue that spiritual and political health should also be included in the definition, because feelings of powerlessness are basic to apathy and ill-health, and social exclusion creates powerless groups in society (young people being one of them). Wise, Bennett, Alperstein and Chown (2003) argue that despite investment in the development of young people by governments, families, and social welfare organisations, many young people are not receiving the support they need for a safe and successful transition to adulthood. They advocate the idea that building resilience will enhance this transition, and that resilience is indeed a key factor in the health and wellbeing of young people. Pittman (1996) identifies five dimensions of healthy development necessary for negotiating this transition, which consist of physical competence (health status and health literacy), social competence (interpersonal skills and judgement skills), creative competence (knowledge base, language skills, problem solving, appreciating creative expression), vocational competence (making choices, preparation and understanding the value of work) and citizenship competence (understanding history and values of nation and community, respecting difference, contributing to the broader good). Whilst this approach seems to reflect some of the more politically and ideologically conservative angles on civic engagement mentioned earlier, the connection between participation and health is clear. Konopka (1973) likewise articulates crucial elements to the healthy development of young people, including participating as citizens, sense of belonging, experience in decision-making, developing a feeling of accountability, and the capacity to enjoy life. Wise et al (2003), Pittman (1996), and
Konopka (1973) all illustrate the role of broader social participation in the development of health and wellbeing in young people.

Sercombe et al (2002) and Eckersley, Wierenga and Wyn (2006) indicate that, whilst as a sub-population the physical health of young people is greater than that of other age groups, their mental health (measured by indicators such as depression, self harm and suicide) is poorer. They list some of the determinants of individual youth health that feature: hope for the future, feelings of self-worth, feelings of being needed, and seeing a positive role in the world for self. Engaging civically and politically provides clear opportunities for addressing some of these determinants. Accordingly, Wilkinson (2006) argues that health and longevity tend to be better in more egalitarian societies. Therefore, any processes which increase equality, fairness and empowerment are going to have a positive impact on an individual’s health. Wilkinson (2006:713) also shows that any form of social affiliation, which includes participating in community life and being valued for it, is ‘highly predictive of good health’. Numerous studies list the positive health benefits of volunteering. For example, the ‘Giving Time’ UK Survey of Volunteering found that volunteering improves physical health and fitness levels, enhances weight loss, helps cutting down on alcohol and smoking less, means fewer days off sick, improves sex life, and helps in eating less chocolate. Indirectly, the Corporation for National and Community Service (2005) associate volunteering amongst U.S. teenagers with improved academic achievement, which has a carry on effect to health status.

It can be shown that social networks and social integration improve individual and community health. Berkman and Glass (2003) establish a clear connection between people who are marginalised (in terms of social cohesion and sense of belonging) and higher risk of poor health (e.g. mental health and suicide). Waterston et al (2004) argue that social capital is a key factor in addressing child health inequalities. They say that socially cohesive neighbourhoods, where trust is higher and value is placed on local friendships, have lower rates of child abuse, for example. There is some correlation between high levels of social capital and good mental health. Ziersch
and Baum (2004), on the other hand, argue that being involved in civil society groups may be good for a community’s health overall, but not necessarily good for an individual’s mental health. They say that the benefits to the community gained from people being involved in voluntary associations, groups, clubs, and societies should be counterbalanced with the experiences that increase stress, anxiety and conflict and diminish physical health in the individual.

Social capital, conceived of by Putnam (1995, 2000) as processes and norms relating to social networks, trust and reciprocity in achieving common civic goals, has emerged as a framework for understanding aspects of health and has been measured through various indicators such as membership of groups and associations (including sporting ones), news attentiveness, and turnout for elections and referenda. Putnam’s (1995: 67) argument is that joining and trusting operate in tandem (that is, the more people get involved in community life, the more they trust others) to produce social capital which, in turn, fosters norms of ‘coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit’. Bourdieu (1986:249) sees that social capital is ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to … membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity owned capital’. Therefore, social capital is, for individuals, a means of gaining access to economic and cultural resources sought after in capitalist democracies. Hence, group membership can be a means or an end. In the Australian context, Winter (2000) identifies that social capital has been shown to develop in a range of arenas (such as government, non-government, business and family). He also acknowledges a range of outcomes from ‘individual good’, ‘group-good’, ‘common-good’, to ‘dark-side’ (e.g. exclusion) resulting from the development of social capital (Winter, 2000:30). Baum (1998) argues that the relevance of social capital to public health activity relates to opportunities for people to come together and establish networks and trust, and to focus on the nature and quality of interactions between people, rather than on individual behaviour or risk factors. She says that research questions should consider ‘collectivities rather than individuals’ (1998:98) and explore what kinds of infrastructure produce trusting relationships.
There is some merit in this approach, especially in acknowledging the range and levels of social networks that build different types of social capital (for example, linking – many shallow relationships; bridging – directed linking relationships; and bonding – fewer but significantly deeper relationships). Furthermore, Baron, Field and Schuller (2000:35) argue that an understanding of social capital is highly relevant for studies relating to young people because it ‘has several adolescent characteristics: it is neither tidy nor nature; it can be abused, analytically and politically; its future is unpredictable; but it offers much promise.’

However, a theoretical framework centred solely on the notion of social capital is too limiting, as it does not provide sufficient depth or coherence for understanding the broader social determinants of the health of young males, and the processes of civic and political engagement that may be influenced by their sports participation. ‘Social capital’ is itself a contested notion. Navarro (2002) is particularly severe on a social capital framework, because of the absence of acknowledging the impact of power and politics. He argues that trying to isolate social capital as a force governed neither by the market nor the state is naïve. As a result, he asserts that the term has been taken over by conservative capitalist politics and economic rationalism (where the purpose of social action is to accumulate more capital in order for the individual to thrive). There is an inherent contradiction in the emphasis on togetherness in social capital discourse and the capitalist emphasis on competitiveness. Harriss (2001) agrees that the growth of social capital has been shown to be related to the coercion of state institutions. He argues that social capital is never good for society as a whole because it advantages some specific groups to the disadvantage of others. Edwards and Foley (1998:1) further criticise the term for being the victim of a manoeuvre that has coopted it into ‘just another label for the norms and values associated with the empirical democratic theory of the 1950s’. There is a danger, as discussed earlier, that the term ‘civic engagement’ may suffer the same fate.

Despite the term being fraught with difficulties and apparent contradictions, Baum (1998) does give a clear indication that participation in civil society will still result in positive health outcomes. If
it is considered that a young person’s health can be improved by their participation in broader social development and political processes, then this participation should begin by finding out what they say about health. Easthorpe and White (2006) conducted a study that sought to escape the trap of understanding youth health through conducting purely epidemiological assessments of it. The study also sought to avoid the misdirected technique of asking adults what they think about the health of young people, and to sidestep current conservative approaches to health that focus on individual responsibility to make good health choices and eschew bad health choices. They sounded out school-age young people about their understanding of health, which as they say ‘encompassed well-being in line with the WHO definition of health as the complete physical, mental and social well-being of people’ (2006:43). What they found was that young people accepted public health messages about being individually responsible for their health by lifestyle choices, but their responses indicate that social relationships are crucial influences on health behaviour. Despite the synonymity of health and well-being in some political definitions, the young people they interviewed considered the two as separate concepts, ‘not occupying the same mind space’ (2006:48). Health was determined by eating well, exercising, and avoiding bad habits like smoking, drug-taking, binge drinking etc. Well-being, on the other hand, is achieved by having a circle of friends and a supportive family, especially ‘mum’. Well-being was closely connected with feeling good. Therefore a young person may know the health messages, and understand their individual responsibility for making health choices, but their behaviour (what they actually do) is much more likely to be influenced by their social relationships (not just peers but family as well), because “well-being” (which outranks “health” in their eyes) is determined not so much by public health messages, but by these social relationships. They propose that it is because of this dichotomy that young people may often engage in ‘risk behaviours’ to feel good and achieve well-being, despite knowing that it is not healthy for them.

It is important to not view young people as sole operators within their experience of the health system or in considering the impact on young people of the social determinants of health. As Easthorpe and White (2006) point out, young people see their well-being as strongly related to
social relationships that includes friends and family. Other researchers, such as Woodman (2004), also acknowledge the existence of young people's understandings of their individual responsibility for future health choices. However, he says that this responsibility also weaves in and out of the centrality of finding time to enjoy the present. He found that young people will rarely include 'risk behaviours' (such as alcohol and other drug use) in their descriptions of well-being, even though they are regularly used as outcome measures in health research. He saw young people's understanding of well-being as connected to overload and 'the constant burden of the future' (2004:92). It may be the case that devolving responsibility for health decisions to the individual young person may, in fact, be detracting from their overall sense of well-being by adding to their feelings of overload. Woodman (2004) proposes that, for young people, the important element in life is balance between responsibility for their future and having time to enjoy the present. Consequently, he argues that those who work with young people, and those in research and policy, need to make room in their work for a young person's understanding of health and how it connects to other aspects of their social world.

Furthermore, Eckersley et al (2006:11) add that other research points to an 'apparent optimism expressed by young people whose lives would appear ... to be fairly negative'. They see this position as showing that young people are fairly resilient in that they are able to adapt to changing social conditions. In the context of a young person's ability to adapt to their environment, they could have argued to maintain a focus on individualism and personal health choices, rather than reinforcing the need to address the social environment in which young people live and move. Instead, in order to maintain and enhance young people’s resilience, they demonstrate the need to think more broadly by proposing that different levels of understanding health and well-being should be acknowledged. These include the social (which embraces the social, economic and environmental factors behind population patterns), the cultural (influenced by the relationships between individuals and society in terms of values, beliefs, world views and stories), and the spiritual (reflecting a level of meaning, and having a place in the world). With this understanding as their foundation, they advocate the focus of research and policy to be concerned with 'the
broad social changes reshaping life today ... and the social and cultural resources that are as important to well-being as material and economic resources.’ (2006:10). Eckersley (1999) also argues that the cultural forces directed toward young people (for example, the media and music) should be the focus of critical and robust discussion about their roles and consequences, and that society as a whole needs to accept some responsibility for these consequences in order for the social and cultural environment to have a positive impact on young people’s well being.
Sociological approaches to sport

In addition to an understanding of the social determinants of health, sociological approaches to sport contribute to the framework for this study. The sociology of sport generally attempts to theorise and expound on the various connections between sport, society and culture. By including elements of sports sociology in the research framework for this study, the researcher has drawn from a number of theoretical bases. In order to understand and interpret the experiences of young males in tracking civic engagement through sport, the researcher has adopted a broad theoretical framework that (even though it may appear paradoxical) combines elements of functionalist theory, interactionist theory and critical and feminist theories.

The first sociological influence is derived from functionalism. Coakley (2003) asserts that, according to functionalist theory, the driving force underlying all social life is the tendency for any social system to maintain itself in a state of balance, so that it continues to operate efficiently. This balance is achieved ‘naturally’ as people develop consensus, common values, and coordinated organisation in the major spheres of social life so that, as Volkwein-Caplan (2004) points out, the status quo is preserved. She surmises that, under functionalism, social change ‘is dysfunctional unless it occurs gradually’ (2004:17). Therefore, functionalist theory focuses attention on how sports help keep societies, communities, organisations, and groups operating smoothly as well as how they influence individuals to contribute to social systems in which they participate. Because sport is seen as a valuable social institution that benefits society as well as the individual, functionalism often leads to discussion and research about how sport as a social institution contributes to stability and social progress. For example, whether participation in sport influences social and personal development; whether it fosters the development of social bonds; has a positive impact on successful education and employment; teaches people social rules; and whether sports contribute to health and wellbeing, and the strength of society as a whole. This typology of questions reflects some of the dimensions of civic engagement outlined in the literature review. The relevance of a functionalist approach to this study is in the exploration of the functions of sport in enabling participants an avenue of inclusion in, and contribution to, the social
systems in young males’ immediate and further experience. An exploration of these issues utilising the functionalist perspective allows parameters for understanding the lived experiences of the research participants that may be more closely aligned with politically conservative ideations of civic engagement outlined earlier.

However, functionalist theory has some distinct and inherent limitations. Horne, Tomlinson and Whannel (1999) argue that in its concern with maintaining the status quo, functionalist theory actually supports social stratification such as class, gender and race, because those forms of stratification can be seen as important for the overall functioning of society. Volkwein-Caplan (2004) believes that, in this way, functionalism assumes that all individuals in society have identical needs, and ignores research demonstrating that access to sports and physical activity is not equal across the social structure. Functionalism does acknowledge difference, though, arguing that people occupy different positions within society and are differently rewarded for their contribution. The more contentious point, though, is that it neglects ‘the nature of power and privilege, and the capacity of powerful social actors to mould society in their own image’ (Horne et al, 1999:103). Coakley (2003) agrees that the key criticisms of functionalist theory are that it ignores that sport serves the need of some people more than others, does not acknowledge that sport is a social construction, and overstates the positive consequences of sport. Volkwein-Caplan (2004) emphasises that theorists may often exaggerate the positive aspects of sport and tend not to acknowledge its dysfunctional elements (for example, violence, performance-enhancing drugs). It is, therefore, naïve to assert that sport is always beneficial. Because the researcher has a driving passion for sport, care must be taken to avoid the pitfall of overemphasising the positive dimensions of sport, at the expense of a broader and more critical analysis of the issues.

There is divided opinion as to whether the work of Bourdieu is a subset of functionalism (that is, left functionalism), but exploring some of his ideas provides further depth to the study. Specifically, there are three relevant key concepts in Bourdieu’s analysis: habitus, field and
capital. According to Tomlinson (2004), field refers to a partially autonomous social arena within which contest over resources takes place. The relative power that determines positions of dominance and subordination (of individuals and groups) within fields is determined by the distribution and accumulation of capital in the form of cultural, social, or economic resources. Shilling (1991) extends the idea of capital to include physical capital, which refers to the social formation of the body through sporting activities in ways which express a class location, and are thus accorded a symbolic value, which is a feature of Bourdieu’s key notion of habitus.

Habitus, as a concept, strives to encapsulate the mastery that people gain of their social world through their immersion in it, where the relationship between the human subject and their social world is one of mutual possession, captured in the phrase ‘the body is in the social world but the social world is in the body’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:20). This interplay of the social impact on the physical (and vice versa) is strongly reminiscent of the basis for acknowledging the social determinants of health, as outlined earlier in this chapter. The relationship is, however, expressed somewhat vaguely - although Bourdieu makes no apology for that. Light (2002:6) interprets habitus as being ‘constituted by the dispositions, inclinations and schemes of perception and appreciation with which the individual interprets social situations’. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) also explain that habitus is the embodied social history of the individual as social subject, and therefore represents a longstanding (but not immortal or immutable) set of socially constructed predispositions which structure social action. The relevance of Bourdieu’s work to this study is in applying these notions to the participants’ stories, especially in exploring the historical and cultural influences on their sport participation.

Interactionism represents the second sociological perspective to influence this study. According to Volkwein-Caplan (2004), interactionist theories see sport as meaningful interaction between people, but that the interactions can change over time. Coakley (2003) shows how interactionist theory focuses on issues related to meaning, identity, social relationships, and sub-cultures. It is a perspective based on the idea that human behaviour involves choices, and that choices are
based on the definitions of reality that people form as they interact with others. As humans interact, they create culture and society. Individual identity is thought of as a sense of connection to the social world. Sports, therefore, are forms of culture developed through social interaction, and participation in sport emerges from decisions about identity and relationships. Interactionist theory can inspire discussion about the experiences of sport participants in terms of how they define situations and use those definitions to form identities and make choices. Research can explore the social processes through which people become involved in sport; how people give meaning to, and derive meaning from, sport; what are the characteristics of sports cultures, how they are created by those involved, and how they influence identities and actions off the field of play. This perspective seems to be a good fit with phenomenological approaches to research, which emphasise lived experience and the meaning associated with it. In this way also, interactionist theory informs the conduct of this study.

Unfortunately, a major weakness of interactionist theory, as Coakley (2003) and Volkwein-Caplan (2004) agree, is that it does not appear to explain how meanings and interactions are related to social structures. A further shortcoming is, again, a tendency to overlook issues of power and power relations within the social system. Therefore, the third influence on this study comes from conflict theories. In general, conflict theories assume that social life revolves around economic interests, and further assumes that people use their economic power to coerce and manipulate others to accept their worldview as the correct one. Investigating class relations, then, highlights the consequences of social inequality and processes of social change. Therefore, Coakley (2003) asserts that conflict theories would assume that dominant forms of sport in a society ultimately promote the interests of people with money and economic power, and would lead to discussion of how sport perpetuates the power and privilege of elite classes, or how sport serves as a tool of economic exploitation and oppression by diverting attention from class-related social problems. Although it is an unpopular or uncomfortable position for many who live in capitalist economies to hear, conflict theory can focus attention on how powerful people use sport to promote attitudes and relationships that enable them to maintain power and privilege. It can also focus attention on
how sport reflects and perpetuates the unequal distribution of power and economic resources across society. However, as Volkwein-Caplan (2004) points out, class and the capitalist system are not the only social structure to explain the relationship between sport and society. She says that not acknowledging other social structures is a significant drawback in conflict theories. Coakley (2003:36) agrees and further highlights that conflict theories ignore that sports can be ‘sites for creative and liberating experiences’.

Volkwein-Caplan (2004) acknowledges that every theory serves a purpose and focuses on a different aspect of inquiry, although they appear to contradict each other. For example, functionalist theories emphasise the positive aspects of sport whereas conflict theories emphasise its problems. Alternatively, interactionist theories centre on social relationships and meaning. Rowe (2007) criticises the simplicity of a dualistic approach to inquiry into sports, where inherently conservative functionalist theories and the inherently radical conflict theories oppose each other. Coakley (2003) maintains that the different sociological approaches can all have value at different times and for different purposes, although in a traditional dualistic sense (that is, an “either/or” position) combining them may appear to be self-contradictory. However, the apparent paradoxes that result from subscribing to functionalist, interactionist and conflict-based models can to some extent be resolved with an application of Gramscian and Habermasian thought.

Horne et al (1999) attribute to Gramsci the notion that running a society requires a process of both force and consent. In democratic societies this process is recognised in the attempt to rule by consent, or hegemony, where the powerful (or the State on their behalf) seek to maintain power by influencing social beliefs. When successful, a common consent is created, by which ordinary, less powerful members of society defer to the underlying beliefs of the powerful. Although Gramsci himself limited his analysis to power and class, his important contribution, according to Payne (2005:232), has been to ‘emphasise how cultural, political and moral beliefs and structures are essential aspects of the way social orders are
maintained through hegemony’. Rather than sustaining schools of social thought as a dualist argument between functionalism and conflict theory, Rowe (2004) proposes that a Gramscian perspective leans toward a form of praxis (a nexus of critical questioning and practical engagement) that provides a more coherent picture of social processes. He explores how praxis can contribute to forming an understanding of sport by analysing its cultural dimensions in complex human society. Forms of popular culture such as sport emerge as fields of play ‘where social values and relations are shaped’ (Rowe, 2004:104). Therefore, the notion of hegemony can help to understand what may have contributed to a Western democracy like Australia being, as Kell (2000) states, obsessed with sport. That is, how and why a preoccupation with sport has developed as a form of national common consent. Praxis also enables a critical questioning of whose interests are being served by the creation of this common consent, and provides a forum for exploring aspects of domination and resistance both within sports, and between sport and general society. Horne et al (1999) further elaborate that sport is one of the everyday cultural activities that vies with dominant institutions to prevent total domination, as the State or ruling class makes concessions to continue to rule by consent rather than coercion. However, sport is still a social structure which integrates dominant groups and fragments subordinate ones.

A further adaptation of conflict theory comes from the ideas of Habermas (1987), who identified that a perceived threat to democracy arises from an inherent paradox of modern society, where people demand greater autonomy but conversely the State increasingly regulates areas that it has not previously controlled. In trying to resolve this paradox he advances an analytical distinction between system and lifeworld, which he characterises by their respective processes of social integration. The system, driven by strategic action, is oriented towards instrumental efficiency, whereas the lifeworld, driven by communicative action, is conceptualised as free individuals communicating with each other. According to Habermas (1987), a healthy society requires a balance between the two, and the problems of modern society are linked to an absence of balance between these parts of the social whole,
because the system has encroached on the domain of the lifeworld. Accordingly, Habermas has also been critical of the rise of instrumental reasoning at the expense of moral reasoning, as indicated by the pursuit of self-interest over questioning the social benefit and value of any given practice or activity. Morgan (2004) applies this framework to an understanding of sport and concludes that an ethos that is built on ‘win-at-all-costs’ and ‘what’s in it for me?’ is a good example of this moral fallout. He argues that a decline in moral reasoning results in a weakening or elimination of people’s moral connection to sport, and commitment to others in sport, and therefore obviously appalling behaviour (like biting off an opponent’s ear) can be minimised or forgotten. Conversely, Morgan (2004:178) also believes that a Habermasian framework can show that sport is ‘still capable of arousing our moral ire because they are still informed by moral ideals’. Therefore, sport can be an arena in which to critically question and oppose unsatisfactory or abusive conduct and structures.

In this sense, it is useful to draw on a line of thought related to Foucault’s understanding of power. Pringle (2005) argues that Foucault was interested in the physical and substantial connections between discourse, power, and knowledge. According to Pringle and Markula (2005), he positions these dimensions within an understanding of power relationships that exist between humans and social structures. Foucault (1978) does not negate the domination of the state, but does reject the Marxist concept that power represents a simplistic division between the dominant and the oppressed. Analyses of power, warns Foucault (1978:92) ‘must not assume that the sovereignty of the state, the form of the law, or the overall unity of a domination are given at the outset; rather, these are only the terminal forms power takes’. Therefore, influential groups (whether politicians, athletes or other) **become** influential because of their contingent workings and, at times, tactical usages of discourses.

Like Bourdieu, the body is seen as central to the analysis, but Foucault (1977) discusses the body as the location for the operations of power. As power is present in all human relations, the body is directly involved in a political field because, as Pringle and Markula (2005) explain, ‘power
was invested in, as well as transmitted by and through, the body’ (2005:476). This Foucauldian perspective allows for power to be both oppressive and enabling – that is, it does not need to be locked into an either/or argument. Applying this principle to the research provides a path, albeit a meandering one, that has guided the researcher’s attempts to avoid a totalising political position on sport. That is to say, sport is neither inherently ‘good’ nor ‘bad’. Based on this interpretive foundation, a framework that relies solely on functionalism or conflict theories (lapsing into dualistic understandings of the issues) would not only be self-contradictory, but also risk excluding important points made by the research participants if they were at odds with the starting theoretical position.

Criticisms have been levelled at the school of social thought that includes Habermas and Gramsci. Pease, Allan and Briskman (2003) summarise the main criticisms as firstly relating to an unconvincing attempt to ‘link individual and social consciousness with institutional analysis and political economy’ (2003:3), and secondly that it overstates the importance of consciousness in attaining radical social transformation. Nevertheless, Whannel (1992:8, cited in Rowe, 2004:104) concludes that:

Gramsci’s concept of hegemony increasingly appeared appealing as an apparent resolution of the difficulty of forging an adequate synthesis of two productive but seemingly incompatible paradigms.

Lastly, whilst taking these criticisms into account, a spectrum of critical social theories has also provided input to the foundation of this study. There are many different theories that could be described as critical, and they focus mainly on explanations of culture, power and social relations. The explanations are not necessarily attempts to generate universal laws or immutable truths, but are concerned with notions of fairness, equity, access, and participant control over the decisions that impact on their lives. Proponents of critical theories argue that social relationships are grounded in political struggles over how social life should be organised. Pease, Allan and Briskman (2003) identify that critical theory questions the place of existing institutions with a view
to constructing a more just society. In terms of sport, Coakley (2003) notes that critical theories propose that the relationship between sport and society changes as historical, political and economic forces change. He concludes that critically-informed research can often give rise to questions about how sports are tied to various forms of power relations and entrenched disadvantage; to what extent sport reinforces or challenges those power relations; whose voices are represented when sport is discussed; how people struggle over the organisation and meaning of sport in their lives; and when does sport become an avenue for challenging, resisting, and even transforming social structures and dominant cultural ideologies.

Further insight here is provided by feminist theories. Grounded in the awareness that women have been systematically devalued and oppressed, feminist theories are critical theories that are concerned primarily with gender relations, and seek to develop pathways to empower women, challenge oppression, and transform the cultures in which women are devalued. Volkwein-Caplan (2004) asserts that feminist theories would argue that sport is gender-biased – that it is the values, experiences, mind-sets and language of men that define sports. For example, athletes are considered successful only if they demonstrate stereotypically male qualities such as toughness and aggression rather than compassion or reflection. Coakley (2003) summarises the advantages of feminist research in that it can pose such questions as how women and girls have been excluded from sport participation; how sport reproduces definitions of maleness or gender relations that produce advantage for men over women; and how people use sport to resist or challenge the dominant gender ideology.

Were the research question about participation and equity in sport generally, then the study should be focused on young women, as the literature seems to indicate that they are more disadvantaged than young men in this regard. However, if the research question is more concerned with participation and equity in society (and whether sport plays a role in that), then young people generally and young males specifically are less civically engaged because the statistical research and community perception seems to indicate that ‘anti-social behaviour’ is
primarily a male phenomenon. Certainly, Bolzan (2005) argues that social indicators such as employment and suicide demonstrate that Australian young people as a group are marginalised, and the subsequent prejudice apparent in the community’s perceptions of young people serves only to marginalise them further. Additionally, as demonstrated by Hallinan et al (1999), Tatz (1995) and Cairnduff (2001), the subjugation of Aboriginal males within Australian society, and the importance of sport among some Aboriginal men, places the issue firmly within the parameters of equity.

A related issue stemming from a critical/feminist perspective is whether it is necessary to redefine notions of masculinity in sport for the purposes of a more positive civic engagement, or whether a celebration - rather than a denigration - of masculinity can lead to positive pro-social development. Kenway (1998) questions the extent to which a feminist framework can adequately analyse all the aspects of masculinities. She points to the need for a synthesised perspective on gender analysis that acknowledges the relationship between aspects of masculinity and boys’ limited choice of sports, the well-documented negative associations between sport and masculinities, the operation of hegemony, and an exploration of gendered power relations that does not estrange males and females, and that incorporates a genuine relational politics for sport participation.

Whilst not a complete answer to the question, the discourse in relation to profeminist masculinity politics, and subsequently a salutogenic approach, are useful here, and lead to a broader discussion of anti-oppressive approaches to practice.
Anti-oppressive approaches to human service practice

According to Pease (2003), pro-feminist masculinity politics (PFMP) seeks to locate men in the context of patriarchy and the divisions of class, race, sexuality and other forms of inequality, while at the same time exploring the ways in which patriarchal belief systems become embedded in men's psyches. It involves a sense of responsibility for sexism, and a commitment to work with women to end men's violence. It acknowledges that men benefit from the oppression of women, recognising that men’s sexism has an impact on men as well. Pease (2003, p) says that ‘systematic male dominance deforms men’, but that not all men benefit equally from the operation of domination (class, race and sexuality). Therefore, he says it is important to make a distinction between men as problems and men with problems. In order to move beyond the ideological dichotomy of victim/perpetrator, PFMP utilises the concept of ‘men’s practices’, which maintains focus on the relations between men and women (rather than on men alone). It examines the complexities of masculinity while grounding these in the materiality of men's practices, yet still maintains the issue of power at the centre of one’s own analysis of men's practices. Pease (2003) notes that there are six main arenas in which these issues generally manifest themselves: sexuality; intimacy and emotional expressiveness; health and well-being; family and care of others; paid work; and violence against women.

In the context of this study, the relevance of PFMP is in its acknowledgement that men do certainly benefit from the oppression of women, but that young males are often significantly affected by men’s oppression as well. This study understands that power is a major factor in the experience of social relationships and opportunities, and acknowledges the personal-political processes involved in how young males develop masculine identity through such avenues as sport participation and sports culture. While there is relevance and value in PFMP, there is a sense that – in Pease’s summary of it – men have only two options for identifying their role in social relationships: that is, they are either 'men with problems' or 'men as problems'. This explanation still seems to portray a deficit approach to men and their issues, and as such leaves itself open to being a disempowering theory rather than an
empowering one. It could be argued that a strengths-based approach, which recognises and celebrates the achievements of males, can form a framework for understanding masculinity and the potential for pro-social development in young males particularly. It is in this context that it is important to draw from a ‘Salutogenic’ model of maleness. Adapting a term from Antonovsky and the phenomenon of survival and resilience, Macdonald, McDermott, Woods, Brown and Sliwka (2000) emphasise the importance of looking beyond pathological and pathogenic elements in understanding men’s health. They argue that despite the dominance of the traditional medical model which focuses on diseases and problems, a perspective on men should instead take in an understanding of health as a positive construct, rather than just being concerned with disease. Furthermore they insist on understanding more of the social and environmental determinants of men’s health, as later expounded by Macdonald (2005), rather than viewing gender differences in health status as the result of deficiencies in men. The deficit model often results in an ongoing act of devaluing men, reinforcing the feeling that they are ‘not OK’.

The Salutogenic model, on the other hand, seeks to move away from historical criticisms of masculinity, and also to avoid building an approach to men’s health based on apologies for what is masculine (Macdonald, 2005; Macdonald, McDermott and Di Campli, 2004). The model acknowledges that ‘all people have a darker side, but …focuses on men’s health and health-enhancing behaviour, on what is salutogenic rather than pathogenic’ (Macdonald et al, 2000:4). In applying the salutogenic model to this study, the researcher seeks to value young males and their experiences. Underpinning the research is the understanding that, although they do things that can be described as negative, young males are resilient. Worsley (2005) describes resilience as the capacity to bounce back in spite of adversity. It describes the capacity of a person to respond in a positive way to the risks, stresses and adversities of life. Therefore, in their resilience, young males also do things that are pro-social and that make a positive contribution to society. In this context it is also important, as Macdonald et al (2000)
point out, that they not see themselves only through the eyes of those who criticise and point out their deficiencies. Hearing their stories is a way of validating their worth as young males.

In terms of validating participants’ stories, aspects of a critical anti-adultist perspective are also useful. Mayall (1996:2) proposes that ‘adults have constructed the ideas about what children are which serve the basis for the lives children lead’. The anti-adultist perspective instead sees children as the sociological equal of adults, and attempts to examine how the social constructions of childhood not only structure their lives but are structured by the activities of children themselves. The experiences of children and young people have often been made the subject of research to only later be analysed and interpreted through an adult’s view of the world. Mason and Fattore (2005) argue the importance of moving between children and young people’s experiences and adult analyses of broader social structures. The application of this perspective is clearly limited by the majority of the research participants being over 18, and yet the line is obscured by the continuing reference to this age group as ‘young people’.

Bolzan (2005) acknowledges the difficulty of locating the sources of discourses that produce social constructions of young people. Language in the media, public policy, public research/inquiry and conversational contexts all play a significant role in this regard. The anti-adultist position would argue that the language and experiences of young people need to be upheld to understand how they construct themselves. Reminiscent of Habermasian notions of communicative action, Bolzan (2005:112) argues that ‘it is apparent that when young people engage with the sites of discourse production a different discourse is created from that developed in their absence’. Because of this alternative discourse, this research seeks to identify and document the lived experiences of young males directly from them and using their language. It also seeks to explore questions such as the level of decision-making capacity that young people have in adult-controlled organised sports (such as cricket, soccer or rugby), compared with self-generated and informally organised sporting pursuits (such as skateboarding, surfing or mountain biking).
Overall, it can be seen that the researcher’s theoretical/conceptual framework embraces a range of influences. This framework encompasses an articulation of the social determinants of health, an appreciation of sociological approaches to sport, and an anti-adultist position which advocates the participatory inclusion of children and young people. In embracing this variety of influences, notwithstanding their limitations, the framework acts as a background and a foundation for the conduct of this study, which is further elaborated in the Methodology section to follow.
Part 2: On the Field
This chapter outlines the methodology utilised in the study, and the manner in which it drew on a number of different approaches to social research. The chapter will describe the study design, the role of researcher as human instrument, the setting, the sample, the techniques utilised, the ethical dimensions of the research, the limitations of the study, and the methods of data analysis employed.

**Study design**

Wadsworth (1997:5) describes research as being:

- a process which begins with people asking questions, then setting out to answer them. They do this by systematically and rigorously collecting observations and imaginatively generating explanation about how and why such and such is the case.

Social research applies this process to people themselves.

The research question in this study was to explore the possible connections between sport and meaningful civic engagement by young males. Using young males aged fifteen to twenty-five as the primary data source, it was seen as important to hear, document and elaborate on their stories within the parameters of the research question. To engage in such research, Walter (2006) recommends understanding a wide range of social research methods (cognisant of their strengths and weaknesses) and then selecting an appropriate method to suit the question, based on practicality, reliability and available resources. In the context of advancing the inquiry process for this study toward a workable methodology, qualitative research was chosen as the basic methodology for this study.

Although part of the history of developing the idea for the study occurred during the researcher’s previous involvement in participatory action research projects with young males, this study was not itself designed to be action research. It was seen as most appropriate to conduct this study...
within a *phenomenological* framework, to explore and describe young males’ lived experiences of civic engagement and sport, in order to cast further light on the issue of civic engagement by young males. As a philosophy, phenomenology is based on the intuitive experience of phenomena, and on the premise that reality consists of objects and events as consciously perceived by conscious beings. Its relevance to the world of social research lies in exploring those intuitive experiences and perceptions of individuals. There is some diversity in the research discourse as to the exact nature of this exploration but several key elements commonly appear. Finlay (1999) describes phenomenological research as a means of seeking to capture the richness of individual experience. Groenewald (2004:5) agrees that the main aim of phenomenological research is to ‘describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework’. In discussing this concept in the field of social inquiry, he cites other works (e.g. Holloway, 1997; Hycner, 1999) that argue the inappropriateness of overlaying a technique or method which will fit all situations. While this point may be a valid, Lester (1999) states that the endeavour of phenomenological research normally translates into gathering information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, and representing it from the perspective of the research participants. Ploeg (2000) affirms that because the process utilises the world of the individual as the main source of data, in-depth interviews are a common means of data collection.

Walter (2006:11) explains that ‘qualitative research is concerned with exploring the understandings and meanings that people attribute to their social world’. The approach taken in this study is concerned with the meanings that young males associate with their experiences of sport and civic engagement. The study, like much qualitative research, does not necessarily start with a hypothesis and then form a system for testing it. Rather, it starts with the lived experience of the participants and looks for themes, relationships, and patterns within the data. This direction is consistent with a phenomenological approach, however one of the limitations of such an approach is the diminished capacity to draw conclusions applicable to a more far-reaching, general social context. Consequently, it could be concluded that this study is not a pure
application of phenomenology, since it is anticipated that the data may point to some
generalisable theories or principles to add to the body of knowledge on the research topic, and
which may inform the process of engaging young males in youth work practice and wider issues
of engagement. Although Groenewald (2004) advocates refraining from pre-given frameworks or
theories, it is important to note that the research did not start with a blank slate. The notion of
exploring connections between sport and civic engagement in young males does, to some extent,
suggest an embryonic form of a hypothesis, particularly in pursuing some of the correlations
emerging from previous literature.

In a similar way, the research was informed by, but not wholly based on, aspects of grounded
theory. Most proponents of grounded theory espouse the building of theories from patterns
observed in the data – an inductive approach, in contrast to deductive approaches that seek to
test a pre-formed theory. The original development of the grounded theory approach is attributed
to Glaser and Strauss (1967), whose prime concern was giving priority to the patterns, themes
and relationships emerging from the qualitative data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) indicate that in a
grounded theory approach, the researcher is regularly moving back and forth between data
collection, coding and memoing from early in the process and continuing throughout its duration
(sometimes referred to as constant comparison). Data saturation is a term that refers to the point
at which no new information is emerging, or no new codes are being generated. These elements
of the grounded theory approach are of great benefit to qualitative research. Whilst the original
articulation of grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967) contended that research should
start with no preconceived ideas, later adaptations acknowledge the importance of infusing the
research process with an understanding of what other research has preceded it, whilst
maintaining an awareness of the principle that any bias on the researcher’s part should be
minimised. Even so, Strauss and Corbin (1998) admit that the researcher’s motivation and
passion for the research topic is central to the research actually being conducted. Combining
these processes of deduction and induction with the researcher’s passion (and critical awareness
of bias) may seem like a precarious exercise, and can often lead to confusion. Allan (2003) notes
other drawbacks in the application of grounded theory, particularly in terms of it being a time consuming process. In the analysis, particularly, there is potential for ‘overconceptualising’ the data by focusing on excerpts too small to be of relevance, although it is also possible that one concept – if it is significant – may be sufficient for generating a theoretical proposition. Although this study of young males’ experiences of sport and civic engagement was not wholly based on the grounded theory approach, it can be argued that the research was informed by some of its broad principles. Despite the inherent tensions in the grounded theory approach, the study was influenced by a focus on the findings from the interviews with young males, with that focus forming the basis of further argument about the issues raised, especially in relation to the specific connections between the factors that constitute the focus of the interviews. Other elements of grounded theory that have informed the study include the notion of data saturation and the process of thematic analysis.

The study design was influenced to a lesser extent by an application of post-modernist thought. According to Alston and Bowles (2003), post-modern research challenges the assumptions of modernist social science, for example the notion that there are certainties, objectivities and realities that can be scientifically proven. Post-modernism asserts that truth or knowledge is not value-free and is created through language and meaning. Hence, knowledge is different for different people, depending on their experiences. Taylor and Wallace (2007) affirm this alternative perspective on meaning as distinct from the Western modernist view of objectivity and making sense of the natural and social worlds. Post-modern research also re-theorises the human subject as an effect of the social, thus overcoming the artificial distinction between the person and their environment. One implication for this study is related to the representation of the participants’ language used to construct meaning about their experience of sport and civic engagement. Kapitzke, Cheung, and Yu (2000) indicate that post-modernism also has implications for research in its understanding of difference, i.e. that difference is not deviance, and does not necessarily need to be explained away. On the contrary, difference denotes equally valid experiences and socially constructed meanings. However, a post-modern approach
provides a potential challenge in terms of subscribing to overarching concepts such as ‘masculinity’, making generalisations about the findings, or relevant application to different research or practice settings. Therefore, it has not been the intention of this research to assert that truth or meaning is entirely relative. If that were the case, then adopting a critical theoretical framework that includes a commitment to social justice (as a non-relative standard) would be contradictory, or at best self-defeating. As Alston and Bowles (2003) point out, post-modernism may, as some critics argue, threaten the very existence of critical social inquiry because with no sense of reality or truth, it is almost impossible to determine whether, for example, critical human service practice is working towards social justice or injustice. Furthermore, it creates something of a vacuum when trying to define ethical research or practice if there is no standard to measure it against. Despite these limitations, this study utilises a post-modern approach in seeking to represent, as fully as possible, the experiences and opinions of the research participants in their own voice. This study seeks to accurately portray the meanings of stories related by young males in their language, rather than using a form of language which runs the risk of reinterpretation through an adult’s social construction.

An important aspect of this commitment is building trust and establishing rapport. Utilising pre-existing contacts and networks can be a crucial step in this trust-building process, although it is vital to acknowledge the possibility that research participants may still provide answers that they think the researcher is seeking. Gollop (2000) considers that the key to the research interview is offering younger participants an opportunity to be heard. Whether they take this opportunity depends largely on the researcher’s careful attention to the interview process, and on the extent to which they hone their listening and attending skills in the context of a positive relationship. Because of this potential opportunity, and the need to address issues of power imbalance in the research process with young people, the research framework needed to offer young males an arena in which to explore their own lived situation and generate a change environment for themselves.
The study design was also influenced to some extent by an emancipatory research approach, although it was not in itself emancipatory research. Alston and Bowles (2003) describe the main features of this approach as primarily being a form of qualitative research, but characterised more by its intentions than its techniques. Emancipatory research utilises research as a tool for challenging and changing oppressive structures in the lives of those being researched. McDermott (1996:6) proposes that social work research would almost always be emancipatory as it is:

research that: arises from a particular theorisation of the acting subject within his/her social, political and economic context; privileges the research process as an intervention leading to the possibility of constructive change; and enables the participation of the researched – the poor, the vulnerable, the oppressed and those who interact with them.

This form of critical research assumes that all knowledge is socially constructed, based on the dominant ideology of the ruling group. On the other hand, Gorman (1993:248) believes that social researchers are privileged to be able to interact with those most hurt by the social structure, and that this position enables them to play a crucial social change role. She says that:

the social worker … is in a pivotal position to serve herself, her clients and her society as a messenger – a bearer of interpretive, fragmentary, personal, emotional heart-wrenching tales of oppression, of silenced voices, and of darkness repressed and projected.

As indicated in the previous chapter outlining the theoretical framework of the research, drawing from multiple bases such as post-modernism and emancipatory theory could be considered somewhat paradoxical. However, as also indicated in the previous chapter, other contemporary power analyses such as those of Gramsci, Habermas or Foucault, or the proponents of critical social work theory, acknowledge and tease out the complex nature of power relations within the social structure, and also provided a framework for embracing paradox.
Whilst this study is not specifically intended to be liberating the disadvantaged or the oppressed from their subjugation, the research topic does provide avenues for exploring and tracking those emancipatory processes of empowerment, control, and participation in the community. As discussed in the theoretical framework, it may be somewhat dubious, from a critical/feminist framework particularly, to be considering the masculine gender as an oppressed group. However, it is clear that some sub-categories of males have lived experiences of low power environments and relationships. *Aboriginal* men, for example, have significantly shorter life-spans, with significantly lower health status, income levels, educational attainment and rates of employment. They are also significantly over-represented in both the prison system and juvenile justice system. Furthermore, in comparison to the general population, *young* males are significantly affected by factors such as stereotyping, prejudice, marginalisation, low access to education, employment and support services, higher rates of crime (both as perpetrators and victims), and poorer states of health (including higher incidence of suicide and mental health issues). This condition has resulted in the life situations of young males being either pathologised or problematised, where young males (or men in general, according to Macdonald, 2006) are only seen as being ‘in deficit’, or viewed as problems themselves, or are blamed for their own plight. The existence of these factors for young males does give them some legitimacy - in terms of equity - as a disadvantaged group within society.

Overall, the study is influenced by principles and processes from a multiplicity of research frameworks, and so could be labelled eclectic. Payne (2005) argues that eclecticism is something to be managed consistently and in a planned way in order to avoid using theories that are internally inconsistent or incommensurate. Hence, researchers need to be aware of the sources of the theories used, along with their values and appropriate uses in any given situation or set of circumstances. It is in this context that this phenomenological study of young males’ lived experience of sport and civic engagement took place.


**The Human Instrument**

Walter (2006:16) states that ‘our research findings and the theories we develop are embedded in and viewed through our cultural milieu.’ In other words, researchers may often see only that which they have been conditioned or enculturated to see. In quantitative research, there is a range of research instruments that are used to gather data that are supposedly more objective and less open to value-laden interpretation. Questionnaires, surveys, statistical analyses and other such instruments provide data collection that is less prone to human influence. Willis (2006) states plainly that in qualitative research, the researcher themselves can be conceptualised as the research instrument. She contends that the sensitivity of the researcher in this regard contributes to the overall understanding and analysis of the findings. Lester (1999) emphasises the importance of making the researcher visible as an actor, with both interest and subjectivity, rather than as a detached and impartial observer. Fook (1999:12) captures this need for researcher sensitivity by saying:

> It is an ability to locate yourself in the picture, to understand, and factor in, how what you see is influenced by your own way of seeing, and how your very presence and act of research influences the situation in which you are researching.

Therefore, it is vital to acknowledge the role of the researcher as the human instrument. Groenewald (2004) proposes that a phenomenological approach is suitable for preventing or restricting researcher bias, because the priority focus is on the story of the researched rather than the researcher. However, the researcher still needs to take active steps to do all they can to materialise the researcher’s sensitivity. In conceiving of the researcher as the research instrument (the method through which the data are collected), Willis (2006) stresses the need for reflexivity, which is a self-conscious awareness by the researcher of their position in the research process.
Researchers can make the most of reflexivity by using reflective memos or journals. Janesick (2004) proposes that the researcher reflective journal becomes a useful ally not just in developing self-awareness but for operating in the midst of balancing intuition and creativity with the observation and analysis of data. She argues that the journal can be used simultaneously to reflect on the role of the researcher as human instrument and to refine the researcher’s considered understanding of participants’ responses. Alston and Bowles (2003) agree that the reflective practitioner will also be an effective one. A reflective researcher not only understands their own assumptions and biases, but also is able to understand and analyse the theoretical and socio-political context in which the research takes place. This analysis provides for a perspective that recognises and acknowledges power differentials, the implications of the broader policy context, and the construction of language and discourse around the research topic.

Reflecting on the role of the human instrument necessitates an overt articulation of the researcher’s own passions, interests and cultural milieu, as they may be a hurdle to clearly interpreting the data. The researcher in this study, throughout his professional/vocational life, has maintained a passion for issues of social justice, particularly for the participation of disempowered groups (including young people) in contemporary society. This passion has taken shape in his Social Work practice, public demonstrations, memberships of political organisations, as well as unpaid involvement in sporting groups and Christian churches. In more recent years, in the experiences of being a father, having a son, and resolving some personal difficulties, the researcher’s interest in understanding the place of men in society has grown, as has the desire to personally invest in the next generation of young males and engage with them in their transition to adulthood. However, the evolving political environment in Australia presents challenges to achieving a sense of engagement in these dimensions. Bessant, Sercombe and Watts (1998) demonstrate that whilst notions of ‘empowerment’ and ‘social justice’ (or at least the associated rhetoric) may have informed youth service delivery and government policy in the early 1970s, by the mid eighties, a more ‘economic rationalist’ approach began to shape government policy and, in turn, service delivery. The past fifteen to twenty years in youth service delivery have seen an
increasingly complicated balancing act of financial management, social justice, administrative rigour and accountability, and striving to maintain the flexibility to respond to human need. Progressively more conservative political leadership has also meant that Australian notions of democracy, citizenship and political engagement may be starting to lean more toward notions of ‘allegiance’ and ‘good, moral citizens’, rather than being broad enough to include those who are engaged in political processes or activities that may challenge the status quo.

In reflecting more personally on sport experiences, it is important for the researcher to declare his passion for sport, having been a player, spectator, administrator and coach in various sports on a voluntary basis for most of his life. Indeed, without this passion the study may never have come about. His particular passion is rugby union, believing it to be a team sport that can accommodate players of any body shape, and in which every player has a unique role to perform on the field. The researcher, in the role of player, coach, spectator and administrator, has experienced high levels of enjoyment, satisfaction and frustration in all of the physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions of the sport of rugby union. In this area in particular lies the risk of bias in interpreting the data, especially where participants may relate their stories of rugby.

The researcher’s feelings about sport are well captured in a line from the Academy award winning movie ‘Chariots of Fire’, where one of the main characters, the Scotsman Eric Liddell (later to become a Christian missionary), is explaining to his sister why he is so motivated and passionate about running:

\[\text{I know God made me for a purpose, Jenny. But he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure.}\]

It should be noted that there is no evidence that the actual Eric Liddell ever said these words, but it is an inspiring quote nonetheless. It has also been vital to reflect on the actual process of conducting the study from beginning to end. For the researcher, his experiences of sport
participation have always been connected with being fit, happy, engaged and vibrant. The process of writing up the study was a contradictory experience, for in the diligent application of research and writing, the researcher instead found himself becoming fat, cranky, withdrawn and boring. This experience has at times greatly reduced motivation levels for completing the task but has also affected the level of confidence with which the researcher has drawn conclusions in the analysis of the findings. Of course, the ever-present temptation presented by televised sport also contributed to the researcher’s fluctuating focus.

Setting

The greater Western Sydney region was the setting for this study, with significant use made of established networks within the area. Greater Western Sydney is a broad geographical area consisting of 11 Local Government Areas bordered by Auburn in the east, Blue Mountains in the west, Campbelltown in the south and Hawkesbury in the North. According to WSROC (2006), the region has a younger population profile than the rest of Sydney, and incorporates a mix of suburban development, industrial development and urban/rural fringe areas. The region is subjected to intense pressure for development, and its size, topography and location also result in poor air quality.

Western Sydney was chosen as the setting for this study for a number of reasons. First, the researcher’s professional and vocational experience has all taken place in the region, and so his familiarity with the area was conducive to the conduct of the study. This familiarity provided an array of networks and contacts with which negotiation could take place for recruiting participants and finding safe venues for interviews. These venues included community centres, youth centres, churches and university campuses. Second, because of the researcher’s commitment to social justice, critical theoretical framework and corresponding professional commitment to Western Sydney, the locational disadvantage of the region was also a major consideration in the setting for this study. As noted, Vinson (1999, 2004) has identified that many suburbs within the Greater Western Sydney region have a significant cumulative disadvantage across the social indicators
identified in his extensive studies, providing a convenient fit with the philosophical and practical commitment of the University of Western Sydney to the development and promotion of the region. A significant element of the University’s mission is to achieve excellence through scholarship, research, teaching, learning and regional and community engagement, in keeping with its values of scholarly rigour, inclusiveness, relevance and responsibility to its feeder communities (UWS, 2006).

**Sample**

The overall study sample was targeted to young male participants involved in sporting clubs, community projects, university campuses, and other organisations throughout the study setting, which the researcher accessed through personal contact and informal networking. In this ‘targeted’ context the sample was self-selecting, through handheld advertising and posters leading to voluntary participation in the study.

It was decided to not recruit directly through schools for a number of reasons. First, it was seen as useful to recruit young males with a range of sporting interests and an experience of a variety of civic engagement activities. It was of greater interest to find civically engaged (and potentially civically engaged) young sportsmen outside the school setting, and the researcher’s networks presented sufficient opportunities for doing so. Second, it was seen as an appropriate strategy to not leave the study open to reinforcing a participatory process criticised by Saggers et al (2004) as being potentially overtaken by school leaders. In so doing, it was not intended to exclude school attending young people or school leaders, but simply to not recruit young people in the context of school being their main locus of identity. Finally, and merely administratively, it was seen as unnecessarily cumbersome to engage in the process of applying for additional ethical clearance from the Department of Education and Training in order to formally approach schools. The process of recruiting the sample and collecting data did pose a curious question (recorded in the researcher’s reflexive journal) as to whether civically engaged young males are more likely to volunteer to be research participants. Literature on this question was lacking, although given that
volunteering is a dimension of civic engagement it could be argued that the correlation would be positive.

The size of the sample was not determined by aiming for a fixed minimum number of interviews, even though fifteen would have represented a nice sense of symmetry and completeness for the researcher (given the aforementioned passion for the 15-a-side game of rugby union). Rather it was based on the opportunities presented by voluntary recruits, and the size was conceived as having been sufficient to reach saturation of data. The data were considered to have reached saturation point when no new information was emerging, or when no new codes could be generated. Allan (2003) describes the experience of determining when saturation is achieved as a very confusing one, taking many attempts before having the confidence to stop. Lester (1999:4) notes the tensions between differing methods in relation to sample size, saying that ‘if the sample size is increased a common misunderstanding is that the results should be statistically reliable’. In qualitative (particularly phenomenological) research, sample size is not the prime consideration. Because this study was not primarily concerned with a comparison of demographic indicators, the researcher did not seek to ensure a representation of participants from different social, economic, educational and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, aside from the lower and upper limits on the age range, the researcher did not intentionally seek to represent every year within it. Although, as mentioned in Chapter 2, one of the advantages of utilising this age range was to explore any similarities or differences in the experiences of young males still at school and those who had left the secondary education system. By the completion of data collection, the sample was comprised of fourteen male participants aged between fifteen and twenty-five drawn from suburbs across the Greater Western Sydney region.

Techniques

Fattore et al (2005) provide some insights into the use of appropriate techniques for conducting qualitative research with young people. In order to maximise the participation of young people in the research process, they propose first that pilot research be conducted in collaboration with
young people, in order to establish age-appropriate and user-friendly processes, concepts and language. Additionally, they indicate that the particular techniques should be chosen based on the research question, the type of data required, and the characteristics and preferences of the participants. Travers (2006) and Alston and Bowles (2003) endorse the principle that the method of data collection should be determined by the research question and the type of data required. Travers (2006) suggests that, where the type of data required relates to the subjective meanings and understandings that people bring to the theme of the research, interviews are the most appropriate technique. To this end, interviews (as opposed to focus groups, surveys or other methods) were seen as the most effective way of collecting qualitative data, since the data required were more concerned with the civic engagement and sports-based experiences of individual young males. Fattore et al (2005) recommend that interviews with young participants have less structure, with more open-ended questions to allow them to explore issues or themes in the way that suits them best.

This study utilised individual semi-structured interviews (taped and transcribed) rather than structured interviews or in-depth interviews. According to Travers (2006), structured interviews involve asking the same set of questions in the same way to each participant, and have more relevance when seeking comparative data from large or random samples to establish social patterns. Alternatively, use of in-depth interviews, according to Alston and Bowles (2003), are more of a discussion or narrative guided by the participant rather than the researcher. As a middle ground between structured and in-depth interviews, the semi-structured interview was considered the most appropriate technique because it provided the opportunity to explore the interplay between previous literature and the participants’ individual experiences. Open and closed focus questions were developed (see Appendix 6) based on the connections found in the literature between sport and civic engagement, and these served as prompts for exploring the issues in the lived experience of the participants, whilst also allowing further exploration of additional information raised by the participant. At times, the stories of the participants led to the generation of other questions which were utilised in subsequent interviews. The study also
utilised secondary data such as text and other print material (e.g. newspaper articles, advertising, books, movies and project reports), and the researcher’s reflexive journal containing notes on interviews (particularly when recording equipment failed) and other research-related informal conversations with young males. In doing so the study also drew on elements of a textual analysis approach and to a lesser extent a discourse analysis approach.

In discussing textual analysis, Sproule (2006) identifies that the content of an analysis refers to a variety of communication forms which can include words, phrases, pictures, photos or symbols. These are usually referred to as texts. Texts can be derived not just from transcripts of interviews but also from matter such as historical documents, newspaper articles, and transcripts of speeches. He proposes that text can also include informal conversation, or advertising. Whilst this study utilises aspects of this form of analysis to strengthen the researcher’s reflexivity, it is also important to acknowledge its limitations. The use of secondary data sources is insufficient by itself to adequately explore the themes of the study, and should not cause the researcher to be pre-occupied with the written form of communication at the expense of communicating with people to explore their stories first hand. Additionally, in dealing with secondary sources, it is important to take a critical view of the text in order to understand the purpose, agenda or ideology behind what has been written. Failing to do so obscures the data and detracts from its relevance to the overall analysis.

Applying critical questioning to texts is a feature of discourse analysis, which is primarily concerned with the analysis of language, to make explicit the meaning and significance of text as data sources. Jacobs (2006) argues that the contemporary social world is identified by its reliance on texts as the main form of communication. Discourse analysis is seen as a method of understanding the functions of these communications and for evaluating the extent of their influence, although as mentioned earlier, the ambiguity and complexity of ‘discourse’ can not be underestimated. One application of discourse analysis to this study is in acknowledging that the texts which occur as part of the everyday social experience can add to an understanding of the
research question, in particular a critical understanding of the social and cultural context. Therefore, newspaper reports, notices, emails, phone messages, advertising and the Internet were considered to be appropriate sources of secondary data.

**Ethical considerations**

The National Health and Medical Research Council (1999) in its National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans identifies a number of principles that underpin research with human participants, and includes (i) integrity, respect for persons, beneficence and justice, (ii) consent and (iii) research merit and safety. These principles align with ethical areas outlined by Beauchamp (1982) as benchmarks when undertaking qualitative research, which include (i) autonomy and self-determination, (ii) maximising benefits and minimising harms, (iii) upholding justice and fairness, and (iv) positive contribution to knowledge.

In accordance with these principles and benchmarks of ethical research, and for the purposes of this study, the researcher was committed to the search for knowledge, recognised principles and methods of qualitative research, honest and ethical conduct of research, and honest dissemination and communication of results. During the study, the researcher applied his ongoing commitment to the ethical values of fairness and social justice. Whilst the research was low risk in terms of burdens on participants, the researcher endeavoured to ensure that there was a fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of participation in research.

Although the research procedures were not intrusive or invasive, and the researcher is highly experienced in working with young people, there was a remote possibility that participants may have experienced emotional/mental distress in exploring their stories of civic engagement. Participants were informed and reminded that they need not have continued if they felt uncomfortable about doing so, and that no names would be identified in written records of the research. The researcher also has extensive knowledge of youth support services/networks (which had been utilised in recruitment) and could have made appropriate referral for the young
person to a relevant service in the event of distress resulting from participation in the research. Thankfully, this was not necessary. Participants were likewise informed of the correct procedure for contacting the University should they have wished to complain about the researcher or the research process. With young people in particular the researcher was always aware of ‘duty of care’ responsibilities. The researcher set out to respect and maintain the dignity of all participants, endeavouring to cater to the diverse range of needs of participants in terms of safety, access, transport, literacy levels, beliefs, perceptions, customs and cultural heritage.

**Limitations of the study**

*Setting and sample*

The location of the study, limited to Western Sydney, was never intended to provide a representative sample of young males in Australia. The limitation in this regard is that the study is not necessarily conducive to being generalised to the entire sub-population of 15-25 year old males across the whole of Australia. As a piece of phenomenological research documenting the lived experience of the voluntary participants, generalisation was never its prime intention. It is anticipated, though, that some application could be made of the study to the broader processes of young males of a similar socio-economic strata engaging with their community, or young males generating change environments, and/or community development organisations engaging with young males.

*The language and understanding of the concepts explored*

Part of the purpose of the study was to acknowledge the forms of civic engagement adopted by young males in their own experience. The implication here is that the participants themselves may not have had labels or language for their participation that are the same as those that emerge from theoretical debate. As such, the researcher needed to translate the concepts related to civic engagement into a youth user-friendly language, and conversely to grasp the meaning of the language used by the participants. The researcher is confident of having translated reasonably well, as it has always been part of his skill set. However, on occasion the substance
of the concepts may have eluded some of the participants, leading to a limited capacity to respond to the research questions.

**Researcher's relationship to participants**

Like all qualitative, non-positivist research endeavours, the ideal of ‘objectivity’ was not adhered to in this study, and the influence that the researcher might have had over the responses of the participants must be acknowledged. It is important to acknowledge possible influence over responses in the content of the questions or in the manner in which they are asked. Backet and Alexander (1991) warn against the discrepancy of public and private accounts, and in particular how research techniques tend to influence young people to give the answer that they believe the researcher is seeking. In this study, because some of the sample was recruited through the researcher’s contacts and networks, it is possible that the participants’ familiarity or prior contact with the researcher may have been a factor in the responses they provided. For example, it is possible that the participants’ awareness of the researcher’s avid interest in rugby union may have led them to speak more positively of this sport than others. The researcher endeavoured to avoid bias, explicitly acknowledging elements of his theoretical framework, experiences and passions, and was overtly conscious of the role of researcher as human instrument.

**Marginalised young people**

Considering that the study reached young males who were, to a fair extent, already connected with their community, the capacity for applying the findings and implications to the experiences of those less connected to their community, or in other words marginalised, may be limited. Whilst the research made no ambit claims regarding the liberation of marginalised young people, it is nonetheless disappointing that this sub-group was missing from the sample.

**Data analysis**

The study aimed to capture the richness and complexity of some young males’ lived experiences. Therefore, the main method of analysis used in this study was one of thematic analysis which,
according to Willis (2006), is an appropriate and effective form of analysis in qualitative research, especially if interviews were the main technique for data collection. Boyatzis (1998) says that thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative data which looks for common patterns, in order to, at the least, describe and organise the data and, at most, interpret aspects of the data. Furthermore, Bernard and Ryan (2000) propose that major cultural themes can emerge when applying thematic analysis to research data, for example around dimensions of maintaining social status, cultural contradiction and social conflict.

According to Richards and Richards (1990:5), making sense of the data is the process involved in constructing theories from the ground up, rather than finding a theory like a ‘lizard … under a rock’. Although Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that in qualitative research data analysis is a matter of induction rather than deduction or reduction, Boyatzis (1998:4) suggests that ‘themes may be initially generated inductively from the raw information or generated deductively from theory and prior research’. Similarly, de Vaus (2002), Strauss and Corbin (1998), and Padgett (1998) agree that researchers are all engaged in both processes of induction and deduction, the difference being where the researcher starts in the process. This acknowledgement allows the interplay between recognising patterns in previous literature and harnessing the inductive process with data gathered from the participants in the study. This interplay is also recognised by Willis (2006), who states that a theme is a central idea emerging from the data, but can also be predetermined if the researcher has completed substantial reading on the topic.

In the process of managing and interpreting qualitative data, whilst maintaining reflexivity, it was important to be aware of bias and avoid it as much as was possible. To manage the possibility of bias, Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that ‘experiential data’ (i.e. the researcher’s experience, informed opinion and passions) can be drawn on for the purpose of sensitising the researcher to the sometimes subtle variations in the data, but can not be classed as ‘primary data’. Avoiding bias does not mean totally disregarding prior thought, but does require trying to ensure that it
does not bias the data to say something that it doesn’t say. As Dey (1993:63) says, researchers need an ‘open mind but not an empty head’.

Thematic analysis is generally regarded to be a reliable method of analysing qualitative data. Boyatzis (1998:146) describes reliability as ‘consistency of judgment that protects against or lessens the contamination of projection’. He says that this consistency of judgment has two dimensions, the first being consistency among various viewers and the second being consistency over time, events and settings. Furthermore, he argues that a researcher’s increased confidence in having captured the issues in question can also be considered a form of reliability. In this study, these elements of reliability were addressed first through reflection on, and discussion of, the data with the researcher’s supervisor, and second through monitoring of the researcher’s confidence in the reflexive journal.

To some extent, the analysis of qualitative data is a process infused with creativity and it could be argued that it can not therefore be prescribed in a precise manner. Mills (1994), in fact, insists that research (and particularly writing about it) is a creative process, equally as creative as a poem, play, novel, or musical composition. However, Willis (2006) maintains that, even in the context of acknowledging creativity, there are some elements of the process of analysis that are important to include in order to ensure a rigorous and replicable methodology. Therefore, in this study the creative process was contained within the parameters of thematic analysis as outlined.

Qualitative data analysis, according to Dey (1993), is the process of describing data, classifying data and finding interconnections, in order to generate a reconceptualisation of the data, that is, to describe, classify and connect the data to make better sense of the meaning. He represents the cyclical nature of the analysis process, implying that the data classification and the finding of interconnections can further inform the kind of data required. Willis (2006:265) agrees that for the qualitative researcher the focus of analysing data is to make meaning. To move towards making meaning, she stresses that the researcher must first be immersed in the data, having read and
Alston and Bowles (2003) argue that qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) analysis relies on interpretation and logic, having no set rules, occurs simultaneously with data collection, and may vary its methods depending on the situation. It may seem contradictory to assert that qualitative research does not follow any standardised rules of data analysis and yet to assert that there are some agreed processes to be undertaken in data analysis. Alston and Bowles (2003) acknowledge this anomaly, asserting that there is a level of agreement amongst qualitative researchers on three stages of the process involved, although they also admit that in practice at times they are indistinguishable. In the same way that Dey (1993) identifies describing, classifying and connecting the data, they cite Sarantakos (1998), who summarises these stages in the data analysis process as data reduction, data organisation and interpretation.

Data reduction is the stage where data is coded, summarised and categorised in order to identify important aspects of the issue being researched. This process helps the researcher work out what further data to collect. The main aim of data reduction is to identify major themes emerging from the research by categorising the data as it is being collected. Willis (2006) agrees that coding is an integral part of the initial stages of analysis. Coding is the marking of the data with symbols, colours, descriptive words or category names. Meaningful chunks of data are identified, separated and coded simultaneously through a careful reading of the transcripts. In stressing the importance of coding qualitative data, Strauss (1990:27) was responsible for the now axiomatic point that ‘the excellence of the research rests in large part on the excellence of the coding’. The codes can be developed through an understanding of the literature or through the initial reading process. Willis (2006) refers to these respectively as \textit{a priori} codes and
inductive codes. Alternatively, Alston and Bowles (2003) use the comparable terms constructed codes and invivo codes. The use of qualitative data management software (such as INVIVO or Ethnograph) has been advocated in certain contexts for the process of sorting and managing data. There are advantages to such systems when dealing with large amounts of data, but Willis (2006) warns that they must not be used to give an appearance of objectivity to the research, as that is not their purpose. She recommends as a general rule of thumb that they are most useful when analysing the data from more than twenty-five in-depth interviews. Any fewer, she says, ‘are easier to manage manually’ (2006:269). Given the number of interviews in this study it was seen as a more efficient use of time and energy to proceed with the analysis manually.

To some extent the narrative in the data can tell its own story, but it is also useful to take chunks of data and search for connecting cues to aid the coding. In knowing what to look for when coding, Strauss and Corbin (1998) propose that the researcher be alert to four elements contained in the data. The first of these is conditions, which are recognisable by cues such as ‘because’ and ‘since’; the second is consequences, which can be identified by clauses such as ‘as a result’ or ‘due to’; the third is strategies and tactics, which have to do with how participants did things or achieved certain ends. Fourth, interactions among actors are concerned with all other interactions that are not strategies or tactics. The paradigm of these researchers is a useful starting point when examining the data, although Alston and Bowles (2003:211) remind researchers that as the analysis continues their attention needs to be primarily focused on ‘emerging themes – the issues that are important to the people from whom the data is collected’. These emerging themes can be discovered by three levels of coding. The first level, sometimes known as open coding, is a non-restrictive process of coding data that attempts to create provisional concepts that seem to fit the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) intimate that the codes do not necessarily need to be ‘right’ at this early stage as they simply begin the process and as the analysis deepens and codes become established, they are refined, modified and elaborated to slowly produce a good fit with the data. The second level, axial coding, begins in the later stages of open coding, where the researcher codes in a more focused and intentional way around
certain categories, usually one at a time. Sarantakos (1998) describes this process as data reduction. The third level, \textit{selective coding}, or interpretation, occurs once the core categories have been identified and named. Selective coding is thus conducted only on the data linked to the core categories, where theoretical frameworks begin to take shape.

\textbf{Data organisation} is the stage of assembling the information around certain themes and points, and presenting the results. During the study, this assembly was done making use of text transcripts and notes from the researcher's reflexive journal. Labelling and coding of the text, according to Boyatzis (1998), enables a clearer conceptualisation of the data by associating common chunks of data with terms familiar to the researcher. Willis (2006), therefore, warns the researcher to be aware of contextualising the analysis. Sometimes, as Margulies (1992) and Alston and Bowles (2003) point out, a mind map or concept map is a more effective way of viewing the organised data. Mind maps represent the data diagrammatically or pictorially by spatially grouping categories and sets of related categories on a large page. Therefore, since the researcher's preferred learning style involves the use of visual and spatial cues, some mind maps were utilised to enable a clearer conceptualisation of the data (see Appendix 6).

\textbf{Interpretation} involves identifying patterns, trends, relationships and explanations that lead to conclusions that can then be explored through more data collection/analysis. This process, occurring simultaneously with data collection, would continue until reaching a point of saturation, which is when no new or unique information is emerging. Decisions about identifying the point of saturation may also depend on how much time, money and other resources are available. Memos form an important part of interpretation, and are separate analytical notes that, according to Willis (2006), help to contextualise and develop theoretical insights about the data. Alston and Bowles (2003:216) describe the need for memos to become progressively more elaborate and 'theoretically dense' as the analysis continues to become deeper. They may include diagrams, questions, hypotheses, summaries and hints at further directions, and are a major means of developing preliminary theories. Willis (2006) also contends that memos are useful for
contributing to reflexivity by noting considerations relating to the impact that the researcher may have had on the process. Strauss and Corbin (1998) insist that memos are dated and kept separate from the data, and should be written as ideas occur. Strauss (1990) also notes that memos should be modified as the research develops. He argues that if the theory doesn’t fit the data then it should be altered to make it fit, because in his view of grounded theory, the data is actually more important than the theory in the analysis phase. In this study, data were tagged with memos throughout the analysis phase in order to track any emergent theory.

The preceding discussion has outlined the dimensions of qualitative data analysis used on the primary data in this study. In terms of utilising other elements of textual analysis, the study drew on secondary data sources such as some historical documents about a sports-based youth leadership project, some relevant newspaper articles, and notes taken in the researcher’s reflexive journal concerning informal conversations with young males about the research. The informal conversations occurred during the recruitment phase of the study, but a number of the young males concerned declined the invitation to be formally interviewed. These additional text samples were chosen for their relevance to the topic, and also to provide further understanding of the cultural milieu in which the study was being conducted. The analysis of these secondary data involves, as outlined by Sproule (2006), coding and categorising the text within certain parameters. This study set those parameters based on the codes and labels identified in the primary data (i.e. the transcripts of interviews), and sought to identify similarities and differences between the data. The final choice open to researchers, according to Sproule (2006), is what to do with surplus information. The information that does not fit with the predetermined categories can be either ignored or used to re-assess the coding system. In this study, the researcher chose to generally ignore the surplus information as there was very little of it, although it was retained in the reflexive journal as potential directions for future research.

Akin to the textual analysis of the secondary data was the use of some elements of discourse analysis on a small amount of broader text material. This study utilised what is known as critical
discourse analysis, which Jacobs (2006) outlines as involving an analysis of the linguistic elements of the text (e.g. vocabulary, grammar), an examination of the strategic writing devices used (e.g. rhetoric, irony), and third an exposition of the ideological components of the broader social context which incorporates the understanding of power and hegemony. The particular elements of critical discourse analysis utilised in this study related to a small range of newspaper articles and non-academic books and films in order to critique the socio-politico-cultural environment in which sport was understood and experienced by the research participants and, perhaps, Australians in general. As these texts were considered to be secondary data, less time and energy was afforded this process but enough to still contribute to a broader discursive analysis, which in turn provided background to an understanding of the content and themes observed in the primary data.

Overall, the methodology encompassed all the essential elements required for a qualitative phenomenological research initiative. (A detailed description of the process is contained in Appendix 2.) The researcher sought to allow the narrative of the data to tell its own story, which gave some clues as to how the participants were framing their sport experiences, and whether there were any connections being made between sport and civic engagement. In keeping with the aim of the study, the participants’ comments reflected their lived experience of how, as young males in Australia, they saw their place in the world and the role that sport played in that experience.

Based on the interview data, a broad range of provisional concepts were identified that explored the connections between sport and civic engagement. The open coding was a process of working through these concepts inductively rather than establishing any predetermined cause-effect relationships, although the inductive process was also guided somewhat by themes drawn from previous literature. The provisional concepts were given interim labels and the researcher kept track of them by keeping them in alphabetical order during the data analysis process. Consequently, the interim labels (of which there were 52) were further analysed and categorised.
into six key themes based on commonality and connection. There was some natural overlap across the six main themes, as shown by the mind map found in Appendix 7. The themes in the data were then compared and contrasted with themes that had emerged from the literature review. The six main themes to emerge from the data were labelled as ‘Meanings of Sport’; ‘Health and Well-being’; ‘Identity’; ‘Belonging’; ‘Contribution’; and ‘Political Pathways’.

These themes enabled a clear discussion of the intentions of the study, in terms of exploring the possibility of a broader definition of civic engagement, and the role that sports play in coalescing the lived experiences of young males in Australia. In making sense of the data, it would be reasonable to argue that all participants who were interviewed could be thought of as being ‘civically engaged’. All participants exhibited more than one element of the different aspects of civic engagement explore earlier in the literature review. Quotes referred to in the three data analysis chapters are taken directly from the young male participants and ascribed to pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The participants have been dubbed: Rookie (15), Smiley (17), Maverick (18), Blue (18), Mungo (19), Lurch (19), Link (20), Stretch (20), Pedro (20), Sonny (20), Wheels (20), Fisher (21), Milo (23) and Skipper (25). Three characters from informal conversations (i.e. secondary data) also feature and are dubbed Sticks (22), Rowdy (21) and Pug (24).
Part 3: From the Change Room

Analysing and discussing the findings
This chapter begins the analysis of the data. The primary data consisted of responses to interview questions (some planned and some extempore) and small chunks of narrative with the fourteen participants. The secondary data consisted of a range of informal conversations, notes from the researcher’s reflexive journal and discursive text from newspapers, websites, project reports, non-academic books, and a small number of films. The analysis of the data is interwoven with reflections on previous literature throughout this and the next two chapters.

This chapter is concerned with matters around two of the six main themes, those being:

1) Meanings of Sport, and
2) Health and Well-being.

The analysis will firstly reflect on the participants’ understanding of the role that sport plays in their lives, and how they view themselves within their social world. Secondly, the analysis will discuss the relevance of the participants’ perspectives on health and well-being to the general exploration of how young males engage with their surrounding community.

A key impression gathered from the data was that the majority of participants had been playing some form of sport since a very young age. This point is important because there is a recurring question in this analysis of whether their sports participation has been a sole factor in their broader civic participation. Obviously there are many other factors besides sport that contribute to the development of civic engagement and these have been discussed in earlier chapters. Basing the analysis solely on the fact that many of them have played sport for most of their life so far does make it difficult to ascertain any exclusive causal relationship between sport and civic engagement, but exploring the intricacies of the whole data set does provide some clearer pictures of the relationship for these young males and to some extent for young males in general.
Meanings of Sport

In understanding the meanings (plural, because singular is too limiting of their experiences) that the participants attribute to sport, this analysis will explore their patterns of sports participation, their identified reasons for participating in sport, some of the benefits of sports participation, and what they understand to be the role of sport in their life and social world. As already mentioned, the majority of participants had been playing some form of sport since a very young age (e.g. 4-6 years old). There were some who had been involved in the same sport for up to twelve years, but there were also some who had only just taken up a new sport within the last twelve months. Some participants had played some sports for only a short timeframe (e.g. one year or one season), and then moved on to a different one. The varying timeframes and serial nature of their sports participation gave the impression that these participants were young males who would try anything - to determine whether they had the ability for it, or whether it was sufficiently enjoyable. These two factors of skill development and enjoyment span much of their thinking about their sports experiences.

Despite their lifelong involvement in sports, some participants had clearly been more active in high school and their levels of activity had dropped off since leaving school, due mainly to time and financial resources needed for other commitments, such as work, study or girlfriends. Sonny, for example, said:

Right now I can’t really find time to do every sport, but I’ve been involved in sports basically my whole life. (Sonny, 20 years)

This finding is consistent with Wright et al (2005) and Sinclair et al (2005), who found that post-school activity levels were lower for most young people. Other young males in this study, however, reported an increase in their sporting activity since leaving school. For some this change was a more focused concentration on one sport, and for some it was in a different sport or with an added role such as coaching. The increase was not because of lack of other things to
do, as it appeared to be the case regardless of work, study or relationship demands. There is some justification for saying at this point that those whose participation had increased or become more focused since leaving school had made sport a higher priority than those whose activity had dropped although, as will be discussed in the next chapter, their self-perceived passion for sport was not very different at all. Upon reflection they all rated sport as very important, exhibited by their lifelong participation in a variety of sports.

The range of sports in which the young males had participated over their lives was quite broad, and included rugby union, rugby league, soccer (indoor and outdoor), volleyball, cricket (indoor and outdoor), boxing, athletics, basketball, softball, touch football, bushwalking, swimming, baseball, downhill mountain biking, free-riding (i.e. mountain bike jumps), karate, tennis, golf, netball, tenpin bowling and going to the gym. Notably these cover both individual and team sports, and the clear pattern was that all the participants had been involved in more than one sport (often more than one in the same season). A common response was that they would be open to consider playing any sport. For example:

> Whatever, like I’d try it and I was alright at it and I’d just give it a go. Sport is, to me sport is just a great way to get fit and have fun you know. I don’t think I’ve ever had a bad time playing sport. So I’d give it a go no matter what it is. (Pedro, 20 years)

The participants’ immersion in such a broad range and number of different sports raises the question of whether they can be considered to be sport omnivores. This term is derived from an application to sport of the notion of cultural omnivores, which critiques Bourdieu’s image of a one-dimensional theory of cultural hierarchy, ranging from high to low, often along class lines. Peterson and Kerne (1996) and Warde, Martens and Olsen (1999) refer to cultural omnivores as those people of higher social class or level of education who would once have eschewed the cultural interests of the lower classes but who now embrace them either for the purpose of seeking variety in their cultural experiences, or for the purpose of ‘taking over’ the lower class
pursuits and thereby further entrenching their cultural status and control. Sport omnivores apply these processes to sport as a cultural pursuit. Certainly the participants in this study had pursued a range of sporting experiences encompassing many cultural and class tastes, and so could be considered to fulfil one of the criteria related to sport omnivores. Bennett, Emmison and Frow (1999) explain that the capacity to be culturally omnivorous is higher amongst those with higher cultural capital (wealth, social class, disposable income, etc), i.e. the socially advantaged.

The significant difference in this study is that, generally, the young males come from working-class or lower middle-class backgrounds and are often without post-secondary education. Whether this sampling represents an inverted cultural omnivorousness is hard to determine, but given that some of the lower class participants participated in sports such as rugby union which are more traditionally associated with upper classes, it must be given some consideration. Alternatively, age may be a factor, given that Houtman and Achterberg (2004) agree that ‘cultural omnivorousness is more typical of the young than of the elderly’ (2004:5). They believe that it is not just because of being young but is more likely to be the product of having been born more recently, since the operation of social change has made latter generations more likely to indulge in variety. It is, therefore, possible that the Australian context in which the study was conducted may be relevant, given that white settlement is quite recent, making Australia a ‘young’ country. It is probably too grand (and outside the scope of the findings of this study) to propose that Australia is therefore a culturally omnivorous nation, but other aspects of the Australian context in relation to sport may be relevant, such as Kell’s (2000) contention that Australians are obsessed by sport, believing it to be a cultural pursuit ‘where everyone gets a fair go’ (Kell, 2000:10). This belief is evident to some extent in the participants, although their experimenting with different sports was also an indication of their disenchantment with the lack of fairness they sometimes experienced, which also matches with the arguments of Kell (2000) and Hill (2002) that Australian sport has a long way to go to be a culture that is inclusive and celebrates diversity.
In the discussion of whether these young males are sport omnivores, it is important to note that whilst seeking a diverse set of experiences, not all their sports were accorded the same classification or status. Some sports were considered to be competitive and some to be hobby sports. The hobby (‘muck-around’) sports sometimes involved playing in an organised competition, although these weren’t ascribed the same seriousness as the competitive sports. Sometimes the hobby sports were non-organised but planned (e.g. mountain biking) and some were impromptu. For example:

*If I got nothing to do, I’d go down the park and kick goals, and just go down with a mate, kick the ball, go down have a game of touch footy. I mean it never stops; it’s always 12 months around. You’re always out doing something, whether it’s on a football field or just mucking around with your mates.*

(Maverick, 18 years)

As mentioned earlier, the distinct impression was that the lives of these participants were filled with sport in one way or another. Coakley (2003) discusses the differences between organised and non-organised sports in terms of the extent to which adults or young people are controlling the laws and conduct of play, but the two-dimensional analysis may not be sufficient for understanding the experiences of the participants in this study. There is reason to consider hobby sports as an overlapping subset. There is certainly an aspect of them that is non-organised (e.g. spontaneously riding mountain bikes through the National Park), but some which were considered to be ‘muck-around’ sports were still in organised competition (such as touch football or indoor cricket). Some that involved ‘getting mates together down at the park’ were informal and impromptu versions of the organised sports such as cricket or rugby that they played in serious competition. Even the mountain bikers who are generally considered in sports literature to be part of a non-adult-organised sport engaged in organised competition as well as hobby riding. The differences lie not just in whether it is organised but the extent of the competitive approach that the person takes whilst participating.
Another facet of the sporting experience emerged when participants compared their experiences of team sports with individual sports. All the participants had been involved at some level with both of these classifications, but some clearly preferred team sports, some individual sports, and some had no preference as they liked both.

The main factor that determined a preference for team sports was the mateship/camaraderie resulting from the team environment. Sharing the competitive experience with friends, and having others upon whom they could rely and work together, added to the pleasure of the game - both in terms of fun and level of performance. Sharing the competitive experience also heightened their motivation as they were able to look to team-mates for assistance and inspiration. For example, in a fairly colourful narrative, Maverick said:

> I like a team sport better than an individual sport. I think a good thing about a team sport is if you’re having a bad day, you’ve got someone there to pat you on the back and tell you, “Lift your head”… A team sport brings a lot out of you, too, because you’re not just working for yourself, you’re working for team mates around you, so you work that, a little bit harder, I believe, you work that little bit harder so you don’t let your team mates down. I’m worried about the bloke next to me who’s busting his guts for me, and bleeding, and I’m sitting here doing nothing, I mean, I don’t want to be the bloke that walks off all clean, the other bloke walks off bloody and dirty. (Maverick, 18 years)

The main factors that determined a preference for individual sports related to intrinsic motivation and gaining a sense of individual accomplishment. These participants had generally not enjoyed the aspect of team sports where others were trying to motivate them to improve and perform, or where they had to rely on others for achieving goals or winning. They clearly preferred to rely on themselves, and operate without the limitations of a team’s particular style or approach to a game. Smiley, who had given up team sports in favour of mountain biking, said:
Well, when I was doing team sports, I felt it was lot more pushy. Like you gotta get there, like there were coaches saying I want you to try and get up to this, so you got to try and show them that you can. But when you’re out riding you can say I’m gonna try it this time and if you don’t make it you can just go out and do it again. There’s this certain freedom… you’re just there to have fun not to like I don’t know, go down … you try it, you push yourself. (Smiley, 17 years)

Those that reported liking both types of sport equally related their thinking in terms of enjoying the best of both, and primarily was an indication of their deeper love and passion for sport. One interesting final point that arose was in relation to cricket, which a number of the participants labelled as both a team and an individual sport. Unlike other sports they had played, they said that cricket had the opportunity for the one-on-one contest and the team effort, which, for them, added to the enjoyment.

Regardless of the type of sport or classification as an individual or team sport, overwhelmingly the most common response about the meaning of sport was that it was ‘fun’. Sport provided an opportunity to have fun, irrespective of the degree of skill or the level of competition. Many participants questioned the point of playing at all if the playing experience did not include a strong element of fun. The type of sport played did not seem to make a difference to their motivation for being involved. In fact many of them played more than one sport, serially or simultaneously, both competitively and recreationally; and above all it was still about fun. There was a significant number of participants who had changed clubs or even sports because the fun had gone out of it for them. The fun element also extended to off-field activities, and having fun through sport also translated to a desire for life in general to be fun. Some typical comments included:

*I love sport, it’s just fun.* (Milo, 23 years)

*You just have a ball, I seriously could not imagine not having sport in me life.*

(Maverick, 18 years)
Sport is just a great way to get fit and have fun, you know. I don’t think I’ve ever had a bad time playing sport.  

(Pedro, 20 years)

That’s the reason I left league ‘cause I wanted to have fun. It’s all about having fun.  

(Link, 20 years)

I don’t see the point in playing and doing anything if you don’t enjoy it a little bit. So, anything that I’ve done, I’ve done it ‘cause I enjoy it.  

(Lurch, 19 years)

This finding concurs with a great deal of the literature regarding young people’s motivation for sports participation (e.g. Allison et al, 2005; Gorely, 2005; Wright et al, 2003; Seippel, 2006) and the theme is captured by Holt (1989:347), who said that ‘conviviality lies at the heart of sport’), and reinforces the ludic dimension (that is, related to play) of sport outlined by McPherson et al (1989). In this study, the specific aspects of having fun meant different things to different participants, however the common element was described as ‘enjoying the game’. Generally, enjoyment related to being active, being with friends, or feeling good. Interestingly, though, for some, this enjoyment included the physical contact involved in their chosen sport. The corporeal experience of tackling and being tackled, for example, and for one or two even engaging in minor on-field fights, actually heightened the fun of playing the game. This physicality can not be overlooked as it was an important part of the sport experience. It may be as simple as the release of adrenalin into the system (in the same way that the thought of a ‘challenge’ added to the fun experience with those into bike jumping for example) but it seems to be more complex than that.

Although somewhat at odds with critiques about male violence in sport (e.g. Burstyn, 1999; Fitzclarence and Hickey, 1998; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), the notion of physical capital may be relevant in understanding the significance of the body and body contact in their enjoyment of sport. Proponents of both Bourdieu and Foucault acknowledge that the body is a site for the interplay and operation of power within a person’s socio-cultural context. Physical
capital, according to Shilling (1991), refers to the social formation of the body through sporting activities in ways which express a class location and are accorded a symbolic value. Additionally, Wacquant (1995) suggests that body capital is developed through intense fitness regimes and practice. Therefore, the bodily expression of enjoyment through body contact sports is not necessarily a product of hegemonic masculinity resulting in unwanted violence. The idea of physical capital suggests that something else may be in operation. The use of the body in sport (through tackling, being tackled, pushing and minor skirmishes) for these participants may represent their attempts to explore and gain mastery of their social world by ascribing a symbolic social value to their body and working hard in training and competition to achieve some form of power. This possibility has significant implications for the interaction between sport and civic engagement in that their sporting experience is a direct expression of their engagement in civic life (that is, playing sport is their contribution) and/or that it lays a foundation and builds a framework for values and energies that can be directed into broader civic engagement. (These points will be discussed further in Chapter 8.) On either level, the fact that they enjoy this corporeal experience of their sport is of benefit to the engagement process as their passion can be channelled into their broader civic engagement.

Aligned with enjoyment was the idea that sport was a form of relaxation, or a release from work. Many participants felt that were able to use their weekend sport to relax from the pressures of the week, as described in this way:

*There's time to relax in a way, take your mind off all the crap you accumulate during the day at work or in the week.*  
(Blue, 18 years)

Pointedly, others saw their ‘hobby’ sports as a way of relaxing away from their competitive sports, so that ‘mucking around with mates’ provided a sporting experience with less pressure and intensity than organised competitions.
In the participants’ experiences of sport, enjoyment ran parallel with skill development as reasons for, and benefits of, playing sport. They played sport so that they could learn new things and continued to be involved because they were motivated to improve their skills. They saw their sports as challenging, and they enjoyed the challenge. For example:

Well, I like to end up being good at it. When I liked doing a certain sport or something I’d just try even harder at it. My skill level, get that up. (Mungo, 19 years)

This focus again concurs with previous literature around motivations for sports participation (e.g. Allison et al, 2005; Gorely, 2005; Wright et al, 2003; Seippel, 2006), although here the desire to develop skills was also tied to their perspectives on aspirations, attitudes of working hard, and competitiveness. Some wanted to develop skills to ‘outdo their mates’, whereas some just wanted to ‘be better than themselves’. Whilst the participants phrased this factor in terms of skill development, they are both reminiscent of the levels of competition articulated by McPherson et al (1989) - that is, direct competition, parallel competition and competition against a standard (where the standard was the individual’s own previous skill level). Others saw their individual improvement as being tied to their team-mates’ improvement, which resulted in a better team performance. Overall, even though it was clearly connected to competitiveness, skill development was a key factor in their sports experiences.

For many of these participants, sport was an arena for pursuing competitive aspirations. Some sports were for taking seriously and some sports were for fun. In terms of aspirations, the ideas of ‘enjoying the personal challenge’ and looking to ‘step up a grade’ were regularly mentioned. Hand in hand with the aspiration to play higher grades was an understanding of having to work hard to get there, and for some the realisation that it would take time to achieve these higher goals was evident. Maverick’s comment neatly sums up the thoughts of a number of participants:
Well, first of all, it should be about having fun … but obviously you’ve got to set your goals, like reaching a higher level. I’ve always wanted to play first division … but it’s such a big jump, so much faster, so much bigger, so much harder, and I got that experience this year, and it brung a lot more out of me that I didn’t know I had. (Maverick, 18 years)

Additionally, some of the mountain bike riders spoke of their aspirations to perform more complex, difficult or dangerous jumps or tricks. Some participants noted that the aspiration to play higher grades or perform more complex feats, and then actually achieving it, had rewards beyond the playing field that were related to self-identity, recognition and reputation.

Related to the theme of aspirations was the underlying attitude of working hard and not giving up. However, hard work was not exclusively related to achieving aspirational goals in terms of reaching higher levels of competition. It was also seen as the way of achieving good quality sporting performance at their current level of competition, regularly summed up in memorable quotes that the participants had taken on board as mottos. For example:

*Just go hard or go home.* (Pedro, 20 years)

*“Nothing’s ever easy”. If you want to be good at something you’ve got to work for it.*

(Mungo, 19 years)

*“Push yourself” has always stuck in my head. Oh yeh also “always try your hardest”.*

(Smiley, 17 years)

As with aspirations, the attitude of working hard only applied to the sports that they considered to be their competitive sports. Hobby sports were often seen as a chance to be more relaxed; still practicing skills but in a less serious playing environment, reiterating the ludic dimension of sport. Related to the attitude of hard work and aspirations, there was definitely an orientation from all of the participants towards being competitive. They acknowledged the competitive nature of sport
and, parallel with that understanding, there was clearly a ‘love for competition’ expressed by most participants. Although the idea of winning was a part of their experience, for almost all of the participants it was not seen as their main definition of competitiveness. Winning is important, according to all the participants, but it is not all that sport is about. A major aspect of competitiveness was the desire to win, and winning added to the fun, but this drive was ameliorated by the attitude of fair play, as summarised in the following quote:

\[
\text{Yeh, that’s the whole reason about playing a sport apart from having fun and stuff.}
\]
\[
\text{There’s two points, having fun and winning.} \quad \text{(Rookie, 15 years)}
\]

Being competitive had elements of improving individual skill level or performance, improving team performance and getting the best out of each other, pushing oneself and trying new things. There were certainly aspects of wanting to be better than the other side, wanting to outperform others (both competitors and friends), but there was also the sense of competing against themselves, for example, in improving race times or training harder to get better. This competitive nature was evident across all types of sports, whether they be individual or team.

While this finding again represents the McPherson et al (1989) levels of competition, there was a sense from these participants that competitiveness was both an individual and a collective endeavour. It was not just about the individual pushing themselves; the effort to enable and encourage others to improve was seen as equally important. This finding could be a product of the importance of the team environment and camaraderie to a sense of belonging (which is explored in Chapter 7), but also extends Gorely’s (2005) idea that adolescents are more likely to participate in sport where there is an ‘achievement orientation’ rather than an ‘ego orientation’. She says that if the focus of the sporting activity moves beyond the superiority of individual participants, then a barrier to involvement and enjoyment has been surmounted. The young males in this study had developed an achievement orientation that extended beyond their own concerns, and which they applied helpfully to those around them. This orientation has immense
significance in understanding and overlaying the process of developing altruism in the context of being civically engaged.

Every participant whole-heartedly rejected the ‘win at all costs’ philosophy in favour of playing within the rules (indicated by not cheating or fighting), having fun, doing one’s best and trying again. Clearly, it is unlikely that their rejection of the ‘win at all costs’ mentality always translated into perfect on-field behaviour. It is also possible that their words could be construed as lack of self-awareness, rhetoric or the reproduction of platitudes, but there seemed to be no insincerity on their part. Some had changed clubs and even changed sports because of their opposition to this approach. There was a certain vehemence to their rejection of the ‘win at all costs’ approach that they had observed in parents of team-mates or club members, especially when displayed at children’s games, and the flow-on effect that attitude has as the children get older.

That’s probably from the adults. Like now, when you go to the younger kids games, they all want to see their kids win, it’s like burnt into them as they get older. You see a lot of these juniors like, the parents are yelling from the sidelines at them. But the adults try and push it! The Under-6’s! Shocking! (Mungo, 19 years)

The opposition to ‘winning at all cost’ introduces the notion of fair play/sportsmanship into the discussion. For all the participants, fair play was an important and valid aspect of their sporting experience. It was clear from the responses that all the participants had an awareness of what constitutes fair play, and all of them articulated a commitment to it in their chosen sports. In defining fair play, they referred to playing by the rules of the game, and also to playing within the rules of the game. There was only a slight nuance in these perspectives, but the former has the sense of following the rules precisely, and the latter had more of a sense that the rules were boundaries outside of which certain actions/behaviours were not fair. They believed that following the latter allowed for some borderline behaviours to occur. For example, vigorous rucking (contesting the ball on the ground) in a game of rugby union was seen as fair play as opposed to
the unfair play of a deliberate kick to an opponent; or a ‘payback’ tackle (legal but very heavy impact) as opposed to a deliberate punch.

Playing fair? Going by the rules, usually, it’s not really winning if you have to resort to breaking the rules to win. (Mungo, 19 years)

The second dimension of fair play related more to the attitude with which the game was played. Attitudes such as trying one’s hardest, respect for the referee, respect for opponents, working as a team, encouraging each other, and playing to the best of one’s ability, but not striving to win at all costs were rated highly. There was no clear pattern as to whether their sense of fair play was something that had developed because of their sports involvement or whether they already had these values before getting involved in sport; whether they came from their family environment or from elsewhere. Some felt that they had learned it from sport, some from family, and some like Milo (23 years) a combination of both. The difficulty in establishing cause and effect was due to the fact that the majority of participants had been playing sport from a very young age, some as early as four or five years of age. The sportsmanship orientation was summed up by both Pedro (20 years) and Maverick (18 years) by their use of the phrase: ‘Play hard. Play fair’.

Many young males in this study clearly displayed what Joyner and Mummery (2005) referred to as a task orientation to sport (distinguishable by their motivations to learn, improve, and master skills) rather than an ego orientation (identifiable by attitudes of superiority, showing off and a preoccupation with winning). As Joyner and Mummery (2005) surmised, this focus was integral to their commitment to sportspersonship. The participants described attitudes and actions across all five dimensions of sportspersonship (respect for the social conventions of the sport, for the rules and officials, for one’s full commitment to participation, respect and concern for the opponent, and the absence of a negative attitude to sport); however their respect for the rules of the game was not quite straightforward. Although all the participants articulated their respect, as already mentioned there was a slight variation in notions of playing by the rules and playing within the
rules. This nuance is not something that is addressed in the literature on sportspersonship, although the participants in this study considered it to be a reasonable expression of fair play. Perhaps their experience represents a nexus between fair play, competitiveness and aggression that steps beyond the simple analysis of keeping these factors mutually exclusive. The findings of this study would suggest that a more complex model is needed, particularly when the participants identified them as being complementary, and indeed sought sports and clubs in which the culture (in terms of the perceived histories, values, attitudes, expectations, policies and behaviours prominent in their clubs) matched theirs in terms of fun, skills, aspirations, effort, competitiveness and fair play. The complexity of this nexus and its relationship to civic engagement (political engagement particularly) is further discussed in Chapter 8.

Developing a ‘winning culture’ was referred to a number of times. For participants this process occurred club-wide (rather than just with individual players) and combined aspirations, skill development and effort with the desire to win, translating into practices whereby, over time, the club focused on building player skills, building confidence and instilling an expectation in players that they would win their games. The majority of participants was quite content to operate within such a club culture, but their experiences became negative when the club culture was characterised more by a ‘win-at-all-costs’ attitude that bypassed notions of fairness and inclusion.

Supporting Gorely’s (2005) analysis about player motivation being higher when participation is valued over winning, the research participants often cited inclusion as an important part of their positive club experience. The clubs that they felt most happy about being in were the ones that were welcoming, friendly and appreciative of their participation, and applied to team sports and individual sports like boxing, where the club’s equivalent was the training gym:

*If someone new comes in and no one knows them, everyone greets them and tries to find out about them. You walk up there and if you do start training, you’re going to get...*
approached straight away in a friendly way. And that’s a key value, that’s very important: to keep members there and to keep them happy as well.  

(Sonny, 20 years)

There were no direct references to participants having been excluded from any club, although there was a suspicion of it in relation to selections being based on favouritism rather than form. They all felt that the players in their clubs were generally representative of their local communities in terms of demographics, although clearly most of the sports in question were all-male. One criticism levelled at sport (e.g. McKay, 1990; Kell, 2000; and Hill, 2002) is that it is exclusive of those who are disadvantaged within the broader society, and as McPherson et al (1989) state, sport provides another social context for the persistence of the wider social values, beliefs and norms (such as self-interest and prejudice). This explanation is not entirely satisfactory, though, as youth (and young males) are arguably one of those disadvantaged groups within society, and yet they are among the highest participants in sport. It is feasible that their feelings of inclusion were produced because the majority of the participants were Anglo-Australian males so that, apart from age, their sporting experiences could be related to the reality of their representing the dominant culture rather than a disadvantaged group. Interestingly, though, there was no discrepancy in this feature of the findings for the two participants from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. They felt no sense of exclusion and seemed to gain as much meaning, pleasure and satisfaction from sport as the other participants.

Most participants wanted to be in a club that valued effort and so were generally satisfied with this aspect of club culture. For example:

On the field we value team performance, providing 100% effort and commitment. This filters into training and socialising as a player group.  

(Skipper, 25 years)

In fact, their frustration was high – and their tolerance low – for those who did not treat the sport seriously enough, leading one participant to look for another club because it did not value effort.
There was a similar intolerance for those who, according to Fisher (21 years), exhibited ‘louish behaviour’ like drunkenness and misogyny.

In some participants’ experiences, there was a particularly acute comparison of their time with rugby union clubs as opposed to rugby league clubs. Rugby league was not well regarded, mainly due to the perceived ‘win-at-all-costs’ attitude of the local club being at odds with their own values of fair play and sportsmanship. This attitude resulted in many of the participants having experienced verbal abuse by their coach and/or team mates during games and training sessions. Losses often resulted in over-training the following week. Many had noticed a lack of equality, and that favouritism was often shown to particular players. They had felt extreme pressure as players to be loyal to the club, but many believed that there was no reciprocal loyalty from club to player. As Mungo lamented about his club’s hypocrisy:

\[
\text{I reckon it’s good to play for the local club, but they kind of backstabbed me so I’m not with them anymore. They expect you to be loyal to them but they’re not loyal to you. If they could find someone better for your position they’d use them. While you’re there they expect you to stay there.} \quad (\text{Mungo, 19 years})
\]

Mungo changed clubs but continued playing rugby league. A number of other participants, however, left the sport of rugby league because of these types of experiences and chose instead to play rugby union. They felt that the differences between the club cultures were immediately obvious. The perceived value in rugby union clubs, of inclusion being equally important as winning, was the first and clearest of these differences, and probably the main reason that the participants had switched codes. This change amounted to a less harsh approach to training and a greater emphasis on social relations, without abating the motivation to play one’s best and the desire to win. Whether this phenomenon is generalisable is uncertain, but it certainly applies to the club environments experienced by some research participants. Generally, the participants had managed a best-fit between the values of the club and their own personal-values, which
sometimes required changes in clubs or sports, although for the most part there was a level of contentedness with their experience of club culture. The decisive action taken by some of the participants in changing clubs/sports is indicative of a form of resistance, which is discussed further in Chapter 8, as it relates to the major theme of 'political pathways'.

A final line of thought that emerged related to how club culture was reinforced and passed on to coming generations. First, participants identified that coaches and administrators have a key role in determining club policy, and setting an example, through words and deeds, of what was expected from club members. Senior players were said to be quite influential in the reinforcement of club culture in a similar way that coaches and administrators had influence:

*Verbally (implicating getting messages from senior players around training and approach to game), visually (observing training practices and interactions of players) and through club folklore. In those stories you get an understanding of what type of player and performance is valued.*

(Skipper, 25 years)

The broader traditions of the club were noted as another way in which values were made clear. For example, annual fundraising activities and other club events were deemed to be ‘*part of what the club was about*’. Some clubs named themselves as family-oriented clubs, which was taken to mean that language and behaviour was generally suitable for children, and that inclusion was more important than winning. There was a sense that participants felt that this type of attitude was actually difficult to maintain because it went against the general trend of attitudes to sport in many clubs and in the wider cultural context.

Finally, in exploring the meanings of sport for these young males, there was some discussion of the connection between sport and employment. The connections were diverse, where some participants like Lurch and Mungo enjoyed their jobs, but happily saw their work solely as a means of income that enabled them to support a preferred lifestyle that included sport. Some, like
Maverick, were in stop-gap jobs because they ‘hadn’t found the right job for me’. Alternatively, others like Link and Pedro saw their current jobs as an interim arrangement until their preferred career choice (Fire Brigade and Police Force respectively) was attainable. Others, like Sonny, had ‘put together work with what I love’ by going into personal training.

One key theme that emerged was that sport had helped participants operate more effectively in the workplace, either because playing sport gave some understanding about how to design training programs or administer first aid, or because they had learned to work in teams applicable to the workplace. On this point there was an acknowledgement that employment related teamwork was not of the same quality as team-work in sport in terms of intensity, belonging or solidarity. Finally, a number of the participants have been pursuing careers which could be considered civically engaged – for example, social work, community welfare work, education, police, defence force and fire brigade. The overlaps suggested here between careers and civic engagement are significant to the research and will be further discussed in Chapter 8.

In summary, the findings of this study, in relation to the meanings ascribed to sport by the participants, appear to some degree to replicate the three sociological perspectives that view sport as reflection, reinforcement or resistance. The findings also give some weight to the argument that sport has much in common with areas of broader civic engagement. The participants appear to make sense of their world through their experience of sport, as for many of them it has been a central activity in their lives from a very young age. Sport provides them with enjoyment, relaxation and skill development. Sport is also the context in which their values base finds its expression. There is some legitimacy in saying that sport has been a determinant of that values system, and some grounds for saying that the values system has developed through other factors and then applied in the sporting arena. The values system seems to be a nexus between fairness, competitiveness, effort, aspiration and aggression which is not succinctly addressed in other literature (which tends to make some of these factors mutually exclusive). This finding highlights a different understanding of sportsmanship, which has commonality with broader civic
attitudes. Finally, the participants’ reflections on sport club culture reinforce their attitudes and in some cases, particularly where they changed clubs or sports, represent a resistance to dominant ideologies to which they are opposed, such as win-at-all-costs, exclusivity and disloyalty.

The interplay between these various factors of their sporting experience bears some resemblance to the interplay of factors in the social determinants of health and well-being, which was the second major theme identified in the study.
Health and well-being

Not surprisingly, and in line with sports science literature (e.g. Cale and Harris, 2005; Allison et al, 2005), every participant described one of the benefits of being involved in sport was that it kept them active, healthy and fit. Most participants referred to physical health, generally alluding to sports participation making them more aware of choices about food, exercise (and how that makes them feel good), strength, muscle tone, smoking and laziness (‘keeping my arse off the lounge’). Interestingly, apart from one comment about exercise being a way ‘to balance out the drinking’, no one made a direct association between making healthy choices and curbing alcohol consumption, with some speaking of drinking regularly and sometimes to excess.

Additional to sport keeping participants active, several comments implied that some of the participants actually had difficulty with being inactive. One participant, for example, said:

_If I’m not playing something on a weekend, I’m lost. Now we got about 3 weeks off between rugby finishing this year and cricket starting and I was sitting at home last Saturday and said ‘what am I doing?’ So I went to the gym and swum for about 2 ½ hours. I have to do something otherwise I just get bored. You don’t want to pick up bad habits just getting lazy and that._ (Link, 20 years)

Some participants often reframed inactivity or stillness as laziness, indicating a sense of being ‘driven’, or at least experiencing a sense of restlessness about their inactivity, leading to the need to _do something_. This finding raises similarities with Corrigan’s (1976) idea about young people creating ‘something’ out of ‘nothing’ as a means of overcoming boredom. Although he was referring to young people congregating on streets to talk, joke, smash bottles or fight, the use of sport by these participants has some similarity to that process of ‘doing something’, although clearly in a less ‘anti-social’ manner.
Alternatively, one participant connected being still with a deeper range of emotions; some based on happy memories of an active childhood, but others related to having been disciplined as a child through being forced to sit still. Other feelings were to do with boredom, and some were partly due to his diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

*I went through one point in my life I sat still for ages, but that was I think because I always get in trouble for moving so I’m going to sit still, so trying to conform, but then I thought, “it’s not me”. So, when I get bored I get up and I do something, I just have to do it. If not I’d go crazy, start getting agitated, so that’s just how I am, but then again lots of people are like that, I’ve got lots of mates who are like that and they don’t realise it.*

*(Blue, 18 years)*

Apart from this one example, the broader definitions of health discussed in the literature review, such as mental health or social health, were not labelled as ‘health’ or even as ‘well-being’ by the participants. However, they did refer to them in other ways such as ‘feeling good’, ‘confidence’ and ‘coping with hard times’. Furthermore, it was clear that the social dimension of sport was vitally important to participants, particularly when identifying their sense of belonging and the way in which they derived a ‘good feeling’ from sport.

Acting as a thematic bridge between activity/fitness and feeling good was a small number of comments about *looking good* (i.e. physical appearance), in that sports contributed to fitness and muscle tone, resulting in them being noticed by others and, as one felt, being more attractive to girls. The other aspect of looking good was more aligned with the spectacle of the performance, for example in making a ‘big hit’ in rugby or in accomplishing a major trick on a mountain bike. That people would see it and think it looked good was also related to recognition and reward, and is discussed in Chapter 7. In this context, though, the findings appear to match Daley’s (2002) findings that, for boys, sport contributed to a higher sense of physical self-worth and attractive body adequacy.
Participants also said that being able to look good gave them a good feeling, although feeling good through sport was achieved in a number of other more significant ways. For example, simply being active had the effect of lightening their mood, as they acknowledged the internal bodily effects of adrenaline and endorphins. Furthermore, winning made them feel good, but of equal importance was the feeling experienced from knowing that they had done all they could to achieve their goals, even if they did not win. Feeling good was also derived from helping others to play their best, and commonly from the sensation of being part of a team. The sensation of feeling good also seemed to have an ongoing effect, in that many of the participants were able to recall great moments from the past of playing well, winning or having an impact on their team or on the game. For one participant, the memory of a past moment actually appeared to produce a similar sensation even when recounting it during the interview. Pedro (who interestingly isolated this feeling to rugby union as distinct from other sports he had played) said:

_The team just really pulls together and you go out there ...like one game that always sticks out in my head when I think back is the game we played against Campbelltown. We played 'em like four other times and we lost and we played them at the stadium and we finally beat them. That game was just one of the best games, just awesome. The thing that sticks out is not that like you did this mad try, whatever. It was the way the team pulled together and the way that everyone just believed in each other. Those are the things, and they give you that tingly feeling. It's like a rush._ (Pedro, 20 years)

For some participants, the team environment also provided opportunities to feel good by playing well and 'earning the respect of the older guys'. The recognition and respect of peers, both within the team and with the broader peer group, was an important source of feeling good.

_I like getting praise, like, cause you put in a lot of hard work to be good at playing footy and when you get, “Oh you did really well when you did such and such …”, you always get a buzz out of it._ (Mungo, 19 years)
The health implications of feeling good and, as outlined earlier in the chapter, having fun are quite relevant to the enhancement of well-being and the development of resilience. Aspects of resilience emerged through participants’ thoughts about confidence, pushing through pain and coping with hard times.

There was consensus amongst the participants that being involved in sport had significantly increased their confidence. Participants were keen to point out that this increased confidence from sport affected their broader lives as well. For example:

*It brings out so much confidence. I mean I wouldn’t be where I am today without sport, because I just feel like I’ve got so much confidence over where I am, today, and doing what I’m doing.*  
(Maverick, 18 years)

The nuances of this increased confidence added some richness to its meaning in this context. First and foremost was the notion that they had greater verbal confidence. Almost all the participants said that being involved in sport had given them, for example, confidence to speak in front of other people, to express their opinions, confront others with whom they disagreed, problem-solve by talking through issues, motivate others, and to speak easily about themselves in job interviews. Below are some samples of sport acting to build confidence:

*It’s just something I find I feel a lot more confident. Like, if I look back, when I was 13 or 14, I was a pretty quiet kid. Around friends and family I was loud, but not around people I didn’t know or weren’t particularly associated with. But now I’m happy to get right into it and get involved in discussions and that type of thing.*  
(Fisher, 21 years)

*Through playing a lot of team sports, I have become much more extroverted and easier to talk to people. I’ve definitely learned a lot of communication skills through like different types of sport and different levels, and, like, even different positions and how much you have to talk.*  
(Stretch, 20 years)
I think sport makes you more confident; it makes you more confident in life; it makes you get up and say what you want to say; you’re not scared of what people think, not scared of what people see, just you want the eyes on you. People that don’t play sport I think they’re a little bit less confident. (Maverick, 18 years)

Another element of verbal confidence was that some of the participants would use sporting analogies in other types of discussion. For example, in debates or tutorials at university, Fisher said:

It’s weird because I find that all my analogies in anything are related back to sport. Like, it doesn’t matter what. I did debating and I got criticised because there’d be a political topic and somehow I’d use an analogy to relate it back to sport. (Fisher, 21 years)

Participants also reported having less fear because of their involvement in sport. Because of the confidence gained through sport, they were not so afraid of the opinions of others, or of being in the limelight. This confidence is related to resilience, but also to the increased sense of control that they had gained. Having more control helped them to feel that they could achieve anything, whether that came from control over the equipment (like a mountain bike) or from a position of leadership.

On the bike, it’s just like you’ve got control over the bike and you can go where you want. I reckon it’s good to be in control. Makes you feel a lot better. (Rookie, 15 years)

I built a lot of confidence up with footy like being able to talk in front of people or get everyone’s attention, like make everybody be quiet and listen because that’s something you get taught when you’re captain. (Pedro, 20 years)
The lessening of fear also related to an increased level of interpersonal confidence, that is, the self-assuredness to meet new people. Joining sports teams inevitably means having to meet new people, so the increased exposure to unknown social situations led them to develop their confidence in building relationships. The building of social networks, as is discussed in the following chapters, is central to developing a sense of belonging and a means of contributing to community. It is also a key ingredient for developing resilience. This aspect of interaction with, and control over, their surrounding environment is, according to Macdonald (2005), central to the meaning of health. Resilience was something that almost all the participants felt that they had taken from sport into general life. They felt that sport had made them stronger and more able to handle hard times or adversity. In other words, it had built their resilience. For example:

> Go in and give it everything you’ve got. If you get knocked off at least you can say, “Well, I tried”. (Pedro, 20 years)

> I can lift my head up higher and not be afraid of other things… I’ve been used to going through pain or hard training and that helps with everyday life, to accomplish obstacles that are in your path. I’ve always felt that I can overcome battles and that, but the sport has helped me physically do it. (Sonny, 20 years)

> They all sort of bring the same thing, like they bring the character out of you; they bring things out of you that you didn’t know you had. (Maverick, 18 years)

> You take the sports mentality out with you in life. You just keep going. (Mungo, 19 years)

A few participants had experienced loss or hard times during their teenage years and felt that their involvement in sport had helped them cope with these times. For example, involvement in outdoor and adventure sports gave one participant, as already noted, a way of handling his
ADHD, by having the freedom to move rather than having to sit still in formal education. Another participant experienced the loss of his mother when he was in Year 9, and felt that his sports team and coach were very supportive. He felt that their support, and the opportunity to redirect his energies into sport, had helped him through this time.

Atwool (2002) and Worsley (2005) both conclude that, for young people, resilience is derived from characteristics such as high self-esteem, self-confidence, communication skills, conflict resolution skills, cultural pride, easy temperament, a sense of belonging, or any kind of skill that a young person has learned that they can rely on and contributes to their ability to survive adversity. Furthermore, broader factors such as a supportive family, a regular peer group (even if it is characterised by violence), and a supportive person, network or agency outside the family also contribute to resilience. The findings of this study show, in line with the factors that contribute to resilience as understood by Atwool (2002) and Worsley (2005), that sport has proved to be a source of these factors for the young males in developing their resilience, since almost all the factors listed were cited by the participants as part of their sport experience. The exploration of how resilience is a key aspect of broader civic engagement is taken up in Chapter 8.

The findings of this study do mesh nicely with the theoretical understanding of resilience, and show that sport is indeed a source of its development, not the least of which is that it helped the young males to feel good. The importance to the participants of feeling good also uncovered something of the thrilling and risky nature of sport, and their resilience displayed their capacity for handling the risk. This feeling primarily related to the sensation experienced from the rush of adrenaline, or the effect of endorphins being released during exercise. The terms ‘release’ and ‘natural high’ were used a number of times. Extreme sports such as downhill mountain biking and jumping, and adventure sports like abseiling, were most associated with thrills and sensations arising from adrenaline, although some of the rugby players also spoke of ‘the rush of pulling off a big tackle’.
There were various perspectives on the operation of these hormones, with some saying that they ‘calm you down’, ‘rev you up’, ‘release your stress’ and ‘help you think straight’. Whatever the variant, the general attitude was that the ‘natural high’ was preferable to, for example, an alcohol or drug-induced one. Blue, who had experienced both, was particularly adamant that sport gave him:

*a natural high. It eliminates having to go out and do stupid stuff. You can have fun doing stuff that’s good for you and doesn’t hurt anybody else. You have heaps more fun, you don’t get in trouble for it and you get heaps more out of it.* (Blue, 18 years)

This aspect was developed further by others, in terms of sport being a preferable replacement for other risk-taking behaviours. It seems that they felt the period of adolescence — wherein risk-taking is most common — is made easier by the managed risk involved in sport. This finding concurs with Booth (2000), who argued that young people value ‘risk-taking behaviour’ (that is, behaviour that is likely to jeopardise health and well-being, and where there is poor or no risk management) as a release from an otherwise boring routine. Sport was important for the young males in this study, particularly in terms of the goal of managing risks and therefore minimising harms associated with adolescent behaviour through such active pursuits. This finding also reflects the findings of Hall and Banno (2001), and Morris, Sallybanks, Willis and Makkai (2004) that sport, as one activity that reduces boredom and the amount of unsupervised leisure time, has a function in reducing the ‘anti-social’ behaviour of young people. So, in effect, sport becomes pro-social almost by default, although for the participants in this study there was something more intentional about their involvement, and therefore something possibly more intentional about their pro-social behaviour, despite their risk-taking.

Taking risks and seeking thrills sometimes lead to levels of harm and injuries. Participants had no qualms talking about injuries that they had received from sport, taking it for granted that it was part of the game. For some, bad injuries meant being out for the season and for a few serious injuries meant the end of their playing days in their particular sport. Some mentioned that
because of injuries they had learned ways of treating them which they had then been able to administer to other athletes, and apply to other areas of their life as well (for example, at work). At the same time as the disappointment about getting injured there was, in some of the young males, almost a sense of pride about the types of injury received. One participant was awarded an end-of-season trophy for being knocked down so often during his rugby league season, and so the injury almost became a badge of honour. Additionally, ‘stacking it’ in mountain biking, for example, added to the fun and the entertainment of the activity, although serious injuries were never laughed at.

In these findings on risks and thrills there is nothing out of step with the literature on adolescence as a life stage (e.g. Eriksson, 1968) with its goals of identity and independence, although the connection between the findings and aspects of Hegel’s perspective on subjectivity is less convincing. Hegel (1971) describes youth as regarding themselves as representing all that is true and good, consumed in their own subjectivity. To some extent, this analysis accounts for the participants’ pursuit of feeling good and their dissatisfaction with sports clubs that don’t meet their ideals of inclusion and fairness, but it does not sufficiently explain the often altruistic nature of their values systems. It is conceivable, of course, that this balance is an indication of their having moved beyond the stage of adolescence. Although Hegel (1971) does not set any age limit on the life stage, the age of the sample – and their preoccupation with feeling good and the element of risk – would suggest that this is probably not the case.

Discussion and policy on risk in the context of the health and well-being of young people often settles upon the topic of alcohol use and the concerns about adolescent binge drinking (e.g. NSW Health Youth Action Plan, NSW Police Safe Party Strategy). Some participants in this study regularly referred to their own alcohol use as part of the social nature of their sport. All but two of the participants were over 18, and there was no mention of frequent drunkenness or binge drinking on their part, but that ‘a drink after the game’ was an expected and welcome aspect of being involved, especially in a team sport. The pub offered a site for reflecting on the highs and
lows of the game, putting aside differences and conflicts, and enjoying the company of friends. For some, this company regularly included opponents as well. However, the ‘drinking culture’ of sports such as rugby league and rugby union was identified by a number of participants. The expectation to drink large quantities of alcohol was seen as a risk factor for deterioration of health and wellbeing, and further supports the Morris et al (2004) position that sport can be used to avert this situation:

One of my mates, he was playing for Jersey Flegg sides, and came into C-grade and then got with the drinking culture and all that sort of stuff within rugby league and just started to go downhill, like he’s still…but he’s not nowhere near what he used to be.

(Stretch, 20 years)

In an additional dimension of drinking, some participants alluded to the connection that a team or club may have with ‘the local’. This connection was seen not just as a place to meet but also a way of engendering a sense of belonging to the local community. For example:

The cricket club’s close affiliation to the ‘local’ leagues club helps to create a sense of belonging to the community. In our area the local bowling, RSL and leagues clubs are often both a community meeting point and symbol. Meeting in the team colours after the game at the local best reflects that feeling of belonging.

(Skipper, 25 years)

The participants’ opinions on alcohol seemed to be less related to physical health and much more to do with socialisation, which was spoken of commonly as mateship or friendship. Mateship was, in fact, the second most common response about the benefits of sport (after ‘fun’). All participants related the experience of positive social relationships as the best part about playing sport. Terms like ‘mates’, ‘mateship’, ‘social’, ‘networks’, ‘being with friends’ and ‘camaraderie’ were frequently used in describing their sport experiences, and indicated the level of importance that was placed
on friendship as part of their experience, whether by playing sport with existing friends or by making new friends through sport.

Interestingly, many participants intimated that they had developed qualitatively different types of friendships through sport, acknowledging the positive experience of meeting new people but keeping such encounters at a fairly shallow level. They discussed the social networks formed through sport that were slightly deeper than ‘introductory’, and finally they spoke of bonding and the closeness of friendships that had, for them, gone beyond sport and moved into other life experiences. Many felt that the friendships that they had gained through sport were much closer than those that they had developed in other ways. The following quotes provide some examples of sport’s contribution to making friends:

A lot of my friends have been met playing sports, when I look at it. A lot of my mates are from footy, and athletics, and a lot of my good friends I’ve spent time with doing sport. You see them more often; you learn to work as a team with them. I talk to those blokes almost every day. (Mungo, 19 years)

There’s things to do with union and league that you don’t get from any other sport, nowhere near. Like the mateship you get from playing. The thing you get from footy you can’t replace with it anything. (Pedro, 20 years)

There’s a lot of people who I’m really close to because of sport. (Maverick, 18 years)

You’re just playing with your mates. And if you don’t play with your mates, you make mates in about a week. You know you go to a new club, and someone’s gunna come up and introduce themselves, in one week you almost know the whole team, and there’s another group of mates. (Link, 20 years)
It is this affirmation of the social dimension of sport that most closely relates to the health/well-being dichotomy discussed by Woodman (2004) and Easthorpe and White (2006). They found that young people viewed ‘health’ and ‘well-being’ as separate concepts. Health was determined by eating well, exercising, and avoiding behaviours like smoking, drug-taking, binge drinking and major risk-taking. The participants in this study similarly spoke of sport contributing to health along these lines. Well-being, according to Easthorpe and White (2006), is more related to social networks and a supportive family. In this study, the prominence of friendship, social networks and feeling good (which sometimes involved risk) shows that sport was not just a source of health but also a source of well-being. Whilst, there was also a large number of comments about belonging (which is a major theme discussed in the next chapter), there was no obvious connection made by the participants in this study between belonging and health or well-being. Despite this lack of conscious connection, it would still be fair to argue – as supported by other literature (e.g. Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003; Wilkinson, 2006; Konopka, 1973; Berkman and Glass, 2003; Macdonald, 2006) – that, for these participants who overwhelmingly found their sense of belonging through sport, their health/well-being was enhanced. Furthermore, as Woodman (2004) proposed, young people are trying to balance responsibility for their future and having time to enjoy the present, paralleling the tension in the health and well-being dichotomy. Some sense of this balancing act also emerged in this study, in that the young males rated enjoyment as a highly important element of their sporting experience, and yet also displayed a concern for their health together with a concern for broader social issues. Although the participants in this study were not specifically surveyed about their understanding of the terms ‘health’ and ‘well-being’, it is important to note that in their descriptions of sport, the two terms – as understood via Easthorpe and White (2006) and Woodman (2004) – find a ‘playing field’ in which to meet and merge.

In summarising the place of health and well-being as a major theme emerging from the findings it has been established that, for these young males, sport is a source of factors promoting both health and well-being (as defined earlier). Sport was clearly seen as a healthier and more civically committed alternative to anti-social risk behaviours, and an obvious source of physical health and
fitness. Furthermore, the social nature of sport and the centrality of friendships in their sport experiences show that it is an important contributor to well-being. Resilience is a major area to which sport contributes in terms of self-esteem, confidence, communication, and social networks. As will be seen in the next two chapters the interplay and overlap between health and well-being, and the meanings of sport with identity, belonging, contribution and political pathways provides a critical nexus for framing the role of sport in civic engagement for young males.
Following on from the analysis of the two major themes in the previous chapter (namely ‘Meanings of sport’ and ‘Health and well-being’) this chapter further pursues the connections between sport and civic engagement for young males by analysing the data associated with the major themes of

1) Identity, and

2) Belonging.

The analysis will reflect on the overlaps with the two major themes from the previous chapter, but will particularly explore the themes of identity and belonging by relating the findings to the formation of civic identity and the dimension of civic engagement that encompasses a sense of belonging to community. The understanding of these two themes will then provide a platform for analysis of the final two themes in the following chapter (namely ‘Contribution’ and ‘Political pathways’) as the connections between sport and civic engagement for young males are unwoven.

**Identity**

Identity formation is, according to developmental theorists such as Erikson (1968) and Hegel (1971), one of the key tasks of adolescence. In this study, sport has played a major role in how these young males identified themselves. There was some overlap between sport-related core identity and more specific areas of gender and civic identity, but in their stories the notion of identity was of a more generic nature. Statements like ‘Sport’s me life’ (Maverick, 18 years) and ‘Everyone sees me as the footy player’ (Mungo, 19 years) indicated that, if they were asked to identify who/what they were, they would see themselves as sportmen.
Many participants saw themselves as being identified or defined by either their level of skill or the weight of their involvement in their chosen sport. For many of them, sport filled their week either in competition, training or recreation. A number of them said that their lives revolved around sport in terms of what they did, read, watched on television, and what they talked about with their friends and family. It appeared that were sport to be taken out of their lives, there would be a large void. The time and energy allotted to sport alludes to the passion and importance that they place on sport, but it is also fair to surmise that sport strongly equates with their identity, in the way that ‘who they are’ and ‘what they do’ are so closely intertwined. For example:

Sport is pretty much everything I do. A fair bit of my life, how I am and act would have to be through experiences with cricket, with sport.  

(Lurch, 19 years)

My life revolves around sport. I can’t wait for, twenty past six sports news to come on; I sit up to eleven-thirty to watch Sport’s Tonight and then I go to bed. As soon as the paper comes, bang, straight to the back page.  

(Maverick, 18 years)

Sport’s a massive part of my life. If people asked me my hobbies, what I did, you’d probably define who I am straight away. I’m doing something sport-wise seven days of the week… I kept playing a sport because that’s all I’ve ever known… Sport’s helped me realise, probably, who I am, more than anything.  

(Link, 20 years)

The participants’ identity was not just related to what they did but was also gathered from activities, attitudes and behaviours of certain sport participants from which they distanced themselves. Observing the behaviours of others in sport seemed to provided them with a yardstick against which they measured themselves and hence sometimes distanced themselves from such behaviours. For example, many of the participants expressed disappointment and frustration that some sportsmen (whether opponents or team-mates) are ego-oriented and at times arrogant. Skipper (25 years), whose sport was cricket, said ‘I dislike poor attitude and inflated ego, however these can be found in any sport.’
Ego-oriented players were not well respected, and the participants reported a high level of satisfaction when they were able to defeat them. Their tolerance of team-mates with high ego-orientation was low, and the vehemence of their intolerance is captured in this comment:

I have been in teams when there’s been a new player and he’s been introduced and you give the guy a go and, just, ego might come over him, you know. I can’t stand people who think they’re the best straight off the bat. Like they could be a good player but I mean, what’s the point of sitting there saying you’re the best when you’re playing with us. If he doesn’t go over the top well that’s fine, but if he starts mouthing off and telling us where to go, I mean mate, why? You’re not even meant to be here, this is just ridiculous.

(Link, 20 years)

The values that people either adopt or avoid are often a window into their identity. Wray and Flanagan (2007) particularly propose that values development and civic identity are inseparable. Egotistical displays and lack of sportsmanship were strong sources of frustration and, as such, were attitudes that participants tended to avoid. As described in the previous chapter, the notion of fair play was something with which the participants strongly identified. Frustration was often experienced when a lack of sportsmanship was evident during the game, and then carried on after the game as well:

I found it really frustrating when people would hold a grudge after the game because I think to a certain level what happens on the field is sport, and whether you go in a dust-up on the game, once you’re walking off, that’s sport, and sometimes people wouldn’t shake your hand and I found that incredibly, I don’t know, just really, I just didn’t understand it. I can understand if you did really dirty stuff, but not just run of the mill rugby. That really frustrated me, and I just don’t get it.  

(Fisher, 21 years)
The value systems of the participants in this study, as described in this and the previous chapter, appear to encompass a sense of fair play, hard work, competitiveness and passion. Many of them seemed to have fairly well established value systems and an ability to articulate them, although their thoughts on the origins of their values were not as clear. There was no definitive idea as to whether sport was a source or an expression of their moral development, although participants were very willing to offer a range of opinions. Some felt that family (especially fathers), friends and work influenced their value systems, which is consistent with values education literature (e.g. Freakley, 2002; Rokeach, 1973; Catholic Education Office, 2007) that proposes that family, peers, religion, government, education and media are key social structures for values development as a dimension of identity. Were sport to play a role, it would be in the context of the operation of these other social structures, although the findings in this study showed that participants seemed to skip over religion, negate the influence of elite players as role models, and to discount the influence of the media except, as proposed by Schwartz (1994), in reinforcing values already held. For example:

*How values are passed on? How people come together in team in first place, what style to adopt, what are the rules of the sport. Media personalities and role models from other sports are more about connecting with those you already agree with – the values you already hold. My sense of fairness and fair play comes from personal values and the values of sport. You can spot a sore loser.*

(Milo, 23 years)

There is a sense in this response, and in other participants’ responses, that some of their values are related to their involvement in sport. There is probably not sufficient evidence for establishing a clear causal link since, as prefaced at the beginning of the previous chapter, many of the participants agreed that it was difficult to distinguish the role that sport had played in the development of their values as they had been playing sport for most of their lives. This finding does reflect research (e.g. Jones and McNamee, 2000; Joyner & Mummery, 2005) that describes equivocal findings as to whether sport contributes to, is neutral in, or detracts from the fostering of
positive values or traits. There were, in this regard, a number of comments that reflected more broadly on the traditional image of their sports, feeling that values can be passed on through the club culture (including policies, behaviours, expectations and oral histories) although their ‘purity’ was on occasion called into question. For example:

In terms of cricket, the value system rests on the concept of ‘gentlemanly’ conduct - on and off the field. How this is reflected in park, semi professional and professional cricket is a matter for debate. Loosely I think gentlemanly conduct refers to the age-old adage ‘do unto others as you would have them do to you’ but I think this is a form of justification for the sledge [i.e. verbal abuse].

(Skipper, 25 years)

This comment captures the hesitancy of, for example, Jones and McNamee (2000), about the role that sport plays in development of sportsmanlike and civic values, and hints at the values and behaviours modelled by professional sportsmen. However, the significance of elite players as role models in identity formation for the participants in this study is not supported by the data. There were a few comments that their sport involvement had enabled them to meet celebrities and high profile players. These experiences had importance for them although they were unable to clearly explain the reason for its importance, other than its connection with their love/passion for their sport and the experience of feeling good (as outlined in Chapter 6). It did not seem to be related to any conscious notion of a celebrity being a role model in terms of the values and behaviours they adopted, but was more the case that anything connected with their sport had importance. There is, therefore, the possibility that being able to meet a celebrity or national level sportsperson gave them a greater sense of importance, which in turn contributed to the formation of their identity, but it would be unjustifiable to conclusively argue the point. There seems to be nothing in the responses of this group to support the argument of Fitz Clarence and Hickey (1998) that aggressive, violent and inhumane behaviours of elite sportsmen provide a model for younger males searching for a masculine identity.
In general terms of the task of identity formation through adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Hegel, 1971), it would seem that these participants have negotiated that task quite successfully through their involvement in sport. Whilst, according to Erikson (1968), the successful negotiation of identity may be a signifier of emergence from the transitional period of adolescence (or alternatively, according to Maslow (1943), a demonstration of progress towards self-actualisation), the participants’ perspectives on the formation of gender identity were seemingly absent. Their reflections on identity did not directly associate sport with their masculinity, although in fairness to the participants, they were not asked any specific question related to this aspect of their identity. Responses to other areas of inquiry did, however, reveal some pertinent thoughts on their notions of gender identity. For example, for almost all the participants, family was a significant factor in their sport experiences. There were many references to having been brought up in families that loved sport, and that their pathway into certain sports was the support, encouragement, invitation or example of a father or brother. For example, Milo (23 years) reported that his ‘first experience in volleyball was in the same team as my father.’ Many of the sport experiences of the participants were strongly flavoured with memories or examples of playing in the same team as a male family member:

I want to get my younger brother to play, especially with me ‘cause we got three brothers and the dream was we had when we were younger that we were all gonna play footy together. It looks like me and me younger brother might still play. And I play cricket with my older brother now. (Link, 20 years)

Their identities, clearly tied closely to their sports, seem to have been drawn from male-oriented experiences. Furthermore, as already mentioned, values are a good indicator of identity, and although it was often difficult to demarcate the sources of many of their attitudinal and values bases in or toward sport, it appeared that at least some of their attitudes were derived from the participants’ father’s influence. Lurch, for example, said:
Keep fit, have fun. Make friends. Where’s it come from? Dad. Dad, for sure. It’s Dad through and through… I’ve never really had a problem with confronting anyone. The way I see it, if they don’t like me they don’t like me. It doesn’t bother me. I think that’s just come through family, I mean, Dad, as well. (Lurch, 19 years)

Whereas it was noted in the previous chapter that well-being for young people is routinely linked with positive family relationships and particularly the mother (Easthorpe and White, 2006), the strength of the father-son relationship, according to Biddulph (1997) and Worsley (2005), that is significant in developing resilience in young males, and therefore in negotiating the transition to adulthood. This position on the role of the father-son relationship also found support in the findings of this study, although its importance does not exclude the role of other significant adult males. In this study, it emerged that sport was an effective way of strengthening their relationship with their father through a common activity or a ready topic of conversation:

*Sport’s brung a lot of people close to me, like my Dad. Like, we’ll go up the tennis courts three times a week and have a hit, like. I don’t think if I had sport I’d be as close to my Dad because probably 60-70 per cent of the talk we talk about is sport.*

(Maverick, 18 years)

With identity and values systems emerging from male-oriented sporting experiences, it is inevitable that their sense of maleness, or in other words their gender identity, is also derived from these sport experiences. This connection supports the findings of O’Connor (2006), who argued that lifestyles were mapped by gender-differentiated patterns, with boys being much more likely to refer to sporting activities. Male identity, he proposed, was connected with their hierarchical position arising from competitive sports, although the narratives in this current study were focused more on participation than on competition.
It can be seen that, for these participants, sport has played a role in the formation of gender identity. However, what they felt it meant to be ‘a man’ was revealed in other aspects of their stories such as their discussion of attitudes to sport, and the values/attitudes they had carried from sport into their broader life. The records of what they said, and indeed what they didn’t say, begin to express their ideations of masculinity, and encompass what has been described in the literature review as both hegemonic and alternative masculinities:

> Go in and give it everything you’ve got. If you get knocked off at least you can say, well I tried. You know when someone gets a little crap injury, he’s “pulled a heartilage”. To me it’s footy. It just toughens you up a little bit. We’re living in times where it’s equal rights, fair enough, but a man still has to be more thick-skinned than a woman. He still has to have that element. And it does toughen you up just that little bit more just by playing footy. Things that maybe your dad or older brothers can’t teach you, footy can.

(Pedro, 20 years)

This comment is indicative of some aspects of what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), among others, refer to as hegemonic masculinities. The view that men need to be tough or stoic was represented here as an aspect of sport to be carried into broader life experiences. Minimising injury (and at times honouring it – as discussed in Chapter 6), and value-judging minor injuries as weakness of character (‘pulling a heartilage’), were upheld as elements of surviving the sporting contest and consequently of surviving life. Other participants spoke of being physically strong enough to handle the impact of tackling or boxing or crashing a mountain bike (discussed in Chapter 6 as a dimension of fun), refer to the toughness and risk-taking element required to play these sports, and so to some extent hint at the toughness and risk-taking quality required to be male. Other comments, such as ‘every man has a battle to fight’ (Blue, 18) and ‘you gotta be man enough or big enough to just step over the sledging’ (Link, 20), at first impression may be suggestive of the same kind of stoic quality alluded to by proponents of hegemonic masculinities, but the core of the participants’ comments seem to be related to deeper factors of building
resilience, finding meaning and controlling aggression, rather than simply being stoic because that is what defines masculinity.

In reference to gender relations, Pedro’s comment that “we’re living in times where it’s equal rights, fair enough, but a man still has to be more thick-skinned than a woman” provides an insight into his effort to balance the dimensions of the cultural context described by Fitzclarence and Hickey (1998), where sport is a guardian of masculinity, but men are under an increasing expectation to adapt to contemporary gender politics. None of the other participants offered any responses that could be construed as having anything to do with gender politics, although the idea of looking good – both in terms of body image and accomplishing spectacular sporting feats – was a way of gaining recognition to feed their sport-based identity. An athletic physique, ‘pulling off a big tackle’ (Mungo, 19 years) or ‘doing a cool trick’ (Smiley, 17 years) was thought of as being attractive to girls, hence displaying a sexual dimension to their gender identity. The same aspects of looking good were said to be a way of achieving recognition from team-mates and other males. This focus did not seem to be related to their sexuality but appeared to be more that looking good was a way to feel good about themselves.

The fact that this kind of recognition from other males was desired probably says more about the aspect of masculinity and identity which is formed, as suggested by Biddulph (1997), by interaction with other males in their community. There is no evidence in these data to support the existence of ludism as referred to in the literature review (Huggins, 2004; Tefler, 2004) as the enjoyment of the social and hedonistic dimensions of sport-related male company without actual participation in the sport itself. The young males in this study certainly enjoyed the off-field aspects of the male sporting environment but there was also an overwhelming commitment to be on-field participants as well. Furthermore, whilst the experiences of the participants do seem to be indicative of a homosocial experience that reinforces masculine identity, there is nothing in their thoughts and values to suggest the expression or promotion of homophobia. Similarly, although drinking alcohol was seen as part of the social dimension of being in a team sport, there
is no indication that these young males engaged in binge-drinking or behaviour fuelled by drunkenness.

The participants' perspectives on aggression were also multidimensional. Participants spoke of different aspects of the nature and purpose of aggression in their chosen sport. For contact/collision sports like rugby league and rugby union, there was an acceptance that aggression was a normal part of the game although what the participants meant by aggression was rarely related to fighting and violence. For these young males, it was concerned with using force and putting maximum effort into the on-field performance, for example in making a tackle, or striving for possession of the ball. Aggression was aligned with motivation, passion and the rush of adrenaline involved in playing the game:

*I do enjoy the rough side of it. I don’t mind getting my head in there and having a go. I get pretty pumped up about that – I’m pretty, I’d say aggressive but in the right way. I mean I don’t go there to kill people but I’ll go out there. They’re out there for the exact same reason you are. They’re running at you – you gotta tackle. You’re running at them they’re gunna tackle you. So you can’t think I’m going to take it easy or you’re gunna get hurt.*

*(Link, 20 years)*

This kind of association was also made for those who played cricket, a non-contact sport, especially for those who were fast bowlers. The added aggressive element in cricket was ‘sledging’, which is the practice of making negative comments to members of the opposite team to try to put them off their game. Some, like Skipper (25 years) said that sledging is a normal part of the game and that it was related to camaraderie and protection of team mates, but others said that it can amount to verbal abuse, which is crossing the line into wrong behaviour. In collision sports, this line was considered to be more blurred. There was an acknowledgement that because of the nature of collision sports, controlled aggression can turn into violence, sometimes without realising that the line between them has been crossed, particularly if the playing
experience has been a frustrating one in terms of poor performance or poor teamwork. Team sports, particularly, had the potential to turn violent, because of the importance placed on supporting team mates if they get in trouble:

You get more that mentality, that if it's on then it's on and everyone's in sort of thing, rather than just sort of leaving one man out.

(Stretch, 20 years)

It is important to note that all of the participants felt that they predominantly engaged in fair play, and that being aggressive was not an indicator of unsportsmanlike or foul play, as that would remove the fun from the game. For some, their sense of fun actually included the physical contact involved in their chosen sport. The corporeal experience of tackling and being tackled, for example, and for one or two even engaging in minor on-field fights heightened the fun of playing the game.

I loved the physical activity and especially the rugby I liked the real contact, getting in there and I like the niggle and all that type of thing.

(Fisher, 21 years)

The participants involved in boxing, interestingly, spoke more of composure rather than of aggression. For what is considered by many critics to be a violent sport, there was little evidence of these young males deliberately acting violently during their bouts. Composure, they said, was more important because anger leads to lost concentration and poorer performance. The other distinction that many participants made was between competitive and hobby sports, believing that aggression in terms of ‘big hits’, ‘sledging’, and ego-fuelled behaviour, had no place in hobby sports. For these participants, sports such as touch football or tennis (which are obviously also competitive sports for other people) were named as hobbies because they were played simply for
recreation and relaxation without having to worry about striving for maximum effort that they would need in competitive sports.

There also seemed to be a strong connection between aggression and passion amongst the young males interviewed in this study. Passion – for sport in general and for their sport of choice - was evident in the descriptions of the participants’ experiences, and was demonstrated by their strong interest in, and emotional commitment to, sport. Many of them said that they loved sport, and were motivated by a drive to get involved in it. Some had formed an intellectual rationale for sport, in terms of its importance for health, fitness or addressing obesity, and for the social/relational value it adds to their lives. Sport was regularly the main topic of conversation with friends. Some also shared their passion with girlfriends, indicating that their conversations are often sport-oriented. For example:

*Cricket and sport in general is hugely importantly in my life. My partner and I both share a keen interest in a range of sports such as netball, cricket, golf and car racing to name a few. Most importantly, it’s our interest in coaching sport. She and I frequently have conversations about the aspects, methods, and best approaches to coaching.*

(Skipper, 25 years)

There were also many comments about how much time was devoted to their sport, which alludes to the importance that they placed on it. Playing, training and focusing on equipment were commonly cited as examples of their discretionary activities during the week. For example:

*If I get off early from school, if I’ve got time when there’s nothing else to do, I don’t want to be sitting home in front of the computer, just like typing or playing, or watching TV. I’d rather be out riding though the bush, practising, trying to get the corners perfect, tricks and stuff. Or trying not to stack, or like fixing, cleaning, repairs.*  (Smiley, 17 years)
The terms used by the participants in relation to the time and attention placed on sporting pursuits were ‘passion’ or ‘importance’ which are positive terms. No one used the term ‘obsession’, which has a more negative connotation, and pinpoints again the positive light in which all the participants viewed their sport.

These data provide an alternative understanding of some of the criticisms of sport honed by hegemonic masculinity discourse. There are certainly many examples in the public arena where sport and sportspeople are connected with sexism, sexual harassment and alcohol-fuelled behaviour (Brown, 1998), or misogyny, aggression and violence (Burstyn, 1999; Schacht, 1996). The young males in this study, however, showed little or no sign that any of these connections were part of their personal disposition, which reflects the situation described by Hughson (2000) who felt that hegemonic masculinity was not universally dominant but representative of a specific group of young males. Similarly, the experiences of these participants reinforce the argument of Pringle and Markula (2005), who found that whilst sport did provide an arena for young males to negotiate their masculinity, it did not unequivocally or automatically reproduce a culturally dominant masculine image. Furthermore, Dunning (1986) concludes that “sport appears to be of only secondary importance with respect to the production and reproduction of masculine identity” (1986:282), and that it is the broader social structures that impact on gender and power that are more significant. Therefore, the sport-related values, identities and experiences of these participants, which were an expression of their masculinity, leave them in a position which, as Burgess et al (2003) describe, is in conflict with and resistance to the dominant images associated with their sport. The existence of factors that seem to reinforce and resist dominant ideations of identity give some weight to the desirability of a flexible identity (Wearing, 1984; Heaven, 2001) that can evaluate and respond to the changing nature of social and political processes. This flexibility also provides some lead-in to the discussion in Chapter 8 of the social contract.
There is no indication in these data to suggest that the physical contact and controlled aggression used whilst playing sport translates into violence and aggression in the broader lives of the participants. Indeed, it seems that the contrary may be the case in that controlled aggression arises from the passion that they have for their sport, which provides these participants with meaning and identity, and to some extent has been harnessed by some of the participants for broader civic-minded activities and careers. As discussed in the previous chapter on the meanings of sport, it is certainly this passion that drives them to work hard in their sport, and fused with the notion of controlled aggression also becomes a factor in civic engagement for young males, which is explored in Chapter 8 when discussing themes of ‘Contribution’ and ‘Political Pathways’.

The notion of working hard (as discussed in Chapter 6) and ‘giving it all you’ve got’ is still somewhat reminiscent of the stoic quality associated with hegemonic masculinity, but is also a derivative of the feeling that these participants have for their sports participation. Therefore, it does not appear to be a form of emotionless stoicism that may have characterised, for example, war-era masculinity, but seems to portray an element of earnestness in striving to do their best in the things about which they are passionate. This sincerity also carried over into their thoughts about helping others to do their best, which constitutes both an alternative masculinity and a rudimentary form of civic engagement. That their identity was such that it allowed an aspect of helping and concern for others to be prominent is another example of the way in which these participants placed themselves in conflict with the hegemonic masculinity associated with homophobia. The multidimensional nature of these helping behaviours is discussed more fully in Chapter 8, but it is fair to say here that where they are connected to their gender identity, an aspect of altruism that is an essential component of civic identity is highlighted. For example, one participant (heterosexual) had no concern about being thought of as homosexual because he was committed to helping others:
A lot of people say “well that sounds poofy” or whatever, but to me that’s mad. To be able to make a difference in someone else’s life and not go out there and say “this is what I done”; just do it and know yourself you’ve done it and that’s all, even if they don’t say thanks you know that they’re grateful so you don’t even need thanks. (Pedro, 20 years)

This comment also shows a willingness to engage in helping behaviours without the need for recognition - a feeling shared by other participants even though most wanted some kind of recognition for sporting prowess. Along similar lines, it appears that these young males believe that controlled aggression, fair play and concern for others are not mutually exclusive. These combined dimensions of self-recognition again contrast with the concept of hegemonic masculinity that is described as being unconcerned, violent or abusive. The expression from participants in this study of concern for others and anti-homophobia compares to the work of Beal (1996) in describing self-expression and open participation in skateboarding as an expression of alternative masculinity, and is further evidence of resistance to the dominant images of masculinity.

There is certainly much in the findings to suggest that sport has played a major role in the formation of identity of the participants. The links between sport, family and gender identity are also quite clear, as is the integration of identity, activity and opposition to values such as ego-orientation. As much as the participants loved sport, had a passion for what they did, and closely linked their identities to sport, there did not seem to be any sense of lost identity or crisis in the event of losing a game, which most likely indicates that their identity was not based on winning but on participating. Frustration about ‘having a bad day’ (which generally meant the individual or team was not performing to a desired standard) was a normal part of their experience, but did not strike at the core of their identity. This resilience does seem to point to an identity which is more mature and more outward looking, or as Blue (18 years) expressed it, ‘being part of something bigger than yourself’.
This analysis is suggestive of some of the key ingredients of the formation of civic identity. For example, the findings of this study reflect those of Ferrier, Roos and Long (2004) in that the participants found ways of helping that engaged their passions (sport-related in this instance), involved other young people, and where they could see that they would have a beneficial social impact. It is also apparent, in line with Ferrier et al (2004), that the types of helping in which these young males participated were broader than most formal definitions of volunteering, and also notions of youth participation that generally emanate from the human service sector. Interestingly, there didn’t appear to be a strong explanation of civic identity in the participants’ stories, even though helping and contributing were very solid themes. This discrepancy hints at the distinction made in the literature (e.g. Ruston, 2003; Ferrier et al, 2004; Roker, Player and Coleman, 1999) between formal and informal action, in that participants didn’t necessarily view what they did as clearly defined volunteer work. Furthermore, the fact that many of the participants were happy to be helping others without needing to draw attention to it or gain recognition from it reflects the findings of Roker et al (1999) in terms of young people (and males in particular) doing volunteer work but not talking about it.

Unlike their findings, however, the participants in this study appeared not to be too concerned about either embarrassment from being seen to be altruistic, or about any emotional dissonance arising from the self-fulfilment associated with helping others. The participants in this study did not see that altruism and self-satisfaction were mutually exclusive and, in fact, appeared to bear both of these factors with equal comfort. The integration of these elements is more in line with the findings of Takahashi and Hatano (1999) and Pancer and Pratt (1999) in terms of civic activities providing benefits to both the community and the volunteer. Blue’s expression about ‘being part of something bigger than yourself’ is a good example of the civic identity and sense of contribution that Pancer and Pratt (1999) attribute to volunteering, and that Takahashi and Hatano (1999) describe as giving a sense of meaning to people’s lives.
It has already been established earlier in this chapter that parental influence (especially that of the father) was a significant factor in terms of values development for the young males in this study, but that it was often difficult to distinguish between the role of parents and of sport in this process, as for many of them the two were tightly intertwined. Civic identity is characterised not only by actions but by values and motives as well. Wray and Flanagan (2007) make the point that values development is most clearly linked to family, where family members play ‘a primary role in helping youth form their views of others and their responsibilities to society’ (2007:2). Some literature (e.g. Pancer and Pratt, 1999; Roker et al, 1999) shows parental influence as a determinant of civic identity, although none of the participants in this study mentioned parental influence as a factor in terms of their motives for helping. That is not to say that it wasn’t, just that they didn’t identify it as such. It is reasonable to infer that the overlap between parents and sport was again a major factor in their development of civic identity. There was a variety of reasons for their altruism, but most of them were underpinned by the desire to make a difference in their world. One motivating factor was the difficulty experienced in their move to a new area or transition to high school, and the desire to help make this transition for younger adolescents smoother than their own. A second motivating factor was related to having friends whose drug use or petty crime had affected them, and whom they had been unable to help, enhancing their desire to help others avoid this fate. Third, there were a few participants who had developed more of a conscious political identity and saw that making a difference might contribute to broader social change.

This aspect of civic engagement, which White and Wyn (2007) classify as political socialisation, is further explored in the following chapter under the theme ‘Political pathways’. Participants reported motives that seemed to be based less on parental influence and more on their own experiences beyond the family which have come about in the course of their participation in sport. While it has been established that parental influence has been significant for encouraging sport participation, it appears that development of civic identity has been more aligned with personal experience (which for these participants happen to include sport). The dual operations of
attachment to, and separation from, parental influence are significant for young males in the transition to adulthood and striving to establish an autonomous identity (Erikson, 1968; Hegel, 1971). In the context of this study, the process of forming civic identity captures the apparent paradox of the transition and is represented in the everyday personal experience of participants. Wray and Flanagan (2007:2) affirm personal experience as an equally important determinant of values development in saying that:

value orientations, which translate into individuals’ levels of civic and political participation, are shaped by experiences that take place in the everyday lives of adolescents, and thus are a vital part of their normal developmental processes.

The everyday experience of these young males is exactly what this study has been exploring and, therefore, where sport is a key part of that everyday experience, it follows that it plays a role in their values development and in any ensuing development of civic identity. In this way the findings of this study help demonstrate the socialisation process as conceptualised by Yates and Youniss (1999), in that the young males who have shared their sport experiences here have been shown to be more than just passive recipients of norms and traditions. Certainly, many of their utterances have indicated that some aspects of their world view are reflective of values and behaviours handed down from parents and other older adults, yet it is also the case that this identity development has happened in the context of them being active participants in shaping the world in which they live. Their civic identity, therefore, has arisen through a socialisation process ‘grounded in doing and leading to habitual practices’ (Yates and Youniss, 1999:6). The ‘doing’ and the ‘habitual practices’ for the young males in this study have been firmly rooted in their sport experiences. Finally, Pancer and Pratt (1999:38) argue that civic identity is identifiable in the:

socially responsible individual … who feels a sense of connection to those outside his or her circle … and feels an obligation to help those who are in need, and to share skills and resources with those who are less fortunate.
The participants in this study reported that they have developed these attributes through their participation in sport. A sense of connection is explored further in the second half of this chapter in discussing the theme of ‘Belonging’. It has already been established that helping, concern for others and sharing of skills are traits that these young males have developed in the context of their sporting experiences, and is exemplified by Sonny’s recollection of a High School peer support program:

Yeah, the seniors, only like six of us, had to get all the Year Seven and Eights, all the misbehaviours and that. They were getting suspended and we just got them in a group twice a week and we’d take them up to the ball courts. We’d get them doing sports, push ups, little circuits and had boxing. When it was one on one, I would just go through with them, why, what’s wrong, and he’d be like, “I can’t do my schoolwork, I just don’t want to do it”. And I’d try and motivate him into doing it and why he should do it. At the end of the day you gotta get more out of it, just stuff to encourage him, and one day he’d rock up and say, “I had this fight with this other kid.” And I said, “What was it about?” Just you know, talk it over and make him a better person, and it did help – not with all of them, but most of them improved at least a little bit. You block out everything when you’re training so that was a good tactic. I would go, “You love getting in trouble in school, so hit the bag harder, run faster, sprint faster, do more push ups.” I just wanted to help them out. I want them to change so they can have a future. At the end of the day if it doesn’t happen it doesn’t happen but you might as well try and help. (Sonny, 20 years)

In attempting to draw this discussion of identity towards a conclusion (or at least to some kind of viewing platform) it is important to reconnect with the notion of salutogenesis. A salutogenic approach to men’s health (e.g. Macdonald, 2006) applied more broadly to any issues for men and boys, would acknowledge the positive contribution of the masculine gender to processes of identity development and civic engagement, rather than pathologise or demonise males for their
maleness. In this regard, the effect of sport on the development of gender identity (whether it is part of the discourse of traditional, hegemonic or alternative masculinities) is to be recognised and applauded. The young males in this study have demonstrated a range of attitudes and behaviours associated with identities that have been influenced by sport. Willingness to take action according to one’s passions, not shy away from difficulty, minimise trivialities, embrace conflict as an important and often fun dimension of life experience, play fair, aspire to improving skills and helping others to do the same, and to be willing to both accept and challenge social norms and traditions, are all strengths of identity connected to these young males’ sporting experiences that can be carried over into a broader understanding of civic engagement. In some ways, particularly for different forms of political engagement, they are even desirable. Perhaps it is merely an operation of ‘pragmatic functionalism’ to see the value of these aspects of identity arising from these young males’ experiences of sport. Passion, controlled aggression and engaging in physical challenge, for example, may serve to reinforce the status quo around gender and power. However, there are reasonable grounds for arguing that the diverse elements of identity that these young males have derived from their sport experiences do contribute to social change processes as much as any other kind of ‘resistance’ might. Accordingly, a more detailed exploration of contribution and political engagement is addressed in Chapter 8. The second half of this chapter, though, is devoted to an issue neatly linked with identity, that is, an understanding of belonging.
Belonging

A large corpus of health literature (e.g. Berkman and Glass, 2003; Macdonald, 2006; Macdonald, 2005; Wilkinson, 2006; Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003) establishes that a sense of belonging is an important social determinant of health. An equally convincing body of work (e.g. Hall and Banno, 2001; Baills and Rossi, 2004; Townsend et. al., 2002; Ruston, 2003; Sport Canada, 2005; Lawson, 2005) shows that a sense of belonging is also an essential ingredient to understanding civic engagement. The participants in this study cited a range of sources for that sense of belonging, although sport emerged clearly as a factor in the participants’ experiences. Belonging to the team/club/group was an extremely strong theme in their stories. A sense of belonging to the local community because of sport was not as strong as team belonging, but was still evident in the participants’ responses, with the exception of a small proportion who felt like they did not belong to their community because of their sporting pursuits. Without exception, though, was the lived experience that the sense of belonging that these participants felt in their sporting team/club/group was, outside of family, qualitatively different and more deeply felt than feelings of belonging from any other kind of group in which they had been involved (e.g. school, church, work, the pub). For example:

When I’m with guys who I only ride with, who I don’t see at school, it’s like totally different. I’m a lot closer with those I ride with. (Smiley, 17 years)

The atmosphere I’ve got in my gym, I just feel comfortable there because I know I’m there, the regulars are there. Every time I walk in there everyone stops to say hi. (Sonny, 20 years)

Like, you’ve got your group of friends and family. And then, like, you’ve got work. I’ve been working at the same two places for 18 months now, so I’ve got a good group, a network of friends there, but sport is just different, completely different to the rest of it. (Fisher, 21 years)
I feel it sometimes at work. We’re just digging holes in ground that’s like concrete, and there’s encouragement, “don’t be a wuss, suck it in”: just like in footy. But nothing ever compares to out on the footy field and at the training park. At work and in family obviously you feel like you belong ’cause it’s your family but nothing that’s compared to footy. Nothing at all.  

(Pedro, 20 years)

Some of the intricacies of the participants’ sense of belonging are important to explore. Acceptance was referred to regularly, and some that felt they were accepted by their team/club/group even if they were new or different (e.g. in their cultural background) or not as good as other players. What seemed to matter, according to the participants, was that they wanted to play and that they put in the effort. One participant highlighted rugby union in particular for being a sport that was very accepting of everybody:

You just feel in the right place. Like, you feel accepted. I mean, in other sports the fat kid in soccer he’d be left out, he’s not a good player. But a fat kid in rugby, he’s a front rower. He’s one of the hardest working players out there. Or the tall skinny bloke in soccer or any other sport, you’d be like, “nah!” In rugby he’s a winger. He’s tall he can jump over people: line-out! The little bloke that’s fast but not very strong – he can play half back, you know. So, it feels like there’s a place for everyone on the rugby field.

(Pedro, 20 years)

Precisely how they experienced a feeling of belonging varied, but it was often through recognition of their efforts. One of the benefits of sport, according to the participants, was receiving an element of recognition or respect for their achievements. As alluded to in Chapter 6 in discussing the meanings of sport, recognition was a benefit but also a reward. There was a sense that because of the pivotal role of sport in Australia, they were generally valued because of their sport involvement, and often felt that way simply by wearing the club uniform. This belief reinforces the
analysis of Kell (2000:9-10), who argued that ‘Australians are, to a remarkable extent, obsessed by sport … Australians have a powerful belief that sport is one of the few social institutions where everyone gets a fair go’. The validity of this position has been discussed in the literature review, and there is a clear connection between the Australian obsession with sport and the fact that these young males feel a sense of recognition and belonging because of their sporting involvement. At the grass-roots level of sport participation at which these young males engaged, their experiences of being accepted and of accepting others regardless of socio-economic or cultural background, seems to provide an exception to the argument (e.g. Kell, 2000; Hill, 2002, McKay, 1990) that on a global scale, sporting culture has a long way to go to be inclusive and capable of celebrating diversity. It could be proposed that this belief is perpetuated by the process of hegemony (on class, gender or ethnic dimensions), but the stories of the participants were not just verbalising beliefs about acceptance; they were relating their real experiences of it. However, this experience was contingent on the culture of the type of sport or particular club, where some sports/clubs were not particularly accepting and criticism dominated recognition. These positive and negative experiences were discussed in Chapter 6 and will also be further explored in Chapter 8, but were, nevertheless, an integral part of their sporting experience.

Where acceptance and recognition were part of their experience, the self-realisation of having done a good job was also a significant theme. For many, if they had no recognition from anywhere else, they were at least able to be fulfilled by acknowledging their efforts to themselves. Clearly, though, as a factor in their sense of belonging, almost all of the participants were keen for external recognition. They described gaining the recognition and respect of their team-mates (or co-riders in the case of mountain biking) for what they were able to do, such as spectacular jumps and tricks, big tackles, clever tactics, fast times, or unusually strong efforts under adversity. These feats were often met with instant reward, and frequently followed by more expressions of respect after the game:
Yeah, recognition’s a big thing. Praise and recognition’s always good. When we went in the sevens, I was the younger bloke playing in their age group. I actually gained a lot of respect with the older boys ’cause of what I done on the footy field. I didn’t let them down, so I guess in the light of that they know they can rely on me if they need something.

(Mungo, 19 years)

This level of recognition also came from the club, partly in the assignment of weekly awards and end-of-season trophies, but mostly in the general encouragement given out by the coach. This kind of recognition was a key part of their experience. For example:

I still needed acceptance to know that people thought I was good enough. It’s always good to have someone saying, “You’re doing a good job”, because that just makes you feel good about yourself. You know that you’re actually doing something significant.

(Blue, 18 years)

Recognition and respect from non-sporting peers was also a factor. Participants confirmed that, in their high school experiences particularly, being a sportsman signified higher status and a perceived attraction to girls. Pedro, for example, said, ‘you play sport; you’re a good footy player - people talk about you; girls start noticing you more.’ Others spoke more generally about being perceived as skilful or ‘cool’. Rookie uniquely explained that:

It feels good because they think, oh, he’s got a lot of skill and it’d be nice to get into that. And then it makes you feel big, really. That’s the way I feel. It’s pretty fun and people just go “woah”, just seen someone do a jump and go “phwoar”. They think “he rides, he’s cool” or that’s what I hope they say! (Rookie, 15 years)

Further exploration of belonging as a theme in this chapter is concerned with the overlaps and comparisons between sport and a number of other sources of belonging. For example, as has
already been discussed, for almost all the participants family was a significant factor in their sport experiences. There were many references to having been brought up in families that loved sport, and that their pathway into certain sports was the encouragement, invitation or example of a father or brother. A number of participants had strongly positive memories or examples of playing in the same team as a family member (in their cases always a male), which for them heightened the playing experience:

*I want to get my younger brother to play, especially with me cause we got three brothers and the dream was we had when we were younger that we were all gonna play footy together. It looks like me and me younger brother might still play. And I play cricket with my older brother now.*  

(Link, 20 years)

A number of participants also spoke of their families' support for their involvement in their sport, and the way that added to their experience. Family support was expressed in a number of different ways, first through the whole family’s interest or passion in a sport, and through family members being involved in club activities or positions; but mainly through coming to watch and cheer for them when they played or competed:

*I have had a few wins, and yeah, just having family there and everyone watching you, it’s a great feeling.*  

(Sonny, 20 years)

*As a junior it’s a family thing – family/friends cheering you on.*  

(Milo, 23 years)

These experiences underline the importance of family as outlined in the literature (e.g. Worsley, 2005; Atwool, 2002) and show how for these young males, there is a relationship between sport and family in generating a sense of belonging. Biddulph (1997) also comments on the role of significant adult male relationships outside the family in facilitating the transitional stage for young
males, believing that they negotiate the transition to adulthood more effectively with the assistance of male role models beyond the nuclear family.

In this study, participants spoke of sport as an environment where positive relationships were developed with other significant and trusted adults. A number of participants reported that these relationships were integral to their experiences of sport. The adults were usually performing some kind of coaching, managing or mentoring role for the young males, and some adults mentioned were family members, primarily fathers but also uncles and older brothers. Some were high school teachers and or other adults who were members of the local sport club. Another point to note here is that some were older males (sometimes up to 80 years of age) who gained the participants’ respect by playing with or against them in all-age competitions. In all cases the adults of whom the participants spoke were males. This focus was not meant to deny the importance of adult women in their lives, but in terms of their sporting experiences the well-remembered adult relationships were with males. Sometimes the adult was remembered with fondness for a particular motivational quote. Many of the participants reflected on the fact that they had personalised some of those quotes and accredited the adult with having that kind of influence on their outlook or lifestyle. For example:

One always used to say, “If it is to be, it is up to me”. So, talking about the responsibility, and I think that’s one thing. You’ve got to take ownership of your own circumstances.

(Fisher, 21 years)

The category of the adult may have varied but the quality of the relationship with the adult was commonly held as an important part of their sporting experience. Many spoke of the skills that the adult was able to pass on and the values of sportsmanship that they respected. There was an added dimension to these mentoring relationships in that, for some, they seemed to outlast and go beyond the boundaries of the sport experience. For example, as high school students some of the participants remembered a change in the quality of their relationships with high school
teachers after having them as coaches. There was an admission of maturity being a factor in this change as well, but they felt that the shared sporting experience was significant. Furthermore, some participants had since taken on assistant coaching roles with their former coaches, and some had even maintained friendships with former coaches and managers to the point that they socialise together despite a six to eight year age difference. One advantage of this type of relationship, said Maverick, was having an adult to fall back on at times when contacting parents was thought to be unwise or embarrassing:

When I was 14 and 15 I was coached by a bloke and we're still really good friends. I mean, he's like bailed me out of times when I can't ring me parents. Been drunk, and he'll come and pick you up, and he's just, he bails you out. (Maverick, 18 years)

However, many of the participants also reported negative experiences with adults, especially coaches who were over-competitive, unfair, critical and sometimes verbally abusive. Understandably, the participants were not particularly keen to talk about these memories. Interestingly, though, it seemed that they were more likely to associate these kinds of behaviours and relationships with the culture of the club rather than with an individual, whereas for the positive relationships it was the individual that was usually remembered and respected.

Alternatively, the comments of bike riders (unaffiliated with sporting clubs) were not so concerned with the mentoring relationship but did report sometimes having positive interactions with adults who, for example, were amazed at their track-building abilities or pleased that they weren’t involved in drugs or crime. It was often the experience that, as young males they ‘got into’ downhill riding through watching older brothers or other older males doing it, performing jumps and other extreme tricks. Unlike the team/club based sports, though, some bike riders also reported particularly negative relationships with adults, first in terms of adults’ lack of understanding about their extreme sport, but more particularly in experiencing conflict over the positioning and building of tracks and dirt jumps in bush areas where sometimes adults would
destroy things that they had spent months building. Whilst some were able with some disappointment to ‘shrug their shoulders’ and start again, this conflict had the effect for others of simultaneously enraging and demoralising them. That is, they would be angry at those who had ruined their hard work and at the same time not bother trying to rebuild what had been destroyed:

_We didn’t really try to negotiate and since then quite a few riders that ride this particular track have given up on fighting for it really._ (Wheels, 20 years)

These relationships with other adults, both positive and negative, also have an impact on the capacity for broader civic engagement, especially since it is adults with whom the young males would often engage in civic and political processes. It was the case for a number of the participants (particularly the mountain bike riders) that they had attempted to communicate and/or negotiate aspects of their sport with adults, both those in authority and local residents, with varying degrees of success. The social capital discourse (e.g. Putnam, 2000; Waterston, 2004; Winter, 2000; Baum, 1998; Baron et al, 2000) expresses some understanding of this success in terms of trust and reciprocity, where trust between community members is higher there is more social capital. Similarly, where there is a higher degree of reciprocity – that is, an exchange and negotiation around social relationships and civic issues – there is more social capital. According to this discourse, a greater degree of social capital accompanies a higher level of belonging and, hence, of civic engagement. Therefore, in this study, when the participants and adults were able to engage and relate with each other in respectful ways emanating from trust, social capital was enhanced and the likelihood of success increased. This relationship was demonstrated particularly in the mixed experiences of mountain bikers, which is mostly a self-organised sport, although Seippel (2006a) has shown that memberships of any voluntary sport organisation involves social capital that is conducive to generalised trust and political commitment.

Furthermore, the social capital discourse proposes the notions of building, bridging and linking capital which, for the purpose of civic engagement, may involve relationships with adults. For
young people, though, it is more often based on relationships and social networks with other young people. For the young males in this study, peer relationships were an essential source of belonging, and almost exclusively arose in the province of sport participation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, all participants related the experience of positive social relationships as the best part of playing sport.

In terms of belonging, there is a clear indication in the findings of this study that social networks play a very strong role. The relationship between belonging and social networks ties in with the line of thinking articulated by Berkman and Glass (2003), Wilkinson (2006), Wilkinson and Marmot (2003) and Macdonald (2006) that connects belonging and social networks with enhanced health. As has also been discussed earlier, resilience is complemented by the strength of peer relationships and networks. It is through sport that the young males in this study have generated such networks, making sport both a form of belonging and a facilitator of it.

The final aspect of sport that the participants raised in terms of social relationships was the more philosophical point that it was seen as an area of common interest that brought people together who had nothing much else in common. They also felt that sport brings people together by crossing such boundaries as age, language or culture:

*I think that’s another thing that sport offers. That it’s kind of, it could be an escape where people that weren’t necessarily, or would never associate together, in sport they come together and they’ve got something in common.*  
(Fisher, 21 years)

*As a kid I played soccer, where there was mateship/camaraderie as a team sport. As a game it’s played all around the world and breaches language/culture, it brings people together.*  
(Milo, 23 years)
It is vital to note that in their praise of sport’s unifying qualities, none of the participants mentioned breaching gender boundaries, although a number of them had played mixed (male/female) competitions in volleyball, softball, and in male teams in the traditionally female sport of netball. It is difficult to ascertain from their comments what such practices said about the connection between belonging and gender identity. Some social theorists (e.g. Burstyn, 1999; Schacht, 1996; Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) would argue that the absence of comment about breaching gender boundaries exemplifies the way in which sport reinforces male dominance through either excluding women from male sport or through male colonisation of a traditionally female sport. An alternative argument (e.g. Beal, 1996; Pringle and Markula, 2005; Pringle, 2005; Burgess et al, 2003) would be that the participants’ experiences of playing mixed gender sports or traditionally female sports would be an indication of male willingness to engage in activities that did not represent hegemonic masculinity, thereby positioning themselves in conflict with the dominant gender order. It is even more difficult to determine the ramifications of this conflict over gender identity for the participants’ sense of belonging, other than to say that their teams/clubs, friends and significant family sporting experiences that brought about their enduring sense of belonging through sport were predominantly male. The participants themselves, however, did not connect the two aspects of their gender and their sense of belonging, and so it is not clear whether they felt that there was an essential relationship between them.

What was clear was the theme of teamwork. Experiences in team sports, especially in rugby union, produced some very clear praise from the participants about the nature of teamwork and the associated feelings of camaraderie. There was a similar sentiment expressed by mountain bikers in their experiences with co-riders, and also from boxers in terms of their gym (and sometimes even their opponents). The ‘team atmosphere’ was regularly referred to as being an important dimension of their feelings about playing sport, but at times they found it difficult to clarify its meaning. It was certainly tied to the idea of ‘working together to achieve a common goal’ (Milo, 23 years) and helping each other to stay motivated (‘I’ve just go no motivation by myself’ –
Mungo, 19 years). There were elements of respect and accepting diversity, coupled with an intolerance of ‘show ponies’, that is, one player who ‘jumps out of line and wants to do it all themselves - that’s when it all falls apart’ (Maverick, 18 years).

One or two participants articulated a more technical understanding of the combination of roles in their sport that showed how teams work together, for example, in rugby union in the way that forwards and backs have quite distinct roles but have to work together to progress the ball downfield. Underlying the technical aspects, and this awareness came from more than a few interviewees, was the perspective that despite different roles and responsibilities there was an equality amongst players that enabled the building of a team approach when the diverse roles were combined. For these participants this equality was also exemplified by their experiences playing rugby union, although even more deeply felt than the sense of equality was the feeling of being supported by team-mates in adversity. This support is encapsulated in the term ‘camaraderie’:

I feel that the biggest thing I got was that word: camaraderie. If anyone says to me, “why do you love footy so much?” I would say because of that – the feeling that you’re out there and the 14 other blokes on the field are your best mates. You know that if something happens to you, that all of them will be there straight away. And that feeling, you just, you can’t replace that with anything else. (Pedro, 20 years)

There’s definitely people around you that will bust their guts for you. You don’t want to let that person down who’s busting their guts for you. There’s a lot more people in the team that will want to do it for each other than the bloke who wants to be a show pony. (Maverick, 18 years)

Even though this sentiment came out most strongly amongst the rugby players, it was not limited to rugby. There was a clear sense of team work and camaraderie among the mountain bikers as
well, not only in the construction of tracks, but also in their support for, and defence of, each other. A number of them related experiences of being ‘hassled’ by people in the bush or on trains, which highlighted the importance of their ‘team’ support:

You stick up for each other. There’s been a few incidents where guys have decided they don’t like bikes on trains. They’ve decided to kick our bikes and stuff, and so everyone’s just tried to push them away and tell ‘em to go away. Anyone you see that’s getting picked on, and it’s serious, you want to step in. (Smiley, 17 years)

Tying in with these themes around equality, support and camaraderie was the idea that working as a team enabled them to rise above personal conflicts that they may have had with their teammates. The capacity for rising above conflict also related to ideas explored earlier around higher goals, passion and being involved in something bigger than themselves. Being able to put aside conflict for the sake of working together to play the game was something that they said gave them an even more rewarding emotional experience. To give an example, Sonny relates this story of a trip to Canberra to play in a combined team for a rugby tournament:

Our group and their group were meant to combine as a team. And even if they were good guys and we were good guys, ten males and another ten males, it’s hard for them to quickly combine and be best friends. I mean on the bus it all got out of hand and there was punches thrown, but at the end of the day we had games to play. And they had to be played no matter what and the only way we were going to win was by at least agreeing – we don’t have to become best friends, but we had to combine as a team for those particular games. And we done that, and the two guys that had the punch-up ended up scoring a try together. Even though there was negatives, it was still a good feeling to see what happened, what the outcome was. And on the field when they scored that was the best feeling you can get. (Sonny, 20 years)
The findings in this study generally support the literature (e.g. Allison et al, 2005; Seippel, 2006; Cale and Harris, 2005) that describes the positive effect of sport on social-psychological factors such as communication and conflict resolution. Sonny’s above narrative is also a reasonable example of the operation of what Johnson and Johnson (2006) refer to as a superordinate group identity, which is based on pluralistic values, unites diverse personal attributes and makes diversity and conflict within a team a strength through candid discussion of differences and achieving high levels of positive interdependence. Similarly, Maddux (1992) notes that teams will function more effectively when its members accept collaboration as a source of power. When people work together to achieve common goals, despite underlying conflict, they stimulate each other to higher levels of accomplishment. Collaboration builds and reinforces recognition and mutual support, and leads to commitment to support and accomplish organisational goals. The benefits of collaboration are supported by Johnson and Johnson (2006), who report that the more cooperative the team, the greater the productivity, the more committed team members are to each other, and the greater the members’ social competencies. Although Sonny’s narrative does unveil some of the negative aspects of sport such as ego, violence and perhaps even territorialism, the eventual outcome of collaboration also illustrates that dimension of civic identity discussed earlier that requires a certain maturity to move beyond individualism in order to be part of something bigger than the self.

Participants also spoke of camaraderie in terms of having a connection with opponents. This connection is related to sportsmanship/fair play (which is discussed in Chapters 6 and 8), but there were some comments that seemed to imply that going through a shared combative or extreme experience in sport produced a mental/emotional connection even with their opponents. For example:

Just that fact that you’re both doing the same thing; you’re both going for the same path; you’re both motivated to win. I guess there’s only one winner at the end and the fact that you can still support the other opponent when he loses or wins and say, “You’re strong,
you did that right, good luck in the future," especially in a tournament. You give each other encouragement… You’re best mates after you have a bout, before you don’t know each other, you go in there, you compete, you go through hell sometimes, but then afterwards you’re like best mates.   (Sonny, 20 years)

This dimension of the connection seems to extend beyond the notions of respect for opponents and ‘friendly drinks after the game’, and it was a connection that they felt they did not make with other people who had not been through the same experience. The comments came from participants involved in individual sports (e.g. boxing, downhill biking) rather than team sports, but they also gave the impression that the connection was also somehow qualitatively different from the team atmosphere and camaraderie which they had experienced in team sports. That belonging engendered teamwork, camaraderie and ‘sticking up for each other’ was clear in the findings of this study, and these can prove to be valuable assets in terms of broader civic engagement.

One of the more broadly encompassing themes that emerged in the data focused on the participants’ thoughts about their local community, the definition of which was straightforward for some participants but a little more complex for others. For many of them, their first instinct was to visualise their community as the geographical area in which they lived, whether that be a single suburb, the Local Government Area or, on occasion, the broader Western Sydney region. However, in addition to this geographical definition of community, a different understanding of the term related to the people with whom they spent the most time. For example:

It’s probably mostly geographical area, you know. But then again, I suppose in a lot of ways I live in a lot of different communities. Like, I’ve got a church community, I meet lots of people and spend time with lots of different people and different age groups as well and then I’ve got lots of different groups of mates I spend time with, you know, and different areas, different circles and people and friends.   (Blue, 18 years)
When responding to the question about community, other participants also gave similar stories of spending time with people from different age groups, different backgrounds and sometimes different areas. Not surprisingly most of their relational definitions of community were centred on their sport club or team. That their friends were generally from the same geographical area, however, tends to point back to a geographical definition of community anyway. Many of them described their local communities as being sport-focused (or ‘sports-minded’ according to Stretch, 20 years) because of the number and range of sporting opportunities available to them in that area. The presence of a number of definitions leads on to a slightly more intricate understanding of community that is centred on place, and is something of a hybrid of geographical and relational definitions. Milo, for example, said:

*Place is an important thing in sport. For soccer it was the geographic area. For volleyball it was the closest venue to where we lived but people came from everywhere. My idea of community is about place, and about the people – commonalities and social relationships rather than locality*  (Milo, 23 years)

This interplay between the geographical location, the venue, the club and the people with whom they share a common interest or experience provides quite a deeply ingrained sense of community that is inextricably linked with their passion for sport. This link also led many of the participants to speak highly of their local community, although their feelings about their local community were not always positive. In fact, at times they were actually quite the opposite. Apart from noting how sport-focused their communities were, there was a level of disappointment about the way that some people within their communities behaved, and a concern about some of the entrenched social issues within their communities. For example, as noted earlier, some were frustrated at the rudeness of adults who destroyed hard-built bike tracks. There was also almost a sense of disconsolateness when describing differences in wealth and poverty, or overt racism and other forms of social exclusion. Skipper believed that these forms of social stratification were evident in the composition of his local community’s sport club:
Our community is a conundrum. On one hand it is exclusionary, xenophobic and isolationist, yet on the other, welcoming, inclusive, charitable and compassionate. I do not think it is remarkably different to any other suburban community in Australia. It consists of haves and have-nots, multiculturalism, suburban couples and diverse religious groups. This is largely reflected in the players and people associated with the club I play for.

(Skipper, 25 years)

Participants were less forthcoming with experiences of recognition from their broader community. Some felt that their communities appreciated their efforts for the local club (either in playing or in activities like fundraising) as doing so somehow translated into representing the image of the local area. Some noted that their involvement in sport was valued by their communities because they were not involved in a worse alternative. As Smiley mentioned in relation to his mountain biking exploits:

PRETTY MUCH MOST OF THE PEOPLE WE TALK TO - THEY'RE ALL FOR IT. CAUSE THEY COMPARE US TO SOME OF THE OTHER KIDS WHO JUST GO ROUND VANDALISING AND GO OUT DRINKING AND ALL THAT STUFF. THIS IS KEEPING US OUT OF ALL THAT AND DOING STUFF THAT'S ACTUALLY HEALTHY.

(Smiley, 17 years)

Alternatively, a few participants felt that certain clubs or places were not very accepting of them. Being in an unknown gym, for example, left them feeling isolated and unwanted because nobody spoke to them. This isolation also occurred more broadly on the community level, for mountain bikers particularly, where the broader community was distinctly opposed to their pursuits. As Wheels (20 years) lamented, ‘DO I FEEL LIKE MY COMMUNITY VALUES MY PARTICIPATION IN SPORT? 80% OF IT PROBABLY IS NO.’ In the main, though, many of the participants felt that their involvement in sport did to some extent lead to a sense of belonging to their broader community. As the club is usually representative of a local area there was a firm connection between the two. Being visible
to the community whilst playing was also a factor here, especially for sports played on outdoor fields. This visibility also translated into being seen in club colours after a game:

When I played for one club I felt a sense of belonging when we were in team uniform/colours and when we could be identified at the ‘local’ after the game.

(Skipper, 25 years)

Others felt that certain suburbs had particular sports they were more passionate about, and so those that played that sport felt more part of the community than those that didn’t. A factor of geography that inhibited the feeling was if the catchment area of the team/club was broader than the boundaries of a local community, or the community for which it was named.

It would be reasonable to conclude that, however community is defined, the young males in this study mostly felt a sense of belonging to their community. In this way, they fulfil one of the aspects of being civically engaged. According to Worsley (2005) and Atwool (2002), a sense of belonging is a major factor in building resilience for young people and so enhances their capacity to handle adversity and progress through their transition to adulthood. In doing so, they accomplish the development of identity and belonging that are independent of family relationships (Erikson, 1968; Hegel, 1971).

Overall, the findings of this study reinforce the breadth of literature reviewed in Chapter 3, in terms of the relationships between sport, belonging, health and civic engagement. A sense of belonging was derived from several sport-related sources, including the team, the club, the main playing venue, and the resulting social network. However, there was significant diversity as to whether sport participation provided a sense of belonging to the local community. How the combined factors of definition of community, sense of belonging, resilience, identity and independence translate to a capacity for contribution to community and political engagement, as further aspects of civic engagement, is discussed in Chapter 8.
‘Pick up the ball and run’

The previous chapters have so far outlined four of the main themes to emerge from the findings; those being meanings of sport, health and well-being, identity and belonging. There is much in the findings to suggest that not only has sport made a serious contribution to these aspects of the participants’ lives, it has also led to broader civic experiences. This final chapter of analysing and discussing the findings turns attention to two key aspects of civic engagement:

1) Contribution, and
2) Political Pathways.

This chapter will draw on some of the previous discussion and introduce new dimensions to emerge from the study in order to provide a richer understanding of the connections between sport and civic engagement for young males.

**Contribution**

It is reasonably well established in Chapter 4 (e.g. Lopez & Moore, 2006; Ferrier et al, 2004; Eley and Kirk, 2002; Sport Canada, 2005; Calloway, 2004; Hall and Banno, 2001) that a sense of contribution as well as actual contribution were important dimensions of defining civic engagement. Although some of the literature is inconclusive about sport’s influence on this level of engagement (e.g. Morris et al, 2004; Lopez and Moore, 2006), there is a general understanding that sport participation does have an impact on contribution. Indeed, Calloway (2004) found that young people’s contribution through sport was framed on the levels of program design/delivery, training and skill development, and relationships with adult mentors. The findings of this study generally support this framework, and the first part of this chapter explores these intricacies.

In this study, there were several ways in which the participants viewed their style and type of contribution that went beyond team belonging. First, they had an awareness of their contribution
to their club, and the way in which their club involvement contributed more broadly to their local community. Second, there were ways in which the participants contributed to their community beyond the activities of the club, which emerged in their experiences of helping and volunteering. Third, they felt that their values systems and their notions of responsibility and leadership that led to broader contribution and an application to life in general, had developed through their involvement in sport.

In relation to their contribution to the club, many participants spoke of their sport involvement not just in terms of playing, but also in terms of coaching. Their love/passion for sport was usually the motivating factor here, but there was also a very strong theme that it was just as enjoyable to coach as it was to play. For example, one participant stated:

*The training side? Um, I just really enjoy passing the knowledge off to kids and then it’s like, if you teach a move, and then you watch them and they do it perfect and they score a try off it, and then you get a high because you taught them how to do that… It’s like you scored the try with them.*  

(Maverick, 18 years)

Apart from the hint of vicarious satisfaction in this example and one or two others for whom the technical aspect of coaching was an interest, for most of the participants coaching was related to the idea of ‘giving back to the game’. This phrase seemed to mean that because they had benefited from playing (in terms of fun, fitness, social networks, skill development, etc), they also wanted to be able to help others, usually younger boys, to enjoy similar benefits, and was seen by many as a very important aspect of participation in their chosen sports. Whether it was an individual choice or a club expectation was unclear, but this sense of reciprocity regularly emerged. For example:

*If a sport looks after you like my cricket club looked after me, you try and put the effort in.*

*And I do. I’ll put in as much as is expected, probably even more.*  

(Link, 20 years)
There were some participants who also felt that there was value in coaching because of the positive influence it could have on the broader life experiences of younger boys. This feeling is connected to the participants’ own experiences of what they learned from sport and carried over into their general life choices, and so is still related to the notion of reciprocity. For example, as a teenager one participant found a lot of help and support from his team-mates and coaches when his mother died and, as a result, felt that helping people and giving back through his sport was not just enjoyable, but a very important dimension of the sport experience. Similarly, having an influence through sport on lives beyond sport was raised in the context of working with ‘troubled kids’:

I put all the kids through all the adventure stuff, I, well you’re in charge but you also get the opportunity to be a bit of a leader in the kid’s life, be able to direct them for that little hour and a half that you’ve got with them, so I guess there’s that. (Blue, 18 years)

In addition to coaching, some of the participants felt that they contributed to their club in other ways. There were formal contributions, such as joining club management committees and attending club meetings, mainly with a view to developing junior sport. However, meetings had the common thread of losing their interest:

I’ve attended a couple of meetings when my Dad was involved, just like to have a listen to see how it worked, but, um, I think I was a bit young to sort of think it was anything other than boring. (Stretch, 20 years)

Lopez and Moore (2006) did report a positive correlation between sport participation and the likelihood of attending and speaking in meetings. This relationship is not well represented in this study, which more closely reflects other research on the difficulties of engaging young people in formalised meetings procedures (e.g. Saggers et al, 2004; Sercombe et al, 2002; Williamson, 2005; White and Wyn, 2008; Eden and Roker, 2002). Boredom is a commonly reported factor at
this formal level of participation. The lack of enthusiasm for formal meetings and procedures, which tend to be static and verbal, is not surprising given participants’ views and experiences of sport as embodied and active. Informal contributions that the participants described were more to do with attracting other players to their clubs, although a number of the participants felt that they had some small influence on the direction of the club through making comments to their fathers, who were involved as coaches or managers. Whether this was actually the case is unknown (as the fathers were not interviewed), but their perception of this influence was evident.

“Giving back to the game” is a much-used cliché in sporting circles, especially at the professional/elite level, but for the participants in this study it had meaning beyond the hackneyed words. For example, in an informal conversation, Sticks (22 years) proudly exclaimed that “we might get pissed on Friday night but we’ll still get up in time to coach the under 11s on Saturday morning, because it’s important to give back to the game, before our game at 3”. Consequently, there appears to be an innate reciprocity about their forms of contribution that matches with models of social capital. Despite the shortcomings of the many theoretical approaches to social capital (as discussed in Chapter 4), reciprocity – as reported in the literature as a basic ingredient of social capital (e.g. Putnam, 1993) – carries some weight in understanding the participants’ motivations for making a contribution beyond playing sport. The most prominent examples of it in this study related to the club. There is some evidence of a process of reciprocity with the local community as well, although the extent to which their sport participation was a way of contributing to local community is not as clear as the relationship with the club.

On this point, another form of organised contribution was through joining in fundraising efforts, which usually took the shape of selling raffle tickets or chocolates. The irony of selling confectionary to support a healthy activity like sport was not lost on them, but they still saw it as a positive way of helping the club. A number of participants noted a heavy expectation from clubs that players would be involved in fundraising. As a result, for some there was a realisation that through this activity the connections with the broader community are increased, so that
fundraising had benefits not just for the club but also spin-off benefits for the whole community. Activities like car-washing, for example, were seen as a way of meeting a need in the community, and by paying for the service their patrons reciprocally helped them:

> Basically fundraising through sport sort of leads to other community interaction because just to go away for a competition, you have to make money and the community basically helps whether they know it or not, like through getting their car washed or getting a sausage sandwich. (Stretch, 20 years)

Furthermore, as discussed in the previous chapter, there appeared to be for the participants a reasonably strong sense of belonging to their local community based on their involvement in sport. Connectedness to community was clearly related to their sport participation, which led many of them to feel that when they played sport for their local team they were in a way representing their local community, especially when they travelled out of the area. There did not appear to be any evidence of embarrassment (as suggested by Eden and Roker, 2002), despite some ambivalence toward their local area (for example, Skipper calling his local community a ‘conundrum’). It was a recurring thought that wearing the club uniform or playing a game in another area meant that they were representing their community and most seemed to be quite proud of where they came from. For many of the participants this notion of representation broadened into the idea that the playing of sport in itself was their way of contributing to their local community. There were some who were specifically active in non-sporting ways, but the majority offered sport as their main form of contribution to their community:

> For the community it’s good to just try and get people involved in it anyway. I find I get people involved in sports that I know about. I think it’s really important for people to play sport, any sport. (Link, 20 years)
The participants felt that sport enriched their local community, gave younger generations a model for attitude and behaviour, and that their community could be more widely known and well regarded through performance and success in sport. Their participation as players and coaches was seen as a major part of that type of contribution. For example:

*Being involved and playing sport gives you a sort of pride in your community; you want it to be a community known for sport. So, I mean, just to play for your community and make sure they're known as a good sporting side and they can be good players, just to get on the map gives you a bit of motivation.*  

(Stretch, 20 years)

These kinds of response gel with the notion of the social contract referred to in Chapter 3. The young males in this study envisioned the benefits of their contribution to younger sport participants and to younger people in general. This perspective captures the essence of the intergenerational bargain, referred to by Flanagan et al (1999), that is part of the set of mutual rights and responsibilities within which young people connect with, and contribute to, various social structures and the social order. The participants in this study clearly indicated the benefits that they derived from sport, and subsequently the ways in which they have sought to make those benefits available for children and other young people. This contribution through sport was seen as a contribution to community. The mutual benefit inherent in the social contract, therefore, is exemplified and is perhaps another way of understanding reciprocity as a component of social capital. The contract as applied to these forms of contribution (within a values system centred on fair play) is, however, one which appears to maintain the existing social order without necessarily challenging any unfairness on a broader level.

It could therefore be argued, as do Flanagan et al (1999) and Flanagan (2003), that these contributions through sport reflect or reinforce currently dominant culture and ideology, rather than engage in exploring their connection to the polity with a view to changing it. This interpretation would be doing some disservice to the data, however, as the political engagement
themes have yet to be discussed fully and there is certainly some evidence in the participants’ experiences (to be explored later in this chapter) that also supports Flanagan’s (2003) argument that young people can create both stability and change through the ‘social contract’. At either level, it is reasonable to conclude that the young males in this study are, as Flanagan (2003:260) expressed it, reinterpreting their social contract “by actively engaging in community affairs”.

The notions of contribution, as related by the young males in this study, were not what might be expected considering the models of youth participation that generally arise from the youth services sector. For example, those models characterised by inclusion of the already included – as previously described in the works of Saggers et al (2004), Hart (1992, 1997), Dwyer (1996) and Williamson (2005, 2007) – are common within the sector. Of significant difference in this study is the feeling of many of the participants that their contribution to community is largely represented by their sport participation. This understanding of contribution is supported by Smith, Lister, Middleton and Cox (2005) who, rather than focusing on formal organised participation which actually serves to exclude some young people, proposed a constructive social participation model of citizenship that provides room for young people who are constructively active in their communities, but not always in the way that adults tend to perceive the nature of participation. Ferrier et al (2004) also identified that young people generally look for activities that would engage their passions, involve other young people, and where they could see they would have an impact. These characteristics neatly describe the orientation to sport of many of the participants in this study.

Participants’ experiences of contribution to sport, contribution through sport, and broader contribution as a result of sport, also represent the eight steps in Hart’s (1997) model of participation. Even though their contribution was not often to constituted organisations or programs within the youth sector, the young males in this study gave examples of manipulation and tokenism (paralleling steps one to three); being informed and consulted yet not part of an adult’s final decision (matching steps four and five); and adult support for youth decisions and
shared decision-making (representing steps seven and eight). In this study, the participants’ active engagement combined with values of respect gave the impression that they were comfortable with any of the range of participatory models that took them beyond the first three steps of Hart’s model. For example, when provided with decision-making and leadership opportunities the responsibility was willingly taken. Alternatively their respect for coaches, managers and other significant adults allowed them to be satisfied with adult decisions in which they had taken no part.

Coakley (2003) places these aspects of youth participation in the space between adult-controlled and player-controlled sports. He found that the informal player-controlled sports (represented in this study by mountain biking, BMX, or social games of touch football and park cricket, etc) are more amenable to greater use of interpersonal communication skills and higher involvement in participant decision-making, and have important civilising functions not found in adult-controlled sports, although there are difficulties in these sports in that the maintenance of order and the operation of power, prestige and status is sometimes left unchecked. Organised sport, on the other hand, provide a context for players to participate in visible social activities, and to negotiate and manage their relationship with rules, hierarchies and authorities, yet it is possible that it can teach them to be passive recipients without developing critical questioning skills. It has already been shown how the young males in this study have provided insight into their experiences of these aspects of power and control.

To explore further the extent to which the participants’ sport contribution translated to broader community contribution, it is useful to revisit the participants’ experiences of helping. As raised in the previous chapter when discussing identity, there was a very strong sense in the participants’ responses that helping was a key part of how and why they did things. It emerged in their stories of sport, and also in discussing their broader lives, that they looked for opportunities to help others and gained satisfaction from being able to do so. Helping took various forms, and seemed to be viewed as qualitatively different to coaching and contributing to the club in the ways
mentioned earlier. In team sports, many of the participants related stories of helping team-mates improve their skills or their fitness, and consequently improving self-esteem. Those being helped were generally younger players or those who were not quite as fit or skilful as the other players in the team, but still wanted to be part of it:

*I remember when I was playing there was this big bloke, I mean he was really fat. And people would tease him and he’d take it but you could tell it got to him. And I remember the second year when I became Captain I’d hang back with him, and when it came to sprints and stuff, I’d do mine and come back and push him along. And I remember the look on his face when he started to be able to play a full game, when he started to do two whole laps without stopping.*  

(Pedro, 20 years)

This story again reflects many of the dimensions of contribution already discussed (for example, reciprocity, the social contract, and constructive participation models) and, therefore, serves to support the proposition of contribution through sport. Some of the participants felt able to use sporting activities to help others develop or achieve more psychological and emotional goals. Blue, for example, who was an instructor in adventure activities, believed that by taking younger adolescents through a ropes course he was able to help them build their confidence, overcome fears or be instilled with trust and humility. Similarly, Sonny, who was becoming a personal trainer, saw that he was not only training people for their fitness but helping them ‘to feel better about themselves’. It was apparent that, for the participants in this study, sport offered these helping opportunities where they wouldn’t exist elsewhere. Experiences of helping beyond sport included informal efforts of providing support to their friends, but significantly a number of the participants had also moved or intended to move into ‘helping’ careers such as welfare, social work, the police force and the fire service. These career options are discussed later in this chapter when considering the theme of ‘political pathways’.
In describing their experiences of providing help to either individuals or small groups through sport, the participants did not appear to make a conscious connection between the well-being of individuals and any contribution to that of their community, but it is feasible to interpret some broader community benefits as eventual outcomes of their actions. Whilst it never appears to be specifically stated in the literature, it seems to be assumed (acknowledging the operation of class and power differences) that improved individual health will improve social health. Certainly the proponents of the social determinants of health note a reciprocal connection between individual and community well-being. Macdonald (2005), for example, concludes that health is embedded in the social, economic and cultural fabric of people’s lives and that their interaction with, and control over, their surrounding environment is central to the meaning of health. Similarly, Wilkinson (2006) argues that equality, fairness, empowerment and participation in community life lead to improved individual health. The related contention – that improvements in individuals lead to improved community well-being – is not quite as straightforward. Ziersch and Baum (2004), for example, argue that the benefits to the community gained from people being involved in voluntary associations, groups, clubs, and societies should be counterbalanced with the experiences that increase stress, anxiety and conflict and diminish physical health in the individual. In one way this discussion relates back to some dimensions of social capital, in that trust and reciprocity built through quality social networks can be expected to improve both individual and social health. Moreover, much of the social work, community development and health promotion discourse (e.g. O’Connor, Wilson, Setterlund and Hughes, 2008; O’Hara and Weber, 2006; Thorpe and Petruchenia, 1985; Clarke, 2000; WHO, 1986; Zastrow, 1993) implies that people whose quality of life has been enhanced through social networks, skill development and empowerment are in a better position to contribute to broader community well-being.

A different version of helping came out of the mountain bikers’ stories where they related experiences of coming together to help friends in the physical construction of tracks, jumps and ramps. There was certainly an element of fun, camaraderie and team work involved, as well as the capacity to produce a result that they were able to later utilise themselves, so the underlying
approach to participants’ involvement seemed to be a combination of altruistic and self-seeking behaviour. Whilst this involvement was similar to the idea of contributing to the club as described by team sports participants, the mountain bikers were not necessarily in accord as to whether it was a way of contributing to their broader community especially when, as mentioned previously, some members of that same community were unappreciative of their pursuits.

One of the mountain bikers’ experiences is intriguing, in that ‘Smiley’ had in the past been a member of the local bush care group. His concern for the environment was his prime motivation for this involvement, and he has carried these environmental values into his sport so that even though he rides through the bush, he claims to try to take care of it at the same time:

> How do I match it up? Just not go crazy, like cutting down trees and stuff. Like some people make the track and go “whatever’s in the way we’re taking it out” kind of thing, but we try do it bit by bit. So if there’s a tree in the way, we just leave it – go around it. It makes the track more interesting. Try and avoid the native features. Some things you can’t help but most stuff you just go around. (Smiley, 17 years)

This almost paradoxical avenue of participation could be likened to the balancing act discussed in Chapter 7 in relation to young males and gender stereotypes. In a way similar to the participants finding a position that Burgess et al (2003) outlined as the dual role of being enculturated with a dominant ideology about masculinity yet opting for resistance on some aspects of gender identity, Smiley’s position here is one which is infused with a sporting culture that often has little regard for the environment, and yet he resists that disregard by incorporating some elements of bush care philosophy into his downhill biking. In a way this values ‘balancing act’ also relates to Flanagan’s (2003) analysis of the social contract being one in which stability and change can co-exist.

Despite the strong theme of ‘helping’, there were actually very few references in the data about formal, organised volunteering activities. Two participants spoke of volunteering as senior high
school students to help in a peer support program for Year 7 and 8 students. Interestingly, this program for ‘at-risk’ students was centred on sport and physical activity as a forum for being able to get alongside the students and help them to talk over their issues. The participants’ motivation for volunteering was because it was sport (they said that they would have been less likely to volunteer if it was not), and also because they thought that they might be able to help someone. These findings continue to reinforce those aspects of contribution already discussed. Curiously, those participants who had been involved in a community-based youth leadership project did not seem to see their involvement in that project as formal volunteer work either. The project, with rugby union as the medium/parameter, organised and ran community activities and events, but it appears that their focus on the project was on their own passion for sport and the development of leadership skills, and so was not necessarily seen as a form of helping others. Significantly, though, the participants’ responses indicated that, for some of them at least, the commitment to contributing was part of a broader sense of leadership and responsibility that became part of their values systems. Not surprisingly, they indicated that being involved in sport had helped them to develop leadership skills that they felt they wouldn’t have developed in any other way.

_I probably wouldn’t have come into the program but (I mean I like music but I’m not good at any type of music or art) I felt I was good at footy and it was something I knew that no matter anything else no one could take that away from me that. And when it said leadership, like, because I’d been captain and things like that already, a footy program to do with leadership I just thought well this is my thing. So I jumped on it straight away. If it was anything else I would have taken a lot more convincing for me to come for it._  (Pedro, 20 years)

Furthermore, in discussing his effectiveness as school captain, Stretch said:

_I’d have to attribute that to sport as well. Playing on different teams, being an older or more experienced person on teams, I just had to learn leadership skills in how to bring younger guys through, or new players into the game._  (Stretch, 20 years)
Although their thoughts on leadership were quite varied, most referred to it as a ‘responsibility’, in that they were being relied upon to fulfil a particular role, and they felt very comfortable carrying that responsibility. Leadership roles that they identified included helping team-mates to focus and achieve; encouraging, motivating and inspiring team-mates; and being outspoken if necessary (for example, to team-mates and/or referees). There was also the sense that leadership did not always have to come from an appointed leader (coach, captain). Informal leadership roles that provided some on-field direction to the style of play were also acknowledged:

*I had the role of sort-of leader without being captain. In rugby last year I was put in the position of five-eighth, where you’ve gotta direct things and have things going the way you want it. I’ve got to put upon myself to set things up and things like that.*

*(Link, 20 years)*

This variety underlines generally accepted theories on group leadership, captured by Johnson and Johnson (2006), for example, that portray leadership as a capacity to influence others and/or as a role to be shared amongst group/team members, and not necessarily fulfilled by someone in a designated position or office. This more democratic and participatory approach to leadership sits well with the stories of the young males in this study, and even though some of them held leadership ‘positions’ (Stretch was a school captain, Pedro described himself as ‘lucky enough to be captain’, counting it as something of a privilege to hold that role) it also overlaps with their value systems that aspire to democratic participation as a dimension of civic engagement.

As already mentioned the sense of responsibility that came from leadership appeared to be something that the participants were happy to carry. The main point by many of the participants about taking responsibility related to the idea of ‘pulling your weight’. This point applied particularly to team sports, where they saw it as extremely important to take their role seriously, make an effort and ‘not clown around’. There was no question that sport was fun for the participants but that did not equate to making less of an effort than their team mates. This sense
of individual responsibility carried the attitude of ‘not going out there half-hearted’, implying that achieving their goals was the product of expending their own energy. As Fisher (21 years) said, ‘You’ve got to take ownership of your own circumstances’.

For those involved in individual sports such as boxing, athletics or mountain biking, the reality was that there was no one else who could accomplish the task or achieve the goal on their behalf. They alone were responsible for driving their own sport involvement and indeed responsible for their mistakes; as Blue (18 years) said, “I couldn’t see my mate go down for that because I done it and it wasn’t him”. To this sense of individual responsibility there appeared to be a strong undertone of equality and the expectation that, in a team sport particularly, all players would contribute an equal amount of effort even when there was an inequality in skill level. What also emerged was the sense that it would be wrong to expect others to work hard without expecting the same of themselves. Quite a number of the participants, did, however, unabashedly carry this expectation of their team-mates and there was a hint of intolerance about the laziness of others (‘no stuffing around’). This standard led some of them to act as motivators for other players. For example, Blue said, “I just think that you can get a lot more out of pushing somebody sometimes than by just letting them push themselves”.

Further to the sense of individual responsibility was a lesser emphasis on corporate responsibility, which took shape when discussing the way that their team-mates’ behaviour and/or performance reflected on them, but also the way in which a team could work together when everyone understood and took responsibility for their own role, and so for the whole team performance. This dual responsibility flowed over into the themes around camaraderie and defending team-mates in a conflict. For example, Fisher (21 years) said, “I think responsibility is a key value, so everyone’s got their own tasks, and I’m a big believer in if you do the simple things right then things will come in turn”. This theme of ‘responsibility’ provides an opportunity for a parallel analysis with the political/ideological spectrum, and is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.
That sport was a major part of the participants’ lives was undeniable, but sometimes they had difficulty discerning the direction of the learning relationship (that is, sport-to-life or life-to-sport), particularly when sport had been part of their lives from a very early age. This aspect of the research has been raised a number of times in presenting the findings and is central to understanding the experiences of these participants concerning ‘contribution’ as well. Even though many had felt that their participation in sport had fostered in them a certain level of self-awareness, much of the time the transference of learning from sport into life in general has been more subtle. Milo sums up a number of these points by saying:

*Participating in sport has given me skills for being able to apply in other parts of life, for example tolerance, competitiveness (which I mean ‘improving your own game’). It’s a mind set. Also other things in life impact on how you conduct yourself in sports. I don’t think I’ve really made a conscious choice to adopt these values; it’s more picking them unconsciously and internalising them.*

(Milo, 23 years)

Respect was another of these categories. To have respect (for team-mates, the opposition, referees, the rules, and for fair play) in the context of sport meant that participants felt that they were able to also practice respect in their broader lives. This practice translated in a number of ways. For example, they had respect for other people who were part of their world (work, study) regardless of difference, and indeed respected their right to be different even if they didn’t agree with them. Furthermore, there appeared to be a multi-layered element of respect which reflected diverse dimensions of civic engagement, and also related to diverse positions across the political spectrum (as described in Chapter 3). First, respect for rules in sport seemed to translate into respect for government and the ‘laws of the land’. For example:

*In sport, playing fair, going by the rules, usually, it’s not really winning if you have to resort to breaking the rules to win. In life, you don’t want to cheat at anything. It’s not really doing something if you cheat.*

(Mungo, 19 years)
Alternatively, respect for fairness and equality in sport seemed to translate into concerns about discrimination and social justice, at least on an interpersonal level. For example:

_I don’t like, sort of, unsportsmanship, or unfairness in sport. If someone’s getting the blame for something they didn’t do, I like to stick up for them, put in a good word, not bad-mouth them. Outside of sport, when people say things about people and I know different, I’ll say it. And if someone tells me something and I believe them then I’ll stick by them. Definitely._ (Lurch, 19 years)

As outlined in Chapter 6, there was consensus amongst the participants that being involved in sport had significantly increased their confidence and built resilience. This confidence contributed to their civic engagement in a number of ways. They had developed confidence to speak in front of other people, express their opinions, confront those with whom they disagreed, problem-solve by talking through issues, motivate others, speak easily about themselves in job interviews, and to use sporting analogies and metaphors in discussion. With the exception of one or two participants this confidence didn’t really translate to regularly attending or speaking in public meetings, as Lopez and Moore (2006) found to be an effect of sport participation, but the confidence developed through sport had definitely extended beyond it.

The participants were also not as afraid of the opinions of others, or of being in the limelight, which is related to resilience (as discussed previously) but is also connected with the increased sense of control that they had gained. Having more control helped them to feel that they could achieve anything, whether that came from control over equipment (like a mountain bike) or from a position of leadership. Lastly, this area of control and leadership spilled over into having the confidence to take action and to influence the lives of others in their surrounding communities. It was fairly evident that the participants had developed the confidence to offer their opinions, for example in confronting others about issues of discrimination or unfairness, but also to get involved in other types of action for which they wouldn’t have had the confidence in the past. For
example, with acute self-consciousness, Blue (18 years) said, “If you’re secure in yourself or have a bit of security in yourself, you want to be around somebody or you like feeling accepted or important, like you mean something in an area”.

Having explored the theme of contribution, it can be seen that the range of forms of ‘contribution’ exhibited by these participants, together with the discussion on ‘identity’ and ‘belonging’ in the previous chapter, provide clear examples of the way in which sport has played a role in this dimension of civic engagement. The steps from contributions to sport, contributions through sport, and broader community contributions as a result of their learning from sport, lead to the conclusion that in a number of ways the young males in this study have been able to see beyond themselves to the concerns and needs of the broader society. This higher order thinking is consistent with Hofer’s (1999) principle of transcendence, defined as ‘the ability to think about societal principles in abstract terms and to relate themselves to principles of the society in general’ (1999:124). It is a process of transforming concrete experiences into abstract concepts through involvement in community activities and interacting with people who represent distant but significant parts of societal structures. There are sufficient instances in the participants’ stories to argue that this process has occurred in many of their cases, and that they have taken an opportunity to reflect on stereotypes, compare situations and realise their good fortune, and for some to search for the structural causes of these differences in social/economic status. There is certainly the capacity in their case for engaging in a reflective process to understand and connect their own experience with structural issues like inequality, justice and responsibility. Whether that capacity emerges in actual forms of political engagement is the substance of the following discussion, captured by the theme ‘political pathways’.
Political Pathways

The final theme emerging from the findings of this study relates to the potential, and reality, of sport participation being a pathway to political engagement. It is important to indicate at the outset of this discussion that there is no intention to favour any particular political position, and that any form of engagement with the political/ideological spectrum and political processes is considered relevant and a key dimension of civic engagement. The literature discussed in Chapter 3 provided some clarity about the connections between sport and political engagement but also left some questions unresolved. For example, there is the ongoing discussion of sport being an agent for the reflection of, reinforcement of, or resistance to dominant social values, ideologies and structures. As mentioned in the literature review, sport participation is a predictive factor in many dimensions of civic engagement, with particular reference to belonging and contribution. However, there are contradictory findings about the role of sport in political engagement, especially in the context of political diversity. Furthermore, the problem remains that sport does not seem to adequately address social inequity and exclusion (e.g. Coakley, 2003; McPherson et al, 1989; Rowe, 1995; Light and Kirk, 2000; Pringle, 2005), although there is still support (e.g. Lopez and Moore, 2006; Canada25, 2005; McFarland and Thomas, 2006; Donovan et al, 2004; Maclean, 2000; Black, 1998) for the idea of sport being a pathway to political engagement, social activism and resistance. The findings of this study mirror aspects of this literature, but they also provide some complexity that has not already been addressed in existing research.

The first area of discussion on political engagement revisits the participants’ thoughts on responsibility. As mentioned earlier, some participants related that being involved in sport had helped them to develop leadership skills that they wouldn’t have developed otherwise, and that they were comfortable carrying the associated responsibility, whether that was in designated leadership positions like captain, or by otherwise fulfilling leadership roles by influencing others. The progression to leadership through sport participation, demonstrated by the participants in this study, provides a pathway to democratic participation that circumvents some of the problems outlined by Saggers et al (2004), who point out that the participatory process is often overtaken
by school leaders. Donnelly and Coakley (2002) believe that the development of sincere leaders and mentors is one of the conditions by which sport is more likely to promote social inclusion. This area of leadership and mentoring overlaps with the notion of responsibility. In this study, there was a common theme throughout the participants’ stories that disclosed a value system incorporating ideas of both individual and corporate responsibility, which carried across both individual and team sports. There was a sense in the data that the ability to take responsibility for their actions was a prerequisite for the ability to take broader responsibility. For example, as Blue (18 years) noted, “If you can’t take responsibility for your own actions then you can’t take responsibility for anything. If you can’t look after yourself how are you going to look after something else?”.

Resonating with the classification of citizenship by Westheimer and Kahne (2004), participants’ comments clearly show an embodiment of the personally responsible citizen, whose core assumptions are that to solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character, be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community. Second, there is a demonstration of the participatory citizen, whose core assumptions are that citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures. There are also some responses that exemplify the justice-oriented citizen, whose core assumptions are that citizens must question, debate, and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice.

This classification draws in some analysis of a political/ideological spectrum. Easthorpe and White (2006), Thorpe and Petruchenia (1985) and Payne (2003) all identify that a politically conservative (right wing) position places strong emphasis on individual responsibility for well-being and advancement, with the extreme position being that if people have a problem within society, then the blame lies with them alone. Alternatively, a politically radical (left wing) position emphasises social responsibility and structural causes for personal problems. The idea expressed in these data of people being individually responsible for their own actions and their
own development does have some undertones of a more conservative political position. Alternatively, the values that relate to a shared or corporate responsibility move more to the left along the political continuum. The fact that the participants in this study felt comfortable in seemingly holding both positions places them in something of a contradictory position, but is again reminiscent of the social contract (Flanagan, 2003) being an opportunity for stability and change. There is reasonable evidence in the accounts of their experiences to make this connection, even though the participants themselves did not consciously articulate it. Similarly, there is a parallel with Hofer’s (1999) description of transcendence where young people make ‘fundamental ideological commitments regarding social and political needs’ (1999:202). An understanding of this process also emerges later in the chapter as the discussion enters the realm of the participants’ concerns over various social issues.

Another relevant area in this study is related to the participants’ ideas about respect. As mentioned earlier, for some of the participants, their respect for the rules in sport seemed to translate into respect for the ‘laws of the land’. Other participants spoke of learning to be disciplined through sport, in terms of ‘shutting my mouth’ when they felt that a referee had made a mistake, but also in terms of working without getting distracted. For example, Lurch (19 years) said, “I think about the discipline and stuff in sport in the way I think about work or with everything I try and do”.

Pedro, on the other hand, commented that his respect for the law came more from his upbringing rather than any learning or application he may have made because of sport, although his desire to help others see the point of keeping laws was also influenced by a commitment to fair play and sportspersonship. Helping has emerged as a regular theme throughout this study as something that the participants carried from sport into general life, and this transference also has connections to political engagement. Their motives for helping were multidimensional, primarily related to the desire to make a difference in their world, but also incorporating a number of other motives, such as a concern for integrating newcomers into a community; some despair about
friends and teammates that they had been unable to help; and the development of a more political consciousness that making a difference might contribute to broader social change.

This range of motives is consistent with Pancer and Pratt (1999), and other research cited by Yates and Youniss (1999) who argue that there are three factors that may initiate action as opposed to socially concerned thinking. These factors can be seen in the experiences of the young males in this study. They have demonstrated instrumental factors, where their helping and participation has given them something in return; social influence factors, where their involvement has arisen from the urging of others; and religious factors, where they show commitment to personal, religious or moral values. Religious factors, according to Pancer and Pratt (1999), are not solely the domain of organised religion – and so in one way it is a misnomer – but includes political/ideological values as well. One of the major values that all participants exhibited was that of fair play. These notions of fair play and sportspersonship have a number of implications for political identity and political socialisation.

All the participants in this study had an awareness of, and commitment to, fair play/sportspersonship despite the fact that the value was not always shared by opponents, teammates, coaches or clubs. The attitudes of effort, respect, teamwork, encouragement, playing to the best of one’s ability, and disowning a ‘win at all costs’ mentality were all highly rated. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 6, participants saw that fair play contained two complementary explanations: playing by the rules of the game and playing within the rules of the game. These dual approaches implied the sense of following the rules precisely, or alternatively that the rules were boundaries outside of which certain actions were not fair. The similarities between these values and approaches to social justice are important in understanding the potential for political engagement. Even though the ‘helping professions’ do not have exclusive ownership of the term, discourse in the social work literature (e.g. Payne, 2005; O’Connor, Wilson, Setterlund and Hughes, 2008; O’Hara and Weber, 2006; Thorpe and Petruchenia, 1985) demonstrates that the understanding of what is judged to be fair or unfair is basic to most
conceptions of social justice. It is concerned with, for example, redressing the proliferation of disadvantage, inequality, exclusion and unsustainable development. There is a commitment to broad-based participation, empowerment and advocacy, sustainability, redistribution of resources based on rights and needs, and the analysis of the structural causes of social problems. The personal commitment to such a wide-ranging position is one that develops over time, but the rudimentary basis for intervention, according to O'Hara and Weber (2006), begins with personal values such as helping and fairness.

Because fairness was central to the experience of sport, the absence of fairness (whether real or perceived) in their sporting experiences was a particular source of frustration for many participants. This feeling was described in a range of instances. For example in team selections or decisions/priorities of club administration, Skipper (25 years) reflected that “The idea that all players are picked fairly and based on performance is naïve; however as a value it is not always translated into practice”. Another area of frustration surrounded the experience of mountain bikers when people destroyed their tracks and jumps. The frustration came from having put what was sometimes months of effort into designing and building a track only to have it ruined by other people. Their reactions against this perceived injustice ranged from a fatalistic shrug of the shoulders, through rage, to despair. These emotions give insight into the nature of their passion, which is another important area for interpreting political socialisation.

The participants’ passion for sport has already been well established. Based on a range of factors that included health and fitness, social networking, intellectual rationale, time, commitment to ensuring fair play, and the controlled aggression with which they engaged in their sports, their passion was a strong source of meaning, identity and belonging. The implication for civic engagement is in the young males’ capacity to harness that passion for issues of a more social and political nature. Ferrier et al (2004) clearly identify that young people seek civic activities that engage their passions, involve other young people, and where they can see that they would have an impact. Canada25 (2005) argues that political engagement in young people is related to their
self-defined passion without being aligned to any particular political persuasion (e.g. social change or social control). Furthermore, McFarland and Thomas (2006) found that, in teenage years, participation in civic activities and voluntary associations (including sports-based organisations) is an indicator of political engagement in adult life.

There was a fusing of passion, controlled aggression and working hard in the way that the participants approached their sports, that also has significance for civic engagement. There is a theme in some of the political science discourse that links passion, drive and controlled aggression with idealism in the pursuit of political goals. Noted historical figures such as William Wilberforce, Mahatma Ghandi, Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr and Nelson Mandela are often cited as exemplars in this regard. Emihovich (2005) emphasises that shaping a more just and equitable society for the future essentially requires imagination and passion. On a more analytical level, Hall (2005, 2007) proposes that engaging in democratic debate through the privileging of calm, rational discussion over passionate speech only reinforces and reproduces inequalities of gender, race, and class. The marginalising of passion in conservative politics, she argues, ‘fosters apathy, passivity and privatism among citizens; it reduces the conditions for citizen involvement in public life ... it blunts the key force for improving political life’ (Hall, 2005:37). Walzer (2004) concurs, saying that the act of opposing social structures and political orders that reproduce inequality requires a political struggle driven by a passionate intensity of engagement, the neglect of which makes the struggle against inequality more difficult.

This literature appears to align reason – sometimes referred to as ‘deliberative democracy’ – with conservative politics and morals, and passion with the more agitative politics of social justice and activism. In this study, however, the participants’ passion was directed towards sport and not necessarily tied to a political/ideological position. Values concerning fairness and discrimination were balanced with values about individual responsibility. Notions of change were equally present with notions of stability. Furthermore, passion was sometimes joined by a rational/technical enthusiasm. These experiences more closely resemble Bufacchi’s (2005) analysis, which
advocates a political engagement that sanctions both rational debate and emotional drive. He argues that even when people are motivated by their sense of justice, if they are “vulnerable to self-regarding passions, they often fail to act upon the principles of fairness or impartiality” (2005:25). Therefore, there is an impetus for political engagement (whatever the politics) to be guided by both rationality and passion.

There was little in the data to suggest a connection between controlled aggression and violence, which adds complexity to an understanding of civic engagement. As noted earlier, Whyte (1999) found that even with politically motivated young people in Ireland there was little connection between political ideation and violence, although he felt that political apathy ‘leaves a vacuum ready to be filled by the politics of violence’ (1999:175). Alternatively, Barber (1999) found with youth involved in the Palestinian Intifada that their violent actions (e.g. stone-throwing, barricade-building and tyre-burning) were motivated by their political awareness and was indicative of their intense drive to redress oppression and inequity. She argues that long-term oppression, galvanised into collective action, was an indication of young people’s capacity for sustained resistance. None of the participants in this study had experienced long-term religious or cultural oppression, and so, according to Barber’s (1999) analysis, they would not be expected to be so highly driven to political extremism. Nor were any of them apathetic about social issues, although there was variation amongst the participants as to the extent of their political enthusiasm. They were emotionally motivated and committed to their sporting interests and yet, as noted in the previous chapter, their passion and controlled aggression did not exclude fair play and sportsmanship. Their sense of fun, meaning and identity in sport was derived from the combined operation of all those factors. As such, and as passion is a contributing factor in voluntary civic participation, active citizenship and political engagement, there is clearly a basis for anticipating broader political engagement from the participants in this study. However, as Pancer and Pratt (1999) acknowledged, there is a difference between potential and real participation in terms of political engagement. The plethora of skills that these participants had transferred from sport to life – including self-confidence, verbal confidence, less fear, control, responsibility and leadership
– all point to the potential for political engagement, but what points to the actual engagement emerges in considering the participants’ reflections on how sport has influenced a number of different dimensions of their lives, including their changed perspectives, passion, emerging political awareness, resistance to club culture, growing concern about certain social issues, and planned career paths.

A number of participants noted that they had experienced a change of perspective or learned something, not directly through playing sport, but through observing the behaviours and lifestyles of team mates with whom they had played. As mentioned previously, a number of participants had chosen to pursue careers/life directions as a result of earlier sport involvement. Those who were embarking on civically engaged careers reflected on friends/team mates whose lives had been affected by alcohol, other drugs or crime, and found that their views had changed, sometimes through their own reflection, involvement in community projects or through further education. This changed perspective is captured well by Pedro, who said:

At first I was like “anyone who breaks the law chuck ‘em in prison – they don’t deserve a second chance”. But you change your thinking, you open your eyes. A lot of people say too many police officers have that mentality. I was like that at first but my views have changed now.  

(Pedro, 20 years)

This changed perspective to which sport contributed also emerged in the idea that a number of participants began to see themselves as ‘part of something bigger’ than themselves. The idea that sport enabled them to look beyond themselves to a bigger picture is crucial to understanding their emerging civic identity. In the experience of volleyball player Milo (23 years) it was related to the idea of representing your area, getting to see more of life, and doing things for a reason. For Blue (18 years), being involved in adventure and extreme sports paralleled a more symbolic (almost spiritual) story of the ‘adventure of life’ and the journey/battle that men have to face. He
said, “They’re drawn to something that’s bigger and better than themselves, that they want to be, they want a cause to fight for, they want a battle to fight, and every bloke does”.

This capacity for big-picture thinking is an integral feature of civic identity and, with the outworking of altruistic motives, it presents an example of the beginnings of the shift from potential to actual engagement. Pancer and Pratt (1999) argue that civic identity can be identified by a sense of connection to those outside an individual’s circle coupled with a sense of obligation to help. The socialisation process – which is ‘grounded in doing and leads to habitual practices’ (Yates and Youniss, 1999:6) – is seen in the participants’ experiences of connecting with and questioning the bigger world through their ‘everyday lives’ (Wray and Flanagan, 2007:2) that are filled with sport. Many proponents of critical thinking and lifelong learning (e.g. Freire, 1970; Adams, Dominelli and Payne, 2002; Allan, Pease and Briskman, 2003; Brookfield, 1987, 1986) would say that this capacity for critical reflection or ‘praxis’ emerges from the everyday experiences in which people find themselves.

The move toward critically reflective thinking by participants in this study was also accompanied by an emerging political awareness. With the exception of one or two participants who were not interested in politics, it appeared that generally their political awareness had increased through (or at least at the same time as) their sport involvement. Many put this growth down to sport-related experiences, although some attributed it to their ‘world getting bigger’ from attending university or simply maturing rather than anything to do with sport. The political awareness that is part of an intellectual/emotional dimension of civic engagement emerged in a number of ways, although a general principle was captured by Milo (23 years), who said that “Participating in community life means living life and being part of things for a reason”.

Another aspect of this growth related to the emerging passions of the participants as they matured and progressed further in their sporting experiences. Learning more about nutrition, for example, led one young male to be quite vehement about the need to address availability of food.
in schools. Another was animated about drugs in sport (and drugs in general), and another was passionate about the role of umpires in weeding out cheats. These examples demonstrate a growing engagement in thinking and talking politically, that they themselves said had come about because of their sporting involvement.

A different variant was related to a growing awareness of local power relationships. Several participants cited examples of observing or experiencing local conflicts between young people and adults, either related to community safety (for example, graffiti on clubhouse walls, vandalism in sporting fields and car parks, and some street violence) or the use of public space (for example, congregating on street corners or making bike tracks through the bush). Another aspect of their awareness of local politics came through club management committees where, as Skipper (25 years) noted, 'justice and fairness are frequently set aside for personal gain within the organisation/group/committee'.

Awareness of local government had increased to some extent, particularly for the mountain bikers whose attempts to build tracks had been over-ruled by local councils. Two differing outcomes resulted from their experiences. The first amounted to some form of tacit arrangement between the opposing groups which meant that mostly the tracks were untouched if they were not blatantly destroying the native environment. Bikers, council workers, and sometimes bush care groups had then been able to greet each other civilly upon chance meetings in the bush. For example:

\begin{quote}
I've rode past the council workers once or twice. You generally say hi and wave; everyone's friendly out there. Bush Care – we talk to them now. They're alright with it but I don't think they know that we're cutting holes in the fences. (Smiley, 17 years)
\end{quote}

The second reported outcome was less positive and resulted in growing anger between opposing groups, banning and destruction of tracks and jumps, and either an ongoing civil disobedience by bikers continuing to build, or an ensuing loss of heart. For example:
The council have approached us various times and just told us to stop building, and announced a “notice of closure to Jump Site”. We didn’t really try to negotiate and since then quite a few riders that ride this particular track have gave up on fighting for it really.

(Wheels, 20 years)

There was a less well developed awareness of State and Federal government political processes, but it was still present. For some, their involvement in sport had made them aware of other health-related issues, which in turn led them to find out more about government priorities on the issue. As an example, Sonny’s passion about nutrition had seen him place the issue in a broader political/economic context:

You go to the canteen now and you buy a sandwich for six dollars and there’s a pie for three dollars with tomato sauce. I mean, you can buy a pie with a coke instead of having that sandwich with water. Marketing, prices and food, and they’re trying to make us healthier but you don’t see the healthy snacks dropping down. (Sonny, 20 years)

The findings of this study support the argument of Manning and Ryan (2004) that, whilst young people do not have an in-depth understanding of parliamentary politics, their concern about a range of political issues has increased. The participants in this study pin-pointed a range of specific social issues that were of concern to them, some being of local orientation and some being more broadly applicable. Some of the issues had come to their attention through their sport involvement, and some through general community life. The most commonly identified issue was related to the harmful effects of alcohol and other drug use. Some identified recreational use of alcohol (and to a lesser extent cannabis) as a behaviour that is accepted, or at least overlooked. Some, however, had friends whose playing performance, and subsequently quality of life, had been adversely affected by cannabis use and/or binge drinking:
I know a lot of blokes that were really good footy players. Now they’re too busy drinking, smoking, doing drugs on the weekend, and when it comes to sport they ‘just have a good time’ and they stay at one level, they don’t want to succeed. (Pedro, 20 years)

These experiences made some of the participants quite adamant about avoiding the same pitfalls and produced in a number of them a ‘zero tolerance’ attitude towards drugs. There was a particular antipathy towards tobacco, with the use of some very emotionally charged and value-laden phrases to describe their attitudes about smoking. For example, ‘it is so disgusting’ and ‘mate, that’s wrong’. Link (20 years) was unequivocal in his intolerance:

I hate the smoking thing. I was young and heaps of my mates would offer me a smoke, and I’d say ‘no’ the first couple of times and they’d look at me and offer me again, and I’d say, ‘Mate, you’re joking aren’t you?’ I’ve never been offered a smoke since. I’ve been vocal about things like that. When I was 10, I went with Dad and bought a ‘No Smoking’ sign, walked inside and whacked it on the front door. It’s still there now and that is fair dinkum, no joke, it’s there now. That’s how much I hated it and I still hate it now.

Issues of community safety were also identified, primarily graffiti, vandalism and bullying (both in school and on the street). There was a frequently expressed opinion that anti-social behaviour, for want of a better term, had become worse in the few years since these participants had left high school, and was also being perpetrated by younger people. Whether this was actually the case is hard to determine, but the feeling was evident in the responses:

The way younger kids are getting. They’re shocking, they hang out at Maccas, all the younger kids these days they’re getting worse. Like, somehow, all the young high schoolers, they’re all a bit too big for their boots ….when I was younger we were all just smart arses, now they’re doing some really bad things. (Mungo, 19 years)
It is difficult to pinpoint a particular political position they have taken on issues like these, given that this comment reflects a familiar generational discourse and the extent to which it represents a true belief or a parroting of this discourse is difficult to determine. Within these constraints, it can be argued that this perceived ‘zero tolerance’ attitude may be more commonly associated with a conservative ideology that places the responsibility on the individual. What is clear is that the participants have at least engaged in broader thought about the issue and feel that some kind of action needs to be taken. A number of comments emerged expressing concern for environmental issues, most notably about ‘caring for the bush’ among a few mountain bikers. Climate change, ecologically responsible development and other environmentally sustainable practices (although not in that language) were mentioned by one other participant as being issues that would probably motivate him to local action.

There were some particularly strong opinions about the education system, and were mostly concerned with finding a way to accommodate the learning needs of children with lower academic abilities. Some participants felt that the school system needed to change to allow for highly active boys to learn without having to sit still for long periods of time, and one participant, Blue, had dreams of one day starting his own school that incorporated his love of outdoor/adventure sports. Others felt that exit points from high school need to be better addressed, with more careers advisors helping students with choices about leaving school in Year 10, 11 or 12, and there being some kind of program within the school that helps students find jobs if they are not coping with academic demands of higher level schooling. For one participant, Sonny (20 years), this recollection led on to deploring the youth wage and how lower incomes contribute to the lesser status of young people in society. These were quite sophisticated ideas in that they began to make a link between human need, appropriate intervention and meaningful social policy.

A number of participants felt strongly about tolerance and inclusion, which emerged in the repetition of the rhetoric about the unifying capacity of sport. For example, Milo (23 years) contended that “soccer is a game that's played all around the world and breaches language/
culture. It brings people together.” Comments such as Milo’s, and others in the same vein, do betray a naiveté in terms of the often divisive actions of football fans and players, particularly, as Hallinan and Jackson (2008) point out, given that sport often does not provide a level playing field in terms of cultural diversity. This particular element of the data was clouded by ideological rhetoric about sport. Most of the participants were from an Anglo-Australian background and had not personally experienced discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity, although they personally spoke of aiming to include team-mates who were different to them. However, it is also fair to say that neither of the two participants who were from a culturally diverse background reported any experience of race-based discrimination. Similarly, being male, none of the participants had experienced exclusion because of their gender. Some had felt overlooked by coaches who didn’t think their skill level was high enough, but as indicated in Chapter 7, many spoke of sports in which there was a role for anyone irrespective of body shape. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 6, many of them spoke positively of being in, or switching to, sports and clubs that placed belonging and participation above the ‘win-at-all-costs’ mentality. Without trying to generalise too far, it does appear from the data that, despite the global and structural associations between sport and exclusion outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, the young males in this study had not been aware of the existence of such factors at their grass-roots level of sport participation. The actual existence or otherwise of these factors can not be determined here, but clearly the participants’ rhetoric about unity illuminates their values concerning the positive benefits of sport to society.

Overall, there didn’t seem to be any indication that the participants were overtly swayed by friends or family to adopt concern for any of the aforementioned social issues. They seemed mostly to have integrated it into their own personality/identity, although parental and peer influence must be acknowledged as a factor in that integration process. It did not seem to matter to them whether their peers or family held the same perspectives and, for someone like Link, the attitude on an issue like smoking was contrasted with that of his family members. What appeared to matter was their own resoluteness, and their sense that they could possibly influence others.
This specific finding made it difficult to ascertain any other sources or pathways of their political socialisation, but did reflect their understanding of leadership and influence - situations which for many of the participants had developed through sport.

In terms of ‘influence’, there was still a range of responses about taking action on their chosen issues. Their sport involvement was often a strong determinant in taking these directions or in any broader politicisation but, as mentioned earlier, for many of the participants, the confidence to speak out or act had been developed through their participation in sport. These courses of influence resemble the elasticity of goal-driven action proposed by Budd (2001). Participants such as Lurch, for example, described his preference for holding personal concerns without taking further action. This position would be classified by Budd (2001) as a private goal (ingrained in existing social relations and therefore not a form of resistance but of reinforcement). Participants such as Link and Blue were vocal about issues and attempted to take some individual action to address them, aiming to influence family and surrounding peers. These would be public goals (not necessarily intended to advocate broad social change, opposed to the existing social system in some way, but non-transformative). There was no sign in the participants’ past and present experiences of collective goals (which involve deliberate strategies intended to lead to social change) but there was an indication of planned future action from participants such as Sonny (on food policy) and Blue (on education), and the pursuit of formal study, oriented toward social action to create change, from participants such as Fisher and Milo.

The range of goals demonstrated by the young males in this study, both current and intended, is also captured by White and Wyn’s (2007) continuum of minimal and maximal citizenship. Some participants had opinions yet had no intention of taking broader action, either because they felt that there was no need, or no point in doing so. This type of position could be considered as falling at the minimal citizenship end of the continuum, although there is a danger in automatically assigning those who do not wish to engage in action to minimal citizenship. They may well be politically engaged but more oriented towards actions which maintain the status quo. Other
participants were consciously aware of their contribution to society and their role in a democratic culture, and had experienced degrees of political socialisation (conceived of by Whyte (1999:156) as 'the process through which young people become aware of how power is distributed in society and acquire their orientations and patterns of behaviour as citizens'). These positions are more aligned with the maximal citizenship end of the continuum, which White and Wyn (2007) say is developed through critically reflective thinking combined with situations where young people are given roles in the organisations in which they participate.

The young males in this study had reported being given concrete roles in their sports, teams and clubs (for example in captaincy, coaching, mentoring and fundraising), and it is clear from their interests and analyses of diverse social issues that many of them had developed a capacity for critical thinking, in the manner described by White and Wyn (2007), although not all the attitudes/opinions expressed by participants were indicative of critical reflection. Furthermore, not all of the participants were deliberately engaging in action on social issues which, despite their ideations or aspirations, seems to reinforce Eden and Roker’s (2002) finding that young males are significantly under-represented in involvement in social action. Similarly, Lopez and Moore (2006) found that while young female sport participants were more likely than female non-participants to boycott a product or service, there were no significant differences for young males. In terms of signing petitions, neither female nor male sport participants showed a significant difference from non-participants.

This absence of current direct action leads to the discussion of how political awareness progresses into political action. In this study, responses diverged into three perspectives that resemble different locations along the political/ideological spectrum. The first perspective was that expressing an opinion about an issue was a sufficient response without needing to take practical action. For example:
Oh, big headlines and stuff, like big world headlines, the war in Iraq and something like that I'd listen to. I like to have an opinion about that and let people know about that, but to be honest with you I don't really go out looking for all that political sort of stuff.

(Lurch, 19 years)

The second view was that the government and laws should be respected and enforced rather than changed. For example:

Once you learn to play by the rules and play fair and that sort of thing, then you sort of learn to apply it in the community. Like, you don't want to break the rules in the game, you don't want to break them outside of the game, just in life in general sort of thing. So I think you become more sort of law-abiding and more aware of laws and rules because they've been enforced in your life so much for your sport.  (Stretch, 20 years)

The third position was based on the feeling that a lot of laws and government decisions are 'stupid' and need to be opposed. Although the following quote is long, it exemplifies this third position and its length is necessary for retaining the richness of the text:

Oh, personally...screw...as far as political stuff goes it's all got out of hand. You can't achieve what used to be achieved because you're not allowed to. All the safety procedures for adventure stuff is OK but when kids go to the park and play on the equipment and go on the swing and there's mum and dad saying, “Don't do that! Don't climb that tree, you know, you might get hurt, you know, don't do that!” or “Quick, that's dangerous, there's a bit of rust, too dangerous, ring up the council, my kid tripped over on the step, you know, we're going to sue you. My kid got hurt because of your negligence, because you didn't do it good enough.” Instead of saying, “Well, mate, pick your foot up a bit higher next time. Hang on harder. Learn from it.” It's this sorta stuff that has killed the imagination and I think that is very much political. At least 99 per cent is the fault of the
government because of rules and regulations and things like that, and because the state law has sections in there that if you hurt yourself and you can blame it on somebody else instead of taking responsibility for yourself. I think our government structures and systems and stuff at the moment is teaching us to pass on to somebody else, you know, it's somebody else's fault. (Blue, 18 years)

On the more practical dimension of civic engagement, there were several key contexts in which these young males were able to express their contribution. The first and most obvious has been through their team/club in fundraising, and promoting local sport. For many, though, their engagement first began to emerge in high school (in mentoring, peer support, helping with younger sports teams), which was also where their sport participation was highest. It was at this stage, too, that a number of the interviewees participated in a sport-based leadership development project, which provided opportunities to organise community events, get involved in mentoring, and provide some input to the management committee of a local Non-Government Organisation (NGO). Many of these young men reported that if leadership were not combined with sport, they would have had no interest in participating.

The different types of action in which the participants engaged were also diverse. Some referred to instances of stating their opinions in order to influence family and friends (for example, for a friend’s brother to complete Years 11 and 12 at school, or buying a “No Smoking” sign for the family home). Others recounted experiences of having volunteered at youth centres and undertaken field placements as part of their social work/welfare training. Finally, some spoke about joining committees at school, local community or their sports club. However, there were some barriers identified to taking action. Time was a major factor, for the same reasons that it constrained their post-school sport participation. For some the motivation was present, but a lack of awareness about how and where to get involved was a major factor. A third barrier that they identified related to a perception about the local community’s apathy about social issues:
The thing that I’ve found is that a lot of people don’t know about the type of things, the types of help they can get. All they have to do is walk in to a centre and just have a chat for half an hour once a week or something, and they start learning about different things and they start learning about how many events that are around that nobody knows about because they just, I don’t know because they don’t have time, they can’t be bothered.

(Pedro, 20 years)

One revealing barrier that some participants identified was a feeling that, even though they were passionate and knowledgeable about some issues, they felt that they were not yet able, qualified, prepared, or old enough to engage in practical political action. This barrier meant that for some, the depth of their civic engagement seemed to be limited by their self-perception. For example:

Yeah, I’d like to get into it but later on. I think at the moment they wouldn’t listen to me, but, yeah, if I get my business going really good, you know. I feel that it will be good, and in five years, build up my business, the more you’re helping out people the more you can say your stuff and the more you can spread your word out too, you know.

(Sonny, 20 years)

For others, like some of the bike riders who once had an engagement in the life of their community, now because of negative experiences they had lost interest in any of the related civic or political processes. One very apparent issue that emerged for quite a number of participants, and one on which they took clear action, was their experience of, resistance to, and rejection of an unfavourable club culture. As discussed in Chapter 6, there was a range of responses related to participants finding their place in certain club cultures. Because of the emphasis that the participants placed on inclusion, hard work, fairness, loyalty and socialising, there arose situations of conflict for some who were playing for clubs that did not represent these values. This conflict led to the definitive actions of changing clubs or sports, the most noticeable switch being from rugby league to rugby union.
A number of participants reported differences between clubs representing the two codes related to the perception that rugby union equally valued winning with inclusion, resulting in a balance, at training, in the game and off-field, with which participants were more comfortable. The perceived lack of political manoeuvring and favouritism in rugby union at the local club level, and an increased sense of loyalty between club and player, were also clear differences between the two sports in the participants’ experiences. Maverick’s story captures these elements well:

I think there’s not as much politics in union as there is in rugby league. Like, there’s a lot of talking behind people’s backs in league. In union it just seems like everyone just gets along with everyone. The older boys love the younger boys; younger boys love the older boys. I played league and I mean, I’ve never had an older team come down and help me, whereas union we were training and the older boys were just watching before they trained, and they noticed we were doing a few things wrong, so they came over and just helped us. I’ll play my game and then we’ll stay and watch every single other game and so will everyone else, they’ll just stay and support everyone, where in other sports everyone will just go home, like they’ve done their part, they’ll go home. Everyone just likes to chip in and everyone gets along. Like everyone says, it’s a gentleman’s sport. There’s less politics and everything’s out in the open. (Maverick, 18 years)

The key point to note here relates to the background of the young males who had left rugby league clubs in favour of joining rugby union clubs. Traditionally in the UK and Australia, rugby union has been the domain of the private schools, ‘gentleman’ and higher socio-economic status groups, whereas rugby league has been more commonly linked with the working class, and was, according to Collins (1998) and Hill (2002), an early form of class resistance whereby the working class was able to earn an income by breaking away from rugby union and professionalising their new sport. Class differences and value sets have hence grown around the two codes. Clubs that were linked to schools (for example, Old Boys) had an additional level of tradition that emanated from the school culture. One participant related the example of a school traditionally known as a
successful rugby school, where the expectation was instilled – through school policy, and reinforced by teachers, parents, coaches and administrators – that the whole school community would be present at their rugby matches. At school level, the culture was also reinforced through the discipline system should a student not attend a specified game. It could be said that this influence is part of a long cultural and religious history originating in the inextricable link between rugby union and English public schools.

The fascinating aspect of this study lies in the move by young working-class males – essentially living in a rugby league heartland – away from rugby league clubs and their identified values, and towards rugby union clubs because of their espoused values. The rejection of certain leagues club values/cultures suggests what might be called a ‘reverse resistance’, in that it seems to be an operation directly opposing the original class resistance that resulted in the formation of rugby league in the early 20th century. It is difficult, however, to ascertain the extent to which this ‘reverse resistance’ represents a contemporary class struggle or something more complex. While Kenway (1998:165-166) points out that ‘male sport performs different functions for differently located males’, these participants’ experiences do not seem to be related to class mobility. Similarly, given that these participants are generally from working-class or lower middle-class backgrounds, they do not seem to represent a desire for the reproduction of social advantage or consolidation of class-related economic capital, as Light and Kirk (2001) uncovered in their analysis of elite schools. Their expressed motivation for change seemed to be more linked with their basic enjoyment of the game, although it is feasible that the desires of the participants for a more positive sport experience may have been related to socio-economic aspirations, in that the club attitudes and values that they were seeking may be representative of a perceived attachment to ‘gentlemanly’ or ‘Christian’ conduct traditionally associated with private schools and the upper class. Despite this association, and acknowledging rugby’s ongoing limitations, internal political conflicts, exclusionary practices, and political-economic bases (e.g. Black, 1998; Grainger, 2006), it could be argued that in terms of player participation in Australia, rugby has become a sport that has begun to span different social classes and cultural backgrounds.
In discussing rugby league, and in particular the advent of the pay TV driven ‘Super League’ in 1995, Phillips and Hutchins (2003) contend that the political economy of League is bound up in both its history and the current operation of sport media. They argue that supporter resistance to this cultural ‘takeover’ resulted in some of the ‘most visible … and largest public protests in Australia for decades’ (2003:226). Similarly, Rowe (1997) demonstrates that Rugby League, although a minor sport in global terms has, in fact, been embroiled in global processes and ambitions, particularly related to media and profit through the Super League conflict. Given that the research participants in question were between five and nine years old when the Super League phenomenon surfaced, and that their ‘reverse resistance’ occurred more than ten years later (with not one mention of Super League), the actions of the participants cannot be said to be a direct response to this split in rugby league, although there is a possibility (without being able to cite any evidence) that the culture of the local league clubs, or at least the participants’ perceptions of it, may have been affected by the split. Phillips and Hutchins (2003) make the point that the professionalisation and commoditisation of rugby league meant that many clubs became privately owned, generating a hyper-focus on winning, and initiating a subsequent reaction by supporters, as they became aware of their loss of contribution to, and control of, the administration and ownership of the competition. As an indirect, longer-term impetus, it could be argued that these processes have filtered down to the local clubs to take the form of values and attitudes to which the participants were opposed.

It is true that rugby union has not been exempt from these issues, with the tacit tradition of providing fringe benefits to leading elite players and the advent of overt professionalism in 1995, although there is still an abiding rhetoric, at least, about the value of retaining amateur status. Even with an acceptance of these political-economic dimensions of the difference between the two rugby codes, it seems more likely that the participants’ form of resistance uncovers their desire for a sporting experience that fits more closely with their value systems and aspirations for a changed society. For them, the close association between sport and identity is a factor in
understanding this process of resistance, as well as the levels of their engagement in such transformational activity.

This analysis resembles the variation of resistance, understood by McPherson et al (1989), that relates to competing interests between groups within sport, rather than the influence of sport in pursuing change in broader society. The relevant participants made choices and took actions that represented their interests in finding a club culture that more closely resembled their personal value systems. While other aspects of their sport experience may be related to the latter variation, this rugby-related resistance seems less concerned with broader social change, even though some of them saw the power dimension as part of the equation. Being verbally abused, forced into excessive training, or subjected to disloyalty from the club, created an environment where they could see that they had little power and the club had a lot. Rowe (1995:140) argues that the power that leads to dominance or oppression also ‘inevitably provokes resistance and subversion’, which can be seen in operation here on a smaller scale, grass-roots level. The level at which this action is pitched is captured in Budd’s (2001:10) notion of resistance as an ‘elastic concept, extending across a range of actions from stubborn nonconformity to conscious opposition to prevailing social relations’. The difference between private, public and collective goals was discussed earlier in this chapter. In this instance, the decision to change football codes is still more related to a public goal than to either of the others. The participants’ private choices and public action in changing codes, and in attracting other players to join them, represents individual (and to a lesser extent, collective) actions opposing existing social relations, yet is still bound within the current social structure. It can not really be classified as a collective goal, according to Budd’s (2001) definition, since there was no overt intention to strive for broader social change.

Even though there doesn’t seem to be a broad-ranging political strategy behind this ‘reverse resistance’, the fact that power relationships were acknowledged and opposed through smaller-scale action and personal choice connects the analysis to the critical social work discourse that
follows the dictum that the ‘personal is political’. The nature of power relationships, according to Fook (1993), is pivotal in understanding how to engage in political action on a day-to-day, relational level in the way that the young males in this study have done, with their choices about which club to join and sport to play. The ‘personal is political’ discourse is also relevant to the final area in which the concept of ‘sport as a political pathway’ emerged, which was in the participants’ work and careers. Since completing high school, a number of the participants have demonstrated a pursuit of what could be called civically engaged careers (such as social work, community welfare work, education, police, defence force and the fire brigade). They felt that this commitment emerged as they progressed through their sporting experiences. It has, in their minds, been linked to the idea of ‘helping’ or ‘giving back’; the same notion of reciprocity that underlies some of their motives for coaching sport. For some, these civically engaged career choices had been spawned by involvement in sport-based leadership projects and activities during their high school years. For example, Pedro (20 years) affirmed that ‘working with the rugby project, and seeing what they did here, that also gave me a lot of learning’. Another participant also reported a similar story:

_We were actually talking about it in a tute the other day. They were saying, “What are your skills that you could bring to the social work field?” I’ve never thought of sport before that…but I do think that it has had an influence on where I am now._ (Fisher, 21 years)

There were some who had found casual jobs through networks associated with their sport, and others who were pursuing sport-related careers, e.g. personal trainer, which again had the same element of helping/giving back that the others mentioned. Different feelings were also associated with these career directions, for example, a sense of elation about being in a job that was also sport-related; a feeling of fulfilment that such a job could still help someone; and for one participant the expectation of the adrenaline rush from being a fire fighter. Overall, the sense of contribution through a career was strongly identified in the data:
Like, the coaching’s good but um, that’s why I’m looking to get into social work because it helps me that it’s something I feel that I can contribute and help somewhere or someone in life.  

(Fisher, 21 years)

Pedro had studied welfare at TAFE and undertaken field placements as part of the course. He spoke very enthusiastically about how he had been able to use sport in these endeavours:

Every week we had after school activities from 3 till 6 and we’d get about 20-30 kids at one time in there and spend time with them, play sports with them and all that and then the parents come and pick em up. And so that hands-on stuff, you know, it helps you learn a lot more. You want guys to come, sport’s the thing.  

(Pedro, 20 years)

There were also some comments that more directly reflected an understanding of their careers as being politically motivated and engaged, and it is important to note that these comments represented a number of different political positions. Pedro, for example, was effusive about civil obedience:

I’ve always been raised to obey the law, and not make people obey the law but to help them see that the law is there for a reason and rules are there for a reason, things like that. I think that’s what got me interested in the police and also giving something back. This country and this state has done a lot for me and my family and I feel like joining the NSW police will help the state and the country.  

(Pedro, 20 years)

This particular expression of Pedro’s position is more closely aligned with a conservative political framework, although it does not fully capture the diversity of his views that have been expressed in other responses and discussed earlier in this chapter. Conversations that occurred informally with other young males (but not resulting in formal interviews, and as such can only be considered secondary data) revealed some different perspectives on politically engaged careers.
Pug spoke of the impact of sport on career choices. It was, in fact, his frustration with the limitations of recreational programs that motivated him to change his career path:

I worked in Sport & Rec but I got sick of seeing disadvantaged kids just given recreational programs, so I decided to do Welfare/Youth Work to try and make a bit of difference in their lives. (Pug, 24 years)

This comment represents something of a social democratic political position, as it seems most closely aligned to redressing disadvantage at the level of the individual or ‘target group’, but is not necessarily advocating broader change to the social structure. Rowdy (21 years), on the other hand, in exclaiming that ‘this world is pretty fucked but we’ve got a chance to make it better – (because we’re going to be) P.E. teachers!’; clearly saw a career in secondary school physical education as the opportunity to create social change by influencing a new generation of young people.

In this range of responses and the respective political positions that they imply, it can again be seen how the sport experiences of these young males tie in with the sociological analyses of sport as reflection of, reinforcement of, and resistance to dominant social values, ideologies and structures. All three of these understandings of sport are evident across the diverse experiences related by the participants in this study. The fact that the participants’ responses represented a range of political/ideological viewpoints, though not necessarily always coherently formed or free of self-contradiction, is an indicator of their ability to think beyond themselves and their openness to the processes of political socialisation. For these young males, the connection between sport and political engagement appeared to be mostly at an intellectual level, with only a few examples of practical action, such as the ‘reverse resistance’ of playing rugby union. In the main, though, sport was, for these participants, more of a potential pathway to political engagement than an actual one, which is a phenomenon foreshadowed in the literature about sport and civic engagement reviewed in Chapter 3.
Despite some acute differences in politics, the presence of intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to broader political engagement, and a certain level of naivety about the unifying power of sport, the participants also displayed a commonality in their concern for others, which is at the heart of civic engagement. This concern has been seen in their commitment to helping others and in their different forms of contributing to their communities, as well as in their ideations and actions relating to the nature and structure of society. Furthermore, there are many synchronicities between the themes of this chapter – that is, ‘contribution’ and ‘political pathways’ – and the other four major themes of the preceding chapters – ‘meanings of sport’, ‘health and well-being’, ‘identity’ and ‘belonging’ – that provide a basis for gaining a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the connections between sport and civic engagement for young males. The following concluding chapter will summarise these synchronicities and point to some key implications of the research in terms of reconceptualising civic engagement, rethinking youth participation, improving youth service delivery, and generating directions for future research that will continue to add to the body of knowledge around young people and civic engagement.
Part 4: The Post-match Debrief
‘Mate – it’s game on’

Conclusions, contested spaces and implications

In pursuing the main themes outlined in the previous three chapters (i.e. meanings of sport, health and well-being, identity, belonging, contribution and political pathways), this concluding chapter draws together the findings of this study which have tapped into the experiences of young males in relation to sport, especially participation at the grass-roots level, and the role that it has played in their civic development. This synthesis ultimately brings the discussion to some of the contested spaces, which include understanding sport, reconceptualising civic engagement, and rethinking youth participation. The findings also provide a basis for discussing implications for human service delivery to young males. Lastly, this chapter includes a consideration of further research possibilities.

Connecting sport and civic engagement for young males

In attempting to resolve the original research question, this thesis has demonstrated a number of significant connections between sport and civic engagement for young males. First, sport had a diversity of meanings for young males, with a focus on fun, skills development and social networks. These meanings intertwined with participants’ perspectives on health and well-being; the former being related primarily to fitness and individual responsibility and the latter related predominantly to feeling good, having fun and making friends. These friendships and social networks were also a key aspect of developing a sense of belonging through sport, as was a connection with the club, although this connection to club was also significantly related to sets of values and attitudes that reflected aspects of the participants’ identities. For almost all of the participants, fair play, respect, passion and controlled aggression co-existed in a nexus that contributed to sport-related identity, gender identity and civic identity.

Aspects of civic identity such as altruism and critical reflection provided a link to notions of contribution, which took a variety of forms in the experiences of the participants. This diversity
revealed that the young males in the study believed that they made a significant contribution to their sports club, but that they also contributed to the community life simply by playing sport. Furthermore, they felt that they were able to contribute to their communities through other activities affiliated with their club or sport, and finally that some contributed more broadly to their communities because of the learning or networks derived from sport. It is this point that led to the final interpretation of sport as a political pathway, where some of the participants acknowledged the process of political socialisation in which they had been involved through, or because of, their sport participation. The political engagement represented by the participants, and indicating a range of positions on the political/ideological spectrum, occurred at both an ideational/intellectual level and, in some cases, a practical level, especially in the ‘reverse resistance’ exemplified by leaving rugby league to play rugby union. These forms of contribution and political engagement were clearly linked to their sense of belonging, identity, understanding of well-being, and to the priority values/meanings that they associated with sport. In exploring these connections, the findings of the study can contribute constructively to a number of contested spaces. The first of these spaces relates broadly to an understanding of sport.

**Understanding sport**

The range of debate in sport literature (e.g. Coakley, 2003; McPherson et al, 1989; Volkwein-Caplan, 2004; Calloway, 2004, Hill, 2002) implies that sport itself is a contested notion. In general, this study supported and mirrored previous literature related to an understanding of sport, particularly in terms of the definition of sport, participation rates, participation patterns and reasons for participation in sport. The areas to which the findings of this study significantly contributed additional knowledge have emerged in the analysis of the sampling of sport, control of sport, sport as reflection, reinforcement and resistance, and the meaning of locality in sport.

**Sampling sport**

A clear impression gained from the participants was that their lives were filled with sport in one way or another, indicating both the importance of it, and their passion for it. All of the participants
had played multiple sports, both sequential and concomitant, individual and team, and competitive and recreational. Although Coakley (2003), for instance, found that elements of respect for rules and conditions were more prominent for participants in individual sports, for the participants in this study there were no significant differences in the values surrounding sportsmanship, possibly because most of them had been involved across many different sports anyway, and for most of their lives.

Sampling, however, is not a neutral act. There was an element of the ‘sport omnivore’ about this phenomenon in that multi-sport taste and practice was common. The argument about ‘cultural omnivorousness’ referred to in sociological literature (e.g. Ohl, 2007; Peterson and Kerne; 1996; Warde, Martens and Olsen, 1999) is that people with higher cultural capital (e.g. wealth, social class) sample, or take control of, the cultural pursuits of the lower classes. The capacity to be omnivorous is higher amongst the advantaged. The experiences of the participants in this study (who were predominantly from working class or lower middle class backgrounds) in sampling sports more commonly associated with the upper class (e.g. rugby union), appeared to be a form of inversion of the omnivore process. That is not to say that the process was smooth, and participants certainly identified the tension between sport loyalty (and associated class tribalism) and the sampling of new sports.

Control of sport

The complexities of control emerged as another key finding, as the range of sports in which the young males had participated included competitive, adult-controlled, recreational (‘hobby’ or ‘muck-around’), participant youth-controlled and informal, impromptu sport-related activities. The significance of this range is that the two-dimensional analysis of sport as adult or youth controlled, as outlined in sport sociology literature (e.g. Coakley, 2003), is not sufficient for understanding the experiences of the participants in this study. There is reason to consider ‘hobby’ or ‘recreational’ sports as an overlapping subset, in that they have a non-organised dimension but are often still part of organised competition. ‘Getting mates together down at the park’ as an informal and
impromptu version of the organised sports played in serious competition. Even the mountain bikers, who are generally considered in sports literature to be part of a non-adult-organised sport, engaged in organised competition as well as hobby riding. The differences lie not just in whether sport is organised but the extent of the competitive approach that the participant takes whilst participating in it.

**Reflection, reinforcement or resistance**

The findings of this study generally, and not surprisingly, confirmed the tripartite nature of this debate about sport, in that the range of participants’ experiences, values and attitudes represented all three positions (and were sometimes present in the one person). The most fascinating aspect of this analysis was in one form of resistance demonstrated by a number of the participants in rejecting their local rugby league club culture, described as harsh, disloyal and ‘win-at-all-costs’, in favour of a more regional rugby union club culture that better matched their personal values and attitudes about inclusion, fair play and sociability. In the light of the participants’ working-class and lower-middle class backgrounds, the fact that they lived in a rugby league heartland but opted for participation in rugby union (traditionally closer to the upper class and private schools), and apparently contradicted the original resistance against rugby union that formed the Rugby League in 1908, this action can be interpreted as ‘reverse resistance’.

**The meaning of locality**

There is a question about whether ‘local’ means the suburb, region, state, or even nation. The participants in this study were more likely, both in terms of their sport participation and civic engagement activities, to view ‘local’ as their surrounding geographical area, which was closely tied to their suburb of residence, club of choice or even main sporting venue. For these participants, the notion of locality was a fairly fixed one that did not expand to state or national identity. This limitation may well be related to the geographical position of Australia in relation to the rest of the world, where – unlike, say, in Europe – international travel is difficult. However, it may also be connected with the limited local mobility of these young males in their social and
work spheres. The importance of this understanding of locality cannot be understated, particularly in light of Rowe’s (2007) criticism that much sport-related inquiry does not focus on local, amateur, ‘grass-roots’ player culture. Given the high rates of sport participation in Australia – 39 per cent amongst young people at the local level (ABS, 2004) – there is great potential for both maximising the benefits of sport for societal functioning, and for addressing the inequalities within sport as a model for broader social change. These notions of reflection, reinforcement, resistance and locality take the discussion toward the second contested space, which is broadly related to concepts of civic engagement.

Re-conceptualising civic engagement

There are findings in this study about the concept of civic engagement that both confirm and enrich previous literature. This study further confirmed a sense of belonging to community, and a of contribution to it, as relevant dimensions of civic engagement through sport, and further explored the aspect of political engagement that is not always a feature of the civic engagement literature. It is in grasping the intricacies of these dimensions – including contradictions and inconsistencies – that the study has provided additional knowledge.

Belonging and identity

The experiences of the young males indicated that sport was a form, and facilitator, of belonging, due to, for example, the feelings associated with being in a team of club, or the camaraderie and shared effort which form part of memorable team performances. Sport is also a facilitator of belonging in that, for example, it enables the participants to develop broader social networks, and also provides them with a means of recognition, reward, and being valued by their local communities. A sense of belonging is also a significant social determinant of health (Berkman and Glass, 2003), without which it is difficult to contribute civically, and therefore points to the connections between belonging, self-worth and identity. This thesis has shown the positive role of sport in the development of masculine identity, whilst balancing the negative associations of sport
with masculinity, thus providing an enhanced understanding of how young males, in particular, might civically engage.

**Contribution**

The significant area of difference in the findings of this study from other research in the area was that, for the participants, contribution took on many forms. Altruism was at the core of their contribution, whether that was helping team-mates, friends or others in the community, but the most significant aspect was in the participants’ self-defined notions of participation that incorporated contribution by playing sport, contribution to community through sport-affiliated activity, and broader contribution to community as a result of what they had learned/developed through sport.

**The political spectrum**

There is ambivalence in civic engagement literature about whether political engagement is a necessary dimension of civic engagement, with additional debate about whether being ‘civic’ refers to upholding the State or challenging dominant social structure. This spectrum provides a clear parallel to the debate about sport being a reflection of, reinforcement of, or resistance to, social structures. The participants in this study represented all of these positions along the political spectrum, including the position that represented a lack of interest in broader political issues. For some participants, multiple political positions were evident in the one person. This multiplicity is not surprising, as it is consistent with the variations in the political socialisation process as it occurs through the transitional stage of adolescence, where values are still in the development stage before they form a more coherent world view (although it is important to note that a fixed, coherent world view is not necessarily a typical outcome of attaining adulthood).

The abiding theme underlying this diversity and not-quite-coherence, though, is that, where the participants were interested, aware or involved on some political level, it was generally with a conscious purpose. This element of intention relates to one other important aspect of their
political activity – the distinction between potential and actual engagement. For most of the participants, their political engagement was an intellectual one, a form of engagement that implied that sport has the potential to be a pathway to social and political action, but did not necessarily result in practical choices (and this is probably no different to the general population). Some of the barriers in relation to moving from potential to actual engagement are discussed below, as they have implications for understanding youth participation and service delivery. A significant aspect of this thesis, however, is in understanding the nature of the participants’ passion for sport, the use of controlled aggression in playing it, and how these phenomena can be harnessed for broader political engagement.

Overall, the findings of this study, in relation to the connections between sport and civic engagement, have several implications beyond definitions of terms, and in particular provide opportunities for examining and understanding better the nature of male youth participation, youth service delivery to males, and proposing possible future research directions with regard to young people, sport, and civic engagement.

**Rethinking youth participation and service delivery**

This thesis provides some pivotal findings that enable revised conceptualisations of youth participation, and have particular relevance for youth work practitioners. A major point to highlight here is related to the participants’ own definition of contribution. These young males felt that they contributed to community life simply by playing a sport in, or for, their local community. For some, playing sport was enough for them to be sufficiently engaged in community life. That is not to say that young males should not be encouraged to move to a deeper level of civic participation, but that the youth-defined level of participation needs also to be appreciated. This process also begins to connect with a young male’s sense of identity. If their identity is derived substantially from sport, and their contribution through sport participation is unappreciated or even mocked, they can be left with the impression that they as people – as men in the making – are, in fact, unappreciated, the result of which may be that they become marginalised.
In the same way that youth-defined civic participation needs to be acknowledged by practitioners, the direction that youth social action can take, according to Eden and Roker (2002), needs to be driven by their passions. It is simply untenable to ask young males to get involved in an issue in which they have no interest, no matter how enthusiastic the youth worker may be about the issue. A significant number of the young males in this study got involved in broader community activities only because they were related to sport. Such activities included organising local community festivals, participating in local leadership/mentoring programs, and convening local public forums with national sporting identities. These types of experience have since become a pathway for imagining and pursuing other forms of community action which would be considered to be more aligned with anti-discriminatory and social justice frameworks. What is important to note is that, for the young males in this study, these pathways began with an intrinsic passion, rather than an imposed agenda. As Youniss et al (2002) intimate, mismatched politics is a potential barrier to encouraging young males to become involved in social action, particularly where the definition of civic engagement is an all-embracing one in terms of the political spectrum.

The revised viewpoint of youth participation leads to a consideration of the implications of this thesis for human service delivery to young males, and to young people in general. Apart from self-determination and passion, another implication centres on life balance. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the sport participation patterns of the majority of the participants were consistent with previous studies relating to life after high school, although there was some divergence related to balancing priorities of sport and other demands. As Woodman (2004) has argued, to attain well-being, young people require a balance between responsibility for the future and time to enjoy the present, both of which are also important features of a civically engaged person. The implication of this struggle for balance is that researchers and policy-makers need to make provision in service planning and priorities to accommodate this process. At the face-to-face level of service delivery, workers need to be conscious that the activities in which young people are being encouraged to participate (whether educational, recreational, developmental or civically oriented) do not detract from a young person’s experience of responsibility and enjoyment. Based
on the findings of the study, this thesis contends that sport is conducive to achieving this balance of responsibility and enjoyment for young males.

Once young males are valued for their self-defined contributions, engaged through their passions, and accommodated for their search for balance, they can then be invited to channel their energy and skills into a broader range of issues and practices. Biddulph (1997) suggests that this growth/learning process often happened because of a positive relationship with a significant adult. In the case of sport, this person is often the coach. The young males in this study responded particularly well to positive relationships with adult males. In a number of instances, the young person’s non-sporting and social/political interests developed as a result of understanding the adult’s broader passions. This mentoring relationship in which civic engagement develops is a key element in literature, and embraces an intellectual/emotional dimension not limited to any one particular political perspective, which can sometimes result in ideological conflicts between young people and workers. Youth worker practitioners need maturely to assess their current or potential role as a mentor in this learning process.

There are several issues emerging from the research that relate to barriers to getting young males involved in community development and social action, the first being time. Wright et al (2005) showed that participation in sport declines in senior school years and beyond, mostly because of less available time and competing priorities such as work, study and relationships. Lopez and Moore (2006) suggest that the same holds true for participation in broader civic engagement, with a number of the participants indicating that they did not have time at the moment even for sport, let alone getting involved in other community activities. Asking young males to be involved in community development and social action may, therefore, prove to be a costly experience for them. For youth workers/services who want to engage with young males the first question must be, ‘why do you want to do it?’ It is important that the service exists for the target group, rather than the other way around. If there is a genuine need that can be met or a practical service that can be offered that young males are not receiving from other sources, then
there is some basis for action. The practice of engaging with young males to make service statistics look better – or for some other tokenistic or self-involved reason – needs to be discarded. Civic engagement is a demand, and all the demands on time need to be respected.

The second barrier relates to time of life. A number of participants said that they would like to follow up on their politically-oriented interests and passions in a few years, after completing study or having their business up and running. In their mind, this timing would make their efforts more noticeable, and therefore more effective. Alternatively, some had positive ideas but lacked the self-confidence to take the initiative in any kind of community/social action. Therefore, despite the confidence learned from sport participation, self-perception becomes a third barrier, although the two are closely connected – for example, lack of self-confidence may underlie the ‘time of life’ barrier. Either way, self-perception is one barrier that applies to young males whether or not they are considered to be ‘marginalised’. On this front, one of the drawbacks of this particular piece of research is that none of the participants could be classified as marginalised young males, since through sport they were connected in some way to their community. At the level of youth service delivery, in terms of addressing the ‘time of life’ barrier, workers could choose to take young males at their word and wait a few years before expecting their involvement. If, however, it is the self-perception and lack of self-confidence which is in play, then workers can have a key role for young males by maintaining their interest through sport-based programs, and gradually building their confidence for broader social action.

This thesis found support for other research (e.g. Youniss et al, 2002) which found that mismatched politics between workers and young people is a fourth potential barrier, particularly where the definition of civic engagement is an all-embracing one. Some of the participants in this study had what could arguably be called conservative opinions (e.g. zero tolerance on drugs), but were still interested in community action. Workers with a more left-of-centre position need to consider how important their politics are, and whether they can still collaborate with enthusiastic young males with different political positions.
The final barrier relates to workers’ negative associations with, or attitudes to, sport. The diverse experiences of the researcher have included, for example, the mention of male team sports at an interagency meeting producing groans of frustration, annoyance or mocking from the predominantly female youth workers present. Whilst it is true that there are many negative aspects of sport (as mentioned earlier), this thesis confirms that sport participation may be a pathway for many of these young males into community involvement and civically engaged careers. The barrier here is that young males pick up on worker negativity (when present), and so they become defensive, or they may feel that they are not wanted, or that their masculine identity is being put down. None of these possibilities are conducive to fostering young males’ sense of self, nor for encouraging, maintaining and developing their civic engagement.

Overall, this thesis proposes that sport is an effective way for young males to civically engage. Sport provided participants with a source of a sense of belonging and recognition, a means of contributing to the life of their community, and provided a pathway to be civically engaged on both an intellectual/emotional and a practical level. There is real potential for youth services to utilise sport not just as recreational activities, but as avenues for connecting with young males, and engaging them in community development and social action processes.

**Directions for further research**

Acknowledging the limitations of this study, which included an absence of ‘marginalised’ young males, the research outcomes do provide some further potential avenues of inquiry around the emergent themes. The first of these opportunities relates to the possibility of ‘targeting’ marginalised young people for a similar piece of research into the connections between sport and civic engagement. Research could specifically target indigenous young people, especially in light of the work of, for example, Hallinan et al (1999) and Tatz (1987, 1995, 1996). Alternatively, young people of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds could be interviewed, particularly in the context of the Human Rights Commission’s (2006) investigation of racism and prejudice in sport. Additionally, any connections between sport and civic engagement for
marginalised young people could be analysed in relation to changing directions in social policy, such as new Australian policies on social inclusion and volunteers, and the need for a new national sport policy. It is also a feasible research direction to engage in a comparable study with young females, to determine whether the connections are similar, or to explore additional gender issues emerging from such a study.

A second research opportunity could relate to exploring synergies between the themes of this study and research relating to transitional age groupings of young people and young adults. The target age range for this study was fifteen to twenty-five, although the majority of participants was over eighteen years of age. Legally this age makes them adults, although it could be argued that this life stage may still represent the adolescent tasks of achieving identity and independence. There is literature that provides further understanding of this transitional stage, such as that concerning ‘emerging adulthood’ (e.g. Arnett, 2004; Padilla-Walker, Barry, Carroll, Madsen and Nelson, 2008; White, McMorris, Catalano, Fleming, Haggerty and Abbott, 2006), which is oriented toward identity formation and the “in between” feeling. Other critical research concerning these themes (e.g. Wyn, 2008; Beck and Lau, 2005; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe, Thomson and Grigoriou, 2007) proposes a more complex pathway to an adulthood that is incrementally achieved. These frameworks suggest there would be some useful parallels with this study’s findings on sport and identity.

Engaging more fully with this research would also prove helpful in a third area, that of tracking the future civic activities of the participants in this study. This type of longitudinal research, perhaps in parallel with a ‘lifelong learning’ framework (e.g. Wyn, 2006; Stokes and Wyn, 2007), would provide valuable insight into the connections between sport and civic engagement that may become abiding, and could, to some extent, test the argument of McFarland and Thomas (2006), who contended that participation in voluntary associations in teenage years is a predictor of political engagement later in adult life.
A fourth issue, in relation to both the themes of ‘meanings of sport’ and ‘political pathways’, concerns the participants’ experiences of different sport club cultures. It was beyond the scope of this study to fully engage in an enquiry about contributing factors in the development of specific local sports club cultures. Some potential factors were proposed; such as folklore, oral tradition, policy, power relationships, major current events fought out in the media, and broader politico-historical influences. It would be extremely useful to conduct a case study of a local sports club in order to trace the consolidation of values and practices that constitute the perceived club culture, and explore the extent of diversity in the perception of it. Finally, while this study has provided some key insights into the connections between sport and civic engagement, further research could take up the challenge of examining other non-sport related pathways to civic engagement for young males – for example, music, art, cars, or the environment.

In conclusion, this doctoral thesis has discovered the complexity of the connections between local sport and meaningful civic engagement by the young males researched. The analysis of this complexity has enriched the general body of knowledge in these areas of study, particularly in relation to: the meanings of sport; the role of sport in health and well-being; sport as a factor in identity development, gender identity and civic identity; sport as a source of belonging; sport as a form of contribution and an area for learning to civically contribute, and sport as a pathway to potential and actual political engagement.

The research was of distinct benefit to the participants through the opportunity to relate their experiences, and have them taken seriously, the outcome of which is a further fostering of their self-worth, leading to a better sense of their place in the world. Furthermore, youth work practitioners, service planners and policy makers can greatly benefit from the implications of the findings to more effectively incorporate the nuances and motivating factors for civic engagement by young males into social policy and youth service provision.
Part 5: Coaching Resources
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11 ‘Nothing’s ever easy’

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UWS HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

PROTOCOL APPLICATION FORM

To Obtain an Ethics Clearance

Research projects involving human participants

- Staff, PhD, Masters Hons candidates see Instruction Sheet 1.
- Bachelors Hons research degree candidates and Masters (course work) candidates see Instruction Sheet 2.

*You are reminded that your project should not commence without prior written approval*

1. Title of Project

   ‘Sports culture as a factor in civic engagement by young males’

2. Indicate whether Staff or Student Application (please □) Staff □ Student □

   and complete the appropriate section of Question 2

2. a Chief Investigator/s (Staff)

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2. b Associate Investigator/s (Staff)

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2. c Chief Investigator (Student)

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<tr>
<td>Neil Hall</td>
<td>SASHS</td>
<td>9772 6591 or 0417 278 645 <a href="mailto:n.hall@uws.edu.au">n.hall@uws.edu.au</a></td>
<td>PhD</td>
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Name of Student Supervisor Prof John MacDonald

3. Address for Correspondence *Students must provide an external mail address*

24 Meredith Street, Blaxland, NSW. 2774.

4. Anticipated Duration of the Project

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<td>January 2007</td>
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5. Funding

Is the research project the subject of an application to an internal or external grants body, or will be granted other funding support? (please ☐) Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, Name of the funding agency _______________________________________________

What was the outcome? Approved ☐ Pending ☐ Refused ☐

Are there any constraints placed on the release of research data by the funding body Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, provide details

6. Lay Summary of Project

Write in words a layperson would understand a brief description of the project, ie use ‘Plain English’ (use approx. the space provided and type in 12 point font)

The research sets out to examine the relationship between sports culture and meaningful civic engagement by young males. This will be achieved by interviewing young males aged 15 to 25, and tracking and documenting their experiences of civic engagement (participation in community life), where those experiences have been influenced by some form of involvement in sport.

7. Scientific, Educational or Cultural Aims of Project

Refer to Guidelines Section 7. for information on details required
There is an established connection between people who are marginalised (for example in terms of social cohesion and sense of belonging) and higher risk of poor health (e.g. mental health and suicide) (Berkman, L.F., and Glass, T., *Social Integration, Social Networks, Social Support and Health*, in Berkman, L.F., and Ichiro, K., *Social Epidemiology*, OUP, 2003). There is a seemingly narrow understanding in the literature and in practice of what constitutes civic engagement.

This research aims to examine the notion that young males’ involvement in sport, including immersion in sports culture, contributes to aspects of civic engagement such as participation in community life, having a sense of being part of community life, community acknowledgement of that participation, a sense of belonging, and development of social networks/cohesion.

8. **Value and Benefits of Project**
Refer to *Guidelines* Section 8 for information on details required

This particular piece of research will broaden the understanding of civic engagement from what appears to be a limited view of ‘full and democratic’ participation to a meaning that more accurately reflects the ways in which young people, and in particular young males, participate in the life of their community, and the benefits associated with that participation.

The research will add to the general body knowledge available relating to issues for young people. In turn it will benefit youth work practitioners to enable them to work more effectively tap into motivating factors for engagement by young males.

Participants will benefit by having the opportunity to tell their stories of civic engagement, and by being listened to and taken seriously. They will also benefit from having their experiences celebrated and their efforts acknowledged.

9. **Details of Research Methodology/Procedures and Recruitment Procedures**
Refer to *Guidelines* Section 9 for information on details required.

As a piece of qualitative research, the research will involve the exploration and documentation of young males’ experiences of civic engagement through sport and, for the duration of the research, tracking pathways of civic engagement by young males through sport.

Participation will be voluntary. Young males will be invited to participate in the research through advertising in sports clubs, youth services and networks, churches, possibly local media, as well as other relevant networks (e.g. word of mouth, young people’s informal networks). Invitations to participate, with relevant phone numbers, will be posted at such venues and leaflets distributed (with permission from relevant authorities).

Participants will initially be interviewed about their experiences, which will be taped. They will then be asked about their willingness to be interviewed subsequently for the researcher to follow their experiences of civic engagement over the duration of the research. Should participants wish to have a support person in the interview, the researcher will encourage that.

10. **Participant Sample Description and Sample Size**
Refer to *Guidelines* Section 10 for further information on details required.
You must clearly define the ‘type’ of participants, and in particular if the participants are children or young people, persons with an intellectual or mental impairment, highly dependent on medical care, persons in dependent or unequal relationships, persons from a distinct collective, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In some circumstances, involving children, it may be necessary for the researchers to have undertaken a criminal record check. You should indicate if this is required and provide a copy of the documentation.

The researcher/s will be required to undertake a criminal check

Yes ☐ No ☐

The researcher has had a criminal check conducted in the past, in connection to another piece of research, the documentation for which remains with the partner organisation (Burnside) and the researcher (as a staff member) has recently followed university protocols in this regard.

Participants will be young males residing in Western Sydney, aged between 15 and 25. The research will not intentionally target young people from disadvantaged or vulnerable groups, but will not exclude volunteers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, Pacific Island backgrounds, Non-English Speaking backgrounds, or young males with disabilities.

The number of participants will be determined by saturation of data.

If the data suggests the need for a larger, more quantitative study through a survey, this will become Part Two of the research and further ethics approval will be sought.

11. Evaluation of Potential Harm or Risk of Harm from Research Procedures

Refer to Guidelines Section 11 for information on details required

Does the project involve any of the following research procedures? (please ☐)

a) the possibility of physical stress/distress, discomfort to the participants

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, how will the potential harm or risk of harm be addressed?

b) the possibility of psychological/mental stress/distress, discomfort to the participants

Yes ☐ No ☐

to the participants. If yes, how will the potential harm or risk of harm be addressed?
Although the research procedures are not intrusive or invasive, and the researcher is highly experienced in working with young people, there is a remote possibility that participants may experience emotional/mental distress in exploring their stories of civic engagement. Should this occur the researcher has skills in communicating with young people and their families. Participants will be reminded that they need not continue if they feel uncomfortable about doing so, and that no names will be identified in written records of the research. The researcher also has extensive knowledge of youth support services/networks and is able to make appropriate referral (for example, the Warehouse Youth Health Centre in Penrith will be given prior knowledge of the research and possibility of referral). With young people in particular the researcher will be aware of ‘duty of care’ responsibilities.

c) deception of participants at any stage of the project

Yes ☐ No ☑

If yes, give details, will the participants be debriefed after the procedure?


d) the use of drugs or invasive procedures

Yes ☐ No ☑

For example, chemical compounds, drugs, ionising or non-ionising radiation, other biological agents, human tissue, special diets or modified foods, sensory evaluation of genetically modified food. Evidence of clearance from the University Biosafety Committee should be submitted with your application.

If yes, give details as to how any potential harm or risk of harm will be minimised:

12. Potential Ethical Issues

You should address each potential ethical issue as it relates to your project (use approx. the space provided and type in 12 point font)

12 a. Integrity, Respect for persons, Beneficence and Justice

Refer to Guidelines Section 12 a for further information on details required.

You must provide a statement that demonstrates that you have considered the ethical principles of Integrity, Respect for Persons, Beneficence and Justice as it relates to your research project.

The researcher is committed to the search for knowledge, to recognised principles and methods of qualitative research, and to the honest and ethical conduct of research and dissemination and communication of results.

The researcher will ensure his respect of all participants and to maintaining the dignity of all participants. The researcher will endeavour to cater to the diverse range of needs of participants in terms of safety, access, transport, literacy levels, beliefs, perceptions, customs and cultural heritage.

The researcher is committed to the ethical value of justice. Whilst the research is low risk in terms of burdens to participants the researcher will endeavour to ensure that there is a fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of participation in research.

12 b. Consent
You should refer to Guidelines Section 12b for information on detail required. Provide details about how you will obtain the agreement of your participants to take part in the research. Provide as attachments copies of Information Letters, Consent forms, etc. as set down in this section.

Participation will be voluntary. Those young males who express interest in participating in the research will receive and information sheet (see attached) and the researcher will also explain it verbally. Should they agree to continue, understanding that their participation is voluntary and they may terminate their involvement at any time without penalty, they will be asked to sign a consent form, to be co-signed by parent/guardian if the participant is under 18. (see attached). Selection of a safe venue for interviews will be at the discretion of the participant. Information sheets and consent forms will be written in plain English, to attempt to cater for people with low literacy levels.

12 c. Research Merit and Safety
You should refer to Guidelines Section 12c for information on details required. Your response should demonstrate the research is justifiable and is designed as to ensure that any risks to participants are balanced by the likely benefit/s to be gained. The research should be conducted or supervised only by persons with experience, qualifications and competence appropriate to the research.

The research is low risk in terms of possible harms to participants, and will provide a range of benefits (already acknowledged) to academia, practitioners and young people.

The researcher is a member of the Childhood and Youth Policy Research Unit (within the Research Centre for Social Justice and Social Change), and has completed other significant research with young people in Western Sydney over the past 4 years. The researcher worked as a Social Work practitioner in counselling, group work and community work with young people for ten years prior to employment at UWS. He maintains close links with a number of community groups and provides professional supervision to Youth Workers in Western Sydney. He has a good rapport with young people and a good knowledge of resources available in the community.

d. Ethical Review and Conduct of Research
Refer to Guidelines Section 12 d for information on details required. Provide details about how the results of the research will be disseminated and to whom. You must provide details of how the data collected will be stored securely, who will have access and the disposal time line.

All participants will be informed that interviews are confidential. No names will be recorded against information provided, and no identifiable information will be used. Should the thesis use any specific quotes, pseudonyms or generic references to young people will be employed. Records of interviews, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at UWS in the supervisor’s office and stored securely for at least five years. Copies of consent forms will be kept in a different locked filing cabinet for at least five years. Any data on computer will be stored in a passworded file on the researcher’s hard drive, with a copy (also passworded) on disk kept in the same locked filing cabinet at UWS. Audio tapes of interviews and focus groups will be erased after being transcribed.

The research will be used primarily for production of a doctoral thesis, and also for conference papers and publications.

13. Privacy requirements
Refer to Guidelines Section 13 for information on details required for Questions a & b
a. Will you be accessing data held by a Commonwealth Department or Agency? Yes ☐

No ☐

Possibly ABS Census data

b. Will you be accessing data held by a State Department or Agency?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If the researcher/s answer yes to question a or b they should be aware of and agree to abide by the Privacy Principles in dealing with personal Information.

c. Does your research involve the use of existing records, which identify individuals but which are not in the public domain (eg medical or other personal records) that are held by an organisation.

Yes ☐

No ☐

Provide details if you answer yes to a, b or c

14. Ethics Approval from Another Institution

Does this research require the ethics approval of another institution? If yes, give details including whether or not you have submitted an application to that institution for ethics approval.

(please ☐)

Yes ☐

No ☐

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15. Chief Investigator/s Declaration (Staff or Student)

I/we certify that the information given in this application is correct to the best of my/our knowledge. I/we acknowledge that I/we must notify the Committee if there is any ethically relevant variation or if the project is discontinued prematurely. I/we have read, and agree to abide by the relevant code of practice for research involving humans.

Chief Investigator Signature/s:

Signed................................................  Signed................................................

Signed................................................  Date.................................................

16. Student Supervisor Declaration

I certify that the information given in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge.

Supervisor’s Signature:
Before lodging the application please complete this checklist

☐ All questions have been answered

☐ Chief investigator/s and if applicable Student Supervisor have signed the declaration

☐ Supporting documentation is attached ☐ Required number of copies plus the original are attached

The Human Ethics Officer has reviewed the application  Yes ☐ No ☐

☐ Staff, PhD or Masters (Hons) candidate - Application has been submitted to the UWS Human Ethics Research Committee (See Instruction Sheet 1.)

☐ Students – Bachelors (Hons) candidates, Masters (Course Work) - Application has been submitted to the UWS Human Research Ethics Student Panel (See Instruction Sheet 2.)

Application submitted.................................................................(Date) End of Application

☑ APPROVAL GRANTED
APPENDIX 2 – DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION

This appendix describes the process actually undertaken by the researcher in conducting the study. Based on the methodological framework, the researcher took the following steps to ensure as close a fit as possible with the previously described research plan.

**Preparation**

As an academic at the University of Western Sydney (UWS), the researcher had approval for conducting research with children and young people through the NSW Working with Children criminal record check.

Beauchamp’s (1982) ethical benchmarks were observed, including (i) autonomy and self-determination, (ii) maximising benefits and minimising harms, (iii) upholding justice and fairness, and (iv) positive contribution to knowledge. The principle of autonomy involves respecting people and respecting their right to choose if they will be part of the research. Therefore, research studies need to demonstrate that participants have given their informed consent. Informed consent means they understand the nature of the research, its purpose, the risks, what will be asked of them, how it will be reported and what benefit there will be for them. Not addressing this issue raises the possibility of coercion. Coercion is the practice of recruiting research participants against their will, against their best interests, or without their fully informed consent. Alston & Bowles (2003) suggest that the principle of autonomy also requires respecting the participants’ right to privacy, including the right to refuse to answer questions, or withdraw from the research (and take their data with them) if they wish. Privacy also means the researcher must ensure both the anonymity of research participants, and the confidentiality of information provided during the research. Homan (1991:42) adds that the concept of privacy assumes that individuals have a right to control ‘access to their own private domains’. In the research context, confidentiality does not mean never reporting what participants say (as that would be rather self-defeating), but divulging that information only in reporting the research results as agreed, and that information gathered for the research will not be used for any other purpose.
The second benchmark relates to maximising benefits and minimising harms. Social work and welfare codes of ethics identify this principle as underlying good practice, and must be applied to research. The research must be of some benefit to the researched, and any potential harms of the research should be made as unlikely as possible. This principle leads to the third benchmark, which is the conduct of research in a manner that upholds justice and fairness. In relation to this point, Habibis (2006:70) discusses the process of researching what she calls ‘vulnerable respondent groups’, which should be treated with special sensitivity by the researcher. Included in her definition are children, students, and people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island background. In the context of this study, the young males could be considered to fit this description.

The final benchmark relates to positive contribution to knowledge. Contributing to the broader knowledge base means having a worthwhile purpose to research, gathering data carefully, choosing appropriate methods, reporting results honestly (without errors, distortions and misrepresentations) and not publishing data collected by someone else. Additionally, credit, acknowledgement and reference to other contributors must be given because plagiarism is a serious offence. Additionally, as Campbell (1997) notes, personal interests are in play because researchers are drawn to research those things about which they care, often passionately.

Fattore et al (2005) apply these principles specifically to work with young research participants. They reinforce the importance of user-friendly information sheets and consent forms, finding interview locations that respect their privacy, elaborating on ways in which anonymity will be maintained, and explaining the purpose of confidentiality (including its limitations in situations where, for example, legislation requires the mandatory reporting of child abuse). These measures are primarily related to the adults’ duty of care in protecting children and young people from potential harm. With young people in particular the researcher was always aware of ‘duty of care’ responsibilities.
Participation was voluntary. Those young males who expressed interest in participating in the research received an information sheet and the researcher also explained it verbally. When they agreed to continue, understanding that their participation was voluntary and they could have terminated their involvement at any time without penalty, they were asked to sign a consent form, to be co-signed by parent/guardian if the participant was under sixteen (as required by legislation). Bessant (2006) argues that this legal requirement is an ageist practice and elaborates on a number of key issues surrounding informed consent. She points out the apparent illogic of requiring parental consent for those under eighteen, because of the conflicting definitions of ‘child’, ‘adolescent’ and ‘adult’. It would make more sense, she argues, to adopt principles that relate to a young person’s capacity and maturity (rather than a fixed-age rule), their rights to participate and their contribution to constructed identities. Proposed changes to the NHMRC framework that waive the parental consent requirement where the young person is competent and research is low risk, or where the young person is estranged/ separated from their parents or guardian, or where it is against their best interests to seek parental consent are, says Bessant (2006), some concession but are still vague and still equally difficult to practically adopt in research with young people. In any event, they have not yet been adopted and in this study, obtaining parental consent for those under sixteen was adopted as a principle even though the research was low risk.

An application to the Human Research Ethics Committee of UWS was submitted and approved, giving permission to conduct the study as per the procedures outlined. A copy of the application and approval is in Appendix 1. Submitted as part of the application were drafts of the information sheet for distribution to potential research participants, and the research consent form for those young males who indicated their willingness to be interviewed. Because the targeted age range study (15 to 25) included young males less than 16 years of age, the consent form required a section for parental permission as well as participant permission. Because of the concern for catering to people of varying literacy levels, the layout of the information sheet was adapted slightly to make it more reader-friendly. The information sheet and consent form can be found in
Appendices 3 and 4. The researcher then produced a reader-friendly flyer for advertising and recruitment purposes, which can be found in Appendix 5.

Opportunities were taken to engage with workers from youth organisations, in the event that participants needed to contact them for support and/or counselling in the event of distress as a result of their participation. At the time of writing, none of the participants required this type of support, implying that no significant distress was reported as having been experienced from their participation in the study.

To assist in the development of appropriate questions, the researcher drew from some of the available literature that indicated possible courses of inquiry about the research topic. Additionally, some open-ended questions were developed to allow for further exploration of the participants' stories. Informal conversations took place with some young males in the target age range, which further informed the content and phrasing of the questions. These informal conversations also enabled the researcher to refine some of his skills for the commencement of interviews for this study. Given that there no real problems were experienced at this stage of preparation, the researcher was able to move on to the recruitment phase.

Recruitment
The sample was recruited in a number of ways. The reader-friendly leaflets were distributed to various youth organisations in Greater Western Sydney and were made available to young males who had contact with those organisations. The leaflets invited interested parties to make contact with the researcher for more information. Secondly, ‘word of mouth’ advertising was also utilised through the researcher’s networks in Western Sydney, which included networks with sporting clubs/organisations, gyms, churches, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and other voluntary organisations. Some of these organisations were able to identify young males who may be interested and passed information to them directly, with an invitation to contact the researcher. Once or twice, a youth worker acted as a go-between when young people expressed some
interest in participating, but were unsure of contacting the researcher directly. On a few occasions the young males concerned came from families known to the researcher, so particular care was taken to ensure informed consent. Thirdly, opportunities arose through the sporting and academic activities of UWS. At the 2005 Australian University Games (Eastern Conference), the researcher engaged in informal conversations with UWS students, resulting in interviews. The researcher also took opportunities to invite participation from Social Work and Community Welfare students who mentioned, in the course of unrelated conversation, their involvement in sporting pursuits. Interviews also resulted from these invitations.

The researcher was careful at all times to ensure that potential participants understood the voluntary nature of the research, and that should they decline the invitation it would not disadvantage them in any way, particularly in the case of UWS students, and with young males from families known to the researcher. No significant problems were experienced in the recruitment phase. Some minor difficulties included the apparent slow rate of volunteers making known their willingness to participate, and participants initially agreeing to be interviewed but then either changing their mind or experiencing altered circumstances that made their participation difficult. Another set of potential interviews were cancelled due to the death of their peer. The only other difficulty lay in one or two other participants and the researcher missing each other’s calls when trying to negotiate a meeting time and place.

The sample

Having utilised these recruitment methods, and overcome the administrative hurdles associated with organising interviews, the sample size built gradually over time and by the end of the study, consisted of fourteen young males aged between fifteen and twenty-five, two of whom were still engaged in secondary education. The participants either resided in Greater Western Sydney, or were undertaking tertiary studies in the region (with some participants fitting both categories). Additionally, some of the participants were employed on either a full-time, part-time or casual basis.
The majority of participants were from a predominantly Anglo-Australian background, with a small number born in Australia to families from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background. In terms of socio-economic indicators, no specific demographic data was collected from the participants, but the majority of the participants’ suburbs of residence represented what could feasibly be termed a range of working-class and lower middle-class areas. The cumulative disadvantage rating devised by Vinson (1999) would place the suburbs concerned between 250 and 500 in a range where 1 was most disadvantaged and 578 was least disadvantaged. Clearly, the sample was not drawn from any of the most disadvantaged areas in New South Wales, which would have ranked in the top 200 on Vinson’s cumulative disadvantage scale. This outcome was mildly disappointing, as the study was situated in the setting of Greater Western Sydney in order to encompass the more comparatively disadvantaged areas. Nevertheless, the specific location of the research volunteers was not entirely within the researcher’s control, nor was it the researcher’s intention to measure or compare forms of civic engagement across socio-economic indicators, (even though, as mentioned in the literature review, there is a general association between higher socio-economic status and sports participation).

The participants had a broad range of sporting involvements throughout their lives, spanning sports such as soccer, volleyball, basketball, cricket, rugby union, rugby league, touch football, athletics, boxing, BMX biking and mountain biking.

**Interview settings**

Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations throughout the Sydney region. The locations were safe venues, agreed upon by the researcher and the interviewees, and included rooms set aside in Neighbourhood Centres, Youth Centres, church buildings and the researcher’s office on the University’s Bankstown campus. In adapting to a variety of venues, the researcher endeavoured to set up the interview space in the same way each time, as space and layout allowed. No problems were experienced in locating safe and convenient venues, and the
researcher needs to express appreciation for the flexibility and cooperation of staff and management of the various organisations for allowing the use of their rooms free of charge.

**Informed consent**

Consent was obtained through standard ethical procedures. The recruitment advertising stressed that participation was voluntary and that prospective interviewees could make contact with the researcher at their convenience. When that contact occurred, the researcher verbally expanded on the information contained in the reader-friendly leaflet, which often resulted in some informal conversation about the topic. On a number of occasions the full information sheet was mailed to the young person. If the young person was willing to be interviewed, a suitable time and location was agreed upon. Parental consent was required for only one participant in the end because all the other participants were over sixteen years of age.

The researcher and participants then met at the agreed interview locations. Before commencing an interview, further dialogue occurred regarding the project, and the contents of the full information sheet and consent form were outlined. To accommodate varying literacy levels, the researcher also read aloud the statements on the consent form, including who to contact should they feel distressed or should they wish to complain about the research process or the conduct of the researcher. When the young person was satisfied that everything had been sufficiently explained, they were formally invited to be interviewed and asked to indicate their willingness by signing the consent form. The researcher also signed the consent form indicating his commitment to conducting the research in an ethical and proper manner. At this stage the researcher reiterated the option for the participant of stopping the interview at any time.

**Interview process**

During the process of conducting the interviews, the researcher utilised questions (derived from the literature review and informal conversations prior to the commencement of primary data collection) as starting points for dialogue, and as prompts for further exploring the participants’
experiences. The sample interview schedule can be found in Appendix 6. This questioning technique proved useful in allowing sufficient time and space for the participants to elaborate on their ideas and opinions, without putting undue pressure on them to articulate their thoughts spontaneously. There were a number of short silences, none of them uncomfortable, and for most of the participants their ability to express themselves was quite well developed. On occasion, the researcher needed to clarify the meaning of a particular word or phrase that was unfamiliar (or perhaps generation-specific) and participants were able to do so without difficulty. Near the end of each interview the researcher asked the participants whether there was a particularly memorable quote from a coach/manager/mentor that they held as being important. On a couple of occasions the recall of a memorable quote led to further discussion but in most interviews this interaction signified the end of the actual interview. A number of these quotes, because of their parallel meanings, have been adopted as chapter headings for this thesis.

The researcher did take brief notes during the interviews whilst simultaneously aiming for appropriate and timely eye contact, but the interviews were also taped. Participants were assured that they could talk in a normal voice, and so were able to ignore the presence of the tape recorder for the most part. Unfortunately, there was one interview for which the tape recorder did not work (the first formal interview, in fact), after which a new tape recorder was used and no further technical problems were experienced. Each interview was allocated a code number which replaced the participants’ names. The code number, and the date and time of the interview, were marked on the tape, in the researcher’s field notes and on the ensuing transcripts.

A number of interested young males preferred not to be interviewed, mainly due to a two-fold discomfort at the idea of answering spontaneously and/or being taped. However, they still wanted to participate in the research. These participants were offered the option of writing their responses to the same key starter questions asked in the interviews. Their responses were returned by email, and further emails were exchanged attempting to clarify some of their comments. These were included as primary text data alongside the interview transcripts.
Informal conversations

A number of informal conversations occurred before, during and after the phase of formal data collection. As mentioned earlier, the informal conversations that occurred prior to data collection provided some clues in terms of language, phrasing and content of questions. Some of the content of the conversations with young males at this early stage was also useful in understanding the connections between sport and civic engagement in their opinions. These comments were noted in the researcher’s journal. For those contacts that did not go on to participate in a formal interview, verbal (but not written) assent was obtained to still refer to their ideas in the context of the study, particularly in contributing to the analysis of the primary data. The difficulty in obtaining written consent in this context, or of engaging the young males in formal interviews had mostly to do with location and time of the conversations, which primarily occurred on the sidelines of sports fields and in pubs.

Other conversations that occurred during the course of data collection, but outside the formal taped interview, were noted in the researcher’s field notes and reflexive journal, as some of them provided additional insight into the nature of sports experiences of young males. In some instances these were post-interview conversations (after the tape recorder had been turned off and all equipment packed up) as the researcher and participant were leaving the interview venue and walking towards their respective cars. The content was still considered to be primary data despite not being recorded.

A small number of informal conversations occurred after the point at which the researcher felt the data was saturated. These conversations generally failed to produce any additional data gathered through interviews, and therefore were not pursued. On one occasion, a further conversation occurred with one of the young males who had been interviewed about three weeks earlier, with the result being one piece of additional information about his future career ideas.
**Reflexive journal**

The researcher used the reflexive journal to record thoughts and ideas about the data as it was collected. These thoughts included ideas for pursuing additional lines of questioning in future interviews. The researcher also used the journal to make note of reflections about the impact of the researcher on the process, and his internal reactions to the process of inquiry in which he was engaged. For example, the researcher used the journal to reflect on thoughts and feelings that arose upon viewing a movie mentioned during interviews.

The reflexive journal also became a collection point for other text to be used as secondary data such as newspaper articles, historical documents and titles of non-academic books and movies to help in understanding the cultural milieu in which the study was situated. Most of the articles were taken from newspapers distributed in the localities of the research participants, together with some articles from the Sydney Morning Herald. Historical documents included the rationale and description of a sports-based youth leadership development project in which a number of the participants had been involved. A number of non-academic books were incorporated in the analysis if they related to boys and sport, or if they related to sports mentioned by research participants, or other books that the researcher felt contributed to the discourse around the subject matter of the study.

**Data Analysis**

In applying a thematic analysis technique to the data, the researcher utilised manual, non-electronic tools. However, a typist was engaged to transcribe the tapes and the researcher printed multiple copies of each transcript. Every page of each transcript carried the code number relevant to the interview. After reading, re-reading and further reading of the transcripts (that is, ‘immersion’), and then mulling over the information for another period (that is, ‘incubation’), the researcher took coloured highlighter pens and began to notate sections of narrative that appeared to be describing similar patterns of thought or behaviour. Notes were made in the margins and other memos were also written and attached on post-it notes.
At the point where the researcher was beginning to feel confident about potential labels for the data, the transcripts were cut up, and relevant excerpts were placed in separate envelopes according to shared or similar themes. Here the focus was on emerging themes discovered by engaging in the three levels of coding: Open coding (assigning interim labels), axial coding (establishing core categories), and selective coding (interpretation). Chunks of data that represented a combination of themes were printed twice (or more where relevant) and copies of the same chunk were placed in the respectively labelled envelopes. Assembled themes of data were re-analysed and any adjustments made before choosing labels. Because of the researcher’s preference for visual and spatial representations of ideas, mind maps were also utilised during this phase of the analysis process.

It should be noted that the analysis process, in terms of immersion and incubation, commenced during the phase of data collection, and both occurred simultaneously, in order to keep track of, and make sense of, the data as it was being collected. As a result the researcher, in consultation with his supervisors, was able to discern whether more data was required, and the final judgement about data saturation was thus made easier. During the analysis of the transcripts, it was considered useful to seek out a few more interviews to hopefully add to the available data. The data was determined to be sufficiently saturated after 14 interviews, and so this phase of the study was considered to be complete.
WHAT IS THIS ALL ABOUT?
You are invited to be part of some research that is trying to find out whether your involvement in sport has made a difference to the way you think and feel about your community. My name is Neil Hall, and I am doing this research as a student and lecturer at the University of Western Sydney. I will put together all the information that I get into a report to go towards my PhD.

HOW WILL IT WORK?
If you are between 15 and 25 and you want to be involved, you will be able to come to an interview and talk about your experiences. It will go for about an hour. In the interview, I’ll ask you whether your involvement in sport helps you feel like you belong to your community, or gives you a group of friends, or gives you recognition, or makes you want to do more things for your community, or you can say whatever else you think is important. The interview will be audio-taped.

I won’t use anybody’s name in the report so no one will know what you as an individual said. You’ll also be able to find out about the report before it’s printed to make sure you’re happy that your experiences have been written down accurately.

WHAT BENEFITS ARE THERE?
Hopefully this research will help people better understand what it means for young men to take part in the life of their community, give you some kind of recognition for it, and give you the chance to tell your story. The research will also hopefully help youth workers do their job better.

DO I HAVE TO?
You can be part of the research if you want to. You can pull out anytime you want to. You can say as much or as little in the interview as you want to. I won’t ask you to say anything about your personal lives that doesn’t relate to the research, and you won’t be forced to answer any questions out loud. You and/or your parent/guardian just need to sign the consent form to agree to be involved.

WHERE WILL IT HAPPEN?
We will be able to find a safe space for the interview near where you live. It might be in a youth centre, community centre, church or somewhere else you can suggest. It’s also fine if you want to bring someone with you for support.

WHO DO I CALL?
If you have any other questions or would like to speak to me more about the project you can call or sms on 0417 278 645, or email me at n.hall@uws.edu.au

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4736 0883). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
APPENDIX 4 – PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

SPORT & COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION RESEARCH

CONSENT FORM

I, __________________________, have had explained to me what this research is about and what will be done with the information collected.

I understand that …

- The interview will be taped
- I can quit the interview at any time for any reason
- My name or the names of any other people will not be mentioned or recorded in any reports about the research produced by Neil Hall.
- Participation is completely voluntary - I am free to change my mind about participating at any time.
- The results from this research will used for a PhD, and may also be presented at conferences or in journals.
- Neil Hall is a PhD student and teacher at the University of Western Sydney, on Bullecourt Ave Milperra. He can be contacted on:

  0417 278 645 or n.hall@uws.edu.au.

I agree to be interviewed ______________________ Date_________

(Participant)

For participants under 16 …

I, ____________________________, being the parent/guardian of ____________________________, give my consent to his participation in this research.

Signed ____________________________ (parent/guardian)

I agree to meet the conditions specified above________________________ (Researcher)

Date__________________________

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4736 0883). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Do you love sport?

Are you interested in some new research?

Neil Hall, a researcher and teacher from University of Western Sydney is interested in talking to males aged 15-25 about their involvement in sport, and whether it makes a difference to the way you think and feel about your community.

Being involved in the research is pretty simple. It will mean being interviewed, in a safe place, about your experiences of sport and your participation in community life.

If you’d like to get involved, or for a more detailed info sheet, call/SMS Neil on 0417 278 645, or email n.hall@uws.edu.au
APPENDIX 6 – SAMPLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE AND SETTING

- What kind of sport are you involved in?
- What do you like/dislike about it?
- What benefits do you get from it?
- How important is sport in your life?
- How would you describe the values of your sport/club/group?
- In terms of the culture of your sport/club/group,
  - who sets the values?
  - how are they passed on?
  - Is there a role for elite or senior participants as ‘role models’?
  - does the media have any effect?
- Are there any values/expectations of the club that you strongly agree/disagree with?
- How would you describe your ‘community’?
- How do you feel about your community?
- In what ways does your sport make you feel like you belong/not belong to your community?
- In what ways does your sport help/hinder building friendships?
- Do you feel like your community values your participation in sport?
- What does it mean to you to participate in your local community?
- Is sport the main way in which you participate?
- Has your participation in sport led you to get involved in any other ways of participating in your local community?
• If so, can you describe your involvement in those activities? e.g. What did you do? What positive/negative experiences you have had? What worked/didn’t work? What would you do/not do again?

• If not, can you describe some of the reasons why not?

• Are there any other things that might make you motivated to get involved in other aspects of the life of your community?

• Have you made a conscious choice to participate/engage in community? What have been the reasons for this choice? Have they changed at all over time?

• Have you been engaged in community because of sporting passion/participation or would you have been anyway?

• Has your involvement with sports changed the way you view society?
  o Has it influenced how you vote? (or whether you care?)
  o Has it made you more attentive to news?
  o Has it increased your likelihood of making statements in public meetings?
  o Has it increased your likelihood of volunteering? (how – time, type of work, type of organisation)
  o Has it made you more conscious of issues of fairness and justice?
  o Has it motivated you to get involved in any community issues or any form of political activity?
  o Has it helped/hindered career choices?
  o Has it helped/hindered relationships?
  o Has it helped/hindered any other life choices?

• Are there any other aspects of your sports participation which you have carried over into your general life?

• Do you have anything else you would like to add?
**Interview setting**

The physical layout of the room was devised to facilitate positive communication between the researcher and the participant, yet also allowed for easy egress should the participant decide to terminate the interview (See Figure 1). To optimise recording, the tape recorder was pointed toward the participant. Both chairs were in front of the table so that there was no artificial barrier between the parties. Fook (1993) describes this arrangement as a practical outworking of a radical theoretical perspective, as barriers such as desks often serve to reinforce unequal power relationships. The information sheet and consent form were placed on the table next to the participant’s chair to allow easy access. A clock on the table was also visible to both parties. The chairs were situated on the door side of the table in order to avoid the nuisance of negotiating obstacles when initially entering the room. This also meant that the participant did not need to negotiate obstacles should they have chosen to terminate the interview and leave the room.

**Figure 1: Set-up of interview space**