The Bad, The Good, and The Ugly: The Formation of Heroes within the Setting of a New Sports Team

by

Keith D. Parry

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

Doctor of Philosophy - Culture and Society

Institute for Culture and Society

Western Sydney University

2017
Acknowledgments

I would first like to acknowledge the support, expertise, patience and direction provided by my supervisors, Professors David Rowe and Deborah Stevenson. Their understanding throughout this journey has been invaluable and I have benefitted from their knowledge in ways that go beyond merely the completion of this thesis. I also want to thank the other staff and students in the Institute for Culture and Society that have been integral to my completion. The education, advice, and camaraderie offered at the Institute were vital in this process. The Institute’s support during tough times was very much appreciated.

The support of the GWS Giants has also been much valued during this period and I particularly wish to acknowledge Rebecca Shaw and Richard Griffiths for their interest and support. It has been a pleasure to watch the development of the club during the period of research and I look forward to watching their future successes.

I also want to acknowledge the support of Western Sydney University and School of Business for providing me with a period of study leave to focus on this thesis. I will be forever grateful for the time afforded me to reach this stage in the process.

I also thank my family and friends for their support, encouragement, and prayers. I feel I have neglected them all at times during this doctoral research and want them all to know that their support has been greatly appreciated.

Finally, I want to thank my wife for her patience, encouragement, and unending support and love over the length of my doctoral studies. I am indebted to her for her willingness to sacrifice some of our plans and aspirations to allow me to complete this thesis. I promise to provide the same levels of support and encouragement when she decides to undergo the same doctoral journey!
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

....................................................

(Signature)
# Table of Contents

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................. i

Abstract ................................................................................................................................... iii

Chapter 1 – Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1
  The Role of Sport ................................................................................................................... 1
  Sports Hero Research and Analysis ....................................................................................... 3
  The Greater Western Sydney Giants ..................................................................................... 8
  Stylistic Conventions .......................................................................................................... 10
  Research Method ................................................................................................................. 11
  Chapter Outline .................................................................................................................... 13

Chapter 2 – Sport in Society .................................................................................................... 15
  Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 15
  The Role of Sport in Society ............................................................................................... 16
  Masculinity and Representation of the Body ...................................................................... 22
  Race and Ethnicity .............................................................................................................. 26
  Sport Labour Migration ....................................................................................................... 29
  Sport Fandom ..................................................................................................................... 34
  Sport in Australia ............................................................................................................... 39
  Australian Rules Football and the Australian Football League ......................................... 45
  Indigenous Athletes in Australian sport ............................................................................. 49
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 51

Chapter 3 – Heroes .................................................................................................................. 53
  Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 53
  Search for the Hero .............................................................................................................. 54
  Hero Studies ........................................................................................................................ 60
  Sporting Heroes .................................................................................................................. 67
  Australian Sporting Heroes .............................................................................................. 75
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 80

Chapter 4 – Australianness ...................................................................................................... 82
  Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 82
  Historical Visions of Australianness ................................................................................... 84
  Australian Masculinity ........................................................................................................ 90
  The Australian Landscape ................................................................................................. 94
  Multiculturalism in Australia ............................................................................................. 97
  Western Sydney .................................................................................................................. 104
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 109

Chapter 5 – Observations of the GWS Giants ...................................................................... 111
  Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 111
  The Evolution of the GWS Giants ....................................................................................... 112
  Development of a fan culture ............................................................................................. 124
  Notable players and staff ................................................................................................. 130
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 134

Chapter 6 – The Bad: Israel Folau .......................................................................................... 136
  Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 136
  Background of Israel Folau ............................................................................................... 137
  From Hero to Villain .......................................................................................................... 144
  Body Matters ..................................................................................................................... 157
  Ethnicity and Otherness ................................................................................................. 163
Abstract

This thesis examines the formation of sporting heroes in the context of a new sporting club. In particular, it investigates when and how a sporting hero is formed, and who (or what) dictates the emergence of a hero. Central to this line of enquiry is a discussion of the negotiation between fans, the club, and the media in forming a hero. Moreover, this thesis discusses sports hero formation in relation to national identity, arguing that it can be a critical component of the development of a hero. Drawing upon the work of Joseph Campbell and Orrin E. Klapp, it contextualises the sporting hero in the wider narratives of hero typologies. As a secondary line of enquiry I explore the characteristics of, and barriers to, the formation of fan and club cultures in the context of a new sporting club.

The themes of the thesis are analysed through a case study investigation of the new Australian Football League (AFL) club, the Greater Western Sydney (GWS) Giants. The 2012 debut of this team in the AFL afforded an unusual opportunity to examine how sporting heroes, a team, and its fans are simultaneously formed. The research utilises a mixed qualitative methodology, incorporating organisational communication analysis, observations at GWS Giants’ matches and events, and semiotic and discourse analyses of club communications to members, of online fan forums, and of media coverage in the two best-selling Sydney-based daily newspapers, The Daily Telegraph and The Sydney Morning Herald.

This thesis identifies three key figures within the club – Israel Folau, Jeremy Cameron, and Kevin Sheedy – as prominent individuals. Folau, a former rugby league player, was ‘headhunted’ to be a hero and was utilised in marketing and promotional material, but was not able to perform to a heroic level on the pitch, and was condemned for being a sporting ‘mercenary’. Narratives were built up around Cameron as an emerging hero, emphasising his athletic ability and cultural connection to notions of ‘Australianness’. He was presented as a ‘boy from the bush’ in a manner that was reminiscent of the revered Australian cricketer Don Bradman. Sheedy, the club’s first coach, is one of Australian football’s best-known figures, with narratives around him focussing on his personal history in the sport and image as a ‘typical Australian’ who played the historically resonant role of the ‘clever hero’.
The culture of a club takes time to develop and the identification and activity of GWS
Giants’ fans, with respect to the club and their heroes, was influenced by their on-
field success – or lack thereof. I conclude that fan cultures are spatially specific,
meaning that the geographical and cultural diversity of the GWS region hinders the
development of a club culture.

Finally, the thesis argues that the formation of sports heroes is shaped by established
notions of national identity and longstanding mythological archetypes rather than
heroes’ personal traits or deeds. Universal hero myths, furthermore, provide
recognised narratives that frame the emergence of new heroes in otherwise very
different societies. My research offers a significant contribution to debates
surrounding the roles of heroes both in and outside sport. It advances the sociological
understanding of the dynamics of sports hero formation and functions as a platform
for future, innovative research in its field.
Chapter 1 – Introduction

“We all need people to look up to. When you know yours, break down what it is you most admire about them” – Adam Goodes (2014 Australian of the Year and former Sydney Swans AFL player)

The Role of Sport

Sport is situated within the material context of everyday life and, therefore, becomes an important site for discussions about subjects such as identity, cultural politics, globalization, and nationalism (Andrews, Mason & Silk 2005). David Rowe (2015, 577) believes that the pervasiveness of sport raises questions such as:

…whether sport should be played and, if so, which sports and by whom, and to what ends, as well as how it should be represented, and which practices and values should sport be expected to promote, and which to subdue.

It is traditionally regarded as a conservative institution (Anderson 2011) that can often reinforce and preserve stereotypes and dominant ideologies, and in doing so, its barriers to participation can come to exclude whole classes and groups of people (Coakley, Hallinan & McDonald 2011). Sport becomes a site of contestation with struggle over whose version of sport truly matters (Giulianotti 2005). According to the Federal Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), sport forms a critical element of Australia’s culture and identity (DIAC 2014), often reinforcing traditional notions of Australianness to the exclusion of those who do not fit with the dominant narrative.

Sociologist Paul Willis (1990) suggests that sport also provides resources for the formation of cultural identity. He proposes that sport facilitates sociability, providing the opportunity to meet new people, while at the same time offering a degree of mutual interest and trust. Sport also provides a mechanism for “thinking about, regulating and developing the body, and through that a sense of the self” (Willis 1990, 110), with the social nature of sport allowing this image of ‘the self’ to be constructed on both outward and inward levels. Through sport, people are able to develop an
image of the self based on those around them, which they can then project onto others. Robert Sands (1999, 11) similarly states that sport “has been and always will be a significant element of cultural behaviour” and a leading agent for social change in societies across the world. Moreover, sociologist Norbert Elias (2008) claims that, on a wider basis, sport can also act as an indicator of the structural characteristics of society. Sport, therefore, plays a significant role in the formation of identity at not only an individual but also at a broader societal level, and it is clearly worthy of academic investigation.

The field of sports studies was founded in the 1960s and has been primarily influenced by the disciplines of sociology and history (Giulianotti 2005). The sociology of sport arose from these beginnings and is a multi-paradigmatic discipline (Dunning 1992). In addition, Andrew Parker and John Harris (2009) believe that the diverse nature of modern society is such that it is no longer possible to develop one single theoretical perspective to explain the structures, processes, and practices that constitute multiple, diverse societies. Sport is a diverse field and there are many sub-areas that are worthy of study. Schimmel, Harrington and Bielby (2007) argue that the area of sports fans has been marginalised within wider sport research, despite the increasingly significant role that sport consumption is playing within everyday life (Crawford 2004). While sociological studies which focus on the positive aspects of sport fandom are increasing, Cottingham (2012) contends that there are still many areas which require further inquiry. Hills (2002) lists elements of culture such as films, television programmes, music, and celebrities as areas that fan cultures are often built around.

While sport may not appear in Hills’ list, it is one of the cultural domains that sees otherwise ‘normal’ people, from all walks of life (Crawford 2004), develop a deeply subjective devotion towards a particular element of that culture. This devotion leads to displays of emotion that, as my previous research has revealed, may appear irrational and, at times, dysfunctional (Parry 2012). I, along with my co-authors, have also argued elsewhere that sports fan cultures share a number of forms of behaviour and characteristics (Parry, Jones & Wann 2014) but, nevertheless, these fan cultures are rich and diverse, and are not restricted to one particular place or sport. Each sports fan culture will have its own unique characteristics, influenced by the cultural
setting and society within which the sport is being played and consumed. Each fan group will have rituals and patterns of behaviour that have special meaning for members of the group and may not be easily understood by those outside it. The richness and diversity of fan cultures makes it important that fans are not studied in isolation. Fandom interacts with other identity formations, such as nationality, class, gender, and race (Osborne & Coombs 2013), and factors such as the sport, club, and the region and its demographics will all influence the attitudes and behaviour of the fans. Fan behaviour varies not only across sport but also between teams in the same sport or teams playing in the same league and city (Brown 2007). Nevertheless, one of the areas of commonality across fan cultures is the presence of heroes, and the following section will outline the importance of sports heroes and the existing research in this area.

**Sports Hero Research and Analysis**

Sports heroes are yet to be understood fully, and the majority of studies into this phenomenon have examined established heroes in existing settings (see, for instance, Melnick & Jackson 2002; Stevens, Lathrop & Bradish 2003; Parry 2009). The process by which sports heroes are formed and emerge remains unclear. Since the mid-twentieth century sport has been increasingly commodified and now the faces of the top athletes are even known to those with little interest in sport (Smart 2007). These recognisable faces are often heralded as heroes by their fans.

The term hero is derived from the Greek *heros* and refers to one that is part human and part divine, transcending the mortal and the mundane (Boon 2005). While it may not be the case that modern heroes are explicitly presented as divine beings, top athletes are often believed to have seemingly superhuman powers that are greater than those of most mortals. For instance, athletes who set records for running faster than anyone has ever run before (Tännsjö 1998) offer the illusion of transcending the mortal, which partially serves to explain their heroisation. In discussing the sociology of sport, Joseph Maguire (2011, 854) argues that “[o]ur heroes express both the myths and revered social values of a society and the sports ethic...[which underpins] involvement in sport.” Sports historian Richard Crepeau also shares this view that sports heroes provide an insight into the society within which they are constructed. In
this vein, Crepeau (1981, 24) suggests that heroes, “show us what we ought to be, and we make him a hero because we wish to be what he is”.

Sport is one of the key domains from which people, both young and old, draw their heroes (Wann et al. 2001; Melnick & Jackson 2002; Stevens, Lathrop & Brandish 2003; Parry 2009), and if one was to ask most sports fans who their sporting hero is, it is likely that a name would be quickly offered. For fans, no explanation is needed for what a sports hero is, as the concept is deeply ingrained within sport (Lanfranchi, Holt & Mangan 1996). While fans may be able to offer some basic explanation for their choice of hero, through, for instance, reference to the skill of the athlete or their prosocial behaviour (Wann et al. 2001), they may not follow the advice of 2014 Australian of the Year and former Sydney Swans player Adam Goodes (presented at the start of this chapter and cited in News.com.au (2014)) and really “break down” what is important in their selection of a hero.

It has been claimed that heroes are the very essence of sport and that “sport without a hero is like Hamlet without a prince” (Holt, Mangan & Lanfranchi 1996, 5). While this may be a rather dramatic description, the underlying tenor of the statement does speak to the significant role that heroes play in sport. The character of the Prince is pivotal to Shakespeare’s Hamlet, providing the thrust of the plot, and the focal point for the hopes of the audience. In sport, the hero also carries the hopes of spectators and may occupy an equally pivotal role in the unfolding sporting drama. Whether intentional or not, Holt, Mangan, and Lanfranchi’s (1996) comparison of sport to a theatrical performance serves to emphasise the elements of suspense and drama, with the uncertain outcome a vital element of sport (Whannel 1993; Whannel 2008). These dramatic elements, which will typically, and crucially, be conveyed to audiences through the media (Crawford 2004, Whannel 2008), have been identified as playing an important role in the formation of heroes (Klapp 1948). Boorstin (1992) argues that the notion of fame began to be ‘manufactured’ in America during the nineteenth century. He believes that a person could rapidly gain fame and that it is the media and their consumers that drive this rise to 'well-knownness'. The rapidity and effectiveness of this rise to prominence may, then, mislead those same consumers into confusing a 'big name' with a 'big man’, and to recognise the fame of a celebrity rather than the achievements of a hero.
Despite the important social and cultural role that sports heroes play, research in this area is limited and has only recently become of interest to the academic community (Crawford 2004). Indeed, authors such as Greenwood, Kanters and Casper (2006) identify the need for more research into this element of sport consumption. A sociological understanding of heroes is an important aspect of knowledge and understanding of sport and its role within society (Crepeau 1981). The sporting hero, in particular, is recognised as a key component within sport consumption (Crawford 2004; Smart 2005) and is now commodified, and so produced and reproduced (Meân, Kassing & Sanderson 2010). It is likely that the religious undertones that exist regarding celebrity worship may also be present within hero worship. As is the case with the relationship between fans and athletes, recent work on the topic of heroes also appears to be dominated by social psychological studies that have identified common characteristics and functions of heroes in sport (Wann et al. 2001; Parry 2009; Sullivan & Venter 2010). There is a degree of similarity between the sports heroes in these studies that has been partially attributed to the shared cultural background of the participants (Sullivan & Venter 2010). There have also been a number of studies that have focussed on analyses of established, and often departed, sporting heroes, examining the historical and cultural contexts for their heroisation (see, for instance, Yoseloff (1999); Hutchins (2002); Bale (2006); Mooney and Ramsland (2008); Phillips & Osmond (2009); Naha (2012); Viita (2012) Allen (2013)).

The majority of the limited sociological literature that does exist (for example Cashmore 2004; Smart 2005) has tended to explain the heroes who have emerged largely as a result of their sporting achievements or moral and physical superiority, and who are presented by a dominant mass media to a passive body of sport fans. However, as Crawford (2004) suggests, it is dangerous to view such phenomena purely in these top-down terms. He stresses the need to focus on the power of fans themselves to create their own heroes, sometimes through interaction with each other at the sports stadium. These venues have become increasingly mediated and communication in the stadium also plays an important part in the creation of the sports hero (Drucker 1994). While there is a body of sociological work that discusses celebrities, in both a sport context and more generally (Turner, Bonner & Marshall,
2000; Rojek 2001; Smart 2005; Whannel 2008; Rojek 2012), this literature fails adequately to address the notion of sports heroes.

Dean A. Miller (2000) asserts that hero selection is a personal choice yet there are several classic works that have presented shared characteristics of heroes and a number of archetypal forms that heroes can take. Such archetypes have identified types such as the clever hero (Klapp 1954a), the prophet (Carlyle 1840), and the unpromising hero (Klapp 1948; 1949a). In most instances, it is possible to identify a pattern in the ‘journey’ that heroes follow (Carlyle 1840), or in their life story (Raglan 1956). The existence and enduring popularity of such typologies suggest that there is a degree of commonality in these choices. Emile Durkheim (1965), the French sociologist, argued that social phenomena are defined by the collective aspects of the beliefs and practices of the individuals – social facts – that make up a particular society as a reality that is ‘sui generis’ (distinct). In such a situation memorable entities become sedimented in the collective unconscious of a society (Berger & Luckman 1966). Therefore, while the social psychological approach adopted in previous studies may have presented some explanation of the justifications that people present to explain their choice of hero, and for the differing categories of hero that may or may not exist, it is not used in my thesis. The apparent pseudo-religious nature of sports fandom and sports hero worship suggests that there are deeper societal issues at play within the lives of sports fans that cannot be explained by a social psychological investigation. Such approaches fail to address appropriately the social and cultural contexts within which people make decisions. While Sullivan and Venter (2010), as noted, allude to the importance of the shared cultural background of the participants in their study, they failed adequately to consider what this cultural setting was and how it influenced their participants.

Writing in the mid–to-late twentieth century, historian Daniel Boorstin (1992) suggested that it was only during times of war that it was possible for heroes to arise. Boorstin believed that acts performed on a battlefield were easily comprehended as heroic. In past eras the accomplishments of the ‘Big’ (or ‘Great’) Men have been relatively easy to understand; explorers discovered new lands, artists created stunning works, political leaders fought for the rights of the people. Boorstin (1992) proposed that, as humanity progressed and became more scientific and technologically
sophisticated, it was increasingly difficult to understand the achievements of the ‘Big Men’ of the times, whose achievements were accomplished on ‘unintelligible frontiers’. Regardless of the basis for heroisation, historian Thomas Carlyle, in one of the classic studies into heroes (1840, 26), claims that all societies are a representation of a “graduated worship of heroes” and, for over four thousand years, tales around heroism have been reproduced in mythical formats (Campbell 2004), historically passed down through oral traditions to be told and retold until the hero myth has become ingrained in western society (Drucker & Cathcart 1994). The significance of myths in earlier oral societies and twenty-first century life is emphasised by Berger and Luckman (1966) who argue that myths are among the most archaic of human constructions. These mythical stories have become everlasting, universally recognised structures (Lévi-Strauss 1955) that allow humans to make sense of both their lives and the world around them, living out the patterns of stories that have been previously created (Fisher 1984a; Pearson 1989; Wright 2005). Such is ‘our’ reliance on stories and narratives that humans have been described as ‘homo narrans’ (the storyteller man) (Fisher 1984b). The media have assumed the ancient role of the storyteller in oral cultures to disseminate the stories surrounding heroes (Cathcart 1994) and, as an example of this role, Alexis Tadié (2012) proposes that literary works on association football have addressed two concerns, one of which is heroes. He argues that the second type focuses on the fans and their attitudes towards sport.

Celebrity figures and heroes do not emerge in a cultural vacuum (Parker 2009). These subjects of adoration are first created by cultural, political, and historical circumstances and are then further popularised through media coverage. Holden (2012, 19) highlights that heroes are “emotional icons whose qualities match ideals embedded in the culture”, suggesting, therefore, that it is not possible to separate a study of sports heroes from a study of the society within which they exist. Thus, to gain a deep understanding of the process by which sport fans form their heroes, it is first necessary to gain a strong understanding of the context within which the process of heroisation takes place.
The Greater Western Sydney Giants

In 2012 the Greater Western Sydney (GWS) Giants entered the Australian Football League (AFL) as its 18th team. The establishment of this new team afforded me an unusual opportunity to research the formation of sports heroes, a team and the associated fan culture within a complex, rich, socio-cultural context. It should be noted that the Giants were created and, to a large extent, imposed on a region that had little history of Australian football. Without a historical basis, the club needed to develop its culture and to present suitable heroes for their developing fan base, while the fans themselves would need to construct their own distinct fan culture. GWS is a region within the metropolitan area of Sydney in the eastern Australian state of New South Wales (NSW). The region has a diverse ethnic make-up that includes one half of the world’s nationalities, and it is home to one in eleven Australians, with the most recently reported census (June 2011) revealing an estimated population of 2.02 million that is forecast to grow to over 3 million inhabitants by 2036 (Parramatta City Council 2012). This projected population is larger than the current combined populations of South Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory, and the Australian Capital Territory (Department of Premier and Cabinet NSW 2012). The expanding population of GWS has led three of the main professional sporting competitions in Australia, the A-League (association football), the Big Bash League (cricket), and the AFL to establish teams in the region since 2011. In two of these cases, the new teams that have been established in GWS have been clearly labelled as representing Sydney’s West. As with the Greater Western Sydney Giants, the new association football team was named the Western Sydney Wanderers (my italics), and, while the second of Sydney’s Big Bash teams – the Sydney Thunder – is not linked to the region by name, the club has aligned itself with it and “the people of Western Sydney” (Sydney Thunder 2013). The Sydney metropolitan region is now saturated with sports teams all vying for sport market share, including: nine of the sixteen National Rugby League (NRL) teams; two A-League teams (with corresponding women’s teams); two teams in each of the men’s and women’s Big Bash Leagues; two teams in the Australian national netball league (starting in 2017); one Super Rugby (rugby union) team; a team in both the National Basketball League and the Australian Baseball League; two AFL teams; and, from 2017, a team in the new AFL Women’s competition.
As the number of NRL teams suggests, the Sydney region has a historic association with rugby league and is considered to be a heartland of the sport (Rosenberg 2009). It was not until 1982 that the first AFL team, the Sydney Swans, was established in the region and, as my previous research has argued, the move to introduce a second team was greeted with some hostility by those who feel that AFL has no place in NSW (Parry 2013). This hostility is to some degree based on historical notions, with NSW classified as a rugby league state (alongside Queensland), which contrasts with the traditional Australian football states of Western Australia, South Australia, and Victoria (Kelly & Hickey 2008). The introduction of a second professional Australian football team in the Sydney region was in part due to a desire by the AFL Commission (the governing body of Australian football and the AFL) to increase the presence of AFL not only in the Sydney area, but in the most populous Australian state. From the outset, the AFL has been keen for the new GWS team to be part of a spatially defined community, reflecting the needs and values of the local population (Cullen 2009). With the addition of a second Sydney-based team, the AFL is ‘theoretically’ able to ensure that there is an AFL game in Sydney each week during the AFL season and, more significantly, it has enabled the AFL to increase its presence on free-to-air television within the region as all Giants and Swans home games are broadcast live on free-to-air television in Sydney. It is within this aforementioned socio-cultural context that the GWS Giants club is attempting to establish itself. The club and, in some instances, the players are positioned in relation to various regional and national identity discourses, and are caught up in a (perceived) battle for supremacy between sporting codes in the region.

I set out to explain the formation of sports heroes within the setting of a new team with sports heroes initially defined as sociocultural constructions that are renowned for substantial achievements or performances in sport. In addition, the relationship between heroisation and institutions such as the media, sport associations, and sport clubs is important. A secondary aim of the thesis is to analyse the development of fan and club culture within this setting. Drawing on the work of cultural theorist Matt Hills (2002), a fan culture is defined as the specific characteristics and behaviour built up around a common interest. Of particular focus is the process by which fans of a new team form heroes, particularly if the team does not enjoy immediate success, and when players are not well known. It examines whether it is possible for the media or
a club to ‘present’ fans with a potential hero. Any new high-profile player brought into a nascent club can be considered as a ‘top-down’, imposed hero, identified by the club and highlighted as such by the media. The club’s fans may not accept such top-down figures. What emerges as important are the negotiations in the conceptualisation and formation of heroes that take place between fans, the club, and the media.

Historian Tim Hogan (2005) states that academic writing on Australian football only began in earnest the 1980s, highlighting that there was previously a lack of literature and scholarly research that focussed on off-field events linked to the sport. Matthew Nicholson (2005, 3) goes on to state that the importance of spectator culture had been “virtually ignored” to such an extent as to create a “massive blindspot” in the understanding of Australian football. He also argues that the greater mass of research has concentrated on clubs and competitions in Victoria. This thesis will, therefore, address two current gaps: first, the lack of sociological research into sports heroes and, second, the limited research into Australian football cultures outside Victoria. Given the complex sociocultural context of this thesis, and to avoid any unnecessary terminological confusion, I will briefly clarify my use of key terms.

**Stylistic Conventions**

Some stylistic conventions should be noted at this stage. First, while the club presents its name as the GWS GIANTS, for the purpose of this thesis this capitalisation has not been used. Second, in Australian sport, the term football (or footy) is used to describe a number of different sport codes (Rosenberg 2009; Hynes, Kiernan & Parry 2013). In New South Wales the term is likely to refer to rugby league, but in Victoria, it will most likely mean Australian Rules football. In other regions it can also refer to association football and rugby union. To avoid confusion, the term football is not used in this thesis. For consistency, Australian Rules football, as played in the AFL, will be referred to as Australian football; association football will be used for the version of the football that is also known as ‘soccer’; and the two rugby codes will be referred to as rugby league and rugby union. In addition, the advice of Joan Fayer (1994) will be followed and the word hero will be used to describe anyone who performs a heroic deed, whether male or female, with the plural heroes also used.
Fayer cites Miller and Swift’s (1980) *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing*, which identified the word heroine as a condescending word that diminishes the degree of heroism in a female’s deed. Finally, following common practice in Critical Whiteness Studies, I capitalise the term White to draw attention to the constructed nature of race, in line with practices in critical interdisciplinary areas such as Critical Race Theory (CRT). This introductory chapter will now provide a brief overview of the methodology adopted in this thesis, and an outline of the following chapters.

**Research Method**

An interpretivist, qualitative case study method, which has a long history within sociological research (Yin 2009), was adopted for this thesis. Case study research is a stand-alone method that involves an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon within its ‘real-world’ context. Multiple sources of evidence are used and the case study method is often seen as synonymous with qualitative research (Edwards & Skinner 2009). In this thesis a mixed qualitative approach was taken, incorporating a triangulation of data from observation, netnography, and analysis of club communications to its members and media narratives (mainly newspapers).

Working from Crawford’s (2004) supposition that sports heroes are likely to be constructed in bottom-up terms, observation of fans was initially identified as an appropriate research method to capture the formation of heroes. Sport fandom is often expressive and, as discussed by Wann et al. (2001), it is based on observable behaviour. Therefore, it was initially believed that performative expressions of fandom (Hills 2002; Crawford 2004; Osborne & Coombs 2013) would include observable evidence of heroisation. Participant observation has been used to study marginalised subcultures in sport, with a particular focus on dysfunctional fans and hooligans (Armstrong & Harris 1991; Giulianotti 1995; Hughson 1998; 2000; Weed 2006; Kraszewski 2008; Fairley 2009). Observations were conducted at the three venues that were believed to be the principal sites of sports fans’ heroisation practices. Games at the home stadiums of the GWS Giants (ANZ Stadium in Sydney, the Sydney Showground (known as both Škoda Stadium and Spotless Stadium at the time of this study) and Manuka Oval in Canberra) were attended between March 2012 and April 2014, with observations captured via fieldnotes and photographs. While
these observations largely failed to reveal major, noteworthy levels of heroisation activity, this finding in itself is significant. The apparent lack of such activity has enabled valuable insights into the process of heroisation and the development of fan and club cultures. This initial limitation helped me to conceptualise the wider context of hero formation, and to probe this observation further. From this analysis, three potential hero cases emerged as significant and worthy of detailed investigation – Israel Folau, Jeremy Cameron, and Kevin Sheedy. Observations were also supported by an unobtrusive netnography of two online sports fan forums, primarily of archival data (Jones 2015), following the method adopted by Rebecca Williams in her analysis of online sites. A total of 1,254 threads across the BigFooty and FanFooty forums was analysed and revealed a level of detail on, and insight into, the formation of heroes that was not observable at games. This combination of observation at games and netnography allowed an in-depth understanding of fan practices to be developed.

To investigate the formation of heroes from a top-down perspective, a textual analysis was conducted of the discourses developed in the media coverage of the three heroes identified in the first phase of the research. The obvious top-down presentation of heroes would come from the club, and so 204 emails from the Giants to their members, and content on the club’s website formed the first data set for further analysis. The reporting of sport by a nation’s press has been identified as a key representation of the country’s cultural priorities (Naha 2012), and thus I analysed the two best-selling Sydney-based daily newspapers (AMAA 2015), The Daily Telegraph (a tabloid) and The Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) (a ‘quality’ broadsheet now in tabloid format). 350 articles were identified via search engines on these newspapers’ websites and Western Sydney University’s Library. A combination of semiotic and discourse analysis was utilised to identify the presentation of these heroes in the newspapers. Roland Barthes (1968; 1972) contends that many objects can be treated as a system of signs and so, by extension, can be read as a ‘text’. In their examination of Australian popular culture, Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987) utilised a semiotic method, and it has also been used in a limited number of studies of sport (for example, Osmond and Phillips 2011; 2014). Discourse analysis has previously been used within a sport setting to examine a number of areas (such as media coverage of sport and the sporting experiences of children) and is an established method within the field of the sociology of sport (Cooky 2012; Walters et al. 2012; Smith & Moore...
As advocated by Long (2007) and Corbin and Strauss (2008), analysis began after the first stage of data collection, and thereafter a constant process of data collection, coding, and analysis was used. Initial themes were refined and developed as this process of analysis progressed (Rapley 2011). A full discussion of the methodology utilised for this study is provided in the Methodological Appendix.

Chapter Outline

This first chapter has provided an overview of the subject area and context of this thesis, by way on an introduction. Chapter 2 contextualises the thesis within the field of the sociology of sport. Its key themes are discussed, along with an analysis of how they ‘play out’ in an Australian setting. In Chapter 3 the overall theoretical framework surrounding sports heroes is detailed, differentiating between the terms used in this area – namely celebrity, star, and hero. This chapter positions the thesis in relation to the existing body of scholarly work on heroes. Chapter 4 further explores Australian identity and highlights its historical bases, providing the context for this thesis. The chapter finishes with a discussion of the Western Sydney region and details the key discourses that frame the region’s identity, which are relevant to understanding the process of heroisation.

Chapter 5 details the key developments in the brief history of the GWS Giants and, with reference to participant observations, discusses the evolving fan culture. As noted above, the three heroes that emerged during the course of this study are examined – former NRL player Israel Folau, young forward Jeremy Cameron, and the club’s inaugural coach, Kevin Sheedy. These three subjects are studied in detail in turn in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. Chapter 6 focuses on Israel Folau, an existing ‘hero’ poached from another football code, and provides a case study of his time at the Giants. It will be shown that narratives surrounding the marketing and promotion of Folau were part of wider discussions of a ‘code war’ that was perceived to be taking place in Western Sydney, and which ultimately resulted in his portrayal as a villain rather than as a hero in the media. Discursive representations of his body that diminished his other personal characteristics, and a focus on his ethnicity, presenting him as ‘Other’, are key analytical concerns. Jeremy Cameron’s on-field performances
saw him emerge as a hero for fans and the club was quick to capitalise on his success. Chapter 7 explores representations of him and identifies club and media narratives that highlighted his personality and physical characteristics, and presented him as a ‘boy from the bush’. A combination of his athletic ability and his association with mythical constructions of both Australianess and heroisation positioned him as a particular kind of hero. The final case study, in Chapter 8, explores discourses related to Kevin Sheedy, selected for analysis due to his status as the club’s foundation coach and high profile media advocacy for the team. He proves to be a complex and controversial figure that was heroised due to his legendary status, his leadership capabilities, and his ‘cunning nature’.

Finally, Chapter 9 reveals the key analytical findings from this thesis. It provides significant insights into the formation of sports heroes, identifying the roles that both myth and national identity play in the construction of sporting heroes. I identify that the historical and socio-cultural factors are the most significant elements in hero selection. This chapter also addresses the question of whether it is possible to migrate heroic status and argues that it is sport specific. I conclude that, although my research has focussed on sports heroes, the findings can be extended to heroes across society more generally. To begin this investigation into the formation of sporting heroes, I will now contextualise the setting for this thesis within the field of the sociology of sport.
Chapter 2 – Sport in Society

Sport “contributes constructively to the harmonious and complete development of man, body and soul” – Pope John Paul II.

“Someone said to me ‘To you football is a matter of life and death!’ and I said “Listen, it’s more important than that”” – Bill Shankly.

Introduction

Each day people from varying backgrounds and nations give considerable prominence to “seemingly bizarre cultural practices” (Rowe 2004, 1). The cultural practice referred to here is sport and, as Rowe further suggests, it is now an integral, almost taken for granted, element of daily life. Its role in everyday life is such that Eric Dunning (1999) drew attention to the importance of sport by stating that “Sport Matters” (admittedly, this title of Dunning’s text was also making a pun on ‘matters’ as both a noun and a verb). He believes that there are no other activities, past or present, which have “ever served so regularly as foci of simultaneous common interest and concern to so many people all over the world” (Dunning 1999, 1). Dunning is of the belief that the importance of sport does not need to be proved through facts and figures on participation or income generation. He contends that the pervasiveness of sport in culture, language, media coverage, public expenditure, and even social relationships is a more than adequate justification of its importance. Rowe (2013, 19) also captures the significance of sport when he states that “it would be foolish to ignore any phenomenon that could attract almost a seventh of the world’s population if only fleetingly, to engage in the same activity at the same time”. Sport is clearly significant, and sociologist Richard Giulianotti (2005) stresses that it should be considered on a par with love and truth as a human medium that connects people. Careful consideration of sport’s pervasiveness reveals that it cannot be considered as trivial and should be the focus of sociological studies (Elias & Dunning 1986a). Through studying sport it is possible to gain an understanding of the social world in which those who participate in, watch, or place importance on it, live. Furthermore, sport is a social construction (Coakley, Hallinan & McDonald 2011) that acts as “an indicator of the structural characteristics of a society” (Elias 2008,
The first section of this chapter will provide the contextual basis for this thesis, examining sport through a sociological lens to provide an understanding of some of the key struggles that exist within it. To this end, a discussion of the development of modern sport will first provide an awareness of the social and historical beginnings of sport, which will then be followed by a discussion highlighting the struggles for power that are replicated within it. While it is acknowledged that there are numerous factors that are pertinent to the discussion, three will be addressed here: gender (especially masculinity), race and ethnicity, and sport labour migration. Over the course of this investigation into sporting heroes, these factors emerged as significant influences on heroisation in the context of the GWS Giants. The second section of this chapter will provide a brief overview of sport fandom to develop an understanding of the dynamic relationships between sport consumers and organisations and players and to foreground subsequent discussions of the formation of a club culture. Finally, the third section will detail the Australian sporting landscape to identify the importance of factors such as gender, ethnicity, and geographical rivalry in Australian sport. The chapter will end with a discussion of Australian football that will identify its historical roots in Melbourne and highlight how its socio-cultural past has shaped the modern game and, ultimately, the formation of its heroes.

The Role of Sport in Society

Humans have long engaged in physical activity or “practices resembling the individual or recreational or theatrical activities we now call ‘sport’” (Mandell 1999, xi) but scholars such as Allen Guttmann and Richard Mandell have “argued forcefully that sports as we know them are something new under the sun” (Hardy 1999, 45). Admittedly, activities such as the Ancient Olympics have inspired modern sporting developments (Mechikoff & Estes 2006), but modern sport arose from rural games and rituals that were common in Europe before the eighteenth century (Stewart & Smith 2000). Dunning (1990) believes that the institutionalisation of sport in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a function of general social developments in
Western society, as part of what sociologist Norbert Elias (1994) termed the ‘civilising process’. Although this process involved a variety of factors, such as a society’s technology, manners, and scientific knowledge (Dunning 2012), a key element of his theory was the control of the often violent rural games (Lake 2009). Stewart and Smith (2000) link the development of spectator sport in that period to rapid economic growth in the wider society. As the civilising process involved increased urbanisation, sport played a role by “communicating the message that obedience to rules was required in city life” (Phillips 2000, 325). Within this civilising of society, sporting activities evolved from unregulated and often violent affairs to become a “healthy, enjoyable and socially constructive ‘end in themselves’” (Dunning 1990, 71). The codification of rural and folk games in Britain over approximately 150 years from the early eighteenth century until the late nineteenth century, gave birth to many modern sports (Guttmann 2004), and the process by which English pastimes were transformed into sports is termed ‘sportization’ (Elias & Dunning 1986b; Maguire et al. 2002; Mennell 2008). Therefore, England, the birthplace of industrialised capitalism, was to influence the development of sport and also the exploitation of it. The diffusion of sport can be connected to the spread of the British and other European empires in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Maguire 2015). Imperialistic advances facilitated the export of sport, along with other dimensions of British culture (Holt 1990; Horton 2015). It was seen as “a central element of the adhesive that unified the outposts of the British Empire” (Horton 2015, 1240) and, in conjunction with Christianity, was used to instil ‘gentlemanly’ virtues on native populations (Holt 1990; Mangan 2010; Parker & Weir 2012). When sports and games already existed in a country, it was more convenient for English codes and rules to be imposed so that competition at national and international levels would be possible (Mennell 2008). Sport was subsequently commercialised, becoming a “mass consumption industry” (Stewart & Smith 2000, 282), with human behaviour transformed into marketplace transactions (Guttmann 2004).

It was in the late twentieth century that sport emerged as a global phenomenon (Smart 2005), and its rise to prominence has led Garry Whannel (2008, 10) to claim that sport is now “everywhere”. Sport is so prominent that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)
have more nations affiliated with them than the United Nations. It is a pervasive element within many Western societies (Rowe & Gilmour 2009; Griggs, Leflay & Groves 2012), facilitating the spread of “Anglophile, Protestant, capitalist” ideologies throughout the globe (Carter 2011b). It has become increasingly intertwined with cultural, economic, political, and even environmental spheres of contemporary society (Jackson & Haigh 2008). The pervasive nature of sport means that, whilst it may have relatively low cultural status generally (Whannel 2008), it occupies a prominent position within many societies. The media’s preoccupation with sport makes it very difficult for a person to remain oblivious to the daily happenings in the sporting world. For many people, their day starts and ends by accessing sport through some form of media, as I have previously described (Parry 2012). One possible reason for its importance is put forward by American sport historian Allen Guttmann (2004, 157), who suggests that sport offers the “possibility of a realm of relative if not absolute freedom”, and thus, provides an opportunity for pleasure and autonomy that may be missing in the everyday lives of most men and women.

The pleasure that people gain from sport (as a leisure activity) is seen as a socially acceptable level of excitement which is controlled at a personal and public level (Elias 1986). This element of social acceptance means that it is given special meaning by people in societies around the world and is tied to dominant beliefs and ideologies in many countries (Coakley et al. 2009). Sport also represents a potential environment to construct and display identity (Maguire et al. 2002) by providing people with a sense of difference and a way to classify both themselves and others (Harris & Parker 2009). Many societies use sport as an important element of how they define themselves (Hallinan, Hughson & Burke 2007; Harris 2008) and in Australia sport is deeply embedded in the national culture (Rowe 2013c). Nonetheless, this identity is often defined on the basis of success in international sporting competitions (Bruce & Wensing 2009), and failure to succeed can negatively affect national identity (Nicholson, Sherry & Osborne 2014). The significance of sport in many nations means that athletes who succeed at an international level are frequently revered and assigned high status. As will be discussed in next chapter, a deep sense of identification is developed between large numbers of people and such successful athletes.
Its importance and pervasiveness notwithstanding, the very concept of ‘sport’ is contested (Horne 2006). Its definitions range from those which emphasise its physical, mental, and social benefits (Council of Europe 2001) through to those emphasising its competitive and institutionalised elements (Coakley et al. 2009). Guttmann (2004) places sport within a ‘paradigm’ as a progression of play, suggesting that it is a subcategory of organised play or games. Jay Coakley (2009) likewise identifies sport as a progression of play, but he draws distinctions between amateur and professional sport, and recreational and high-performance sport participation. It is important to note that participation in sport is not even across the population and whole categories of people are often excluded. In many instances, categorical exclusion is related to factors such as gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, age, disability, and religious belief (Coakley, Hallinan & McDonald 2011).

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1978), participation in sport and sport preferences contribute to an embodiment of cultural capital and to the formation of cultural identity (Willis 1990) as it is said to “build friendships, promote social mobility, [and] develops liberal viewpoints” (Hartman 2014, 169). Participation in leisure has also been shown to facilitate the acculturation process for new migrants by decreasing the stress associated with migration (Lock 2009; Hasmi, Gross & Scott-Young 2014). According to Tonts and Atherley (2010), this facilitation of integration is, in part, due to sport’s ability to build a sense of place. It has been argued that sport also has a mythical ‘morality’ to it, teaching positive life enhancing skills, allowing the “good” side to overcome “evil” and justice to prevail (Hartman 2014). It must be acknowledged that sport can also be associated with “social division and conflict” (Tonts & Atherley 2010, 381). As mentioned, sport demonstrates how people see both themselves and others, and provides one avenue for a person to display their social identities. While early work on social identity originated in the discipline of social psychology, the concept has increasingly been utilised by sport sociologists to examine “how and why social identities are constructed and maintained in and through sporting activities” (Harris & Parker 2009, 2).

That there are conflicting definitions of, and meanings given to, sport is of significance as it draws attention to the struggles which exist within and between groups to control it (Giulianotti 2005). These struggles are often a reflection of the
struggles for power and over the value systems that exist in the world outside sport. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Meân, Kassing, and Sanderson (2010, 1591) suggest that sport “functions as an ‘invisible’ re/producer of power through narratives and definitions that are familiar and ‘innocent,’ yet deeply and emotionally relevant to (global) consumers and interpretive communities”. Hence, it can also be a domain which reinforces or challenges social structural factors such as class (Bourdieu 1978), gender (Bourdieu 2001), ethnicity (Giulianotti, 2005), and political organisation (Guttmann 2003). Sport can be linked to ideas of the state (Bourdieu, Dauncey & Hare 1998), militarism and imperialism (Guttmann 2004), or used to demonstrate the ideological ‘superiority’ of a state (Jackson & Haigh 2008). Sports teams often embody a nation, fostering passions and allegiances (Tadié 2012) and it has also been suggested that sport may act as a tool of social policy (Dunning and Waddington, 2003) or even of social control. Tännö (1998, 23) highlights that in many European countries sports teams have often been used “by nationalist governments to create a chauvinist zeal in their own populations.” Perhaps with this state involvement in mind French Neo-Marxist sociologist Jean-Marie Brohm (1978, 108), went as far as to assert that it was the Olympic Games, rather than religion (as Marx had earlier claimed), which acts as the ‘opiate’ of the people, keeping them enthralled and pacified.

Brohm, writing in the 1970s, argued that the media are implicit in the subjugation of the population and that a greater understanding of the relationship between sport and the media was needed. Rowe (2004) claims that it was the commercialisation of sport, driven by the media and developments in audio-visual technologies, which enabled it to reach, and therefore control, a large market. Sport (or certain sports) has popular appeal, and media companies have recognised and exploited this capacity. Rupert Murdoch, the media mogul and founder of News Corporation (the multinational media corporation), suggested in 1996 that sport was now better able to attract viewers to television than any other form of entertainment, stressing that his media conglomerate planned to “use sport as a battering ram and a lead offering in all our pay television operations” (quoted in Cashmore 2005, 365). Mediated sport has now grown to such an extent that, whilst attending sporting events is a common practice among adults, consumers from Europe, North America, and Australia are now much more likely to watch it on television than to attend a sports event in person.
(Parry, Jones & Wann 2014). For example, over two-fifths of the Australian population watched televised sports such as Australian football, horse racing, and cricket in 2009-10 (ABS 2010). Sport has benefitted enormously in economic terms from the increased media involvement, but it has also been changed. Many sports, such as basketball and golf, have been adapted and modified to benefit television audiences at the expense of spectators and players (Boyle & Haynes 2000; Stewart & Smith 2000), and athletes are now the subject of micro-attention, with details of their private lives scrutinised by the public and the media (Moss 2011). Technological advancements have also affected the consumption of sport, increasing the accessibility of global sport through television, the internet and mobile content (McDonald, Karg & Lock 2010). It will be shown in this thesis that the increased mediated consumption of sport has impacted significantly on the heroisation of athletes.

Through the televising of sports events, Brohm (1978, 114) sees the ruling class as being able to reduce the population to “a servile mass” in a move that is eerily similar to the use of “bread and circuses” to appease and distract the citizens of Ancient Rome (Jackson & Haigh 2008). Similarly, a Neo-Marxist view is that even participation in sport, which teaches an individual to conform through their acceptance of imposed rules that are often unjust and unfair, can be viewed as a mechanism for socialising the working class into acceptance of bourgeois societal rules (Guttmann 2004). Such legitimisations of the ruling class’ position, either through sports participation or the consumption of sport via the media, are termed hegemonic domination by Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, for whom the working class becomes complicit in its own subjugation through sport (Anderson 2010). In his Pre-prison Writings, Gramsci (1994) claims that sports, such as football, are regulated by the concept of fair play, with the referee as a constant reminder of the need to adhere to rules.

Hegemony is a powerful concept that can be used to explain the dominance of a variety of cultural beliefs and R.W. Connell has, in particular, used this theory to explain masculinity and the subjugation of women and many men. Connell (2005, 77) defines hegemonic masculinity as the “configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of
patriarchy, which guarantees…the dominant positions of men and the subordination of women”. Such ‘gender practices’ typically reinforce the established social order through the excise of institutional power but, significantly, can also result from a “voluntary compliance with the exercise of power” (Hargreaves 1986, 7). Connell (2005) argues that professional sport is one example of an institutionalised organisation that legitimises the dominance of men. Masculinity is particularly pertinent to this thesis because (as will be detailed in Chapters 6, 7, and 8) it is a significant component in narratives of heroisation. Attention will now turn to how sport reinforces concepts of masculinity and the role of hegemony in this process.

**Masculinity and Representation of the Body**

While it has been shown that sport provides social currency for individuals, it must be noted that it is primarily for males, with sport often facilitating the formation of “cool athletic [male] groups” (Moss 2011, 166). Sport has historically been seen as the domain of males, belonging “unambiguously to boys and men” (Messner 2007, 1). Male sports are all-too-often associated with sexism (Messner 2013), with the sexuality and femininity of women and girls who do participate often disparaged and even ridiculed (Messner 2007; Hill 2011). Participation in sport by females has been discouraged by the dominant classes and particularly so in the Victorian era based on medical, aesthetic and social rationales. High profile figures such as Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics, believed that women should be restricted to the role of spectators (Teetzel 2011) or to “crown the victor with laurels” (Kay & Jeanes 2008, 132). Too often, women are confined to the sporting periphery, with the only legitimate roles that they can occupy being to “spectate, support, and admire” (Osborne & Coombs 2013, 673).

Female participation in sport began to increase globally in the 1970s, and there have been several attempts to remove barriers to female participation (Messner 2007; Hill 2011). For instance, in the United States, Title IX of the Educational Amendments, a federal law passed in 1972, required colleges funded federally to provide equal financial support for women’s programs (Cashmore 2005). This legislation continues to be met with opposition from conservative politicians and colleges (Messner 2007). Sport is also a site of gender construction through the division of competitions on
gendered grounds and, therefore, cultural theorist Garry Whannel (2008, 191) maintains that sport “is still the pre-eminence social practice that divides the genders”. In this manner, sports culture remains one of the strongest bastions of gender differentiation (Hargreaves 1985) or, according to Messner (2007), is the last bastion of masculinity in a society where traditional male domains are being eroded. Men’s sport is often privileged at the expense of women’s sport (Teetzel 2011) and used as the standard against which women’s sport is measured. Female participation remains lower than that of males and women have struggled to “shrug off their stereotypes” within sport (Cashmore 2005, 159).

However, even male sport has not always been accepted. Physical activity was frowned upon by the church-based societies of the Middle Ages (Mechikoff & Estes 2006), and sport faced hostility from early Protestants (Guttmann 2004). The public schools of England, particularly Rugby School under the stewardship of Thomas Arnold, were instrumental in the codifying and structuring of sporting activities, and they were also prominent in the rise of the concept of ‘muscular Christianity’ (Mangan 2010). During the mid-eighteenth century, sport was increasingly seen as a tool for transforming males into “good Christian gentlemen” who possessed a sense of high moral value (Parker & Weir 2012, 254). Mangan (2010) places muscular Christianity as part of a wider Social Darwinian school of thought that embraced masculinity in that period. In this manner, sport began to be advocated as beneficial to a healthy body, developing character and promoting moral well-being (Sage 1997; Hartman 2014).

According to educational historian Mark Moss (2011, 165) sport serves as one of the “primary ways in which traditional forms of masculinity has [sic] been measured”. The masculinity of males is even questioned if they do not watch or play sport (Moss 2011; Chon-Smith 2014). Sport is still seen as helping boys learn how to be men, while providing males with a reassuring all-male environment in which to socialise and bond. For instance, in Australia Richard Cashman (2010, 57) suggests that “sport plays a central role in growing up male”. Sports, especially those based on physical contact, teach young males how to use their bodies as weapons against their opponents, reinforcing the importance of a strong masculine body (Messner 2007). Sport has become central in establishing and demonstrating hegemonic masculinity,
particularly through school systems and competitive sport (Hargreaves 1986, Burgess, Edwards & Skinner 2003; Connell 2005; Smith & Beal 2007). In some Australian schools, especially in Victoria and South Australia, Australian football, which is identified as being a “ritualistic celebration of hegemonic masculinity” (Engebretson 2006, 97), was found to play a key role in the construction of this version of masculinity (Connell 2005). Engebretson (2006) also found that those male children who embodied hegemonic masculinity tended to come from families that divided labour along gender lines. The family backgrounds of these children indicate that, while sport acts as a mechanism for the construction of hegemonic masculinity it is only as part of a wider societal process. Sport certainly serves as an acceptable site for male bonding as part of the phenomenon of homosociality. This term describes the social bonds that exist between persons of the same sex, and it is a mechanism and social dynamic that can be used to explain the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity (Hammarén & Johansson 2014). For some males, their lives are ordered in such a way that male-to-male relationships take priority over male-to-female relationships (Evers 2009; Cashman 2010). However, it is typically treated as a platonic relationship and with no direct implication of homosexuality (Evers 2009). In contrast, those male athletes that fail to exhibit the requisite dominant masculinity, or who express an interest in perceived feminine domains, such as art and antiques, may be liable to be labelled as homosexual by their peers – as was the case with English association footballer Graeme Le Saux (Cashmore & Parker 2003).

Masculinity is not fixed, and there are often multiple, intersecting versions that will come into existence at particular times and places to compete with the hegemonic masculinity that is currently accepted (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Carniel 2008). For example, in the late twentieth century, a new representation of the male body and its sexuality was recognised in some sporting cultures, notably European association football. In November 1994 a British newspaper article published the first account of the ‘metrosexual male’ (Coad 2008; Clayton & Harris 2009). Mark Simpson, the journalist who is credited with coining and popularising the term, identified young, often single, narcissistic, urban-living men with high disposable incomes as increasingly important consumers and a promising target market for marketing companies (Carniel 2008; Clayton & Harris 2009). Metrosexuals, as exemplified by athletes such as English association footballer David Beckham (Cashmore 2004),
were identified with elements of homosexual lifestyle and a desire to be looked at and admired. The connection to urban lifestyles is explicit in the prefix of the term, and urban settings provided opportunities for these ‘vain males’ to be seen parading themselves around the town taking pride in their appearance. The rise of metrosexuality was linked to an increased use of the male body in advertising in ways that were “overly erotic” (Coad 2008, 21). Although activities such as grooming and shopping have been previously labelled effeminate or homosexual, the heterosexuality of metrosexuals is largely assumed (Carniel 2008). Athletes, through their training regimes, were often in possession of bodies that were ideally suited to these erotic displays. The commercialisation of sport has resulted in top athletes being elevated to a status comparable to that of entertainers, with entertainment programs such as MTV’s ‘Cribs’ focussing on the private lives of athletes (Smith & Beal 2007). Some athletes are now portrayed as being fashion savvy, displaying an interest in art and concerned with their physical beauty – all elements associated with metrosexuality (Smith & Beal 2007). As mentioned, David Beckham has been identified as the ‘poster-boy’ for the metrosexual look due to his photogenic, media-friendly image, celebrity wife and lifestyle (Carniel 2008). Beckham, whose personal life is often the subject of much media attention, is presented as providing straight men with an example of how they could easily ‘self-style’ and be fashionable with this new version of masculinity (Ross 2007). Athletes have increasingly come to rely on being noticed in such a manner with Beckham, and others like him, afforded celebrity status.

The physical talent and masculinity of athletes remain important, and John Hargreaves (1985) suggests that the body is the very foundation of personal identity and is a site of social struggle. Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu (1993), has identified the muscular body, bearing outwards signs of strength, as something that is valued by the working class, who view their bodies as instruments with which to earn a living (Naha 2012). Bourdieu (1993, 437) argues that, in the eyes of the aristocratic classes, outward displays of physical size, epitomised by weight lifting, symbolise the “mere strength, brutality and intellectual poverty” associated with the lower classes. He further states that physical sports (such as rugby league and union) require not just investment of effort, but also the acceptance of pain, suffering, and risk to the body itself. Conversely, Coakley, Hallinan, and McDonald (2011) claim that a muscular
body can be a source of social status as it is an indicator of self-control and discipline, while the ability to ignore pain is seen as a gauge of physical strength and is valued in sport. But it is questionable as to whether the physical size of players in sport is indicative of a healthy body, as discourses surrounding physical education practices have tended to emphasise the link between a slender body and physical fitness and health (Webb, Quennerstedt & Öhman 2008). Regardless of whether athletic bodies are or are not healthy, Peter Kelly and Christopher Hickey (2008, 59) argue that, for a young AFL player to be successful, they are required to “willingly sell their body, mind and soul”, which “can carry significant costs”. The willingness of athletes to offer their bodies for ‘sale’ is of particular relevance to this thesis as the GWS Giants recruited Israel Folau from rugby league in a high-profile multi-million dollar move. Moreover, given his Pacific Islander heritage his case study (Chapter 6) explores the implications of his signing in light of hero formation in relation both to masculinity and ethnicity.

Indeed masculinity and ethnicity are frequently linked in sport. The bodies of black athletes are particularly lauded in the media and presented as aspirational role models and heroes for young black males (Cashmore 2005). Additionally, Connell (2005, 80) argues that race relations are a key part of the dynamics between competing masculinities with, for example, “black sporting stars becom[ing] exemplars of masculine toughness”. The following section will briefly explore the interplay between sport and race/ethnicity to detail the implications of such exemplars and role models.

**Race and Ethnicity**

While millions of young black males (and increasingly females) have aimed to emulate their sporting heroes, it is only a small percentage that will succeed at the elite level or get “out of the ghetto” (Cashmore 2005, 221). Sport journalists and broadcasters have historically ‘promoted’ racial differences through their coverage of sporting performances (McDonald 2010). Although there is increased awareness of the impact of such essentialist thinking, media images continue to emphasise the success of black athletes, and thus position sport as the idealised or the only career path for young black people (Hardin et al. 2004). Sport historian John Hoberman
suggests that, by idolising athletes such as former American basketballer Michael Jordan, and rejecting role models who have found recognition for intellectual pursuits, African Americans are actually damaging themselves by limiting their aspirations. Hoberman (1997, 5) says that the sport-fixation of African Americans (and other minority groups) is part of a “global racial folklore” that foregrounds black physical and athletic superiority. Athletic black bodies are ‘hyper-visible’ in global media culture (Carrington 2010), but although the black male athlete may be idolised, they are routinely reduced to stereotypical views of their body alone (Chon-Smith 2014). As a result of this ‘folklore’ black male athletes have increasingly been objectified and sexualised and are presented as models of “hyper-blackness” (Whannel 2008, 197). Sporting performances continue to be ‘seen’ in racialised terms with success (and failure) explained in terms of skin colour (Coakley 2009). The white skin of an athlete is rarely highlighted (and is essentially invisible), whereas the skin colour of a black athlete continues to be cited (albeit possibly unconsciously) as a determining factor of ability. Whiteness is the norm against which all others are measured, with athletes from different backgrounds classed as ‘others’. Thus, skin colour continues to play a role in the lives of athletes from an ethnic minority background that it does not play in that of white athletes (Lawrence 2005).

While those who govern and administer sport may wish to believe that sport is ‘colour-blind’, a number of sports, including ice-hockey, motor racing, alpine sports, swimming, and volleyball, continue to be dominated by White athletes (Melnick 2001). In sports that have greater participation rates among ethnic minority groups, there is also evidence that these athletes are excluded from central playing positions or those positions that carry the most influence on the outcomes of matches. In one seminal study in this field, Loy and Elvogue (1970) found evidence that black athletes, because they were not linked to the White-dominated administrative structures, were relegated to peripheral positions in baseball and American football, and so did not have high levels of interaction with their teammates. More recently, such patterns of ‘stacking’ have also been found in British association football and cricket (Coakley, Hallinan & McDonald 2011), and also Australian football (Hallinan, Bruce & Coram 1999). These patterns in players’ positions are indicative of deeply ingrained ideological beliefs of the relative merits of White and ethnic minority athletes, based on the premise that pseudo-biological, racial characteristics can be
used as determinants of psychological or athletic ability (González 1996). While White athletes are believed to be suitable for ‘thinking’ and leadership positions, for instance, black athletes are believed to be “especially good at running and catching” (Coakley, Hallinan & McDonald 2011, 297). The out-dated views of former Crystal Palace Football Club chairman Ron Noades in 1991 were typical of this belief:

The black players at this club lend the side a lot of skill and flair, but you also need [W]hite players in there to balance things up and give the team some brains and some common sense. (Quoted in Cashmore & Cleland 2011, 1597)
enhanced by the increased globalisation of sport and an associated trend of athlete migration. It is common for athletes today to move between countries and continents to ply their trade, a process that can be termed sport labour migration. This migration adds further complexity to perceptions of, and reactions to, ethnicity. In countries where there is widespread ignorance about an athlete’s background, this unfamiliarity can lead to hostility, intolerance and potential abuse. Indeed, once again, as is explored in this thesis, a player can be rejected or set up as an ‘other’, and so viewed as a threat to a dominant identity which can be localised and club based or, as I will go on to argue, encompass a wider national identity. Sport labour migration and globalisation are part of the complex narrative of ethnicity and thus become an integral area for exploration when considering the formation of heroes and the development of club cultures. The next section, therefore, considers the impact of labour migration and the globalisation of sport.

Sport Labour Migration

Sport is now a commodity that can be bought or sold. Individuals and companies globally own sporting merchandise, televised sport, sports teams, and even athletes. Summers and Morgan (2008) highlight the creation of the sports celebrity, discussed above, as a product in their own right as an important element in the commercialisation of sport. Increased commercialisation is in part a result of the wider societal process of globalisation and the associated “flows of ideology, people, politics, economics, and the media” (Horton 2012a, 2392). People, and elite athletes, in particular, are now moving globally to seek employment (Carter 2011a), and these transnational sports migrants are “transcending localized, spatialized, identities in order to become cosmopolitan citizens of a singularly imagined world” (Carter 2011b, 226). Sport, then, is just one element of the exploitative capitalist relationships between more developed nations and the rest of the world (Kanemasu & Molnar 2013). Sport’s role in globalisation should not be overlooked. It has been an important element of the process for over a century and even led the way with the formation of international organisations such as FIFA and the IOC (Whannel 2008).

It is typically Western nations that have exported their commodified sports to less developed countries, and the process has been “from the West to the ‘rest’” in the
words of Maguire (2001, 16), with Magee and Sugden (2002) using the example of association football to trace the diffusion of the sport from its core in England through South and Central America, to Africa and finally Oceania, Asia, and North America. Sport labour migration is typically asymmetrical (Falcous & Maguire 2005) and has traditionally seen athletes from nations at the “periphery” of the world capitalist system move to nations or cultures at the “core” (Horton 2012a, 2391), which has been described as a neo-colonial exploitation of developing countries (Lee 2010). For instance, Brazilian association footballers and Fijian rugby union players are now routinely migrating abroad (Kanemasu & Molnar 2013).

Sport labour migration is not a new phenomenon, and Magee and Sugden (2002) point out that the migration of association football labour from the Celtic fringes of Britain to the English professional core has taken place for almost as long as professional teams have existed. There is also a history of movement between the two rugby codes of league and union (most commonly from union to league, in particular prior to the professionalisation of union) dating back to the formation of the New South Wales Rugby League in 1907 and Herbert Henry ‘Dally’ Messenger’s decision to leave rugby union and take up the new professional code (Fagan 2006; Heads 2013). Traditionally, those players who have gone on to represent their country in both forms of the sport have been venerated as dual-code internationals.

The global movement of athletes has accelerated since the late twentieth century, and the migration of “administrators, coaches, athletes, and ancillary staff is a prominent feature of global sport” (Falcous & Maguire 2005, 137). Athletes are treated as commodities that can be traded between teams, and countries at the core of capitalist sport, are able to use their economic superiority to recruit cheaper talent from peripheral countries in order to minimise their labour costs (Lee, S 2010). This form of migration is, according to some commentators, “a case of ‘brawn drain’ and ‘muscle trade’” from the peripheral nations (Kanemasu & Molnar 2013, 868). At the same time, athletes are recognising that their bodies “are invested with cultural capital which they can translate into economic capital”, and which others are willing to pay large sums to acquire (de Vasconcellos & Dimeo 2009, 726). In the highly competitive world of sport, driven increasingly by the demand for immediate success,
athletes are now able to sell their services to the highest bidder wherever this team may be located (Jackson & Haigh 2008).

Recently, the historical trend has reversed, with an increasing number of athletes leaving the core nations to ply their trade in newly cash-rich peripheral leagues. This reverse flow of sporting labour has been termed ‘out-migration’ (Lee 2010). Other new sport labour migration routes have included athletes from the Pacific Islands, or of Pacific Island or New Zealand heritage, rising to prominence in rugby union and representing countries such as Japan, America, and Australia at international level (Horton 2012a). Seungbum Lee (2002) stresses that increasingly new and unorthodox sport labour migration routes are opening up for athletes, as is typified by Jarryd Hayne’s switch from the NRL to American football (Fahy 2015). Many Australian athletes and coaches will now willingly migrate to Europe or Asia, to seek new experiences or to play in the best leagues (Phillips 2000). For instance, it is now common to see Australian rugby league players in the European Super League (Evans & Stead 2014). The AFL also has a history of converting players from other sports. Since the mid 1980s young Irish Gaelic (amateur) football players have been encouraged to relocate from Ireland and to learn Australian football (Nadel 1998b). The ‘Irish Experiment’, as it is known, started at the Melbourne Football Club and seventeen Gaelic footballers have subsequently played in the Victorian Football League (VFL) or AFL, with varying degrees of success (Cazaly 2012). This type of movement between sports is conspicuously absent from most discussions of sports labour migration. Given the AFL’s continued conversion of athletes from other sports, ‘code switching’ clearly warrants further consideration, and this thesis will offer insights into whether it is possible for an athlete to migrate their heroic status in addition to their athletic ability.

Sports labour migration (or transnational sport migration as Thomas Carter terms it) is a dynamic and multifaceted process, and the reasons for it are varied (Carter 2011a; 2011b), but it is possible to identify patterns in the migration of athletes (Maguire 2011a). Maguire (2001) proposes that there are five key, interconnected and overlapping categories of migrant. The first of these is the Pioneer, typified by nineteenth-century missionaries or the twentieth century YMCA movement, which aimed to convert ‘natives’ to their sporting culture and bodily habitus (the acquired
characteristics that result from social and historical conditions, which contribute towards bodily capital (Bourdieu 2005)). Second, the Settler brought their sport with them to a new culture, but then stayed to perform their labour in that country. His third category is the Mercenary, who has little or no attachment to the local culture and who is willing to trade bodily habitus for short-term financial gain. Others were termed Nomads/Nomadic Cosmopolitan as they used their sporting career to provide a cosmopolitan engagement with migration and a sense of the ‘other’ or the ‘outsider’ (Maguire 2011a). Finally, Maguire suggests that there is a Returnee category of athletes touring the globe in sports such as Formula One motor racing or tennis. This category overlaps with each of the previous four and further underlines the complexity of sport labour migration. Thus, Magee and Sugden (2002) devised an alternative typology of migration for English league football with a combination of overlapping categories. They contend that Maguire’s typology had pigeonholed migrants into a particular category, whereas their model permits greater movement between categories as it allows for consideration of the underlying motivations behind migration, including reasons that are personal or political. Magee and Sugden’s (2002) typology comprises the Settler, Ambitionist, Exile, Nomadic Cosmopolitan, Expelled, and Mercenary. The typologies of Maguire and Magee and Sugden will inform discussions of Folau’s move to the Giants in Chapter 6.

It is important to realise that sport migrants do not operate in isolation or make decisions solely for their own benefit (Carter 2011a; 2011b). Migration can also be a source of financial security for the players’ families and their wider community (Horton 2012a; Lakisa, Adair & Taylor 2014). For other athletes, the decision to migrate may reflect a desire to qualify for international competitions, which may be strong enough for them to switch nationalities. As such, sports labour migration can also create tensions in the host nations, with fears surrounding cultural integration reflecting similar local-global tensions arising from increased global interconnectedness (Maguire et al. 2002). These tensions can also occur when an athlete moves ‘intra-country’ (as detailed in Chapter 7). In some countries, these fears have also resulted in the introduction of “protectionist labor [sic] barriers, including quotas, residency clauses, selection limitations, and eligibility thresholds” that are designed to protect local interests (Falcous & Maguire 2005, 139). Conversely, nations are often willing to sacrifice a degree of national identity and to
recruit citizens “specifically for their short-term potential to enhance the nation’s international standing” (Jackson & Haigh 2008, 351). In these instances, international sporting success (and the assumed associated increase in national pride) is prioritised over ‘local interests’ and is indicative of the significant place of sport in the national identity of some nations.

As a cultural or television commodity, sport is ideally suited to cross language and cultural barriers – it is largely visual and has the added benefit of being understood in cultures around the world (Whannel 2008). Sport is now a global commodity and, in the words of Joseph Maguire (2001, 1), “the sportization of the planet seemingly knows no bounds”. The marketing efforts of Nike and the profiles of players such as Michael Jordan and LeBron James have aided the spread of basketball, while global mega events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games have aided the spread of football and the various Olympic sports (Whannel 2008). Even tiny Pacific Island nations, located miles from large continental masses, are not immune to this process, and the inhabitants of such islands have developed attachments to European and South American teams and players (Parry 2014). Maguire (2011, 1041) describes this flow of sport consumption as the imposition of Western, capitalist cultural products on “vulnerable communities across the globe”. Global sport tourism has become a major industry (Jackson & Haigh 2008) and, for example, the increasingly transnational coverage of association football and the lower costs of air travel have resulted in non-domestic consumers being able to attend live matches, thus creating a global market for both televised and live sporting events (Rookwood & Millward 2011). People from countries around the world are now able to tune in via satellite broadcasts or the Internet to watch elite players performing in a small number of sports leagues (Maguire 2001). Australia’s geographical isolation means that its competitions are yet to benefit from the extensive transnational coverage of overseas leagues (such as the English Premier League or the National Football League), and their audiences are primarily domestic, which may have implications for migrating athletes. These trends in television coverage indicate that sport consumption is complex, and so the following section will provide an overview of the most important elements of sport consumption – fandom.
Sport Fandom

There have been sport fans for as long as there has been sport (Osborne & Coombs 2013). Australian Bureau of Statistics data reveal that 43 per cent of the adult Australian population attend at least one sports event as a spectator once a year (ABS 2012), while in America 33 billion hours of sport were watched on television in 2013 (Nielsen 2014). These consumption patterns may, in fact, be a result of the sense of emotional commitment that can develop between a consumer and a particular athlete or team that builds a sense of loyalty to the ‘product’. Although Crawford (2003) initially rejects the term fan, he subsequently (2004, 20) uses it and claims that attempts to define what constitutes a fan “inevitably involve highly complex and subjective codes of ‘authenticity’”. Nevertheless, authors such as Madrigal (1995), Jones (1997), Stewart, Smith, and Nicholson (2003), and Hoegele, Schmidt and Torgler (2014) all argue that, when consumers develop an emotional commitment to a team or athlete, they are often referred to as fans. Guttmann (1986, 6) states that a fan refers to the:

…emotionally committed ‘consumer’ of sports events. The terms [fan and spectator] overlap but are obviously not identical. In practice, most fans are spectators, and most spectators are fans, but it is logically possible to be one and not the other. Some fans have never actually attended a sports event...some allow themselves to be dragged to games that they then observe without any of the emotional involvement characteristic of being a fan.

Hills (2002) takes the notion of commitment further and suggests that a fan is somebody who is obsessed with something which, in this case, would be a particular athlete, sports team, or sport. For fans, the obsession goes further than just an involvement with a team and, in many instances, fans view the team as actually a representation of themselves (Branscombe & Wann 1992). Crawford (2005, 107) argues, following Bourdieu, that sport fandom “operates as a source of ‘cultural capital’” for fans. Given the degree of this obsession, there are those who feel that sport fandom is detrimental, not only to the individual but also to the wider population, and the dangers of sport fandom have long been discussed and at some length. For instance, over a century ago the American historian/sociologist George Elliott Howard (1912, 45) warned that sports fandom was “evil” as it was centred on
“extreme partisanship”, lowered morals, the suppression of pro-social feelings, and had a propensity for primitive “cave-man” behaviour. Fandom can, therefore, be considered a “complete and utter absorption” in a team, and Moss (2011, 169) claims that it is overwhelmingly men that develop this level of devotion. The negative attributes associated with sport spectators have been the focus of much research (Elias 1986; Stokvis 1992; Dunning 1999), but fandom has also been shown to have a number of benefits such as access to social groupings, social acceptance, and respect (Wann et al. 2001). Sport fandom may also serve as an “outlet or safety valve” for aggression and stress, while also providing easily understood interpretations of manliness (Moss 2011, 169).

As fans perceive themselves to be members of “a tacitly existing group to which the object of their fanship belongs” (Zillman & Paulus 1993, 604), social interaction is also important. In this sense, fandom is described as a community (Farred 2002) where members share common interests and recognise shared characteristics in their fellow group members, creating a sense of unity (Osborne & Coombs 2013). Becoming a sports fan involves the same process as becoming a member of any social group and entails the development of a social identity. Tajfel (1972, 31) defines a social identity as “the individual's knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership”, and that being part of such a group will enhance the self-worth of the individual. However, it also creates divisions and feelings of hostility towards anyone that is not a part of this group, leading to the creation of prejudices towards others (Anderson 2010). These divisions often form the basis for rivalries between teams and, as will be discussed later in this chapter, can facilitate the identification of fans with new sports teams.

As mentioned previously, it is now more common for people to watch sport rather than play it. Watching sport is not a recent development and, from the earliest days of modern sport, people have developed deep attachments to, and identifications with, sports teams and individual players. Sport has become increasingly popular with experience and pleasure seeking leisure goers, a group that Stewart and Smith (2000, 287) called “theatre-goers”, who are often keen to affiliate themselves with successful athletes and teams (Madrigal 1995; Campbell, Aiken & Kent 2004; Kwon, Trail &
Lee 2008; Madrigal & Chen 2008). Stewart and Smith’s observations, in conjunction with Guttman’s differentiation between fans and spectators, suggest that the wide group of sports consumers is not homogeneous, and British sociologist Richard Giulianotti (2002) has identified a number of categories for sports consumers as part of his ‘contemporary sports fan typology’. This typology divides sports consumers into two dimensions: the extent of the consumer’s identification with a particular team or player, and the basis of their investment in a particular club. Giulianotti distinguishes the consumer’s investment between traditional spectators with a longer, more local and popular cultural identification with the club, and consumers that have a more commodity-based relationship with the club. He describes the degree of identification as either hot, an intense identification and solidarity with the club, or cold, possessing a weak sense of identification and solidarity. This classification results in four types of consumers: the hot/traditional Supporter, hot/consumer Fans, cool/traditional Followers, and cool/consumer Flaneurs. There are apparent similarities in these typologies and consumers will clearly become attached to teams and sports for a variety of different reasons, and to greater or lesser levels.

Stewart, Smith, and Nicholson (2003) also argue that fans can be distinguished according to whether their attachment is based on a ‘true’ sense of loyalty to a team and a strong sense of the game’s history and culture, or whether they are attracted by the entertainment on offer and an ephemeral experience. Other typologies have identified factors such as geographical locality, specific players (Hunt, Bristol & Bashaw 1999), and the performance of the team (Smith & Stewart 1999) as being influential in fandom choices. Fans can shift between categories (Stewart & Smith 2000), and their identities are not fixed, as changes in lifestyle or circumstance can impact on fandom and levels of identification.

The association of fans with specific players, as discussed in Hunt, Bristol and Bashaw’s (1999) typology, is an important factor to consider and a number of scholars have discussed this link. Wann and Branscombe (1993) posit that some fans are driven to attend sports events due to their identification with high-profile athletes and in the case of new sports teams it has been suggested that a high-profile ‘star player’ may be beneficial in building a fan culture. In a Sydney setting, for example, Lock, Darcy, and Taylor (2009) found that high-profile players and managers
provided initial credibility and awareness for Sydney FC in association football’s newly-formed A-League. Australian Studies scholar Zoran Pajic (2013) also highlights the role of high-profile players in raising interest levels in the A-League. My thesis will add to their research on sport fandom by investigating the role of high-profile players and coaches in the AFL.

Paul Willis (1990) provides an insight into the rituals of British association football fans. Participants in his study provided a rich and descriptive discussion of how their allegiance to a team is acted out and displayed in their lives. For some, their interaction with a particular player is a very public display of passion for both the player and the club. One participant in his study discussed how the player draws on the fans to provide the desired level of sporting performance:

“…he looks up at the South Bank [an area in the stadium] and there’s a huge roar, you’re shouting like mad. You know he’s gonna do it. You know he’s communicating with the whole of the South Bank. And if he does it...he goes mad, we go mad, the whole crowd goes mad...he’s doing it for the fans and they love it”. (Willis 1990, 113)

For other fans, their displays of affection are far more intimate and personal, as they decorate their bedrooms in the team colours and display cherished memorabilia on the walls. Yet since the 1970s television has played a significant role in transforming Australian sport (as in other parts of the world), with players increasingly promoted in both heroic and sexualised manners (Stewart & Smith 2000). These mediated, heroic images of players are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3.

Sport fans experience iconic sporting events together, perhaps sharing collective memories of an event, but the individual fan will also have innately personal experiences and memories (Griggs, Leflay & Groves 2012). These memories form the basis of, and the vehicle for, spreading recognisable and ‘tellable’ stories that will often become deeply ingrained in fan culture. One particular aspect of sport consumption that is reinforced through media-driven narratives is the role of ‘heroic actors’ (Snyder 1991). Sport is built on its history, and the quantification of performances and the keeping of records are integral elements of modern sport that allow current performances to be compared with previous ones. As Guttmann (2004,
puts it, through quantified records, “the Australian can compete with the Finn who died a decade before the Australian was born”. A knowledge of facts and figures can also be an obsessive element of sports fandom (see Hornby (2010) and Parry (2012) for examples of this desire for knowledge). The exploits of top athletes are increasingly venerated and honoured through institutions such as halls of fame and teams of the century (Drucker 1994). Chapter 8 shows that it is not only athletes who can be afforded such status. Sports coaches, in this case Kevin Sheedy, are frequently treated in such a manner and identified as legendary figures within sport.

The feelings of nostalgia that are evoked through institutions such as halls of fame assist with the development of a sense of collective belonging and “collective memory” (Griggs, Leflay & Groves 2012, 90). Historical knowledge of past performances gives individuals “significant meaning and value to their identities and understandings of the contemporary world in which they live” (Kohe 2010, 1054). Nostalgia allows the past to be selectively recalled and blurs the line between reality and myth, creating a collective interpretation of events. Mediated sport also serves to reinforce and define the identities of sporting heroes by repeatedly presenting the defining moments from an athlete’s career (Griggs, Leflay & Groves 2012). These collective memories often draw on a sense of nostalgia, using symbolic objects from the past that have been widely shared and that trigger “remembrance or recollection of the past, a past that is imbued with special qualities” (Snyder 1991, 229). Feelings of nostalgia tend to be associated with positive emotions, but elements of melancholy and sadness may also be present. Nostalgia has recently begun to play an increasingly important role in many aspects of sport, such as sport tourism (Fairley & Gammon 2005; Mason, Duquette & Scherer 2005; Ramshaw & Gammon 2005), stadia (Twietmeyer 2008; Wood & Neville 2011), halls of fame (Snyder 1991) and, more generally, in a romanticisation of pre-commercialised, halcyon days of sport (Moore 2002; Falcous & West 2009).

Stewart (2005) argues that the use of the term fan is relatively new with regard to Australian sport, and in particular to Australian football, as traditionally team ‘partisans’ were referred to as barrackers or supporters. Given that there are differences in the spectating customs of Australian sport, it is important to probe what they are and to understand its nuances and differences.
Sport in Australia

Sport is used by many Australians as a way of escaping the rigours and stresses that are associated with modern life (Booth 2000). It has also been identified as being a “key cultural institution in Australia” (McKay et al. 2001, 233) and Peter Kell (2000) states that matters of state in Australia are disrupted for one of two reasons – the first being matters of national or international importance, and the second updates on the top sporting events. Sport is clearly important in Australia, but Bob Stewart (1990) suggests that it is actually a ‘national necessity’ and one of the principal amusements of Australians. He argues that, as far back as the 1960s, playing and watching sport was identified as one of the key meanings in the life of Australians, and may even be a ‘super religion’. The importance of sport to Australian culture goes back to the settlement of Australia in the late-eighteenth century (Horton 2012b), but it was in the nineteenth century that it rose to prominence.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Australia had become one of the world’s most urbanised societies (Cashman 2010). A degree of wealth, created in part by a series of gold rushes, meant that Australia was based on the form of industrial capitalism that has been attributed with facilitating the spread of sport (Guttmann 2004). Sport also served as a facilitator of colonial identity and “as a salve to the dislocation that the tyranny of distance invoked in the hearts and minds of the colonials” (Horton 2012a, 2392). Migrants, primarily from Britain, brought not only their “social, political, ideological and educational discourse” to Australia, but also the sporting traditions from their homelands (Taylor, Lock & Darcy 2009, 863). British migrants, therefore, influenced which sports became popular in the second half of the nineteenth century, such as horseracing, prize fighting, and cricket. Nineteenth-century migrants were also arriving in Australian cities with a number of different forms of the emerging sport of football. This melting pot paved the way for the development of an Australian form of football – now known as Australian rules football – that was developed in Melbourne in the nineteenth century and continues to be strongly associated with the city of Melbourne and the state of Victoria (Blainey 2003).

Australian football has not been able to establish a country-wide sporting supremacy, with rugby codes preferred in New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland, and there
has also been an increase in the popularity of association football following large-scale post-war migration into Australia from southern Europe (Whimpess 1994). This division of the country occurs along the so-called ‘Barassi Line’ (a term first coined by historian Ian Turner in honour of Ron Barassi, a former player and coach who advocated for an national Australian football competition (Hay 2006)), which splits the country into the north-eastern rugby states of New South Wales and Queensland and the rest being Australian football states (Rosenberg 2009, 248). Although this is a rather crude and inaccurate conceptualisation, the perceived divide remains ingrained in the nation’s sporting discourses.

Hess and Stewart (1998) argue that, although Australian football aroused some interest in NSW during the early years of its formation, the creation of the Southern Rugby Football Union (SRFU) in Sydney in 1874 resulted in the increased popularity of rugby in Sydney. While the SRFU refused invitations to play games against travelling Victorian Australian football teams, one of its members, the Waratah rugby club, accepted an invitation to play the Carlton Football Club of Melbourne, and these games drew the largest recorded crowds for a football match played in Sydney at that time (Blainey 2003). Yet, despite the formation of the New South Wales (Australian) Football Association in 1880 and investment from the Australian Football Council’s ‘Propaganda Fund’ (Sandercock & Turner 1981), Australian football failed to take off in Sydney. Grow (1998c) variously attributes this failure to: a lack of match publicity and management; a ban on SRFU members playing Australian football; the introduction of rugby into NSW Schools; the early establishment of rugby games against Queensland, and the monopoly of the state’s premier sports ground (the Sydney Cricket Ground) by rugby. One final reason put forward by Grow is that Australian football was seen as a product of Melbourne, Victoria (the first rules of the game were known as the Melbourne rules). There was at this time (and still is) intense rivalry between New South Wales and Victoria (Grow 1998b), so Australian sport remains very parochial (Cashman 2010). Blainey (2003, 155) draws attention to the one-sided nature of early contests between NSW/Sydney teams and those from Victoria and suggests that these initial ‘humiliations’ may be another reason for the lack of popularity of the Australian code in the region. As such, Sydney has traditionally been the heartland of rugby league, and has little history of Australian football (Nadel 1998, 215).
While Sydney has remained a rugby league stronghold, it is also regarded as being the state capital city that is the least receptive to spectator sport (Nadel 1998a, 214). The modern Australian sporting landscape is complex and crowded (Lock, Darcy & Taylor 2009), as it boasts an array of sports including four football codes (McDonald, Karg & Lock 2010), all supported by a population of approximately 24 million (ABS 2016a). Sports, even those such as tennis, golf and lawn bowls that are less popular than the football codes, are still widely regarded as contributing to local (and national) identities within Australia (Tonts & Atherley 2010). Sporting traditions are not consistent across the country, and the cities of Sydney and Melbourne, in particular, continue to have divergent sporting identities (Cashman 2010). Melbourne lays claim to having the country’s premier horseracing venue, the nation’s biggest stadium, and is home to the Australian Formula One Grand Prix. It is often declared to be the ‘sporting capital’ of Australia (Jones 2012; Westerbeek 2014), although debates and polls in the media as to the validity of this claim are common (News Corp 2013a). There continues to be a rivalry between the two cities and between the states of Australia that is played out through sport (Cashman 2010).

While Peter Horton (2012, 1670) argues that sport is a vital element in the “collective imagination of communities at all strata of Australian society”, Australian sport also displays evidence of inequalities and exclusion based on class, racial, ethnic, sexuality and gender. In an Australian setting participation in sport is not even across all social groups (Dollman & Lewis 2010; Hardy et al. 2010; Spaaij 2012), and it is predominantly the domain of young, well-off, and well-educated males (Bennett, Emmison & Frow 2001). Modern sport participation in Australia is dominated by those who live in cities, with those based in the country or suburbs, migrants, and Indigenous Australians having lower levels of participation.

Sociologists Jim McKay et al. (2001) argue a strong masculine inflection heavily influences Australian sport and that, through sport, hegemonic forms of masculinity are asserted, promoted, and defended against alternative versions of masculinity and/or femininity. They also claim that sport can be both misogynistic and homophobic and that it “literally embodies the seemingly natural superiority of men over women” (McKay et al. 2001, 237). Sport now offers one of the few remaining settings in ‘civilised’ society for score settling and physical aggression. In Australia,
physical sports such as Australian football and rugby league are valued, while association football has been “deemed, at best, the effeminate cousin in the hyper-masculine family of football codes in Australia” (Carniel 2008, 74). McKay et al. (2001, 237) go on to argue that “Australian sport is pervaded by systematic gender inequalities”, with the division of labour in sport remaining unequal. They point out that women do an unequal share of ancillary labour such as washing sports kit and taking children to and from sport. With the involvement of women directed towards support services, the masculine hegemony of sport is further legitimised.

The former Australian association football player Johnny Warren, in his 2003 autobiography, captured the perception of association football as effeminate in its title – *Sheilas, Wogs, and Poofers*. Warren’s book title also draws attention to the significance of ethnic background to Australian sport. Both Daniel Lock (2009) and John Hughson (1999; 2000) point out ethnic divisions within sport, and association football has historically been identified as the sport of ‘wogs’ (an Australian slang term referring to most non-British European migrants) (Hay 2011). The connection between association football and continental European migrants was in part due to the aforementioned wave of migration following World War II (Van Krieken et al. 2010), with European migrants identifying with the sports of their homeland rather than more ‘Australian’ ones (Sandercock & Turner 1981; Hughson 1997; Ricatti & Klugman 2013). The “persistent ‘ethnic’ affiliations” within the sport have long been a concern to sport administrators and government officials, and eventually led to the creation of a ‘de-ethnicised’ national league (Hallinan, Hughson & Burke 2007, 295). This move may have increased the appeal of the sport to a wider audience (Georgakis & Molloy 2014), but while this ‘de-ethnicising’ took place at the national A-League level, suburban teams continued to be linked to local ethnic communities (Hallinan, Hughson & Burke 2007; Ricatti & Klugman 2013).

Cricket, Australian football and rugby league have historically been identified as sports for ‘real’ Australians in contrast to association football (Stoddart 1986). John Hughson (1997) found that second-generation Australians born to Croatian migrant parents believed that they were excluded from the dominant Australian sports. Cricket, in particular, has a strong association with ‘traditional’ Australian values (Utting 2015), while historian and sociologist Jon Gemmell (2007, 34) suggests that
in Australia it “remains a fortress of [W]hite masculine values” and that White hegemony continues to be dominant. With its historical links to cricket (Grow 1998a), it is perhaps unsurprising that Australian football has also been associated with the dominant White Australian values. Hallinan and Judd (2009a, 2360) argue that the Victorian Football League (the precursor of the AFL) was an “institutional signpost of [W]hite Australian national identity” and promoted the sport as the national game of White Australia. Furthermore, in the early years of Federation, politicians such as Prime Minister Alfred Deakin believed that Australian rules football could be used to maintain the White national values of Australianness that were pervasive at that time (Judd & Butcher 2016), with the stereotypical player characterised by his British cultural outlook and the Whiteness of his body. The connections of Australian football to the dominant British versions of Australianness were so strong that the acceptance of other European migrants has been a very gradual process. Given the post-war immigration of Europeans to Australia, it has only been since the 1970s and 1980s that players with European heritage have become common in the sport, with commentators and fans ‘Australianising’ the names of such players (as is common practice in Australian sport) as a sign of acceptance (Stoddart 1986). In this manner players such as Alex Jesaulenko who played for Carlton and St Kilda became known as “Jezza” and Hawthorn’s Berto DiPierdomenico became “Dipper”.

Perhaps due to the country’s history of migration, Australian sports fans have multiple identities and loyalties (Stewart & Smith 2000; Melnick & Wann 2011). Australians will often support teams in a number of sports, teams in different countries, and even more than one team in the same sport (McDonald, Karg & Lock 2010), with their loyalty and identification based on mediated images of the club or its best players (Stewart & Smith 2000). Of particular interest is a study by sport management scholar Daniel Lock (2008), who investigated the factors that fans of a new team (namely the association football team Sydney FC) deemed salient in their decisions to support this ‘new team’. He found that fans were already identified with association football and a desire to support the code was the most salient motivation for becoming a member of Sydney FC. In a related study, Lock, Darcy, and Taylor (2009) discovered that the connections between fans and a new team are weaker at first because the team lacks tradition, any shared experiences, and history. The notion of
collective memory and the concept of nostalgia have, as noted, been found to be
important in sport (Snyder 1991). It appears that identification with a sport team is, in
part, based on the shared experiences and memories that fans and the media generate.
Thus, teams that do not have any history or traditions, such as the recently formed
GWS Giants, the focus of this thesis, may need to find alternative methods to generate
positive feelings and emotions towards the club. As discussed above, one potential
avenue for generating such connections with fans may be through the appointment of
high-profile heroic figures, which as I argue in this thesis is what the Giants attempted
to do when they recruited Israel Folau to the club.

One new team that has been able to develop a sense of identification amongst their
fans is the Western Sydney Wanderers A-League club, founded in 2012 (Rowe 2014).
The Wanderers mirror the Western Sydney region, with its diverse population, and
Knijnik (2014) has found that the club’s fans are proud of their ‘immigrant’ image.
Identification with the team is particularly strong amongst those who come from
Eastern Europe and South America (Knijnik 2014), and the club also created a sense
of identification for migrants from Asia when it signed the former Japan international
player Shinji Ono (Pajic 2013). By drawing on well-established narratives of
difference across metropolitan Sydney (Bossi 2014), the Wanderers also managed
quickly to establish a rivalry with their cross-city opponents Sydney FC (Knijnik
2014). This sense of rivalry has served to increase the levels of identification with the
team amongst Western Sydney residents, as there is a sense of division and rivalry
between Sydney’s regions and suburbs (discussed in Chapter 4). As will be examined
below the Giants also attempted to create a cross-Sydney rivalry with the Sydney
Swans as a means of increasing identification levels with their emerging fan base.

Even though the Wanderers were a new club in 2012, they immediately managed to
tap into a sense of association football’s history in Australia. In 1880 a team called
the Wanderers had played the first game of association football in Australia and, in
addition to the name, the newly formed Western Sydney club also ‘borrowed’ this
original team’s playing colours (Pajic 2013). The Western Sydney region has, in
recent years, had high participation levels in association football (Georgakis &
Molloy 2014), and there had been a number of attempts to establish an A-League
team in the region prior to the Wanderers’ foundation (Pajic 2013). The demand for a
second Sydney-based A-League team was thus driven by the local population. It should also be noted that the Wanderers enjoyed a high level of success in their first season (Rowe 2014), and experienced a “meteoric rise” (Knijnik 2014, 1) to prominence as one of the top A-League teams. Given Sydney’s fickle attachment to sporting teams (Nadel 1998b) and the aforementioned importance of sporting success to some fans’ allegiances (Smith & Stewart 1999), the Wanderers’ on-field results may have played a significant role in increasing the level of identification of their fans. The formation of two new professional sports teams in Western Sydney, both making their league debuts in 2012, was significant and provides a number of areas for comparison.

While the Wanderers have been remarkably successful quickly in establishing a fan base and consistently winning matches, their AFL equivalents initially struggled to achieve on-field victories and have not attracted the same large crowds (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of their crowd numbers). Unlike the Wanderers, the GWS Giants do not have an established history to draw upon to establish their fan base. It may be that, in a manner akin to that found by Lock (2008), some fans already identified with Australian football and that this association may provide the point of identification for fans. Indeed, as will be shown in the next section, the sport does have a long history, and it is associated with numerous traditions, and I will now provide a brief overview of this sport and its elite professional league in providing an important context for understanding the situation of the Giants.

**Australian Rules Football and the Australian Football League**

Melbourne was the Australian city that had the greatest population growth in the colony in the 1850s, in part due to the gold rushes (Cashman 2010). Dry, mild winters with longer days (in comparison to the UK); a large number of well-to-do young men in employment; high levels of wealth (again due to the gold rushes) and large open spaces, were all conducive to the formation and growth of sport in the city in the mid-19th century (Grow 1998a; Cashman 2010). Indeed, in 1856 the city’s stonemasons were credited with being the first workers in the world to be granted an eight-hour working day, thus leaving time for recreational activities. While early sporting activity in Melbourne had included hurling (played between Irish migrants),
goat racing and skittles (Grow 1998a), the lack of a dominant sporting code left the region with the luxury of developing its own form of football. Three prominent schools all had head teachers from Britain who brought different forms of football to the area. To facilitate competition between them it was necessary to establish a common form of football and so, in 1858, the first recorded football match between two Victorian clubs or schools took place, although Blainey (2003) argues that in every year since 1840 at least one match had been played in the city. Rules for the new sport were drawn up by members of the Melbourne Club in 1859 (Hay 2010), and from the beginning it had different characteristics from other football codes, possessing innovative rules, such as the abolition of an offside concept (Harms & Jobling 1995). It has been characterised as possessing a free-flowing beauty (Alomes 2000a) and elsewhere it has been described as being “a consuming passion, of hope and despair, of escape and reality, of religious commitment and frustration. It is an expression of the grand qualities of human endeavour” (Harms & Jobling 1995, 77).

Nicholson (2005) states that Australian football began as a Victorian competition that was grounded in “inner-city” tribal loyalty. In a short time, the sport had become a “passionate locally based, collective involvement which expressed values of great importance for its participants and its supporters” (Hess 2000, 111). Tribalism in Melbourne led supporters to adopt a myriad of colours, badges, emblems, and related symbols to reinforce and display their community identity (Hess & Nicholson 2005). This reaffirming of identity enabled residents to develop a sense that their suburb was a legitimate community within the larger city. Stewart (2005) supports this view and argues that Australian football and the clubs in the initial league structure played an especially important role in developing a sense of suburban identity in the growing city. Class and religion provided the basis for differentiation of residents in its suburbs, and football clubs proved to be the ideal tool to express these socio-cultural differences and identification. The sport became popular very quickly and, by 1876, observers were noting the size of the crowds (Harms & Jobling 1995). Australian football has since gone on to occupy an important position in Adelaide, the South Australian capital, but it remains most significant in Melbourne, with Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner (1981) suggesting that support for a team is obligatory for everyday social exchanges in the city. They go on to say that fans describe their
support for the sport as an “obsession” and suggest that “winter is bearable in Victoria only because of the footy [Australian football]” (1981, 231).

The sport’s elite league structure consisted solely of Victorian teams under the guise of the VFL until the 1980s (Stewart, 2005). The league was rebranded as the Australian Football League in 1991 to enhance its appeal nationally, with teams now from New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, and South Australia. While there are still numerous teams in the Australian football heartlands of Melbourne, a significant development had come in 1982 with the creation of the Sydney Swans. The Brisbane Bears subsequently followed in 1986 (although in 1996 they were merged with Fitzroy Lions, from Melbourne, to create the Brisbane Lions) and in 1997 the second side from Adelaide joined the AFL. (Although Port Adelaide had a history spanning over one hundred years, the first Adelaide side to participate in the AFL was the Adelaide Crows Football Club – a newly formed composite South Australian team (Shilbury & Hooper 1999).) The expansion of the league also saw a move away from geographically/suburban based and identified teams, with explicit reference to the locale of the team, to teams representing a city or region and identified by a name or image, such as the Adelaide Crows and most recently the GWS Giants. While still maintaining the traditional values that a club had come to stand for, a city or region-based identity allowed teams to appeal to a wider fan base, and by 2003 the AFL had more fans outside Victoria than within the state (Stewart 2005). Indeed, in 2004 the two best-supported teams were based outside Victoria, with the first Sydney-based team recorded as having a fan base of 1,341,000, the highest of the then 16 AFL teams. The team was formed when the South Melbourne Football Club (known as the Swans because the team had an influx of players from Western Australia) relocated to Sydney (Sydney Swans 2016) and so, in one sense, they were not a ‘new’ AFL team.

Despite the increased prominence of team nicknames and logos, many of the older AFL teams continue to retain links with specific suburbs and their associated identities, and the fans of these clubs have identifiable club cultures (Walsh 2015). The AFL is the best supported sport competition in Australia in terms of average match and weekly attendance figures, with Bob Stewart (2005, 112) describing the AFL as Australia’s “premier sports competition”. Indeed Australian Bureau of
Statistics data show that in 2009-2010 Australian football was the most popular spectator sport in Australia. Nineteen per cent of men and thirteen per cent of women (1.7 million and 1.2 million individuals respectively) attended a game in the 12 months prior to the survey date (ABS 2011). Females accounted for over 40 per cent of AFL total season attendance in 2003, and Australian football actually has a long history of female spectatorship (Klugman 2012).

Rob Hess (2000, 114) points out that the sport has consistently attracted a large number of female fans despite the fact that it is men who historically “play, coach, umpire, promote, administer, provide commentary on, and follow the game”. He argues that, despite the perception that women are peripheral to the game, their involvement has actually been valued and encouraged for a long period, which may make Australian football unique amongst masculine football codes in Australia. But, as with the majority of professional sporting codes in Australia, it has historically been identified as a male sport. Early games were inherently violent, despite the attempts to make the game safer than the competing codes of football that had originated in England. One of the early pioneers of the game, H.C.A Harrison, was of the opinion that football was a rough game and not suitable for “men-poodles”, “milksops” or “old women in disguise” (Grow 1998a, 25). The male-only nature of the elite-level AFL further serves to reinforce the taken-for-granted notion of maleness, with women conspicuously absent from the playing field, coaching staff, and commentary box. Australian football thus provides an avenue for males to cultivate the aforementioned “homosocial” relationships (Coad 2008, 10), allowing appropriate male bonding and affording opportunities for males to engage in male-only discussions around sport.

Although Australian football can be a site for the construction of local, regional, and national identities, it has also been subject to negotiations and struggles for power and acceptance. Australian football has, at various stages, accepted the involvement of a variety of different cultures, which in turn have exerted their influence over the sport. As mentioned above, the involvement and acceptance of non-British migrants from Europe was a gradual process, but it is now common to find players with European heritage playing in the AFL. There is also evidence for a long involvement by

---

1 As noted previously, a new eight-club women’s Australian football competition, known as AFL Women’s will commence in 2017. These players will only be on part-time contracts.
Aborigines (Gorman 2012; Gorman et al. 2015), and the AFL brand has “closely aligned itself with the politics of Aboriginal reconciliation” (Judd & Butcher 2016, 69). In fact, the AFL has an over-representation of Indigenous players (10 per cent when compared to 2 per cent of the population) and this over-representation has been cited as evidence for the success of Australian football in appealing to Aboriginal Australians (Judd & Butcher 2016). Yet these players are often excluded from positions of influence on the pitch (Hallinan & Judd 2009a) as another example of ‘stacking’ in sport (discussed earlier in this chapter). This marginalisation of Indigenous players is indicative of racial ideologies that Hallinan and Judd (2009a, 2359) believe are the result of “multiple structural, individual, psychological, social and historical events”. Coakley, Hallinan & McDonald (2011) also highlight how such racial ideologies and stereotypes influence the positions played by participants from minority groups. Furthermore, on closer examination, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the majority of Indigenous AFL players have been recruited to teams outside Victoria (Hallinan, & Judd 2009a). While teams such as the NSW-based GWS Giants and Sydney Swans have been more open to the inclusion of Indigenous players and, increasingly, players from other cultures (AFL 2012), fans of the sport have not been as accepting and have targeted Indigenous players with racial abuse. The social and historical events that contribute towards the marginalisation of Aboriginal players need careful consideration.

**Indigenous Athletes in Australian sport**

It is claimed by the AFL that Australian football is the country’s only Indigenous game (AFL 2012). Yet, while there have been suggestions that Australian football originated from the Djab-wurrung game of Marn-grook (or marngrook) (Gorman et al. 2015), historians Geoffrey Blainey (2003) and Roy Hay (2010) have both concluded that there is insufficient evidence to support this claim. Hay (2010) suggests that Aboriginal influence only began when Aboriginal players became directly involved in the game. Although Indigenous involvement in Australian football can be traced back to the nineteenth century (Gorman 2012), there is also a history of AFL supporters emphasising notions of difference through their behaviour towards, and abuse of, Indigenous players. One infamous example occurred in 1993
when the St Kilda player, Nicky Winmar was abused by Collingwood fans (Nadel 1998b; Gorman 2012). Winmar responded to this racism from the stands by raising his shirt and pointing at his skin colour (McNeill 2008). Hallinan and Judd (2009a, 2366) report that Winmar shouted that he was black and proud of it in the face of a “sea of hostile whiteness”. Historian Colin Tatz (1995, 53) quotes an extract from the SMH newspaper that suggested that the reason for this abuse was that Winmar was seen as “one of them [Aboriginal] rather than one of us [Anglo-Celtic Australian]”. Such episodes are sadly not uncommon in Australian football and the sport has a history of racial abuse of Indigenous players (Klugman & Osmond 2009). In recent years athletes such as Adam Goodes, Lance Franklin, and Eddie Betts have been racially abused during AFL matches, with Goodes, in particular, receiving abuse from large sections of some crowds (Judd & Butcher 2016; Parry 2016).

Indigenous Australian footballers (and rugby players) have been portrayed as possessing ‘innate’ ability and, as such, being ‘born to play’ sport due to their Aboriginality. Colin Tatz (2009) argues that it is politico-socio-economic conditions rather than a biological or mystical ability that explains the performances of Indigenous athletes. He states that, rather than possessing a mystical clairvoyance, it is the need to adapt to difficult ‘cultural circumstances’, “skills honed through living closely together, kicking balls through tree forks and in the dark”, and through taking a total enjoyment in playing sport (free from the formulaic play of White teammates), that Indigenous players have developed their skill levels (Tatz 2009, 26).

Racism is not limited to Australian football and Bruce and Wensing (2009) claim that Australian sport has historically been ‘intimately’ linked to race and racism. For instance, in an echo of Winmar’s abuse, Olympic runner Cathy Freeman was referred to as “not one of us” by some Australians (Bruce & Wensing 2009, 94). Racial prejudice against the Indigenous community historically limited Aboriginal participation in sport prior to the 1940s (Cashman 2010) and although indigenous participation in sport has increased, attitudes towards Aboriginal players sadly continue to reflect a societal hostility towards non-White Australians. Indigenous athletes, along with musicians and artists, are amongst the small proportion of ‘visible’ Aborigines, with Indigenous people otherwise being invisible “except in so far as they constitute either a problem, or a decorative feature” (Collis & Webb 2014,
Sport remains one of the few avenues for Indigenous Australians to speak out about their off-field experiences in Australian society, yet, when they do speak out, they can often be vilified. For example, Sydney Swans’ player Adam Goodes was racially abused twice in recent years (Crawford 2013) because he highlighted “the disadvantage and historical wrongs that continue to adversely impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities” (Judd & Butcher 2016, 68), while a number of other Indigenous players have also been targeted in a similar manner (Baldwin & Conn 2014). It was such incidents that have led Tatz’s (1995, 43) proposition that “sport is a measure of Australian racism”.

Conclusion

Having evolved from simple folk games, sport is now embedded within most cultures. It fulfils multiple roles in society; for instance it can simultaneously be a source of employment, a form of entertainment, and a recreational activity. In its most basic form, as a ludic expression, sport can serve as a site of freedom and escape from modern life (Booth 2000; Guttmann 2004). It allows strangers to socialise and migrants to ‘acclimatise’ in new settings, fostering a sense of belonging and identity. Fans of a new team, such as the GWS Giants, can find acceptance and integration through sport. Yet, it is also a source of conflict, with large groups of people excluded from participating in sport, and power struggles continuing to exist over which sports, and whose versions of sport, matter (Rowe 2015). It has also become increasingly professionalised and commercialised, and playing competitive sport (primarily at an elite level but increasingly at all levels) can be devoid of the freedom and joy that were once integral to it. In many cases these characteristics have been replaced by regimented and formulaic systems of play, a rigid adherence to team rules and instructions, and an increase of bureaucratic control.

With the commercialisation of sport, there have been technological advances that mean it is increasingly consumed electronically rather than in person at games, resulting in lower attendances for a number of teams (Stensholt 2014). The advances in mediated sport have allowed teams to expand their ‘virtual’ markets but leagues such as the AFL are also attempting physical expansion into new or growing markets (for instance Western Sydney). These moves have, however, resulted in tensions and
hostility between rival codes and clubs. Such tensions also surface when athletes seek to exploit their bodily capital and sell themselves to teams around the world, or in new leagues. As detailed above, friction can result from a perceived threat to the dominant culture of a country or a region. Sport can, therefore, be used as a propaganda tool to legitimise and promote political and racial ideologies, and it can generate intense feelings of nationalism and tribalism amongst players and, particularly, fans. It consequently occupies an important role in many Western societies but within Australian society this role is particularly significant.

Sports historian Richard Cashman (2010) captures Australia’s obsession with sport when he highlights that Australia has been called a ‘Paradise of Sport’. Yet it is only a ‘paradise’ for those who conform to the dominant social norms and values (such as the institutionalised concept of egalitarian mateship) with those falling outside of these boundaries excluded and marginalised. Sport, in the form of a test match cricket crowd, is identified by Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987) as a social leveller, and one of the most classless places in Australia. Yet such a view is blinkered and ignores the physical and social division created by Members areas/clubs at cricket matches and numerous other rifts that are based on historical (and often biased) notions concerning features such as ethnicity, masculinity, and geographical loyalty. Australian football, in particular, has been tied to Anglo-Celtic notions of Australian national identity and is seen “as a marker of Anglo-Australian exclusivity and uniqueness” (Judd & Butcher 2016, 70).

One key area where narratives relating to the dominant norms and values of Australian sport is particularly apparent concerns the significance of nation’s sporting heroes. The following chapter will detail the social role that these sporting heroes play in the representation of, for example, masculine and ethnic identities.
Chapter 3 – Heroes

“We may become something like the immortal gods through greatness, greatness of mind or greatness of body” – Pindar

“We suppose the Gods and Heroes to excel men” – Aristotle

Introduction

The athlete that rises above others through their achievements can be described in a variety of ways. Cashmore and Parker (2003, 215) argue that there is in fact “a conflation of terms and descriptors that are commonly rendered synonymous – “stars,” “superstars”, “heroines”/”heroes”, “icons””. This conflation can result in confusion and so it is necessary to conceptualise what is meant by the term ‘hero’. The first section of this chapter identifies the differences between heroes, celebrities, and stars, drawing in particular on the work of historians Thomas Carlyle and Daniel Boorstin, and cultural historians Samuel Brunk and Ben Fallaw, amongst others. Goodman, Duke and Sutherland (2002) argue that heroes resonate with society when they connect with timeless archetypes, and so an overview of the historical studies on heroes and the most important archetypal typologies follows.

Following a discussion of heroes within society, I then address heroes in the context of sport. An overview of sports heroes in Western society documents their evolving nature and clarifies the distinction between sporting heroes and sporting celebrities. The key studies of sporting heroes are discussed, along with brief discussions of selected sports heroes. While it has been suggested that the worship of sports heroes can be traced back as far as the Ancient Olympics (Smith 1973), this contention is not accepted because, as was detailed in Chapter 2, such practices are not considered to be ‘sports’ in a modern sense. Therefore, this chapter only considers sports heroes in the context of the modernisation of sport from the nineteenth century onwards. Finally, sporting heroes in an Australian setting are discussed, with particular attention paid to the twentieth-century cricketer Sir Donald (Don) Bradman.
The nineteenth-century historian Thomas Carlyle (1840) suggests that human endeavour and accomplishments are inextricably tied to ‘Great Men’. For Carlyle, any history of what ‘man’ has accomplished is, in essence, a history of the Great Men who had made these accomplishments, and these figures were the heroes that had shaped world history. It should be noted that he is emphatic in his belief that heroes are male, which is perhaps unsurprising given the context of the nineteenth century, and his gendered language is analysed later in this chapter. Carlyle was one of the first historians to identify that “heroes reflect sociocultural values and norms” (Roessner 2009, 43). Consequently, Brunk and Fallaw (2006, 3) suggest that:

...heroes serve as a kind of cultural glue that helps hold together many kinds of communities...heroes help large numbers of people identify with a nation and internalize and accept as natural its basic principles and laws, thus producing greater unity in a population.

Michael Oriard (1978, 516), a former professional American football player and later English professor, believes that all democratic societies need heroes and “it is our heroes who define for us our human potential, and whose achievements become the collective property of all men”. A functionalist view would, therefore, be that heroes reinforce “cultural priorities and values” and figure in the communication media that present and preserve information about them (Drucker & Cathcart 1994, 2). Heroes capture both the popular and historical imagination of a nation or region in appealing to their ideals. Therefore, an analysis of heroes is important because the myths surrounding them “tell us about what attributes are seen as the good, the beautiful, and the true, and thereby teach us culturally valued aspirations” (Pearson 1989, XXV). Although it is shown later in this chapter that not all hero myths are associated with positive cultural values, heroes are generally understood to be aspirational characters for society. Richard Crepeau (1981) argues that heroes illustrate the reality of these myths and show society its highest potential and, in an American setting, sports heroes express one (or more) of three themes of the ‘American Myth’. Therefore, heroes also play a role in maintaining social structure, representing the dominant norms and beliefs of a society, which are typically controlled by the social elite (Smith 1973). Heroes, consequently, form a part of the
process by which the working class and other major (but subordinate) social categories become compliant to the hegemonic class. Additionally, hero worship provides a feeling of fellowship and belonging for those who engage in this practice, thereby reinforcing social bonds and cohesion between members of the population.

It has been argued that, since the terrorist attacks in America on September 11th 2001 (9/11), heroes have come to occupy an especially prominent place within popular culture (Spigel 2004; Anker 2005; Boon 2005; Gibson et al. 2007). Although this event brought heroism to the forefront of popular narratives, heroes are an enduring phenomenon and have played an important role in human history, as I will detail later in this chapter. Historian Daniel Boorstin (1992) argues that it was only in times of conflict that heroes emerged in the twentieth century, with the acts of fire-fighters, medical professionals, and the armed services recognised as heroic (Chidester 2009; 2013), but human subjects from areas of popular culture are also increasingly regarded as heroes (Till 2010). The concept of the hero is consequently not static and can adapt to temporal or societal changes.

Brunk and Fallaw (2006, 1), writing from a socio-historical perspective and drawing on the work of Max Weber, define a hero as:

…a person to whom remarkable courage, talent, and other noble, even godlike traits are attributed by members of a community and who thus acquire a lasting place of importance in that community’s culture.

Such a definition would certainly cover the acts of the emergency services or armed services and, in their investigation of the construction of post 9/11 heroes, Gibson et al. (2007) also position heroes as people who perform extraordinary acts of courage that transcend the mediocre and potentially involve great risk. Other definitions do not require risk or sacrifice on the part of the hero. For example, Boorstin (1992, 49) suggests that a hero can also be “a human figure – real or imaginary or both – who has shown greatness in some achievement. He [sic] is a man or woman of great deeds”. Psychologists Adrian North, Victoria Bland, and Nicky Ellis (2005, 40) offer an alternative definition of a hero as someone “having produced ideas or objects of considerable and lasting importance to society, and who may or may not have been well known”. Regardless of whether a hero must face personal risk, these definitions

55
all identify the need for a significant achievement and position heroes as occupying an important space in their community.

Boorstin’s (1992) definition is significant as he, unusually, indicates that heroes can be both male and female – while still using the masculine pronoun. Other definitions and discussions either fail to consider the possibility of feminine heroes or explicitly equate the heroic with men and strength and toughness (Wellard 2002). Carlyle (1840, 6) offers one such example of this gendered language when he argues that they are a source of “manhood and heroic nobleness” and so unite a Great Man to other men. Sociolinguist Joan Fayer (1994, 24) explains this gender specificity by claiming that, in Western culture, heroic deeds have typically been reflected in “actions of courage, command, and conquest in conflicts” – all of which are associated with the male domain. Similarly, Kevin Alexander Boon (2005) suggests that mythical figurations of heroes have functioned as an unattainable ideal against which contemporary masculinity is measured, but nevertheless the pursuit of the heroic is still seen as an important part of masculinity. Contemporary males are, therefore, required to embrace this mythical heroism if they wish to “embody the culturally coded definitions of a man” (Boon 2005, 310). Carol Pearson (1989, 2) further argues that historical interpretations of the heroic ideal have predominantly been reserved for the White male, with women confined to the roles of “damsels-in-distress to be rescued, as witches to be slain, or as princesses who, with half the kingdom, serve as the hero's reward”. Pearson also highlights the marginalisation of males from minority groups in traditional tales of heroism. Heroes have, therefore, been historically equated with masculinity but, with the rise of democracy and an increased desire for an egalitarian society, the heroic archetype has been claimed first by working-class men, then women, and finally by ethnic minority males, and so heroism is no longer the sole domain of elite White males.

Boorstin (1992) offers a rather sombre view of heroes and argues that, from the mid-twentieth century, society ceased to create heroes, suggesting that they had been consigned to memories from youth. He argues that those men of the previous century were more heroic than contemporary men – “men of antiquity were still more heroic; and those of pre-history became demigods” (Boorstin 1992, 63). It is hard to conceive that contemporary figures are god-like beings and McDorman et al. (2006,
claim that the modern heroes “we do find have imperfections that expose their human frailty”. It may be that the increased familiarity with contemporary heroic figures that the mass media afford diminishes the significance of their achievements. Likewise, writing in the 1970s, social critic Henry Fairlie (1978) also claimed that American society was no longer creating heroes. Sixteen years later, Drucker and Cathcart (1994) also pointed out the dearth of heroes in American culture and suggested that they had been replaced by celebrities. For these authors, heroes were a reflection of bygone times and a romanticised past. Other scholars have disagreed and Boon (2005) proposes that heroes are not in decline, but are merely ‘hibernating’ and are now less prominent within society. As mentioned above, since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, a resurgent source of heroes has been those who put themselves in harm’s way to help or save others (Gibson, et al. 2007) but sociologist Steven Jackson (2007) believes that sport is one cultural domain which continues to create heroes. My own research (Parry 2009) certainly indicates that many individuals still claim to have a hero, with sport as a primary source.

Regardless of the domain from which heroes are drawn, social psychologists Sullivan and Venter (2010) suggest that it is their personal traits rather than their behaviour that are more important in their elevation to heroic status. Indeed, according to Brunk and Fallaw (2006, 2), one such prerequisite characteristic of a hero is charisma, which, they state, is “what makes heroes heroic”. These arguments are contrary to those of Klapp (1948), who suggests that personal traits are relatively unimportant in hero formation. Klapp argues that it is the role played by the hero that is more important, as the public will have little opportunity to make observations of a hero’s characteristics when they first emerge. Klapp (1948) states that the actions of the hero are more durable than their traits. Public opinion on the traits of individuals would be formed on the basis of the actions that they have performed, and these actions and deeds have typically been ritually retold, embodied as a narrative, story, or myth (Drucker 1994).

Holden (2012, 19) claims that heroes are “emotional icons whose qualities match ideals embedded in the culture” within which they are heroised, and he draws a distinction between the terms hero, celebrity, and star. He suggests that heroes are less common than stars, while celebrities are the most common of the three. The
proliferation of celebrity-focussed magazines and television shows is certainly indicative of the ‘commonness’ of celebrities and Drucker and Cathcart (1994) believe that the pace and form of contemporary media have resulted in performances rather than heroic deeds being celebrated. Steven Jackson (2007), citing Boorstin, draws a distinction between heroes and celebrities by suggesting that the former are distinguished by their achievements and so can be considered to be ‘Big Men’. This distinction has obvious parallels with Carlyle’s Great Men and, by implication, relegates the celebrity to someone without such accomplishments. According to Boorstin (1992), rather than looking for (and up to) Great/Big Men it was Big Names that became valued and idolised, yet Smart (2005, 14), in his discussion of sports stars, suggests that celebrities are “superficial, trivial, bereft of distinction, in short insubstantial”. However, it may be that heroes are also becoming less substantial as heroic qualities have increasingly been commodified through their association with products and services. As a result of this commodification, Goodman, Duke and Sutherland (2002) suggest that heroism has increasingly been constructed in ways that appeal to consumer audiences, primarily by advertisers and the media. They dub this modification as “consumer’s heroism”, and such a description may be particularly apt for the modern sporting world, which, as discussed in Chapter 2, is also increasingly commodified. If notions of what is heroic are evolving then the relationship and distinctions between heroes and celebrities have become increasingly complex, and not well understood.

Boorstin (1992) points out that the word celebrity originally referred to the condition of being talked about – ‘famousness’ or notoriety – rather than to a person. The term evolved and was subsequently used to refer to a famous or well-publicised person who may actually be characterised by their ordinariness (Klapp 1962). Despite contentious claims by Robert Garland (2010) that celebrity has a long tradition, it was the twentieth-century developments in mass media that have increasingly seen the elevation of individuals on the basis of on their “well-knownness” rather than their deeds and actions (Boorstin 1992, 57). The invention of the motion picture allowed actors to become celebrities purely because they were well known and ensured that their image was visible to the public. This increased image-based veneration consequently ended the connection between the heroic act and the hero (Cathcart 1994) and the mass media now provides society with so many well-known figures...
that they drown out heroes (Smart 2005) and create an obsession with celebrities. Indeed, Cashmore and Parker (2003, 215) suggest that celebrity is the epitome of economic fetishism and that it is a commodification of the human form characterised by notions of “fame, notoriety, charisma, and exception”. Celebrities have become “human pseudo-events” (Boorstin 1992) created by the commodification of reputation and are, therefore, a product of capitalism and a ‘culture industry’ that measures success in monetary terms (Kurzman et al. 2007). While heroes essentially create themselves by their deeds, celebrities are created by the media and are distinguished by their image or trademark. (In Chapter 6 I will provide important insight into whether a hero can be successfully created).

While a celebrity may not be a hero, Drucker and Cathcart (1994, 10) argue that “today no person can be a hero without also being a celebrity”. There has been a shift from the traditional notions of the hero “as a transcendent character dominating events through great deeds” (Drucker 1994, 93) to a modern notion of someone that is highly talented and well-publicised but is at the same time ordinary. Many modern heroes have indeed become celebrities, with an associated media profile, and sociologist Barry Smart (2005) argues that celebrity is inherently tied to the production and dissemination of media representations of individuals. Indeed, the media are pivotal in generating awareness of celebrities, who have consequently become hyper-commodified cultural or media productions (Giles 2000; Naha 2012). Due to this commodification, Dominic Malcolm (2012) claims that, while celebrities have an impact on public consciousness, interest in them rests on their private lives and not their profession. There is intense scrutiny over all aspects of celebrities’ lives and their fame is reliant on media attention. Cashmore (2004, 203) states that, unlike heroes, celebrities “rely less on doing, more on being noticed”. He argues that celebrities need to be seen and that representation is the key to celebrity – consumers have to be able to picture their favourite celebrity and to imagine what they are doing. Through the media audiences have developed an awareness of all aspects of the lives of celebrities, gaining deep knowledge about complete strangers that they will never actually meet (Chung 2003; Miller 2013).

Giles (2000) has developed a typology of celebrities, identifying the categories of: public figures that rise to prominence due to meritocratic fame, show business stars,
and accidental stars. He suggests that athletes fall within the category of meritocratic fame, and that they are actually the best example of this class because their performance is easy to measure. But it is no longer the case that athletes fit into this category alone as, given the aforementioned commodification of sport as an entertainment product, they are also now showbusiness stars. Stars (of popular culture) are typified as being the ‘royalty’ of the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Gitlin 1998). Smart (2005) argues that stars are actually just a particular form of celebrity drawn from the world of entertainment, in particular music, film, television, and, increasingly, from sport. They possess a mysterious quality that makes fans want to know about every aspect of their lives so that they are not merely anonymous figures on a screen. Sports stars are one such example of individuals who are afforded a celebrity-commodity status and so subjected to both on-field and off-field scrutiny (McKay & Brooks 2013). However, Smart (2005) contends that the topic of stardom in sport has received little, if any, consideration within wider discussions of the significance of cultural celebrity, which is at odds with the prominent position that sport occupies in popular culture. Sports heroes are, therefore, positioned within this wider spectrum of commodified sociocultural constructions, which includes celebrities and stars. In order to understand fully sports heroes and their formation, as is the aim of this thesis, it is necessary to address and analyse the wider literature on the topic of heroes.

**Hero Studies**

Early modern research on heroes was dominated by a series of leading names, dating back to the aforementioned historian Thomas Carlyle in the nineteenth century, who first established a typology of heroes. Less complicated, dual typologies, such as the history book hero and the vernacular or archetypal hero (Lerner 1957 cited in Smith 1973), have also been put forward to explain the different forms that heroes can take. Studies of heroes from diverse disciplines (Smith 1976; Ingham et al. 1993; Whannel 2002; Boon 2005; Sullivan & Venter 2005; Lee, Jackson & Lee 2007) still draw extensively on Carlyle, twentieth-century writer Joseph Campbell, and also American sociologist Orrin Klapp, and so these will now be discussed.
Carlyle (1840, 6) believed that heroes were the leaders of men or even “the soul of the whole world’s history”, and that even to look upon such a Great Man was of benefit to the rest of society. He suggests that hero worship is the transcendent admiration of such a Great Man in a quasi-religious manner, and claims that there is no nobler feeling than to admire such an individual. He proposed that, while heroes may assume different types and be received by the world in different ways, there are a limited number of hero types. His typology thus divided heroes (or Great Men) into six classes that he believed provided an insight into the world’s history. These are the hero as: Divinity, Prophet, Poet, Priest, Man of Letters, and King (Carlyle 1840). Carlyle recognises that some of these heroic types, particularly the hero as Divinity and as Prophet, may not exist in the industrialised world, suggesting that modern citizens are not able to see their fellow ‘man’ as either a god or as one speaking with the voice of a god.

A century later, Orrin Klapp (1948; 1949a) also identified a number of roles that heroes played in mythology and folklore, namely: the conquering hero; the clever hero; the unpromising or Cinderella hero; the defender or deliverer; the benefactor; the cultural hero; and the martyr. Klapp (1954a) pays particular attention to the clever hero, suggesting that they often verge on being a villain, as epitomised by the likes of Robin Hood. The clever hero can be an upstart, liar, and malefactor, yet these villainous qualities add to their appeal and turn them into a social force that is “universally popular” (Klapp 1954a, 22). Humour, deception, and the ability to escape from an oppressor are integral characteristics of the clever hero. The clever hero often appears physically smaller and weaker than their larger, cruel, arrogant opponents, but uses these qualities to win out – in essence ‘brains’ or tricks ultimately triumph over ‘brawn’. Klapp (1948, 136) describes the Cinderella hero as being either youthful or unpromising in appearance, a “dark horse” or an “unknown”, the “poor boy who makes good” or the unknown athlete with real but hidden ability and potential. He would later (1962) term this form of hero ‘the underdog’ or ‘independent spirit[s]’. Those individuals who give the illusion of superhuman powers, by performing miraculous feats, can become ‘conquering heroes’. In contests against others such a hero may seem invincible and, in these tests, they display endurance, bravery, skill, or virtue that is considered superhuman. Significantly it is
an athlete, baseballer Babe Ruth, who is proposed as an example of this category. Klapp (1948, 136) claims that:

...any story, impression, photograph, rumor [sic], or role which can be engineered to emphasize the extraordinary power of the candidate, or his supremacy in any field of endeavour [sic], is likely to help make him a popular hero. Conversely, any sign of weakness will diminish his stature.

While he does not define them as archetypes, he does acknowledge that these types are “well-nigh universal” (Klapp 1954b, 58), and I agree that they should be considered as such. He maintains that heroes inspire a large degree of sentimentality and faith among their followers (or “fans” as he describes them) (Klapp 1954b). Klapp (1949a, 53) appears to disagree with the notion that heroes are those with extraordinary talent by highlighting that those who are honoured in America is frequently “an athlete, an entertainer, or a person of a relatively trivial accomplishment”. He further highlights that hero worship on a mass scale leads to a tremendous level of loyalty and to “excesses, to blind devotion to leaders”, and when these do not occur it can lead to “the irrationality and triviality of fads and cults” (Klapp 1949a, 53). Heroes, then, arise in areas of public interest where the drama unfolds in such a way so as to create suspense or to fill an unmet need. Klapp (1948, 135) proposes four general ways in which heroes can be formed: through spontaneous popular recognition and homage; formal selection (as is the case with military decoration); a gradual growth in popular legend; and finally as poetic creations of dramatists and writers.

The work of Joseph Campbell has also been an important influence on the field of hero studies. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (first published in 1949), he identifies a “standard path” for the “mythological adventure of the hero”, which he considered to be a representation of rites of passage (Campbell 2004, 28). Campbell studied the myths and legends that were present in many societies, dating as far back as the second century BC Akkadian poem concerning Gilgamesh, a third century BC king of Uruk. He dubs the perilous heroic journey ‘the monomyth’, as it captures the recirculated nature of this heroic narrative (Hartman 2014). The hero’s adventure, at a basic level, follows three stages: *separation* or departure, trials and victories by way of *initiation*, and a *return* to be integrated. The would-be hero sets out on some form
of task and then returns home, often with a message or some form of learning for their society (Campbell 2004). They possess exceptional gifts and are capable of achieving triumphs that can have local or global impacts. The hero’s purpose is ultimately to achieve illumination and to provide insight for the benefit of humanity, often requiring some form of transformation. Campbell proposes a number of archetypes for the returning heroes: the Warrior, the Lover, the Emperor or Tyrant, the World Redeemer, and the Saint. He argues that the heroic journey, no matter the culture or context, varies little and essentially follows a standard or archetypal path. This journey is broken down into seventeen steps that the hero may follow on their path and, while not all steps need to be followed, the basic elements of the journey are still needed. In instances where a basic element of the archetypal pattern is omitted, Campbell (2004) claims that it will be implied in some way, thus reinforcing the enduring nature of the hero’s journey. He also proposes that heroes are often believed to be predestined for greatness:

…but the makers of legend have seldom rested content to regard the world's great heroes as mere human beings who broke past the horizons that limited their fellows and returned with such boons as any man with equal faith and courage might have found. On the contrary, the tendency has always been to endow the hero with extraordinary powers from the moment of birth, or even the moment of conception. The whole hero-life is shown to have been a pageant of marvels with the great central adventure as its culmination. (Campbell 2004, 294)

The enduring nature of this monomyth points both to its significance and resonance, but the above description blurs myth with history and positions the hero as possessing a mystical destiny. Both Raglan (1956) and French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955) claim that the ‘divinised’ heroes of classical history were likely to be mythological figures rather than historical individuals, and so it may be difficult to associate such a concept with modern sporting figures. Nevertheless, Durkheim (1965) has argued that myths are given greater credibility when they are based on historical events and so there may be some elements of substance behind many of these heroes. It is important to understand the significance of myths in the heroisation process as they allow humans to interpret their current situations, drawing on
historical precedents to provide interpretations and, therefore, act as systems of communication. Barthes (1972) contends that myths are only made of material that is already suitable for communication, thus signifying an underlying consciousness within the process of mythologising (and, consequently, of heroisation). Sociologists Berger and Luckman (1966) have argued that myths are the most archaic form of legitimisation and universe-maintenance and for the ‘ancients’ they fulfilled “mystical, cosmological, social, and psychological needs” (Chidester 2009, 355). Myths have, therefore, long been integral to humankind’s sense-making processes, providing early humans with a way to interpret life, death, creation, and unexplained events. They are collective dreams that are used to explain not only the past and present, but also the future (Lévi-Strauss 1955), and transform history into a current ‘reality’ – the very principle of a myth is that “it transforms history into nature” (Barthes 1972, 128). Through myths the profane, present day is reconciled with the sacred past in the stories of heroes, and they continue to serve an important role for societies (especially when conceived as nations), acting as essential constituents of cultural meaning and maintenance (Chidester 2009; Price 2010).

Will Wright (2005) proposes that cultures are still based on stories, and so humans have been dubbed ‘homo narrans’ due to their reliance on storytelling. Indeed, Walter R. Fisher made use of this term as far back as 1984 as part of his narrative paradigm to explain the seemingly innate way in which humans make use of stories to understand and interpret the world around them (Hoebeke, Deprez & Raeymaeckers 2011; Sellnow 2014). Humans continue to produce stories about the world to help them understand it, but, in return, they live out the plots of these stories (Pearson 1989). As is pointed out by Barthes (1983), all human groups and classes have narratives, which are ingrained within life itself. Heroes feature prominently in these narratives and, whether such stories are based on historical fact or are mythologised accounts, there are obvious similarities in many reports of heroes. The twentieth-century British scholar Lord Raglan similarly studied mythical/legendary heroes and identifies points of commonality in the stories of those such as Theseus, Romulus, and King Arthur (Raglan 1934). He claims that there was a series of clearly defined features and incidents in all of these stories (Raglan 1956). He also offers a three-stage path for the hero’s life (birth, initiation, and death) that bears similarities to Campbell’s monomyth. As part of their path, the hero will again set out on a journey,
overcome trials, and then either return in glory or achieve glory elsewhere (Raglan 1956). While acknowledging that some of these heroes may be purely mythical, he argues that those who do have some historical basis may actually have their stories altered to ensure that they fit with the traditional, recognised patterns of the hero. This point is significant as, if Raglan is correct, the heroic narrative assumes more importance than the individual themselves. Accounts of individuals will, therefore, identify and emphasise those elements that match recognisable heroic types, so perpetuating mythological archetypes. Chidester (2009) takes the notion of the heroic narrative further and argues that it is so enduring that a hero does not actually need to perform heroic deeds for them to be afforded heroic status – it is sufficient for them to have demonstrated potential to perform such acts in the future.

It was the analytical psychologist Carl Gustav Jung who first made popular the use of the term ‘archetypes’ to describe those models of human behaviour “that echo the supernatural creative acts that give life meaning” (Gahan 2014, 37). This interpretation also represents the hero’s journey as a transformation, but approaches heroes from a psychological perspective, describing the transformation as representing a separation from an earlier state of consciousness (Izod 1996). The term ‘archetypes’ was borrowed from classical authors to describe a pre-existing prototypical image that Jung (1970, 11) describes as “primordial”. Regardless of whether the change taking place is physical or psychological, the patterns are ingrained into the ‘collective unconscious’ in a limited number of archetypes (Jung proposes that these are: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, and Trickster). There are parallels in these types and, for instance, the Trickster is reminiscent of Klapp’s ‘clever hero’ in possessing a fondness for sly jokes, pranks, and by taking joy in mocking social superiors. Both of these types have been equated with Reynard the Fox, a heroic figure of medieval folklore. Reynard, characterised as possessing cunning and trickery, “bests his rivals by wit, unexpected tricks, or hoaxes” (Klapp 1948, 136), and the clever hero is likely to have these characteristics, along with humour and charm. Klapp (1956) also developed a typology of American villains which contains elements of this trickster archetype, in particular: the rebel, the flouter, the troublemaker, and the rogue. These figures all act against those in positions of authority and, in the case of the rogue, may contain elements of the hero. Hoebeke, Deprez, and Raeymaeckers (2011) even suggest that heroes may assume the character of a
trickster during a temporary fall from grace, potentially due to a defeat or in yielding to temptation.

Carol Pearson has also drawn on Jung’s ideas about archetypes to devise a typology of personal heroic journeys. She stresses that her archetypes are conscious manifestations rather than unconscious psychological formations, and argues that, for an archetype to have resonance with a person, “there must be some external duplication or reinforcement of the pattern: an event in one's life or stories recounted in the culture that activate the pattern” (Pearson 1989, xxvi). Drawing another important distinction from earlier work, she also asserts that archetypes are more culturally specific and, therefore, Jung’s archetypes (and those developed by other Western scholars) are likely to only be relevant to Western culture. She suggests that it is both a person’s culture and their personal histories that dictate which archetype(s) will be dominant in their lives. This work is worth discussing for two reasons. Primarily, for the first time it explores heroic journeys using feminist theory (Fayer 1994), identifying archetypal patterns that are applicable to a feminist hero in addition to those of a masculine hero. Additionally, Pearson acknowledges that some archetypes are not universally constant. Similarly, Miller (2000, 1) identifies what he believes to be a fallacy in hero studies – that heroes all follow the same model and argues that “the word ‘hero’ projects to us a kind of spurious solidity, so that we use it, and hear it used, as if it actually referred to a single cognitive image” (2000, 1). Heroes and hero types can, therefore, be specific to regions, cultures, and particularly sports teams.

The frequent use of typologies to explain heroes indicates that there is a degree of commonality or universality to narratives surrounding heroes. However, if heroes are indeed domain specific, it is important to consider the contexts within which they are formed. Sport is one realm where heroes still exist (Wenner 2013); the large number of halls of fame, media representations, and fan discourses certainly point to the prominence of sports heroes. Indeed, it is claimed that sports heroes are a “fundamental element of the sporting landscape” (Gammon 2014, 246). The following section will discuss the field of sport heroisation, detailing the key studies in this field. This section will detail the significance of national identity in hero
formation, while also recognising the common characteristics of heroes from a number of relevant countries.

**Sporting Heroes**

According to Meân, Kassing, and Sanderson (2010), sport is reproduced for consumption through societally recognisable narratives and practices. News reports, television shows, sports films, and other forms of sport media present sport in narrative format, and while one of the features of sport is that the outcome is uncertain (which creates excitement for spectators (Whannel 1993; 2008)), there is also a desire for a degree of certainty, and for a familiar shape and narrative. Sporting events are reproduced in an easily understood narrative format, which includes characters, a series of chronological events, and a plot (Sellnow 2014), usually with the triumph of good over evil emphasised (Hartman 2014). The presence of a hero at the centre of the narrative is an integral element, with stories related to heroes (and (hyper)masculinity and nationalism) representing some of the most common, intertextually related narratives that surround sport (Meân, Kassing & Sanderson 2010). Sport is now at the heart of Westernised cultures and the most successful sportsmen and women are adored and ‘worshipped’ as though they were religious figures (Rojek 2006). Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar is a prime example of a sportsman seen as a hero or religious figure in India (Nalapat & Parker 2005). He is the leading run scorer in international cricket and is ‘worshipped’ by his fans to the extent that he has been described as a “secular saint...touched by divinity...a boy-god” (Baum 2003). Drucker (2006, 84) proposes that a sports hero plays multiple roles:

> [The hero] restores civic pride, serves as a role model, plays a role in oft-repeated sports legends, is followed by groupies, writes autobiographies, runs for public office, but most often “leads the troops into battle” as teammates take the court, ice, or field.

According to Smart (2005), high-profile sporting figures are recognised and admired in all social echelons, with people's perceptions of athletes driven by media coverage. Their media profile helps them to acquire 'star quality' and its associated celebrity status, which is not solely attributable to their performances on the sports field. These
athletes are honoured with titles, statues and financial rewards, and praised by their adoring fans as just one part of the growing contemporary cult of celebrity (Boyle and Haynes, 2000). Phillip Chidester (2009, 354) claims that, although modern sports heroes may not be comparable to the demigod characters of classical mythology, they are a symbolic representation of the “literal sacrifices to the well-being of the community” of classical heroes.

The meritocracy of sports heroes is much debated, and the noted sociologist C. Wright Mills is just one of many expressing dismay at how athletes have been elevated to heroic status, saying that “a man who can knock a small white ball into a series of holes with more skill and efficiency than anyone else thereby gains social access to the President of the United States” (quoted in Wagg 2007, 443). As is the case with celebrity, Yoseloff (1999) argues that sporting fame is fleeting and that new heroes emerge each sporting season to replace their predecessors. He believes that the athlete that manages to increase or retain their fame is rare. Sports heroes have also not been immune to the process of ‘celebrification’ and the mass media now take a growing interest in their private lives (Hoebek, Deprez & Raeymaeckers 2011).

Many modern celebrity athletes are known for their popular image as much (if not more) than their sporting ability (Allen 2013), and Toby Miller (2013) argues that, when the social and private lives of athletes receive more attention than their professional qualities, the athlete has passed into the domain of celebrity. If media attention is primarily on an athlete’s private life, this focus is a key distinction between these two categories. There are many similarities between modern-day celebrities and the sports hero-formation process, and so it has been argued that athletes fall short of true heroism and should actually be considered as pseudo-heroes (Drucker 1994). As with heroes more generally, the media play a crucial role in creating sports heroes and publicity clearly remains a vital element in their creation (Radford 2005), and so sports organisations have relied on their high-profile athletes, particularly those with media profiles, to market their sports (McKay & Brooks 2013).

Rojek (2006, 684) identifies the onset of professionalism in sport in the late nineteenth century as the catalyst for the elevation of certain players above the “ranks of ordinary men and women” into the category of sports celebrity. Subsequently,
early twentieth century media reports began to mix traditional heroic portrayals with celebrity-style coverage (Roessner 2009). But sporting celebrities in English association football really came to the fore following the removal of the maximum wage in 1961 and is perhaps best characterised by the Northern Irish player George Best, who gained attention for his romantic liaisons, lifestyle, and appearance. Taylor (2000, 32) identifies Best as a “fully-fledged media personality, straddling the worlds of sport, showbiz, fashion and pop music”; in essence the first sporting celebrity. Sports heroes are often a link to the history of a club or sport, and this heritage helps to define and differentiate sport from other cultural forms (Taylor 2000). Involvement in historic events or moments will often play an important role in the elevation of players to heroic status.

Despite scepticism from the likes of Mills, sporting performances (such as the breaking of the four-minute-mile barrier in men’s athletics (Bale 2006) or running faster than anyone has ever done before (Tännsjö 1998)) have been cited as examples of achievements that may elevate an athlete to the status of a ‘Great Man’. Hence they can be the object of heroisation, although it may also be that the public nature of these performances helps to foster the appearance of heroism (Drucker 1994). A variety of studies in a number of different Western societies, including my own work, have identified athletes as prominent and recurring ‘source’ of heroes (see, for example, Melnick & Jackson 2002; Stevens, Lathrop & Bradish 2003; Parry 2009), and Cooke (2005) argues that the word ‘hero’ is typically synonymous with a sports setting (particularly for males in a post-industrial, twenty-first century context). María del Mar Rubio-Hernández (2011), writing from a media studies perspective, argues that sports heroes have arisen as a response to a crisis of moral values in modern society, which has created a feeling of emptiness in many people, and it is the case that having an attachment to a player is a relatively modern development. For instance, Rojek (2006) claims that, in the early years of modern sport, it was more common for spectators or fans to relate to the team rather than to a player. He suggests that this attachment to a team may result from the strong bonds that were established between sporting organisations and local communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
Sports heroes, rather than a team have, therefore, now become the focal point for the hopes and aspirations of communities (Hartman 2014). Athletes that lead their country to success against foreign nations are feted as being heroic for inspiring hope, and they are often compared to soldiers on the battlefield (Radford 2005). Crepeau (1981, 25) argues that sports heroes play a significant role in society as they are the purveyors of myths of national identity and “speak to the fundamental character and concerns of the culture”. In this manner they have the ability to represent the nation (or a particular society) and its ideals, which in turn helps to boost national pride (Conchubhair 2005). To be representative of a society Hutchins (2005, 29) discusses the need for heroes to:

…tap a vein of populist sentiment and appeal to ideals of national and/or regional character, and in doing so capture the popular and historical imagination.

An examination of Australian sporting heroes will, therefore, reveal the extent to which they represent national identity. Sports heroes can cross “economic, social, linguistic, racial, and geographic barriers” (Drucker 1994, 84), and so their appeal is not be restricted to one particular nation. Yet while they are significant across nations they also serve to exclude those who fall outside of the ‘fundamental character’ of that culture. For instance, Wellard (2002, 239) states that sport acts to reinforce a “traditional, ‘natural’ version of masculinity that holds immense power” but which, therefore, excludes anyone who does match this version. Furthermore, Henderson (2000) believes that the heroic archetypes offered by sport play a role in the construction of masculine hegemony, and as I have also noted elsewhere sports heroes are typically, or almost exclusively, male (Parry 2009). Therefore, sporting heroes reinforce masculine ideals, presenting images of strength and power to which other males can aspire.

Joseph Campbell’s concept of the heroic journey (discussed above) has also been applied to a sporting setting (Chidester 2009; Hoebeke, Deprez & Raeyaeeckers 2011; Gahan 2014). Joseph Dorinson (1997) traces Campbell’s stages of separation, initiation, and return in the lives and careers of athletes such as Jesse Owens (athletics), Joe Louis, and Muhammad Ali (boxing). James Rhodes (2011) also identifies elements of Campbell’s monomyth in his discussion of white, working-
class, male, boxing heroes, saying that such boxers must follow a transcendent path to achieve their hero status. Additionally, Lori Amber Roessner (2009) attests that early journalistic reports of sport typically emphasised the heroic journey that athletes had passed through to achieve heroisation, often highlighting their deeds rather than their virtues. Indeed, as argued by Duret and Wolff (1994), for sports heroes the journey in pursuit of honour is more important than victory itself. It is argued in this thesis that, as was identified with archetypal heroes, the narrative that is constructed around a sporting hero is a (if not the) key element in their heroisation.

Sports heroes, then, do not have to be perfect, they can be flawed, often fail to win, and at times fall from grace, so much so that McDorman et al. (2006, 198) state that “questionable behavior [sic] and off-field legal troubles seem an almost mandatory accompaniment to professional athletics”. Redemption following transgressions is an integral part of the media sport scandal (Rowe 2013b) and, while fans may acknowledge that athletes will participate in illegal or immoral behaviour, the overall perception is that sports heroes ultimately represent ‘goodness’ (Hartman 2014). Forgiving sports heroes (and potentially forgetting their transgressions) may, in part, be a mechanism for ensuring that “the ideological association of male athletes as glorified icons of hegemonic masculinity” (Messner 2013, 117) is maintained.

Sports celebrities, however, have been identified as possessing “a veneer of authenticity” which sets them apart from other celebrities, and perhaps makes them slightly more immune to the celebration–transgression–punishment–redemption cycle than other entertainment celebrities (McKay & Brooks 2013, 236), and so it is likely that sports heroes may also be more immune to this cycle. They are certainly given the chance to defend themselves when they fall and may then be re-embraced by society. Hoebeke, Deprez, and Raeymaeckers (2011) argue that such a fall may be temporary, with sporting heroes able to adopt the aforementioned trickster persona at times, as identified in the case of cyclist Tom Boonen. It may be that a fall from grace makes a sports hero appear more ‘human’, less of an unattainable demi-god-like figure, and hence more of an attainable aspirational target for their followers. But not all fallen sports heroes will be rehabilitated and it is also not uncommon for athletes to pass from hero to villain following a transgression, becoming national disgraces rather than national heroes. There have been a number of cases where athletes have
moved between these two categories. For example, Irish swimmer Michelle Smith (Conchubhair 2005) and Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson (Jackson, Andrews & Cole 1998), who were found guilty of using performance-enhancing drugs and were not subsequently redeemed. In such situations it may take an extended period of time before the sportsperson can be considered heroic. Sean Gammon (2014) argues that hero status cannot be bestowed during an athlete’s lifetime, as the passing of time is needed to ensure that any potentially damaging revelations are revealed prior to their heroisation. I will argue, based on evidence from my case study, that such movement from hero to villain indicates that heroisation is relatively fluid.

In addition to not being perfect, in terms of sporting talent the male hero does not actually need to be the best at his sport, but he must show courage to take on formidable opponents and have “at least one significant success in an event that matters to the general public” (Radford 2005, 267). Former Olympian and sport scientist Peter Radford (2005) maintains that publicity is the key element of hero formation, and extends recognition beyond just those who have an interest in sport to include a large proportion of the population. As the public become more aware of an individual, their admiration of the individual’s talent may turn to pride, gratitude, and eventually an affection that will last beyond the player’s career and may continue all their life. Interestingly, he suggests that a sporting hero does not need to come from a particular country, or even be from the same ethnic group as the country’s dominant culture, to be a hero for a particular society. But as this thesis argues, it is more important for the sporting hero to possess the characteristics that the country believes or wishes it has. The concept of a sporting hero, therefore, is specific to a particular age or culture rather than being universal, with hero types varying in different eras and societies (Taylor 2000).

Radford (2005) has drawn on the work of Richard Holt to emphasise that, while great artists or inventors are believed to possess a genius and so may be considered special creatures, sporting heroes are more likely to be seen as everyday people as they have qualities such as courage and specific national and social characteristics. Indeed, sporting heroes at the end of the twentieth century have been shown to possess a number of these shared characteristics (Wann et al. 2001; Melnick & Jackson 2002; Stevens, Lathrop & Bradish 2003; Parry 2009). In an earlier study, I identified that
they were typically masculine, reinforced societal values, and had crossed over into other areas of popular culture – hence becoming a celebrity in addition to being a hero (Parry 2009). To further investigate areas of commonality it is pertinent to examine the three most prominent ‘celebrified’ (and perhaps talented) sports heroes from the above studies: Wayne Gretzky, Michael Jordan, and David Beckham.

In Canada, ice hockey player Wayne Gretzky continues to be the country’s most enduring sporting hero. Despite ending his twenty-year career in 1999, he is still considered to be the greatest ever player and referred to as ‘the Great One’ (Jackson & Ponic 2001). Gretzky came to symbolise Canada and its struggle for a national identity that is, if not distinct from America (Jackson, Andrews & Cole 1998), then at least from the “dominant form of white, masculine, heterosexist, Anglophone, national identity” (Jackson & Ponic 2001, 59). His marriage to a Hollywood celebrity had provided him with a media profile and elevated him to the level of hero and celebrity.

In America, Michael Jordan has a comparable status to that of Gretzky, and he was the most commonly identified sports hero in North American studies (Stevens, Lathrop & Bradish 2003). He is a former American basketball player, primarily representing the Chicago Bulls in America’s National Basketball Association (NBA) and is widely believed to be its greatest ever player. His fame was such that he became the stereotypical image of the celebrity black athlete, characterised through his trademark airborne body that featured in a ground-breaking Nike marketing campaign and which captured the public imagination (Andrews & Mower 2012). He has come to represent more than just athleticism and is considered to be a champion of “late capitalism who not only wonderfully adapted to its ideology, but also cleverly exploited his mediated identity as American, male, family man in corporate America in the global market” (Chung 2003, 100). Moreover, because of his family man reputation Jordan also became the antithesis of the media’s representation of the “stereotypical threatening black masculinity” (Jackson, Andrews & Cole 1998, 83). Therefore, while he was not a symbol of White national identity as Gretzky was, he had greater commercial appeal to White-dominated, corporate America and became accepted as a (capitalist) hero. He was widely utilised in advertising and marketing, and starred in the 1996 film Space Jam, thereby enhancing his profile in popular
culture. According to Andrews & Mower (2012, 1065), Jordan became more than a basketball player, he came to be “an affectively charged national symbol”.

In addition to comparisons to Gretzky, there are also a number of remarkable similarities between Jordan and association footballer David Beckham, as I have elsewhere discussed (Parry 2009). Vincent, Hill and Lee (2009) identify a familiar heroic pattern to Beckham’s career: a rise to fame with Manchester United Football Club and the England national team, a fall from grace when his ability seemed to be waning at Real Madrid, and then a reinvention of his ‘star’ quality in America at the aptly named L.A. Galaxy, with subsequent cameos at two of Europe’s top association football clubs. He may be considered “a product of imagination and industry, rather than exploits” (Cashmore 2002, 192), and he has been described as “the embodiment of vicarious achievement and the epitome of conspicuous consumption” (Cashmore & Parker 2003, 218). Although much of this criticism is based on his marriage to a popular music star and his apparent courting of fame, to achieve his status as the world’s most famous association football player (Gilmour & Rowe 2010) Beckham required a high level of skill and talent (something which is epitomised in the 2002 film *Bend It Like Beckham* – a reference to his ability to curl a free-kick). As was the case with Jordan, he has also been at the forefront of global advertising campaigns for brands such as Adidas and Pepsi, and he was part of the Closing Ceremony of the Beijing 2008 Games and Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Games. His role in these two Olympic Games served to position him as an symbol of British national identity. He also featured in the 2007 film *Goal II: Living the Dream* and so his place in popular culture, and his resultant celebrity status, have been firmly cemented alongside his heroic profile.

These three figures have much in common. Most importantly, they became symbols of national identity and representations of their nations. Gretzky came to symbolise Canada, Jordan was “an affectively charged national symbol”, and Beckham can be interpreted as a signifier of Britishness. Their status in their respective countries is utilised to reinforce the values, characteristics and attributes of the nation (for example, masculinity and social values, such as the importance of family and good deeds). As I will later argue, narratives that are specific to each country have been created/constructed around each of these heroes. Therefore, the ingredients that
contribute to hero formation will be different for each country, allowing heroes to vary temporally and culturally as Goodman, Duke and Sutherland (2002) contend. Hero formation, however, is more complex and multi-layered than just a representation of national identity. Although each hero is specific to their own nation, they also share commonalities. Using the typologies discussed above (particularly Campbell’s monomyth and Klapp’s hero type), it is possible to identify universal narratives into which each hero taps. Thus, a hero emerges as a tool to uphold a specific national identity while also conforming to a wider accepted, universal narrative or typology. Both observations are critical to this thesis and form a central aspect of my analysis of the heroes of the GWS Giants. To understand the Australian context of this thesis it is essential to examine Australian sporting heroes, and the roles that they play within Australian society and national identity.

**Australian Sporting Heroes**

The information booklet issued to prospective new citizens the Commonwealth of Australia indicates that sport is an important part of Australian identity. In this document, Don Bradman is discussed as a defining element of ‘Australianness’ and is described as “the greatest cricket batsman of all-time and…an Australian sporting legend” (DIAC 2014, 44). Bradman is not the only athlete to be considered a national hero in Australia and the country has a long tradition of venerating athletes as part of its national identity. As will be shown in the following chapter, Australian national identity is associated with a variety of elements that are relevant for this discussion of sporting heroes. These elements include: masculinity, battling against adversity, and a disregard for authority. Significantly, it has also been shown that Australianness is typically connected to Anglo-Celtic ideals.

In Australia sports heroes have often risen from working-class origins (Mooney & Ramsland 2008), are predominantly male, and they typically have a propensity for larrikin behaviour. This behaviour could include marginal brushes with the law and drunkenness, but was also typified by a ‘loveable’ sense of humour. Early Australian football players were initially seen to be representative of their local communities and, as local residents were loyal to their suburbs, towns and districts, the players quickly became sporting heroes. For the fans of sports clubs these heroes seemed
more important than any other individuals in society and they were attributed a god-like status for ‘battling’ against opposition suburbs or communities (Harms & Jobling 1995). For example, the ‘god-like’ status of top Australian football players is exemplified by their ability to rise above others to take a high mark², reaching for the stars in the manner of the gods (Harms & Jobling 1995).

Within this environment Tom Wills was one of, if not the very first, hero of Australian football (Blainey 2003; de Moore 2005). He has been described as “the greatest colonial cricketer of his generation” (de Moore 2005, 356) but he is also credited as being one of the early pioneers of Australian football in Melbourne. Sport historian Gregory de Moore (2007) claims that he is actually the most significant figure in Australian sporting history due to his role in the creation of Australian football. Wills was a prominent figure in cricket during his lifetime, learning the game at Rugby School in England, and then playing for Kent and the Marylebone Cricket Club before returning to captain Victoria. He also established and coached an Aboriginal cricket team that became the first Australian team to tour England in 1868 (de Moore 2005). It is his role in the creation of Australian football, and in codifying the first laws of the sport, that are most significant in his selection as an Australian sporting hero (Blainey 2003).

Bradman remains the most legendary figure in Australia sport. Former international cricketer-turned-journalist and writer Ashley Mallett says that, in a cricketing sense, “Bradman is the SUN itself” (2000, 1), while David Rowe and Geoff Lawrence (1990) term him the ultimate Australian hero. He has been described as “possibly the best batsman to ever play the game” and is recognised as far afield as Canada (Veenstra 2007, 320). His Test cricket batting average of 99.94 is so much part of the game’s folklore that the Post Office Box number of Australia’s national broadcaster (the ABC) is 9994 in each state capital city, and the ABC’s national telephone number is (13) 9994. No one before or since has matched this level of performance (Hutchins 2005). Mallett (2002) discusses how Bradman’s sporting talent was recognised in his early years. In 1920 his performances for his school team resulted in complaints from opposition schools, who requested that he not play against their teams. Bradman’s

² A mark is a distinguishing feature of Australian football and is defined as when a player cleanly catches a ball that has been kicked more than 15 metres without touching the ground or being intercepted by another player (AFL Rules 2016).
first senior game came when he was asked to fill-in because the team was short of players. Being at the ground to act as scorer, a young Bradman was the obvious option to make up the numbers and, despite the other players being much older than him, impressed and was asked to play the following week again. In the view of his biographer Charles Williams (1996), these first steps appear to be straight out of a storybook, and he goes on to suggest that Bradman’s initial successes were attributed to his persistent effort (a putative characteristic of Australians) and his country origins. Mallett also identifies Bradman’s generic sporting prowess as a child; he was a school champion at running, played rugby in the off-season. Tennis was his other love and, at age 15, he spent a year concentrating on this sport at the expense of cricket (Mallett 2000). Coming from a country town the young Donald Bradman would also frequent the fishing spots on the rivers and creeks around his hometown of Bowral, and he also had a love of shooting. His fishing prowess was later recognised when, during his work at a firm selling sporting goods, he was asked to teach fishing in addition to cricket (Williams 1996).

Bradman’s rural upbringing in Bowral has also played a key part in his association with Australianness. He was frequently portrayed as being an underdog from the bush who made it against the odds, which hence romanticised the Australian bush and the ‘Aussie battler’ (Hutchins 2005). He was dubbed the ‘boy from Bowral’ and, at the age of 81, was still referred to as “the wonderful boy from the bush” (Hutchins 2005, 30). Such descriptions conjure up impressions of a youthful innocence that may not be supported by factual evidence. Holding onto the innocence of Bradman’s earlier years, and not the latter where he was involved in disputes over pay as a cricket administrator and worked for or ran a number of stockbroker firms (Hutchins 2002), is symptomatic of a desire to forgive any ill of a hero, and to see them in an idealised manner (Parry 2009).

Hutchins (2002) claims that Bradman was the very essence of Australianness in the 1930s. He was a “White heterosexual Protestant male, a family man and businessman who played sport at the highest level” and who epitomised many of the characteristics associated with cricket in Australia, such as masculinity, traditionalism, and conservatism (Hutchins 2002, 7). Bradman is upheld as the symbol of clean living and virtue at this time as he neither drank nor smoked, "nor joined in the expensive
Underwent business of young social life in the city" (Williams 1996, 41). In contrast to some elements of Australianness, and particularly his Catholic teammates, he was teetotal, self-assured and “perhaps rather too quick to point out the flaws in others” (Williams 1998, 29).

Hutchins (2002) is quick to point out that much of what is remembered or ‘known’ about Bradman is intertwined with myth and legend, factual information about the man is often entangled with stories around the mythical cricket legend, The Don. One such myth is that he was predominantly self-taught, making use of improvised equipment to practice on his own. The often-repeated story of his early cricket practice recounts how the young Don would improvise with a cricket stump for a bat and often a golf ball. Practising on is back porch he would throw the ball against a corrugated water tank and try to hit it as it rebounded at different angles. What is typically omitted in this legend is that he was occasionally tutored by NSW coaches and practised with his family, playing on wickets at the home of his uncle and of other family friends (Hutchins 2005). The use of the moniker ‘The Don’ reflects Bradman’s popularity in Australian popular culture and his place in the Australian collective consciousness is clear. He remains the sporting hero by which other Australians are measured.

While it is conventional for sporting heroes to be male, there has been a number of notable female sports heroes in Australia. For example, sport sociologist Tara Magdalinski (2000) suggests that Dawn Fraser is part of Australia’s golden age of saints and heroes. Fraser is an Australian swimming champion from the 1950s and 1960s (Osmond & Phillips 2011b) who won the 100m Freestyle gold medal at three consecutive Olympic Games (and eight Olympic medals in total). She was the first female athlete to be inducted into the Sport Australia Hall of Fame and was named Australian of the Year for 1964. She was also associated with larrikin behaviour, for instance stealing an Olympic flag at the 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games, which resulted in a ten-year ban from the Australian Swimming Union (Booth 2006). Fraser has been the subject of a documentary (The Dawn Fraser Story from 1964) and a biographical movie (Dawn! from 1979) (Phillips & Osmond 2009). Dawn! portrays Fraser as a larrikin, romanticising “her working-class origins and affiliations, as well as her antiauthoritarian, battler attitude and behaviour” (Phillips & Osmond 2009,
Such a portrayal upholds numerous notions of national identity and it may also be that her larrikin nature is sufficiently ‘masculine’ for her to be accepted as an Australian sporting hero. Australian sport has a history of celebrating such larrikin behaviour and many Australian cricketers, like Dennis Lillee and Jeff Thompson, have been presented in just such a manner. In the case of these players, who represented Australia in the 1970s and 1980s, this behaviour was often juxtaposed with and defined against the ‘Britishness’ of their opponents in the England cricket team (Fiske, Hodge & Turner 1987). Even coaches such as Australian swimming coach Laurie Lawrence have been presented as “an Australian larrikin male, lovable in [their] histrionic fallibility and spontaneity” (Miller 1990, 86). It is shown in Chapter 8 that a larrikin nature was part of the narrative developed around Giants’ coach Kevin Sheedy.

A discussion of female Australian sporting heroes must also include reference to the Aboriginal runner Cathy Freeman who, being both Aboriginal and a woman, suffered from “double discrimination” (Cashman 2010, 114). Freeman, however, played a key role in the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, lighting the cauldron at the Opening Ceremony and then winning a “historic 400m race before a record Olympic crowd” (White 2012, 154). She became the unofficial ‘face’ of the Games and was the most visible and talked about Australian athlete. In spite of this veneration, she was also subjected to some degree of hostility due to her Aboriginal heritage (Bruce & Wensing 2009) and, particularly, when she spoke out about the ‘Stolen Generation’ of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were forcibly removed from their families (Elder & Moore 2012). In 1994, during her victory lap after winning the Commonwealth Games 400m, Freeman raised the Australian Aboriginal flag before subsequently sporting the Australian national flag (Tatz 1995). She was presented as a figure advocating reconciliation between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in Australia, and it was for this action, in addition to her track success that she was heroised (Knight et al. 2007). As was detailed in Chapter 2, because of her Aboriginal heritage, her sporting success alone was still not sufficient for Cathy Freeman to be accepted as a hero by all elements of Australian society. Australian sports heroes are clearly linked to wider narratives, such as national identity and mythological accounts of heroes, and this discussion allows a number of important
conclusions to be drawn which are relevant to this thesis, and will be elaborated fully in due course.

**Conclusion**

Heroes facilitate cultural identification for large numbers of the population, emphasising the values and norms of the dominant social classes, and acting as agents of social control by encouraging the emulation of their pro-societal behaviours (Klapp 1954b; Chung 2003). As a result, they are deeply tied to national and/or regional identity, speaking to the documented myths of a particular culture. This reinforcement of norms and ideals often takes place through the mythologising of the deeds and stories associated with historical figures.

Studies of these historical heroes have identified both a pattern to their careers or lives, as exemplified by Joseph Campbell’s concept of the monomyth, and also common groups or types of hero. Some of the subjects of these studies may be of mythical characters, but it is also important to recognise that the stories built up around factual individuals can be altered to fit with existing mythological narratives of heroes. These archetypes are significant as they may be “modified to suit new needs” (Burke 2009, 202), and so they may offer useful patterns for the analysis of modern athletes and potential heroes. I will utilise both the concept of the monomyth and the heroic archetypes of Klapp (along with his analysis of fools and villains) as a theoretical-conceptual framework for an analysis of hero formation using a case study of the GWS Giants.

While Mills questions whether athletes can be considered heroic (Wagg 2007), they continue to be ‘selected’ as heroes by many societies. Boorstin contended that warfare was the only source of heroes in the twentieth century but sport, famously described as ‘war minus the shooting’ by George Orwell (Beck 2013), is likely to be another suitable source of heroes. The feats of top athletes are reproduced repeatedly by the mass media, making them seem increasingly spectacular and miraculous, and the result of some sporting genius. While this media coverage increases the ‘well-knownness’ of the athletes, and their celebrity profile, it also positions them as
candidates for heroisation. Sport remains a rich source of heroes and researching this area reveals much about the cultures that form them.

Australian sporting heroes have been shown to represent a number of important attributes of national identity. For example, Australian society and sport are identified as principally masculine domains (see, for example, Dixson 1999; Crotty 2001; Coad 2002; Young 2004) and the country’s sporting heroes are the epitome of masculinity. The achievements of female athletes such as Dawn Fraser and Cathy Freeman are noteworthy because they have also been identified as heroes. While Fraser’s larrikin nature may have made her appear less threatening to hegemonic masculinity and, therefore, more acceptable as a representation of Australian identity, this is not the case with Freeman. She challenged accepted concepts of Anglo-Celtic Australian sporting heroes (Pearson 1989) and her heroisation following the Sydney 2000 Games has consequently been questioned. On the other hand, Sir Donald Bradman is viewed as quintessentially Australian and exemplifies myths of Australian identity (Hutchins 2002; 2005). Bradman’s career and life also fit both Klapp’s conception of the Conquering and Cinderella heroes, and also Campbell’s Warrior hero, and so conforms to wider, older narratives of heroisation.

As heroes can represent national identity, it is important to understand the societal influences on Australian sport and the context in which heroes of the Greater Western Sydney Giants are formed. The next chapter will explore Australian society further, identifying the historical, social, and political factors that affect the lives of early twenty-first century Australians and particularly those living in Western Sydney.
Chapter 4 – Australianness

According to the myth the ‘typical Australian’...believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better, and so he is a great 'knocker' of eminent people unless, as in the case of his sporting heroes, they are distinguished by physical prowess. – Russel Ward

Introduction

As was detailed earlier, sport is integral to Australian society and it has been central to the creation and maintenance of myths of Australian national identity and ideology (Henderson 2000). This centrality of sport means that national sporting triumphs may be the only times when the majority of the population is mobilised by a “single image of national identity” (Carter 2000, 66). Cultural historian Richard White (1997) has highlighted sport as one of the rare constructs that cause people to consider their Australianness, comparing international sports matches with voting, travelling overseas, and military conflicts as the limited instances when Australians actually stop to consider the concept of identity. Sport and Australianness are intertwined and Australian culture, the country’s history, and Australia’s differing regional identities influence the cultures of Australian sporting teams and their fans. The smaller-scale cultures of Australia and Western Sydney will, therefore, be significant factors in both the development of a club culture for the newly established GWS Giants and the formation of its heroes. To investigate the processes by which both club culture and heroes are formed it is necessary to understand how national and regional identities have developed.

Personal identity loosely refers to who people think they are and how they see others, while national identity can be defined as a “broad set of shared understandings within a nation about its people and values and also to common languages, symbols and practices that help to constitute them as a nation” (Van Krieken et al. 2010, 272). More specifically, sociologist Anthony Moran (2011, 2155) links national identity to “particularistic configurations of ethnic cores, myths and memories, religious beliefs, language, connections with territory, and political values”. Therefore, identity is tied to a variety of concepts, some of which may be mythical. Dominant constructions of
Australianness are typically associated with masculine, Anglo-Celtic ideals based on earlier, rural constructions. The themes of masculinity, ethnicity and the bush are intertwined with discussions of Australian national identity. Images and symbols play an important role as signifiers of Australianness, but they can often be contradictory, such as those of the Sydney Opera House and rural architecture (typified by a shearing shed, for instance) that both in some sense represent Australia (Turner 1994). The concept of national identity is complex and, as suggested by Miriam Dixson (1999, 130), may belong to “a universe of illusions, distorted images, delusions”. If, as Dixson contends, national identity is elusive, then it is created through a variety of media and will be influenced by those in privileged positions, in popular culture, and in the nation’s history.

To provide an understanding of Australian national identity this chapter begins by detailing the historical setting for the formation of Australian identity based on the cultures that have created it. It proposes that Australian identity is a mythical construction founded on nineteenth-century images (or a later twentieth-century reimagining) of Australian lifestyles in the bush. The chapter argues that masculinity plays a prominent role in a number of these stereotypical images of Australianness and is associated with the quintessential Australian concept of ‘mateship’. Significantly, mateship is typically associated with White masculine values and excludes indigenous peoples and women. The concept of mateship has had a particularly strong resonance in the Australian countryside, and a discussion of Australia’s natural landscape establishes the importance that the bush has played, and continues to play, in representations of Australia in popular culture. I show later in this thesis that sport is one area of popular culture where the bush retains much significance, and in particular with reference to sporting heroes. The final theme to be discussed is Australia’s multicultural history and policies, as they are a vital component of Australian identity. Finally, a closer examination of the regional identity of Western Sydney establishes the specific cultural and geographical context for this study, detailing the complex social and historical factors that influence the formation of the Giants.
Historical Visions of Australianness

Australia has a conflictual cultural identity as it has been shaped by a British settler heritage, waves of non-Anglo migration, a long exposure to American culture, its geographical location near to Asia (Mackay 1993), and its Indigenous history. At the turn of the twenty-first century, historian Miriam Dixson (1999) argued that Australian identity had three distinct roots – Indigenous, Anglo-Celtic and ‘new ethnic’-Australians, but its culture continues to be dominated by the Anglo-Celtic core that is steeped in its British settler history. She claims that, at the time of the bicentenary of Australia in 1998, the country had been increasingly fussing and fretting over its national identity, and, as will be shown later in this chapter, tensions between the country’s history and its evolving ethnic mix continue to be apparent. While many countries may be similarly searching for a sense of their identity, this Australian search is given particular importance due to its settler history (Hollinsworth 2006). Moran (2011) reasons that Australia’s comparative ‘newness’ as a nation is the source of these anxieties. With a dispossessed Indigenous community, a dominant settler community and an increasing number of migrant ‘others’, Australian identity is hard to define and is currently in a state of flux. It may be for this reason that constructions of Australianness are grounded in historical accounts of national identity and, therefore, studies of Australia’s past provide insight into the difficulties that it is currently facing (Castles 1991).

A number of archetypal Australian figures can be identified from the works of historians and writers that, according to Dixson (1999), invoke historical images of bygone Australians that help construct a narrative of national identity. Historian Richard White (1997), likewise, argues that nations draw on the past to construct their identity, with the ‘imagined community’ of a nation (as was first introduced by Benedict Anderson) including past lives and, particularly, the past lives of those who died in service of the nation (again invoking a country’s ancestors). Anderson’s 1983 text Imagined Political Communities has been proposed as being the best description of national identity (Scorrano 2012) and is pivotal to the way in which the Australian nation is understood (Dixson 1999). An ‘imagined community’ is socially constructed and evoked through culture, and “represented through the agencies of ethnicity, language or religion” (Horton 2012, 1670).
The importance of the past in the construction of national identity is also stressed by twentieth-century Australian historian Russel Ward (1988), who argues that it is neither inherited nor dreamed up by poets and romantics. He claims that national identity is how people view themselves and that it is based on their past experiences. Both Dixson (1999) and Armanda Scorrano (2012) agree with this idea of a constructed notion and also argue that national identity ultimately exists only in people’s minds. If it is indeed constructed, then it is possible for this idea to be re-modelled and managed, and for a collective interpretation of national identity to be developed. Given Australia’s complex history, constructions of national identity have been particularly significant for its population. White (1981) states that, while many nations go through a period of inventing national identity, Australia has long supported a whole industry devoted to informing Australians of who they are, and that a sense of Australian identity was first developed in the nineteenth century. This invention of identity was constructed within a framework of European ideals and values (Richards 1999), and yet these nineteenth-century images have been hard to dislodge or deconstruct, and remain the dominant and established images of Australian identity. Graeme Turner (1994, 11), the renowned cultural theorist, argues that the “discourses conventionally used to represent the nation come to ‘mean’ the nation almost irrespective of their context of use”. And so, Australia remains linked to its British past, as is evident through its Constitution and even its flag. These established discourses and images could subsequently be utilised for a variety of political and ideological purposes and, as was shown in Chapter 2, they continue to have much influence in Australian sport.

For David Carter (2000), Australian identity is not one fixed thing, nor is it settled or static. Hudson and Bolton (1997, 1) argue that although “Australian national identity is entirely mythical, even fiction” it continues to be a significant concept. Nations are now reliant on the collective imagination of the communities living within them (Boucher 2009) and, also drawing on the ideas of Benedict Anderson, Turner (1994) points out that, as most people live in a modern, urban society, they never actually meet most of their fellow citizens, meaning that the common identity between individuals in indeed ‘imagined’. John Eddy (1991, 17) states that national identity is often based on unquantifiable or “meretricious ‘myths’ which may be ‘invented’, consciously or unconsciously”. Yet, although national identity can be considered to
be an imaginary construct, it is based on existing, historical narratives. These narratives become deeply ingrained in national culture and can, in particular, be reinforced by heroised figures. Over time, the mythical elements in these narratives become accepted by a nation and solidified in popular culture.

Ward (1988) has also taken up this theme of mythology, suggesting that in the case of Australians there is, or has been, a myth of the ‘typical Australian’. He provides an extensive list of the characteristics of the mythological type of the bushmen of the nineteenth century. These characteristics immediately emphasise that this figure is inherently masculine. Ward (1988, 2) begins by saying that the mythical “‘typical Australian’ is a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affection in others”. Ward’s book, titled the *Australian Legend*, is similar to a number of other accounts variously dubbed the ‘bush legend’ or the ‘bush myth’. All of these accounts emphasise masculinity in their descriptions of typical Australians and, while these are mythical pictures of Australians, they have become accepted and ingrained into the collective imagination of Australia. Figures such as the bushman were popular and afforded Australians with a frame to make sense of their national identity (Schroeder 2010). As was argued in Chapter 2, the dominance of masculinity in Australian identity and culture is particularly apparent in sport and, I will argue, the construction of sports heroes but society as a whole remains heavily influenced by these earlier depictions of masculine Australianness.

White (1981) also provides a list of characteristics that the nineteenth-century Australian was imagined as possessing, with a love of sport and an inherent manliness featuring high on his list. A picture is built up of an Australian as a relaxed, perhaps slightly lazy man of few words, one that will always support his mates and ‘have a go’. Australia has historically been put forward as a model of a free, egalitarian society (Mackay 1993), and Ward (1988) argues that Australians are quick to criticise eminent people, particularly those who are seen to be a superior or master. Australia has, therefore, been known for a dislike of ‘tall poppies’ and so for ‘cutting down’ anyone with claims to be in a higher social position. This ‘social levelling’ was reinforced and epitomised by the reported and celebrated attitudes of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps soldiers (Anzacs) (Basu 2012). But Australians also have a purportedly despise of those who prioritise intellectual pursuits over more
manly and athletic activities (Crotty 2001). Thus, although the tall poppy syndrome is ingrained in Australian culture, those who distinguish themselves through their physical prowess, especially as sporting heroes, are more likely to be honoured and heroised rather than criticised. This latter group, the subject of this thesis, assume a prominent role in Australia’s national identity and are tied to mythical descriptions of Australianness. Australian studies scholar Linzi Murrie suggests that Ward’s ‘typical Australian’ is constructed as a series of binary oppositions: he is physical rather than intellectual; good in a crisis but laid back; practical rather than theoretical; common and earthy rather than possessing cultural pretensions, and unswerving in loyalty to his mates rather than individualistic (Murrie 1998a). These characteristics are typically in opposition to British values of the nineteenth century, thereby creating a contrasting view of Australians while at the same time opposing yet also celebrating their British heritage.

Similarly, Rowe (1998) identifies a number of distinct clusters of meanings which have come to typify dimensions of Australianness based on the concepts of work and leisure. Rowe terms one of these the ‘pioneer myth’, where White settlement of Australia is portrayed as a heroic struggle against nature – both the Indigenous population and the harsh environment. The heat and deprivation of rural life in this land required strong, tough characters (Seymour 2001) and such pioneers are presented as “rugged, stoic and resourceful individual[s] able to endure and conquer a harsh and alien landscape” (Pocock 2005, 335). This pioneer myth, which can be equated with the bush legend or the Australian Legend, is often associated with conservative nationalist versions of Australian culture (Lee 2006) and has been celebrated in stories, poetry, and visual art. While Aborigines had successfully inhabited Australia for between 40,000 and 60,000 years, pioneers believed that they were enduring one of the harshest continents on earth, carving out a living against a land that, to them, was often unwelcoming and unforgiving. Curthoys (2000) claims that part of the enduring popularity of the pioneer legend was its supposed inclusivity in cutting across social and class divides. But the pioneer myth is not inclusive of all groups as it emphasises the apparent ‘virtues’ of White, male settlement (Rowe 1993) and is one of the central myths of ‘traditional Australia’ (Fiske, Hodge & Turner, 1987). Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987) suggest that, although myths such as the bush legend and the pioneer myth are not relevant to modern Australia, they remain
enduring images and continue to resonate in Australian culture, as will be demonstrated in this thesis (indeed, the bush legend features prominently in the case of GW player Jeremy Cameron – see Chapter 7).

These myths have been expressed through a number of male archetypes that are deeply ingrained within Australian culture (Butler 2009; Van Krieken et al. 2010). Lake (1986) contends that the bushman was a cultural hero for the urban city dwellers of the nineteenth century because the nomadic ‘carefree’ life of the bushman was envied and romanticised by those men with family ties. Russel Ward (1988) also puts forward the bushranger as a hero of nineteenth-century Australia. He suggests that this heroic status was, in part, due to the lack of colourful military figures in Australia prior to Federation. The rustic bushman image has been so enduring that it was recognised as a national figure over a century later, and for much of this time it achieved an “unchallenged mythic status in the Australian imagination” (Coad 2002, 69).

This unchallenged dominance of the bushman was to change at the start of the twentieth century. The Gallipoli campaign during the First World War is often claimed to mark Australia’s ‘national awakening’ (Garton 1998), when the ‘new’ nation faced its first major test and the ‘digger’ emerged as a national hero (White 1981). The serving soldiers were portrayed as displaying “the vigour, independence, courage, disrespect for authority, reliability, inventiveness and mateship of ‘the best fighting men in the world’” (Sandercock & Turner 1981, 79). Images of Anzacs draw heavily on a romantic image of the Australian bush (to be discussed below), with those soldiers serving in the trenches at Gallipoli “even likened to farm hands, their officers to station managers” (Dwyer 1997, 226). In reality the soldiers were often undernourished and unhealthy (Rice 2013). However, military conflicts, where the feats of soldiers are heroised, mythologise supposed national characteristics and provide a further avenue for the embodiment of masculine ideals (Garton 1998). Despite the unprecedented loss of Australian life, the Gallipoli campaign was seen as a mythological victory in the national consciousness. Therefore, with the conflict occurring soon after the Federation of Australia, and following the formation of the Returned Sailors’ and Soldiers’ Imperial League of Australia (which is now the Returned and Services League (RSL)), there was a push for the digger to be seen as
the embodiment of Australianness. Curthoys (1997) suggests that this image of Australian national identity was initially tied to the British Empire, as Australia displayed its loyalty to the Crown by participating in this war (and other wars) against the enemies of the British Empire (Adair 2009).

By the late 1930s a new national type was added to the list – that of the surf lifesaver (White 1981; Evers 2008). The surf lifesaver has been seen as the successor to the bushman and then the digger as the epitome of what it means to be Australian (Fiske, Hodge & Turner 1987; Cashman, O’Hara & Honey 2001). White (1981) further highlights how this new symbol of Australianness was once again identified with an ideal type of manhood. Lifesavers were seen as inherently masculine and again upheld the tradition of mateship (Saunders 1998). They were viewed as “paragons of national manhood” (Fiske, Hodge & Turner 1987, 64) because, until recently, surf lifesaving (and the associated clubs) has been a male-dominated institution (Adair 2009). Similarly, Langer and Farrar (2003) list diggers, shearers, drovers, and bush battlers as early Australian national types, all of which are identified as Anglo-Celtic ‘mates’. White (1981, 83) also emphasises that women were generally excluded from these Australian ‘types’ and that the “emphasis was on masculinity and on masculine friendships and team-work, or ‘mateship’”.

Mateship celebrated a “working-class, nationalistic fervour based on male bonding” (Coad 2002, 82) and applied only to White males. Mateship became synonymous with Australianness and, as a result, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, ethnic minority groups, women, and homosexuals (or any males who were not overtly heterosexual) have been excluded from this imagining of what it means to be Australian. The notion of mateship is a quintessential element of Australianness, but it is strongly linked to male culture and sport. Nowhere was this sense stronger than amongst the previously discussed bushmen (Coad 2002), for whom mateship may have been a pseudo-religion (Ward 1988), and who saw it as an obligation not to refuse an invitation to a drink and to help those in need. Bushmen lived in an inherently masculine environment, with women not generally present in the “men’s huts, in shearing sheds, at musterers’ camps or on the roads where most of the real work of the pastoral world was carried out” (Ward 1988, 182).
Mateship has, therefore, played an important role in Australian society, from the group solidarity of early convicts and bushmen (Ward 1988) to the loyalty of the digger (White 1981), from the camaraderie of the surf lifesavers (Saunders 1998) to the homosocial relationships fostered by sport. It appears to be very strong at times when Australian men are faced with trials or harshness, such as in the early years of settlement, in the Australian bush, or during periods of military conflict. It has become so integral to Australian life that the Commonwealth of Australia’s guide for prospective citizens stresses its role in Australian society (DIAC 2014). New migrants who may not understand this very Anglo-Australian concept are educated as to its benefits and central role. Mateship can thus be seen to be a form of homosociality that results from the institutionalisation of the ties of friendship, loyalty and camaraderie between males (Coad 2002).

Dating back to the years of settlement, masculinity has historically been central in images of Australian national identity (Seymour 2001), with bushmen again seen as the epitome of, and even a prototype for, Australian hypermasculinity (Coad 2002). Eddy (1991, 34) affirms the belief that maleness is still taken as a given in Australia and suggests that “Australians had long been lampooned as ‘male chauvinists’” and, despite formal policy and cultural changes, there is still an attachment to this ‘masculine ideal’. The prominence of maleness and masculinity has implications for Australian identity and, indeed, for how the country is perceived in the international sphere. Tony Ward (2010, 29) highlights one stereotypical (British) view of Australia that was represented in the British Daily Telegraph newspaper as being the “Land of Sunshine, Sport and Sexism”. As was detailed in Chapter 2, the association of national identity with masculinity is particularly apparent in Australian sport, and so it is important to understand fully the manifestation of masculinity in Australian identity.

**Australian Masculinity**

During the Australian Bicentenary celebrations of 1988 (mentioned above), Eddy (1991, 18-19) identified a number of “powerful and specific ‘national’ images” that were celebratory in tone. These images depict:
tall, athletic, bronzed, healthy, sincere men (and nowadays women), brave in adversity, sworn to independence and yet capable of great ‘mateship’, casual and laconic, witty and practical, patron saints of the ‘fair go’ and support for the ‘underdog’.

Turner (1994, 5) interprets these 1980s images as being underwritten by a surge in Australian nationalism that created a version of national identity that was “prescriptive, unitary, masculinist and excluding”. David Coad (2002) also associates the Bicentenary with resurgences in the celebration of both Australianness and masculinity that resulted in a reimagining of the ‘typical Australian’. The images used during the Bicentenary were inherently masculine and associated with a corresponding celebration of Australianness (Eddy 1991; Turner 1994; Coad 2002). Consequently, an image of hypermasculinity was created that, in turn, became “indistinguishable from hyper-Australianness” (Coad 2002, 73).

As argued above it is not just in the late-twentieth century that Australianness has been equated with masculinity. Australia has a history of celebrating masculinity (Murrie 1998b) and the various myths of Australian national identity have been typically based on Anglo-Celtic masculine constructions, or “fetishised [White] masculinity” as Jackie Hogan (2010, 65) describes them. Many of these constructions can be traced back to the convict foundations of the colony, which gave rise to a number of collective characteristics and sentiments, such as group solidarity and loyalty (Ward 1988). Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century was seen as a ‘Workingman’s Paradise’ (White 1981) due to its relatively high standards of living and working conditions in comparison to the more industrialised nations in Europe (Mawson 2011), and also due to the lack of female influence. The ‘bush bachelors’ used the demands of the harsh natural environment to justify this “uncompromising character of their masculinity” (Little & Panelli 2007, 183).

The late-nineteenth century is identified as a pivotal moment in the emergence of this version of masculinity (Young 2004) and of depictions of the Australian bush as a hypermasculine (Little & Panelli 2007), ‘womanless world’ where survival was reliant on mateship (Jebb & Haebich 1992) and heterosexual needs were satisfied on a casual basis (McGrath 1997). Writing from a feminist viewpoint, Marilyn Lake (1986, 117) accuses both Ward and White of eulogising country life, and so
promoting a “particular model of masculinity” that may have been a backlash against the increasing domesticity of life in England in the mid-nineteenth century. Many male migrants saw this domestic lifestyle as emasculating and restrictive, and hence the freedom of the bush allowed men the opportunity to reclaim their masculinity. Both Ward and White do present very romanticised views of rural life in their writings and so it is important to recognise the limitations of such views. Lake warns that the image of Australian identity constructed by Ward may actually be a reflection of the situations and attitudes of Ward (and others like him). Resultantly, the mythologies around bushmen should be recognised as urbanised constructions celebrating notions of masculinity that are tied to the Australian bush (Coad 2002). Although the bush may not have been as womanless as portrayed by Ward, males did greatly outnumber females in rural areas in the nineteenth century (Moore 1998), and the absence of women and family (and of society at large) from his descriptions emphasises the masculinity of these characters (Murrie 1998a).

Visions of country living based on such versions of rural society have retained much power and were still significant in the twentieth century (Barnett 2015). These images promote a particular construction of hegemonic masculinity that emphasises the manliness of surviving against the elements in the bush, but which also marginalise women and those men who did not fit with this construction of masculinity. Curthoys (1997, 30) draws attention to the reinterpretation of the image of the ‘typical’ Australian as one that has at times been “ethnocentric, racist and sexist”, and suggests that some persistent structures and practices of sexism can be attributed to Australia’s history as a penal colony. Eighty-eight per cent of the convicts who were initially transported to Australia were male, which created “ideal conditions for all sorts of sexual and gender trouble” (Coad 2002, 16) involving many colonial males being “violent, racist and sexist” (Moore 1998, 43). For Miriam Dixson (1999), Ward’s version of Australian identity is male chauvinistic and racist as it marginalises the role of women and of those men who do not fit his masculine, Anglo-Celtic type. I will show below that these earlier constructions of Australianness continue to influence representations of Australian identity and are reinforced through Australian music, films, and sport. They continue, therefore, to be significant in discussions of Australian identity, and this thesis will explore the extent
to which these limiting and exclusionary versions of Australianness continue to be present in its heroic figures, and in particular its sporting heroes.

In the mid-twentieth century the view of the ‘typical Australian’ was still that of the Anglo-Celtic ‘mate’, a lineage that, as mentioned, can be traced from the bush battlers, pastoral workers and diggers. For Brett Hutchins (2002, 14), the ‘Australian type’ was a “masculinist, Anglo-Celtic and intensely nationalistic character”, and was personified by Don Bradman. Australia’s film industry also played a crucial role in reinforcing the dominant position of masculinity in Australia. Films such as *Gallipoli* (1981), the *Mad Max* series, and *Crocodile Dundee* (1986) perpetuated “a bronzed, dinky-die image of Australian manhood” (Coad 2002, 105) and heroised a particular form of masculinity (Lucas 1998). The masculine figures in these films are replicated in Australian television programs, such as *The Crocodile Hunter*, where the lead characters are often presented as larrikins (Lang 2010). Even late-twentieth century Australian pop music has drawn on mythologised masculine images based on the bush legend (Young 2004).

In a contemporary popular cultural setting it was suggested that Australianness was associated with drinking, smoking, watching football and going to the races – all very masculine-dominated pastimes (Archer 1997). In his study of images of Australian identity, social researcher Hugh Mackay (1993) asked a group of Australians to describe typical Australians. He found that masculinity and a larrikin nature were recurring topics. Popular representations of ‘typical’ or average Australians in Australian films, such as *Kenny* and *The Castle*, highlight the working-class masculine nature of the ‘Aussie Battler’ protagonists (Whitman 2013). In such representations the battler is an underdog, struggling to succeed against the odds (Butler 2009). The battler may, therefore, be considered to be a local sub-hegemonic and centralised masculine type (Whitman 2013). It can be equated with the pioneer myth (Kell 2000) and, while it is often assumed to represent all ‘mainstream’ Australians, the image continues to be that of an Anglo-Celtic male. Sean Scalmer (1999, 11-12) argues that the battler is actually “the key actor in the drama of [W]hite Australian history…the protagonist of the Australia legend”. I concur that the battler is, first and foremost, an Anglo-Celtic manifestation of working-class masculinity.
For historian Martin Crotty (2001) the hegemonic embodiment of Australian masculinity is to be found in the country’s athletes and is reinforced through the Australian school system. Again, women, the Indigenous community, and other non-Anglo-Celtic Australians are excluded – the “consequence of longstanding discrimination, opposition and imperialism” (Turner 1994, 5). The prescriptive nature of these images also serves to establish what is accepted as normal. Light and Kirk (2000) contend that elite Australian independent schools are also masculinising institutions for the ruling class, using sport as a means to inculcate a class-based form of masculinity that is connected to earlier ideals of manliness. Australia’s masculine culture resultantly places emphasis on the physical, as is evident in the disproportionately high participation in sport by Australian males, and the high levels of coverage of male sport in Australian media (Young 2004). The physical nature of popular Australian sports, including Australian football, rewards aggression and violence, and serves to reinforce the dominant role of masculinity in Australian society (Keddie, Mills & Mills 2008). As discussed, the Australian bush is a key symbolic factor in discussions of masculinity and Australian types, and features prominently in *The Australian Legend*. Its image continues to be associated with notions of Australianness and, as discussed in Chapter 7 (which focuses on Jeremy Cameron), it plays a significant role in constructions of some types of sporting hero.

**The Australian Landscape**

As identified by Dwyer (1997) and argued above, the constructions of Australian manliness that were made popular through images of bushmen and the Anzacs drew heavily on romanticised views of the bush. The bush has been central to myths of Australian identity for over a century (Darian-Smith 2002), and rural mythology has been integral in cultural explanations of Australian national identity (Lee 2006). Indeed, the Australian bush and rural Australia has been valorised in many Australian cultural discourses (Tucker 2005), and there is a stereotypical belief that the ‘true’ or ‘typical’ Australians were the “men of the outback” (Ward 1988, 73). The outback was seen as being the natural *milieu* of the Australian male, with nineteenth-century romantics embracing rural lifestyles as a form of utopia (Mawson 2011). It should be noted that rural life is often praised as possessing a “stronger and livelier sense of
Community [Gemeinschaft]” when compared to the more transient and superficial urban Gesellschaft (Tonnies 205, 19), but in Australia the bush has assumed particular significance. The country was in this cultural imaginary devoid of the temptations of the city and its provocations of lawmen – a hazard for settlers with a convict background. As was noted above, life in the country also offered a sense of freedom and simplicity, and in the nineteenth century a strong anti-urban sentiment was prevalent in Australia (White 1981). Cities and towns were seen as soft, debilitating, crowded, and unhealthy, while the country offered wide-open spaces. The country was even seen as being more ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ than urban centres (Coad 2002).

The term ‘the bush’ came into popular use early in the nineteenth century, used by settlers to describe “country covered in native vegetation in its natural state” (Bromhead 2001, 446). In an Australian setting the term acquired a variety of meanings linked to culture and human settlement, with one such meaning referring to areas in Australia outside the major cities (Richards 1999), but it can also refer to the ‘natural’ Australian environment (Pocock 2005). In this sense ‘the bush’ is used in direct opposition to ‘the city’ and gave rise to the expression “Sydney or the bush”, which came into use in the nineteenth century (Bromhead 2001, 462). The bush was identified by influential nineteenth-century writers, such as Henry Lawson and Andrew Barton ‘Banjo’ Paterson, as setting Australia apart from the rest of the world and especially England (Beeton 2004). The development of the film and television industries was to play a major role in foregrounding the bush in Australian identity. The world’s first (surviving) feature-length film, the 1906 film The Story of the Kelly Gang, was to set a trend for representing Australia through visions of the “wild Antipodean bush” (Beeton 2004, 126). Early Australian cinema was dominated by bush tales that were largely grounded in the historical myths discussed above, romanticising the cowboys, bushrangers and stockmen that lived a life free from the city (Murphy et al. 2001). In the late twentieth century there was a reimagining or re-positioning of the Australian bush as the marker of Australia’s distinctive national identity, particularly through its prominence in the opening ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and the designation of 2002 as the ‘Year of the Outback’ (Darian-Smith 2002). The Sydney 2000 Opening Ceremony served to construct ideals of Australianness that were also tied to a promotion of Australia’s successful sporting past, and these constructions were primarily based on the bush mythology.
A substantial global television audience – 3.7 billion watched some part of the 2000 Games (IOC 2001) – was presented with an image of a rural Australia that was based on cultural constructions of the nineteenth century. The bush continues to feature in narratives of Australian sport and, as was detailed in Chapter 3, it has historically featured prominently in stories relating to the country’s sporting heroes. This thesis ultimately demonstrates that the bush continues to feature in narratives of current sporting heroes, such as the Giants’ Jeremy Cameron.

The eulogising of the bush typically presents two almost contradictory representations, presenting it as both paradise and as hell (Richards 1999). The first vision presents the bush in contrast to the decadent, urbanised environment (Richards 1999) as an untamed natural place, a space of leisure and also of restoration, reflection and solitude. At the same time, the bush is presented as a harsh, primeval, unconquered environment, experienced as a result of exile, and the home to adversity and struggle that is only survivable through mateship and the Aussie battler spirit (Pocock 2005). It becomes an imaginary frontier that is open to appropriation in a multitude of contexts (Richards 1999), particularly that of the sporting narrative.

Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987, 54) suggest that the free, natural, and tough bush existence is “an anachronistic version of national identity”, and that the bushman has become less relevant to modern Australia. Since the early 1990s more than 60 per cent of small towns in Australia have experienced the closure of amenities (such as banks, medical centres and sports teams) and manufacturing plants that have resulted in a loss of jobs and a drift of younger generations to the cities (Darian-Smith 2002). Therefore, while myths about Australianness may privilege the bush, the reality and the lived experience of the majority of Australians is now urban (Nile 2000). In the mid-twentieth century the population of Australia was spread fairly evenly between urban and country settings (Bromhead 2011), but now the proportion of Australians who live in the bush has declined to less than a fifth of the population (Rowe 1993; Greiner 2001), making Australia one of the most urbanised countries in the world (Beeton 2004). Thus, only a small proportion of Australians, even those living in country towns, encounter the bush on a daily basis (Pocock 2005), with the closest that many get being the annual agricultural shows in the capital cities (McManus & Pritchard 2000). Therefore, the rural lifestyle that is presented is often a “middle-
class, [W]hite, masculine rurality” that excludes and marginalises ‘others’ (Tonts & Atherley 2010, 383). Despite the racial, ethnic and gender biases that are present in the portrayals of the bush, these images are enduring and it remains central to the way in which many Australians think of themselves (Pocock 2005).

Those non-Indigenous Australians who do actually live in the bush are generally of a narrower cultural background as most immigrants are attracted to the major metropolitan areas of Australia (Bromhead 2011). For instance, while over a half (fifty-six per cent) of the population in the City of Sydney Local Government Area are born overseas, the corresponding figure is less than one in six across the remainder of NSW, falling to around a tenth in the far west of the state (ABS 2016b). Shirley Tucker (2005, 112) states that rural communities are “almost exclusively associated with excessively monocultural and deeply sexist notions of cultural identity”. Although this view may be someone stereotypical, a backlash against multiculturalism has been reported in the bush. The negative views of multiculturalism from those living in the bush may also be behind the relatively high concentration of electoral support for political parties such as Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party (Gale 2000). Despite coming from an urban region of the Brisbane metropolitan area, Hanson drew on Anglo-Celtic conservatism to gain public support and again associated the bush with early Australian legends (Lee 2006). The bush legend and bush life are not reflective of the twenty-first century Australian population. As the following section details, Australia has evolved from a society dominated by a largely mono-cultural elite into an extremely diverse culture.

**Multiculturalism in Australia**

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century there have been unprecedented levels of forced and voluntary international migration (Hollinsworth 2006). For Australia this pattern of population movement is not new and there were particularly high levels of immigration in the twentieth century, with the population more than doubling between 1947 and 1999 (Markus 2001). It now has one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the world and has been labelled as both a “nation of immigrants” and a “settler society” (Van Krieken et al. 2010, 268). This ethnically diverse population, with citizens born in more than 200 countries (Engebretson 2006), is in marked
contrast to the heavily Anglo-Celtic dominated population that existed in Australia prior to the second half of the twentieth century. At that time the country had a strong sense of itself as ‘White’ and, therefore, as superior to the Asian nations that surround it. Australians were “British, White, and/or Anglo-Saxon and Christian” (Moran 2011, 2156).

Prior to Federation, what is now Australia had existed as six separate colonies (Moore 1998) which functioned as separate communities with individual identities based on their historical formation (Eddy 1991). Then, on the 1st of January 1901, the colonies were united as the Commonwealth of Australia. White (1981, 110) provides a description of the newly formed Australian Commonwealth as “young, [W]hite, happy and wholesome”. Nineteenth-century fears of an influx of immigrants from Asia, and particularly from China (Mawson 2011), led to a number of policies that were designed to restrict immigration (Cashman, O'Hara & Honey 2001). The White Australia Policy rose to prominence at this time and was subsequently passed as federal law (Adair 2009). Measures to control immigrants also included the Immigration Restriction Act of NSW, which introduced a dictation test – White (1981, 141) states that, in the inter-war years, an “obsession with racial purity was as strong as ever”. Racial prejudices ran deep in Australia and immigrants from many nations were regarded as threats to, and defilers of, Australian purity. Immigration policies “favoured the entry of British and other ‘Aryan’ or ‘Nordic’ people; immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were regarded as second best” and “non-European and other dark-skinned people were denied entry” (Markus 2001, 12). Even in the mid-twentieth century the presence of multicultural identities was ignored by the government, and the assumption was that “being Australian” equated with “being white” (Langer & Farrar 2003, 118). Deviations from this accepted Whiteness were only tolerated for narrow and restrictive bands of ‘difference’ (Langer & Farrar 2003).

Australia remained overwhelmingly Anglo-Celtic even into the mid-twentieth century, with over 90 per cent of the population identified as British as late as 1947 (Dixson 1999). Anglo-Celtic Australians have subsequently developed “a privileged identification with an Australian national identity imbued with primarily Anglo-Australian national ideals” (Hage 1998, 192). Britishness became the foundation of
Australian nationalism and created a myth of time-depth that is important for all nations (Moran 2011). The loyalty to Britain was ambivalent as Australians maintained a strong sense of superiority over the British, particularly in sporting contests, and there was a thinly veiled underlying hostility towards English migrants. In the post-war years this resentment was to be replaced by an antipathy towards migrants from mainland Europe (Langer & Farrar 2003). The archetypal images of Australian national identity discussed earlier in this chapter are celebrations of this monolithic Anglo-Celtic culture in ways that are “located primarily in a rural past” (Richards 1999, 173).

The Anglo-Celtic core of the Australian population obviously contained two key elements, the Anglo-English and the Celts from Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Cornwall and the Isle of Man. This Celtic segment was dominated by those of Irish (and Catholic) heritage, and has played an important role in Australian identity formation, constituting up to one-third of the population from 1788 (Dixson 1999). White (1981) discusses how those Australians with an Irish background, and taught in the Roman Catholic school system, maintained a sense of loyalty to the (Irish) Church in addition to Australia. Furthermore, at the time of the foundation of the political party system, there was a fundamental religious divide between Protestantism and Catholicism in Australia. The Australian Labor Party (and its affiliated trade unions), with working-class roots was aligned with Roman Catholicism in opposition to the main non-Labour parties that were affiliated with Protestantism (Brett 2002). Consequently, Australia has a history of Anglo-Irish tensions, which may at times have spilt over into sport, as Adair (2009) argues with examples of accusations of discrimination against Irish-Catholic Test cricketers.

In 1973 the Whitlam Government officially declared Australia to be a ‘multicultural’ society when it finally ended and denounced the White Australia Policy (Jupp 2001; Frisby 2014). This official ending of White Australia had been preceded by a wave of immigration, primarily from southern and eastern Europe, following the Second World War (Van Krieken et al. 2010). In 1975 federal legislation also outlawed racial discrimination (Markus 2001) and sought to provide welfare and education to migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds (Van Krieken et al. 2010). As a result of such policies, Hudson and Bolton argue that, in the last half of the twentieth
century, Australia became a society of multiple identities with a “conscious acceptance of ethnic diversity” (1997, 2). Curthoys (1997) identifies this cultural diversity as being the distinctive feature of Australianness.

There was a surge in popularity of multiculturalism at a national level in the 1980s and early 1990s, with a succession of governments presenting Australia as accepting of all cultures (Ozdowski 2012). Yet Jupp (2001) argues that there has subsequently been a decline in enthusiasm, funding and focus at all levels of government regarding multiculturalism. By the early 1990s there may even have been a “mainstream” resentment of immigration (Dixson 1999, 19), or even a “resurgence in racism” following the High Court rulings on Mabo in 1992 (Gale 2000, 17). Attacks on multiculturalism became common in the 1990s. Politician Pauline Hanson was at the vanguard of these attacks, espousing a kind of ‘culturalism’ (Gale 2000) in arguing that different cultures were incompatible, and expressing a particular concern about migrants from Asia (Hollinsworth 2006). Indeed, a fear of Asian migrants had earlier been raised by historian Geoffrey Blainey (1984), who questioned the legitimacy of multiculturalism (Utting 2015). In 1996 Pauline Hanson maintained that there was “no racism in Australia” (Markus 2001, 193), but also claimed that the most downtrodden person in Australia was the “White Anglo-Saxon male” (Hage 1998). Hanson, and others who oppose multiculturalism, typically deny that they are racist or discriminatory, argue that national unity is threatened by multiculturalism and migration (Schech & Haggis 2001) and positioning themselves as worried nationalists trying to uphold social harmony (Hage 1998). An alternative vision of Australia would be that it is multiracial rather than multicultural, and that migrants should assimilate and embrace the Australian way of life and its values (Mackay 1993). Some even see Australia’s recent multicultural policies as another way of obscuring its dominant 'Whiteness' (Jupp 2001) and conserving its mono-cultural White core (Schech & Haggis 2001).

Although a Coalition Government reaffirmed multiculturalism as national policy at the end of 1999 (Jupp 2001), it would be naive to suggest that racial tensions and racism do not exist in Australia. The traditional, old form of racism held that “capacity for civilisation’, loyalty to the nation and morality were as inescapably linked to racial origin as skin colour, hair type and eye shape” (Markus 2001, 4). It
was believed that differences in behaviour between population groups could be explained on the basis of such (socially defined) physical characteristics (Tatz 1995; Fitzgerald 2014). Race continues to be a significant concept but it is also problematic as its meaning is frequently challenged (Massao & Fasting 2010). Racism in twenty-first century Australia may not take this form of “old, blatant and hierarchical racism” but, since the second half of the twentieth century, it has been replaced by a newer, symbolic racism that is “strongly related to national identity as an Australian” (Hollinsworth 2006, 233), and which feeds off anxiety about the position of an individual’s ethnic group in relation to others. This symbolic racism is more subtle and does not base discrimination on physical appearances, instead focussing on cultural, national, and even language differences, and has, therefore, been dubbed as a ‘new’ or ‘cultural’ racism based on ethnicity (Markus 2001). It serves to highlight the differences between ethnic groups, identifying out-groups that can be equated to the notions of otherness and difference (Dunn et al. 2004), and raises fear of a threat to the position of the dominant ethnic group, in this case Anglo-Celtic Australians (Dunn et al. 2004).

Under such symbolic racism, migrant cultures are marginalised because of these differences and, therefore, the values and culture of migrant groups are not accommodated (Hartman 2014). For some Australians, immigration by ethnically diverse communities is a threat to Australianness, with the very nature of Australian identity being reshaped by new cultures (Taylor, Lock & Darcy 2009). Hallinan and Hughson (2008, 1) take this proposition further and suggest that the intrusion of the ‘foreign other’ was seen as a threat to national security under the Coalition government of John Howard (1996–2007). They argue that the nationalism of this government was a return to the immigration policies that existed prior to the 1970s, when it was expected that all migrants to Australia should assimilate to the existing cultural milieu. It should also be noted that some Indigenous Australians maintained an ambivalence towards multiculturalism, believing that it detracted from their claims for recognition and equality (Smits 2011).

The Australian Ethnic Affairs Council (AEAC) has expressed a belief that Australia should be a country where "people of non-Anglo-Australian origin are given the opportunity...to preserve and develop their culture, their languages, traditions and
arts" (AEAC quoted in Jupp 2001, 262). Nevertheless, there is limited evidence for the acceptance of non-Anglo-Australian cultures and Dixson (1999) argues that multiculturalism has, in fact, failed to dent the enduring dominance of the Anglo-Celtic bush legend. For example, politicians have continued to identify the British origins of Australia (Jupp 2001, 265) and, in Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship stresses Australia’s British, settler history (DIAC 2014). Indeed, Jerzy Zubrzycki, the then chairman of the AEAC, in his 1968 paper The Questing Years, had previously identified assumptions of Anglo-Celtic superiority and conformity in Australia’s multicultural policies (Jupp 2001, 262). Policy makers in Australia (in both political and business spheres) continue to be predominantly drawn from people of Anglo-Celtic heritage (Gelber 2010) and, perhaps as a result, multiculturalism in Australia has effectively been an immigrant settlement and integration policy. Indeed, Australia Day, one of the formal state-instituted celebrations of Australianess, has been identified as a fiercely nationalistic event when the Anglo-Celtic traditions of Australia are celebrated ahead of those of multiculturalism (Garbutt 2011). A day that celebrates the arrival of the First Fleet of convict ships from the United Kingdom is historically insensitive to the country’s Aboriginal community (some of whom refer to it as Invasion Day or Survival Day) and commemorates British dominion over Australia, to the exclusion of non-Anglo arrivals (Fozdar, Spittles & Hartley 2015).

As Ann Curthoys (2009, 5) has put it, “White people [Anglo-Celtic Australians] see themselves simply as people, as an unmarked category against whom everyone else must identify themselves”. Greater levels of intolerance towards ethnic migrants from groups that are seen as most different from “ordinary Australians” is also indicative of Anglo-Celtic Australians being the ‘norm’ by which others are measured (Hollinsworth 2006, 236). Immigrants from this perspective by definition are ‘outsiders’ (Jupp 2001) and are compared unfavourably with the accepted ‘Australianess’ of the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture. Those Australians who do not fit with this dominant culture, whose bodies, appearance and accents are interpreted as being different, have identified a sense of alienation and a feeling that they are not perceived as Australian (Butcher 2008). This alienation is such that, in some instances, those from non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds do not identify themselves as Australians but rather refer to their cultural background as their identity (Poynting,
Noble & Tabar 1999). As was shown in Chapter 2, sport continues to be a site for the reinforcement of the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture in Australia and high-profile, successful athletes may be considered as ‘others’ when they are not deemed to be sufficiently ‘Australian’. Furthermore, those who do not fit with this dominant version of Australianness often do not identify with Australian national teams and may retain their allegiances to their national countries of birth in sport.

Historically, several mechanisms have been utilised to preserve Australianness. For example, the dictation tests that were a part of the White Australia policy emphasised the role that language played as a gatekeeper for entry into Australia (Butcher 2008). Given Australia’s colonial history, a British accent was initially privileged, and still is in some spaces (Cary, Pruyn & Austin 2015). Nevertheless, the Australian accent is identified as a unifying element of Australianness which, although representative of working-class ideologies and values, unites most Australians (Fiske, Hodge & Turner 1987). This accent is broader than just the way that a common language is spoken, incorporating a distinctly Australian way of doing many things, with the spoken accent being a key identifier of Australianness. The traditionally accepted Australian accent is distinctive and became common across the country by 1880 and remains consistent (White 1981). The accent allows someone to be easily identified as Australian by non-Australians. To the outside ear it may be that all Australian accents are identical, but within Australia, there are variations in the accent that betray cultural backgrounds as markers of difference. Physical appearance may be less important in defining ethnic identity than the ability to speak English with an acceptable accent (Rosenthal & Hrynevich 1985). Migrants must sound sufficiently ‘Australian’ to be accepted as such (Perkins 2007), with accent being a marker of cultural belonging (Butcher 2008). Those who do not fit within this accepted range are often classed as ‘different’ or ‘other’ by the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture. Language and accents thus become not only expressions of identity but also the means of gaining social capital. It becomes a socio-political construct that is deeply involved in the exercise of power (Butcher 2008). In this manner, and encouraged by the metropolitan press, Australia’s Anglo-Celtic culture has been presented in opposition to Indigenous or multicultural Australia in academic discussions of Australian national identity (Lee 2006).
Early constructions of Australian national identity based on old Anglo-Celtic masculine creations may be flawed myths and values thought to be long defunct (Curthoys 2009) but they clearly continue to have resonance in the twenty-first century and modern Australia’s multicultural makeup is widely ignored by other nations (Simpson 2002). Multiculturalism in Australia is further complicated by government policy on refugees and asylum seekers, with those arriving by boat now ‘processed’ and resettled offshore by participating nations. Attitudes towards asylum seekers continue to be influenced by a combination of traditional Australian values and norms and media and political rhetoric (McKay, Thomas & Kneebone 2011), and while migrants who attain Australian citizenship may, in legal terms, have the same rights and expectations as Anglo-Celtic Australians, the reality remains somewhat different (Gelber 2010). Tensions between the Anglo-Celtic and other elements of Australian culture have in recent history resulted in conflict and structural inequality (Turner 2008). Many members of the latter groups still occupy low-status occupations and reside in less ‘desirable’, working-class suburbs, such as many of those in Greater Western Sydney (Rosenthal & Hrynevich 1985). It is in this area that the AFL has established the Giants. The tensions around the region’s multicultural population and its working-class traditions are among the significant difficulties for the club to negotiate, and are factors in building a fan base and developing sporting heroes.

Western Sydney

Migration patterns have differed between the states and territories of Australia and, as a result, the regions and cities have developed distinct identities (Eddy 1991), with their inhabitants displaying a fierce pride and parochialism that is rooted in the historical settlement of the country (Bolton & Hudson 1997). Rivalries between Melbourne and Sydney are particularly fierce, as noted in Chapter 2, with Melbourne deemed to have a more serious intellectual culture and a longer sporting tradition than Sydney, which in turn positions Melbourne as a dull or ‘bleak’ city (Cashman 2010). These, of course, are gross rhetorical generalisations, and it is important to understand the specific Western Sydney context – as part of a large, diverse conurbation – of the Greater Western Sydney Giants.
In 1973 the Whitlam Labor Government carved the Sydney metropolitan area into five subregional areas, one of which was a group of ten (now fourteen) local government areas to be referred to as Western Sydney (Fulop & Sheppard 1988). Western Sydney is a large and diverse geographical expanse that has been deemed to be symptomatic of Sydney’s suburban sprawl (Johnson 1997). The region has a long history and has been settled since the late eighteenth century with Parramatta, its major city, founded in 1788. Cities in Australia, as in other parts of the world, have long been divided along class lines, with geographical boundaries used as indicators of socio-economic status (Pini, McDonald & Mayes 2012). Sydney’s West has historically had abundant cheap land and housing, and as a result it has attracted low-income earners, young families, migrants and welfare recipients (Fulop & Sheppard 1988). Because of this population migration, Western Sydney has been stigmatised as being less sophisticated than other areas, and as “marked by social dysfunction” (Butcher 2008 373). It has been identified as having average education, income and employment levels that are lower than the rest of Sydney (Randolph, Ruming & Murray 2010; Lodewijks 2013). Sydney’s western suburbs are often referred to as working-class (Morgan & Idriss 2012) and multicultural (Poynting, Noble & Tabar 1999), and youth in Western Sydney have been shown to experience “significant emotional and mental health problems” and to experience isolation and boredom at higher levels than in other locations (Chang, Dixon & Hancock 2001, 21).

Rivalry between metropolitan Sydney’s suburbs is especially evident in sport (see Chapter 2 and later in this thesis) and became particularly prominent in the late 1970s. In 1978 a ‘feud’ was created between the Wests and northern-beaches located Manly rugby league teams, which came to be known as the ‘Fibros versus Silvertail wars’. This name was in reference to the perceived differences in socio-economic status that were reflected in the building materials used in Western Sydney housing, and the attitudes of the two clubs and their fans (Masters 2006). Brian Stoddart (1986) argues that players at the Wests club were encouraged to see themselves as representatives of the working class when they played against clubs that were perceived to be of higher social status. Although this feud was a clever marketing ploy by Wests’ coach Roy Masters, it tapped into popular sentiment regarding socio-economic differences in Sydney, and has continued to be significant in the city and region. It will be argued in
This negative view of Sydney’s Western suburbs is, however, stereotypical, out-dated, and unsupported by empirical evidence. Western Sydney has experienced dramatic transformations since the mid-twentieth century (Morgan 2006) and now has areas of luxury ‘privatopias’ along with disadvantaged areas (Randolf, Ruming & Murray 2010). It is experiencing significant economic growth (Bahfen 2013) and has a population that has expanded rapidly since 1947 (Fulop & Sheppard 1988). The population is forecast to rise from around 2 million in 2011 to 3 million inhabitants by 2036 (Department of Premier and Cabinet NSW 2012). This forecast population growth means that the population in this region would outnumber that of the rest of the Sydney Metropolitan Area by 2026 (Parramatta City Council 2012). The resident population is culturally and linguistically diverse (Rowe et al. 2008) and has the highest level of cultural diversity in NSW, the highest levels of overseas-born population in metropolitan Sydney (Aquino 2012), and the densest urban Indigenous population in Australia (Cowlishaw 2010). While, in Sydney generally, almost a quarter of all young people speak a language other than English at home (Butcher 2008), in Western Sydney it is over a third (Aquino 2012). The multicultural nature of some Western Sydney suburbs has resulted in the media portraying them as being rife with crime and poverty, lacking cultural resources and amenities (Burchell 2003), with some suburbs presented as ‘Asian ghettos’ by politicians such as the aforementioned Pauline Hanson (Dunn 2003). Media representations have, in particular, driven the creation of a distinctive Western Sydney regional identity, a largely negative construction that has presented the West as Sydney’s ‘other’ (Burchell 2003; Johnson 1997). Even those who are successful continue to be denigrated, with the newly rich referred to as “cashed up bogans” in reference to their working-class backgrounds and lack of ‘culture’ (Gibson 2013). Coming from Western Sydney, therefore, continues to carry a stigma.

People from Western Sydney are often marked by their accents and are considered to possess less cultural capital than those living to the east of the city. These accents are sometimes termed ‘Westie’ or ‘Woggie’, in a derogatory fashion, and are contrasted with the more acceptable and dominant Sydney accent (Butcher 2008). Originating in
the 1960s or the 1970s (Gibson 2013), ‘Westie’ initially referred to a working-class, masculine individual who assumed ‘Aussie’ characteristics of dress (jeans and flannelette shirts); had a taste for “Oz Rock, FM radio, pies, sausage rolls”; played or watched rugby league and cricket, and had a passion for “drinking and driving, sometimes together” (Simic 2008, 228). With the population shifts in Western Sydney since the 1980s, the term has increasingly been used to imply both deviance and ethnicity (Hughson 1999), set against the conformity and acceptability of the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture of Sydney’s North and East. While many of those from Western Sydney were born in Australia, or have lived in Australia since childhood, they have continually been treated as ‘outsiders’ (Morgan & Idriss 2012). Perhaps as a result of this treatment, it has been found that Western Sydney residents often possess multiple identities, or a “cultural hybridity” (Poynting, Noble & Tabar 1999, 74), as they identify with their nation of birth or their cultural heritage in addition to Australia. Second-generation Australians in Western Sydney are able to combine their cultural heritage with elements of Australian culture to create a ‘convertible’ identity (Noble 2007). At times, residents also display regional identities and label themselves Westies, appropriating the term for their own use and displaying pride in their region.

For some, areas of Western Sydney are identified as being sufficiently removed from the Centre of Sydney for it not to be seen as “city life” (Johnson 1997, 125). In this sense it might be judged to be a better and healthier place to start a family and to set up home, and, in the mid-twentieth century, Sydney’s West was seen by some as an alternative for those living in inner-city dwellings that were cramped and dilapidated (Morgan 2006). Therefore, the West may at times be associated with the virtues of rural, semi-rural or outer suburban living, and the diverse geographic nature of the region means that there are considerable areas of countryside in addition to urban centres.

While there are now areas of wealth and prosperity in Western Sydney, the region is still widely regarded as being working-class, and it has a diverse and multicultural population that possesses multiple cultural identities. It is home to over 160 nationalities and is thus one of the world’s most diverse communities (UWS 2015). Many migrants retain an interest in the sports that they are familiar with, as this
connection facilitates their settlement in a new country, and allows them to retain a sense of identification with their culture and fellow migrants (ABS 2006). Second generation (or later) Australians often have no understanding of or grounding in the Australian football and instead prefer rugby league (Encarnacion 2014) or association football (Georgakis & Molloy 2014). It is an ‘alien’ sport to many in the region due to their varied cultural and social identities. A number of Western Sydney suburbs, such as Canterbury, have distinct ethnic identities (Hughson 1998b) and the AFL is, therefore, keen to expand into these new, ‘multicultural’ markets (AFL 2012).

Due to both its historic and predicted expansion, Western Sydney has been identified as one of two priority markets for the AFL (AFL 2010a) in their bid to ‘grow the game’, with a view to having an AFL Premiership match in Sydney each week of the regular season (AFL 2007, 16). When conducting an assessment of the feasibility of establishing an AFL team in Western Sydney, it was not only the growing population of the region that the AFL identified as being indicative of the potential for a team to be based here. According to the AFL’s 2007 Annual Report, the other factors included the existing sporting infrastructure in the region (a legacy of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games), growing demand for AFL in the region (with 46 per cent of three-match AFL ticket purchases at the Olympic Stadium coming from Western Sydney residents), and the strength of its commercial market (with over 150 of Australia’s top 500 companies based in Western Sydney).

Despite the growth of Western Sydney’s population, the sporting landscape of the region remains crowded, with rival leagues and codes competing for this newly identified market (as detailed in Chapter 2). Western Sydney is clearly a region that has been identified as a potential market for sports teams and leagues, but it is complex and culturally diverse. In this competitive marketplace an understanding of the region and its people will be essential for sporting codes that wish to establish themselves or to survive. So, for example, it was in recognition of the multicultural nature of the region that the AFL-appointed multicultural development officers specific to Western Sydney to allow the league to understand better the region’s identity when establishing their new club there (AFL 2009b). Nevertheless, the region has multiple identities and so it is be difficult – and undesirable – for a new club to base their own identity on one particular culture, which may hinder the
development of a distinct club culture. The above elements of Australian and Western Sydney identities are particularly relevant to later discussions on the development of both the club’s culture and its heroes.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the concept of Australian identity in order to place the GWS Giants in their historical, geographical, cultural and social context. The topic of Australian identity is a vast subject that has been the focus of many academic volumes. Although the discussion here cannot cover all of the varied and intricate aspects of Australian identity, it is apparent that Australianness is often constructed around the intertwined notions of masculinity, race/ethnicity and the non-urban Australian landscape. Indeed, Australianness and these themes, in particular, emerge as integral elements in discussions of heroisation in this thesis.

Australianness continues to be associated with Anglo-Celtic symbols. Despite attempts to create a greater acceptance of a multicultural Australia, and to move away from the views characterised by the White Australia policy, ethnicity continues to play an integral role in the fortunes of migrants to Australia. The dominant culture in Australia remains Anglo-Celtic, and those that do not fit within this narrowly defined range of acceptable characteristics are perceived as being different and often inferior. Non-Anglo-Celtic Australians continue to experience racial and ethnic vilification in Australia (Noble & Poynting 2010) and, as recently as 2005, the Sydney beach suburb of Cronulla was the scene of a riot following tensions between ‘Aussies’ and youths of Arab and Muslim background (Gemmell 2007; Lattas 2007). While Australia may have moved on from the ‘old’ racism evident in the early twentieth century, a new or symbolic racism, that positions migrants as ‘different’ or ‘others’ and as having incompatible values with those of Anglo-Celtic Australia, is still present. However, there have been large-scale incidents of racial vilification in Australian football in recent years, which suggests that old racism is still present in Australian society. This thesis will explore how associations with Australianness help, or hinder, the process of heroisation.
The role of working-class values is also apparent in many analyses of Australian identity, and is linked to the belittling of those who regarded as ‘social superiors’. Representations of the Aussie battler are often used in popular culture to position the ‘typical’ Australian (Whitman 2013). This portrayal is apparent in a number of discourses tying the ‘Aussie battler’ to masculinity and to qualities historically associated with the working class. Such discourses of adversity serve to portray further the groups opposing the ‘battlers’ as being ‘others’ and hence in opposition to genuine Australian values. As the Aussie battler is typically portrayed as a rugged, bush-bred, Anglo-Celtic male, this construction serves to ‘other’ anyone who does not fit this image.

The foregrounding of masculinity in portrayals of Australianness is reflective of the position of social power that men hold over women within Australian society, and also of the struggles between males over versions of masculinity (Leach 1997). Discourses of Australian identity continue to draw on nineteenth-century masculine constructions that have been dubbed “sexist” (Curthoys 1997; Moore 1998), which has grave implications for Australia in the twenty-first century. Images of ‘typical Australians’ are based on a number of archetypal masculine characters, such as the bushman or the bushranger (Ward 1988), the digger and surf lifesaver (Butler 2009), and most recently the athlete. The following chapter will detail how structured observations of GWS Giants’ games revealed important insights into both the process of heroisation (and the role of masculinity) and the formation of the club’s culture. The chapter will also establish the foundation for the three case studies of heroisation in this thesis.
Chapter 5 – Observations of the GWS Giants

“Everywhere we go, the people want to know, who we are, where we come from. So we tell them, Greater Western Sydney, the mighty, mighty Giants! We are the Army, the mighty Orange Army. Orange Army! Orange Army!” – GWS Giants fans

Introduction

Sports clubs are complex entities that develop their own unique profiles over time, influenced by historical, cultural, and geographical factors. For the GWS Giants their distinct cultural identity and associated fan base are the result of the historical development of Australian sport (in particular Australian football), regional (GWS) and Australian history. The period of observational research in this investigation (March 2012–April 2014) coincided with the Giants’ first years playing in the AFL as a nascent club. As a result, the club's culture was being established and it was difficult to identify distinctive characteristics of fan culture. This finding in itself is significant and has revealed valuable insights into the process of, and barriers to, the development of fan and club culture. This chapter argues that the lack of either a developed club or fan culture indicates that both of these elements require time to become fully established and is dependent on playing success. Further barriers identified, include the club’s initial lack of success, the grounding of the club’s identity within traditional Anglo-Celtic ideals, a diluted fan base spread across two regions, and the difficulties associated with starting a club in an ‘alien’ environment.

As new teams are formed, sports heroes play a key role in the facilitation of cultural identification with the teams (Smith & Shilbury 2004). The chapter details that, while there were distinctive pockets of fan culture on display, the lack of a dominant club culture and the initial on-field struggles of the team also hindered the heroisation process. The chapter goes on to argue that those heroes who did eventually emerge had less to do with the specific Giants fan and club cultures than the heroic narratives aligned with the wider context of AFL and Australian identity.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first details the context of the club’s formation and development, along with associated observations that arose from my
fieldwork. It then goes on to outline critical matches and milestones for the club that highlight significant advances in, or barriers to, the development of club and fan culture. The second section provides a discussion of the significant figures that arose and the limited observable heroisation that was present. It identifies three specific emerging heroes who are examined in detail in subsequent chapters.

The Evolution of the GWS Giants

In 2008 the AFL announced that the league’s 18th team was to be based in Western Sydney (GWS GIANTS 2014b). The introduction of a new team was not based on the demands of fans in the GWS region. Instead, the decision to base a team in the region “reflected a strategic approach to expanding the code by capturing ‘growth markets’”, which had been identified based on:

…future population growth, the size and scope of the local business community, current and future stadium infrastructure, current and future demand for AFL matches, current growth in community participation in our game [Australian football] and other codes and the significance of the regions as media markets – newspapers, television and online. (Nash 2009, 13)

There was an element of controversy associated with this decision, culminating in a Senate enquiry into whether Tasmania was a more suitable location, in part because it was claimed that the Sydney market would not be able to support a second AFL team (Harvey 2009). The Sydney Swans had developed the highest membership of any club in Sydney (Rogers 2009), and had an average attendance of 30,676 for the period 2009-2010 (AFL 2010a) in a region that has traditionally been identified with rugby league and other football codes (see Chapter 2). Among the non-football motivations for the second Sydney team was the AFL’s desire to cater for the multicultural nature of Western Sydney, as already noted a region with 184 nationalities (Burgan 2009), while generating economic and social benefits for the area (AFL 2009a). Finally, on the 13th March 2008 it was agreed that a new club would be established in Western Sydney.
The AFL claimed that a key requirement for a team to be established in GWS was that it should be a part of the community, reflecting the values and needs of the local population (Cullen 2009). To develop this sense of community ownership, members of the public were invited to help decide the colours and name of the new team, with the final team name, the Giants, selected from one of four proposed names; the others being the Pride, the Rangers, and the Stallions (Proszenko 2010). Following suggestions from schools, community groups, and online polls, this name was selected by the AFL as it "embodies the size, strength and power of West Sydney" (AFL 2010b). The team’s colours were to be orange, charcoal, white, and blue – representing “the Western sunset, the Blue Mountains, [and] the granite of the Great Dividing Range” (AFL NSW/ACT 2010) – and the official club motto was “Think Big, Live Big, Play Big” (GWS GIANTS 2014b). In these early moves it was apparent that the club was attempting to position itself as being representative of the region's identity, and deriving their own identity from it. This move was a potentially risky strategy as an identity was being formed that may not be universally appealing, especially to the region’s multiethnic population, and it certainly makes no reference to the region’s Aboriginal history.

The AFL’s first move towards the establishment of their new team was to register the club’s official name; and so the trading name Western Sydney Football Club Limited was registered in 2008 (AFL 2008; Barrett 2008). Identifying a permanent home ground for the team was to follow, and an agreement was reached in 2011 with the Royal Agricultural Society and the NSW Government to develop the Sydney Showground as the home of the Giants (AFL 2010a). The Showground (also known as Škoda Stadium and currently as Spotless Stadium) was not ready for the start of their first season, and so the club had four ‘home’ venues. Their other Sydney grounds in 2012 were ANZ Stadium (Stadium Australia) and Blacktown International Sportspark, which was also the location of their initial training and administration base. The club had also signed a 10-year partnership with the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government to play four games in Canberra each year (GWS GIANTS 2012a). Performing in two ‘home’ cities is not uncommon for AFL teams, with Hawthorn, for instance, playing four games per year in Launceston, Tasmania (Nash 2009). However, such moves to multiple home venues are typically a strategic decision to expand an existing fan base rather than simultaneously to build two fan
bases. Unusually for a new club with no existing fan base, the Giants were, in effect, creating a dual identity with both a base in NSW and the ACT, where their guernsey design incorporated Canberra’s Black Mountain Tower.

Stadiums are important sites for fans, often contributing to a sense of home and generating a love of place (Bale 2000; Penny & Redhead 2009), or ‘topophilia’ as John Bale has termed it (Malcolm 2008). Having two ‘home’ venues from the outset had the potential to diminish this feeling of topophilia amongst fans and result in a lack of attachment to these stadium environments (Penny & Redhead 2009). Western Sydney is also, as previously noted, an extremely diverse region in both geographical and cultural terms (see Figure 5.1). Historically, clubs have been formed around specific local identities (Sandercock & Turner 1981; Lock et al. 2012) rather than regions, but due to the dispersed locality of Western Sydney the Giants do not have a specific, local cultural reference point on which to base their club culture. Thus the Giants’ potentially geographically scattered fan base may have the adverse effect of diffusing their fan culture rather than building it.

Figure 5.1. Map showing Greater Western Sydney Region (.id 2016)

The final totemic symbol needed to complete the new AFL club’s identity was the obligatory team song. Each AFL team has its own song, which has been described as
one of the historic emblems that belongs to a club and its supporters (Pascoe 1997). A ritual associated with AFL involves playing the winning team’s song numerous times at the end of the match (Alomes 2000b). The singing of a club song has been identified as another key ritual associated with AFL fans’ game day behaviour, and it plays a role in developing identification between the club and new fans (McDonald, Neale & Funk 2006; Neal, Mizerski & Lee 2008). The Giants’ team song (written by Melbourne musician Harry James Angus), is musically in the tradition of older club songs. It is as follows:

Well there's a big big sound
From the West of the town
It's the sound of the mighty Giants
You feel the ground A-SHAKING
The other teams are quaking
In their boots before the Giants
We take the longest strides
And the highest leap
We're stronger than the rest
We're the Greater Western Sydney Giants
We're the biggest and the best
And we will never surrender
We'll fight until the end
We're greater than the rest
(GWS GIANTS 2012b)

The song foregrounds the club’s connections to the west of Sydney and draws on the connotations of size and strength that are associated with giants (AFL 2010b). As is common with many sports clubs the imagery around this term (giants) emphasises the
use of strength and power, and potentially violence, to achieve success in sport (Coakley 2009). The song also establishes a sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’, or in the terminology of sports fan research an in-group of fans of the GWS Giants and an out-group of opposition fans and others (Pehrson & Green 2010). Historian Robert Pascoe (1997) says that a club’s name, its guernsey colours, and the club song are key symbols with which fans identify. In addition to these symbols the club also developed a mascot to offer another object for fans to associate with the club (Foster & Woodthorpe 2012). Mascots serve a number of roles, including as an educator, a voice of the club (van Uden 2005), and as a brand ambassador (Griggs et al. 2012). A key function is their interaction with children (Dane-Staples 2012), and this was one of the roles identified for the Giants’ new mascot, G-MAN (GWS GIANTS 2014c). I observed G-MAN’s popularity with children at a number of games and, as he was involved in promotional activities at schools, it is likely that he will serve as a point of identification for this younger generation.

The Giants had thus established all of the required elements for an AFL club identified by Pascoe (1997), and, as detailed below, also recruited a number of players that may appeal to the Western Sydney region (Hunt, Bristol & Bashaw 1999; Lock, Darcy & Taylor 2009; Pajic 2013). In August 2011, prior to entering the AFL, the club had gained 10,000 foundation members (AFL 2011) and, by the end of 2011, this number had risen to 12,190 (GWS GIANTS 2012c). Such a tally was comparable to the membership numbers of the Western Sydney NRL clubs (NRL.com 2013) and suggested that the Giants had made a significant impact on the Sydney sport market.

Despite these preparations, as was widely predicted by most commentators in the media, the Giants finished their first season in last place, having won only two games in 2012, beating fellow expansion club Gold Coast Suns in their seventh game and then Port Adelaide Power in round nineteen. In their second season they won only one game and again finished last. This initial lack of success on the field can have only contributed to the slow development of a fan culture in the early stages of the club’s formation. Slowly, as their young squad gained more experience, and with the addition of a number of more seasoned players, their results improved and the Giants ended the 2014 season with a total of six wins, finishing in sixteenth place. By their fourth year in 2015, GWS reached 11th place and won half of their regular season
games. At the time of writing, in 2016, the Giants had qualified for the AFL Finals following a very successful fifth year. The club was evolving and developing over time and, as indicated to me in conversation by the club’s Chief Operating Officer, they believed that it would take five years for the club to establish itself in the AFL (Griffiths 2012, pers. comm., 10 April).

There were several significant milestones in the club’s first years. These are critical in observing the infancy of fan/club formation and the techniques utilised by the club to instil a sense of identification with this fledgeling team. A key milestone in the Giants’ formation was their AFL debut in a derby match against the Sydney Swans. A staggering seventeen of their twenty-two match day players, including Israel Folau (a player discussed in detail below), made their AFL debuts in this match, which meant that the Giants fielded a young and inexperienced team. The game was played at ANZ Stadium, the centrepiece of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, and which has a capacity of over 83,000. Although the Giants were the ‘home’ team for this match, the Swans also regularly hosted games at this venue at the time, and their fans were the majority of the 38,203 spectators. There was much media attention on this game and, given its significance, my fieldnotes have been included below to provide a flavour of the events.

Figure 5.2. Walking to ANZ Stadium from Olympic Park Station, GWS banners line the route ahead of the Giants’ first game, 24th March 2012
Another key development for the newly-formed team was the 2012 move into their new home ground, the Sydney Showground at Sydney Olympic Park (as noted above initially known as Skoda Stadium and then renamed as Spotless Stadium, following a new naming rights partnership with the Australian cleaning and services company (Meyrick 2014)). The Giants and Kevin Sheedy, in particular, built up hype around the new stadium and hoped that the 25,000 seater venue would become a “colosseum”

Travelling to the stadium [from the west] there is a noticeable number of fans wearing orange, but they are outnumbered by those wearing the red and white of the Swans…There is a relatively large crowd but the stadium does not feel full and it is fairly quiet. There are clearly more Swans fans here.

Arriving at the match the precinct was decorated with the orange of the Giants and there was an excited buzz around the ground before the first bounce. Early exchanges suggesting that the Giants were looking to target their opponent physically, but within two minutes the Swans scored their first goal, and this was greeted with a large roar from the crowd, which suggested that it was dominated by fans of the Swans. Young Northern Territory player Curtly Hampton had the first chance for the Giants, which resulted in one point for a behind, and then later in the first quarter Callan Ward kicked the first goal for the Giants. There was a large cheer as Folau took a defensive mark in the 2nd quarter and he appeared to be embraced by the fans, and was affectionately referred to as ‘Izzy’.

The Swans took charge of the match and quickly built a lead. As the game progressed the fans dressed in orange became quieter and their flags were waved less frequently. During the second half the television coverage played on the screens inside the ground focused on Folau, showing him sitting on the sidelines, looking glum. The Giants’ first match ended in a 37-100 loss. Their fans did not appear to be too disheartened and outside the stadium after the game GWS fans could be heard chanting “Kevin Sheedy’s Orange Army”. Heading home after the match there was a mixture of fans waiting at the train station, mingling with good-humoured banter taking place between them, and little evidence of a hostile rivalry.

(Fieldnotes from GWS’ debut in the AFL, ANZ Stadium, 24th March 2012).
that other teams would “dread to visit” (Sheedy 2012b). The venue was presented as a ‘niche’ facility that would provide a more intimate AFL experience for fans (Street 2013). My observations of games at ANZ Stadium had certainly pointed to a lack of atmosphere in the venue, with fans spread around the stadium and far from the pitch. The choice of home venues for the Giants was significant because Olympic Park is located towards the eastern boundaries of Western Sydney and some raised concerns that it may alienate the club from its fans (News Limited 2012b; Sygall 2012).

Throughout the 2012 season the attendance figures at the Giants’ home games at Škoda Stadium averaged only 8,117 and 8,431 at the 16,000 seat Manuka Oval in Canberra (a venue that has hosted Australian football games since the 1920s and became one of the club’s home venues in 2012) (AFL Tables.com 2013). In their first game at the Showground the venue was less than half full, with a crowd of only 11,887 in attendance. My fieldwork observations at this match also revealed that a sizeable proportion of this crowd consisted of away supporters, and it was these fans that generated most of the noise and excitement. The Giants, with Folau absent from the team, were comfortably beaten and, aside from Jeremy Cameron’s three goals, there was little for their fans to cheer. Again, this lack of initial success potentially contributed to the deficiency of immediately observable club culture and heroisation, in contrast to the Wanderers’ initial success and highly developed fan culture discussed in Chapter 2.

The year 2014, however, started with promise both on and off the field. The club opened its Learning Life Centre – a multi-purpose, multi-million dollar training and education facility at Sydney Olympic Park (GWS GIANTS 2014a). The club paid careful attention to detail in this new venue, even down to ensuring that gymnasium equipment was branded in the Giants’ colours (as is shown in Figure 5.3). On the field the Giants won two of their first three games, including a round one win against the Sydney Swans at Škoda Stadium. In the lead-up to this game the rivalry between the Giants and the Swans had been heightened through a social media campaign, with supporters asked to post their support on Twitter with either of the hashtags #GOGWSGIANTS and #GOSYDSWANS (Figure 5.4). In 2013, the game between the Giants and the Swans had been dubbed the ‘Battle of the Bridge’ making reference to the Anzac Bridge, which spans Johnstons Bay in Sydney and links the
city’s center with its western suburbs. Primarily driven by Kevin Sheedy (Wu 2013h), much attention was subsequently placed on the socio-economic divide of Sydney, reminiscent to the ‘Fibros versus Silvertail wars’ (discussed in Chapter 4). This rivalry with their Sydney neighbours was to a large degree generated by the club and indicates that it was attempting to contrast itself with their opponents. They were essentially presenting their identity as opposite to the longer, more established culture of the Swans. In 2014, the Giants were for the first time, able to compete with their cross-town rivals, resulting in a previously unseen atmosphere at the match. The Giants’ fans were noisier and more active than they had been in previous matches, cheering and waving flags and banners. As the outcome of the match became obvious, the Giants’ fans began gleefully to mock their opponents, suggesting that the rivalry between the two clubs was now more significant and tangible for them and revealing the first glimpses of a developing fan culture.

Figure 5.3. Branded weights at the Learning Life Centre
A specific technique utilised by the club to attract people to their games was routinely to incorporate entertainment into games with bands, DJs, and even freestyle motor cross shows supplementing the on-field offering (Figure 5.5). Half-time activities were also used to excite and arouse the crowd and included competitions, such as for the best Irish dancing at a game held on St Patrick’s Day. Another frequent element of half-time entertainment at Giants’ games is the exhibition match by children in the AFL Auskick program (a popular, adapted version of the game for young children that is often featured during AFL games). These games were invariably popular with match-day attendees and offered a chance for children to play on the same pitch as the professional players. The most engaging and popular activity identified in my observations was the traditional ‘kick-to-kick’, which allows match-day attendees to enter the field of play and kick balls to each other following a match (Figure 5.6). The Giants were able to capitalise on this interest by offering branded Australian footballs for sale to any fans that came without one. As a result of this activity fans that may have felt disappointed by the game itself finished their match day with a fun and enjoyable experience. From the 2014 season the Giants were more competitive and the increased fan involvement during games, in contrast to previous seasons, suggests that expressive fandom was driven by on-field success. For example, in the
second of their 2014 wins, against the Melbourne Demons, the team led for the majority of the match and won by 32 points. The home fans, although quiet at first, became lively towards the end of the game as the Giants’ win became assured.

Figure 5.5. Fan engagement activity in 2014

Figure 5.6. Kick-to-kick after a Giants’ match at Spotless Stadium, 15th March 2014

The Giants also provided their fans with a number of opportunities to get close to their players over the course of the seasons under observation. It was common to see small groups of fans dressed in full kits displaying their identification with the team.
While not in full kits, many others attended wearing other items of club merchandise, and some had signatures of players and staff on this apparel. At one event, the offer of free coffee also attracted less ‘identified’ fans, with some female attendees overheard discussing that their motivation for coming was “for the coffee and the eye candy [attractive players]” (fieldnotes 19th December 2012). Fans had some ability to engage with players, mainly with those not involved in on-field practices, by talking and signing autographs. It was common to see children at these events and a number of adults held their child up for players to sign their clothing or asked for photographs of their children and themselves with players and coaches. It was clear that the players were not well known by many fans, with one overheard saying, “I don’t know who the players are without their number” when a group of players were training bare-chested (fieldnotes 19th December 2012). In addition, it was noticeable that the Giants’ players were predominantly White, not reflecting the ethnic diversity of GWS, and all relatively similar in appearance. With the exception of Israel Folau and Curtly Hampton, the players have all been Anglo-Celtic in appearance and initially were also all relatively tall, lean, and devoid of obvious tattoos and piercings (see Figure 5.7). The difference between the Giants’ players and the region’s population may impede the heroisation process in the long term and subsequently the development of club culture (Smith & Shilbury 2004). Perhaps as an attempt to generate greater knowledge of their players, the club placed large posters of them around their venues (see Figure 5.8), and during games the scoreboard screens also detailed goal scorers to help fans identity players. It was noticeable that, unlike in association football, the name of the scorer is not announced over the public announcement system in AFL. The similar appearance of the players may have been a further hindrance in the process of heroisation as, physically at least, none stood out from their peers as an obvious focus for adoration.

Although not directly linked to heroisation, the fan culture of a club is an important element of the context within which heroisation takes place. The following section details the observations made of the emergence and development of the GWS Giants’ fans.
Development of a fan culture

One immediate observation is that, in contrast to the segregation of fans that is observed at association football matches, opposition AFL fans are largely able to intermingle and can often be found sitting next to each other. While this mixing of fans facilitated the creation of a friendly atmosphere, for the Giants this also meant that there were few concentrations of home fans to generate solidarity and identity,
and in some home games, the away fans outnumbered their own. In addition, it was often common for young Auskick participants and their parents to make up a significant portion of their crowds. Both the participants and their parents appeared to have less interest in the outcome of the match itself and did not add overly to the atmosphere during the match. The Giants’ fans were generally quiet, and in those games where the team was losing heavily, appeared to lose interest. In closer games, such as in round 15 in Canberra against the Western Bulldogs in 2013, where the Giants led for most of the match but ultimately lost by four points, their fans were noticeably more active and vocal as a collective.

Clearly defined fan groups emerged amongst the crowds in the course of the Giants’ first years. First, there was the requisite cheer squad sitting behind the posts (this is the official supporter group responsible for designing the run-through banners and providing vocal support). The cheer squad was obviously highly identified with the club and would dress in the team colours, sport a variety of Giants-related paraphernalia, and often adorn their hair and faces with the club’s colours (see Figure 5.9 for an example of two leading members of the cheer squad). These fans of both sexes appeared to be generally middle-aged and ‘intense’, with a degree of passion for the club that was not matched by others. Significantly, the more vocal fans, and the cheer squad, in particular had a clear, White ethnic background, again not reflective of Western Sydney’s multiculturalism:

Looking at the fans around me I am struck by the ‘Whiteness’ of the crowd. There is little evidence of the multicultural diversity of Western Sydney here. But looking at the pitch this ethnic makeup appears to reflect the players…I was worried that I wouldn't fit in with the Giants’ fans but I don't stand out here. (Fieldnotes, 12th May 2013).
The cheer squad has also set up social media profiles on both Twitter and Facebook, although to date both have limited followers. On Twitter the @orange_army username (that claims to be the Giants’ “#1 supporter group”) was established in August 2013 and had 262 followers (compared to the official GWS Giants’ Twitter profile that has 33,769 followers), and had sent 728 tweets in January 2016. Their content consisted predominantly of retweets (primarily from the GWS Giants or members of the cheer squad) or replies to other users. The achievements of players, such as Jeremy Cameron’s selection in the Australian team in 2013, were celebrated via this Twitter page, which also served as a source of confirmed and rumoured player transfer news. To engage the club and other fans, frequent use was made of the hashtags #standtall and #neversurrender, the latter drawing on the club’s song. The Orange Army, GWS Giants Supporters’ Facebook page, was set up in April 2013 and had been liked by 848 people by January 2016 (the official Giants’ account had 76,459 likes at that time) (Figure 5.10). This account contained much more original content, with photographs of the cheer squad, Giants’ players at training and run-through banners designed and constructed by the cheer squad. In addition to this dual social media presence, several GWS Giants-specific fan forums were established online within larger Australian football forums. In particular, the Big Footy forum,
which was established in 2009, had over 1,000 discussions and 50,000 posts related to the GWS Giants by the end of 2015.

Figure 5.10. The Orange Army’s profile picture on Facebook

In the 2013 season a group of ‘mad monks’ also emerged. This entity was a small group of fans wearing Hare Krishna style orange robes and bald wigs that added an element of noise and colour (see Figure 5.11), although in some games it was observed that a number wore opposition guernseys under their monk outfits. This group was short-lived, which further suggests that it may have had limited connection to the club. Over time other fans engaged in performative acts of fandom (see Figure 5.12 for one such example), but these displays were generally only witnessed when the team was performing well, suggesting that attachments to the club were still evolving for many. The correlation between the club’s lack of success and the limited fan engagement (and relatively small crowds) again points towards the importance of on-field success in the formation of a new club’s culture.
Another surprising feature to emerge from observations of the Giants’ matches was that it was not uncommon to see fans attending these games wearing a guernsey from
a team other than the two involved in the match. This practice may be indicative of a desire to support the sporting code generally, as was found by Lock (2008) in his study of a new association football team in Sydney, and by Funk, Mahony and Ridinger (2002), who examined attendees at Women’s National Basketball Association matches. Most commonly it was an adult attending with children who wore other teams’ shirts, while the children were often wearing Giants’ guernseys. Informal conversations with such fans suggested that the Giants’ engagement activities with local junior clubs, schools and children had developed an attachment for the children but that their parents retained their loyalties to their pre-Giants teams. One parent (a Swans fan) stated that he now attended “more Giants’ games due to the closeness of Spotless Stadium and [his son’s] involvement in Auskick”. His son’s junior club was one of a number of clubs that had been renamed the Giants and who now took part in Auskick at Spotless Stadium during AFL matches. While this fan retained his loyalty to the Swans (and admitted to wearing a Swans’ shirt at Giants’ games) he had clearly developed some affinity with the Giants, particularly as it enabled “light-hearted banter” between him and his son (fieldnotes 15th March 2014). In some instances other parents had moved from interstate and continued to follow their original club. The traditional fan base for Australian football is grounded in ‘Anglo-Celtic Australianness’ (see Chapter 2), meaning that these fans ‘supporting the code’ are typically from a limited range of ethnic backgrounds. The general lack of awareness and association with the adult population of Western Sydney has potentially acted as an impediment to the development of a multicultural fan culture among the Giants.

It was also apparent that, as is common with sports fans, the Giants’ cheer squad had developed a number of chants and songs, often using traditional tunes or adaptations of fan chants from other teams and sports. For instance:

Giants, Giants, Giants;

Here come the Giants;

Greater Western Sydney/Let’s go Giants, Let’s go!
Chants and songs have been identified as a central part of match-day experience, constructing and (re)negotiating identity, and perhaps even attracting some fans to the game (Clark 2006). By 2013 the Giants’ fans were, therefore, beginning to construct their own fan identity and to draw from elements of popular culture to help them do so. In their ‘songbook’ the Giants’ Cheer Squad list ten separate chants and a further eighteen songs, seven of which make reference to individual players. Some of these songs were imaginative, such as “They fought [Adam] Treloar and Treloar won”, which was sung to the tune of *I Fought the Law* (as made famous by The Clash). However, while elements of the cheer squad generally led these chants, the rest of the crowd did not often take them up. The player most frequently featured in this songbook was Jeremy Cameron, who was the subject of:

Jeza Cameron, Jeza Cameron, Ole ole ole (adapted from a traditional Spanish association football song);

Jeza Cameron baby. Jeza Cameron Ohh, oo, oo (to the tune of *Don’t you Want me Baby* by the Human League); and

We love you Jeza, We sing this song for you, We love you Jeza, Forever we’ll be true, We really love you Jeza, Yes we love you (to the tune of *You’re just too Good to be True* by Frankie Valli).

The use of familiar nicknames for some players (such as Jeza for Jeremy Cameron) indicates a developing bond between fans and players. Fans, and particularly the cheer squad, would frequently wave flags and home-made banners and, in some instances, these signs carried references to players, with slogans such as “In Devon we Trust” (referring to Devon Smith). Such instances of heroisation were infrequent, but several players and staff were notable between 2012 and 2014.

**Notable players and staff**

To help the GWS team become established in the league, the AFL granted a number of concessions with regard to signing players. A combination of greater draft selections, an increased salary cap, and a Sydney cost of living allowance was
afforded the team, although these grants were deemed to be "ludicrously generous" by other AFL teams (News Limited 2012c). The key player concessions were: nine first round draft picks in 2011; the top eight rookie picks in 2012; zoned access to players from NSW, ACT and the Northern Territory; access to 16 uncontracted players, and an expanded playing squad list (Broad 2009). The Giants also benefitted from the AFL’s introduction of free agency at the start of 2012 (Smith & Moore 2014) as this new rule allowed the club to sign players that were delisted by their previous club or long-serving players if they were out of contract and not amongst the highest paid players at the club. As a result of their recruitment policy, the playing roster of the Giants was initially inexperienced, with only ten of their squad having featured in the AFL. Five of these players – Callan Ward (60 games prior to signing), Rhys Palmer (53 games), Tom Scully (31 games), Phil Davis (18 games), and Sam Reid (10 games) – were considered to be in the early stages of their career. Phil Davis was the first player that GWS signed from another AFL side (the Adelaide Crows) with notable recognition for his on-field performances (Balym 2011). Rhys Palmer, formerly of Fremantle, had been chosen as the 2008 AFL Rising Star, an award given to the emerging player that is deemed to have made the most impact during that season (Schmook 2011b). The most prominent of the young players signed was Tom Scully, who moved to GWS from Melbourne for a reported $6 million. This signing was not without a degree of controversy, as it was revealed that GWS had also employed Scully’s father as a recruiting scout on a large salary ( Warner 2011).

To support these younger players, and to provide experience and leadership skills, the club also recruited four veterans, a number of whom had won Premiership titles, to act as both players and coaches. Chad Cornes and Dean Brogan were signed from Port Adelaide (prior to signing for GWS, both players had retired from playing). Luke Power from the Brisbane Lions was another veteran title-winning footballer, and was to be a player-coach for the 2012 season (Schmook 2011a). The final addition was James McDonald, who had played for and captained Melbourne until he retired from the game in 2010 (Sheahan 2011). Another experienced footballer signed by the Giants was Setanta Ó hAilpín, a former Carlton player of Irish and Fijian descent who had also previously played hurling in Ireland, and whose signing may in part have been motivated by a desire to attract Western Sydney’s Irish community as much as his on-field experience (Khokhar 2011). The remainder of the
Giants’ 49-man squad in 2012 was predominantly made up of young players who had yet to feature in an AFL game.

The Giants’ roster has seen a large degree of change. Two experienced players, Luke Power and James McDonald, retired at the end of the 2012 season, and the already-young team was supplemented by five more young players from the AFL draft (GWS GIANTS 2014b). Premiership winner Stephen Gilham (from Hawthorn) and former Carlton player Bret Thornton added some experience, but both were to have little impact and Thornton would only play one game for the club. At the end of the 2013 season the club signed experienced Premiership winners Shane Mumford (known as ‘Big Mummy’) from cross-town rivals the Sydney Swans (ABC 2013), and Josh Hunt and Heath Shaw from Collingwood (Herald Sun 2013; Schmook 2013). In addition to a further two young players via the draft, their playing roster saw the acquisition of another former Swan, Jed Lamb (News Corp 2013b). However, the player whose signing attracted most media attention actually had very limited experience of Australian football at all.

On June 1st 2010 it was announced that Israel Folau, the Brisbane Broncos, Queensland, and Australian rugby league player, had signed for GWS in a move that generated much interest in the team (Niall & Cowley 2010). The AFL (AFL 2010a) claims that this signing resulted in 6,311 media items in the first week alone. He was also heavily utilised in marketing efforts and was the best-known player in their squad. As such, the club set him up as a potential hero, with hopes that fans would identify with him due to his high profile and original connection to the region. A combination of his marketing role with the club, and the media fixation on his move, meant that Folau was frequently the focus of attention. His on-field success, however, did not match the hyperbole, and he left the club at the end of 2012 with his only season in the AFL ranking him 415th out of 416 AFL players to have played more than ten games (News Limited 2012a). Despite his lack of playing success, Folau is a noteworthy figure, offering considerable insights into the complexity of hero formation and is discussed in detail as the first of my in-depth case studies in Chapter 6.

The player who has enjoyed the most on-field success for the Giants during my research was Jeremy Cameron. He finished as the club’s leading goal kicker in its
first four seasons, and this achievement was taken to be an indicator of his heroic potential. In the 2013 season, his tally of 62 goals from 21 games was almost four times as many as the club’s next highest scorer. His performance in a season during which the club only won one game was noteworthy, and also ended with him being selected for the All-Australian team. Cameron was also recognised as the club’s best and fairest player during this year. Prior to the 2012 season, he was not one of the more high-profile players but, as he became more successful, the frequency with which he acted as the focal point of the club’s communications also increased, and so he received more media attention and became a focal point for fans. Having risen almost from obscurity to be recognised as one of the best players at his club and in the league, it became apparent that Cameron’s career resembled those of earlier hero myths and narratives. Cameron is the subject of my second case study in Chapter 7.

While Cameron was relatively unknown in 2012, the coach of the club most certainly was not. Kevin Sheedy, who had previously won four Premiership titles during a 27-year coaching career with Essendon, was appointed the club’s inaugural head coach in 2009. Over the course of my research, Kevin Sheedy emerged as a significant figure, both in terms of the development of a fan culture and in offering insights into hero formation.

The round 19 match against Port Adelaide at Škoda Stadium on 4th August 2012 was his 1000th AFL/VFL game and the Giants’ first win in Sydney. The Giants honoured him during this match with a variety of activities and tributes (GWS GIANTS 2012d). It was fitting that the team matched this occasion with only their second ever win, and scored 100 points in a game for the first time. The activities surrounding this game drew heavily on Sheedy’s reputation and history in Australian football, and elevated his already-high status within the club to heroic proportions. Yet, despite the publicity for this game, a crowd of only 6,811 attended. The Giants’ game against the Richmond Tigers on 25th August 2013 was billed as a celebration of Kevin Sheedy’s last game in charge of the club in Sydney (GWS GIANTS 2013c). In addition to a guard of honour and a run through bearing the slogan “A GIANT OF THE AFL WE SALUTE YOU”, the crowd of 12,314 was provided with flags commemorating his accomplishments linked to a fan engagement activity and competition at half time.
While lively at first, the crowd became quieter as the match progressed and the flags were waved less and less:

| This is starting to become repetitive, the Giants are struggling to contest even the centre bounce now! As soon as Richmond get the ball they move forward and score…I feel a kind of morbid fascination now, I wonder if the margin will reach 100 points…This is such a shame for the club, a good crowd, good activities, but the team are getting thumped! (Fieldnotes, 25th August 2013) |

The (as then) record crowd was not rewarded and the Giants lost 42-163, with Richmond scoring 25 goals in the match. Sheedy’s term as coach finished in a rather inglorious manner. He was to remain at the club as a board member and ambassador until 2015, when he returned to his previous team Essendon in a senior management role (Denham 2015). Sheedy was (and is) a complex character. He projects an image of gravitas and tradition while simultaneously provoking (and antagonising) fans and opposition teams. Although not a player he nevertheless provided surprising insight into the process of hero formation and is the focus of my final case study in Chapter 8.

**Conclusion**

During this period of research the culture of the GWS Giants and their fans slowly took shape. This development has accelerated since 2014 as the Giants began to win games. While members of the cheer squad were active throughout games, the behaviour of the majority fans at games was linked to on-field performance, with an increase in activity observed when the Giants performed well. This varying engagement was indicative of the strength (or weakness) of fan identification. The club’s initial lack of success appeared to make it difficult for fans to develop identification with the club and individual players. There were some noticeable achievements by players between 2012 and 2014, such as Jeremy Cameron’s goal kicking exploits, but other than through infrequent chants, and a small number of home-made banners, there was little direct evidence of heroisation of players at
games. For instance, while it was common for fans to wear a replica guernsey, these did not often have a player’s number on them, which would have provided an outward expression of identification with a particular player. The players at the club were young and inexperienced for the majority of this period, and so there was little on which the fans could initially base their heroisation. It was also noticeable that the players were not visually distinct, with little to elevate one above another. Over the research period fans became increasingly familiar with both the club and the players, which was facilitated by increased media attention as the club enjoyed more playing success.

Over the course of my research it became apparent that narratives of heroisation were being built up around a number of significant figures at the club by the media, the club, and the fans in online forums. Surprisingly perhaps, the narratives that were developed came to assume more importance than the observed acts of the players and staff at the club. Rather than focusing on the on-field achievements, these narratives were primarily based on discourses related to Australian football identity and Australianness, and on wider ones linked to historical heroic. These narratives were most evidently applied to Israel Folau, Jeremy Cameron, and Kevin Sheedy. In the chapters to follow, it will be shown that the Australianness of all three was presented in contrasting ways, which shaped their heroisation. These case studies reveal significant insights into Australian sport, highlighting issues associated with masculinity, ethnicity, and the importance of tradition and nostalgia in sport. The first of these heroic case studies is Israel Folau who, as mentioned above, was the most prominent player at the start of my research and is an example of a top-down, imposed hero.
Chapter 6 – The Bad: Israel Folau

“It was hard because our team was a new team, and every week we’d get a flogging…It wasn’t an environment for a player to enjoy and learn an entirely new game. It was quite hard” – Israel Folau (cited in Payten 2013)

Introduction

Despite Crawford’s cautionary advice on top-down, imposed sports heroes, in the case of Israel Folau, who was born in Western Sydney, GWS attempted to do just that and as I will argue failed. As noted, Folau was recruited to GWS with an already-established reputation as an elite athlete in rugby league, but with very little, if any, experience of playing Australian football. The purpose of Folau’s signing was twofold – to help promote the club and the AFL to a non-traditional market, and to act as a ready-made hero for the fledgling team. Folau is an instructive case study of manufactured, top-down heroisation. He serves to illustrate that it is difficult to create a hero and indeed, the very attributes that the club highlighted concerning him served to alienate him from traditional AFL fans.

This chapter begins by providing an overview of Folau’s career, with his move from the NRL to the AFL as the focus. A brief semiotic analysis of the initial promotional material produced by the GWS Giants then acts as a springboard to illustrate how Folau was framed as a hero from the outset. An examination of the construction of Folau as an Australian football hero follows, utilising an analysis of media coverage, the club’s promotional material/email communications, and discussions by sports fans on online message boards. This analysis reveals the risks involved in the migration of heroes from one sport to another, and the fine line that exists between heroisation and villainy. This case study also identifies the significance of the player’s body in working-class constructions of masculine heroisation and concludes by identifying the extent to which ethnicity and nationality play a role in hero selection. This study reveals that Folau’s move highlights notions of difference between the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture of AFL fans and Pacific Islander players.

3 Elements of this chapter have been published previously as Parry (2013)
Background of Israel Folau

The Giants signed Folau to provide a ready-made hero for their new fans, hoping that his ability and standing in the NRL could be easily migrated to the AFL. Folau is not the first athlete to switch sporting codes, and he followed in the footsteps of another Queensland rugby league player, Karmichael Hunt, who in 2009 had also signed to play in the AFL (AAP 2009). According to journalists Cowley and Baumgart (2010), it had been while watching Hunt play that scouts for the AFL had first identified Folau as another candidate who could make the transition to playing Australian football. Folau’s athletic ability was deemed to be sufficient to compensate for his limited experience in the sport. While Folau did not have a pedigree in the AFL he had enjoyed an impressive career in rugby league. In his first season playing in the NRL he had set the record as the youngest player to play for his club at that time (Melbourne Storm), had scored the most tries in a debut season, and became the youngest Australian Test player. He was rewarded for these performances by being named both the Melbourne Storm and NRL Rookie of the Year, and was selected in a World XIII of rugby league players (Rogers 2009). When Folau moved NRL clubs in 2009 he continued his good form with the Brisbane Broncos, equalling the club’s record for the number of tries scored by a player in a single game. His on-field success elevated him above his peers and was sufficient for him to be considered a rugby league hero.

Folau’s athletic ability and his performances on the field were not the only attractive factors for the AFL. Because he was from Minto (Western Sydney), and is of Tongan parentage, it was believed that he would act as “a beacon for his community” (ABC 2010) who would enable the AFL to attract interest from the non-traditional, culturally diverse market of Western Sydney (AFL 2010a). In addition, his standing as a sporting hero in rugby league meant that his code-switch would attract attention to the GWS Giants in the non-traditional AFL market of Western Sydney.

Folau’s high profile did result in a large degree of publicity for the league, with the AFL recording “more than 6,311 newspaper, TV and radio items in the first week alone, which in publicity was valued at $12.3 million” (AFL 2010, 64). While returning to the region may have had some appeal to Folau (as much of his family still
live in Western Sydney), he was also to be well rewarded for his potential and marketability. Reports suggest that he was to earn $6 million over his four-year contract (ABC 2010). As Greater Western Sydney did not play in the AFL itself until 2012, the team, with Folau its most prominent player, played the 2011 season in the minor North East Australia Football League (NEAFL). During this season he enjoyed a degree of success and kicked 25 goals in his 15 appearances for the club. In the lead-up to the GWS Giants’ first game in the AFL, in March 2012, much of the discussion on fan forums, and media speculation, revolved around Israel Folau. This focus on him was, in part, driven by marketing activities that featured him prominently on promotional billboards and in email communications. On one billboard, displayed around Sydney at the time, he appeared alongside the leading Sydney Swans’ player Adam Goodes (Figure 6.1). This move was bold, as Goodes had been selected as a member of the Indigenous Team of the Century, was a two-time Brownlow Medal winner (the award for the best player in the AFL during a playing season), and an AFL Premiership winner. Goodes subsequently went on to win a second AFL Premiership and was named Australian of the Year for 2014 (a yearly award by the National Australia Day Council for someone deemed to have changed lives and Australian society for the better and who is worthy of heroisation). Placing a player who was yet to feature in an AFL match alongside someone of this pedigree not only raised the profile of Folau, but also heightened the expectations around him and positioned him as a hero on a par with Goodes.

![Figure 6.1. GWS Giants Email and Marketing banner March 2012](image-url)
In contrast to these high expectations, Folau’s first and ultimately last season in the AFL did not prove to be successful. Due to a combination of injuries and loss of form he played only thirteen games and managed to score just two goals and eight behinds. He recorded only 39 kicks, 41 handballs, 80 disposals, and 22 marks over the entire season (GWS GIANTS 2013d). Mark Robinson (2012a), admittedly writing in *The Daily Telegraph*, a pro-NRL newspaper, calculated that Folau’s AFL contribution cost $25,000 per possession. Folau failed to settle into one position during the year, playing in the forward line, ruck, and back line during his thirteen games (GWS GIANTS 2014a). On 1st November 2012 he was released from the final two years of his contract. Rather than returning to the NRL, Folau opted for a third football code and signed to play rugby union with the NSW Waratahs (HSBC Waratahs 2012). This move has been much more successful and he was selected to represent the Australian Wallabies team during his first season at the club. Folau subsequently scored 18 tries at international level by the end of 2015, became the first player to win consecutive John Eales Medals (awarded to the best Australian rugby union player), and represented Australia at the 2015 Rugby World Cup (ARU 2015).

*Introducing the GWS Giants: A Promotional Video*

When initially recruited, it was clear that the AFL held high hopes for Folau’s success. As such, he was extensively utilised by the Giants as a promotional tool. His use in the club’s marketing materials reveals a deliberate, manufactured approach to hero formation. Identified as a potential attraction for a new fan base, Folau’s image was used by the club in an orchestrated campaign to heighten the awareness and status of the newly formed club. Folau was essentially being ‘set up’ as a conceivable hero. This tactic was clearly evident in an initial promotional video created by the Giants called *Introducing the GWS Giants* (Škoda Australia 2010). This video was subsequently posted on YouTube and aimed to raise awareness of both Australian football and the club, and drew heavily on Folau’s recognisable profile. A semiotic reading of this early video provides a number of recurrent themes mobilised around him as the club positioned him as a hero.
The footage begins with black and white aerial views of Sydney, with shots moving progressively further to the west. Eventually, a vision of Sydney Olympic Park, the site of the home venue of the club, is presented. The screen then goes blank and the background music is cut. From the darkness emerges the sound and sight of a solitary player, silhouetted, walking down the playing tunnel towards the pitch (see Figure 6.2). The sound of the player’s studs on the ground echo and further emphasises the sense of solitude. The connotation of ‘emptiness’ that is presented within this video suggests that a difficult and lonely challenge faces this player. His desire to take on and accomplish this task is, then, clearly represented as heroic.

Figure 6.2. Screenshot from *Introducing the GWS Giants*

Figure 6.3. Screenshot from *Introducing the GWS Giants*
The image of the player is then replaced by a slogan, *YOU ARE ON YOUR OWN*. It then cuts back to show the same player being joined by a variety of figures, coded as being from Western Sydney through their attire, all heading onto the pitch. Heroes need followers (Klapp 1949c) and, at a mythological level of signification, the video suggests that this silhouetted figure is capable of leading others and his club into the light of the AFL. The first of these followers is a woman dressed in what appears to be traditional Islamic religious dress (Figure 6.4). She is followed by a young female, dressed in jeans and a shirt (and therefore the connotative signification is ‘Western’), and then a casually attired man (Figure 6.5). They follow the player to the pitch. The player is then revealed to be Folau, standing confidently, staring into the distance. At the second level of signification he is presented as looking into the future and his destiny (Figure 6.5). He is presented as an imposing figure, carrying a weight of expectation but with the implied support of the community. The film continues to show a variety of individuals again chosen to be representative of the Western Sydney community (or at least the marketing firm’s view of Western Sydney) – there are families, businessmen, children, and others all drawn from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The video concludes with clips of Australian football action, and in these scenes the Giants’ player who is most heavily and almost exclusively featured is Folau. The video positions him as a pioneer who is leading the introduction of the AFL to engage with new multicultural markets within Western Sydney. He is representing the team, the sport, and a connection with the region.

Figure 6.4. Screenshot from *Introducing the GWS Giants*
*Introducing the GWS Giants* set the tone for the club’s marketing activity throughout Folau’s first year at the club. Despite his lack of Australian football experience, Folau is presented as heroic. He acts as a beacon, lighting the journey into new territory, attracting followers (fans) to his cause: the spread of AFL and the arrival and legitimisation of the team. He is portrayed as a leader and pioneer. It is important to reiterate that this narrative was manufactured and it was not one that was
emerging due to fan responses. It was displayed on billboards, brochures, and posters, all of which were used in the initial marketing of the club (Figures 6.7 and 6.8). Most of these messages utilise one common image: that of Israel Folau. Yet, despite the club’s efforts to construct a heroic narrative around their key player, these attempts failed. Indeed, as argued here a constructed, top-down hero requires substance in addition to publicity. In the case of Folau this tactic hit three critical barriers that require examination.

Figure 6.7. Billboard featuring Israel Folau (Principals 2013)

Figure 6.8. Marketing material produced by Principals
From Hero to Villain

The most apparent barrier to Folau’s heroisation is the delegitimisation entailed in impugning his financial motivations and the footballing code rivalry widely covered by the pro-NRL media. It is unusual for players to move between rugby league and Australian football, and this code-switch opened up debates about the two sports and their status in Sydney and Australia. The nature of these debates, and how Folau was portrayed, will now be discussed. Folau’s status as an elite rugby league player who represented his club, state and country positioned him as a hero for many rugby league fans and the pro-NRL media. By leaving the NRL he was seen to be betraying the sport and the fans who had turned him into a hero. He was a villain in the mould of Judas – selling out the values of his group. During his time with the GWS Giants, he was often subsumed within a wider discourse around the perceived battle between sports leagues taking place in Western Sydney, particularly between the ‘resident’ NRL and the ‘encroaching’ AFL.

When Folau signed for the Giants the media response was largely negative. The partisan press suggested that his move was a ‘defection’ from the NRL (AAP 2010a; Baum 2012; Marshall 2010), with the Sydney-based The Daily Telegraph newspaper even using the term “traitor” when making reference to him (Balym 2010). Terms such as “deserter”, “defection” and “AFL traitor” (The Daily Telegraph 2010) were frequently used and provide an indicator of the degree of hostility in the media coverage. The literal, denotative meaning of these terms relate to changing allegiance from one state to another but they also connote military and in particular Cold War era espionage narratives, where defection is considered the ultimate betrayal. At an ideological level of significance, the use of these terms implies that leaving a sporting code is on a par with such betrayals and that loyalty is the natural and expected state of being. Comments from past NRL players were utilised to support the position that Folau should not turn his back on the sport.

Conversely, on the BigFooty forum (a pro-AFL site), while fans identified this rivalry between football codes, they considered his signing to be a ‘win’ for the AFL at the expense of the NRL. The following posts are typical of such views:

…it is a massive win for the AFL over the NRL. (BigFooty, “Falou signs with w Sydney”, May 31, 2010, post #3)
Suck on it NRL. (BigFooty, “Falou signs with w Sydney”, June 01, 2010, post #11)

It looks like Rugby League is in trouble out in West Sydney. I hope you guys [the Giants] capitalise on it they are having a protest rally because the NRL and West Tigers arnt doing enough. Time to divide and conquer! (BigFooty, “Folau Predictions”, January 09, 2012, post #56)

The code-rivalry was also emphasised through references to the differences in the two sports and attempts were made in the media to undermine Folau as an AFL player. Although he was portrayed as a “natural athlete” (Cowley & Baumgart 2010; Lewis 2010), his lack of AFL-specific skills (particularly his poor kicking ability), and his lack of tactical understanding of the game, were frequently contrasted with this ‘natural’ talent. SMH writer Greg Baum (2012b) provides a typical example of such media coverage:

Folau still is lost in the AFL. He has little instinct for the game. It appears to wash over and around him, stranding him half a kick out of place…He is not tall enough to play in the ruck, or savvy enough to play on the forward line, and seemingly not ready for a run-with role.

At the time that Folau signed for GWS, The Daily Telegraph’s Jon Ralph (2010) pointed out that he had only “kicked the ball 10 times in 80 NRL games, has limited endurance, and played no Australian rules football in his junior days”. Similarly, writing in the SMH, Sally Robbins (2010) questioned the fairness of “someone who has little to no experience kicking and marking a Sherrin [the brand name of balls used in the AFL], [being] paid such a high salary, equal to that of the top players in the industry”.

My analysis of online message boards reveals that fans also recognise differences between the requirements of rugby league and Australian football. A number of forum posters argue that Folau’s lack of Australian football playing experience would limit his effectiveness in the AFL, claiming that it would take time for him to learn how to play. Some representative posts that typify such sentiments are presented below:
Obviously he has the right body type for the game but how far can someone with such little experience in the game really go? I guess GWS would be banking on the likes of Tadgh Kennelly and Jim Stynes successfully being able to transition into the AFL. (BigFooty, “Folau Predictions”, November 23, 2011, post #1)

But the footy smarts, the ability to read the play, know when to lead, anticipate how the ball will fall from the packs that's something he can only learn on the field during a game. That's the area that concerns me. (BigFooty, “Who will Folau play like”, June 08, 2011, post #5)

He is untested at the game and will probably have to drop 10kg to get the run he will need to change from the elite power athlete that he is. Don't really care about impact on NRL. Is an asset or a liability? Born in western Sydney with allure to the polynesian community and a great athlete. We know he can catch and run but can he kick and make position. Only time will tell. (BigFooty, “Folau signs with w sydney”, June 01, 2010, post #14)

Despite playing AFL week in and out atm, dont think Izzy would play seniors for most SANFL teams. This shows he should still be working on his game in NEAFL, O'Hailpin is a much better option at key forward. (BigFooty, “Would Folau get a game in the SANFL”, April 28, 2012, post #1)

These comments point towards perceived physical and tactical differences between the codes, which fans did not think that Folau would be able to bridge. Others appeared to be happy for the AFL’s NRL converts to fail, as they believed that their successful transition from rugby league to Australian football could be seen as indicative of the NRL’s superiority. The derogatory comments in the example below also reveal the degree of hostility evident in such posts:

If these leaguies come to the AFL and nail it, it could vindicate the no neck's stance that Aussie Rules is an easy game that requires no skill. (BigFooty, “GWS offers $3m to Folau”, April 30, 2010, post #12)

Other contributors believed that he would be able to make the transition to Australian football successfully. His athleticism and youth were believed by some fans to
compensate for his inexperience and one online post pointed to the measures that he was taking to learn the game:

It's a totally different skill set; but he is an elite athlete. And he has time on his side. (BigFooty, “Folau signs with w sydney”, May 31, 2010, post #6)

Being a more gifted athlete will help alot :P. The man is a workhorse so may be a lethal forward :o. Heard he kicked a bag a few weeks back and looks promising. But getting paid so much for a background never featuring football was questionable. Won't doubt his potential but given he will be playing with the Big Boys next season, will 1 season be enough? (FanFooty Forum, “Israel Folau's Progress”, May 31, 2011, 06:58:37 PM)

The raw materials are excellent, and he is visibly growing before us. He will be an absolute backman devouring monster in a couple of years time, but it won't be overnight. Karmichael Hunt's trajectory is pretty much on par with where our Izzy will be going. He has my complete respect. (BigFooty, “Folau Predictions”, May 01, 2012, post #85)

…apparently a couple of weeks ago he picked up a copy of AFL Live on Playstation 3 and has been madly playing it which is paying dividends in his ability to read the play and better understand the intricacies of the game. (BigFooty, “Forward line the best role for Folau and for GWS”, June 02, 2011, post #10)

Such views were in the minority and the overall consensus was that this move was unlikely to succeed. Ahead of the club’s first game The Herald Sun, a Melbourne–based tabloid newspaper, asked people on the streets of Blacktown (a Western Sydney suburb) to identify three images (Figure 6.9). It was found that Folau was the only one that the local residents could identify, and continually referred to him as an NRL ‘convert’ (News Limited 2012a). Although this term is commonly used in many domains there are clear religious connotations to this term as it is associated with the adoption of another faith. While at a mythological level, signification is based on the dominant positions that sport holds in Australian society and the quasi-religious status that sport and sport heroisation has assumed. Yet the locals appeared to be unaware of the fact that Folau was now playing in the AFL, and the story continually implied
that Western Sydney was not a region that knew about, understood, or cared for the AFL. Folau was only recognised, it was suggested, because of his NRL background.

Figure 6.9. Image from (News.com.au 2012)

Throughout his time at the Giants, his connection to the NRL continued to be reinforced and he was presented as an NRL star, superstar, or ‘great’. Folau’s NRL past was clearly still overshadowing his AFL present. Due to his limited success on the AFL field, media coverage never identified Folau as an AFL player and he was continually associated with his NRL origins. His athleticism and skills were such that he was identified as an elite (NRL) player, even during the time when he was playing for the GWS Giants. As late as January 2013 on the GWS Giants’ own website under the information about the club, even the GWS Giants made reference to Folau as an “NRL Star” (GWS GIANTS 2013c).

The theme of code rivalry was again apparent when Folau announced in November 2012 that he was retiring from the AFL and leaving the Giants. During the press conference to broadcast this decision, he referred to his lack of passion for Australian football (Robinson 2012b), and this reference to passion formed a key element of media coverage. The NRL was believed by the media to have, in some way, won a victory through Folau’s inability to generate sufficient passion for the AFL. Folau ‘quitting’ the AFL was presented as a victory by the pro-NRL The Daily Telegraph.
newspaper and used as evidence that ‘their’ sport was superior (Rothfield 2012a). Importantly, it was assumed that the “prodigal son” would be returning to play in the NRL (Parry 2013). The newspaper presented this move as a homecoming – Folau was returning to “where he belongs” (Rothfield 2012a). Journalist Phil Rothfield (2012a), who referenced other players who had left the NRL to play another code (in these cases rugby union), said:

THEY all come back. Mat Rogers, Wendell Sailor, Timana Tahu, Lote Tuqiri, Sonny Bill Williams – and now Israel Folau have all returned to the greatest game of all.

The NRL-supporting media and fans alike assumed that Folau would make a heroic return to playing in the NRL. Had he made such a return this career path would certainly have adhered to Joseph Campbell’s (2004) heroic journey, with a separation from the NRL, his AFL ‘trial’, and then return to be integrated back into rugby league. The hero’s journey is deeply ingrained within many societies and may explain the willingness of the media and fans to welcome him back. The actuality was very different, with Folau choosing a third sporting code rather than making this return. On one online message board, fans were quick to reposition his subsequent signing with a rugby union team as another defeat for the NRL. The certainty with which the media and NRL supporters believed that he was to make a return to the NRL was subsequently presented as being foolish by a number of contributors, such as these below:

You certainly have to LOL [laugh out loud] at the NRL. They were licking their lips, and rubbing their hands with glee and using Izzy leaving us to bash us over the head. Now he's off to Europe to play another sport entirely so it is completely Suck to Them. I don't think GWS or the AFL have come out of it looking that bad. We tried something, it didn't work out, we move on. It's the NRL that look like gooses because they worked so hard to get him back and then he was available right on a silver platter and they still didn't get him. (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, December 01, 2012, post #55)

I was thinking pretty much the same thing. Rejecting League in favour of Union makes me think that his willingness to join us wasn't purely down to the
money. Possibly he was already disenchanted with the ARL before he made the move to Aussie Rules and was looking for a way out or a fresh start. (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, December 01, 2012, post #56)

We looked a bit foolish when he walked away from AFL, but now he has made the NRL look foolish too. And himself I'm guessing. But at least he only walked away from us ONCE, whereas he has walked away from the NRL TWICE! (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, December 04, 2012, post #66)

As evident in this last post, fans attempted to present the negative situation created by Folau’s departure from the Giants in a positive light. A number of fans were quick to suggest that the club would subsequently be able to strengthen their team with players that were committed to the team, as displayed here:

I guess this proves to be a good thing for us. If he's ready to just up and quit like this, he was clearly not that invested in the season. Looking back, I can only think he was a waste of a spot. (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, November 01, 2012, post #21)

Let's be honest. Folau found the transition to AFL too hard, and basically stopped trying. Psychologically, Elvis had well and truly left the building some time ago. Compare Folau's matchday efforts late in the season with someone like Toby Greene. Frankly, it was embarrassing. He's done the right thing for all concerned. If he'd stayed, it would have warped the structure of the team as we tried to figure out what to do with him. With him out of the way, we can really get serious. (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, November 01, 2012, post #27)

He gave us the best he had; his coaches and his teammates loved him; he was great for the other players and when he realised that his heart could never fully be in a game that he wasn't able to master he resigned. No disloyalty to us in the slightest. Any issues that people have with him don't relate to his time in AFL and, I believe, involve details that they have no genuine knowledge of. Disappointment does not equal disloyalty. (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, January 04, 2013, post #73)
It was not just fans who positioned his departure in a positive light. The *SMH* writer Will Brodie (2012) suggested that his recruitment to a “struggling, youthful team…felt unfair”. Folau is portrayed as being a victim of the AFL’s plans to expand into Western Sydney (Rothfield 2012b), an unwitting pawn in their battle with the NRL, whose welfare was not of paramount concern to the league. A fan claimed that they had:

… no doubts he would have been told repeatedly, by all manner of 'experts' that he could easily make the transition to AFL and he would have made the switch in the belief that it was going to be successful. Obviously the money was a huge motivation but I very much doubt he would have made the move if he hadn't been led to believe that it was going to work. Blame the guys who gave him unrealistic expectations but don't blame Izzy for giving it a crack. (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, December 01, 2012, post #56)

In another post on the FanFooty forum the abuse that he was subjected to was utilised to explain his retirement (FanFooty, “Izzy going back”, November 01, 2012, 05:13:02 PM), and fans also highlight the shortcomings of his team to justify his struggles:

It didn't help that the our midfield was getting smashed at the afl level and our inside fifties were atrocious (apposed to neafl where they has more time). An impossible situation to learn how to play. They could have done a Pyke and had him play reserves all 2012 and 2013 but that would have been politically impossible. This was a nowin scenario from the beginning (unless he did stick out the 4 years and improved as the Giants did). (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, November 01, 2012, post #37)

There is a degree of sympathy in these comments and, although he was typically regarded as having ‘quit’ the AFL when he retired, Folau’s decision was initially presented in a positive manner by the media, before his move to rugby union was announced. He was praised for his honesty and bravery in deciding not to continue taking his considerable salary while not performing at a suitable standard on the pitch (Robinson 2012; SMH 2012c; Walter & Proszenko 2012). *The Daily Telegraph* quoted Kevin Sheedy, who suggested that Folau was “one of the (more) honest people” that he had dealt with (Barbeler 2012). Nevertheless, some online posts, such
as the one below, attacked him for another sporting code-switch and suggested that he was motivated by financial greed:

Izzy just continues to lose his credibility. I'm sure he was reported to have told Parramatta he was 100% signing with them. Now he backflips and joins overseas rugby? He left NRL for a sport he's never played and ended up leaving. He's now going to another sport he never played. Will he last as long in union as he did in AFL? You can't tell me money has no influence on his decisions. Just the way I see it. (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, November 30, 2012, post #52)

Folau’s career has been fairly nomadic, with him moving from NSW to Victoria, and then to Queensland before returning to NSW, and code to code in moves that have often been very well financially rewarded (Pandaram 2010; Baum 2012b; Cowley 2012). At times, he was portrayed by the media as being an adventurer who aimed to master a variety of different sporting codes, with SMH writer Jamie Pandaram (2010) describing him as a “Polynesian pioneer”. The term pioneer has particular resonance in an Australian setting (as will be detailed in Chapter 4), with the aforementioned ‘pioneer myth’ linked to conservative and nationalistic constructions of Australianness and represents a heroic struggle in a harsh and unforgiving land. Describing him as a “Polynesian pioneer” creates an interesting juxtaposition, with the traditional notions of Australian national identity that are associated with the term pioneer contrasted with his Polynesian heritage. Folau’s heroic struggle was in the NRL heartlands of Western Sydney. There was a structured plan by the AFL to use him, with his Polynesian background, as a multicultural ambassador (AFL 2012) promoting the sport to Western Sydney and the Tongan community (AFL 2010a). The Daily Telegraph’s Mark Robinson (2012a) portrayed Folau as:

…an ambassador trying to win the hearts and minds of the west Sydney's youth. It wasn't just the youth. It was the multicultural youth. They were the AFL's target group and Izzy was the Oceanic-born pied-piper. And the kids loved him.

Maguire’s (2001) sport labour migration typology also uses the term pioneer to describe a category of sport migrants. In a reversal of roles seen in Victorian sporting
missionaries, Folau, of Tongan descent, was seeking to “convert the [Anglo-Celtic Western Sydney] natives” to his (new) sport (Maguire 2001, 105). The colonial connotation of the term ‘natives’ is a direct reference to the missionary origins of the pioneer type, and at a mythological level of signification the challenges and hardships faced by these Victorian pioneers resulted in the perception that their endeavours were heroic, and so presenting Folau in such a manner is again positioning him as a hero. There is some evidence of him acting in this way and he even describes his own move as “a great challenge…a great journey and an adventure” (Folau quoted in ABC 2010). His use of these terms draws on notions associated with heroic journeys and struggles (as discussed in Chapter 3) and in online discussions fans repeated the notion of a challenge:

He may very well have wanted a challenge…And even if the money was the primary factor, why does that mean he wont take u the challenge and strive for success? As a professional sportsman he is most likely a very competitive person and enjoys pushing himself to the limit physically. (FanFooty, “Israel Folau's Progress”, June 07, 2011, 07:59:27 PM)

It may be heroic to act as a pioneer battling adversity and hardship but his large salary, and use as a marketing tool by the AFL and the Giants, point towards a more avaricious role and motivation. The sport labour migration typologies of both Magee and Sugden (2002) and Maguire (2001, 105) propose that there is a set of players who are “motivated more by short term gains” and who will work as “hired guns” (referred to as Mercenaries in these typologies). The military connotations of this type of migrant are apparent and again questions the loyalty of such athletes – positioning them in opposition to some of the traditional Australian values identified in Chapter 4. Israel Folau fits this mercenary category as he clearly values his earning capacity and regards sport as a job. The potentially heroic nature of his struggle is undone if his primary motivator is money rather than a desire to “win the hearts and minds” of the ‘natives’. The negative traits of mercenaries position them as villains “in total opposition to the hero” (Klapp 1954b, 58). His mercenary reputation was further strengthened when he admitted that he had not watched an AFL game prior to his switch. Fans responded to this revelation with some hostility:
I've lost all respect for him after that comment. I realise he's going to be payed a small amount of the $1 million a year on playing footy, but that's just plain ridiculous. (FanFooty Forum, “Folau: "I've never watched a game of AFL before"”, July 30, 2010, 06:48:42 PM)

What a dud! He's just in it for the cash I reckon. He's in for a rude awakening though ;D (FanFooty Forum, “Folau: "I've never watched a game of AFL before"”, July 30, 2010, 09:53:26 PM)

He doesn't care!! As long as the $$$ gets to his back pocket he'll be happy. It's crap that he is playing in this case though!! (FanFooty Forum, “Folau: "I've never watched a game of AFL before"”, August 02, 2010, 01:06:11 PM)

…can't believe he hasn't even seen 1 game, well go back to rugby then (FanFooty Forum, “Folau: "I've never watched a game of AFL before"”, August 01, 2010, 02:50:39 PM)

This perception of Folau as a mercenary was reinforced by the frequent media discussions of the size of his salary, which as mentioned above was reported to be as high as $1.5 million per year (Hinds 2010; Cowley 2012c). He was later to admit that his code switch was ultimately motivated by financial considerations (Baum 2012b; Murnane 2012), and many fans suggested that his motivation for changing football codes was solely money:

I'm saying that it's unlikely that someone would swap codes unless there are bigger $$$. Hunt might have told him something about the $$ he's been offered, and Folau took it up. (FanFooty Forum, “Israel Folau's Progress”, June 07, 2011, 07:09:09 PM)

At a million a year he better play like the king. (FanFooty Forum, “Folau!!!!!!!”, June 01, 2010, 01:42:22 PM)

For a million a year he would want to win the coleman straight up. (FanFooty Forum, “Folau!!!!!!”, June 01, 2010, 01:53:38 PM)

Interestingly, one fan drew a distinction between Folau and Karmichael Hunt based on the latter’s attitude and hard work, stating that the former was:
...in it for the cash...I was completely against both of them but Hunt has grown on me since he is actually making an effort and isn't in it just for the money. (FanFooty Forum, “Folau: "I've never watched a game of AFL before"”, August 08, 2010, 05:00:46 AM)

But Folau is just one of an increasing number of athletes aware that they are selling their labour in a “capitalist marketplace that is fickle” (McKay et al. 2001, 236). Athletes’ careers are relatively short and so it is economically rational for them to maximise their financial rewards by selling their labour to the highest bidder. Evans and Stead (2014, 716), in their study of Australasian rugby league player migrants, identify financial considerations as “fundamental in contouring career choices” for these athletes, and so he is not alone in ‘selling himself’ in such a manner. Athletes often make career decisions to benefit their families (Carter 2011a; 2011b; Horton 2012a), and justifications were provided for Folau seeking the best financial reward for his athletic ability, such as to support his large extended family (Robbins 2010; AAP 2012; Murnane 2012). Some fans recognised his revenue-maximising choices and a degree of respect for him was apparent:

Why are people getting so upset about the fact he is only playing for the money, of course he is using them for the money...Dont clubs use players for memberships, to pay their wages and as soon as they hit a certain age see you later good on him he made the right CHOICE. (FanFooty Forum, “Folau: "I've never watched a game of AFL before"”, August 13, 2010, 06:52:20 PM)

The AFL clearly planned to ‘use’ him and signed both Folau and Karmichael Hunt, in part, for their marketing worth and their potential hero status in non-traditional AFL markets (ABC 2012). Given his reported salary it is little wonder that the club hoped to get value for their money, and used Folau’s image extensively. Media reports at the time frequently acknowledged his marketing role for the AFL and the Giants, and the extent of this role was highlighted by the large number of media commitments that he had in his first year (SMH 2012a). Some media reports suggested that Folau’s marketability was of greater importance than his on-field success (Cordy 2012; AAP 2010b).
Contributors to a number of online forums also recognised his marketing role. They were aware that his salary was part-funded by the AFL and it was assumed that his off-field impact was more important than his playing prowess (BigFooty, “GWS offer $3m to Folau”, April 30, 2010, post #11; FanFooty Forum, “Israel Folau’s Progress”, June 02, 2011, 06:21:04 PM). While there was some scepticism about his move, fans believed that the “risk” of signing Folau was one that was “worth taking” (BigFooty, “Folau signs with w Sydney”, June 01, 2010, post #23) due to the amount of publicity that resulted. In addition to generating merchandise sales (apparently “jumpers sold 3:1 in favour of #4 (izzy) [Folau]” (FanFooty Forum, “Izzy going back”, November 01, 2012, 05:07:37 PM)), fans believed that his primary role was to attract “kids and sporting juniors” to the sport (BigFooty, “Israel Falou's move to AFL, QLDers reactions and showing AFL is superior to NRL”, June 15, 2010, post #7). One fan claimed that even though “Izzy” may not have been successful on the pitch, he may still “convince a lot of young blokes who might otherwise never bother playing Aussie Rules that it's in their best interests to try the game”. The post went on to suggest that children:

…might say to themselves that perhaps if Izzy, like Hunt, had played as a junior it might have made the transition work. That being the case, they might feel that even though union or league is their main priority, it makes sense to also have a grounding in Aussie Rules. If that does happen then the whole experiment was worthwhile. Izzy mightn't have made it on the field but he will have helped to change people's perceptions and help to grow the game in NSW and Qld. (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, November 02 2012, post #44)

Despite the marketing success of Folau’s move, therefore any heroic status he did have diminished during his time with the Giants, and he was ultimately portrayed as a villain. His villainisation was primarily based on his financial motivations for migrating to the AFL, which were perceived as being mercenary – the antithesis of the heroic. Folau was derided for trading his bodily capital for financial gain, but his physical characteristics were the very attributes that had first elicited the AFL’s interest in him. His body was the initial source of heroic narratives around him.
Chapter 3 identified that sports heroes are typically elite players with high levels of athletic ability. It is, therefore, not surprising that Folau’s athleticism was a recurrent theme in media coverage, and it was put forward as the AFL’s key reason for approaching him to convert to Australian football (Cowley & Baumgart 2010). In addition to his “innate” athleticism (Lewis 2010), Folau’s imposing physique emerges as a corresponding theme. Media texts highlight his height (Cowley 2010), overall size (Wilson, J 2010), physical shape (Cordy 2012), and even the size of his hands (Niall & Cowley 2010). Fan discussions similarly focussed on his physical attributes, as detailed below:

Folau is good at RL [rugby league] because he is a tremendous athletic talent. (BigFooty, “GWS offers $3m to Folau”, May 02, 2010, post #18)

He's six four, he can jump, he can catch, he's strong and he can kick straight. (BigFooty, “Folau Predictions”, November 23, 2011, post #4)

Sheeds reckons his hands are as good as anyones below the knees... (BigFooty, “Folau Predictions”, November 30, 2011, post #18)

…his leap is absolutely phenomenal. will out leap anyone in the competition at the moment (including Nic Nat). (BigFooty, “After watching Israel tonight…”, June 16, 2010, post #1)

In email communications from the club to its members, he was often pictured alongside more established AFL players. Folau was positioned in ways that displayed his physique and stature (see Figures 6.10 – 6.14), with the definition of his arm muscles apparent. These pictures of Folau are also noteworthy because they showed him carrying the ball in a manner that was different to the way in which he had previously carried a rugby league ball. He was typically in an action pose, displaying dynamism and athleticism, with a look of concentration on his face. Folau was presented as a considerable physical presence, and appeared to be more physically developed than those around him. In some images he is also foregrounded to enlarge further his physical presence, as is shown in Figure 6.10 below:
On 12th September 2012 the club sent an email to their members’ database, ostensibly from Israel Folau. In the email he thanked members for their support in his first season and affirmed that he was committed to the club for the following year. He was pictured smiling and happy alongside his Twitter username, standing confidently.
with his chest out and his arm muscles again on display. A subsequent email to renewing members in October would similarly make use of his image. In Figure 6.14 the low-angle shot enhanced his imposing physical presence and helped, in particular, to present his leg muscles.

Figure 6.13. Email banner from 12\textsuperscript{th} September 2012

Figure 6.14. Email banner 24\textsuperscript{th} October 2012
Sport has been regarded as one of the last bastions of male hegemony, and a defence against a perceived ‘effeminising’ of society (Clayton & Harris 2009). In Chapter 3, it was detailed that Australia has become increasingly urbanised, and that sport is often projected as one mechanism through which a softening urban lifestyle could be warded off. Sport supposedly kept men both ‘manly’ and ‘masculine’ (Phillips 2000). Images of Folau emphasise his manliness and masculinity, with attention focusing on his arms and legs. The camera angles used present a conative signification of him as larger-than-life, and, therefore, at a mythical level of signification he becomes someone who is more than mortal. If heroism is associated with physical toughness and strength, as Wellard (2002) contends, then the foregrounding of his size serves to position Folau as a sporting hero. Yet a disjuncture exists between the ‘heroic’ pursuit of strength, toughness and masculinity, and Bourdieu’s (1993) aforementioned view that such a pursuit only serves to subjugate the working class. Views on what constitutes heroism vary depending on the particular social and historical context and the theories used to explain these contexts. In the Australian instance, historian John Rickard (2000) has shown that sports heroes are linked to working-class ideals. It is thus unsurprising that strength is venerated and heroised by Australian sports fans, and that images of athletes will thus tend to reinforce these masculine ideals.

While physical characteristics such as height and athleticism alone may not be considered as heroic, they certainly are amongst the statistics and qualities that the AFL uses as measures of talent identification (Kelly & Hickey 2008), and they play a key role in the success of an AFL player. Therefore, Folau’s ‘exceptional athletic talent’ may be a precondition of him becoming a sports hero. Nonetheless, as a result of this focus on his physical attributes alone, Folau’s body assumed more importance than other personal characteristics, and it was utilised to explain his success in sport. Whannel (2008) states that it has increasingly been the visual appearance of athletes that plays a significant factor in marketing them, and youthful bodies and sexuality are often the central focus of the marketing of athletes, as discussed in Chapter 2. Former English footballer David Beckham, Welsh rugby union player Gavin Henson, and Russian former tennis player Anna Kournikova, for example, have been commercially successful, in large part, due to their physical characteristics, and they have become recognisable outside their sports for their celebrity image and beauty (Smart 2005; Harris & Clayton 2007). In the marketing of Folau it was his physical
appearance that was primarily utilised. Furthermore, the focus on his physicality meant that his personality assumed lesser prominence in his initial portrayal in the media and in online discussions amongst fans.

Speaking in 2014, Kevin Sheedy said that he believed “Izzy Folau lost patience with AFL” (fieldnotes 20th May 2014), suggesting that he lacked determination. Similarly, in a number of online forum threads, when reference was made to his personal characteristics it was often in a negative manner. He was presented as being disloyal (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, January 04, 2013, post #72), lacking dedication (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, November 01, 2012, post #1), lacking confidence (BigFooty, “Folau – Ruck or Bust…”, March 06, 2011, post #4 and March 10, 2011, post #7), and lazy (BigFooty, “Folau Predictions”, March 02, 2012, post #86; BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, November 01, 2012, post #3). Significantly, ‘lazy’ was one of the adjectives most commonly used to describe him in these forums and there is a clear implication that he relied on his natural athleticism rather than hard work and dedication. The following forum post typifies such views:

i heard he was a lazy trainer BEFORE he went to AFL. i still believe he has better AFL skills than [Karmichael] hunt. but hunt has a go. folau is lazy. its a good example for young blokes looking to do well as a senior. folau has all the advantages over hunt; height, weight, speed, marking ability, talent, etc. hunt just tries harder. he pushes himself. he dedicates himself. i thought hunt was too much of a meathead to become an AFL 'sophisticate'. he proved me wrong. i thought izzy might find a role that didnt include running too much, but obviously ive misjudged the game of AFL. (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, November 01, 2012, post #24)

These comments are reflective of “long-standing, widely held, racist, and ill-informed presumption of innate, race-linked black athletic superiority and intellectual deficiency” (Edwards 2000, 9). White athletes are typically identified as hard working and determined, and ethnic minority and Indigenous athletes characterised as naturally talented but idle (Cashmore & Cleland 2011; Coakley, Hallinan & McDonald 2011). In one online forum it was suggested by a fan that Folau performed
at his best when he relied on his “instinct” and his body rather than trying to think about the game:

…in his sixth game, he had a breakthrough playing on the forward line rather than down back, against the Lions reserves at the Gabba. Folau explains he stopped "thinking" and started playing on his intuition just like he used to do in the NRL, he notes. As a result, he assisted in a number of goals and took several strong marks. "I played on instinct in that third and fourth quarter," Folau says. "I started to play a lot better. If I keep on doing that I think I will improve quicker over time." (FanFooty Forum, “Israel Folau's Progress”, May 30, 2011, 11:00:10 PM)

Folau’s Polynesian heritage features prominently in fan and media discussions of his capabilities and characteristics, and is used to explain his athletic ability. In the United States, there is a tendency in the media to over-represent black athletes in certain sports (Beamon 2010), particularly in newspaper images, which has resulted in the image of an athletic black male athlete becoming the “defining symbol of sports dynamism” (Hardin et al. 2004, 212). In this way, stereotypical notions of black athleticism, and racial difference are reinforced (Hardin et al. 2004; Edwards 2000; 2010; Mastro et al. 2012; Ferrucci & Perry 2015; Hughey & Goss 2015), as discussed in Chapter 2. In an Australian setting, sport can also serve to act as a legitimate space for the representation of ethnic minorities and Aborigines. The most marked example of this legitimisation is concerning Indigenous athletes, who disproportionally feature in the AFL (Judd 2010). Sport has been used to show “Aborigines that using their bodies is still the one and only way they can compete on equal terms with an often hostile, certainly indifferent, mainstream society” (Tatz 1995, 54). In a similar manner, Folau’s Polynesian heritage is emphasised through the photographs used by the media and club. He consequently becomes an ‘acceptable face’ of Australia’s Tongan community, acting as a role model and potential hero for others, while at the same time limiting their aspirations to sport. The foregrounding of his ‘natural’ ability and physique, and the demeaning treatment of his mental qualities and characteristics, particularly by fans (as discussed above), are certainly congruent with stereotypical racial views on athletes (Coakley, Hallinan & McDonald 2011).
Although the Tongan community may heroise him, his ethnicity has implications on his acceptance as a hero by the dominant Anglo-Celtic core of Australian society.

Ethnicity and Otherness

The AFL has recently attempted to widen the appeal of Australian football to non-traditional markets, and in 2012 recruited ten players from diverse ethnic backgrounds to act as Multicultural Ambassadors. The players were of Brazilian, Polynesian, African and Lebanese heritage (AFL 2012), while Indigenous players, such as Adam Goodes, have also been prominently featured in marketing material (see Figure 6.7). In a culturally diverse region like Western Sydney (NSW 2012), it was hoped that athletes from ethnic minorities would attract fans from similar backgrounds. As mentioned previously, Folau was expected to act as the ambassador for the Polynesian community, but doubts over the effectiveness of his role were raised. For example, journalist Steve Gee (2010) in The Daily Telegraph perhaps unsurprisingly quotes two Polynesian rugby league players who claimed that the Polynesian community in Sydney are not interested in AFL:

“I don't think Israel signing for the AFL will make much of a difference to the Polynesian community…I've got 100 per cent faith Polynesians don't find AFL attractive.” (Roy Asotasi (a New Zealand player of Samoan heritage) quoted by Gee 2010)

and:

“The blokes with the islander backgrounds, they love their contact sport – when I was growing up I hated AFL…it just wasn't a contact sport”. (Michael Jennings (an Australian player of Tongan and Fijian descent who has previously represented Tonga) quoted by Gee 2010)

Folau’s Polynesian heritage is a common theme in media coverage of him (Gee 2010; Kent 2010; Pandaram 2010; Webster 2012), but this focus may actually be detrimental to his heroisation due to the still-pronounced Anglocentric culture of Australia (as detailed in Chapter 2). On the BigFooty message forum several fans equated Australian football with Australianness, with the players believed to be
representative of what the fans saw as the dominant demographic of the Australian population – namely Anglo-Celtic. One post referred to Folau’s move as a Pacific Islander (PI) Experiment (echoing the aforementioned Irish Experiment), and suggested that it was threatening the Australianness of the AFL:

…but i cant say im sorry that one of the PI experiments failed. AFL matches the australian demographic. NRL now has over 45% of pacific island kids in their under 20s comp. the Nrl is flooded with big, talented PI men. i dont begrudge them their talent or opportunity. but NRL could turn it round a bit with less interchange...which they refuse to do. it will kill the game from the bottom up. juniors parents dont want their kids playing monsters. but the change for interchange is something that is inevitable in AFL. the interchange will be slashed to make athletes run more. that will keep AFL 'australian'. and free of a small population of 'explosive' athletes. it will also keep the demographic picture of the australian population reflected in AFL. not the NRL. (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, November 01, 2012, post #24)

Here rugby league is identified as being increasingly dominated by players of Pacific Island descent. This shift in the demographic profile of players in some Australian sports was of concern to a number of contributors. Perceived physical differences between Australians of Anglo-Celtic and Pacific Island descent are from this position regarded as detrimental to the history and traditions of both rugby league and Australian football:

…i wonder how many mums and dads have quietly talked their kids around from playing RL, because of the worry of getting steamrolled by PI kids 30 kg's bigger. (BigFooty, “Israel Folau leaves the Giants”, November 04, 2012, post #48)

…the interchange rule has seen islander heritage players domminate player numbers in the NRL tyo the point that 30% of players are now of islander heritage. (BigFooty, “Folau Predictions”, May 02, 2012, post #86)

As was discussed in Chapter 4, Australia has a history of systemic discrimination against those from visible ethnic minority communities (Taylor Lock & Darcy 2009),
and up until the 1970s this discrimination was deeply embedded within the population and the White Australia policy (Forrest & Dun 2006). While such ‘old racism’ is now less overt, it has been replaced by a ‘new racism’ or ‘cultural racism’ (Markus 2001) that highlights cultural differences and presents ethnic minority groups as “threats to ‘social cohesion’ and ‘national unity’” (Dunn et al. 2004, 411). This ‘new racism’ may explain some of the derogatory comments made about Folau’s personal and mental characteristics.

In their semiotic analysis of Australian life, Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987) identified a distinct accent that is recognisable globally as a clear marker of Australianness, arguing that it may even be the dominant definition of Australianness. The ‘accent’ goes further than just the sound of the Australian voice and they also propose distinctive Australian ways of working, eating, dressing and approaching sport. These elements of the accent are powerful creators of “authenticity and solidarity for many ordinary Australians” (Fiske, Hodge & Turner 1987, 166). This notion of ‘difference’ – with little tolerance of deviation from the norm of Anglo-Celtic, masculine constructions of national identity – is ingrained within Australian society (Langer & Farrar 2003). The perception that an athlete may be considered as ‘different’ based on subtle variations in accent or appearance has implications for the presentation of potential heroes such as Israel Folau. The focus on Folau’s Polynesian background, and perceived physical differences between ‘Australian’ athletes and Polynesian ‘others’, certainly highlights his cultural difference from the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture and positions him as a potential outsider. As such, his acceptance as a hero by Anglo-Celtic fans would be hard to achieve.

Such notions of difference can be fine-grained and have previously been identified in Australian sport. To gain an understanding of how these notions may be played out in the case of Israel Folau, it is worth discussing one such example of constructions of difference. Peter Kell (2000, 117) highlights the role that ethnicity and background play as “markers in determining the credentials of a ‘genuine’ Aussie sporting hero”. Kell presents two potential heroes from the sport of ultra-marathon running. One, Cliff Young, was a ‘true-blue’ Aussie battler with relatively little success. The other, Yiannis Kouros, was the holder of 70 world records (the most of any Australian) and was the dominant figure in the world of ultra-marathons in the 1980s. In this case
athletic ability appears to have been of secondary consideration to the ethnicity of the athletes. The dominant, successful Kouros attained comparatively little standing with the Australian public, and was portrayed mainly as a foreign outsider. While Kouros was a naturalised Australian, his Greek heritage did not apparently appeal to the Anglocentric culture of Australia. As Kell (2000, 121) states, it was “not because he [Kouros] isn’t Australian but more to do with the fact that he is not identified as Australian”. According to Kell, linguistic and cultural backgrounds position some athletes as outsiders. If an athlete does not “sound like us” or “think like us”, it is enough for them to be considered as ‘foreign’. Hallinan and Hughson (2008), in their discussion of association football in Australia, similarly maintain that, because this football code was associated with non-English speaking ethnic communities, it was widely perceived to be ‘un-Australian’. If Folau is identified predominantly as Polynesian, then he may not be seen as ‘sufficiently Australian’ to be accepted as a sporting hero, particularly as heroes are argued by Brunk and Fallaw (2006) to help people identify with a nation, region, or city.

The historical hostility towards otherness that has been present within the AFL, or at least its fans (Tatz 1995; Nadel 1998; Hallinan and Judd 2009a), may also have place Folau at odds with followers of Australian football. As discussed in Chapter 5, my fieldwork observations revealed that the fans of the Giants appeared to be predominantly Anglo-Celtic, further serving to position him, with his lack of AFL experience and knowledge and his Polynesian heritage, as an outsider. While his heritage may not be a significant factor in his villainisation, it may well be an impediment to his heroisation. Folau’s case has, therefore, revealed much about the process of heroisation and offers important analytical insights into several significant areas relating to Australian sport.

**Conclusion**

One key aim of Israel Folau’s move from the NRL to the GWS Giants was to provide a heroic figure for followers of the new club. Although he had not played a single AFL game, he was to be at the forefront of the club’s marketing and promotional activities. In this manner Folau was very much a top-down, imposed hero. AFL fans, in part, initially heroised him because he had left the rival football code to sign for the
Giants. Rugby league adherents villainised him for this switch, and he was subsumed within a wider discourse of a ‘battle’ taking place in Western Sydney between the rival codes. Folau’s heroisation was further impaired as it was revealed that his primary motivation for switching codes was financial gain and, therefore, rather than leading his followers in a missionary or pioneer manner, his migration to the AFL assumed a mercenary quality. AFL fans subsequently villainised him when his on-field performances were below standard and failed to justify his high salary. Clearly the top-down attempts to position Folau as a hero were based on “consumer’s heroism” (Goodman, Duke & Sutherland 2002) which lacked the substance of a bottom-up heroisation process.

While Folau’s time at the Giants may be considered a success based on the amount of media coverage the club gained, it was ultimately unsuccessful in terms of his on-field performance, and this may be the most important factor in his failure to achieve heroic status while at the club. In contrast, during this study one player did emerge as a potential hero, enjoying a much greater degree of on-field success and presented in markedly different ways by the media and the club. This player was Jeremy Cameron, who is the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter 7 – The Good: Jeremy Cameron

As the ball was sent long into the goal square the ball was tipped into the air. Cameron threw himself backwards and volleyed the ball over his head. The ball skimmed the post, narrowly missing a goal, for a behind. The commentators are ecstatic in their assessment: “How good is that?...That might have been goal of the century”

(GWS Giants versus Gold Coast Suns 25th April 2015)

Introduction

If Israel Folau was an imposed top-down hero, a sharp contrast can be made with the subject of this chapter, Jeremy Cameron. At the start of the 2012 AFL season he was not well-known, yet by 2016 he was recognised as a highly talented athlete, had scored 166 goals in just 68 games, and was a focal point for the club’s media. Jeremy Cameron clearly emerged as a hero for the GWS Giants. It is useful, therefore, to chart his rise as a hero as it reveals key attributes in sports hero formation.

This chapter begins by establishing how his athletic ability plays a crucial role in his emergence as a hero. It is demonstrated that his talent was identified as a significant factor on fan forums, in media discussions around him, and in the club’s communications to fans, while his modest, rural background allows him to be presented as ‘Cinderella hero’. In studying Cameron it became clear that the narratives around him are based on well-established myths that are associated with Australian sporting heroes and the wider Australian society. A Channel Seven video feature is examined in the chapter to highlight representations of Cameron’s country upbringing. He is portrayed in a way that draws on rural mythology and a romanticised view of the Australian bush. I argue that the combination of these factors sets him up as an exemplary Australian sports hero.

Personal Ability and Characteristics

In 2015 Jeremy Cameron’s profile on the Giants’ website read:
Jeremy Cameron arrived at the Giants from the tiny town of Dartmoor in Victoria at the age of 17 as an underage recruit. Cameron didn’t begin playing football until the age of 16 but burst on to the AFL scene, making his debut in Round 1, 2012 and finishing his first year as the Giants’ leading goal-kicker. 2013 saw Cameron finish third in the Coleman Medal, become the first Giant to be named in the All-Australian team and win the Kevin Sheedy Medal as the Giants’ Best and Fairest player. (GWS GIANTS 2015)

The profile suggests that he had quickly adjusted to life in the AFL and lived up to his early promise in what was only his second season of playing at the highest level. Cameron rose from relative obscurity to prominence in a very short time and his talent quickly marked him out as a potential hero for fans. While there has been some discrepancy over the age at which he first played AFL (journalists Andrew Wu (2013a) and Peter Hanlon (2010) put his age at 15 and 14 respectively), what is agreed upon is that he did not have the same depth of training as other players typically have.

He had an inauspicious debut and did not feature in my fieldwork observations of the Giants’ first AFL match, being just one of a number of young White players. It was not until his second game that his performance was notable, becoming the first Giants’ player to score more than one goal in a game. Cameron ended the match with four goals, seven marks, and 12 disposals – which also resulted in him being nominated that week for the AFL’s Rising Star award (AAP 2012b). He finished his first season in the AFL as the club’s leading goal kicker, with 29 goals from 16 games (which was no mean feat considering that the club only managed 182 goals in total during this season). In the 2013 season, Cameron (then aged 20) scored 62 goals to finish as the third highest goal kicker in the AFL and was selected in the 2013 All-Australia Team (the team of players identified as having performed best during the season). His rise to being one of the most recognisable names in the GWS Giants’ line-up and indeed the AFL was thus rapid. Throughout the period of study his on-field performances were impressive and identified by both the media and fans as being of a significant, heroic level.

As I have previously argued, for most athletes a prerequisite of selection as a sports hero is the possession of extraordinary playing ability (Parry 2009). The news media
have built Jeremy Cameron up in just such a manner, suggesting that he has athletic ability above not just his own age-group and peers, but potentially above that of most of the players who have played the game. Cameron’s athleticism and ability are key components of his heroisation that emerge in media coverage. While he is physically much leaner than Folau, Cameron is shown to possess a physique and level of talent that surpasses that of most other players. Terms such as “special player” and “freak” used by Freemantle coach Ross Lyon (AAP 2013b) are indicative of the admiration of his talent within the AFL. Media reports also suggest that Cameron has the potential to become an even better player. He has variously been described as a “potential superstar” (Cordy 2014) and a “future AFL star” (Landsberger 2013) by The Daily Telegraph, a future Hall of Famer (Polkinghorne 2013), and a player who would “turn into an unstoppable forward force” (Larkin 2013) in the SMH. In the view of SMH writer Roger Vaughan (2013), Cameron was “already a star and could become an all-time AFL great”, a sentiment echoed by Kevin Sheedy, who was reported as saying that Cameron had the potential to be one of the greatest forwards ever (Warren 2013).

On both the BigFooty and FanFooty forums fans also discussed his ability, with one contributor suggesting that he was “the best full forward talent to emerge in the last 20 years” (BigFooty, “Jeremy Cameron – All Australian Full Forward”, September 30, 2013, post #17). Threads highlighted his youth and relative lack of AFL experience as significant:

How good is this young man. It defies logic that he only started playing Aussie Rules when he was 15 years old. (BigFooty, “Jeremy Cameron – All Australian Full Forward”, September 21, 2013, post #15)

[N]ot many blokes almost win the Coleman [sic] in their second year and bag 90 goals in their first two seasons. (BigFooty, “Jeremy Cameron – All Australian Full Forward”, September 30, 2013, post #20)

Interestingly, the contributors that professed their veneration for Cameron in these forums were not just fans of the GWS Giants:

Even as a Collingwood supporter, I freaking love him. I'm half convinced to buy a GWS jumper with his number on it. (BigFooty, “CH7 Jeremy Cameron #Discovered”, June 24, 2013, post #8)

Two fans went further still and expressed their adoration as follows:

Is it wrong that I want jezza to impregnate my missis? Them genes. (BigFooty, “Jeremy Cameron – All Australian Full Forward”, September 30, 2013, post #21)

and:

I just compared to my wife his resigning to how I felt when I proposed. (BigFooty, “Jeremy Cameron signs five year extension”, March 05, 2015, post #23)

During his first year at the club his performances were recognised by his in being voted the Best First Year Player by the AFL Players’ Association (AFLPA). This achievement was discussed by fans, with one online contributor suggesting that Cameron was “[m]ore than deserving of the recognition from his peers after really putting his stamp on [the Giants’] debut season” (BigFooty, “Jeremy Cameron AFLPA Best First Year Player”, September 11, 2012, post #1). In this manner the media, his club, fellow players, and fans highlight Cameron’s athletic qualities.

The SMH’s Andrew Wu (2013a), identifies a key moment in Cameron’s career when his talent was particularly put on show. It came when he scored seven goals in his 32nd game against Collingwood at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). Wu (2013a) describes this feat as being against “the biggest club in the land on the hallowed turf of the MCG”, which is an iconic Australian venue steeped in cricket and AFL tradition. It is the biggest stadium in the country and the venue for the AFL’s Grand Final each year. Scoring seven goals on such a public stage was a
performance that helped to foster Cameron’s burgeoning heroic status and facilitated the ritual retelling, and subsequent heroising, of his performance (Drucker 1994).

The Giants were quick to identify Cameron’s ability and the recognition that he was receiving, and email communications with club members by the GWS Giants frequently make use of player images as banners and graphics. As discussed in Chapter 6, in 2012, prior to his departure from the club, images of Israel Folau had featured prominently in club communications, often appearing alongside teammates Phil Davis, Callan Ward, and Tom Scully. Folau’s departure from the club obviously led to his image being removed from Giants’ publicity materials. They subsequently used either group images, typically with eight Giants players standing and looking down at the camera (Figure 7.1), or with Davis, Ward, and Scully appearing together, ‘Folau-less’, in a variety of poses (Figure 7.2). While Cameron features in some club communications, it is primarily when his achievements are being promoted, such as on the 16th September 2013 when the club announced that he had won All-Australian honours (Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.1. GWS Giants Email Banner 1st November 2012

Figure 7.2. GWS Giants Email Banner 4th October 2012
Given Cameron’s pre-eminence as the club’s highest achieving player and his growing profile as a hero, it is initially surprising that he does not feature more prominently in marketing activities, particularly in 2013, when he had received numerous accolades. Yet under AFL and AFLPA rules, the Giants have restrictions placed on the use of his image because Cameron was yet to have an ‘image agreement’ that allowed the club unconditional use (fieldnotes 21st January 2014). The Giants could only use his image for limited purposes, such as to promote a particular game, as part of a group with at least three other players (providing all are
shown equally), or for the promotion and publication of the AFL Awards. Despite the restrictions on the use of photographs of him in marketing materials, the club did identify Cameron’s growing status as a hero and featured him whenever possible. It deliberately portrayed him as dynamic and athletic, in an active pose and often overcoming an opponent. Alternatively, he was shown celebrating an achievement with mouth wide-open and muscle and sinew apparent (see Figure 7.7).

The images of Cameron used by the club and the media tend to follow a similar pattern to the ‘national images’ of Australians that were used to celebrate Australia’s bicentenary (see Chapter 4), although his body lacks the tan previously associated with Australian national images (Eddy 1991) or even with bush-bronzed ‘diggers’ (Bellanta & Martin 2012), perhaps due to increased awareness of skin cancer (Iannacone & Green 2014). It should also be noted that his Whiteness is in contrast to Folau’s ‘other’ body. By recreating elements and messages from these earlier representations, the club and the media are tapping into a traditional picture of Australianness (see Chapter 4) and presenting the player as embodying strength, athleticism, and determination. While this portrayal may be unintentional, an inherently masculine image of Australianness is presented and reaffirmed through these sporting images (Ward 2010). One noteworthy example of how the Giants were able to use his image was the 2013 Giants Yearbook (see Figure 7.4), which was distributed free to all Giants members and also available for purchase.
On the front cover Cameron is pictured ‘marking’ (taking a high catch) above three other players, along with the caption “JEREMY CAMERON: A GIANT RISING STAR”, a reference to his nomination for the 2012 AFL Rising Star Award. This award is given annually to the young player (under the age of 21 on January 1st of that year and having played fewer than ten games previously) deemed to be the most outstanding during a season. It aims to identify young players with the potential to rise above their peers. Fans’ discussions are also indicative of their belief that Cameron is a player of some potential:

Just like to agree with others, a great achievement by our very own Jezza, 2nd year player, still only 20, playing a lone hand in our forward line in a very young, inexperienced team. Impossible to overstate it. Makes it extra special that he has been there since our pre-AFL days. He's likely to become our first 200 game player (as in playing all his games at GWS), and on track to become our very first AFL legend. (BigFooty, “Jeremy Cameron – All Australian Full Forward”, October 01, 2013, post #24)
Kids a Gun in the making. We will enjoy watching this guy for a decade.  
(FanFooty Forum, “Cameron”, September 08, 2013, 01:03:36 AM)

The assumed longevity of his playing career sits in contrast with the typically short-lived nature of stardom (as was discussed in Chapter 3), and further points to the notion that he is a hero rather than a star. Indeed, the use of terms such as ‘legend’ by fans is further evidence that they think that he will continue to perform at such a level for some time. Fans, therefore, believe that Cameron will have a long-lasting impact on the AFL and so is deemed to be heroic.

The Role of Personality

As I have discussed elsewhere, sport heroes are often recognised regarding their behaviour or personality (Parry 2009 and Chapter 4) and, as is the case with celebrities, sport fans want to know about the personal lives of the top athletes (Smart 2005). Like other sports heroes (Wann et al. 2001) and heroic figures from Australia’s past (see Chapter 4), Cameron was presented as being humble and linked to historical, masculine constructions of Australianness and his social media profile and presentation in the media have helped to position his personality as heroic.

As is evident also in the unassuming and casual attire that he wears in media appearances (such as in #Discovered Jeremy Cameron, as is detailed below), narratives position him as humble and unassuming, as may be expected of an apparently unpromising hero (Klapp 1948; 1949a). Cameron alludes to his connection to the country and to its claimed beneficial impact on him. In doing so, an image of him as a normal young man with interests outside of his sport is created, and popular media have further been used to present these aspects of his personality. Like many athletes Cameron makes use of Twitter, and the club has also exploited his growing hero status with fans by featuring him in its social media activities. For example, in July 2013 members and fans were asked to suggest questions for the “GIANT Rising Star” to answer, making use of the hashtag #askjezza on Twitter (GWS GIANTS 2013a). While many athletes have been the subject of controversy when using Twitter for personal expression (Hutchins & Rowe 2012), Cameron has so far used it to develop his public profile in a positive manner and so creating what
Hutchins and Rowe (2012) describe as ‘mediated visibility’. As of October 2016 he has produced 1,034 tweets and has over eleven thousand followers on this social media platform, allowing an uncensored, albeit managed, insight into his life and personality, while at the same time promoting himself in a manner reflective of fellow AFL player Karmichael Hunt (Hutchins 2010). Cameron’s down-to-earth self-presentation is echoed in his Twitter profile (@Jezzacameron) on which, in January 2016 (since updated), his personal information read:

Kickin [sic] the pig skin around for a living, tryin [sic] to be rex hunt [a former Australian football player turned commentator and fishing journalist], part time professional [sic] shooter, good at climbing trees and sleeping

‘Selifies’ of him with his teammates are common on his profile, along with photographs at club events or functions, and of him fishing. Cameron has managed to build and maintain a clean-cut image that may appeal to the more traditional fans who often associate themselves with less consumption-driven lifestyles according to Giulianiotti (2002). It may also be a refreshing alternative to the scandal-plagued lives of some modern athletes – such as the aforementioned Karmichael Hunt, who has been involved in a number of scandals, including being banned for using cocaine. Cameron’s image is further enhanced through reports of his love of sleep, to which he makes reference in his Twitter profile (as noted above). He also admits to sleeping for up to thirteen hours at night, on planes and buses, and even during team meetings (Cordy 2013). In contrast to Folau’s racialised laziness, Cameron’s sleeping is presented in a positive manner. Australians have often been represented as hedonistic to the point of being lazy (Rowe 1993), and there is an element of this characterisation in Cameron’s image. He is, therefore, again representing traditional versions of Australianness.

Authenticity and user engagement are the key factors in attracting and maintaining social media followers (Pronschinske, Groza & Walker 2012), and it is significant that Cameron’s self-presentation in social media is reflected in media accounts. He is shown as ‘authentic’ in his passions and hobbies. There is also a degree of child-like innocence to this element of the narrative because, despite his on-field success and off-field recognition (and despite living in a ‘corrupting’ city environment), he is keen to suggest that he draws pleasure from simple practices such as sleeping, fishing and
climbing trees. Cameron’s ‘unsophisticated’ and innocent presentation belies his athletic ability and sets him up as an unpromising hero. An innocent-yet-wise portrayal of Australians has been emphasised and popularised through films such as *The Castle* and *Crocodile Dundee* (Greiner 2001) as argued in Chapter 4, and so Cameron’s image also resonates with accepted and comfortable images of Australianess. The importance of ‘mates’ (and ‘mateship’ is a key element of Australian identity, as was discussed in Chapter 4) frequently comes through in the stories that Cameron tells about himself. For instance, Cameron says that, during his childhood, he would fish with friends after school; when learning to play AFL he claims that he spent time practising with friends, and now as a player he spends time ‘chilling out’ with other country boys (Channel Seven 2013). Australian men are reputedly staunchly loyal to their mates, with the implicit assumption being that they prioritise spending time with each other over women.

While charisma may be identified as a key characteristic of heroes (Brunk & Fallaw 2006), this does not emerge in narratives surrounding Cameron. Instead, he is portrayed as modest and, to a certain extent unexciting given his passion for simple pastimes such as fishing. ‘Jezza’ (a nickname used by the club, player, and fans alike) is portrayed as being relatively ordinary in his personal life. During the opening of the Giants’ Learning Life Centre in 2014, he was recognised as being the reigning mini-golf champion at the club, with reference made to his all-round athletic ability (fieldnotes 18th February 2014). Cameron appeared shy and embarrassed at this recognition. His personality was in contrast to that of Kevin Sheedy who, although no longer the team’s coach, was present and displayed a willingness to be the centre of attention. While it is far from uncommon to see reports of illicit or transgressive off-field misbehaviour by AFL players (Wilson, Stavros & Westberg 2008; Hopwood, Kitchin & Skinner 2010), the most ‘scandalous’ report (at the time of writing) about Cameron was his aforementioned love for sleep and of taking any opportunity to get a “nanna nap” (Cordy 2013). His image is unblemished and attributes attached to him in the media highlight his being level-headed and humble. Cameron’s media-driven image is also recognised by fans, with the below fan forum post an example of fans’ views of his personality:
What a refreshing attitude he has. Even if we do sign a superstar next year in Buddy [Franklin] you can still see Jeremy Cameron being a fan favourite, he is just a likeable character. (BigFooty, “CH7 Jeremy Cameron #Discovered”, June 24, 2013, post #2)

In responses to questions about his role in the team, Cameron is reported in the SMH as saying that his focus was on holding his spot (Warren 2014). It should be noted that comments such as these are likely to be influenced by the club’s media advisors and are indicative of standard responses by modern athletes (Billings, Butterworth & Turman 2012). Media reports also point towards the esteem with which those who work with Cameron hold him. For instance, David Matthews, the CEO of the Giants, describes him as not just a talented player but also an outstanding person with great resilience (Cordy 2014). Sheedy, who coached him during his first two AFL seasons, also identified his positive personal characteristics, highlighting his maturity (AAP 2012b), courage, determination, and strength (Wu 2013b). Discussions of Cameron in the media also make reference to his teammates emphasising his unselfishness, which at times may be detrimental to his own success (AAP 2013a). Such positive representations are in contrast to the discussion of Israel Folau’s personal qualities and characteristics, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Although it was the on-field performances of Cameron that primarily positioned him as a hero, his image was also shaped and framed by the media, with particular reference to myths and narratives concerning heroes and Australian national identity. These myths were particularly obvious in a video feature that was produced by the free-to-air television broadcaster of the AFL, Channel Seven. Detailed analysis of this feature provides the basis for a discussion of the role of myth in the construction of Cameron’s heroic image.

#Discovered Jeremy Cameron – Presenting a Country Boy

In 2013, Channel Seven (2013) aired a three-minute feature on Jeremy Cameron as part of its #Discovered series that was shown during its Saturday Night Football coverage. This episode was awarded the Grant Hattam Trophy for excellence in sports journalism by the AFL Players Association (McInerney 2013). This video was
typical of both the media coverage and club communications relating to him during this period. The broadcast was set up in such a way as to present Cameron apparently telling his own story. It focussed on his off-field life and the aim was clearly to provide insight into him as a person. The #Discovered series aimed to bring a creative and artistic quality to the AFL, and this episode was no exception. The soundtrack was Sigur Rós’ ethereal Ókki Múkk, which evokes a sense of mysticism about the setting and the screen subject.

![Figure 7.5. Screenshot of the opening scene from #Discovered Jeremy Cameron](image)

The broadcast opens with the sun rising over a bush landscape, Australia’s clichéd red dawn sky as the backdrop and a soundscape punctuated by the sound of kookaburras (Figure 7.5). The opening presents a stereotypical view of the Australian bush, and the connotative signification of this image is to numerous concepts of ‘Australia’. Such images, which are reinforced by popular media discourses, are often designed to appeal to a very Westernised audience (Greiner 2001). The mythological signification of this opening shot serves to naturalise hegemonic masculine, White constructs of Australia, prioritising this version over, for instance, Indigenous
constructions of Australia. It is into this setting that Jeremy Cameron comes into focus, as the rising sun first silhouettes him and then creates a halo-like effect around him. Cameron is shown gazing up at the scenery around him with a look of awe (Figure 7.6).

As the camera pans to the bush scenery, Cameron’s voice cuts through:

This is probably the best thing about Dartmoor, it’s so remote and there’s not much here but…It’s so different but, [um,] in a good way.

Cameron reminisces about his time growing up in Dartmoor, a small township in the Glenelg Shire in south-western Victoria that, according to the 2011 census, has only 134 dwellings and a population of 263 (ABS 2013). There is evidence for Indigenous occupation of the Glenelg Shire dating to 10,000 years ago (Jean, Kellaway & Rhodes 2002) but at the time of #Discovered Jeremy Cameron the population was sparse. Located almost 400 kilometres from Melbourne, Dartmoor is a ‘country town’. Where Cameron is from is significant when analysing the development of fan identification and the formation of heroes. His inextricable link to his Dartmoor roots
immediately positions him outside the Giants’ local community. Although not all heroised players are representatives of their locale (Harms & Jobling 1995), geography has been shown to be a key factor in fan identification (Hunt, Bristol & Bashaw 1999), and traditional spectators (those with local identification to a club) may still look for local associations in their heroes (Giulianotti 2002; Parry 2009). However, it is clear that Cameron is not positioned as an outsider nor is he ostracised because he is not local. Quite to the contrary, his rural roots are amplified, highlighted, and used positively and deliberately to paint a very different narrative in his positioning as a hero.

The frequent mentions of the size of his hometown in the video and media stories on him (for example, Lloyd 2013; Wu (2013a) indicate that this size is significant for the romanticism of the struggle against adversity that being from a small town entails. Such struggles have been historically associated with the ‘Aussie battler’, an Anglo-Celtic Australian heroic type, and so the small-scale of Dartmoor, along with its unglamorous location, are used to create a ‘rags-to-riches’ hero narrative around him. This narrative is reinforced by media references to Cameron’s youth in phrases such as a “boy from the bush” (Wu 2013a) and the “Dartmoor kid” (Lloyd 2013), both of which were used by the SMH. He is portrayed as the embodiment of every schoolboy’s dream, rising from humble origins to grace some of the country’s elite sports stadiums.

The frequent description of the player as a ‘country boy’ by the media, the Giants’ marketing department, and a media-savvy Cameron is a recurring one within Australian sport. For example, rural life was eulogised as a key element in the appeal of sporting heroes such as Australian tennis player and Queensland farm boy Rod Laver (Segrave 2013). Similarly, former Australian Test cricket captain Mark Taylor has been portrayed as an ordinary, humble country boy who possessed extraordinary ability (Kell 2000). Narratives around Taylor also focused on notions such as dedication, dependability and loyalty, with these qualities being seen as typical of battling country boys. In Chapter 4 the mythical notion of the Aussie battler was identified as a key element in images of Australianness, and it has commonly been associated with the nation’s athletes. The figure of the battler, which has been
celebrated consistently in Australian culture (Milner 2009; Falcous & Anderson 2011; Whitman 2013), has continuing resonance, particularly when hailing from the bush.

Recently, the notion of the naturally talented country boy who succeeded at sport was brought sharply into focus with the death of Australian cricketer Phillip Hughes in November 2014. Following Hughes’ death, media stories (often drawing on interviews with teammates and family) presented him as an “innocent” (Webster 2014), a “country boy” (Doolan 2014) who would frequently return to his country home and beloved Angus cattle (Fitzsimmons 2014). Hughes was also presented as having natural talent and a technique that was attributed to his country roots (Earle 2014) rather than coaching (ABC 2014). Speaking at Hughes’ funeral, James Sutherland, the Chief Executive Officer of Cricket Australia, emphasised the role that the idea of the ‘country boy’ has played in Australian sport by saying:

“Ever since Bradman, the image of the innocent country boy playing in the backyard, while dreaming of wearing a baggy green cap, has become entrenched in our [Australia’s] psyche”. (Quoted in Webster 2014)

According to Sutherland, the country boy image that resonates with Australian sport was popularised by the case of Bradman. Hutchins (2005, 30) states that the narrative around Bradman is that a “simple country lad excels in the meritocracy of sport, goes on to become a national hero, but never forgets his country roots”. This upbringing is set against the putative sophistication, power, and corrupting influence of the city. The natural/social obstacles of rural life present barriers against which the country boy must battle. In typical heroic tales, he will ultimately, and inevitably, overcome these hurdles. Hutchins (2005, 33) identifies Bradman’s “lack of formal coaching” as the key to his image as a battling boy from the bush. It is contended that he received little or no coaching, possessed no coaching books, and played little sport with children of his own age. Hutchins (2005, 33) describes his representation as that of a “country-bred immaculate talent” who did not need external help because his talent (supernaturally) was ‘born into him’ in the Australian bush. For Cameron, this ‘immaculate talent’ narrative is replicated and again positions him as a heroic ‘boy from the bush’ with his talent imbued in him by the bush – the claimed centre of Australia’s creativity (Curthoys 1997).
When discussing his first experience of playing Australian football, Cameron describes it as almost occurring by chance, again serving to reinforce the myth of his natural talent. It was not part of a formal development program, and he had not received years of coaching. Despite this natural ability, Cameron also stresses how hard he had to work – probably harder than other players – because he was younger and did not have the benefit of the same degree of coaching. In #Discovered Jeremy Cameron, he talks about his first game of Australian football, saying how one day in 2007 in an unplanned, serendipitous encounter he walked over to a training session at the local Dartmoor club. Club officials subsequently approached his parents to ask permission for him to play, first for the reserve side and then the senior side soon afterward (Wu 2013a). He had no previous experience of playing Australian football and (similarly to Folau) was yet to see a live AFL match (Green 2013). Aged approximately 14 (Hanlon 2010) or 15 years (Wu 2013a), he would have been younger and less seasoned than his opponents, which are described by Cameron as very tough and inherently masculine, being farmers or “cowboys” (Channel Seven 2013). It seems inconceivable that a boy of 14 or 15 could compete with such rivals, and yet he enjoyed success. His mother was quoted by SMH writer Andrew Wu (2013a) as saying that she “felt a bit sorry for the other kids” when they competed against her son, as he was more talented than they were. Here an image is being constructed of a child who is talented and tough beyond his years, outgrowing his peers and testing himself against his seniors. This image is again reminiscent of Hutchins’ (2005) description of Bradman, who also preferred to play against adult opponents rather than children of his own age, and is identified with wider heroic narratives and myths. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, the feats of athletes become mythologised through ritual retelling, and such exceptional athletic ability is seen as being indicative of heroic status.

In #Discovered Jeremy Cameron, the subject describes himself as being “pretty relaxed, like all country boys are”. He states that he spends time with other country boys while he is in Sydney, and that they “chill out together and do [their] own thing” (Channel Seven 2013). His discussion of the difference between players from the city and those from the country suggests a sense of difference, with a shared – implicitly superior – identity among the ‘country boys’, who have collective tastes and interests. The implied distinction between the ‘country boys’ and the ‘city boys’ is further
reinforced when he declares that the city boys – those that grew up in the city – have a love of shopping and that, having grown up with this habit, they were always spending time in the shops. The association of Cameron with the country, and his antipathy towards urban pursuits such as shopping, position him as an alternative to the feminised, metrosexual lifestyle that emerged in the late twentieth century (Coad 2008). For Cameron shopping is a utilitarian, feminine pursuit and not a suitably masculine leisure activity, and that he only frequents one of the major supermarkets presumably in order to shop for groceries. As a result, he is again associated with traditional versions of the Australian masculine type and plays his part in further propagating the myth of the boy from the bush.

Russel Ward (1988, 73), as noted in Chapter 4, argues that in the nineteenth century there existed in Australia a belief that the ‘true’ or ‘typical’ Australians were the “men of the outback”. Ward (1988) claims that the country is celebrated because it lacks the temptations of the city, the perils of the lawmen, and of ‘emasculating’ family life. In Cameron’s case the perils of the city are no longer lawmen, but shopping malls and consumption. The lack of “things to do” in Dartmoor (Channel Seven 2013) point to a simplicity in Cameron’s upbringing that did not involve the distractions of city life. In contrast to the city’s (possibly) corrupting influences, Cameron discusses his continued love of fishing and hunting, simple pastimes that are removed from the city, and serve to reinforce the country boy narrative. In #Discovered Jeremy Cameron, Cameron claims that his time in the city is only temporary and that, in the future, “I can really see myself back in a nice, um, a quiet town, I’m not sure if it will be Dartmoor but hopefully somewhere like this”. A triumphant return home is a key element in the boy from the bush myth and the wider heroic journey narrative and, if he does make such a return, would further reinforce his association with these heroic signifiers.

Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987) claim that the discourse that affirms nature over culture continues to be one of the enduring myths of Australia, and was still relevant in the late twentieth century. They contend that Australians continue to see the outdoors as the “natural location for social interaction” (Fiske, Hodge & Turner 1987, 43), and that the continued importance of outdoor spaces points to a connection to these earlier myths of the outback. There is a clear contradiction in this eulogising of
country life. While the image of idyllic country living that #Discovered Jeremy Cameron provides is one that is commonly used in other media representations of Australia (Greiner 2001), it is not supported by material evidence. Many country towns in Australia are bereft of amenities, employment opportunities, and infrastructure (Darian-Smith 2002). They have higher rates of socio-economic deprivations, lower access to health services and consequently higher suicide rates than urban centres (Cheung et al. 2012). While Cameron confessed his love for living in the country, and his desire to return to it, around 85 per cent of the Australian population now live in urban areas. A rural mythology and nostalgic vision of country life has been developed by these urban dwellers as ‘ruralism’ (viewing country dwellers as the bearers of idealised values) remains deeply embedded in Australian culture (Rowe 1993).

In keeping with this stereotypical and romanticised image of the rural, fishing is claimed to have been a “big part” of Cameron’s early life, and it is a practice that has been passed down through the generations of his family, which further underlines his deep connections to the bush. He discusses how he would go down “to the local river hole” after school with his friends. As his voice is heard on the audio of #Discovered Jeremy Cameron, the image is of him standing on a jetty at one such spot, fishing by himself in the early morning light (Figure 7.7). There is a sense of solitude and quiet contentment to the image of Cameron “chilling out” by himself. In a similar vein to Bradman’s childhood, Cameron’s early years also involved guns and shooting, and he claims “hunting is probably one of [his] most favourite things to do”. In Channel Seven’s video documentary he is shown with a variety of guns and rifles, and with his close friends and family taking aim at empty bottles. In the footage he appears focussed yet also relaxed. The sound of gunfire cuts through the backing music. An image of rural life is created with an Australian man enjoying simple masculine rural pursuits such as hunting and fishing in a tranquil, unspoilt setting. Yet again, these constructions of Cameron’s childhood and his favoured pastimes fit the stereotypical, mythologised images of the leisure-loving, outback-living masculine Australian lifestyle that are common in its popular culture (Greiner 2001). These pursuits are especially significant as Australia’s iconic figures, from the bushman, through the digger, to the surf lifesaver, have all embodied masculine struggles against adversity – whether the adversary be the landscape, enemy soldiers, or the sea (see Chapter 4).
These heroic figures have been portrayed in ways that emphasise their masculinity, including the display of their bodies to the admiring gaze of the public.

The #Discovered Jeremy Cameron feature also shows Cameron walking through the bush on his own, once more gazing up at the natural beauty around him. He is pictured against the backdrop of the trees armed now only with a stick, with the seclusion emphasised by the calls of birds (Figure 7.8). At a denotative level this image can be simply read as showing a man enjoying the Australian bush, but at connotative level he is portrayed as being at one with nature. At the third order of signification, a mythological image of the Australian bush is presented, with Cameron in the centre of it. In a previous interview with Herald Sun journalist Warwick Green, Cameron speaks of how he “used to know all the pine trees” around Dartmoor and would use them to navigate his way (quoted in Green 2013). A sense of harmony with nature and mysticism is evoked, as it is implied that he does not need the aid of compasses or modern tracking devices. This navigational ability is reminiscent of those possessed by Russel Ward’s bushmen (1998), and his love of hunting and fishing point towards an ability to subdue and overcome nature and to live off the land. Cameron appears to be representing many of the characteristics that early
settlers and bushmen embodied and valued, and which were deemed to be heroic in both nineteenth and twentieth century Australia. Cameron’s heroic qualities are seemingly not limited to sport-specific domains but also to historically resilient notions of contemporary Australianness.

As already intimated, the constructed narrative behind Cameron’s heroism is not just limited to Australian contexts, but is indicative of older, wider global myths. Cordy (2013) describes as “a fairy tale” the progression from his first, almost unintentional steps into Australian football to being recognised as one of the top players in his team and the league. The narrative presented is very much in the mythical mould: a young boy of humble origins travels to the bright lights of the big city, where he faces the challenges of older, harder players. Under the tutelage of a grizzled, experienced coach he begins to tackle the seemingly unassailable odds. Eventually, he overcomes the obstacles and hardships that were placed in his way and emerges victorious to achieve long-lasting fame and glory. Such is the familiarity of this narrative to societies across the world that it has become the conventional representation of sports
heroes in Hollywood film (Jones 2008). Narratives found in Cameron’s career also echo Campbell’s heroic journey (discussed in Chapter 4), which is often recreated in the stories built up around the lives of athletes (Dorinson 1997; Rhodes 2011). This story also taps into many of the enduring mythical accounts of heroes. In the terminology of Orrin E. Klapp (1948), this narrative of heroic progress is presenting him as a variant of what he describes as ‘the Cinderella’ or unpromising hero, whereby a “person of youthful or unpromising appearance…a hero who apparently hasn't a chance, who perhaps has been ridiculed, rises to success over more favoured opponents” (Klapp 1948, 136). Interestingly, Klapp goes on to suggest that professional sports teams may be able to publicise young players with (hidden) promise in just such a manner in order to facilitate the creation of a new sports heroes. Jeremy Cameron has been presented as a personification of this mythologised heroic type.

Conclusion
This chapter has provided an insight into the narratives that have been built up around Jeremy Cameron, a young GWS Giants’ player of obvious talent who the club, the media, and fans believe has potential to match some of the great players in AFL history. One of the defining characteristics of sport is that it is competitive (Coakley et al. 2009), and from the earliest athletic contests competitors have striven to show that they are the best and so worthy of adoration. It is these “exceptional performances in competitive settings” (Smart 2005, 195) that are typically a pre-requisite for an athlete to become venerated as a hero. The quantification of sports performances allows athletes to be ranked and compared, and is one of the key features of modern sport (Guttmann 2004). Media reports comparing Cameron to past players have helped to establish his heroic status. His talent has already been recognised through a number of awards from both the club and the wider AFL community, but despite this success he continues to be portrayed as a ‘normal’, humble, young man. Importantly, his athletic feats allow a narrative of heroic performance to be built up around him. In a similar manner, fans of the club also identify him as possessing heroic qualities and his heroisation is, therefore, not solely the product of a top-down process. These heroic narratives were based on two
important elements, mythical constructions of heroism and myths of masculine Australian identity.

The first element drew on historical/mythical heroic types and, in particular, on the unpromising or Cinderella hero. Romanticised reconstructions of Cameron’s unglamorous upbringing, combined with his humble and down-to-earth personality, are then contrasted with his superior ability. The initial struggles of his club further set up his feats as heroic, because he is shown to be battling against superior opposition.

In the context of Australian society, narratives around Cameron have drawn heavily on the ‘boy from the bush’ mythology, which is associated with an idealisation of Anglo-Celtic country life and which continues to resonate within Australian sport and society. Despite the importance of homosocial mateship to Cameron, he was keen to stress that he was not associated with metrosexual ideals; he remains linked to more traditional Australian masculine types. He also fits with the longstanding accepted image of an AFL player, which is connected with notions of Whiteness (Hallinan & Judd 2009a). The traditional association of the AFL with the concept of Australianness will be further explored in Chapter 8.

Cameron is still emerging as a hero within the club and, as he has not yet had a long-lasting career, Cameron cannot, currently, be considered as a ‘great’. During the initial stages of this study, the Giants did have someone at the club who may be considered an AFL ‘great’, Kevin Sheedy, and he forms the subject of the third heroisation case study. As with the case of Cameron, Sheedy has been associated with existing constructions of heroisation and also typified the White Australian national identity that has long been connected with Australian football (Hallinan & Judd 2009b).
Chapter 8 – The Ugly: Kevin Sheedy

Sheedy strode in with an air of confidence. Taking his place in the centre of the room he stood legs apart, chest forward, like a drill sergeant about to take parade (fieldnotes 20\textsuperscript{th} May 2014)

Introduction

Kevin Sheedy (who, it is stressed, is not literally to be regarded as ‘ugly’) was recruited to be the initial ‘face’ of the Giants, promoting and establishing the club, and following his retirement from coaching in 2013 he remained on the board until 2015. He thus played a significant role in shaping the club and was the focus of considerable media coverage. Sheedy is regarded as a ‘legendary’ figure within the AFL, being renown for his imaginative tactics and outspoken nature. This chapter details how the Giants utilised his reputation to aid the initial development of their team’s culture. Moreover, it shows how although not a player he was associated with historical notions of heroisation, such as long-lasting achievements and traditional images of Australian national identity. These qualities combined to create a nostalgia-heavy construction of a quintessentially Australian hero.

This chapter begins by exploring how Sheedy’s legendary status in the AFL, which resulted from his involvement in a record number of games, was framed as heroic. It then discusses how the media portrayed him as a leader in areas such as education and Indigenous rights, which again feature as characteristic of heroes. Finally, an analysis of his ‘cunning’ nature, which can be equated with a heroic archetype, details how he was able to market his club and the league in a manner that was frequently controversial.

An Australian Legend

Heroes are admired because they stand out from their peers due to their extraordinary merits or attainments (Klapp 1954b). Kevin Sheedy is, according to his own website at least, “one of the [sic] Australian football’s best known and most enduring figures” (Sheedy Vision 2013). Sheedy, or ‘Sheeds’ as he is often affectionately called, is
certainly one of the AFL’s most prominent ‘characters’, having played or coached in more than 1000 Australian football games. As a player he won three Premiership titles and added a further four as a coach. He played 251 games for Richmond in a 12-year playing career, coached a further 634 games over 26 years with Essendon, and finished with 44 games as the head coach of the GWS Giants (SMH 2012c). Sheedy won all of his coaching Premierships as a coach with Essendon, and has also twice been named coach of the All-Australian team. His achievements on and off the field have been recognised by those involved in Australian football by his induction into both the Richmond Team of the Century and the AFL’s Hall of Fame. He has received the Advance Australia Award in 1993, was admitted as a Member of the Order of Australia in 1998, and was voted The Australian Thinker of the Year in 2008 (Sheedy Vision, 2013). Due to his history in Australian football and his reputation in the AFL, Sheedy has assumed a legendary status that can be considered heroic.

He has also played a crucial role in marketing both the AFL and the GWS Giants, and this was a key part of his job at the club. Media stories frequently focussed on this facet of his work. His marketing ability stems from the cleverness and guile that has at times caused controversy. He was also a pioneer, advocating the benefits of education and learning, and promoting the rights of Australia’s Indigenous community. An analysis of club email communications and media coverage in the *SMH* and *The Daily Telegraph* revealed that he was represented in terms of themes of ‘Australianness’ that were tied, in particular, to working-class ideals and the Anzac spirit.

Like Folau, Kevin Sheedy was also recruited to give the club profile. Also like Folau he did not have on-field success during his time with the Giants. Media reports and fans frequently referred to his standing in Australian football, his four Premierships wins as a coach (Wilson 2012), and his past Premiership successes (Wu 2012) as a way of reinforcing his status. Additionally, his “AFL record 20-game winning start to the 2000 season” (Cowley 2012c) and the longevity of his “28-year, 637-game, coaching career” (Cowley 2012a, 14), were used by journalists to frame him as a “master coach” (Wu 2013b; Wu 2013d) who was, in fact, “one of the greatest coaches in AFL history” (Cowley 2012b, 10). Fans also frequently refer to him as a “legend” in online discussions (BigFooty, “Kevin Sheedy’s open letter to Andrew Newbold”,

192
February 26, 2013, post #5). The quote below exemplifies typical comments about him:

No matter what age Sheedy is he still knows everything about the game and his coaching methods are brilliant. He is one of the best coaches the game has seen. (FanFooty, “Sheeds:The new Coach!!”, May 01, 2010, 07:58:31 AM)

The 2009 announcement that he would coach the GWS AFL team generated much media interest, with the publicity valued at $6.5 million by the AFL (AFL 2010a). Both *The Daily Telegraph* and *SMH* acknowledged his record in the game. His status was clearly one of the reasons for his appointment as the Giants’ coach, as it raised the profile of the fledgling club and provided it with a link to Australian football history.

During the 2012 season Sheedy celebrated the historic achievement of becoming the first man as either a player or a coach to be involved in 1,000 games (when pre-season and All-Australian matches are taken into consideration). The club was at the forefront of efforts to highlight this achievement, promoting it via email to members (see Figure 8.1) and at the game itself, when it allowed fans to celebrate the occasion by signing a ‘Tribute Wall’ (Figure 8.2).

![Image](image11thJuly2012.png)

Figure 8.1. Email image 11th July 2012
In online discussions, fans expressed their awe at this achievement and some suggested that it might never be matched:

1000 games, an unbelievable milestone. Will anyone match it you think. (BigFooty, “Sheeds’ 1000th”, August 03, 2012, post #8)

You never say never (about anyone reaching a record), but some records like…this one, really do look almost unattainable. And Sheeds can still add some 25 games to it. (BigFooty, “Sheeds’ 1000th”, August 03, 2012, post #11)

Sheedy’s longevity in Australian football is a key element in how the club presented him and how both the media and fans heroised him. In Chapter 3, it was established that it has traditionally only been when a person’s achievements have stood the test of time that they can be seen as a “great man” and honoured as a hero (Carlyle 1840).
contrast to these long-lasting achievements, the celebrity lifestyle and commodification-driven following of many modern athletes (Gilmour & Rowe 2010) is based on the ‘well-knownness’ of the athlete rather than the deeds of a hero. Drucker (1994) argues that the media has driven hero formation, resulting in the creation of sports celebrities rather than sports heroes. The image of Sheedy as a legendary figure in the AFL, which transcends the modern temporal (and fleeting) presence of a ‘celebrity’, has been deliberately exploited by the Giants. Sheedy’s long career and his reputation surpass this modern media-driven ‘celebritisation’ and, therefore he can be defined as a hero. The representations of his playing and coaching career used by the club include black and white images (see Figures 8.1 – 8.3), which locate his career historically and generate nostalgia around it. His link to the past offers a ‘rose-tinted’ view of bygone days (Wann et al. 2001) when sportspeople were seen as being more heroic than their current equivalents (Russell 2006).

Sheedy’s retirement from coaching in 2013 enabled the club to promote and celebrate his achievements. It utilised images from his career in an email banner (Figure 8.3) and even developed a commemorative guernsey that documented his contribution to “the greatest game on the planet” (see Figures 8.4 and 8.5). At Sheedy’s last match as the Giants’ Head Coach in Sydney, against Richmond on 25th August 2013, the club’s ‘race’ or banner again paid tribute to his involvement in Australian football (Figure 8.6).

Figure 8.3. Email image 19th August 2013
Figure 8.4. Email banner 20th August 2013

Figure 8.5. Email banner 16th July 2013
Again, a feeling of nostalgia was created around Sheedy’s final games as coach. The commemorative shirt that was produced was replicated on flags that were handed out to spectators when the Giants played Richmond (Figure 8.7). In both of these instances the history and achievements of Sheedy featured prominently in the narratives that were created around him. The Giants’ use of activities such as a tribute wall (see figure 8.2) and involvement of fans in commemorative activities to celebrate his last game helped to foster a collective interpretation of these nostalgia-filled events. Such collective nostalgic interpretations further serve to position him as a hero (Snyder 1991).
It has been shown that Australian football fans place importance on the historical performances of teams and players (Klugman 2006), and treat those that demonstrate superior talent to their peers as heroes. Sheedy’s record provides the foundation of the stories created around him and, in this case, while the Giants did not have a history, they were able to create a vicarious connection to the past through him. One fan, for example, identified that he was actually “making history by being the first coach at the club” (FanFooty, “Sheeds:The new Coach!!”, November 10, 2009, 05:48:39 AM).

Heroes often affirm and illustrate myths of idealised social norms and national identity (Crepeau 1981), and stories around Sheedy were often associated with (possibly mythical) views on Australianness, presenting him as a somewhat traditional social hero. In both media representations and club communications, he is linked to images and notions of Australianness and is presented as an upholder of Australian ideals. In the media he was portrayed as a proud Australian who had pioneered and innovated throughout his coaching career, shown support to Australian industry and the Indigenous community, and reference was made to his army career.
(Hassett 2012b, 2012c). His association with key elements of Australian identity and historically-accepted domains of heroes (such as the military) all present him as heroic. In a number of instances the Giants also connected his image with a variety of traditional Australian institutions to develop its credibility as a new club and to establish its connection to working-class ideals. Sheedy has working-class origins that enabled him to appeal to the traditional working-class culture of Western Sydney. He trained as a plumber prior to his AFL career, and is from a working-class Irish Catholic background (when his grandfather migrated to Australia from Ireland in 1887, his listed occupation was “labourer” (Prior 1995)). The Giants promoted their support for traditional Australian industries, such as construction and farming (which are two contrasting city and country-based industries respectively), often through the use of Sheedy’s image (Figure 8.8 and 8.9).

Figure 8.8. Email banner 18th September 2012

Figure 8.9. Email banner 4th June 2013
Sheedy himself also highlighted his connection with Australian identity, further building his image as a hero. He was often quoted as extolling the virtues of not just the AFL, but also of Australia, and the qualities that the country represents. He has claimed to be proud that the AFL had become known as the ‘Australian’ Football League and that it had “opened up doors not just in this sport but in other sports, cultures and nations.” (Hassett 2012c). In 2012, he was also behind the establishment of the ‘Building Australia’ match between the Giants and Collingwood, which would recognise “everyday Australian heroes” (GWS GIANTS 2012d). In reference to this match, he was quoted by SMH journalist Sebastian Hassett (2012b, 20) saying:

“This is something that's been travelling around in my mind for some time, even in my days at Essendon, to celebrate the very courageous Australian people who have built our country over the past 200 years...This is a hallmark game...for these 22 million people who helped build the nation. AFL has been going for 150 years and we've finally put our hand up to thank the working people of this country. That's too long...It's a great opportunity for the Giants to put their hand up for the people of western Sydney, who are good, strong, working-class people...I was told that I would love the people of Western Sydney because they're tough, they're honest and hard and that comment has always been ringing in my ears.”

Such quotes, and the above media representations, portray Sheedy as being intensely nationalistic, which is in keeping with what Hutchins’ (2002) describes as the typical ‘Australian type’. His championing of notions of Australianness was again utilised by the Giants, and he was frequently featured in promotional campaigns linked to working-class ideals (see Figure 8.8 and Figure 8.9). Being situated in Western Sydney, and having marked itself as a club that represents Sydney’s West, the Giants would be expected to espouse the values of the region. Sheedy’s passion and support for these working-class ideals appeared authentic, and helped him to connect with fans in the region. Despite Western Sydney being one of Australia’s most important growth corridors (Bahfen 2013), Sydney remains divided, with the western suburbs still stereotyped as less sophisticated and cultured (Butcher 2008) than their “latte-loving” (see below) eastern peers. Although such divides are not uncommon in cities, the stereotypical differences are frequently referenced in relation to sport in Sydney.
Sheedy has the required Anglo-Celtic cultural background to be identified as ‘Australian’ and for fans to see him as such. His lack of ‘airs and graces’ allows him to meet Kell’s (2000) ‘markers’ of a ‘genuine’ Australian hero (see Chapter 6).

His links to, and support of, the Australian military also provide a key element in this narrative of Australian identity and again position him as being heroic. Sheedy spent two years (between 1969 and 1971) completing compulsory military service during his playing career, and received the national service medal in 2003 (Rood 2003). It was during his time as coach of Essendon that he worked to establish the annual Anzac Day match between Collingwood and Essendon. This match now acts as a major element of the AFL’s tribute to those who have served their country in war (Hassett 2012b). The Giants have also taken advantage of his association with Anzac Day in their marketing material and utilised his image, standing solemnly alongside his ‘troops’, as part of their 2013 tribute, as shown in Figure 8.10. In this photograph the connotative signified is a military parade, and there is apparent third order semiotic signification to Australia’s military history and notions of Australianness. The link to heroic figures from Australia’s past, such as the ANZACs, presents Sheedy as a societal not just a sporting hero. This form of heroisation is based on images from Australia’s Anglo-Celtic past, which will appeal to nostalgia-seeking Australian football fans. In addition, his military associations and bearing position him as a leader of his young players and his leadership role provides another heroic discourse around him, which will now be discussed.
Sheedy the Leader

Sports heroes have often assumed leadership functions (see Chapter 3) and, as the coach of the club, Sheedy was in an already elevated position of authority. Beginning with a semiotic reading of the images used by the club in its communications, this section identifies that his charisma and professed love for learning were integral to his presentation as a leader and to his heroisation. Sheedy featured heavily in the GWS Giants’ communications during the 2012 and 2013 seasons, and such communications portrayed him as educated and wise. Emails from the club to its members were at times personally addressed to them from him – for example, in the welcome email to new members. His image frequently featured on email banners and was commonly used on MEMBER ALERT emails, which were sent out with updates from the club (see Figure 8.11). In the typical photograph (with a bespectacled Sheedy gesturing) the first order of denotative signification is of him giving coaching instructions (Figure 8.12). The second order signification of such images can be interpreted as Sheedy looking into the future in a thoughtful yet authoritative manner. Moreover, at
an ideological level they can be read as significations of wisdom and leadership and thus suitable for heroisation.

Figure 8.11. Email banner 18\textsuperscript{th} September 2012

![Email banner 18\textsuperscript{th} September 2012](image)

Figure 8.12. Email image 11\textsuperscript{th} July 2012

![Email image 11\textsuperscript{th} July 2012](image)

He also featured in a regular video segment titled \textit{Kevin Sheedy's Inner Sanctum}. These videos, which were posted on the Giants' YouTube channel and emailed to club members, were filmed around the Giants’ facilities and typically have him dressed in club merchandise/training wear (see Figure 8.13). The connotation in these images is authority and confidence, an impression enhanced by appearing on his own without the aid of others. In a sport setting, leadership roles, particularly those of coaches, may take on the characteristics of a military or religious figure, and Sheedy
has been venerated in this manner by fans of the club. Indeed, one chant of the GWS Giants’ fans (commonly used in a variety of sports settings) referred to “Kevin Sheedy’s Orange Army” (Fieldnotes 24th March 2012). Media discussions presented him as a messianic figure with “disciples” (Gaskin 2012a), the religious connotation of which is, again, in keeping with the quasi-religious role that sport can play within modern society (Nalapat and Parker 2005; Rojek 2006), and is comparable to the religious reverence paid to top athletes in the classical world (Smith 1973). In these earlier societies heroised athletes were considered to be part divine (Boon 2005) and were frequently honoured via quasi-religious cults (Currie 2002; Miller 2004). It is not uncommon for modern sporting heroes to be venerated in a similar manner, and Sheedy has been treated in this way.

During the final year of his coaching career Sheedy acted as a mentor to his successor, Leon Cameron, offering further evidence of his heroic leadership qualities. He is quoted by Andrew Wu (2013c, 48) in the SMH as saying:
“You've got to be there to do the right thing by the club and make sure that this young man [Cameron], who's coming in to a really tough job, is going to get the best learning experiences”.

He was also presented as a supporter of the younger generations, someone who was capable of nurturing, encouraging and caring for young players (Sygall 2013b). This nurturing nature was particularly relevant during his time at the GWS Giants, as the team was predominantly composed of young, inexperienced players, and it was suggested in one online forum post that he had been brought to the club to act as a “mentor for the rookies” (FanFooty, “Sheeds: The new Coach!!”, June 09, 2010, 09:00:25 AM). He acted as a protector of the young players he was coaching and showed a degree of compassion for them:

“You've got to show courage and not worry about young players when they are struggling on the ground. Give them the direction and confidence, because players do lose confidence in a game”. (Sheedy, quoted in Cowley 2012a, 14)

As was discussed in Chapter 3, leadership functions are frequently cited as qualities of sports heroes, along with the hero’s ability to inspire their followers towards attaining an idealised social order (Wann et al. 2001). Such heroes can be grouped into either reinforcing heroes, who conform to the norms of society; seductive heroes, who violate traditional societal norms; or transcending heroes, who separate themselves from societal norms and propose new approaches to a social order. Sheedy’s association with notions of Australianness, through his working-class background and links to the traditions of the AFL and the military, positioned him as a reinforcer of very traditional Australian values. However, during his time in the game he has also opposed, and even transcended, the norms historically associated with Australian football on numerous occasions by championing a variety of marginalised causes. One such cause was that of women in Australian football. Addressing what he described as the AFL’s failure to recognise the contribution of women in their centenary publication (Hindley 2005), he co-wrote a text titled *Football’s Women: The Forgotten Heroes* (Sheedy & Brown 1998). Sheedy has also claimed that he was strongly opposed to racism and sexism, along with many other ‘isms’, and also bemoaned what he perceived as ageism in the AFL (Sheedy 1995).
The *SMH* recognised him as being an advocate for the Indigenous community (Hassett 2012c) and in 2002, during his time as coach of Essendon, he was involved in the formation of the Marngrook Trophy, an annual match between the Sydney Swans and the Essendon Football Club. This game was established to pay tribute to the Indigenous game of Marn-grook (Hassett 2012b), which, as discussed in Chapter 2, some authors have argued influenced the origin of Australian football (Hallinan & Judd 2012). In the *SMH* he was portrayed in one report as having played the “biggest role in shifting the game's mentality from mono- to multicultural” (Hassett 2012a). The connotations of such comments position Sheedy as a pioneer in multiculturalism and Indigenous relations.

Sheedy has been presented as one of the leading proponents of Indigenous participation in the AFL, and it has been suggested that he was the “non-Indigenous coach credited with bringing Indigenous players to the AFL, [who] established themselves as symbols of reconciliation in Australian Football and of AFL commitment to Indigenous Australia” (Hallinan, & Judd 2009b, 1229). In a self-penned chapter in his biography, he suggests that, while he was at Essendon, the club “went after Aboriginal players like a rat up a drainpipe” (Sheedy 1995, 278), and described himself as “probably the most pro-Aboriginal coach in football” (1995, 280).

In recognition of this contribution to Indigenous inclusion in Australian football, he was involved in the selection of the AFL’s Indigenous Team of the Century in 2005 (Gorman 2012). Sheedy’s foresight and inclusiveness were well known throughout the AFL, and were frequently referred to in media commentaries. This acceptance of Indigenous players is in marked contrast to the AFL’s historical treatment of such athletes (Nadel 1998b; Hallinan & Judd 2009a; Klugman & Osmond 2009), and marks him as a pioneer in race relations in Australian sport. His battles to support oppressed groups can be considered a heroic struggle.

While Sheedy has challenged social norms, such as racial intolerance in the AFL, he is also presented as an upholder of tradition and as a link to the past. His traditional outlook did not appeal to all fans and in a forum post one fan accused him of being:
Out of touch with the modern youth of today if it hasn't hit him that Scully would be cringing at that type of comment. (BigFooty, “Sheedy accuses Demons”, November 13, 2011, post #8)

According to Brunk and Fallaw (2006), charisma is a key requirement of heroes, and Sheedy possesses it in abundance, along with a big degree of confidence and a large ego (as is evident in a number of the quotes presented above). He has also not been afraid to cite his own importance and was quoted as saying (perhaps ironically): “[s]ome people are really into football. Others see it as relaxation. I see it as like running the bloody country” (Borland & Lye 1992, 1053). When talking to him he was confident and engaging and he was frequently the centre of attention, as I made note in my fieldnotes of a meeting with him: Sheeds stands like a colossus, he has a presence about him. People just gravitated towards him and he seemed to be the centre of attention in the room. Fieldnotes, 18th February 2014

Sheedy’s charisma was actually enhanced by his confidence in his own abilities and contributed to his ability to ‘sell’ both the AFL and the Giants. In his role at the Giants he often spoke to schoolchildren and teachers, and was reported as extolling the virtues of leadership and education (Wu 2011), acknowledging the role that both had played in his career. He pointed to the importance of one of his former coaches, Tommy Hafey, in inspiring this passion in him, and is quoted by SMH writer Sebastian Hassett (2012b, 20) as saying:

“He [Hafey] was always buying books overseas on other great coaches, like [Vince] Lombardi or what motivated other successful people. As a 20/21-year-old, I wasn’t much into books, but he’d buy me one for Christmas and my birthday. I’ve now got one of the best libraries you'll ever see”.

Sheedy’s professed love of learning played a key role in his coaching career, and was a factor in him becoming an innovator in his tactical approach to the game, something that he was renowned for throughout the sport (Nadel 1998a). In his biography of Sheedy the author Tom Prior (1995) acknowledged his longstanding desire to learn, as well as being dynamic, forward-thinking, and intelligent. The Giants presented Sheedy as an intelligent, almost visionary figure of scholarly wisdom, particularly when he was shown seated behind his desk (see Figure 8.3). His link to education
and the region were further reinforced in December 2013 when he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters by the University of Western Sydney (now Western Sydney University). As mentioned, the Giants also made frequent use of photographs of him looking (and sometimes pointing) into the distance (Figures 8.11 and 8.12), suggesting that he was envisioning things that are yet to be, and again positioning him as possessing wisdom.

Cleverness has not been identified as a historical characteristic of Australians who, since the early years of settlement, are typified as being sceptical about intellectual pursuits (Ward 1988; Greiner 2001). However, as discussed in Chapter 3, intelligence and the use of ‘brains rather than brawn’ are essential characteristics of Klapp’s (1954a) clever hero. Sheedy actually embodies a number of the characteristics that are associated with this heroic archetype, and the following section discusses his association with this mythical narrative.

**The Clever Hero**

The clever hero is identified by Klapp (1954a) as being a potential role played by heroes in mythology and folklore. These figures used humour and deception to outwit their opponents and, significantly, they verged on being a villain at times. Media commentaries and online fan discussions reveal a fascinating association between Sheedy and this heroic type. As will be demonstrated here he caused numerous controversies that were popular with fans of the Giants, and which generated attention for the club, but which also resulted in accusations from fans of other clubs and in the media that he is ‘out-dated’ and racist. I argue, however that such behaviour can still be viewed as heroic because it is in keeping with the archetypal clever hero.

In contrast to both Jeremy Cameron and Israel Folau, Sheedy was not involved at the club in a playing capacity, and so the narratives that were built up around him were presented in markedly different ways. Media coverage drew more heavily on his words than on his images although as discussed the images were important at the club level, with his body assuming little significance, and he was often quoted in stories about both the club and himself. While Cameron and Folau were presented as
relatively passive characters, with the latter in particular saying little during press conferences, Sheedy assumed an active role in the media. He spoke to the press frequently at organised press conferences in the lead-up to games and after matches. This regular communication provided the opportunity for media reports to quote his thoughts on the AFL and on wider issues. When discussing the chances of his team, Sheedy was typically portrayed as being confident and optimistic. His optimism was in contrast to the expectations of the press and AFL fans, who believed that the GWS Giants would struggle on their introduction to the AFL. Media reports frequently quoted these upbeat views on forthcoming matches and suggested that, for him, the only satisfactory result was “a win” (Cowley 2012b). Such was his confidence and positivity that media reports were quick to draw attention to any time when he was “markedly downbeat” (Wu 2013d). Sheedy’s positivity is exemplified by the following quotes reported in the media:

“I can't promise you anything, but it will be different I can tell you, it will be different for this Saturday for starters”. (Sheedy, quoted in Bossi 2012, 20)

“The Americans thought they were going to spank the Vietnamese once…But they didn't”. (Sheedy, quoted in Hinds 2012b)

“It's about gradually building a wonderful, great club in the west of Sydney, which we will do and try and work through games you'd rather forget”. (Sheedy, quoted in Wu 2013d)

This confidence contains an element of bravado, as his inexperienced team struggled in their initial two years in the AFL. In his two seasons in charge of the club, they finished 18th (last) on both occasions, winning two games in 2012 and only one in 2013. Their struggle to win included a 21-game losing streak that stretched from the end of 2012 until round 19 of the 2013 season. While Sheedy acknowledged that his team was young and lacking in experience, he continued to believe, or to suggest, that they were capable of winning every game, and continued to encourage fans to come and watch his team. He was quoted as saying:

“We've got every chance of winning. We are here in the ballpark; anything can happen in this game…Anything can happen in this game tomorrow, and...
that's why people should come and have a look”. (Sheedy, quoted in Cowley 2012b, 10)

and:

“We've got a very talented side for anyone who wants to come…The next dozen games they'll get close to 30-40 games [of experience], we'll recruit four players at the end of the year and whoever they are will end up with a damn good side around them”. (Sheedy quoted in Wu 2013c)

In this manner he would frequently build up the chances of his team and suggest that people should come to watch their matches.

Sheedy is on the record as acknowledging that coaching was only part of his job at the Giants, with around a quarter of his time being spent on marketing activities (Hassett 2012c). It was suggested by Michael Cowley (2012b, 10), writing in the SMH, that “his biggest role has been selling the club to a public not really sure they want to buy, and he is a master salesman”. In other press reports he was likewise portrayed as “the great AFL salesman” (Hinds 2012a, 10) and “the game's biggest promoter in Sydney…[who] is sure to do his best to colourfully promote the clash” (Cowley 2012e, 27). Media stories frequently picked up on Sheedy’s marketing abilities and the role that he was playing in the expansion of the AFL into Western Sydney (Cowley 2012b; Hassett 2012b). Fans were also well aware of this facet of his role. At various points during his time at the club discussions amongst fans drew attention to his marketing work, suggesting that he is a “walking headline” (BigFooty, “Rumour – Sheedy back to Bombers”, March 05, 2015, post #16) or was a “walking, talking billboard for the Giants” (BigFooty, “Sheedy accuses Demons”, November 10, 2011, post #4) who engages in ‘stirring’ and ‘trolling, and thinks that “No news is bad news” (BigFooty, “Sheedy accuses Demons”, November 14, 2011, post #10). Other online contributors argued that his marketing ability was the primary reason behind his appointment as Head Coach:

[He is] Great for marketing! I think Sheeds will be able to get the odd headline in Sydney. Thats what its all about. (FanFooty, “Sheeds:The new Coach!!”, June 18, 2010, 02:32:59 PM)
I would have thought it was pretty clear that the main reasoning behind Sheedy's appointment is that he is probably the greatest showman in the modern era of the AFL. Not because he's still "got it" as a coach. (BigFooty, ""Kevin Sheedy has no say whatsoever in the GWS list!", October 13, 2011, post #2)

Tom Prior, in his aforementioned biography of ‘Sheeds’, had suggested that he had “missionary instincts” when it came to spreading Australian football around Australia (Prior 1995, 3). The choice of this term is noteworthy as it carries historical associations with Victorian (Anglo-Celtic) values associated with the spread of sport through Muscular Christianity (Schirato 2013). There are obvious religious connotations to such a description, and Sheedy (2012a) himself, writing in *The Daily Telegraph*, has also spoken in similar terms:

And that's why we are here. That's why we will be in schools and on sporting ovals spreading the gospel of our game – so more kids like them across this vast expanse called Sydney's west can dream big.

AFL fans also believed that Sheedy was a staunch proponent of the sport. In one forum post he was described as “without doubt the best asset for AFL in Sydney” (BigFooty, “Kevin Sheedy's open letter to Andrew Newbold”, March 26, 2013, post #25), “a truly inspiring character with a passion for expanding the game. He was that at Essendon, and even more so since he's taken on GWS” (BigFooty, “Kevin Sheedy last night”, July 29, 2010, post #4). Elsewhere one fan offered this view:

Not the greatest fan of Sheeds, but he does work pretty hard for the benefit for the game of Australian football…Agree that Sheeds brings something very special to the game, and brings more people to AFL. (BigFooty, “Gotta hand it to Sheeds”, February 20, 2013, post #1)

In this vein, he was described in the *SMH* as “ever the salesman...a one-man publicity machine” (Hassett 2012b, 20). According to the then CEO of the AFL, Andrew Demetriou, quoted by the *SMH*’s Jared Lynch (2012), his ability to market the sport (and his ideas) was attributed to his “somewhat larrikin relationship with their fans based on [his] remarkable character”. The Anzacs have likewise been depicted as larrikin heroes who were cheeky, independent, and brave (Basu 2012), and these
qualities are often seen as being key elements of Australianness (Rickard 2000). Larrikinism has also been identified as a characteristic of a number of Australian sport heroes (Fiske, Hodge & Turner 1987; Miller 1990), which marks Sheedy as being quintessentially Australian. Additionally, Sheedy’s portrayal as both clever and charismatic is in line with the concept of the clever hero (Klapp 1948; 1954a) who relies on cunning ahead of strength, which is particularly apt for his non-playing role as a coach, and his ancillary marketing duties.

In his attempts to sell the AFL and the Giants, on a number of occasions Sheedy made provocative comments about the Sydney Swans. Through his comments in the media he sought to influence popular opinion and to position his new club as struggling against their neighbours. He deliberately and antagonistically constructed a rivalry between the two clubs by making reference to historical, geographical, and socio-economic differences in Sydney (discussed in Chapter 5). For instance, Sheedy was quoted as promising that the Giants would disrupt the Swans’ ‘comfortable’ position in Sydney, and he frequently questioned how good they were. In May 2012 he suggested that the Sydney Swans’ position at the top of the league was a false one (Cowley 2012d), and ahead of the first meeting between the two clubs, and the Giants’ first game in the AFL, he was quoted as suggesting that the Giants may beat the Swans:

“They don't know how we play, we know how they play…They are a good side, they have been in finals most of the last decade but they still don't know how to play us because they have never played us. It just might be a little different tomorrow night. They have some very good young players themselves, obviously they are more experienced than us, but the excitement of youth and the energy – you just never, never know”. (Sheedy, quoted in Cowley 2012b, 10)

Later in the season he again claimed that the Giants were able to beat the Swans in the return match:

“But first of all the Swans have got to get over us later in the year, and that's going to be a very, very dangerous match for them…You never know, we just might beat them”. (Sheedy, quoted in Cowley 2012d)
In the *SMH*, Sheedy was portrayed as making “niggly inferences” about the Swans in an attempt to stir up trouble between the two clubs (Sygall 2013c). He was also quoted as suggesting that he and the Giants were going to “annoy the hell out of them [the Swans] over the next five to 10 years” (Cowley 2012e). He had variously accused the Swans of paying over the odds to sign Adelaide Crows forward Kurt Tippett (Gaskin 2012b), and suggesting that their supporter base was confined to the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney (Sygall 2013c; Wu 2013c). He was clearly trying to create a rivalry between the two clubs (Wu 2013e) and their fans in order to attract attention and sympathy for the Giants. Sheedy’s marketing nous was also behind the rebranding of the GWS Giants versus Sydney Swans match from the Sydney Derby to ‘The Battle of the Bridge’ (which, again, has military connotations and helped to conceptualise the notion of a rivalry for fans). While the Swans were not happy that this game was marketed as such (Wu 2013f), Sheedy saw the Anzac Bridge as the gateway to the West (see Figure 8.14) and, therefore, as a suitable image of the contest between these two teams (Wu 2013f). He was quoted as saying:

“It's the battle of the bridge and not the derby, put a line through derby. Throw it down the drainpipe as far as I'm concerned...It's the way the people in the west want it to be. We've spoken to lots of people and they like the idea. They love the idea of the Anzac Bridge and the Sydney Harbour Bridge, so I'll go on my own personal recommendation. Our fans out west like it, they know it's a landmark”. (Sheedy, quoted in Wu 2013h, 42)

![Figure 8.14. Map showing location of Anzac Bridge in Sydney (Google 2016)](image-url)
His most incendiary comments regarding the Swans were made in an open letter to their fans that he posted on the GWS Giants’ website. While Sheedy said that he was “thrilled” that the Swans had won the 2012 Premiership, and confessed to wearing a Swans jumper to barrack for them during the final, there was a suggestion that his support was purely because the Swans’ success was “good for [Australian] football in NSW” (Sheedy 2013). The letter further helped to create the rivalry between the two clubs by focussing on the east/west divide within Sydney. Sheedy (2013) wrote:

I know you have had Sydney to yourselves for 30 years but we are here now and there is plenty of room for both us. You can even have your little corner in the east if you want. I am pretty happy with my view of the Parramatta River…So put down your lattes, get out of Coogee (or wherever you are), drive over the Anzac Bridge in your Range Rovers (I prefer a Skoda [sic]) and get out to the west and support your team. We have lattes over here too you know.

The letter was full of obvious references to the Swans and Sydney generally, and he even managed to draw attention to the Giants’ main sponsor, Škoda. SMH writer David Sygall was one of those to pick up on this letter and focussed his attention on Sheedy’s suggestion that the Swans’ fans were “overwhelmingly a latte-loving eastern suburbs set” (Sygall 2013c). Similarly, fellow SMH writer Andrew Wu highlighted Sheedy’s challenge to Swans’ fans to “put down your lattes” (Wu 2013f). His comments were well received by fans of the Giants on the BigFooty forum, with one claiming “Sheeds just owns those pathetic Swannies” (BigFooty, “”Dear Swannies” by Sheeds”, March 28, 2013, post #6). Others went further and drew on stereotypical views of residents of Sydney’s Eastern Suburbs:

Their latte-drinking, masterchef-watching, realestate-speculating supporters won't make the trip out west to the Olympic Park. You have to take a train you see. (BigFooty, “”Dear Swannies” by Sheeds”, March 28, 2013, post #5)

Oh I believe they were thinking of taking the Aston, or the Bentley out for a spin, but the lack of valet parking due to the Easter show has made them reconsider their plans. (BigFooty, “”Dear Swannies” by Sheeds”, March 31, 2013, post #7)
His mocking of the Swans’ fans as ‘latte drinking’ and ‘Range Rover driving’ was designed to suggest that although the Swans had historically been seen as a working-class team when they were based in South Melbourne (Walsh 2015), this was no longer the case. He was portraying them as ‘others’ and highlighting differences in the two clubs’ fan bases. By rejecting these perceived socially superior activities, and thus appropriating working-class notions (Whitman 2013), he was associating himself with mythical Western Sydney ideals. In Sydney, it has traditionally been the West that has been disadvantaged and of lower socio-economic status (Butcher 2008), and so he was also continuing the Australian tradition of using sport to oppose those who believe that they are of higher social class (Collins 2005). His comments also echo the aforementioned marketing ploy in rugby league of Roy Masters and this east-west divide in Sydney (see Chapter 4). The socio-economic differences between these urban regions are discussed later in this chapter.

Sheedy fuelled this rivalry by claiming that the Swans were not helping him (and the Giants) in their promotion of the AFL. He argued that, in the Giants’ short history, the Swans had “given us [the Giants] nothing”, and that they had not helped the club in their efforts to spread the AFL in NSW (Wu 2013h). He is quoted in Cowley (2012e, 27) as saying:

“But you would think we could work together. But if they don't want to put their hand up...I think that would disappoint their supporters actually. It's going to be interesting to see how it pans out”.

His language is clearly loaded. As was the case with the perceived higher social class of the Swans, he is trying to create an impression that the Swans are a large, elite organisation that was refusing to help the smaller, new GWS Giants. Sheedy was again reinforcing the Giants’ ‘underdog’ status and further drawing on Australian support for such Aussie battler causes (Milner 2009; Whitman 2013 – as detailed in Chapters 3 and 7). Battling underdogs have historically been deemed as heroic and, when their struggle is against an oppressive superior, the hero may again take the form of the clever hero.

It was not only the Giants’ cross-town rivals that were on the receiving end of Sheedy’s calculated comments. As one online post suggested, he developed “an it's
us against the rest of the competition attitude” (BigFooty, “Sheedy accuses Demons”, November 09, 2011, post #1), and verbally attacked a number of other clubs. For instance, he took aim at some of the “struggling” AFL clubs in Victoria that he claimed were “going nowhere” (Wu 2013c, 48), as they had gone “30 or 40 years without winning a premiership”, suggesting that they were “just going around in circles. [Whereas] we are trying to get to a goal which is to win a premiership” (Hinds 2012a, 10). He also claimed that some Melbourne clubs had “become fat on self-interest” (Cooper 2013) or had “been asleep on a holiday...pottering around” (Sygall 2013a). His antagonistic approach was popular with fans of the Giants, with forum posts such as the one below typifying their reaction to his comments:

Just watched the presser. Man I love Sheeds. He stuck it up a few people there. (BigFooty, “Rumour – Sheedy back to Bombers”, March 07, 2015, post #29)

Underpinning all of Sheedy’s comments there is typically an element of spin and calculated cunning. They were designed, in part, to draw attention away from his team’s faltering on-field performances and to refocus media attention on him. At times it is hard to discern whether there was any malice behind Sheedy’s comments or whether it was just ‘spin’ designed to raise the profile of his new team and the AFL. As was suggested by one fan on the FanFooty forum, his job was “to keep GWS in the papers to enhance awareness. No publicity is bad publicity” (FanFooty, “Sheeds: The new Coach!!”, July 21, 2010, 09:51:26 AM). The controversial elements of his comments were largely popular with Giants’ fans.

The biggest controversy surrounding Sheedy undoubtedly came with comments that he made that were aimed at one of the Giants’ cross-code rivals. In 2013, he took a verbal swipe at the latest team to emerge in GWS, the Western Sydney Wanderers, and was widely criticised when he said:

“We [the GWS Giants] don't have the recruiting officer called the immigration department, recruiting fans for the West Sydney Wanderers. We don't have that on our side”. (Quoted in Wu 2013e)

Sheedy claimed that his comments were misconstrued, and that he was only suggesting that most immigrants coming to Australia were already familiar with
association football, but he was subsequently attacked on social media and in the news media. One association football pundit and commentator, Craig Foster, suggested that the comments would result in Sheedy being viewed as “a racist old Aussie” (quoted in Horan 2013). His controversial comments were also greeted with disdain by some fans:

Sheedy's terrible, I honestly cringe whenever I read a statement of his in the media. But he's creating headlines and 'controversy'; which is his job in all honesty. As for this statement he has made a completely unfounded accusation, which he's prone to do, he probably couldn't think of anything more controversial to say. (BigFooty, “Sheedy accuses Demons”, November 10, 2011, post #5)

Sheedy is a tosser of the highest order. I'm quite convinced he doesn't know what planet he is on. What planet he does think he is on is one where he is a deity and everything he says is taken as gospel. Truth is that no one cares what you do/say/think Sheeds. STFU [shut the fuck up] and retire already. You're an embarrassment. GWS needs a good coach for the modern era. Not some washed up old fossil. (BigFooty, “Sheedy accuses Demons”, November 10, 2011, post #6)

Such responses are not indicative of him being heroised, on the contrary, they point towards him being an ‘antihero’, in the guise of a fool or villain (Klapp 1949b, 1954b) as he is presented as being deviant, worthy of ridicule and scorn. However, there is also a begrudging respect at times, with some media texts suggesting that there is much of substance to him but that it is buried beneath layers of ‘spin’ (Wilson 2012), forming part of a media narrative of him as a cunning operator, full of “eccentric charm and wily nature” (Hinds 2012a), possessing a mixture of “Chairman Mao-style thinking” (Cordy 2012c), “home-spun philosophy and potted history” (Hinds 2012a), and an “amusing collection of analogies” (Hinds 2012b). He was portrayed as being full of “tricks”, able to cast a “verbal spell” (Hinds 2012a), and with an ace up his sleeve (Bossi 2012). However, the clever hero archetype may verge on villainy at times (Klapp 1954a), and can be closer to that of a liar and malefactor. Therefore, rather than representing the hero’s fall from grace to become a fool (Hoebeke, Deprez & Raeymaeckers 2011), it is likely that his behaviour is strategically planned and
thought through. A number of fan forum posts certainly claimed that his comments were planned:

He acts like a senile old coot in the media and people believe it. He did the same thing at Essendon and he wasn't a senile old coot then. (BigFooty, “"Kevin Sheedy has no say whatsoever in the GWS list"”, October 14, 2011, post #11)

He's a crazy old codger but no doubt this man knows how to build a footy team. (BigFooty, “Sheeds’ 1000th”, August 05, 2012, post #13)

He carried on like this at Essendon, and managed to be a good coach at the same time. I like it make some rivalries, will liven the place up. (BigFooty, “Sheedy accuses Demons”, November 19, 2011, post #13)

The title of his official biography, as noted above, is *Sheeds: A Touch of Cunning* (Prior 1995). The use of the term cunning further reinforces the connection to this heroic type because, as was shown in Chapter 3, cunning was integral to the character of Reynard the Fox, the exemplifier of Klapp’s archetypal clever hero. It is also in keeping with earlier visions of resourceful and clever Australians (White 1981). Richard Hinds, writing in the *SMH*, describes his tactics of manipulation in the following passage:

After a long and amiable conversation, you rise from the restaurant table. Suddenly, Kevin Sheedy takes your hand in a firm grip, fixes you with a steely glare and demands, rather than asks: "So you think we are going to fail?" And, just like that, Sheedy has you where he wants you…Surprised, reactive, disarmed…the 64-year-old veteran can stop you in your tracks and make you second-guess yourself. And, by the time you've regained your senses, he has probably slipped a Giants ticket in your top pocket… you have to check your pocket to see if he's slipped in another ticket. (Hinds 2012a, 10)

Narratives around Sheedy are complicated and often present contrasting perspectives. His images can be analysed on a number of semiotic levels, and, at a mythological order of signification they are often associated with historically idealised concepts
related to Australianness. He has been controversial at times, but his clever hero characteristics mean that he has retained his popularity with many fans.

**Conclusion**

Kevin Sheedy’s heroisation is largely based on his history in the AFL and unprecedented achievement of being involved in 1000 games. While he was at GWS as coach he was its best-known figure, and his association with Australian football and Australian traditions provided the newly formed GWS Giants with a degree of credibility and allowed them to associate themselves with the traditions of the sport. Sheedy’s links to historical images of Australia, such as the military (Curthoys 1997) and working-class ideals (Leach 1997), further served as points of attachment for potential fans in Western Sydney. As with Folau, he was signed to raise the profile of the club and presented as a hero for the Giants’ fans. In this sense he was a top-down, imposed hero, but even though he failed to have on-field success a combination of his charisma, longstanding/great achievements in the game, and ability to generate local pride meant that, unlike Folau, he was accepted by fans as a hero.

Narratives that focussed on his history and achievements were built up by the club and the media, and these narratives evoke feelings of nostalgia and “collective memory” (Griggs, Leflay & Groves 2012, 90) amongst fans of AFL. However, feelings and memories such as these are selectively recalled (Kohe 2010) and have created the legend of Kevin Sheedy. Prior (1995) states that there are many legends and suburban myths about him, and it is common in the case of heroes for a mythical interpretation to develop. This mythical interpretation of heroes is termed “legend building” (Klapp 1949, 60), and much of what is ‘known’ about Sheedy is, therefore, mythologised.

Sheedy is typified as cunning and full of tricks – a rogue. He is charismatic and confident while also being outspoken and controversial. Sheedy’s cunning and his disrespect for both authority and his ‘social superiors’ have created a discourse of Sheedy as a clever hero. In addition, his working-class, Irish background and quintessential Australianness positioned him as a suitably Australian hero. There are a number of similarities between the heroisation of Sheedy and of Jeremy Cameron,
and noticeable differences with Israel Folau. These differences are in part related to the degree of association with each subject’s perceived Australianness. While Sheedy and Cameron are plausible heroic figures, Folau, during his time at the Giants, assumed the role of a villain. In each instance it has been possible to connect these three case studies with existing traditional or mythical heroic types. The following, final chapter in this thesis will now discuss the implications of the foregoing analysis for the formation of heroes and the development of a club culture.
Chapter 9 – Conclusion

To become a national hero an athlete must do more than skilfully run or kick a football, shoot for goal accurately, bowl quickly or play a straight bat – Hutchings (2005).

Introduction

The aim of this thesis was to develop a greater sociological understanding of the formation of sports heroes. As the commencement of this study coincided serendipitously with the debut of a new Western Sydney-based AFL club, the GWS Giants, I was offered a unique opportunity both to study the formation of sports heroes and the development of fan/club culture in the setting of a new sports club. While Australian football as a sport was initially unfamiliar to me, it enabled me to examine the formation of heroes as an outsider, immune to those ideas and cultural assumptions that are often ‘taken for granted’ by fans and writers that are a product of the Australian cultural system.

Initially, I assumed that fans would ‘drive’ heroisation and that there would be observable acts of devotion at games. Thus, my approach to the research centred on observing fan behaviour with the belief that it would dictate and reveal the emerging heroes of the club. It quickly became apparent that for the Giants, a new, struggling team (at least at the start of my research), this was not the case. To my frustration, observations at Giants’ games and events revealed very little on heroisation, negligible large-scale obvious adoration of players by the fans, and few performative expressions of fandom. In the initial stages, the Giants’ players were homogeneous in appearance and profile, with little playing experience, and were ‘on the end’ of some very one-sided scorelines. These factors were not conducive to individual players standing out from their peers and then being heroised. The lack of interaction between fans and players during games, and a resultant absence of observable heroisation, were also not aided by the small crowds at events and home matches. The paucity of fans would result in little recounting of the heroic deeds of players and ultimately slowed the process of heroisation.
Heroisation was, however, identifiable through the club’s marketing and communications, media coverage of the Giants, and fan discussions on online forums. A textual analysis of the SMH and The Daily Telegraph newspapers and club communications to its members was conducted, and revealed the creation of top-down narratives to aid the heroisation of Giants’ players and staff. Becoming a member of the GWS Giants afforded me access to the club’s regular email communications (in addition to their website), and a similar analysis of these emails revealed how the club was positioning its players and staff as heroes. Finally, to capture the narratives that fans were developing around the club and its players, an unobtrusive netnography was conducted on the BigFooty and FanFooty online forums. The process of heroisation was revealed to be complex and the most significant element in hero formation was identified as the narrative that is created around the individual subject, as will be discussed in detail.

My research identified three key individuals who in different ways were or came to be positioned as heroes. The first of these, Israel Folau, left the club at the end of the 2012 season and ultimately failed to become a hero of the club. The second was the young Giants’ player Jeremy Cameron who received recognition for his on-field sporting prowess and materialised as a Cinderella/unpromising hero in a manner similar to Don Bradman. The third key individual identified was Kevin Sheedy, the coach of the club until the end of the 2013 season, and who emerged as an established hero in the mould of Orrin Klapp’s (1954a) clever hero. As my research addressed a male-dominated sport, it is unsurprising that no female heroes emerged in it. However, with the introduction of a new AFL Women’s competition there is now space for female Australian football heroes to be formed. The new GWS Giants women’s team will offer new lines of enquiry into the formation of sport heroes and may reveal differences in the heroisation not only of women and men, but of women in team sports when compared to individual athletes such as Dawn Fraser and Cathy Freeman.

Hero formation is clearly founded on more than just club or fan culture and to this end my thesis also provides significant insights into Australian sport and society in the twenty-first century. In the cases of Cameron and Sheedy, their quintessential (mythological) Australianness was significant for their heroisation. They represented
dominant constructions of Australianness such as an Anglo-Celtic heritage, masculinity, and ‘typical’ Australian characteristics, for example: a love of country pastimes, the use of cunning against social oppressors, and the possession of a pioneering spirit. These factors were often intertwined and presented in a narrative format that was consistent with pre-existing, universal stories around heroes. The case of Israel Folau was found to be markedly different. His Tongan heritage was highlighted in media coverage and his body was foregrounded ahead of other personal characteristics in fan discussions and in the club’s marketing materials. Therefore, Folau was not presented as epitomising Australianness, but instead became a symbol of the mercenary ‘other’.

The Bad, The Good, and The Ugly Heroes

Israel Folau was presented to the fans of the GWS Giants as a ready-made hero, based primarily on his previous performances and standing in rugby league. However, he was not able to perform at a suitable athletic level during his time at the Giants and, as he failed to achieve even one significant personal success on the field. But he was at the forefront of marketing activities of his new club and received considerable media attention following his move from the NRL. Although it has been claimed that publicity is one of the most important factors in hero formation (Radford 2005), this thesis reveals that the degree of media coverage in this instance was detrimental to the heroisation process. The substantial media coverage served to highlight the obvious discrepancies between his supposed, (top-down, heroised) abilities and his actual on-field performances. The disjuncture between these two levels of performance featured prominently in fan discourses of Folau and resulted in him assuming a mercenary profile.

His prominent marketing role was also identified as a significant factor in both media and fan-generated narratives surrounding him. While AFL fans celebrated Folau’s switch from a rival footballing code, and initially venerated him, the pro-NRL, Sydney print media saw his move as a betrayal and he was consequently villainised. This villainisation is not surprising because, as is the case in other fields, heroised athletes can lose their status and assume the role of a villain when they turn their back on their followers and ‘betray’ them by leaving the club. The ‘betrayer’ is
subsequently abused and faces psychological (and potentially physical) dangers before overcoming these obstacles to ‘move on’ and be heroised by their new club’s followers. Such a ‘journey’ is immediately reconcilable with Campbell’s (2004) concept of the heroic monomyth. In Chapter 6, I argued that Folau was also not successfully associated with a recognisable and established heroic pattern. Instead, his dominant narrative was largely based on the commodification of his body and his ability (and desire) to sell his sporting talent. In combination with his admission that he had never watched an Australian football match, Folau was widely interpreted as motivated by mercenary values. Such a nature is neither associated with Australianness nor with heroic ideals, but could be equated with villainy. I found that AFL fans, in addition to NRL fans, villainised him because he prioritised personal gain ahead of loyalty to a code and an associated passion for playing Australian football. Thus, Folau failed to conform to some of the ideologised concepts associated with competitive team sport and, therefore, falls outside of accepted heroic narratives.

Folau’s code switch (which I will term code migration) also proved to be insightful when considering the formation of heroes. Although it has been shown that athletes migrating to new countries may face hostility in the host nation (Maguire et al. 2002; Falcous & Maguire 2005), there is less research into the impact of code migration. In Australia individual states have distinct identities with associated sporting loyalties, and this thesis has revealed that migrating athletes can be greeted with hostility when they move between states or codes. This hostility is most marked when an athlete is associated with a ‘rival’ state or with a sporting code that is dominant in a rival state. The hostility that Israel Folau faced, while structured around different narratives, was no less significant. It contributed to his villainisation and thus limited his potential to be positioned as a hero.

Jeremy Cameron, on the other hand, was referred to as a ‘star’ by the club, the media, and the AFL. This term is associated with a commodity-celebrity status that is based on ‘well-knownness’ (Smart 2005; McKay & Brooks 2013). The sports-world makes frequent use of this term to describe top athletic performers, with ‘stars’ typically differentiated from ‘heroes’ by both their prevalence and the lack of durability of their achievements. The media and sports leagues/teams, rather than fans, drive the term,
and a star athlete may not be heroised (as was found to be the case with Folau). While the media and fans alike villainised Folau, Cameron was to emerge as a hero for the club’s fans and, based on online forum data, more generally for Australian football fans. Chapter 7 contends that his heroisation was in part based on pre-existing mythological hero patterns that can be found outside the sport world, and also drew on his association with notions of Australianness. Narratives surrounding Cameron emphasised the heroic journey that his sporting career has taken, reflecting Joseph Campbell’s concept of the monomyth. Although his initial heroisation was based on his ability, this thesis reveals that athletic aptitude alone is not sufficient to form a hero.

In Chapter 4 I highlighted that Australia’s iconic heroes (the bushman, the digger, or surf lifesaver) all embody masculine struggles against adversity (Saunders 1998). These heroic figures have been portrayed in ways that emphasise their masculinity, or that display their bodies to the admiring gazes of the public. Cameron was also presented in a manner that accentuated his body and physique, displaying his strength and athleticism and, ultimately, his masculinity. The traditional AFL playing kit, with its relatively high-cut shorts and sleeveless guernseys, emphasises players’ bodies and allows leg and arm muscles to be displayed. Cameron’s presentation by both the club and the media was reminiscent of earlier constructions of Anglo-Celtic Australianness. He fits with a traditional Anglo-Celtic image of Australian footballers and thus serves to reinforce dominant attributes of Australian national identity. As I argue in Chapter 2, traditional ‘Australian’ sports have been, and continue to be, dominated by a White hegemony (Gemmell 2007; Hallinan, and Judd 2009a), with Australian football historically seen as being the sport of White Australia. Therefore, in contrast to Israel Folau, I have argued that it is more palatable for fans to accept the Anglo-Celtic Cameron as an AFL hero because he fits with the traditional image of AFL players. A combination of his talent, Australianness, and the construction around him of heroic narratives that reflect and reinforce mythological hero patterns, create an almost exemplary heroic profile.

Cameron was not the only heroic figure at the club and, as sports coaches are selected as heroes in their own right, it is not surprising that my thesis identifies that the initial coach of the Giants, Kevin Sheedy, emerged as a hero. Coaches are often exposed to
the public through the media (Miller 1990) and, in a world where institutionalised sport has taken on a quasi-religious status (Brody 1979), the coach may assume the role of a messianic figure. This status certainly applies to Sheedy, whose profile at the Giants reflected that of an inspiring leader tasked with conquering Western Sydney for the AFL. In Chapter 8 I argued that Sheedy was perceived as a ‘great man’ due to his historical achievements within the game. This significant reputation paired with his support of, and alignment with, ‘traditional’ Australian institutions and attributes, lead me to conclude that he fits the profile of a hero.

Despite Sheedy’s apparent alignment with tradition he also emerges as a complex, polarising and controversial character. His deliberate attempts to rile rival teams were, in part, designed to raise awareness of his new team and, although there is evidence that some observers recognise the intentionality behind his comments, he was derided by some fans and the media alike. His views were often based on traditional constructions of regional and national identity, which may have contributed to the antipathy felt towards him by some fans on online forums. In Chapter 8 I argued that he fits earlier heroic archetypes, principally the clever hero, and it is not uncommon for this figure to court controversy at times. Mythical heroes such as Robin Hood and Reynard the Fox were frequently associated with villainous behaviour and, in a similar manner, Sheedy was at times portrayed as a villain or fool. Significantly this villainous or foolish behaviour is forgiven when it is aimed at social or physical oppressors, and it is within this context that Sheedy operated. Underlying many of his controversial comments was his attempt to position his fledgeling team as battlers. Therefore, I conclude that Sheedy still maintained his heroic status even amidst controversy.

From each of these case studies it becomes evident that the narratives built up around the central figures assumed more importance than their actions. Heroic tales have existed for centuries and modern sport is one of the primary domains for the (re)creation of heroes. It was initially anticipated that my research would solely concern sports heroes, yet it also identified the broader context within which sporting heroes operate. They are tied to myths and stories that are deeply embedded within society and that help to define collective and individual identities. In the case of Australian sports heroes, they express the fundamental themes of the myth of
Australianness. Sports hero myths and stories are embedded in culture to the extent that the narrative that is built up around a hero is the most important element in their formation as heroes. Thus, as I identified in Chapter 3, both sport and heroes serve to reinforce selected values that are deemed to be national representations in various discursive contexts.

This value reinforcement is certainly the case for my two identified heroes: Cameron and Sheedy. The notion of the ‘boy from the bush’ or the ‘country boy’ is an image that carries much weight with Australians. It has featured prominently in the narratives around many Australian athletes, such as Don Bradman (Hutchins 2005), Phillip Hughes (Doolan 2014), and now, I argue, Jeremy Cameron. The Australian Legend and other Australian country/bush myths are not just confined to sport, but are common within many aspects of Australian culture (Tucker 2005) and, while this form of myth is a quintessentially Australian concept, the basic narrative can be equated with wider pre-existing hero myths. The image of a young boy (often from an unpromising, in this case country setting) who sets out on a journey of discovery to face trials and returns triumphant, has been popular in human history for thousands of years (Campbell 2004). However, for Campbell’s (2004) monomyth narrative to be complete, the ‘hero’ does need to return to his home (to the benefit of the community). The Australian boy from the bush narrative encapsulates this element of the heroic journey, and Jeremy Cameron may be well aware of this pattern (albeit not consciously), when he suggests that he will one day return to his country roots. The humble, unassuming country origins of the boy from the bush are also a reflection of the figure of the Cinderella/unpromising hero that can be found in many mythological and historical stories. Therefore, the tale of a boy from the bush who succeeds against the odds has not only historical and cultural significance in an Australian setting, but also is applicable to the wider canon of work around heroisation.

The larrikin Australian who shuns authority and stands up to social superiors or oppressors is another enduring Australian myth (Crotty 2001; Basu 2012; Whitman 2013). This character is not simply part of the Australian narrative but belongs to universal historical and mythological accounts of heroes. The ‘clever hero’ captures these specific Australian and more general mythological accounts, and has been described as the triumph of brain over brawn (Klapp 1954). This hero type is not
against creating controversy but often offsets potential offence through the use of humour and wit. It was shown in Chapter 8 that Sheedy fits this narrative construct.

The narratives that were built up around Cameron and Sheedy assumed increased significance because their team was struggling on the pitch. The initial lack of on-field success meant that there were few heroic exploits for fans to associate with, and consequently few observable signs of heroisation emanating from the fans. Cameron’s heroisation evolved gradually as his performances became indicative of his ability. I conclude on the basis of this case study research and earlier studies that the process of heroisation first requires the development of narratives around the player and will, therefore, take time to become established. The fan culture of the GWS Giants is also slowly developing and this study was able to identify its main characteristics, on the basis of which analytical conclusions can be drawn on the development of fan cultures in general.

**Developing a Fan Culture**

Several techniques have been utilised by the Giants to cultivate a fan culture. These include: involving potential fans in the selection of the new team’s name and colours, the creation of a mascot and a team song, the construction of multi-million dollar training facility and base, and the development of two ‘boutique’ home venues (one in Sydney and the other in Canberra.) At the time of writing in 2016 it is apparent that these techniques have been partially successful, with the club securing a membership base that is comparable with some of the other teams in the region. But several barriers to the formation of fan culture have also been revealed in this thesis. That the Giants have two ‘homes’ is significant, and there is the opportunity for further investigation into whether fans develop distinctive characteristics determined by locality, and if this duality will weaken, rather than extend, their fan base. The diverse geographical region of Western Sydney was also highlighted as a potential barrier to fan formation. Historically, clubs have been formed around a specific locality, but the Giants are based in a large, geographically dispersed region. Although the size of Western Sydney may result in an increased area in which to attract fans, it is also challenging for the club to build a coherent identity that appeals
to such a diverse area. Thus, as I have argued, this scattered fan base may obstruct the building of Giants’ fan culture.

The region chosen for the GWS Giants presents an additional challenge. Lock (2008) suggests that new teams can draw upon existing identification between potential fans and the team’s sport to ‘leverage’ support. In the case of the Giants, Greater Western Sydney does not have a notable history of Australian football, which makes it difficult for the club to benefit from any existing love of the sport in the region. In addition, Western Sydney is culturally diverse and, although the Giants have attempted to connect with this multicultural region through the appointment of two multicultural development officers (AFL 2009b), it still remains that Australian football is perceived as a conservative, White-dominated sport, which is likely further to hinder identification with the club.

An additional barrier to the development of fan identification was the homogeneity of the Giants’ players (in contrast to the population of Western Sydney), which made it difficult for fans to distinguish one player from another, despite the club’s efforts to generate knowledge recognition of their players (as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6). While it may not be practical for a club to sign a player based on their appearance, players with distinguishing characteristics certainly offer a possible point of attachment for fans. With the team and players struggling to perform on the pitch, it was also initially unclear whether any players would perform at a suitable level. The team lost 41 of their 44 games in their first two seasons, and there was a lack of heroic, match-winning performances to attract fans (Hunt, Bristol & Bashaw 1999). It should be noted that the Giants did enjoy considerably more success in subsequent seasons, reaching the AFL Finals in 2016, their fifth year in the competition. Their latter seasons provided numerous ‘heroic’ feats from players but, as I have argued, feats alone are not sufficient criteria for heroisation. An individual deed may be recognised as heroic without the player being heroised. It is also the case that the team went on to sign a number of older players with existing AFL profiles and the Giants’ fans did form attachments to a number of these athletes, but these players fell outside of the timeframe for this research. In addition, these players already had existing heroic narratives constructed around them and so they were not considered
within my discussion of hero formation. I contend that the initial heroisation of these players will be consistent with the findings of this thesis.

In contrast to the lack of observable performative heroisation, through my observational research I was able to identify some limited pockets of emergent fan culture, including the formation of a number of distinct fan groups. Of particular note is the vocal cheer squad, who in particular display their identity through their attire, songs, and chants. The identification of fans appears to be particularly strong among children, stimulated by the club’s commitment to school-based activities and the use of the Giants’ mascot, G-MAN, to engage younger fans. A further example of the club’s and fans’ evolving identity is the emerging sense of rivalry with the Sydney Swans, reinforced by their win at the start of the 2014 season and enhanced with a further victories in the 2016 season. Despite this flutter of fan activity, my observations indicated that most fan behaviour was determined by the on-field performance of the team. Thus, because the Giants had limited on-field success during my observation period, fan activity and identification initially evolved slowly. This reliance on on-field success indicates low levels of identification among potential spectators who are primarily concerned with entertainment and a consumerist search for excitement (Stewart, Smith & Nicholson 2003). Sydney’s reputation as a city which is relatively unreceptive to spectator sport (Nadel 1998a) – certainly when compared with Melbourne – means that new professional clubs in the city have to work hard to develop identification with fans. In addition, the large number of sports teams in the region offers numerous alternative choices for entertainment seekers, and allows the local population to follow only demonstrably successful teams.

These findings have important implications for studies into sport fandom. First, fan cultures take time to evolve and it can be difficult to create identification with a team artificially when it is imposed on an area rather than evolving from the demand of the community. A sense of identification between fans and a club develops most easily when the players (and those running the club) share a cultural or historical bond, so that fans can see the players as being representative of themselves. It is difficult for a mono-cultural playing team to attract fans from an ethnically diverse region. Finally, on-field success plays a crucial role in the development of a fan culture, generating a
livelier atmosphere at games and providing a reason for fans to affiliate themselves with a new club. While fans with an existing identification may stay loyal to a losing team, fickle fans are often attracted to winning teams. On-field success also has a positive impact on match attendance figures, and the crowds at Giants’ games rose over the course of their first five years, as they became consistently competitive (and qualified for the AFL Finals in 2016). As was discussed above, the homogeneous, Anglo-Celtic backgrounds of most players (and from my observations, also the fans) of the Giants is indicative of wider narratives that are present within Australian sport (and society). Therefore, it is not possible to separate discussions of the culture of the Giants’ fan from their socio-cultural settings.

**Australian Sport, Ethnicity & Masculinity**

In this thesis, I argue that the formation of heroes is reliant on more than just on-field success, and it should be considered in the wider context of national identity. Sport plays a significant role in Australian society, and international sporting success remains a key element of Australian national identity (Ward 2010). While national governments have habitually represented Australia as a multicultural society (Ozdowski 2012), there is only partial evidence of multiculturalism in Australian sport. Aboriginal AFL players are excluded from positions of power and although the AFL became the first major Australian sporting code to outlaw racial ‘sledging’ in 1995, there have, in recent years, been numerous incidents of ‘old racism’ directed towards Indigenous AFL players (Hogan 2014). For a large proportion of this period of study (from 2013 until he retired in 2015 – as a result in part of the abuse he was receiving (Judd & Butcher 2016)), Sydney Swans player Adam Goodes was racially vilified while playing Australian football. He was not the only player to be abused in such a manner, (Eddie Betts of the Adelaide football club has, at the time of writing, been targeted by fans) and the continued racial vilification of Indigenous and ethnic minority players (Crawford 2013; Baldwin & Conn 2014; Parry 2016), along with the easier acceptance of players of Anglo-Celtic appearance in the AFL, is indicative of the systemic discrimination that continues to be evident within Australian society.

As I showed in Chapter 6, images of Israel Folau used by the Giants over-emphasised his body in a manner that reflects media representation of Black athletes in American sports (Hardin et al. 2004; Andrews & Mower 2012). This overrepresentation of
Folau’s body, I argue, is another element of what Hoberman (1997) has described as the global racial folklore that emphasises the physical characteristics of non-White athletes. In Chapter 3 it was noted that emphasis is placed on the physical characteristics of American heroes. In this thesis masculine physicality has been identified as significant in the heroisation processes associated with both Israel Folau and Jeremy Cameron, suggesting that physical appearance is also significant in the heroisation of Australian athletes. In the context of sport, the dominant narratives that emerged are based on “traditional forms and norms of physical activity” that are indicative of a “culturally conservative institution” (Adair 2009, 420). This thesis argues that these traditional “forms and norms” often uphold masculine, White ideals (McKay et al. 2001; Gemmell 2007; Carniel 2008) connected to sports that are associated with traditional notions of Australianness – namely cricket, Australian football, and rugby league (Hughson 1997; Carniel 2008). Historically, Australian football has been used to maintain the values of White, nationalist Australia (Hallinan, & Judd 2009a), and the organisation of sport in Australia continues to be dominated by the Anglo-Celtic element within Australian culture. While the AFL has attempted to widen its fan base to non-traditional markets, it may not be able to do this through mechanisms such as *Multicultural Ambassadors* (AFL 2012) and high profile code switches. In particular, the existing Anglo-Celtic fans of Australian football are often not accepting of Indigenous or ethnic minority players and are unlikely to widely venerate these players as heroes until there is a change in the prevailing culture of Australian football. This thesis has also revealed a number of significant contributions towards the scholarly field concerning sports heroes.

**Sports Heroes**

In Chapter 3 I detailed that earlier studies of sports heroes have widely utilised a social psychological approach to discover which athletes are identified as heroes (Wann et al. 2001; Melnick & Jackson 2002; Stevens, Lathrop & Bradish 2003; Parry 2009). Such social psychological approaches, and social psychologists such as Sullivan and Venter (2010), claim that individuals are free to make their own choices of heroes, typically identifying with the personal characteristics of particular athletes. In contrast, Klapp (1948), a sociologist, contends that the personal traits of heroes are
unimportant and the socially-acceptable deeds that they perform are more significant. In this thesis I argue that heroes cannot be considered to be solely an individual’s decision. Although an individual fan may consider him or herself ‘free’ to choose their hero my thesis has revealed that fans may not have the ‘power’ to create a hero in the way that Crawford (2004) claims. Instead a complex, interrelated network of social, cultural, historical, and political factors, and the media, influences hero choices. As a result of these contexts, there are large degrees of similarity between the heroes chosen in a particular society. Moreover, from the evidence provided in this thesis I conclude that, for an athlete to be accepted as a sports hero, there must be a clearly constructed narrative surrounding them.

If society is a reality ‘sui generis’ as Durkheim (1965) has argued, then it exerts an influence over each individual, shaping his or her views and thoughts. Therefore, while stories relating to heroes are some of the key narratives that are present in sport, they will be shaped by the collective beliefs and the familiar patterns that are present in each society, sedimented in the unconscious of that culture. Sports heroes are, therefore, a result of the narratives that are present rather than the individual athlete’s characteristics. In previous studies the characteristics listed to explain choices of heroes have included pro-social behaviour, athletic ability, and local affiliation (Wann et al. 2001; Melnick & Jackson 2002; Stevens, Lathrop & Bradish 2003; Parry 2009). All of these characteristics can be linked to, and understood through, the societal constructions of heroism that have been reproduced in mythical tales dating back to the Epic of Gilgamesh in the second century BC (Campbell 2004). The typologies that have been proposed by the likes of Thomas Carlyle and Orrin Klapp were based on figures from mythology and folklore, and offer a variety of heroic types that athletes may reflect. These types capture characteristics such as pro-social behaviour, which is a somewhat intuitive key element of a hero, but explain heroes at a higher, mythological level of signification. In the case of the GWS Giants, the narratives around both Kevin Sheedy and Jeremy Cameron display patterns that reflect these hero types – respectively the clever hero and the Cinderella hero. Although Israel Folau during his time with the Giants cannot be equated with a hero type, the narratives that came to surround him are certainly comparable with a traditional villainous typology.
Mythology has been a recurring focus of my research and has been integral to discussions of Australian national identity and heroisation. These conversations, however, are relevant at a global level and this thesis has significance for the wider field of the sociology of sport. Oriard (1982) claims that sport may have been the sole repository of myth in late-twentieth-century American society, and Hartman (2014) contends that the myth of the sports hero is so strong that it can withstand any tears in its fabric or threats to its strength that result from athlete transgressions. She argues that the hero myth “will maintain power and continue to shape how we view athletes and sport” (2014, 166), and it, therefore, plays an important role in identity construction. As was detailed in Chapter 4, hero myths are universal, with a number of scholars tracing them across different cultures and times, and finding similarities in the patterns that were present in their narratives (Carlyle 1840; Raglan 1934; Klapp 1948; 1949a; 1954a; Campbell 2004). However, the studies that examined these myths were predominantly by Western academics addressing Western societies, and both Klapp (1962) Drucker and Cathcart (1994) have argued that hero types are not consistent across all cultures, and what is considered heroic will vary depending on the culture and the period of time. The evidence presented in this thesis supports claims for the universality of the phenomenon of hero myths, but heroisation is demonstrated to be sport specific and notions of heroism deeply influenced by socio-cultural context. It is the heroic narrative created around a player that allows them to achieve hero status. This narrative will be influenced by dominant societal norms and cultural values but, as was shown in this thesis, a suitable level of athletic ability or sporting success (such as in the case of Sheedy) is required to support heroisation.

Female hero archetypes have rarely been identified due to masculine hegemony in sport and society. The aforementioned developments in women’s sport in Australia offer new opportunities to study female sporting heroes, including the emergence of female hero archetypes.

Myths are deeply ingrained in Western society and depict a particular pattern that Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955) describes as ‘everlasting’, as once they become established they tend to be resistant to revision (Eddy 1991). Stories surrounding heroes are often altered to ensure that they fit with recognised myths and narratives, blending factual elements with fictional ones, as is certainly the case with Don Bradman, and can also be seen with Jeremy Cameron. In the instance of a new sports
club, if their players do not have an established playing career or traditions that appeal to fans (or if fans of the club are yet to emerge), then hero formation will be the result of a top-down process that is driven by the club and, in particular the media. Yet, to be heroised an athlete must fit the aforementioned imagined hero ‘shape’ that has been created within a particular society by already existing myths and traditions. For instance, if the imposed ‘hero’ does not have the requisite ability, or does not conform to the ‘dominant culture’ of the team or sport, then the imposition will not be successful. An established sporting hero may be more easily imposed if they do correspond to the ‘shape’ of heroes in a particular sport or cultural environment. This examination of sports heroes, therefore, not only contributes towards the sociology of sport but to the wider field of sociology. Following a brief outline of the important areas for further investigation that this thesis has identified I will detail the contributions that I have made to this field.

Contribution to the research field

I acknowledge that this thesis has not been able to address all areas relating to heroisation and the construction of a club culture, but it has highlighted several avenues for further research. First, while I have identified a number of mythical hero typologies that are relevant to sports heroes, it is important that future research examines whether there are other hero types that modern athletes follow. This additional research will further the understanding of sports heroes formation. Second, the case of Israel Folau warrants further study, particularly in light of his most recent code switch to rugby union, as his success in this sport makes him a likely candidate for heroisation. If he is again considered a hero, then his career offers an instructive case study in heroisation, with evidence of the heroic journey described by Campbell (2004), and will also contribute towards a greater understanding of Pacific Islander (or Pasifika (Lakisa Adair & Taylor 2014)) presence in Australian sport. Third, sport labour migration is clearly a complicated phenomenon (Maguire et al. 2002), and recent developments in professional sport, driven by transnationalism and globalisation have created new patterns of athlete migration that are not captured in existing typologies. Israel Folau is one of a growing number of athletes tempted into crossing sporting codes. Code migration needs greater consideration within the
context of sport labour migration research, as these athletes fail to fit with existing models of migration. Learning to play a new sport is a challenging task and one that exposed Folau to much criticism and vitriol. He was substantially rewarded for this switch and it could be argued that money is the principal motivation for athletes to make such switches. Financial motivation is proposed as one of the key motivators for athlete migration, but it has been established that not all such ‘mercenaries’ are doing it for their sole benefit (Carter 2011b). With the commodification of sport, athletes now have increased earning potential, and many athletes see a successful sporting career (and thus potentially code migration) as a way to support extended families; as was claimed to be the case for Folau (see Chapter 6).

I also argue that Folau’s ethnicity was significant in his representation as a hero/villain. Although there is a wide body of research relating to sport and ethnicity (Kell 2000; Melnick 2001; Cashmore 2005; Giulianotti, 2005; Hallinan & Hughson 2008; Hay 2011), this thesis further extends knowledge in this area. My analysis positions Folau in the wider context of race and ethnicity in Australia, and reveals that ethnicity was a significant factor in his acceptance (or lack of) by some fans. By emphasising his Tongan heritage, the Giants and the AFL positioned him as an outsider and thus potentially at odds with the dominant Anglo-Celtic AFL culture. His code migration also afforded a greater understanding of sport labour migration, identifying a previously overlooked ‘type’ of migration. Significantly, this analysis of Folau’s time in the AFL indicates that, when sports heroisation is based on athletic ability, it is domain specific and may be difficult to translate from one sporting code to another. Folau was a prominent hero in the NRL and, while playing Australian football, he was frequently referred to as a former NRL star still tied to his rugby league origins. His Australian football-specific skills and ability were not of a sufficient level for him to ‘escape’ from his NRL past and be deemed heroic on the basis of his AFL performances. Therefore, for a player to migrate their hero status to a different sport, if it has previously been based on playing ability, they need to display an adequate level of ‘heroic’ performances on their new playing field. When an athlete fails to do so they risk being villainised, particularly if their code-switch is financially well rewarded.
A secondary contribution of this thesis to the sociology of sport is my analysis of the development of fan and club culture at the GWS Giants. I have, in particular, been able to reveal significant insights into Australian football cultures outside Victoria. Although my observations at games did not have the impact on the understanding of hero formation that I first anticipated, they still revealed significant findings in relation to the development of fan and club culture. First, it is clear that it takes time to cultivate a fan and club culture. For the GWS Giants the slow development of their unique fan culture was in part influenced by the lack of on-field success. Indeed, their cross-code (association football) neighbours, the Wanderers, offer an excellent comparison of a new sporting team whose initial on-field success helped to encourage the identification of fans. Nevertheless, I maintain that, for a new club, fan identification and the cultivation of club culture is a process that generally takes time. A historical basis of the sport is helpful in accelerating the formation of a fan culture, and my observations have revealed that the lack of an AFL tradition in Western Sydney has perhaps hindered this development. This thesis has also revealed that a fan culture is often driven by identification with a specific locality as opposed to a region and the Giants may find it difficult to build a coherent identity that appeals to such a geographically and culturally diverse area. While this thesis is primarily focussed on sporting heroes it is possible to draw significant conclusions about heroes more broadly.

Research to date has mainly focussed on established heroes, with a dearth of studies on the specific process of hero formation. Thus, my research is critical in contributing to the ‘literary canon’ on heroisation. A principal contribution of the thesis lies in the approach taken to examining the formation of heroes, focusing on a new sports club to investigate how they develop and emerge. Although new clubs have been researched previously, they have not generally been investigated in relation to hero formation. This approach has led to a fine-grained understanding of a complex process. Sub-themes that have materialised through my research have attempted to address questions over who initiates the heroic narrative, and when and how a hero is formed. This thesis has revealed that heroes do not simply emerge from a fan or club base, but that hero formation is a complex, relational process between the club, fans, the media and, as argued throughout, the narrative created around an individual in a given socio-cultural context. Indeed, a major finding is that heroes
must be considered within a wider context and are clearly positioned within a broader historical or socio-cultural narrative.

The thesis locates sports heroes in relation to this broader narrative and identifies that a hero is often a representation of dominant modes of national identity. Indeed, in the cases of Folau, Cameron and Sheedy, heroes (or villains) often uphold (or challenge) dominant narratives in the construction of national identity (in this case Australian). My three case studies also revealed more than this significant finding. I argue that not only does hero formation draw upon characteristics of national identity, but heroes can also be positioned in the broader, universal narrative of global myths and ideologies found outside sport (and beyond the boundaries of particular countries). Such narratives are most potent when they are linked to the cultural core of the hero’s society and based on wider mythical constructions of heroism that are familiar to the members of that same society.

However, myths are not fixed or immutable, and my research demonstrates that heroisation is a fluid process. It is possible for a subject to move between hero and villain types (and potentially others), as is demonstrated by the examples of Kevin Sheedy and Israel Folau. Whereas Folau’s movement from hero to villain was unintentional, Sheedy deliberately manipulated his image, and was comfortable assuming behaviour associated with villainous and foolish types. He temporarily adopted nefarious qualities to serve a specific purpose, and thus the controversies that he caused are likely to be forgiven, enabling him to move between hero and fool at will.

Heroes continue to occupy an important role in many societies, and particularly in Australia. This thesis has revealed that heroisation is neither reliant on the deeds nor the physical characteristics of heroes. The key factor in the formation of heroes is the narrative that is developed around them; with these constructions tied to earlier mythological hero stories. The hero ‘script’ is, therefore, portable and can be adapted to different societies, where these universal narratives are reproduced at national levels, and incorporated into myths surrounding national identity. There are, consequently, a limited number of typologies for heroes to follow and fans will best affiliate to a hero when the narratives surrounding them are familiar and culturally relevant.
Methodological Appendix

Introduction
Sports heroes exist within networks of social, cultural, and historical linkages that create a dynamic and complex context within which identities and knowledge are shaped and formed. Therefore, it was necessary to identify a methodological approach that would provide the appropriate tools for a critical interrogation of this phenomenon. Sports heroes are shaped by, and in turn produce culture, and they are unlikely to be reducible to the fixed patterns that positivist science would be best suited to capture (Andrews, Mason & Silk 2005). To grasp the complexities of heroisation, an interpretivist, qualitative approach was identified as most appropriate (Denzin & Lincoln 2005).

Qualitative Research Methodology
As qualitative researcher David Silverman (2010, 34) states, “the choice between different research methods should depend upon what you are trying to find out”. Education researcher Jerry W. Willis (2007, 150) further emphasises this point by stating that “it is not a method or research technique that determines whether something is qualitative research; it is how the study is conceived, what is to be accomplished, and how the data are understood”. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) believe that qualitative research is interdisciplinary (or trans- and even counterdisciplinary), multiparadigmatic, and contradictory in nature. It is an umbrella term (Holloway & Wheeler 2002) for “a very broad church and includes a wide range of approaches and methods found within different research disciplines” (Ormston et al. 2013, 3). Therefore, notions of what constitutes qualitative research are continually shifting (Andrews, Mason & Silk 2005) and, as any definition needs to work within its complex historical field (Denzin & Lincoln 2008), it can be hard to provide one clear definition or description of qualitative research (Yin 2011), with many rudimentary definitions based on the fact that it is non-quantitative. Grahame (1999, 4 in Silverman 2010, 34) sums up this situation: “the notion that qualitative research is non-quantitative is true but uninformative: we need more than a negative definition”. Lincoln and Guba (2000), who admit that they were trained as quantitative
researchers, acknowledge the legitimacy of ‘postmodern’ paradigms and qualitative research, but their discussion of qualitative research is still positioned against the backdrop of quantitative research. So, rather than focusing on what qualitative research is not, it is preferable to highlight what it is.

Denscombe (2003) identified that the multitude of distinct kinds of social research that may be classed under the wider term ‘qualitative research’ share a number of common factors. Amongst these factors are “a concern for meaning and the way people understand things” and “a concern with patterns of behaviour” (Denscombe 2003, 267). Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). It takes an interpretivist view of research that places importance on how humans interpret the world around them (Willis 2007) and emphasises socially constructed realities (Denzin 1994). Data are analysed inductively (Creswell 1998) and analysis makes use of (rather than seeking to eliminate) human feelings, reactions, and the insights of the researcher (Priest 2010). In contrast to quantitative research, where influence from the researcher is viewed as contamination (Lincoln & Guba 2000), the researcher assumes a key role in qualitative research, becoming a key instrument in data collection (Lincoln & Guba; Creswell 2009). Qualitative research is prepared to sacrifice scope in favour of detail (Silverman 2005), aiming to provide a depth of understanding through the use of multiple data sources to provide data triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln 2008; Creswell 2009; Yin 2011). Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2) suggest that rich descriptive data are generated through the collection of:

…a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals’ lives.

Qualitative researchers draw on a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices and, therefore, there is no set method or approach to qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln 2008). Rather, an appropriate, naturalistic approach should be chosen that studies ‘things’ in their natural setting, with the aim of understanding phenomena in terms of the meanings which individuals place upon them. The term ‘bricoleur’, which describes the qualitative researcher as a maker of quilts (Denzin & Lincoln
2008), captures the changing and evolving nature of qualitative research, with the researcher learning new skills and using different tools to adapt to the research situation. Qualitative research also has the power to change situations and to bring a new understanding and value to marginalised identities and experiences. In particular, qualitative research can indicate how particular texts reproduce stereotypes and prejudice through the misrepresentation of individuals and groups (Andrews, Mason & Silk 2005). In this investigation I became the ‘maker of quilts’, and my methods changed to fit different stages of the research. I adopted a somewhat pragmatic view and my approach evolved as the project developed.

It should be acknowledged that Silverman (2010) offers a word of caution when using multiple methods, arguing that if social reality is constructed differently in different contexts, then multiple data collection methods and data sets would not represent a single phenomenon. In my research however, it was believed that the convergence of different data sources would add to the validity and trustworthiness of the study (Yin 2011). A qualitative approach was identified as being most appropriate because it allowed an interpretation of sports heroes as a socially constructed reality to be developed. The use of multiple data sources, in this case observations, analysis of media and club communications, and an unobtrusive netnography of online fan forums, allowed a depth of understanding to the process of heroisation to be developed that one single qualitative method or a quantitative approach would not afford.

**Case Study Research Method**

Although case study research can include quantitative methods, Edwards and Skinner (2009) state that it has often been equated with qualitative research. It is a stand-alone, flexible qualitative approach in its own right, which is designed to suit the particular case and question (Hyett, Kenny & Dickson-Swift 2014). As a methodological approach, the practice of doing case studies can be traced back to early work by the Chicago School of Sociology, the conduct of life histories, and casework in social research (Yin 2009). It is an approach that Yin (2009) describes as being one of the most challenging social science endeavours. Case study research involves the investigation of one or more contemporary phenomenon/na within their
‘real-life’ context, and relies on multiple sources of evidence (Flyvbjerg 2006; Yin 2009; Hyett, Kenny & Dickson-Swift 2014; Rose, Spinks & Canhoto 2015). Data collection is an extensive process that draws on “multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials” (Cresswell 1998, 63). Berg (2007) proposes that, through the in-depth study of a single phenomenon, individual, or group, it is possible to uncover the manifest interaction of the most significant characteristics of the subject. Furthermore, through an in-depth study it is also possible for a researcher to capture those “nuances, patterns, and more latent elements” that other approaches may not uncover (Berg 2007, 284). The depth of study is generated through the multiple sources of evidence, with the data converging in a triangulatory fashion (Yin 2009).

Yin (2009) argues that the use of case studies is most appropriate when investigating contemporary phenomena in situ, especially if the boundaries between a phenomenon and its context are unclear. By generating a deep understanding it should then result “in new learning about…behaviour and its meaning” (Yin 2012, 4). Yin (2009, 2012) suggests four applications of case studies: to explain complex causal links which may be too complex for other methods; to describe the setting within which an intervention occurred; to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention, and to explore social phenomena in their natural setting in order to discover theory.

There are two common criticisms of this method: that case study research lacks rigour, and that researchers are too often ‘sloppy’, with a lack systematic procedures, or that they have not taken sufficient care to ensure that biases have not influenced the study (Yin 2003; Berg 2007). The steps I took to ensure the fair reporting of evidence and the systematic methods followed will be discussed in more depth later, but it is worth spending some time first to address the second common criticism; that case study research cannot be generalised. Lincoln and Guba (1979) suggest that generalisations have been seen as enduring assertions that should be context-free. They and Stake (1978) identify the importance placed on the need for research to generate generalisations by many (positivistic) scientists, with Lincoln and Guba (1979, 110) going so far as to suggest that some see generalisations as the “be-all and end-all” of academic inquiry. Yet Robert Stake (2005) posits that intuition persuades researchers and readers that what is known or understood about one particular subject
is often likely to be applicable to a similar case. Stake (2005, 454) is of the opinion that case study research conveys and draws forth “the essence of qualitative understanding”. Case study research does this through the use of narratives and situational description, which convey not only the experience of studying the case, but also the experiences of the actors and ‘stakeholders’. When case study accounts parallel the experiences of the reader, they will make generalisations based on their own personal or vicarious experience. Stake (1978, 6) argues that case studies generate “full and thorough” knowledge about the particular, and suggests that, while this form of knowledge is not the positivistic knowledge created by scientific induction, it can be considered to be ‘naturalistic generalisation’. A person’s prior experiences allow them to link, through naturalistic generalisation, what they have understood from the research to their existing knowledge of “how things are, why they are, how people feel about them, and how these things are likely to be later or in other places” (Stake 1978, 6).

Lincoln and Guba (1979) offer a different approach and suggest that, rather than referring to generalisations, it is more useful to consider the working hypothesis, which forms the basis for transferability of qualitative research. Building on the work of Cronbach (1975), Lincoln and Guba argue that, in each and every case, there will be factors which are unique to that particular location or to the events which have unfolded, and hence it is futile to generalise from this research. Nevertheless, it is possible to make a working hypothesis that may hold true for a given period of time or for other cases. Both Yin (2003) and Flyvbjerg (2006) echo this view as they suggest that case studies are generalisable in as much as experimental methods are to theoretical propositions, a process which Yin describes as analytic generalisation (Yin, 2003; 2012). Flyvbjerg (2006) goes on to argue that formal generalisation is actually overvalued, rendering this continued criticism of case study research somewhat obsolete. In essence, case studies are able to produce initial theories which may explain the phenomenon and whose applicability to other settings can then be tested.

Edwards and Skinner (2009) state that, despite being a valuable tool in sport (management) research, case study research is infrequently used. Regardless, it is possible to uncover a number of instances where case studies have been utilised in a
sports setting, with studies looking at areas such as: the marketing activities of a sports franchise in the United States (Kelley, Hoffman & Carter 1999), tobacco sponsorship of sport (Ling, Haber & Wedl 2010), gender inequalities within the Brazilian sports press (Knijnik & Soares de Souza 2011), sexual abuse in sports organisations (Parent 2011), and small-scale sport events (Gibson, Kaplanidou & Kang 2012). From a methodological perspective, a number of studies are of particular relevance to my investigation, including de Groot and Robinson’s (2008) study of an Australian football fan which examined the participant’s ‘journey’ from initial attraction to the team to their recognition as a fan. Other examples can be found of case studies utilising participant observation (typically as part of an ethnographic approach) in a sports setting: Bignold (2013) undertook a case study of the lived experiences of unicycle riders, and Burrows and McCormack (2011) studied an elite girls’ school in New Zealand to examine the link between discourses relating to sport or physical education and the school culture and teaching practices. As was discussed in Chapter 5, the initial unit of analysis for this case study was the GWS Giants, and a sequential mixed qualitative method was utilised. Participant observations initially identified potential heroes for further study, and these ‘heroes’ then formed the basis of a multiple-case (collective) case study (Baxter & Jack 2008) via textual analysis and netnography.

Observational Research

My first phase of data collection consisted of participant observation of fans of the GWS Giants and the club’s games. The sites selected for these observations were chosen on the basis that they were the principal sites of sports fans’ public ‘real time’ heroisation practices – the club’s home venues. The stadium is of key significance for sports fans (Bale 2000; Penny & Redhead 2009; Tonts & Atherley 2010) and, as such, I initially believed that observations would play a primary role in data collection. Games at ANZ Stadium in Sydney, the Sydney Showground, and Manuka Oval in Canberra were observed between March 2012 and April 2014. In addition, attending functions at the Giants’ Learning Life Centre also offered the opportunity to observe staff and players from the club interacting with the media and corporate followers. Observations of these events were not restricted to the venues, and attention was paid
to the precincts surrounding the stadiums and public transport on the way to and from the venue. While formal interviews were not conducted, I frequently engaged fans and club officials in ‘opportunistic’ conversation and subsequently recorded them in my fieldnotes.

I had initially envisaged that ethnography, which is essentially a ‘deep’ description of peoples or cultures (Denscombe 2010), would be an appropriate research method to adopt in this thesis, and I studied this technique in some detail. In line with the flexible and evolutionary nature of qualitative research, and in my guise as the ‘maker of quilts’, my methodology changed over time and this methodological technique was not completely adopted. A key principle underlying ethnography is Max Weber’s (1947) notion of ‘verstehen’ of lived experiences of humans (Willis, 2007). Hughson (1998a) identifies that the clichéd saying ‘walk a mile in my shoes’ is a particularly apt way of understanding what is required truly to comprehend the lived experiences of other people. The need for immersion is also stressed by Berg (2007, 172) who says that ethnography “places researchers in the midst of whatever they study. From this vantage [point] researchers can examine various phenomena as perceived by participants”. A key characteristic of any observational inquiry is that the researcher spends extensive time in the field, so that gaining access to the field generating rapport, and developing an ‘insider’ perspective are paramount concerns (Creswell 1998; Yin 2011). It was initially thought that an immersed vantage point was required to understand heroisation. To enable an insider perspective, I became a member of the GWS Giants and attended twelve matches and events over a two-year period, received club communications and materials, and engaged with the club website on a regular basis. Brewer (2000) identifies four features of ethnography. It focuses on the ordinary activities of people in their everyday, natural settings; uses flexible, often unstructured methods of data collection; the researcher should be actively engaged in the activities of the participants or engaged with the participants; and finally, that it explores the meanings that both the individuals that participate and the wider society place on these activities. Under such a definition there is a degree of commonality between the methods I adopted and ethnography, but there was not the “sustained social contact with agents” that Willis and Trondman (2002, 394) identify as a vital component of this method. Ultimately, it became apparent that there was little evidence of heroisation by the Giants’ fans (see Chapter 5), and so...
while the participant observational method that I did adopt certainly drew on ethnographic techniques, I do not claim to have conducted an ethnography.

Participant observation has been used to examine areas within the wider fields of the sociology of sport, such as: young people’s participation and experience in an athletics club (Macphail 2004), the role of race in rugby league (Spracklen, Timmins & Long 2010), sport governance (Numerato & Baglioni 2011), sports clubs in rural Canada (Fortune & Mair 2011), performative behaviour of American football fans (Osborne & Coombs 2013), and participatory sports events in Canada (Rich, Misener & Dubeau 2015). Sports fandom has been a relatively rich source of observational research in recent years. Armstrong and Harris (1991) made use of “fieldwork” to study Sheffield football hooligans and Giulianotti (1995) engaged in participant observation of Scottish football fans; Hughson (1998; 2000) used ethnographic method to examine football fans in Australia; Weed (2006) made use of ethnographic field notes and an ethnographic diary to study football spectators – a method which also influenced Kraszewski’s (2008) ethnographic study of American sports fans; and Fairley (2009) utilised participant observation and ‘ethnographic interviews’ to study fans of Australian football.

Madden (2010) highlights that, while it is not always possible to take detailed notes in the field, handwritten notes remains a central tool for capturing observations. Weed (2006, 80) discusses how he would furtively scribble notes on toilet paper and describes how a colleague had suggested using “the back of cigarette packets, beer mats and on newspapers when pretending to do the crossword”. Berg (2007), however, provides a more structured method of creating fieldnotes. This process begins with cryptic joggings that may include key phrases heard, sketches, brief statements, or short notes that are taken at the time, which then provide the basis for detailed descriptions that are made once the field has been left. These descriptions should include as much colour as possible and be as accurate as memory and notes permit. During this stage, it is also important for the researcher to make analytic notes or observer comments of the ideas and thoughts that occur during the process, and can take the form of a research diary. These tentative ideas may be observations concerning participants or initial theoretical ideas on interactions or occurrences. Finally, the process is completed with subjective reflections on personal feelings that
have been elicited during data collection. Berg emphasises the time-consuming nature of this process and states that writing fieldnotes takes four times as long as the time spent observing.

While all attempts can be made to be systematic in the recording of observations, Madden (2010) recognises that the very process of observation and note-taking is inherently subjective, and a degree of filtering (and hence signifying of importance) will take place at this stage. This process has been followed successfully by researchers such as Weed (2006) and Kraszewski (2008), and this was the framework I adopted. To capture observations at Giants’ games some handwritten fieldnotes of short observations were made, but a tablet device was also utilised. The use of tablet devices by sports fans is now relatively common at sports matches, with teams and stadiums offering free Wi-Fi and encouraging the use of mobile devices (Turner 2014). Therefore, the use of such a device to make my initial observations and thoughts (that were later turned into detailed descriptions and analytic notes) did not need to be furtive, and was seen as acceptable sports fan behaviour by those around me. Using a tablet device with in-built photographic capabilities had the added benefit of allowing events to be recorded “in multiple modalities” (Yin 2011, 161), and relevant photographs have been presented and analysed in this thesis. While formal interviews were not conducted in this study, I frequently engaged in conversation and discussions with fans and club officials, and these were recorded as accurately as possible afterwards as soon as was practically permitted. Although Brewer (2000) and Silk (2005) are focussing on ethnography, their arguments that data collection and initial analysis are simultaneous, occurring when fieldnotes are collected and written up, are equally applicable to participant observation in general. Analysis, therefore, began with the capture of my fieldnotes, and the selection of which events were significant and worthy of recording was seen as the first stage in this process.

**Textual Analysis**

The second stage of data collection involved a textual analysis of media and the club’s communications. Silverman (2005) advocates that data should be limited to allow for a detailed analysis and Markham (2008) stresses that the definition of
boundaries for the field of study is also key for internet-based research. Therefore, the first step taken to delineate the boundaries of this analysis was to identify sources of data. The sports pages (mainly) of the two best selling Sydney-based newspapers (AMAA 2015), the SMH, a ‘quality’ broadsheet that became a tabloid in 2013, and The Daily Telegraph, which is a traditional popular tabloid newspaper (Garbutt 2011), were analysed. The latter is strongly associated with rugby league, describing itself as the “authority on NRL” (News Corp 2015, 15) and features a weekly ‘League Central’ section. The SMH claims to offer unbiased sports journalism across every major sporting code and, unlike The Daily Telegraph, has a dedicated AFL section (SMH 2015). There continues to be a decrease in print sales, and a corresponding rise of online reading, of Australian newspapers (TheNewspaperWorks 2015), and so these sources were accessed via online search engines. Search engines on the newspaper’s websites and via the University’s library page were used to find news stories that made reference to the three potential heroes once they have been identified, using the terms ‘Kevin Sheedy’, ‘Israel Folau’ and ‘Jeremy Cameron’. A total of 350 articles were identified as containing discussions on these figures (rather than descriptive match reports), and were then archived using an online content curation tool (Evernote, which allows sources to be ‘tagged’ and annotated). Articles were ascribed initial codes (through Evernote’s tagging tool). The second data set consisted of 204 emails from the Giants to club members (fans) and content posted on the GWS Giants’ website, which included Channel Seven’s #Discovered Jeremy Cameron video feature. Emails were read through (and links clicked on) to identify discussions pertaining to the three case studies, with relevant emails saved for further analysis. The club’s website was regularly visited with content scanned and multimedia watched. Relevant content was again archived via Evernote, and both emails and website content were again initially coded before analysis took place.

As advocated by Corbin and Strauss (2008), data analysis of the texts, searching for “common themes and regularities” (Boeije 2010, 5) began after the first data had been collected, and then continued after each subsequent data collection step in a continuous sequential or cyclical manner (Corbin & Strauss 2008; Boeije 2009; Denscombe 2010). Creswell (1998) also describes data analysis as a spiral where analysis moves in analytic circles, starting with data collection and data management before reading through data to gain a sense of the whole data set and to make initial
observations. The next part of the spiral involved the formation of categories where themes were developed before being reduced to a small, manageable set. These themes were then interpreted to provide naturalistic generalisations. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that there are three generic stages to qualitative data analysis; data reduction of the mass of collected data; then data display in some format so as to allow conclusions to be drawn; and conclusion drawing/verification (interpreting the findings). Miles and Huberman’s analytical stages need not be considered a complete list however. Long (2007), for example, suggests that the first stage of analysis should be familiarisation with the data, through methods such as listening to recordings of interviews or personally transcribing them. In this instance data were read to generate an initial familiarity. Gobo (2008) also provides a different structure for data analysis whereby a progressive three-stage data coding procedure is utilised. This process consists of deconstruction (open coding), construction (axial coding), and confirmation (selective coding). Data collection should take place at all three of these stages and forms part of a spiral reflexive process, situated between sampling and analysis (Gobo 2008). At each stage of coding, data collection serves a different purpose, firstly to uncover the conventions by which the observed interactions are bounded; secondly (during the construction stage) to aid the development of a theory or story which attempts to explain the interactions; and finally to document the ideas detailed in the theory during the confirmation stage.

By drawing on all these strategies a constant process of data collection, coding, and analysis was utilised to develop an understanding of heroisation. Data from all sources were initially read through and notes were made with initial comments and ideas. These notes were then transformed into initial themes, which were refined and developed through further analysis and during subsequent stages of data collection (Rapley 2011). Sullivan (2012) colourfully describes qualitative research as a dynamic engagement with texts along both bureaucratic (following guidelines) and charismatic (stylistic) lines, suggesting that, while data analysis should be systematic and follow guidelines, the researcher’s stylistic choices and personality will also be influencing factors. In this manner it is acknowledged that I played a role in data analysis through the decisions that I made ‘along the way’. Analysis of all data sets involved a two-pronged approach, incorporating discourse analysis and semiotic analysis, which are discussed next.
Discourse Analysis

While Brewer (2000) suggests that qualitative data analysis techniques should arise out of the original research questions and insights that occur during data collection, he states that it should be systematic and rigorous and should follow some general principles. Discourse analysis is described as an approach that allows researchers to investigate questions of power, identity, subjectivity, and conflict. Justin Lewis (2008, 667) suggests that such methods allow a degree of freedom, but is quick to argue that:

[t]his is not merely poetic licence: our understanding of narrative structure, visual imagery, and the full complexity of elements that create moods and impressions – from editing techniques to the use of music gives us access to forms of understanding and appreciation that are difficult to reproduce in simple formulae.

The analysis of a small number of specific and relevant examples that are then discussed in light of the broader social issues that they exemplify has been identified as an appropriate analytical method used by sports sociologists (Jette 2006). While there are several methods that can be used to analyse qualitative data, discourse analysis has been increasingly deployed in sport research. For instance, recent examples include analyses of: the framing of sports scandal in American media (Cooky 2012); children’s experiences of team sports (Walters et al. 2012); the AFL’s introduction of free agency for players (Smith & Moore 2014); racial discourses on message boards for America college basketball (Love & Hughey 2014); media coverage of Muslim women during the London 2012 Olympic Games (Samie & Sehlikoglu 2014); the appropriation of postural yoga by American media (Markula 2014); and the construction of female athletic identity on social media (Heinecken 2015).

Discourse analysis evolved as a branch of linguistics and was initially focussed on linguistic constructions that were larger than just a single sentence or utterance (Bennett & Frow 2008; Blommaert 2011). French philosopher Michel Foucault (1972, 49) suggested that discourses should not be treated simply as groups of signs,
but rather considered “as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”. Foucault (1972) argued that discourses also embrace a plurality of meanings, saying something other than what they appear to say. He suggests that everything is never said and, indeed, figurative language (that is language that does not mean what it says) and the use of metaphor are central to communication. Resultantly, poststructuralists argue “there can be no text which ‘means what it says’” (Chandler 2002, 126). Discourse analysis is able to capture the tension between a ‘literal’ interpretation of signs and the figurative or metaphorical meanings and Yin (2011) argues that such an approach considers language to represent a construction of social reality, particularly within the social context of what is said or written.

Although Foucault made the concept of discourse popular, cultural anthropologist Sine Agergaard (2006) claims that he did not use a coherent model of discourse analysis in his own work or utilise a particular theory. She additionally highlights that there is no recipe for discourse analysis and that researchers have adopted a variety of methods. Contrary to this statement, Jones, Chik and Hafner (2015) identify a number of characteristics of discourse analysis, suggesting that its practitioners typically pay attention to: texts, contexts, actions, interactions, power and ideology. Whatever the approach, discourse analysis seeks to understand the relationships between the micro level of the text and the macro level of how these texts are related discursively to wider social contexts. An in-depth analysis of texts relating to my three identified heroes allowed an understanding of their cultural meaning to be developed. The texts produced by the club and media formed the ‘concrete objects’ of my analysis (Chouliaraki 2008) and allowed an insider description of this sporting culture to be developed. Discourse analysis is one of a number of approaches to textual analysis and within the field of media studies (or the study of media texts) the two most prominent methods of textual analysis are content analysis and semiotics (Chandler 2002). Semiotics, which developed historically out of linguistics, is influential in cultural research (Thwaites, Davis & Mules 1994), featuring alongside ethnographical research as the common methodological strategies used (Fiske 2004) and was identified as a suitable method for understanding the media coverage of the Giants’ heroes.
Semiotic Analysis

Meaning is generated between individuals and signs or texts through language or a “language-like activity (dress or gesture, for instance)”, and the system by which this exchange happens is the same regardless of the language used (Fiske, Hodge & Turner 1987, xi). It is important to note that meaning is always negotiated and it should not be presumed that it is imposed “inexorably from above by an omnipotent author through an absolute code” (Hodge & Kress 1988, 12). However, meaning is typically developed through particular conventions and rhetorical codes that form “part of the ‘reality’ maintenance system of a culture of sub-culture” (Chandler 2002, 124) and there are often assumed or accepted interpretations of signs and their associations.

Roland Barthes (1968) identifies semiology as the study of all such systems of signs and he later (1972) states that, because both writing and pictures constitute signs, it is possible to treat them both in the same way. Texts, therefore, should not be studied in isolation but as part of “semiotic sign systems” that allows the construction of meaning and the representation of ‘reality to be understood (Chandler 2002). Within these systems of meaning the principal unit is the ‘sign’, which can be an object, act, word, or picture. Semiotician Umberto Eco (1976, 16) captures the complexity of signs when he defines them as “everything that…can be taken as something standing for something else”. Importantly Eco (1976, 7) stresses that the ‘something else’ “does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands in for it” and as a result it is important to consider these ‘something else’s’ in more detail.

Signs have two aspects: the mental impression or material realisation of the sign – the signifier, and the general and abstract concept that is the constructed or imperatively communicated – the signified (Eco 1976; Hodge & Kress 1988; Thwaites, Davis & Mules 1994). The relationship between the signifier and its signified is called signification and it can take place at a number of levels and there is nothing to restrict a given signifier to one signified alone. The denotative signified is the first order of signification and can be understood as the literal meaning of a sign, the obvious or ‘common-sense’ interpretation that can be broadly agreed upon by members of a particular culture (Chandler 2002). Alternatively it can be understood as the “most
stable and apparently verifiable” meaning (Thwaites, Davis & Mules 1994). The connotative signified (the second order of signification), on the other hand, are the multiple, sociocultural and personal associations of the sign. At this level the denotative sign (both its signifier and signified) is further attached to a signified. Semiotician Daniel Chandler (2002) states that connotative signifieds are typically related to concepts such as gender, class, and ethnicity, and connotations are, therefore, culturally-coded interpretations of a sign. Connotations do not have multiple personal meanings, as responses will be shared to a certain extent by members of a culture, limiting interpretations to the limited number that will actually make sense. Finally, the signified also exists extratextually in the myths, countermyths, and ideologies of the culture (Fiske 2004). At this third order of signification the denotative and connotative orders of signification are combined to create dominant ideologies (Barthes 1977), which are historically and socially located within the culture. Drawing on Barthes, Chandler (2002, 145) argues that myths ‘naturalise’ the cultural to make the dominant ideologies seem “‘natural’, ‘normal, ‘self-evident, timeless, obvious ‘commonsense [sic]…and…’true’ reflections of ‘the way things are’”. At this level signification is based on hegemonic concepts.

Armstrong (1996, 325) argues that semiotics is one of the “dominant strategies for interpreting qualitative sociological data” and such an approach has much to offer cultural research, as indicated in the preceding paragraph. Therefore, following Barthes’ recommendation I applied a semiotic analysis to interpret the mythical concepts present in the images and texts used by the Giants in their promotional material and in media coverage. In Australia one of the first uses of a semiotic approach was to analyse television cartoons and their interpretation by children (Hodge & Tripp 1986) but perhaps of most significance to this thesis is Fiske, Hodge, and Turner’s (1987) reading of the ‘myths’ of Australian cultural institutions (such as the beach, the pub, and the Australian accent). Borrowing from the work of Barthes, Fiske, Hodge, and Turner, in Myths of Oz (1987, xi), define myth as a “grouping of signifiers around a concept”, and they argue that such myths create a focus for culture and reveal the processes and the language used to construct particular cultural concepts. Semiotics has been identified as a method of analysis that is able to deal with the messages and meanings that are found in myths (Hodge & Tripp 1986) and is, therefore, a key approach to understand the significance assigned to myths of
Australianness. Fiske, Hodge, and Turner were some of the earliest researchers to examine signifiers of Australianness (White 2009) and Phillips and Smith (2000, 205) argue that Myths of Oz is “[b]y far the most important effort” to explain the attitudes of ‘ordinary’ Australians to the images, concepts and constructions of Australian national identity. Furthermore, Fiske, Hodge, and Turner’s work has influenced: Amelia Johns (1989) in her examination of Australian national identity in Cronulla, Jennifer Ramm’s (1989) analysis of Australian folk songs, Jon Goss’ (1993) analysis of the retail built environment, Simone Pettigrew’s (2006) examination of the symbolic meaning of Australian pubs and Emma Price (2010) has drawn on their approach to study the use of myths of Australian identity in ‘reality TV’. While in sports-based research, Osmond and Phillips (2011; 2014) utilised semiotic analysis in their studies of sports stamps and sporting monuments as visual sources of Australian national identity.

Sport is comprised of “signs and symbols of all kinds, with meaning and relationships to things, people and ideas” (Hill & Williams 2009, 129) and so semiotic analyses have been used in a variety of instances. Semiotics has been used to study: surfing (Flynn 1987), violent behaviour from football fans (O’Donnell & Boyle 1996), Michael Jordan and his uniform number (Armstrong 1996), the English Football Association Cup Final (Hill 1999), a professional sports team’s logo (Bishop 2001), the National Basketball Association (Andrews 2006) Nike women’s advertising (Grow 2006), Major League Baseball (Ogden 2007), the use of digital media by skateboarders (Jones 2011), the official mascots of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games (Griggs et al. 2012), Summer Olympic Games opening ceremonies (Arning 2013), representations of gender and national identity in sports photography (Mishra 2014), and Major League Baseball logos (Turner 2015). This list is not extensive and the number of Australian-based semiotic analyses of sport is very limited, therefore my thesis brings a novel approach to the sociology of Australian sport. Such a semiotic approach was able to connect the three subjects in this thesis with their denotative, connotative, and mythological (or ideological) significations.

As Fiske, Hodge, and Turner (1987) acknowledge, my readings of the texts used in this study are not finite or definitive, and I acknowledge that they offer only one
description of how meaning has been produced and semiotics cannot explain every aspect of a sign or text and is not the final ‘truth’ about it (Thwaites, Davis & Mules 1994). However, as a relatively new arrival to Australia, I am not a product of Australian culture and so was, to an extent, immune to many of the ‘taken for granted’, dominant ideas and cultural assumptions embodied in the texts analysed in this thesis. The last of these multiple data sources that were used were posts by fans on online forums related to the Giants, and the method used to analyse these posts will now be detailed.

**Netnography**

To gain an understanding of the narratives that fans were developing around the Giants, an unobtrusive netnography was conducted on the BigFooty and FanFooty online forums, which both had dedicated sections for the Giants. In this process I took on the role of a complete observer; I did not post comments and became a ‘lurker’ (Mkono & Markwell 2014) in relevant forums. While Kozinets (2006) advocates researcher participation in netnography, a large proportion of the data on the selected forums was identified as archival data (Jones 2015), dating from before the study was started and so a complete observational, unobtrusive method was chosen. Bertilsson (2014) says that such a method enables a researcher to avoid a number of ethical difficulties. Given that the sites did not require registration to access the forums, the topics being discussed were related to Australian football and so not judged to be of a sensitive nature, and there were a large number of posts and users, I deemed the forums to be public spaces (Eysenbach & Till 2001), and that informed consent was not needed for such a passive analysis of “retrospectively posted messages” (Bertilsson 2014, 144). In addition, and in line with the views of Williams (2013), I decided that those posting on threads could not expect to exclude any person from accessing their words. To preserve the anonymity of posters the method used by Williams (2013) in her analysis of *Twilight* online sites was replicated. Only the title of the thread and the date of the post were used to identify thread posts, with errors in spelling and/or grammar left unedited.

The BigFooty forum, in addition to having a specific section for the Giants (http://www.bigfooty.com/forum/forums/gws-giants.318), also had threads for every
player to have played for the club. The threads for Jeremy Cameron and Israel Folau proved the initial starting point for analysis of fan-generated discussions of these two players. In addition, 1,084 threads within the main GWS Giants-related forum were searched for references to Cameron, Folau, or Sheedy once they had been identified as subjects for analysis. The other forum analysed was FanFooty, which had a specific GWS Giants page (http://forum.fanfooty.com.au/index.php/board,36.0.html). A total of 170 threads were searched to identify thread titles making reference to the same three individuals, with 34 threads relating to Sheedy, 24 to Folau and 12 to Cameron identified. These threads were then analysed using the same analytical processes identified above.

**Challenges to Qualitative Research**

Qualitative data are produced by the researcher through interpretation (Denscombe 2003) and, as such, it is acknowledged that the data will be influenced by the values, background, and beliefs of the researcher. Willis (2007) affirms the subjective nature of qualitative data production and suggests that it leads to a lack of objectivity when research findings are being presented and discussed. Qualitative methods are necessarily subjective to a degree and have come under attack from some researchers who question their validity and reliability (Brocki & Wearden 2006). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have further argued that qualitative researchers are facing a crisis of ‘representation’, brought about by their inability to present the lived experiences of the participants that they are studying in their published accounts of them. Instead, “such experience...is created in the social text written by the researcher” (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, 19). To address this crisis, Markula and Denison (2005, 165) have highlighted the need for a researcher not only to state the “social categories to which he or she belongs”, but also to be aware of how their own experiences and views will influence the research process and, particularly, their interpretation and presentation of data. Sparkes (2002) advocates reflexivity on the part of the researcher at all stages to ensure an awareness of the personal biases which researchers bring to the research are taken into account. Silk (2005) suggests that this task can be managed through the process of “peer debriefing” whereby a suitably qualified individual explores the researcher’s biases, clarifies their interpretations, and probes and tests all areas of the
researcher’s subconscious thinking. In this thesis my supervisors provided expertise and knowledge to identify any biases that were present in my thinking, and the following section will detail a reflexive analysis of my own role in the research process.

In quantitative research, which fails to provide an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, there are established criteria which can be used to ensure the ‘quality’ of a study (King & Horrocks 2010). The two concepts that are typically used are (internal and external) reliability – how accurately a variable was measured, and validity – how well the measure that has been utilised actually measures the variable being investigated. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), while identifying their dissatisfaction with discussions that question the reliability and validity of qualitative research, state that there is now a variety of guidelines for assessing the quality of qualitative research. Guba (1981 cited in Lincoln & Guba 1985, 219) proposes four replacement measures that should be used in qualitative research, namely: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Although Lincoln and Guba have developed an alternative set of quality criteria based on authenticity, King and Horrocks (2010, 161) claim that “these original criteria remain widely cited”. Credibility of qualitative studies corresponds to internal validity of a quantitative research study and, rather than aiming to ensure the one ‘true’ account of the data, the aim is to ensure that the final written account is an academically credible representation of the participants’ experiences (Brocki & Wearden, 2005). In this thesis a credible and accurate account has been provided due to my sustained immersion within the research setting. To ensure confirmability, details of my data collection and analytical procedures have provided an ‘audit trail’ of the process by which the conclusions drawn are made transparent (King & Horrocks, 2010). Selected verbatim extracts from the data sources have also been provided, allowing readers to make their own assessments of my interpretations (Brocki & Wearden, 2005). The use of auditing also formed part of ensuring dependability, as other researchers can guarantee the consistency of data when “the steps of the research are verified through examination of such items as raw data, data reduction products, and process notes” (Campbell 1996 cited Golafshani 2003, 601). Transferability, the extent to which other researchers are able to apply the findings to studies in other areas, was achieved “by providing a detailed, rich description of the setting” (Seale
By providing a detailed description of heroes and Australian sport through extensive reviewing of literature, other researchers are able to interpret the findings and apply them to research in related or other areas.

Lincoln and Guba (2000, 179) query whether such consensus-driven notions of validity are suitable for qualitative research, questioning whether co-created constructions can be “trusted to provide some purchase” on some important human phenomenon. They highlight that it is important that research or social inquiry provide a faithful representation of some human condition so that the wider society may feel ‘safe’ to act on the findings. Bracketing (putting aside personal biases) is a key element of this process, but it is not easy (Bernard & Ryan 2010), and the identification of personal biases is the first requirement in this process. The personal biases of the researcher are not the only influence that they will have over a research project and it is important to acknowledge the important role that I, as the researcher, played in (perhaps inadvertently) shaping this thesis.

The Role of the Researcher

One of the key considerations for observations is access to a setting that will enable the research question to be answered. Moreover, access to certain settings may require some form of permission, a degree of prior knowledge, or certain skills (Tewksbury 2006). Tewksbury further discusses how initially anomalous encounters can form ‘gatekeeping’ procedures which full participants recognise, and which are required of new members before they are accepted within the setting. As I identify as a sports fan and have a solid understanding of sports fan behaviour, I avoided the need for a gatekeeper to provide access to Giants’ fans and was able to engage individual fans in conversation when needed.

A critical reflection on the self as the researcher, or reflexivity (as advocated by Sparkes (2002)), is an important element of qualitative research that forces the researcher to come to terms with important moments, such as the choice of a research problem, engagement with participants, and the self and multiple identities that each researcher will represent during the course of their research (Lincoln & Guba 2000). In addition to cautioning researchers to reflect on the self, Yin (2011) suggests that
qualitative researchers need to be mindful that their own subjectivity, beliefs, and interests do not influence and disturb the participants and their social world. Tewksbury (2006) provides a discussion of researcher roles in participant observation research and lists those including: peripheral, active, or complete (as identified by Adler and Adler (1987)), complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant, and complete observer. Tewksbury (2002, 84) also introduces the notion of a “potential participant” which can combine “complete observation, complete participation and covert observational research designs”. This role allows the researcher still to be recognised as a real member of the setting being observed, while retaining some degree of scientific objectivity. This concept is not dissimilar to Giulianotti’s (1995) “relative insider”, where the researcher maintains some distance from the subjects due to professional and ethical considerations. Tewksbury (2002) and Styles (1979) also discuss distinctions of (ethnographic) observations, both drawing a distinction between a fully participating “insider” and a nonparticipating “outsider”. While in both cases observations are made from within the field, in the latter case the researcher does not fully engage in all activities of the group, and as a result may not be considered a full member. Styles (1979, 151) highlights how, for an “outsider”, there will be “a correspondingly heavier reliance upon informants as original sources of ideas as well as a means of testing these notions”. I acknowledge that I did not fully participate in all fan activities for a sustained period of time, and as a relative outsider I relied heavily on additional sources of evidence for my research.

Hughson (1998) also identifies the need for self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher to identify their positioning with respect to their subjects. He goes on to suggest that the qualitative researchers should in particular consider their similarities and differences from the subjects of their observations in areas such as race, class, gender, age, and ethnicity. The degree to which I was accepted as an ‘insider’ within the GWS Giants’ community of fans is worthy of discussion. Although a non-native, and with little prior experience of AFL, as a researcher I was readily accepted. Three factors were crucial in this acceptance. First, the GWS Giants is a newly formed team and, despite having around 11,000 members during their 2011 NEAFL season, their fan base was still evolving. For this reason new members were actively encouraged and easily found acceptance. Second, as mentioned above, my knowledge of sports fandom practices allowed me to transition into this ‘new’ fandom fluidly and to join
in with (some of) the behaviours of the fans around me. Finally, as a 30-something-
year-old male, the process of acceptance as a sports fan was facilitated by my fitting a
typical sports fan profile (Neale & Funk 2005). In addition, the diverse nature of
Western Sydney (as identified in Chapter 4) meant that my overseas (White-British)
background was not found to be an issue with regards to acceptance.

Due to their immersion in the field, Berg (2007) claims that it is not possible for the
researcher to remain objective or neutral. This lack of objectivity is sometimes
framed as an accusation of weakness, with researchers accused of ‘going native’ and
over sympathising with those being studied, and of accepting key observations as the
norm (Giulianotti, 1995). Hughson (1998) suggests that this researcher response is
most likely occur in situations where their cultural background is distinct from that of
the culture under observation. While this point is worthy of consideration, the subject
of my research was not as subversive and perilous as the subjects of the two studies
above. A degree of attachment to the GWS Giants was developed during the course
of this study, but, as is clear from the analysis above, this did not lead to a
romanticisation of the club. A faithful representation of the subject is an ethical
decision that researchers should make, and there were other ethical considerations that
were relevant to this thesis

**Ethical Considerations**

A key ethical consideration for all research projects should be that wittingly or
otherwise, should not come out of the research in any worse position in terms of
safety, welfare, health, or finance than when the research began (Madden 2010). This
approach to ethics can be termed ‘consequentialist’ (Murphy, & Dingwall 2001).
Denscombe (2010) states that researchers employing ethnographic observations may
face issues associated with intrusion upon privacy (through observation) and with
gaining informed consent from participants. This concern over intrusion highlights an
alternative approach to research ethics, the ‘de-ontological’, where the focus is on the
rights of the participant in areas such as privacy, respect, and self-determination
(Murphy & Dingwall 2001). Although fan behaviour was observed, this activity was
only conducted on the way to and at sporting functions and matches, all of which took
place in public spaces, and using unobtrusive methods. While some visual data were
collected, photographs were only taken of crowd scenes and individual fans were not identified.

In addition to concerns over the safety of participants, Silk (2005) identifies physical danger as one potential issue faced by researchers in the field, who are typically alone in an external setting, often with individuals with whom they have little or no prior acquaintance. Although Williams et al. (2006) highlight a lack of discussion of personal safety for such researchers, it is possible to establish a number of practices to ensure personal safety. Before engaging in fieldwork a risk assessment should be undertaken to identify potential risks and measures that can be taken to eliminate or minimise them. Unlike the experiences of researchers into ‘dysfunctional’ sports fans and hooligans, the crowds at GWS Giants’ games were largely amiable and there were specific engagement activities that were designed to attract families. Therefore, while I did travel and attend matches and events alone, there were no safety concerns. In addition, ethical clearance was obtained from the University’s Human Ethics Research Committee before commencing research and the GWS Giants were informed of the purpose and scope of the project in the initial planning stages.

**Final Comments**

It is surprising to note the paucity of research in the sociology of sport that has made use of a semiotic analysis. Given the multiple, contested meanings of sport this approach has much to offer. As I have detailed in this thesis, it is not sufficient to study sports heroes via quantitative, survey-based methods and a flexible qualitative approach is needed to capture the complexities of hero formation. Further research using these methods will facilitate comparative analyses into heroes.
Reference List


Adair, D 2009, 'Australian Sport History: From The Founding Years To Today', Sport In History, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 405-36.

Adler, PA & Adler, P 1987, Membership Roles In Field Research, Qualitative Research Methods, SAGE Publications, Newbury Park, CA.


Agergaard, S 2006, 'Sport As Social Formation And Specialist Education: Discursive And Ritualistic Aspects Of Physical Education', Sport, Education And Society, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 353-67.

Allen, D 2013, "National Heroes": Sport And The Creation Of Icons', Sport In History, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 584-94.


Berg, BL 2007, Qualitative Research Methods For The Social Sciences, Pearson, Sydney.


Blainey, G 1984, All For Australia, Methuen Haynes, North Ryde, NSW.


Boeije, H 2010, Analysis In Qualitative Research, SAGE, London.

Bolton, GC & Hudson, W (Eds) 1997, Creating Australia: Changing Australian History, Allen And Unwin, St Leonards, N.S.W.


Bruce, T & Wensing, E 2009, 'She's Not One Of Us': Cathy Freeman And The Place Of Aboriginal People In Australian National Culture', Australian Aboriginal Studies, No. 2, pp. 90-100.

Brunk, S & Fallaw, B 2006, Heroes & Hero Cults In Latin America, University Of Texas Press, Austin (TX).


Burke, P 2009, Popular Culture In Early Modern Europe, 3rd Edn, Ashgate, Farnham.


Carrington, B 2010, Race, Sport And Politics : The Sporting Black Diaspora, Sage, London.


Carter, TF 2011a, In Foreign Fields : The Politics And Experiences Of Transnational Sport Migration, Pluto, London.


Cooper, A 2013, 'Sheedy Hits Out At 'Greedy' Clubs', *The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, Australia)*, 2013/02/27/, P. 13.


—— 2012b, 'Coach Sold On Giants Upset Win', The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, Australia), 2012/03/24/, P. 10.


—— 2012d, 'Jury Still Out On The Swans - Sheedy', The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, Australia), 2012/05/03/, P. 16.

—— 2012e, 'Sheedy Ruffles Swans' Feathers To Kick Off Rivalry', The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, Australia), 2012/01/02/, P. 27.


Drucker, SJ & Cathcart, RS (Eds) 1994, American Heroes In A Media Age, Hampton Press, Cresskill, N.J.


Gaskin, L 2012a, 'No Ill Will From Sheedy Towards Former Disciple', *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, Australia), 2012/12/05/, P. 17.

—— 2012b, 'Tippett's Talent Below His Price - Sheedy', *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, Australia), 2012/12/06/, P. 15.


—— 1986, Sport, Power And Culture: A Social And Historical Analysis Of Popular Sports In Britain, Polity Press.


—— 2012b, 'Sheedy Dreams Up New Match To Build Bridges', *The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, Australia)*, 2012/05/09/, P. 20.


Henderson, M 2000, 'Male Fantasy', In R Nile (Ed.), *The Australian Legend And Its Discontents*, University Of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Qld, pp. 250-66.


—— 2012b, 'We Are Not Going To Be A Doormat, Says Sheedy', *The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, Australia)*, 2012/03/24/, P. 11.


Horan, P 2013, *Kevin Sheedy Cops Verbal Hammering From Soccer Pundit Craig Foster After Post-Match ‘Immigration’ Comments*, Viewed 1st April 2014,


Jackson, SJ & Haigh, S 2008, 'Between And Beyond Politics: Sport And Foreign Policy In A Globalizing World', *Sport In Society*, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 349-58.


King, N & Horrocks, C 2010, Interviews In Qualitative Research, SAGE, Los Angeles.


Lodewijks, J 2013, 'Political Economy In Greater Western Sydney', *The Journal Of Australian Political Economy*, No. 72, pp. 80-105.


Milner, L 2009, 'Kenny: The Evolution Of The Battler Figure In Howard's Australia', *Journal Of Australian Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 153-64.

Mishra, S 2014, 'Nationality And Gender In Sports Photography: A Case Study On Portrayals Of Figure Skaters At Torino Winter Olympics', *Qualitative Research In Sport, Exercise And Health*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 382-400.


Nash, F 2009, Matters Relating To The Establishment Of An Australian Football League Team For Tasmania, Commonwealth Of Australia, Canberra.


—— 2015, Media Kit 2015, News Corp Australia, Sydney.


Parramatta City Council 2012, Summary Statistics Greater Western Sydney, Parramatta City Council, Parramatta.


Penny, S & Redhead, S 2009, 'We're Not Really Here: Manchester City, Mobility And Placelessness', Sport In Society, Vol. 12, No. 6, pp. 755-64.


Russell, D 2006, ‘We All Agree, Name The Stand After Shankly’: Cultures Of Commemoration In Late Twentieth-Century English Football Culture', *Sport In History*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 1-25.


Sands, RR (Ed.) 1999, *Anthropology, Sport, And Culture*Bergin & Garvey, Westport, Conn.


—— 2012c, 'Sheedy In The Spotlight', *The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, Australia)*, 2012/03/24/, P. 10.


Stoddart, B. 1986, Saturday Afternoon Fever: Sport In The Australian Culture, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, N.S.W.


—— 2012, 'Sheedy To Hold Fire On Folau', *The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, Australia)*, 2012/06/28/, P. 17.


—— 2013c, 'Franklin Wouldn't Be Too Out Of Place At Giants: Sheedy', *The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, Australia)*, 2013/06/03/, P. 48.

—— 2013d, 'Sheedy Downbeat As Giants Fail To Bridge Gap', *The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, Australia)*, 2013/07/15/, P. 41.


—— 2013f, 'Sheedy Opens Scoring With East V West Derby Challenge', *The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, Australia)*, 2013/03/28/, P. 41.

—— 2013g, 'Sheedy Puts Ward Up With The Best', *The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, Australia)*, 2013/05/04/, P. 15.

Yin, RK 2003, Case Study Research, 3rd Edn, Sage, London.


—— 2011, Qualitative Research From Start To Finish, Guilford Press, New York.

