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Article

"More Than a Game": The Impact of Sport-Based Youth Mentoring Schemes on Developing Resilience toward Violent Extremism

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Abstract
This paper draws upon the findings of an evaluation of "More than a Game", a sport-focused youth mentoring program in Melbourne, Australia that aimed to develop a community-based resilience model using team-based sports to address issues of identity, belonging, and cultural isolation amongst young Muslim men in order to counter forms of violent extremism. In this essay we focus specifically on whether the intense embodied encounters and emotions experienced in team sports can help break down barriers of cultural and religious difference between young people and facilitate experiences of resilience, mutual respect, trust, social inclusion and belonging. Whilst the project findings are directly relevant to the domain of countering violent extremism, they also contribute to a growing body of literature which considers the relationship between team-based sport, cross-cultural engagement and the development of social resilience, inclusion and belonging in other domains of youth engagement and community-building.

Keywords
AFL; belonging; community resilience; countering violent extremism; counterterrorism; football; Muslim Australians; social inclusion; social networks; sport; violence reduction

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1. Introduction

Enhancing community resilience is now a high priority in Australia and internationally in national security and counter-terrorism policy. As part of its counterterrorism strategy, for example, the Canadian government emphasises the open, diverse and inclusive nature of Canadian society and seeks to foster a greater sense of belonging among its citizens (Government of Canada, 2011). Similarly, the Australian government seeks to bolster resilience to terrorism not only through security and law enforcement responses, but also the adoption of broader strategies that seek to enhance social inclusion and social cohesion. In emphasising "Australia's history of inclusion, multiculturalism and respect for cultural diversity" the government hopes to tap into the "emotional landscapes of communities" as a significant component of counterterrorism study, policy and practice (Spalek, 2012). Thus a key premise for research and policy-making in the CVE (countering vio-

lent extremism) context is that strengthening community resilience "in line with the goals of a democratic civil society" can help individuals and communities avoid turning to extremist ideology and activity to satisfy a range of social and emotional needs (Nasser-Eddine, Garnham, Agostino, & Caluya, 2011).

Engaging young people in activities such as sport has been embraced by some CVE practitioners and government agencies as a central means of developing locally based programs that contribute to community resilience, enhance civic participation of socially marginalised youth, and weaken the likelihood of young people becoming involved in groups engaged in violent extremism (CVE, n.d.). These policies are supported by research that links targeted sport programmes to the development of "pro-social" behaviours and strategies which deal with emotions, fears and grievances that may otherwise escalate into anti-social and violent behaviours (Cale & Harris, 2005; Coalter, 2008, 2013; Hall, 2011; Moreau et al., 2014; Morris, Sallybanks, & Willis, 2004). In particular, research has found that participation in team sports develops "protective factors" that build self-confidence, communication skills, self-discipline, trust, reciprocity and conflict resolution skills (Hall, 2011; Moreau et al., 2014; Morris et al., 2004) and facilitate the expansion of social networks and participation (Bailey, 2005; Coalter, 2013; Tonts, 2005), and intercultural engagement (Nathan et al., 2013; Spaaij, 2014). All of these are regarded as central to developing feelings of membership and belonging to the local community.

Moreover, there has been a growing interest in sport as a setting where young men in particular can express themselves and engage with others through bodily practices and encounters deemed as less threatening ways of developing pro-social behaviours and openness towards others than verbal, cognitive and reflexive approaches (Hall, 2011; Moreau et al., 2014; Nathan et al., 2013). In this vein, Spaaij (2014) considers how bodily practices associated with sport open up "liminal moments" in which forms of "solidarity or *communitas* can take hold" which transgress or dissolve social norms and boundaries. To this, Hall (2011) and Moreau et al. (2014) add the extent to which sport acts as a form of "managed risk-taking" in which bodily experiences and expressions which involve some degree of physical risk can encourage interpersonal confidence, trust, camaraderie and care amongst teammates, acting as a "driving force for social cohesion".

In evaluating the efficacy of targeted sport programmes for building personal and community resilience, we analyse here the key findings of a project exploring the impacts of "More Than a Game", a sport-based programme developed by the Australian Rules Football League's (AFL) Western Bulldogs Football Club, in association with the Australian Federal Police, Victoria Police and Hobson's Bay City Council (McDonald, Grossman, & Johns, 2012). This year-long program engaged young Muslim men in Melbourne's western suburbs through a local Islamic society. The program used team based sport to deliver a range of activities intended to develop personal wellbeing and pro-social skills, and facilitate a greater sense of social inclusion and community belonging for Muslim youth. Specifically, these were oriented toward developing young role models and leaders in the community; enhancing greater understanding of the Muslim community by the broader Australian community; and fostering greater intercultural contact and understanding between participants and other cultural groups.

Although we include some of the general findings from the evaluation of the "More than a Game" program, in this paper we are particularly interested in addressing the question of whether the intense experiences and emotions experienced in team sports break down barriers of social difference and facilitate experiences of mutual respect and trust, social inclusion, belonging and resilience, all of which are relevant to the domain of countering violent extremism.

2. Violent Extremism, Social Cohesion and Community Resilience

2.1. Community Resilience

Resilience—the ability to withstand or recover from disaster, crisis or trauma for both individuals and communities—has become a key concept in understanding and responding to the conditions that underpin violent extremism in an Australian policy context. For example, the government's most recent Counter-Terrorism White Paper (Government of Australia, 2010) clearly signals that strengthening communities to support values of social inclusion and cultural and religious diversity is vital to increasing forms of civic participation and attachment to community, thereby enhancing resilience toward narratives and ideologies that promote violence. This policy framework recognises, first, that communities and community partners are often best placed to recognise and support individuals who are at risk of marginalisation, or who might be attracted to the use of violence to achieve political, social or ideological goals. Second, it emphasises that government agencies are most effective when they support communities to harness their existing capacity to deter individuals from pathways into violent extremism, rather than approaching ethnically and religiously diverse communities from a deficit viewpoint.

The literature on community resilience emphasises two major themes. The first is the importance of neighbourhood networks and social relationships. Community solidarity is enhanced when individuals feel themselves to be embedded in a web of social networks and relationships perceived to be loving, supportive and available in times of need. Informal networks forged

with neighbours, family and friends provide a variety of types of social support that can be mobilised in times of stress and uncertainty. But informal social connections are most productive when accompanied by more formal networks that individuals have with groups and organisations. These formal or institutional networks create structured relationships that encompass professional, social, economic, and health-related participation (Sherrieb, 2010).

The second theme stressed in the literature, which is inherent in these social networks and relationships, is the element of reciprocity and trust. Reciprocity and trust are central to building and sustaining community competence and resilience. Reciprocity can take various forms, but at the community level it is not so much an exchange of what Marshall Sahlins (2004) calls "balanced reciprocity"—the symmetrical, immediate or near-term exchange or expectation of like for like—but closer to the notion of "generalised reciprocity"—a pro-social mechanism wherein an individual provides a service or contribution in the general expectation that this kindness may (but need not be) be returned at some undefined point in the future (Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Welch et al., 2005).

The reciprocal responsibilities of community members to each other are closely related to the theme of trust. Trust entails "a willingness to take risks in a social context based on a sense of confidence that others will respond as expected and will act in mutually supportive ways" (Onyx & Bullen, 2000). Welch et al. (2005) contend that what they call "social trust", the mutually shared expectation that people will engage in "reciprocally beneficial behaviour in their interactions with others", is an important component of a healthy community and society.

Trust is a particularly important dynamic in the context of multicultural communities, where the balance between a range of both complementary and competing cultural traditions, on the one hand, and sense of belonging, participation and rights through shared social spaces and institutions, on the other, is continuously renegotiated. Despite the valid criticisms that have been made of mainstream multicultural policies and rhetoric that regard cultural diversity as a problem to be "tolerated" or "managed", and see culturally diverse communities as somehow being "maladaptive" to Western cultural norms (Hage, 2003, 2012; Harris, 2012), there is, in the resilience literature, an underlying recognition that diversity is often a key attribute of healthy communities and societies and a front-line defence against forms of violent extremism. This includes acknowledgement that communities do not necessarily have to be homogeneous to demonstrate or build resilience. On the contrary, they can be quite diverse, as long as there is a shared emotional connection, predicated on "the sharing of positively valued experiences and stories" (Sonn & Fisher, 1998) and common commitments to dignity. Shared community narratives that build a sense of solidarity and cohesion can produce positive experiences of belonging and of individual and collective identity.

Thus, to be most effective, community resilience also requires extra-local ties that go beyond one's immediate community. The ties that friends, family or close social groups share with one another, referred to in the literature as "bonding social capital" (Putnam, 2000) provide emotional and functional support to members, but they can have a negative impact on communities when they are fostered at the expense of external connections with other community groups or members (Tolsma & Zavallos, 2009). Without extra-local ties and networks, or "bridging capital", a community runs the risk of missing out on the knowledge, resources and skills available in other networks. Forging relationships with people in alternative social networks who have access to different resources not available in one's immediate social circle is essential in helping people "get ahead in life". These relationships also expose people to difference, thereby broadening an individual's identity and enhancing their capacity to work, live and socialise with others (Magis, 2010).

2.2. Cultural Resilience

"Cultural resilience" considers the role that cultural background plays in determining the ability of individuals and communities to be resilient in the face of adversity. For Caroline Clauss-Ehlers, the term describes the degree to which the strengths of one's culture promote the development of coping (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008). A culturally focused resilience model involves "a dynamic, interactive process in which the individual negotiates stress through a combination of character traits, cultural background, cultural values, and facilitating factors in the sociocultural environment" (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008).

A prerequisite for resilience in culturally diverse community settings is thus familiarity with one's own cultural traditions *in addition* to knowing the culture where one is living (Gunnestad, 2006). In understanding their way of "coping and hoping, surviving and thriving", it is important to consider how culturally and linguistically diverse groups navigate the cultural understandings and assumptions of both their countries of origin and domicile (Ungar, 2006). People who master the rules and norms of their new culture *without* abandoning their own language, values and social support are more resilient than those who tenaciously maintain their own culture at the expense of adjusting to their new environment. They are also more resilient than those who forego their own culture and assimilate with the host society (Ungar, 2006). If, as a growing body of literature indicates, the combination of both valuing one's culture as well as learning about the culture of

the new system produces greater resilience and adaptive capacities, serious problems can arise when a majority tries to acculturate a minority to the mainstream by taking away or not recognising important parts of the minority culture. In terms of resilience, if you take the culture from a people, you take their identity, and hence their strength—their resilience capital. If people are stripped of what gives them strength they become vulnerable because "they do not automatically gain those cultural strengths that the majority has acquired over generations" (Gunnestad, 2006).

Research investigating the negative consequences that result from the loss of core cultural identities through oppressive socio-political practices has found that these include self-hatred, the internalisation of negative group identities and low self-esteem (Sonn & Fisher, 1998). When members of minority groups internalise the negative images projected onto them by the dominant group they become their own oppressors. Culture is thus a resource in resilience. For minorities and immigrant groups true biculturalism could be the best way of coping and, indeed, many studies suggest that bicultural individuals are at a lower risk of substance abuse, school difficulties, family conflicts and other maladaptive behaviours (Gunnestad, 2006). In other words, immigrants who participate in the larger community, while also maintaining their native heritage (i.e. bicultural integration), "tend to exhibit lower levels of distress" (Castro & Murray, 2009).

As Tolsma and Zevallos (2009) suggest however, community resilience can be adversely affected if close intra-community ties are fostered at the expense of inter-community connections with other groups and with mainstream society. This can lead to feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement among minority groups. This is particularly problematic when much recent terrorism research indicates that engagement in terrorist activities is usually preceded by alienated individuals withdrawing from the larger community in search of a "spiritual home in the company of small collectives of similarly angry individuals" (Pickering, Wright-Neville, & McCulloch, 2007).

2.3. Resilience as Process: The Dialectics of Coping and Vulnerability

As Cathryn Hunter suggests, resilience cannot be manifested without the presence of *both* adaptive functioning *and* exposure to risk or adversity (Hunter, 2012). Resilience thus makes sense primarily in the context of vulnerability. According to Bean et al., the constitutive rhetoric of resilience relies on the existence of vulnerability as a dialectical partner (Bean, Keränen, & Durfy, 2011). Understanding vulnerability and resilience as two sides of the same coin means acknowledging that resilience is neither entirely personal nor strictly social, but an interactive and iterative combination of the two. It is a quality of the environment as much as the individual. For Ungar, it is the complex entanglements between "individuals and their social ecologies [that] will determine the degree of positive outcomes experienced" (Ungar, 2006). Thinking about resilience as context-dependent is important because research that is too trait-based or actor-centred risks ignoring any structural or institutional forces. As Clauss-Ehlers notes, "the problem with the trait-based approach is that it leaves resilience way too much up to the individual" (2008). Further, recent literature suggests that resilience is not an inherent trait that an individual either possesses or does not, but is something that can be developed (Hunter, 2012). Resilience involves behaviours, thoughts and actions that can be learned and operationalised by anyone, and as a potential response to trauma "is not the exclusive property of any nation or group" (Bean et al., 2011).

Resilience is thus a heterogeneous, multidimensional process that involves individual, family and community-level risk and protective factors. In addition, far from being static, resilience can wax and wane during the course of one's life. As Rutter emphasises, "resilience cannot be seen as fixed attributes of the individual. If circumstances change, the risk alters" (Rutter, 1987).

3. Sport and Its Role in the Development of Pro-Social Behaviour, Social Inclusion, Violence Reduction and Community Resilience

Accordingly, our primary focus here is the extent to which involvement in team sports may offer a key site in which to negotiate intra- and inter-community forms of resilience and shared vulnerability based on intercultural understandings of embodiment, shared purpose and achievement, and the management of conflict and pressure. All of these features are relevant to the domain of countering violent extremism, yet little evidence exists of how this works in practice through programs embracing sporting activity as the primary vehicle for embodied, intersubjective engagement with sociocultural otherness and reciprocity.

Although a large body of literature has examined the benefits of team based sport in addressing psychosocial behaviours and forms of social exclusion leading to antisocial and violent behaviour (Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2008, 2013; Sandford, Duncombe, & Armour, 2008) there has been very little reference in the CVE literature to the role that sport might play in shaping "alternative pathways" and identifications for youth at risk of becoming involved in forms of violent extremism, despite the prevalence of sport based youth mentoring programs funded by CVE schemes. In part, this may be attributed to the policy emphasis on steering young people away from identification with political ideologies and beliefs that may promote violent action

leading sport to be identified more as a "hook", which is combined with counter-narrative approaches that promote values of cultural and religious diversity, civil society and democracy. As researchers have noted, these approaches tend to prioritise the cognitive and reflexive aspects of processes leading to violent extremism, obscuring the emotional, embodied and affective aspects of small group dynamics that are a part of the matrices of factors that make violent extremist networks appealing to young men (Nasser-Eddine et al., 2011).

Another explanation for the dearth of research on the utility of sport based programs for CVE might relate to the conceptual and methodological problems associated with measuring the impact of sports on crime prevention and violence reduction more broadly. Bailey (2005) and Coalter (2009, 2013) for example, relate this issue to the lack of rigorous evaluation of sport-based programs and their social impacts. Coalter, for example, acknowledges that there are "major and often inherent methodological difficulties in measuring the impact of programs" (Coalter, 2013), which he relates to a growing understanding that sports are "sites for socialisation experiences, not the *causes* of socialisation experiences" (Coakley, 2011). This tends to place the focus back on the process of participating, rather than on the role of sport as such.

And yet, despite these well documented limitations there is an emerging focus in the sport and resilience literature on the significance and social impact of phenomenological, bodily practices and forms of emotional expression grounded in the sporting context. For example, in emerging research conducted by Hall (2011), Moreau et al. (2014) and Spaaij (2014), it was found that young people participating in sport programmes experienced strong feelings of inter- and intra-group responsibility, care and camaraderie, enhanced interpersonal confidence, freedom to challenge social habits and boundaries, and enhanced feelings of belonging through embodied and emotional experiences associated with being actively involved in a sporting competition and part of a team environment. For example, in Hall's study into the experiences of adolescent males engaged in team sports, participants reported "feeling good" about "pulling together", "pushing through pain" and earning respect of teammates in the physical contest (Hall, 2011). They also pointed out that by developing self-discipline through bodily practices and training, they had an increased sense of control and confidence which transferred into other endeavours and activities away from the sporting arena.

Although Hall puts these experiences into a larger social context—in which community recognition of individual and team performance, the learning of life skills in a social environment and encounters with role models (i.e. coaching staff) played a significant role to growing self-confidence and capacity to push past personal limitations—there is a space provided for examining embodied and emotional encounters within this social frame. In particular, Hall relates some of the "good feelings" and lessening of fear experienced by participants directly to the role of 'risk' in embodied sporting encounters. For participants, feelings of risk and enjoyment were conveyed through descriptions of "the rush of pulling off a big tackle", for example. Sharing risks and caring for teammates also engendered strong bonding experiences and feelings of belonging (Hall, 2011). All of these bodily practices and experiences forge a direct connection, in Hall's account, to concepts of resilience.

These findings correspond with a more recent study examining the impacts of a sport based programme for 'troubled youth' in Canada (Moreau et al., 2014). First, in evaluating the impact of the program the researchers highlight some of the failings of youth sporting programmes. In particular they cite problems that some marginalised youth have with institutional settings and approaches, and also narrative style therapeutic approaches that favour verbal, cognitive and reflexive processes. In addressing these issues the researchers highlight literature supporting the positive effect of recreational and sporting activities that use non-verbal strategies as a less threatening tool for pro-social development, community and social inclusion.

This is reflected in the findings of the evaluation that identified the impacts of the program. These were categorised into primary, secondary and tertiary impacts. In the primary category participants identified that sport offered them a chance to develop self-confidence through pursuing a regular sporting practice, broaden their social networks, meet new people and develop a sense of belonging (Moreau et al., 2014). This was related to feelings that arose where participants felt a "strong resonance between their own experience and others". In the secondary category, participants note that sport offers them a context of "spontaneous exchanges" with others, "[…] that allow gestures of camaraderie to take place". These experiences also engender feelings of responsibility toward others, the establishment of "team spirit" and "mutual trust". Moreover, these experiences "serve to dispel fears… bringing a team spirit experienced as caring and protective by members" (Moreau et al., 2014).

In the tertiary category, the research findings reflect Hall's understanding that shared experiences of risk (either of injury or failure) act as a "driving force for social cohesion" promoting a strong sense of unity and belonging. This view is tempered, however, by Hall's description of sport being a form of "managed risk", implying that although risky behaviours themselves are enjoyable forms of social learning for young males (Hall, 2011), that such activities may lead to negative outcomes without strong rules and boundaries being imposed on conduct. Moreau et al. (2014) make

this link more explicit, arguing that the role of coaches and trainers is important in the sense that they provide a "constructive contextuality" whereby the benefits of the competitive sporting context can only build feelings of "belonging and personal value" when an atmosphere of "trust, solidarity and reciprocity" within the group is encouraged.

Spaaij (2014) brings these social bonding outcomes of participating in team sport together with an understanding that these forms of "bonding" capital can also engender "bridging" capital. He examines this in relation to refugee and immigrant young people's participation in team sports, and the development of strong feelings of belonging and active membership in the community that are engendered by refugee young people playing with young people from other cultural groups. Spaaij uses the concept of "risk" and "boundary work" to understand what kinds of belonging are fostered for vulnerable young people through participation in sport. In conclusion, he argues that the sporting field is a site where the boundary processes involved in negotiations of identity and belonging are situational and fluid, enabling some social boundaries to be "shifted and crossed, while others and preserved and created" (2014, pp. 6-7), once again highlighting the importance of the social atmosphere created in which embodied expressions and encounters take place.

The following discussion relates the thematic review of the CVE, community resilience and sport and resilience literature to some of the key findings from the "More Than a Game" evaluation in order consider how these may help identify what we can learn from such programs and what insights may be provided around both the possibilities and limits of using team sport as a vehicle for building a sense of resilience, social justice and social inclusion. Specifically, we use these findings to investigate the role that team-based sport, which develops a range of embodied, affective and also cognitive capacities, might play in providing an "alternative model of human hardiness" (Scheper-Hughes, 2008) that encompasses the feelings, emotions and embodied experiences of young people.

4. The "More than a Game" Program

"More than a Game" was a 12 month sport based youth mentoring program that involved 60 young men, aged 15–25, predominantly of Lebanese cultural background, recruited from the Newport Islamic Society of Melbourne. The program was developed and implemented by the Western Bulldogs Football Club in association with government and community partners, including the Australian Federal Police, Victoria Police and leaders from the Newport Islamic Society, with funding provided by the Attorney General's Department "Building Community Resilience" (BCR) grant.

A range of Australian Rules football-related activities were delivered over the duration of the program, including a "Peace Dialogue" delivered by the AFL Peace Team[1] and a "Football for Harmony" Clinic, where participants assisted Western Bulldogs staff in delivering a football clinic to multi-faith schoolchildren from across Melbourne. A range of football skills sessions were also conducted. These activities culminated in two teams being selected to participate in the Unity Cup, a joint initiative between Australian Federal Police, the AFL and participating AFL clubs, conducted annually since 2008 to promote greater social cohesion and harmony by using team sports to break down cultural, racial and religious stereotypes and barriers. In particular, this event showcased the unexpected emergence of the MUJU peace team, an initiative which began with a conversation between Maher, a young Lebanese Muslim participant in the "More than a Game" program, and Aaron, a Jewish student from Bialik College,[2] a Melbourne independent Jewish high school, both of whom had met during the Peace Dialogue and decided to organise an inter-faith exhibition match between two mixed teams of Jewish and Muslim players (McDonald et al., 2012). Following the success of the practice match, the MUJU team was formed by Muslim and Jewish players from local communities and invited to participate in the Unity Cup.

The program also delivered a range of other sporting activities. These included a cricket match, horse-riding, surfing, a multi-sport day and a ropes course. Non-sports-focused activities centred primarily around mentoring activities delivered jointly by Western Bulldogs staff, Victoria Police and Australian Federal Police members. The focus of youth mentoring activities was based around improving social skills and youth leadership capacity. There were also several police-led workshops around conflict resolution, the role of police in the community, cyber-bullying and counter-terrorism, as well as a three-day youth leadership camp in a bush setting. The primary focus of the program, however, was using sport as a medium to promote proactive life values and social skills in a way that was based more on participation in enjoyable, peer-focused activities rather than on top-down forms of learning and mentoring.

We used a mixed method post-evaluation approach to measure the impact and effectiveness of "More than a Game" as a model for enhancing resilience toward violent extremism, social inclusion and belonging for program participants and also the broader Newport Islamic community. This meant that the data was collected with participants and stakeholders upon the completion of the program, although researcher partic-

[1] The AFL peace team is a joint Israeli-Palestinian football team established in 2008 to participate in the AFL International Cup.

[2] Pseudonyms are used here and below for all program participants.

ipant-observation was also conducted during the second half of the program. Qualitative research methods (semi-structured interviews and focus groups) were the primary method used to explore participant, stakeholder and parent views of participants' personal development through the program. This was combined with a lesser focus on quantitative data collection (exit surveys), which were used to provide an anonymous measure to compare with qualitative responses. The data was collected from three target groups including program participants (n = 21), program facilitators (n = 8) and students from Bialik College who also participated in the Peace Team dialogue and Unity Cup (n = 10). Thematic analysis was used to code qualitative responses and to identify common patterns (Hall, 2011, p. 70) in the way that participants and stakeholders described their experiences of the program; particularly the impact that their involvement in team-based sport had on their "attitudes and behaviours in relation to sense of belonging, cross-cultural engagement, and beliefs about violence as a means of solving problems or addressing grievances" (McDonald et al., 2012).

5. 'Playing By the Rules'

The first theme to emerge from the survey and focus group data was the shared experience that participants had of sport as "a level playing field where people of all cultural backgrounds were bound by the same rules and expectations" (McDonald et al., 2012). For participants, this understanding meant that they could feel free to engage in forms of knowledge-sharing and social and physical interactions with young people from different cultural backgrounds, even with groups that they shared a historically conflict-ridden relationship with, knowing that these interactions were bounded and rule governed.

In particular, this was reflected in participant responses to training and playing football as a part of the MUJU football team, which comprised equal numbers of Jewish players and Muslim players:

> Last year we played at Whitten Oval footy ground, and it's not a Jewish ground, it's not a Muslim ground, it's a footy ground that has its own rules and regulations. It was neutral.

This sense that the football ground was a neutral territory where rules that 'applied to everyone' governed participation was seen as highly significant to participants, affording them a "practical and powerful experience of lived justice" (McDonald et al., 2012). This recognition of the importance of the 'rules' in providing a structured space of interaction between players is also reflected in the literature on sport, risk and resilience (Hall, 2011; Moreau et al., 2014) whereby the risky aspect of inter-group conflict and tension are understood to be transformed on the sporting field through sharing a common goal. In particular this is linked to a sense of respecting the rules of the game, including a sense of fairness and respect for "others", which is nurtured during the intense social and embodied interactions shared on the football field. In discussing the ethical implications of this, Debra Shogan (2007) has argued that participation in sport is based on a shared agreement to play by the rules in order to test team and individual skill. This agreement, in turn, promotes ethical and moral development as participants learn to curb their impulses for the good of the game. This theme was expressed by a number of participants in the program, including one who described his own experience of personal development through sport in the following way:

> It teaches discipline because you have to go by the rules. And there are consequences if you break the rules.

The same participant links this with a kind of freedom that comes from being part of something beyond the immediate (ethno-religious) community:

> It's like you're doing something just for the sake of the game and that's a good thing. It cuts down all cultures and allows you to focus on sport, to enjoy yourself and to be yourself. That's it.

In particular, this participant identifies the discipline that comes from playing by the rules with the development of respect for teammates and opponents, regardless of cultural background. Eassom (1998) argues that this experience is not limited to the sporting field but also provides a guide for interactions with others in everyday life. According to Eassom, rules provide boundaries and contexts within which action makes sense. This provides important cues and lessons for understanding how other life endeavours are similarly constrained. As one participant puts it, the experience of communicating with teammates and developing skills like teamwork crossed the boundaries of the sporting context to provide important lessons for life more generally:

> Yes, being part of a team I've developed skills like communication, teamwork […]. And you use that in the outside world. You talk to people, you communicate, you get their point of view, you try to create conversation and break down barriers.

The experience of "breaking down barriers" of racial, cultural and religious difference was significant to many participants. This was particularly related to new forms of awareness and knowledge that were instigated by experiences of playing sport alongside Jewish

teammates, demonstrating that social functions and roles can, under certain circumstances, become more important than social identities, transcending other kinds of group boundaries and divisions:

> To be honest I think that there is no such thing as Jewish footballers. You start playing with them and form good relationships and the team was like a big family. I'll shepherd for you, you block for me...We broke down barriers like that.

Responses such as these were also reflected in the survey data, particularly in relation to self-identified changes in initial attitude towards a number of different cultural groups following involvement in "More than a Game" (McDonald et al., 2012). Responses indicated that, out of the 21 program participants who participated in the evaluation, most indicated a more positive attitude toward a range of cultural groups following participation in the program, particularly toward Jewish cultural background youth (67 per cent improved attitude, see Table 1). When asked to reflect on the reasons for these changes, participants spoke about lack of contact with these groups prior to the program, which allowed the harbouring of negative stereotypes on both sides. Upon meeting and engaging with Jewish players in a physical sporting context, however, perceived cultural differences were set aside, became less important or were actively challenged and revised, leading some respondents to claim "we have many of the same perspectives and deal with critical situations in the same way", "they are good friends" and "we're all human, we all deserve equal rights appreciation and acceptance".

Sport was not the only vehicle for promoting these values, however. Many of these responses were also informed by participation in 'off-field' mentoring activities which worked in parallel with sport based activities to promote values of interfaith and intercultural harmony by developing participants' communication skills and work-shopping some of the positive effects of engaging in dialogue instead of violence. Yet the focus on team-based sport was identified by participants and stakeholders as being critical to these values being fully embraced. This was particularly noted in relation to the emphasis on co-operation, sense of responsibility to others, and trusting teammates not to let you down, thereby forestalling sense of vulnerability or being on your own. As one stakeholder observed:

> And you only really get the opportunities to do this in a team environment, especially with sport where you have to rely on other people. You kick them the ball, you trust that they're going to mark it; you trust that they're going to kick it back to you. It's about communicating with them. You start talking about teamwork and having a shared goal, a shared purpose. Now, all these other things like having a broader view and opportunity, the vehicle for that is actually doing things together that give you an outcome.

Again, this focus on "doing things together" highlights some of the practical, social and embodied dimensions of team sport which can break down barriers of difference through the sharing of experiences of work, sacrifice, disappointment and success in a team environment. In this sense, the social bonding function of team sport is identified by participants as providing a space beyond the constraints of community, where other cultural groups can be safely encountered, stereotypes can be challenged and friendships formed.

This experience of feeling liberated and "free" through encountering others in a safe environment is well supported in the literature, with Hall (2011) in particular finding that participation in sport encouraged young people to feel less fearful and to increase levels of "interpersonal confidence, that is, the self-assuredness to meet new people". In particular, by exposing young people to "unknown social situations" sport was found to improve young people's ability to "develop confidence in building relationships" which was also identified as a key ingredient for developing resilience and strengthening the capacity to cope with adverse life circumstances.

Table 1. Attitudes to Different Cultural Groups.

Cultural Group	Average Initial Response	Average Post Response	Average Degree of Change	% of respondents who improved in attitudes	% of respondents who worsened in attitudes	% of respondents who did not change attitudes.	Missing (n)
Jewish-Australian	2.67	1.76	0.91	64%	0	33%	1
Christian-Australian	2.10	1.65	0.53	41%	0	36%	5
African-Australian	2.33	1.65	0.82	41%	0	36%	5
Anglo-Australian	2.73	1.61	0.94	59%	0	23%	4
Asian-Australian	2.43	1.59	0.88	55%	0	23%	5
Aboriginal-Australian	1.86	1.53	0.53	41%	0	36%	5

6. Discipline and Self-Control

The literature investigating sport and its relationship with community resilience-building has frequently considered the link between participation in sport and violence prevention (Bailey, 2005; Coalter, 2008; Sandford et al., 2008), particularly in light of social policies that positively correlate sport with individual and community health and wellbeing, changes in youth attitudes towards crime and violent behaviour, and the development of a greater sense of social inclusion and social cohesiveness.

These processes are reflected in the experiences of "More than a Game" participants, with the physical and mental discipline learned through training and adhering to the rules of the game being identified by several participants as helping them to manage conflicts that may lead to violence on and the off the field. Specifically, the regularity and discipline of training, and the negative consequences associated with "breaking the rules", were singled out as experiences that had positive benefits in terms of controlling impulses that may lead to violence:

> Participant One:
> It's a routine and routine develops discipline…Like the fact that you have to go to training twice a week and if you miss out on one training session you miss out on the match. Things like that, you have to keep your word and keep to the game to develop all of these qualities that are not useful on the pitch but also outside in society.
> Participant Two:
> The more disciplined you are the easier you are to control...the easier it is to control yourself. Because you're always going to get things thrown at you, so the more you can let go, the easier it is to control and I think that's what a lot of people would do. Instead of taking insults to heart, you get so used to it that you just brush them off.

In particular, the latter statement emphasises that one of the main triggers for violence on the sporting field (also reflecting experiences that can lead to violence in a broader social context) is the use of verbal insults based on racial, ethnic or religious stereotypes designed to provoke a player to lose control and become unfocused on play or even violent. By being disciplined and focused on the team, this participant suggests that personal insults can be ignored, and resilience developed to the extent that 'brushing them off' becomes second nature.

The theme of "rules" and how they are applied in the context of a game also raised some dilemmas for participants, with one participant observing that sometimes breaking the rules, particularly in terms of engaging in violent conflict, was also in "the spirit of the game":

> When a brawl happens in a game, it's obviously the spirit of the game. No matter what you can't always keep positive. And in the end, in some games, a fight is going to happen no matter what.

This response points to the difficulty of assuming that sport, as a "rule governed" activity, always produces ethical and non-violent responses in players. In some cases players can also feel a social responsibility to "back up" teammates, leading to violent confrontation. As one participant explained, "you need to defend your teammates". This can sometimes mean engaging in violence to back up your peers even when you are not personally inclined toward violent conflict, a sentiment that other research has shown is prevalent amongst young men beyond the sporting field (Grossman & Sharples, 2010) and which can lead rapidly to the escalation of conflict.

As Hall (2011) and Moreau et al. (2014) stress, it is these differences in approaches to one's responsibility to teammates that makes the role of the coach as mentor so important in nurturing values of respect, fairness and sportsmanship in young players. This theme was also conveyed by participants in the program, for whom the coach was a figure who either 'embodied' the rules of the game or 'failed to live up to the rules' (McDonald et al., 2012), as illustrated in one participant's experience of club football:

> Participant: In one club that I played at […] I was there for a year and I wasn't respected by the coach or the players so I had to leave mid-year.
> Interviewer: Do you know why you weren't respected?
> Participant: I don't know. I just know that I didn't like it. Every week, week in, week out, you could sense the tension […]. Maybe it was just the culture of the second team […]. The coach wasn't exactly best friends […]. He used to pick on people himself, so that set the tone.

The result of poor coaching is here defined by the failure to live up to the code of fairness enshrined in the rules of the game, which would have encouraged the player to feel confident and develop respectful attitudes to the coach, himself and others. Certainly the feeling of social exclusion and non-belonging the player feels is evident in his decision to leave the club. By contrast, good coaching was identified by both participants and stakeholders in "More than a Game" as being critical to fostering a sense of trust, rapport and respect between players and coach. One participant identified the key role that the coach has in mediating attitudes toward resolving conflicts:

> Stakeholder:
> You go and see the coach, someone who can ver-

> balise [your concerns] for you [rather than using physical means to resolve conflicts], a third party who can de-escalate for you. In a team sport that's your coach, or your runner.

In the context of the "More than a Game" program, participants highlighted the positive relationship they developed with the coach (a serving Victoria Police member) as being an important and enjoyable part of the program. One participant attributed the respect participants had for the coach to the care and effort he put into developing players' understanding of their role in the team, and in developing a team ethos that was respectful and inclusive of all players:

> Participant:
> Yeah, it was virtually [name], he really got into it. Like providing a proper structure for our footy game. Other teams would just run out but [name] got a board and showed us, 'you there, you there'. We had jumper presentations at the start, and like, I was the captain of the mixed team so I had to present the jumpers to the Jewish team. That was [name]'s initiative. He really got into it. It was really good.

These experiences support a common theme to emerge in the literature on sport participation, youth and community resilience, which highlights the importance of the coach as a "significant" and "respected" adult who is able to provide support and mentoring to young people beyond the family and immediate community context. In this vein, Henley (2010) proposes that engagement with teachers, coaches, mentors and peers in youth programs aimed at developing resilience can extend social networks of trust and protection. There is an added dimension to this statement, however, that has particular relevance to the earlier discussion of embodiment and boundary-work, with the ritual of the jumper presentation (players on the MUJU team had their own jumper created as a part of the program, with the Western Bulldogs colours) making a great impression on players. As highlighted here, the jumper presentation enabled the players to symbolically embody the merging of identities (Muslim and Jewish) in the team, and to consolidate this unity by playing together and supporting one another on the field. If the "rules" of the game enabled players to feel a sense of "lived justice", this ceremony, performed on the sporting ground before the Grand Final, enabled participants to experience a sense of "lived reconciliation", symbolised by the donning of the jumpers and the infusion of this "spirit" into the "team spirit" and by extension the "spirit of the game" (Moreau et al., 2014).

Stakeholders in the program particularly focused on the benefits of team-based sport in providing an environment for broadening and strengthening relationships of respect and trust between young people from different cultural groups as well as between young people, police and other community leaders. In particular, one of the by-products of using team based sport which was found to be particularly valuable was the role team sport has in countering feelings of alienation and strengthening feelings of belonging to the broader community and society by promoting an understanding that there is a role for everyone in the team:

> Stakeholder:
> People who lean towards extremism and things like that might be a bit isolated in their community and a bit vulnerable. I felt that being in a program like this, specifically for males and revolving around AFL football, it gave everybody a chance to belong and feel like they were a part of this group.
> Stakeholder:
> It teaches you teamwork, it teaches you that you're not alone and you can rely on other people. You don't have to do everything yourself. And someone will watch your back. Team sports are about society. While you may work individually you are also part of a team.

In this sense, stakeholders saw the ritual and symbolic value of team based sport in terms of understanding your responsibility to others and playing your role for the team as promoting a positive experience for young men who may experience low self-esteem and feelings of being isolated or excluded from their society. The message that "everyone has a role to play" regardless of ability was in turn experienced by participants as providing a strong boost to personal feelings of confidence, belonging and self-worth.

7. Which Team Do I Play For?

Yet despite the strong focus on intercultural harmony in the "More than a Game" program, some of these tensions were discussed by participants and stakeholders in relation to the strong bonds participants felt to their own ethnic and religious community, which was experienced as being like a "team". For example, in relation to the inclusion of the MUJU team in the Unity Cup, one participant spoke about how participants from the "More than a Game" program felt torn between loyalty to their own community and to the concept of MUJU:

> Participant Four: One thing I noticed in splitting up the teams in the Unity Cup into the Muslim and Jewish team some people were sad because they wanted to be in the Jewish team and some people didn't want to be in the Jewish team. They didn't want to let down their community and lose to a Jewish-Muslim team […]. Basically loyalty to the

> community meant that some people didn't want to play in the Jewish (mixed) team. Because they wanted to stay with the full Lebanese team.
> Interviewer: Who did you think you were letting down?
> Participant Four: My mates, people from the town, community, family.

In this sense, the participant speaks about the strong bonding capital and feelings of cultural pride that participants felt towards their peers and their community, which was understood to be at stake through their participation in the MUJU team. Another participant added, however, that this initial reaction was resolved and bridging capital developed over the course of the Unity Cup, so that bonds developed across differences of religion, class and ethnicity and forged an even stronger team identity in the end. This was seen as a factor in the capacity of MUJU—a new team playing in the Unity Cup for the first time—to win the tournament:

> Participant One: But they still did a good job of being loyal when they played on the MUJU team. They backed up each other. Like they didn't say we're Lebanese and we'll just stick with each other. They played as a whole team. And they actually won! Being different cultures and different races, and all that, it just builds a bond. If you get to understand each other the bonds are going to be even stronger than it would be if you were all the same. The chemistry would just be…too strong to be broken. Just like the bond of being a team, being united, not letting differences get ahead of you.

This demonstrates the embodied sense of identity and belonging that playing on a team encourages, with bonding forms of capital associated with playing with members of the same community being broadened by the bridging capital yielded through playing alongside different cultural groups.

The ripple effect of bridging capital extending out to the broader circles of family and community was highlighted by stakeholders and parents as they reflected on their own personal transformations during the program. Their sense of new connections and understandings aligned with the key program aim to counter vulnerability to violent extremism by strengthening and extending community wide relations of trust and reciprocity through grassroots programs:

> Stakeholder:
> I think that engaging with these communities; certainly engaging with the Islamic community has been very empowering for everyone […]. I've grown up in a very multicultural community and I feel in tune to cultural diversity, yet when some of the young men who would be involved in the [program] and a couple of the leaders [came over], my [female] colleague was there with me that day and she went to shake hands and they basically said, 'We don't want to shake your hand'. Just something as small as that helps us to make our organisation more culturally aware as well, to realise where the boundaries are and also the opportunities—and I think that says a lot about resilience.
> Mother:
> For myself and my son, I thought it was an eye opener and a heart opener, especially with the Jewish, when they were involved. As parents, when they said a Jewish and Muslim team together, I thought 'oh no', are they going to be together or separate. And when they were mixed I was happy […]. I enjoyed every minute and my son enjoyed the experience. And he takes the experience for a lifetime.

8. Discussion: Beyond "The Game"

The investigation of "More than a Game"'s impacts and meanings for participants and stakeholders was intended to consider what benefits team-sports-based models of youth engagement and mentoring might have beyond the obvious benefits of sport as an activity which enhances personal health, fitness and wellbeing. In particular, the project sought to understand what benefits sport participation might have for participants and the broader community in terms of transforming attitudes and behaviours related to sense of belonging, interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds and the use of violence as a means to resolve problems, all of which are relevant to strategies aimed at countering violent extremism.

As with all studies of this nature, there were limitations in terms of measuring the precise impact of the program on participants' experiences of personal change, particularly given that the evaluation was commissioned mid-way through the program and therefore did not collect pre- and post-evaluation data from participants. Instead, a mixed method post-evaluation model was utilised. Other limitations relate to the social desirability effect of participants "wanting to please interviewers" in their responses, potentially skewing recollections of their experiences; although this was countered through the collection of anonymous survey data which supported some of the findings that emerged in the focus groups and interviews, particularly related to changes in attitudes toward different cultural groups. A further challenge lies in understanding the impact, if any, that these personal transformations might have on community resilience, given the difficulty of scaling the findings of small group evaluations up to a community level. More specifically in regard to the aims of CVE strategies, stakeholders also pointed to the underlying methodological

problem of trying to establish a link between sport-based mentoring programs and the prevention of violent extremism given that, as one stakeholder said, "you can't measure what hasn't happened" (McDonald et al., 2012). This limitation is also identified in arenas other than engagement through sport (Nasser-Eddine et al., 2011).

Despite these limitations, however, the project findings provide strong qualitative evidence that participation in sport-based programs such as "More than a Game" can make a significant contribution to young people's feelings of confidence and self-esteem in relation to negotiating cultural difference and cultural stereotypes, particularly in terms of recognising and developing skills related to physical ability, intercultural communication, teamwork and leadership. In particular, the experience of playing on the MUJU team was identified by participants as being a "life-changing" experience which facilitated friendships with a new cultural group that participants had clear stereotypes about but little to no contact with previously, so that stereotypes "on both sides" were broken down and challenged. This underlines the role that sport plays in facilitating social interaction amongst a diverse range of groups in a manner which strengthens and expands young people's social networks. These experiences indicate that sport can be a powerful facilitator of sense of belonging, which encourages young people to engage in relations of reciprocity, trust and shared vulnerability with groups where social and cultural differences may previously have led to conflict, while also providing them with "a means of recognition, reward and being valued by their community" (Hall, 2011).

Another key finding from the evaluation was the perception that the discipline learned through sport-based practice encouraged participants to develop self-control in situations where conflict may arise. Participants particularly understood discipline to be a key component to resolving conflict without resorting to physical violence. This was also identified as an attribute that carried over from the sporting field into other life situations. Whilst this finding is well-supported in the literature linking sport to the development of resilience, it also contributes to our understanding of the way that the embodied, affective and social dimensions of sport shape changes in attitude and behaviour, particularly insofar as the shared experiences of camaraderie derived from playing on the same team was seen to create bonds that could break down social barriers.

A particularly significant finding for the "building community resilience" focus of the program was the development of "bridging" capital and the breaking down of stereotypes and barriers between participants, stakeholders, local communities and government agencies. This was identified by both stakeholders and participants as a beneficial outcome of the program, which led to new opportunities for cross-cultural understanding, trust and knowledge sharing. In particular, stakeholders identified sport as a model which enabled them to build strong, sustainable and ongoing relationships with youth whom they otherwise may only have contact with through official forms of contact, such as through law enforcement.

These findings, and their implications, are consistent with the literature linking sport-based programs to the development of resilience and the strengthening of cross cultural awareness in young people and communities. In particular these benefits are seen to develop from the increased participation of at-risk youth in community based activities that develop a sense of civic engagement and responsibility to the wider community through participation in structured recreational activities, amongst them team sports. However, our findings illuminate under-researched elements of how the embodied, affective and social dimensions of team-based sport can produce different experiences of attachment and connection between teammates that do not arise exclusively from a cognitive basis but which nonetheless can be experienced as a powerful force for transcending barriers of racial, cultural and religious difference. Less clear from these findings is the impact that such embodied experiences of belonging to a team might have in creating "alternative pathways" for young people at risk of becoming involved in forms of violent extremism. The discussion here provides a platform for further investigating the potential of using sport as a vehicle to counter violent extremism in the community.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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