Leadership and Role Models for Young Indigenous Australians involved in the Rumbalara Football Netball Club

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Abstract

It is recognized that a range of psychosocial factors contribute to the poor state of Indigenous health in Australia. Connection to community, including positive role models, is one such factor identified by members of the Koori community of the Goulburn Valley, southeastern Australia. There is evidence that good role-modelling and mentoring can promote a sense of empowerment and positive health behaviours in young people. This paper focuses on leadership and role modelling as psychosocial mediators of health within the Rumbalara Football Netball Club, a key Aboriginal community-controlled organization in the region. In-depth interviews were conducted with six Indigenous Club members, who met specific criteria, to improve understanding of the concept of Indigenous leadership in this setting; the attributes that are particularly sought amongst good Indigenous leaders and role models; the levels of leadership and types of role models that resonated with the participants; and how role modelling and leadership may be further developed in this organization. Participants identified "respect," employment status, consistently doing "the right thing" both on and off the field, a responsible approach to drugs and alcohol, and transcending family conflict as positive attributes of Indigenous leaders and role models. Although role models were identified in almost all areas of life, participants tended to identify senior players, in particular, as role models. It is hoped that this research will assist ongoing efforts to promote leadership and role modelling in the local Koori community.

Introduction

The poor health status of Indigenous Australians is widely recognized, as is the substantial inequality between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians across a range of key health indicators (Australia Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] and Australia Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2008). Indigenous Australians suffer greater ill-health, higher rates of disability, reduced quality of life, and a shorter life expectancy, than other Australians (AIHW, 2005). A wide range of factors have been identified as influencing Indigenous health and wellbeing, spanning environmental, cultural, socio-economic and physical domains.

Reilly et al. (2008) identified "connectedness" — to both people and place — as a factor influencing the health of Aboriginal people living in the Goulburn Valley. Of particular relevance to this project, connection to role

models was considered important for the development of a sense of empowerment in Indigenous community members over their lives. Informal mentoring is a long-standing, integral aspect of Indigenous cultural practices (Klinck et al., 2005; Kathleen Stacey and Associates, 2004).

More generally, evidence shows that when theory and evidence-based "best-practices" are followed, mentoring can have a positive influence on young people across a number of dimensions of health and well-being (DuBois et al., 2002). Despite this, formal mentoring programs for Indigenous youth are relatively rare (Klinck et al., 2005). This research project used qualitative methods to explore how role models and leadership are experienced in the context of the Rumbalara Football Netball Club, a key community-owned and controlled organization in the Goulburn-Murray region of southeastern Australia.

Setting

The Rumbalara Football Netball Club (the Club) is an Indigenous sporting club located in Shepparton, a large rural centre. Census data from 2006 suggest that the Aboriginal population in Greater Shepparton is about 1800. However, community surveys indicate the population is much larger (ABS, 2008; Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative, 2001). The Club traces its history back to the late 1800s, when the young men living on a secular mission, Cumeragunja, established a football team and entered local competitions (Potter, 1999). The Club now fields four football teams and eight netball teams in the Murray Valley League across all ages.

The Club's ethos, "more than just a football and netball club," places great value on its role as a promoter of social and emotional wellbeing for the local Indigenous community. Since its inception, the Club has developed and implemented programs for improving the physical, social, and emotional health of the whole community. The club is well positioned for health promotion generally, given its focus on sport, and for mentoring and leadership specifically as it is community-owned and -run, involves Indigenous mentors/leaders, and runs programs over sustained periods of time (Klinck et al., 2005).

Fostering the development of leadership qualities in young club members is the specific focus of the Munarra Leadership Program; a voluntary, experiential program aimed at developing specific leadership-related skills such as public speaking and problem solving. There is no formal mentoring program at the club presently; however, past programs have included men-

toring as one of a number of activities with varied success (Reilly, Doyle, and Rowley, 2007). The quality of leadership and role modelling both in the Munarra Leadership Program and throughout the Club is of interest for a number of reasons. First, community leaders are continually seeking to better understand how members experience the Club and how the Club is affecting the community it seeks to serve. Second, leaders identified a tendency for young people to leave the Club once they finish playing in the junior competitions, rather than progressing through to the seniors and wished to discover possible reasons for this. Third, information gleaned in this study may assist in improving specific programs such as the Munarra Leadership program.

Role models, Leadership and Youth Health

In this section we review the existing literature on the nature of role modelling and leadership as well as their respective functions in promoting health. The first section focuses on defining role models and role modelling, understanding the mechanisms by which role modelling can produce changes in health-related attitudes or behaviours, understanding the varied perspectives through which role modelling can be effective, and reviewing existing research on role model programs with a focus on Indigenous youth. The second section defines the concept of leadership, explains how leadership changes attitudes and behaviours, and examines the role of leadership as a health-promotion tool for Indigenous youth in particular.

Role Models and Role Modelling: Definitions

Although "role model" is a commonly used term, it is rarely defined explicitly. For this project, a role model is defined as "an individual who is perceived as exemplary, or worthy of imitation" (Yancey, 1998, p. 255). Role modelling is explained as the process by which youths find "a positive image or identity that appeals to them" (Struchen and Porta, 1997, p. 123). Also encompassed within role modelling is the concept of mentoring. MacCallum and Beltman (2002) suggest that a mentor is always a role model, but with the added element of direct personal support to the young person involved.

Different theoretical perspectives of role modelling have been proposed along an "interaction continuum," which describes unique functions of role models relative to the level of interaction each has with a young person. There are four distinct perspectives on role modelling outlined by MacCallum and Beltman (2002):

Sociological perspective: This function of role modelling is to change "inappropriate role stereotypes via exposure to alternatives" (MacCallum and Beltman, 2002, p. 20). An example of this might be a successful woman in a career traditionally dominated by males. Such a role model might be presented in literature or the media, or be a celebrity figure. In this sense, the sociological role model is lowest on the interaction continuum as there is no need for interaction between role model and young person for effective outcomes.

Sociocognitive perspective: Role modelling within this perspective requires some interaction, though this interaction may be impersonal. The function is to allow observation of role model behaviour, and the consequences of this behaviour, so that it may be imitated to achieve a similarly successful outcome. This process is described as observational learning. Examples also include celebrities and media figures.

Sociocultural perspective: This suggests a still greater level of interaction between role model and young person. Observational learning takes place here, but in a structured environment, such as a workplace, school, or sporting club. This allows for personal interaction with more experienced or older colleagues, though it may not be extensive. From this perspective, such environments also provide support for observational learning.

Humanist perspective: This is observational learning with extensive personal interaction and support from the role model. Examples of such role models might be close friends or family members. Within the humanist perspective, the young person learns from a person who is both a role model and a mentor (as described later).

Through an audit of role model programs, MacCallum and Beltman (2002) found potential for positive outcomes across all four perspectives. However, one of the key characteristics of successful programs included long-term support and interaction, which are more difficult to achieve in programs based on a sociological or sociocognitive perspective. Greater behavioural change from programs in the short term was also associated with greater levels of interaction. Within this research, we explored attitudes to, and experiences of, role models at each of these levels of interaction.

Changing Behaviour via Role Modelling

One mechanism for behavioural change is for young people to emulate the behaviours of their role models through observational learning (McInerney and McInerney, 1998). For a young person to undergo behavioural change,

they must first aspire to emulate their role model's behaviour. They must then have the opportunity to reproduce the desired behaviours with constructive and instructive feedback. Close support is necessary for both the initiation and the maintenance of new behaviours. Simple exposure may be sufficient to change attitudes and challenge stereotypes, but behavioural change is likely to require additional long-term factors.

With regard to health in particular, positive outcomes of role modelling with extensive interaction have been demonstrated. Sipe (2002) found that youths involved in a substance abuse prevention program with mentor support showed better attitudes towards school and family, and a reduced incidence of substance abuse than those not involved in the program or with no mentoring support. Additionally, Sipe (2002) collated evaluations of eight separate Big Brothers Big Sisters programs (across age ranges of 5–18 years), finding participants were 46% less likely than their control group counterparts to initiate drug use and 27% less likely to initiate alcohol use. Participants also reported more positive relationships with friends and parents and better educational outcomes (Sipe, 2002).

Positive self-identity promotion is a second mechanism for role model effectiveness. Yancey (2002) studied role modelling among 749 North American adolescents and found that having a role model was associated with better self-esteem, better grades, and in some cases decreased substance use. In Australia, Purdie (2000) consulted with a broad, national sample of Indigenous students, parents, and teachers and found that role models were a key factor in the development of positive self-identity in Indigenous youth. Purdie (2000) found that self-identity is domain specific, meaning that while positive self-identity as a student led to better outcomes at school, there was no association with better outcomes in other domains. Similarly, positive self-identity as a sports person did not affect school outcomes.

The evidence suggests that building a positive self-identity in a single area can have a negative or limiting effect on outcomes in other areas. This is of concern for young Indigenous Australians given the prevalence of role models in sport and has been highlighted as a challenge by Tatz (1995).

Leadership

The report of the Koori Communities Leadership Program highlights leadership as a key tool in promoting the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Koori communities (VicHealth, 2005). Leadership is viewed as "critical to the long-term survival and growth of Koori communities" and young

people are viewed as "an important group in realizing community visions and building community capacity" (VicHealth, 2005, p. 28). Participation in the program provides access to supportive relationships, increased self-esteem and confidence, and increased feelings of self-determination and control (VicHealth, 2005).

Understanding the psychology of leadership and its function is a necessary part of defining the concept of leadership within the scope of this research. As explained by Hogg (2001), Social Identity Theory suggests that selection of leaders is a subconscious process by which each group member selects those amongst them who most embody the characteristics and attitudes of that person's aspired identity. As people are consistently influenced by the selected leader, their leadership is recognized and acknowledged by the group. The relationship between leadership and health-decision making in this project can be understood through this theoretical framework. Leaders — selected and followed as aspired identities of group members — who promote positive health-decision making will positively affect the health choices and attitudes of their followers. In addition, leaders will probably, though not necessarily, function as role models and mentors through the processes described above.

Methodology

Position of the Researcher

Grbich (1999, p. 103) describes reflexivity as a "process of self-awareness that should clarify how one's beliefs have been socially constructed and how these values are impacting on interaction and interpretation in research settings." Acknowledgement of the researcher's own background therefore allows examination of how it may affect research findings. There are several factors to highlight in relation to this research project.

First, the primary researcher (MO), was an outsider to the Club where the research occurred. As neither an Indigenous person nor a member of the local community, the primary researcher had no existing relationships or experience with the Club prior to this research. However, the project was supervised by an Indigenous researcher (YP) as well as a non-Indigenous researcher who has worked with the Club over a number of years (RR).

Second, the primary researcher had a "mainstream" upbringing that provided a limited knowledge of Indigenous affairs prior to this research. Through coursework in Indigenous health, he was able to partially bridge

the knowledge gap of white, "mainstream" Australia about Indigenous affairs. This included an understanding of the generational social disadvantage facing most Indigenous Australians, as well as an understanding of the more holistic and community focused Aboriginal model of health and wellbeing. Nonetheless, his non-Indigenous status and mainstream upbringing likely influenced how he asked questions, how participants responded, and the interpretation of these responses. The possible ramifications of this are discussed below.

Indigenous Health Research

Indigenous Australians are amongst the most highly researched people in the world, and instances of exploitative or unethical research practice have created significant reason for them to distrust researchers (VicHealth Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit, 2000; Humphery, 2001). Over the past 30 years, guidelines for research in Indigenous communities have been developed to prevent future exploitation and unethical practice. In addition, Henderson et al. (2002) have outlined specific guidelines for research in Indigenous communities in northeast Victoria, which have specific relevance to this research.

Development of a research project in an Indigenous community requires extensive consultation with the community to develop a project which is considered appropriate, properly targeted to an area of perceived importance, with clear benefits for the community. Furthermore, there is a need for proper supervision and cooperation between the researchers — particularly those inexperienced in working in Indigenous communities — and a member of the community. This ensures that the conduct of the project is undertaken in a culturally appropriate manner (Pyett, 2002). The data are owned by the community, represented in this case by the Rumbalara Football Netball Club, and the interpretation of results and writing of reports is carried out in a consultative manner, acknowledging that control over the research process remains with the community.

Developing the Partnership and the Project

The project was developed following the guidelines identified above for research in Indigenous communities and adhered to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)'s *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities* (2003). Ethics approval for the project was granted by Melbourne University's Human Research Ethics Committee. An existing Memorandum of Understanding

between the Club and the University stipulated research protocols including ownership and management of data. The Club's management and board assumed the role of steering committee for the project and at all stages of the research process the primary researcher sought advice on, and deferred to, community protocols. Research outcomes were first summarized in a community report and, upon the request of the steering committee, a manuscript was prepared for publication. The content and authorship of this paper were also subject to the approval of the steering committee.

The aims and methods of the project were developed during a series of consultations between club representatives and university researchers over a number of months. Club representatives were interested in learning about members' perceptions of Indigenous leadership and mentoring within the setting of the Club, and how the Club facilitated positive leadership and mentoring. In particular, there was concern about a drop in participation amongst junior members between the ages of 12–16. Some queried whether decreased participation in the Club was associated with a decrease in attendance at school, and with health-risk behaviours such as alcohol and other drug use or smoking. Attitudes towards leadership would also be explored in the context of the Munarra Leadership Program.

As there were clear difficulties associated with locating and recruiting people who had left the Club, it was suggested that the project focus on the experiences of players who had played continuously through the junior teams, and investigate how these experiences contributed to their participation. Consultations also identified an appropriate community representative, Brad Firebrace (employee and Club member), to facilitate recruitment and data collection and monitor the cultural appropriateness of the research.

To better understand and address these areas of interest, this research explored:

a. how leadership is perceived within the Club;
b. the participants' experiences of leadership and role models throughout their junior years with the Club;
c. characteristics of leaders or role models within the Club, and why certain people were seen as leaders by these participants;
d. what levels of leadership or role models inspired them the most;
e. how these leaders and role models affect health-decision making; and,
f. their experiences, if applicable, with the Munarra Leadership Program.

This research was designed to assist in:

a. defining the concept of Indigenous leadership, particularly within the

setting of the Club;

b. understanding what levels of leadership and role modelling, and what aspects of leaders or role models resonate particularly with young members of the Club;
c. defining links between Indigenous leadership, role models, and health-related decision making; and,
d. providing feedback on the Munarra Leadership Program to the Club.

Study Design

A number of factors influenced the choice of method for data collection. First, as the project aimed to explore the range of experiences around role modelling and leadership, the wide variety of possible experiences of participants would have been difficult to elicit quantitatively. Second, the specific setting of the data collection meant that preexisting quantitative instruments might not have been appropriate for the Indigenous participants in this study. Third, the small number of potential participants — based on specific selection criteria detailed below — allowed time to carry out data collection in more depth than a quantitative approach (Silverman, 2000).

Selection and Recruitment of Participants

Potential participants were identified using membership information stored at the Club. This method of identification was considered appropriate and approved by the senior community representatives with whom the project was developed and the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee. Selection criteria included:

- identification as an Indigenous Australian;
- having been a continuous member of the Club;
- having made the transition from playing in the juniors (up to 17 years of age) to playing in the seniors.

Once all the potential participants were identified, recruitment was carried out by either the primary researcher or the nominated club representative. The method of recruitment could be described as nonprobability convenience sampling. Club members were approached before or after sports training at the Club facility in Shepparton and informed about the background of the project. The selection criteria adopted resulted in only eleven eligible participants being identified for possible inclusion in this research.

Participants

The participants comprised five men and one woman ranging in age from 18–26. All participants were briefed verbally on the project, were provided with a Plain Language Statement, and gave written consent prior to participation. Sample size was determined by the availability and willingness to participate of those meeting the selection criteria.

Interview Method

Interviews were carried out at the Rumbalara Football and Netball Club. Participants approached early in the project expressed a desire to have interviews take place either before or after sports training and it was decided to maintain this for all participants. This was convenient for participants, and ensured that the interviews took place in a familiar and safe environment, which reduced the risk of data collection being influenced by participants feeling threatened or perceiving unequal power relationships (Rice and Ezzy, 1999).

The interviews were semistructured, with open-ended questions focusing on the topics identified above. Interviews ranged in length from 20–35 minutes, and were audio recorded. Following data collection, interviews were transcribed and copies of each interview were returned to the participants to allow them to check the accuracy of the transcription. No changes were requested by participants.

Data Analysis

Silverman (2000) describes both "realist" and "narrative" approaches to interpretation of interview data. In a "realist" approach, respondents' answers are treated as describing an external reality, and a "realist" study design should include various devices to ensure the accuracy of such responses. By contrast, a "narrative" approach relies on the participant's generation of a plausible account of events, and his or her experiences of these events. For this project, a "narrative" approach was adopted both for pragmatic reasons and due to the nature of the data being collected. Identifiable patterns of responses were listed from the interview transcriptions and used to generate themes of responses (Aronson, 1994).

Results

Dominant themes from the interviews are presented below. Within each topic, subthemes emerged and are described with examples from the data. Selected quotes reflect what was considered to be the most accurate rep-

Table 1: Themes and Subthemes Arising from the Interviews

Theme	*Subtheme*	*Description*
Leaders as role models		Being a good role model is an important leadership quality
Experiences of leadership and role modelling	Respect	• Respect encompassed the relationship with the local and mainstream community, employment status and drug and alcohol use
	Consistency	• Showing consistency between behaviour within and outside the club
	Vision, passion, belief	
	Neutrality	• Having the ability to transcend family conflict
Role model selection	Success at sport	
	Dedication and belief in the club	
	Integration between younger and older players	• Identified as a gap by participants
	Family	
	Professional footballers	• Indigenous footballers cited as role models
Issues in the Juniors	Lack of interest and support from seniors	• May be interpreted as a lack of integration
Munarra Leadership Program	Viewed as a chance to give back	
	Learnt leadership qualities	
	Younger players should be encouraged to take part	

resentation of the ideas of multiple participants. The themes and subthemes are summarized in Table 1.

Leaders as Role Models

Participants were asked a number of questions about Indigenous leadership. While leadership and role modelling are separate, though related, concepts, discussions of leadership quickly shifted to the topic of role modelling. Almost all participants suggested that being a good role model was perhaps the most important quality of a good leader.

> *Just a good example of what to do, and what not to do, and what's right and what's wrong pretty much. Setting a good example, just always do what you say you're going to do, and to always be the first person to do it when you say you're going to do something.* **P6**

> *Good background, you know like, hasn't done bad stuff in the past, or if he has he's made it better and is trying to be a good role model.* **P4**

Experiences of Leadership and Role Models

Participants were asked about their experiences of leadership and role models during their years in the juniors. Leaders were identified included peers in the junior teams, team coaches, members of senior playing group, and staff at an organizational level within the Club. The types of role models identified are discussed further in the next section. In describing these experiences, participants identified qualities that were important for good leaders and role models. Some of these qualities pertained to more general perceptions of a leader/role model, while others dealt with specific attributes that such a candidate should have. Three participants spoke generally of "respect":

> *Like, hard workers, ones that don't do stupid stuff, aren't idiots, are respectable...* **P5**

When asked to elaborate on this theme, participants talked about good candidates needing the respect of the Aboriginal community as a whole, but having the respect of the "white" community was also mentioned by one participant.

Some of the more specific qualities that participants believed made a good leader or role model included employment status and the achievement of material wealth:

> *I looked for people that were doing the right thing, not the wrong thing. Like, pretty much, I don't only look at the football; the work side of things, you know, if they work, if they got good houses, good cars, you know why can't I have that?* **P1**

> *I dunno, one that doesn't muck up all the time, like respectful ones, that have jobs, have work, you know.* **P5**

A candidate's approach towards drugs and alcohol was mentioned by three participants.

> *Doesn't smoke or drink, or get blind every weekend, like he has a couple of beers now and then but doesn't get blind every weekend. Just be a good role model for young kids, doesn't go out fighting around and make a bad name for himself.* **P4**

The response below was related to specific experiences described in detail by one participant but also recalled by two others. As expected, many participants' first experiences of Club leadership were from their junior coaches, who were often senior players.

> **P4:** *When I first started in the under 14s, they were good leaders on the day, but they'd go out and get drunk on the weekend. I never used to go out I'd just go home, they decided to go out and get drunk and go to parties and that. When I think*

back I don't know if they were setting a good example for me back at that age and younger blokes than me.

Interviewer: Did that change?

P4: *As they got older they did, when you're young you always do that stuff I suppose. We had a few good leaders. In the thirds we had [name], he was a good leader. He knew what he was on about, he didn't really go out and get pissed like some of the other blokes.*

These experiences highlight the participants' perceived importance of consistency between the way their leaders and role models acted while performing a Club role and their behaviour outside of the Club. The importance of "consistency," and "staying cool" were described by another participant when asked about his junior coaches:

Sometimes. Yeah, when they are cool they are good leaders, but when they get a bit heated they get a bit violent sometimes, like yelling and screaming and stuff. Cool headed is better. **P5**

Most participants described both positive and negative experiences of leadership. There was also significant mention of senior figures at the Club, and the leadership they displayed off the football field.

I always thought, [name], obviously, a lot of people look up to him. He's got a lot of vision, he could see, no I could see his passion and stuff so that was really good. **P3**

"Vision" and "passion," "belief" (in the Club) and "dedication" were attributes of Club staff which were considered important for good leaders at an organizational level. However, participants also mentioned negative experiences of leadership from an organizational level within the Club.

... if you're a leader you should not think of yourself as part of your family group at that point in time. Just, be a neutral person, because that's where a lot of people get mucked up because they still hold these family issues and stuff and they bring them to meetings or they come out with their opinions when it's time to do selections and it's just like, you know check that stuff at the door, don't bring it in here. **P3**

The family aspect of the Club was generally regarded as very positive. The presence of immediate or extended family within the Club was given both as a reason for joining and a reason for never leaving the Club. However, as **P3** describes above, it also meant that there was occasional conflict between family groups which interfered with positive leadership and created hostility, with unfortunate results:

*I remember instances of family conflict which led family groups away...***P3**

Furthermore:

Sometimes there was too many chiefs ... and when people had certain opinions on, I suppose, who was a better player and who was a better combination of players at that point in time and I think that was a lot of personality conflicts and a lot of family orientated sort of stuff and individual sort of stuff about players in the team. That was probably the only thing that was sort of a downer with some of those leaders. **P3**

These experiences serve to highlight the importance of neutrality as an attribute for good leaders.

Role Model Selection

Understanding the types, and relative importance, of role models that were chosen by junior members of the Club was an aim of this research. Most participants nominated at least one individual who they had regarded as a role model while they were a junior member of the Club. Significantly, most mentioned other Rumbalara players (usually seniors at the time) as their most important role models. Senior players served as role models for a number of different reasons, some of which related to their athletic prowess and dedication, and others which were external to sports, such as making positive health decisions and "doing the right thing." **P6** saw a particular senior player as a positive role model for his attitude towards football while he was in the juniors:

Umm, players from the seniors. Other kids like my age who were playing seniors, like I remember [name], he was a bit younger than me when he was playing his first senior game, and once he got in there he never got out of it, so ... watching him play, seeing what he did to get his body ready and stuff. **P6**

Additionally, **P6** identified a senior player (and coach) as a role model for his dedication and belief in the Club:

He's a non-Indigenous footballer, he was around and he just, when the footy club first started there was a lot of racism towards the Club, and [name] got told all this stuff that we wouldn't be good and things like that and it would be a waste of his time but he stuck to us. **P6**

Although senior players were very commonly selected as role models by the participants, some participants felt there was inadequate interaction between senior and junior players to help foster this role modelling. Multiple

participants said that they had regarded these people as role models just from seeing them around the Club, and from watching them train and play. **P5** suggested that previous attempts to address this issue had failed:

> *Yeah probably, there was a mentoring thing, there was a buddy system, where every senior player had a buddy, like a younger player. I dunno, it didn't work, people just lost interest in it. People couldn't be bothered sort of going over to say hello, and the younger blokes were a little timid to go up to the older guys.* **P5**

Multiple participants also described having family members as role models during their junior years. The relative importance of this type of role model differed greatly between participants, however, with one selecting them as the most important and others mentioning only specific qualities that they had possessed.

> *Yeah my father ... he would come here every day just to help out around the Club. So I was following him and I was helping out around the Club as well.... Yeah, he was hard working person, and he'd just do everything around the Club, just help out and make sure everything was done on game days, and make sure everything was set up.* **P2**

Two participants spoke of professional footballers as being important role models for them. Only one of these participants, however, emphasized Indigenous footballers.

> *There were a lot of AFL [Australian Football League] players I looked up to, like Nicky Winmar. I looked up to him 'cos I thought he was a good player, I sort of started to play football because of him. Like and there is other footy players now like Adam Goodes and Michael O'Loughlin.... Yeah, all them Indigenous players, and when I looked up to Adam Goodes, he helps a lot of our players play football 'cos I try to play the same as him.* **P2**

Issues in the Juniors

As this project was designed in part to address declining participation in the Club at a junior level, participants were also given an opportunity to discuss positive and negative experiences in the juniors which did not relate to leadership or role models. When asked about possible reasons for people leaving the Club as juniors, two participants described a perceived lack of interest in the juniors from the Club as a whole:

> **P4:** *When I was in juniors I don't think they put enough time into the juniors, they were just worried about the seniors all the time, when they should have been*

worried about the thirds and fourths they were just worried about the seniors. The juniors are the upcoming leaders of the Club, so you want to look after them.

Interviewer: And you don't think there was enough focus on them?

P4: *Nah, not when I was there, there wasn't. I don't know, it's just that, when you come to game day, everyone just worried about the seniors, they had water boys and stuff but with the thirds they didn't really care.*

Another participant described similar experiences:

There was a lot of drinking, and we didn't really get much support, like we didn't get many people to watch the fourths games, like we only just had our parents that would watch. **P6**

Most participants mentioned other football clubs as the main reason why people they knew had left the Club, or as the main reason why they might have considered leaving the Club. Only two of the participants said they had ever seriously considered leaving the Club. In each case, the presence of family members around the Club was cited as the main reason for choosing to stay.

Munarra Leadership Program Participants

Two participants, who had taken part in the Munarra Leadership Program, were asked about their experiences with the program and how it had affected their attitudes towards leadership and role modelling. Both saw the program as an opportunity to give back to the Club, which they felt had given a lot to them:

I dunno, as soon as I turned 25 I thought, I'd better do something, I'd better give back. I'd never thought like that before, it was just one of those things I suppose. A lot of people gave back to me in the Club, and I thought, being older now and the younger people are looking at the senior players especially, and they look up to you and you have to be a good role model and teach them good things and good skills and I just thought this is a good time to do that and to give back. **P3**

The program broadened their understanding of the roles of leaders and the commitments required. One participant talked of how the program taught the importance of consistency as a leader, an attribute raised by other participants:

... I mean there are a lot more things involved in it than I initially thought at the start, because you know you aren't just a leader when you walk in and when you walk out the gate. You need to be a leader all the time, you are expected to be that all the time, and you know a lot of people point you out now.... **P3**

> *It's just not the stuff that I thought it was, it's a lot of little things. You think leadership is just the things that you see....* **P6**

Both participants spoke of the program as a positive experience from which others would also benefit greatly. Of note, both participants thought that younger members of the Club would benefit more and should be encouraged to participate:

> *... especially younger people, like in their teens and stuff. I was 25 when I did it and that's the end of your young years, I should have got involved so much earlier but I just wasn't ready at that time. But it was good because it takes you out of your comfort zone a little bit and they make you do public speaking and stuff like that....* **P3**

> *I put forward that maybe we should put some older age thirds on it, so they sort of grow into that. Because, it's a great experience, you get so much out of it, and the Club doesn't really expect much of you.* **P6**

The implications of participants' experiences in the Munarra Leadership Program and in the Club more broadly are considered further below.

Discussion

Leadership

For most participants, the earliest exposure to leadership in a Club setting was their junior coaches. In many cases, these coaches were also senior players at the Club. The importance of leaders functioning as role models was raised by most participants and the selection of senior players as junior coaches has strengthened the association between the two concepts in the eyes of the junior players. As a result, the coaches were not only viewed for their ability to train, select, and organize a team, but also for the examples they set with their behaviour.

Importantly, the settings in which these coaches were viewed and evaluated by their players were not limited to the sports field. Due to the context of the Club in the local, relatively small and tight-knit, Aboriginal community, junior players either witnessed or were aware of the behaviour of their leaders in social settings outside of training and game times. Examples of negative behaviour — such as binge drinking — occurring outside the Club context evidently affected the way junior players regarded their coaches in general. This highlights the importance of attention to a senior player's behaviour on and off field when considering them for leadership roles.

Participants acknowledged that not all "leaders" occupy leadership

positions within the Club, and that unofficial leader selection is a ongoing process as described in earlier sections (Hogg, 2001). From within a junior team, players were likely to regard some of their peers as leaders. Attention to this process, including identification of these junior players, and reinforcement of their positive on and off field behaviours, could promote better leadership at the Club. This process could be enhanced by encouraging these young leadership candidates to participate in the Munarra Leadership Program. The participants who had taken part in this program believed that others might benefit more from involvement at a younger age.

Aside from their coaches and peers, junior players were also exposed to leadership from the Club at an organizational level. Most believed there was good leadership at this level, with the notable exception of instances of family conflict. For this to be avoided, one participant described the necessity of good Indigenous leaders having "a sense of the whole Aboriginal population, not just their own community or their own family group or their own club" (**P3**).

Role Model Selection and Influence

Participants described selecting role models from many different levels of MacCallum and Beltman's (2002) interaction continuum. At a sociological level, two participants nominated professional footballers as role models. Both suggested that these footballers were important influences on them joining the Club, and that, as junior players, they continued to idolize them. Only one of these participants emphasized Indigenous footballers as role models, although he did not elaborate on why they were good role models for him, above and beyond their athletic abilities. Having AFL footballers as role models, therefore, was interpreted as influencing these participants' decisions to start playing football at the Club, participate actively in training, and remain at the Club.

All but one participant nominated senior players as role models for them during their time in the Juniors. Most of these participants agreed that there was little interaction between junior and senior players (other than coaches) and that their exposure to these role models was simply through watching them train and play. These senior players could be best understood as role models through a sociocultural perspective. Though there was limited interaction, junior players were able to watch senior players more frequently than they might see AFL footballers, which allowed observational learning to take place.

For a number of reasons, the relative importance of these senior players as role models was considered to be the highest of the types of role models identified. First, participants could identify more strongly with senior players than they could with AFL footballers, or with family members who were of a different gender or with whom the age gap was much larger. Second, the junior players were already participating in the Club and on their way to the seniors and therefore felt that these role models' qualities were reasonably attainable and that they were in the right environment to emulate them, with appropriate support. In contrast to the predominant way in which professional footballers acted as role models, senior players also served as role models for off-field behaviour. Junior players were therefore able to observe a wider range of their role models' behaviours and the repercussions of these. From the perspective of Purdie's (2000) "positive self-identity" promotion, these types of role models allow positive self-identity development in a number of domains. Considering this, it may be beneficial to continue efforts to promote relationships between playing groups to allow more extensive interaction between junior players and their role models.

Three participants nominated family members as role models for them during their junior years at the Club, which would be considered role modelling at the "humanist" level. These participants observed the work ethic and dedication of family members through extensive interaction and aspired to these qualities. Only one participant identified a family member as a particularly influential role model, which may be due to the focus of the interview being the Club, not the family setting.

Participation Levels in the Juniors

Most participants had limited insight into why junior players might leave the Club. The idea that decreased participation in the Club might be associated with a decrease in attendance at school, and with health-risk behaviours such as alcohol, smoking, and other drugs was not supported by the data. Most participants who discussed leaving or of having friends leave the Club regarded other sports clubs as the primary reason for doing so. Participants also perceived a lack of interest in and support for the juniors, suggesting that a focus on greater integration between young players and older potential role models could be helpful.

Impact of the Researcher on the Results

Adhering to a reflexive process is important to understanding how a researcher's subjective position might affect the data collection and the pro-

ject as a whole. During the interviews, it was felt that good rapport was established between the primary researcher and each participant. This was facilitated in most cases by a preexisting relationship between the researcher and senior members of the Club, a similarity in age between the researcher (who was in his early 20s) and participant, and, in all but one case, a common gender. All participants appeared comfortable and answered most questions freely. It is possible that some participants were reluctant to discuss negative attitudes and behaviours of their peers with someone from outside the Club. As the field researcher was non-Indigenous, it is also possible that issues relating to race/ethnicity and Indigenous-specific problems were avoided by participants. The risk of this occurring was lessened by the involvement of Indigenous people in all aspects of the research process, including question development, recruitment, and interpretation of results, and by the explicit support of Club staff for the primary researcher.

Strengths and Limitations of the Research

The research was limited by the availability of eligible participants. The selection criteria adopted resulted in only eleven eligible participants, and thus participant numbers were lower than hoped. Participant numbers were also limited by the availability of participants during the short time available for data collection. Unfortunately, the availability of the researcher and Club representative meant that female Club members were not generally present while recruitment was taking place, resulting in an overemphasis on male perspectives which should be addressed in future projects. Despite the Club's interest in why people decide to leave the Club, we were only able to interview existing Club members within the scope of this research. The project did provide insights on all of the major topic areas, although not to a level of saturation which might have been reached with more participants. Those who did take part provided a unique and relevant perspective given their status as long-term, continuous Club members. The strong involvement of Indigenous people at all stages of the research process, collaboration at key decision points during project development, and a focus on addressing questions posed by community representatives, rather than researchers, is a strength of this project.

Conclusion

The data provide a snapshot of how role modelling and leadership are perceived and experienced at the Rumbalara Football Netball Club, including

some of the problems and strengths that affect club members. Overall, the research reinforces the strength of the club as a setting for role modelling to take place to enhance the wellbeing of Indigenous young people. Positive qualities of leaders and role models that were observed by the participants, included respect, employment, mature attitudes towards drugs and alcohol, consistency in behaviour, passion for the Club and dedication. Some participants perceived a lack of support for the younger players by older Club members. Interpreted in light of MacCallum and Beltman's sociocultural framework, this suggests that greater integration could improve how well-supported younger players feel. In the absence of any specific reason cited by participants for younger players leaving the Club in favour of other clubs, it seems fair to assume that greater integration may also counter this tendency. In addition to implications at the local level for planning and implementing future programs at the Club, the research enriches our understanding of Indigenous role modelling and leadership more generally, including the various community, family, sporting, and other influences that shape the health decision-making of young people.

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