

“We Don't Want to Be Fake”:

Vulnerability, Emotion, and Bonding to Win in Aussie Rules Football

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Abstract

Determining how to help teams be more productive and successful is a popular pursuit in business, academia, and professional sports alike. This paper explores the case example of the 2017 Australian Football League Richmond Tigers, primarily through a content analysis of the work of Konrad Marshall (2017). This paper argues that emotional intelligence, especially vulnerability, authenticity, and empathy, are all vital to changing team culture. Through their Triple H Sessions and celebrations of Aboriginal identity, the 2017 Richmond Football Club was able to completely reverse their 2016 performance on the field in under a season. This paper further argues that to understand the impact of this emotional intelligence, Olson's Circumplex Model (1986, 2000) is ideal for mapping team flexibility and cohesion.

Keywords

sport, emotional intelligence, teamwork, vulnerability, leadership, Aboriginal

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DEMONSTRATING THE POWER OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: A STUDY OF THE 2017 RICHMOND TIGERS

Professional sports organizations would love to distill the ‘it-factor’ that makes an ordinary team extraordinary enough to win a championship,¹ but determining those intangibles that make that difference is difficult. At the same time, breaking a curse and ending a premierships drought requires even more: something exceptional and miraculous (Kreiser, 2014; Marshall, 2017; Verducci, 2017). In the case of the 2017 Richmond Football Club (RFC),² the victory was made all the sweeter by the fact that the Australia Football League (AFL) team had recorded an equally abysmal season the year before. Yet with Aussie Rules Football being a serious business and the RFC operating as a multi-million dollar corporate entity (Richmond Football Club, 2017), one cannot simply write off such a massive turn-around as luck, fate, or ‘being due.’ Understanding what the poignant story of a football underdog can reveal about the theoretical basis of successful teamwork is pivotal to hypothesizing how teams - athletic, business, or other - can work to develop emotional intelligence, increase productivity and efficiency, and achieve success.

This paper presents a study conducted to determine how strengthening emotional intelligence and developing of certain key psycho-social factors led to the overwhelming turn-around for the RFC from 2016 to 2017. In addition, the paper examines the role of celebrating Aboriginal identity in the process of building team empathy. These factors are considered within the framework of Olson’s Circumplex Model (Olson, 1986, 1990, 1993, 1996, and 2000; Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1989), through which I argue the 2017 RFC is oriented as a ‘Flexibly Connected’ unit. Lessons from this paper can be

¹ While the broad term 'championship' can be applied to any professional sports team achieving the final level of success, in Australian Rules Football, the word used for 'championship' is 'premiership'. This term will be used for the remainder of the paper.

² The Richmond Football Club is a team in the Australian Football League (AFL), Australia’s premier Aussie Rules football league.

applied beyond the realm of athletics, and are discussed briefly at the end of the conclusions.

Emotional Intelligence and Teamwork

Any coach will readily argue that there is far more to making a player or a team successful: he has to have the intangibles, the unmeasurable factors that cannot be denied simply because they cannot be quantified. What makes an individual a strong athlete mentally and emotionally is a subject many, from academics to professionals in the sports industry, have tackled (Afremow, 2015; Fitzgerald, 2015; Gordon & Smith, 2015; Grover, 2014; Kerr, 2013; Wooden, 1997).

The intangibles that lead to group success, however, are less well understood. What constitutes 'teamwork' has been approached by psychologists, business analysts, and sports professionals alike (Kerr, 2013; Lencioni, 2002; Mackay, 2015; Sinek, 2017; Stanier, 2016; Willink & Babin, 2017), since the broad concept of 'improving one's team' is applicable in numerous disciplines. Some factors, such as open communication and ability to handle conflicts, seem obvious, although opinions diverge as to how to develop communication skills or improve conflict resolution within teams.

Several recent works have focused on certain key aspects of emotional intelligence, such as vulnerability, authenticity, and empathy, as vital to the team experience (Avolio & Walumbwa, 2006; Brown 2013 and 2015; Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005; Gardner, Fischer, & Hunt, 2009; Perlini & Halverson, 2006; Susing, Green, & Grant, 2011). This paper will contribute to those discourses, tying them together to argue that these affective experiences create the trust and teamwork necessary to achieve significant goals.

Observing how emotional intelligence manifests in a specific successful team (in this case, the 2017 AFL Richmond Tigers) is beneficial for the team and its fans, and results in stirring narratives like that of *Yellow and Black: A Season with Richmond*

(2017).³ However, using these observations to make larger hypotheses about team development requires placing them within a theoretical framework. Daniel Olson's Circumplex Model (Olson, 1986, 1990, 1993, 1996, and 2000; Olson et al., 1989), which was originally developed to assess the stability and strength of marital couples and families, has been applied in a variety of studies to explore how cohesion, flexibility, and communication interlock to create successful family effort (Kawash, G. & Kozeluk, 1990; Kazak, 1989; Rodick, Henggeler, & Hanson, 1986; Thomas, & Ozechowski, 2007). However, Olson's model has not yet been applied to an athletic team, even though a sports team possesses many of the same beliefs and behaviors as a familial unit.

This paper does exactly that: utilizes the Circumplex Model to argue that changes to team building, and the emphasis on vulnerability and authenticity in particular, simultaneously increased cohesion and flexibility within the organization, stabilizing the team enough to execute a full reverse from 2016 to 2017. Demonstrating this, however, requires an in-depth, ethnographic study of the team; this paper instead employs a fairly rigorous substitute.

Memoir as Psychological Ethnography

This paper also seeks to demonstrate the ways that a memoir, when written concurrently with exciting events, can serve as a primary source to be studied by academics.

Unfortunately, one cannot test long-term athletic team development strategies in a lab. The best case scenario that psychologists or sociologists could hope for is a case example of a team which failed miserably one season, made a significant change in the team's psychological approach to cohesion and teamwork, and then had a wildly successful comeback season, all while being recorded by a non-player/staff member.

Konrad Marshall's all-access memoir-ethnography text, *Yellow and Black: A Season with Richmond* (2017), provides exactly such a record regarding about as good a

³ For ease's sake, Konrad Marshall's book *Yellow and Black: A Season with Richmond* (2017) will be subsequently referred to as *Yellow and Black* (2017).

case study as a social psychologist might hope to find. In 2016, the Richmond Tigers were terrible: they came in 13th out of 18 in the Australian Football League, including having some embarrassing showings, and missed the finals. Team morale was at a low. However, once the Richmond organization made adjustments to their approach to team cohesion and flexibility by introducing a new activity known as ‘Triple H Sessions,’ the 2017 RFC made a complete reversal and won the 2017 Premiership, its first in thirty-seven years. Marshall was present through both seasons to record it all, though *Yellow and Black* only recounts the 2017 season.

Part of the reason that Marshall’s memoir of the 2017 Richmond Tigers is such a useful case study of psycho-social factors which affect teamwork and team success is that the team staff and players were already comfortable talking about psychological strategies for team building (Marshall, 2017, 291-298). This is because the organization utilized a number of psychological assessments and programs to improve performance. In 2016, these efforts did not achieve success; in 2017, they reaped dividends. Essentially, the team was primed to be studied as a case example of the successes of certain team-building strategies.

Every day during the football season, all Tigers complete Player Wellness Reports, which survey the players’ physical, mental, and emotional statuses. Questions address emotional state, sleep patterns, aches and pains, motivational levels, and mental attention. An analytics team employed by Richmond looks for spikes, red flags, and changes over time once each player’s baseline is established, and coaching and training decisions are made based on the recommendations of the analytics team (Marshall, 2017, 293). Thus, the organization was acutely aware of the need for a change in strategy to address issues of satisfaction, loyalty, flexibility, and leadership because they could track players’ responses to failures in 2016.

Also, it should be noted that this degree of assessment, evaluation, and analysis is not common for AFL teams: the Richmond approach to the psychological development

of team staff and players is uniquely proactive, further elucidating the strength of the 2017 Tigers as a case example. In *Yellow and Black* (2017), Konrad Marshall notes,

New staff and players routinely report as being amazed - even confronted [*sic*] - by the way players and coaches are so intricately evaluated (and then supported) at Tigerland. Craig McRae, who played in three premierships during the Brisbane Lions' halcyon days, then coached at Richmond before spending five years as development manager at Collingwood, returned to Richmond in 2016 to find measurement and tracking had reached a new level in his absence. Defensive coach Ben Rutten, who came to the Tigers from an at times rigid environment at Adelaide (under the famously systems-driven Neil Craig) was also intrigued by the level of control.

It didn't happen overnight. [Head of Coaching Tim] Livingstone arrived at the club in January 2009 as manager of player development... Six months later, senior coach Wallace was given the sack, and by August the club had appointed [current Coach Damien] Hardwick. The new coach quickly asked Livingstone to manage the coaching program, which has grown now to include 10 staff, coaches included. (2017, 295-296)

Richmond also uses the Insights Discovery Assessment System (Insights Group Limited, 2018) to measure personality/leadership styles, and map them to colors (blues are cautious, reds are assertive, yellows are cheerful, greens are mellow).

Recommendations on how to interact with and predict others' behaviors follow these broad color categories. The framework is used by players and staff regularly, with Marshall acknowledging that, "I have heard players reference the system in meetings: "Sorry, that's probably borne of my Red personality" (2017, 294). Marshall argues that the staff and players are acutely self-aware of psychological approaches to improve performance and mental state. One could argue, in fact, that the team was already ripe to be successfully strengthened by activities like Triple H Sessions.

Therefore, while direct interviewing⁴ would have been ideal, Konrad Marshall's

⁴ I was able to speak with Richmond's leadership coach Shane McCurry, who is discussed at several

Yellow and Black (2017) provides the ethnographic detail and direct quotes needed to conduct a content analysis and reap beneficial qualitative evidence to support hypotheses about emotional intelligence, Aboriginal identity, and Olson's Circumplex Model. This is made possible by the club's unique position and perspective regarding psychology and team building efforts.

Our Road to Victory

In order to explore the role of psycho-social connections between players and staff on a winning sports team, this paper focuses primarily on the 2017 Richmond Tigers, discussing the ways that emotion, communication, and Aboriginal identity played an important role in success on the field. By characterizing the team as a familial organization, Olson's Circumplex Model (Olson, 1986) can be applied to show that the 2017 RFC is an example of a successful 'Flexibly Connected' familial-unit.

The literature review which follows will allow me to bring the reader up to date on some of the debates in academic circles regarding the role of emotional intelligence, vulnerability, authenticity, flexibility, and character in athletic training and performance. The special importance of Aboriginal identity in Australian sports is introduced and supported by peer-reviewed literature. Finally, the Circumplex Model (Olson, 1986, 1990, 1993, 1996, and 2000; Olson et al., 1989) is presented and explained.

In the methods section, I introduce the reader to the 2017 Richmond Tigers, the unique and moving subject of the Konrad Marshall book, *Yellow and Black: A Season with Richmond* (2017). This text serves as a primary, though not the sole source of material to analyze the 2017 Richmond Tigers. The exploration of the team, which includes content analysis of *Yellow and Black* (2017) and a survey of Australian media

points in this paper, for an hour in December 2017. This was an informal interview, however, and only served to direct themes of this paper's research. During our discussion, McCurry emphasized that the change in approach to leadership was organization-wide, not limited to the playing group. It was also from his repeated praise of the Korin Gamadji Institute that motivated me to examine the role of Aboriginal celebration in bringing team members together empathically.

coverage and club organizational media, will focus on the ways that emotional connections, including pseudo-familial and ethnic connections, helped to push the team to victory. Drawing from the literature that was navigated in the literature review, my analysis will focus on core themes of authenticity, vulnerability, empathy, and unique Aboriginal identity to show that the psycho-social bonds between players and team staff can have a significant impact on team success.

The findings section discusses the importance of these traits in creating a familial unit that behaves as a 'Flexibly Connected' family in Olson's Circumplex Model (Olson, 2000). The Democratization of decisions and changes in leadership were well accepted, and connections were built on empathy and vulnerability - not obedience or loyalty to the team, but to each other. By making a concerted effort to improve leadership, increase team emotional dependency, and encourage authentic communication, the organizational coaching staff was able to orchestrate a reversal of serious proportion. This section will continue by discussing why this model is relevant and potentially predictive for teams, and why it could be used by team management to improve team relations and performance. The section will culminate with a discussion of some of the overarching conclusions which can be drawn from this analysis, as well as a discussion of the directions for future research. The paper as a whole will then conclude with some final thoughts on the use of sports memoir as material for psychological analysis.

GROUNDING THE TIGERS' SUCCESS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to critically apply psychological and sociological theory to the case example of the 2017 Richmond Tigers, we must first familiarize ourselves with the relevant concepts and models which will help us to understand how such a dramatic change in team chemistry was possible in just a season. This review is divided into three parts: an analysis of emotional intelligence in professional sport, a discussion of the unique situation of Aboriginal identity in Australian Football League, and an overview of Olson's Circumplex Model of Familial Stability (Olson, 1986, 1990, 1993, 1996, and 2000; Olson et al., 1989). These three loci will inform the content analysis found in subsequent chapters.

Emotional Intelligence in Professional Sports

There are many definitions of emotional intelligence, though they tend to emphasize the ability to process emotion and use that information effectively. Mayer, who has written extensively on the topic of emotional intelligence (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999; Mayer, Salovey, 1997; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002) has developed one of the dominant testing tools for evaluating emotional intelligence, the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). Mayer, along with Salovey and Caruso, defined emotional intelligence as the "ability to recognize the meanings of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them. Emotional intelligence is involved in the capacity to perceive emotions, assimilate emotion-related feelings, understand the information of those emotions, and manage them" (Mayer et al., 1999, 267). The emphasis on reasoning and management is of particular importance when considering sports teams, where emotional control is a precursor to athletic success (Crombie et al., 2009; Perlini & Halverson, 2006). There is also the dimension of problem-solving as a part of the emotional intelligence experience.

Emotional intelligence has become almost a ‘hot topic’ in business discourse.⁵ In the world of sports, studies (Cohen et al., 2006; Hanin, 2000; Locke, 2003) have demonstrated that optimum mood (Beedie et al., 2000; Lane et al. 2005) enhances athletic performance, and that individual athletes and teams can be managed to improve mood, control emotion, and increase group cohesion (Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Locke, 2003). Many of the traits required for strong emotional intelligence - emotional control, self-discipline, awareness of surroundings, patience with others, receptive disposition, or cooperative nature - are also common traits in athletes (Crocker & Graham, 1995; Zizzi et al., 2003), leading some to argue that the correlation is not coincidental and thus worthy of further research (Meyer & Fletcher, 2007; Perlini & Halverson, 2006).

The applicability of emotional intelligence in the realm of athletics has been the subject of a number of interesting studies, but as Crombie et al. (2009) note, the majority of these studies have been focused on emotional intelligence in the team setting.⁶ This paper will also be a study focused on team-level analysis, as opposed to directly measuring and monitoring the emotional intelligence of each individual player. As will be discussed later, there are opportunities for research in the future that include looking at athletes’ emotional intelligence at the individual level.

Markers of Strong Emotional Intelligence

Beyond the ability to control and understand emotions, emotional intelligence also includes a willingness to embrace certain complex affects which are pivotal in the building of trust and the developing of strong relationships. The transferability of these

⁵ Though this is not an exhaustive list, several authors have approached the issue of emotional intelligence in business team building in ways that are relevant for this paper: Barsade & Gibson, 1998; Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Brown, 2015; Caruso & Salovey, 2004; Cavallo & Brienza, 2004; Chattopadhyay & Finn, 2017; Cherniss, C. & Goleman, 2001; Chrusciel, 2006; Crombie, 2004; Druskat, Sala, & Mount, 2005; Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Goleman, 2005 and 2011; Kahneman, 2013; Kerr et al., 2006; Perlini & Halverson, 2006; and Totterdell et al., 1998.

⁶ See Cohen, Tenenbaum, & English, 2006; Covassin & Pero, 2004; Crocker & Graham, 1995 as notable exceptions.

factors to any team demonstrates not only how primary emotional intelligence is for the functioning of any group, but also that athletic teams, such as the Richmond Tigers, are structured like familial units and function similarly to other types of teams.

Brené Brown (2010, 2015) is well known for her work in the willingness to show vulnerability. Vulnerability is a lack of confidence, an uncertainty, or being in need. Vulnerability also includes a willingness to ask for assistance, or admit an inability to do something (Brown, 2010, 2015). Vulnerability, she argues, is not a weakness if used constructively, and is the foundation for honest, meaningful relationships in the long-term. Brown argues that vulnerability comes from shame and alienation (Brown, 2006); successful individuals and teams embrace their vulnerability and derive connection from the experience (Brown, 2015). Examining vulnerability in the context of the 2017 RFC was not difficult: as will be shown, there are several examples throughout the season of the coaching team harnessing the power of vulnerability in their pep talks and discussions.

Another factor which has become indicative of strong emotional intelligence in much of the literature about leadership is authenticity. Authenticity is generally defined as behaving in a manner that aligns with one's espoused values (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Clapp-Smith & Vogelgesang, 2009; Erickson, 1995; Susing et al., 2011). Being authentic has been suggested as a solution to ethical problems in the business world as a way of aligning values and expectations for employees and leadership (Avolio & Walumbwa, 2006; Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005; Duignan & Bhindi, 1997; Eagly, 2005). Authenticity includes expressing and sharing gratitude (Bartlett et al., 2012; McCullough, et al., 2001). Authentic leaders are perceived of as trustworthy and credible, both traits of importance in coaching. Gardner, Fischer, and Hunt (2009) and others (Gardner et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008) connect authenticity to self-awareness, particularly of one's own emotional intelligence. Authenticity is also tied to issues of intent (Bhindi & Duignan, 1997; Harvey, Martinko, & Gardner, 2006; Walumbwa et al., 2008), so

connecting ideas of authenticity and motivation are common in sports leadership. Staying true to one's identity is also relevant to building team cohesion because of the way trust can be developed.

Australia's Unique Aboriginal Identity

One of the most authentically Australian identities that has an interesting place in Aussie Rules Football is that of Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities. Beyond the problematic history between white Australians and Aboriginal peoples, Aborigines today face significant disadvantages (Australian Government, 2014; Dockery & Gorman, 2017). A legitimate discussion of these issues are beyond the scope of this paper; instead, I will focus on Aboriginal athletes, particularly in the AFL, who themselves have experienced no small share of discrimination and abuse.

Discrimination against dark-skinned or black athletes is hardly a uniquely Australian flaw; rather, it is a tradition shared by many racially-charged societies including South Africa (Booth, 1998), New Zealand (Melnick, 1996; Melnick & Thomson, 1996), the UK (Malcolm, 1997: 266), and the US (Boyd, 1997; Davis & Harris, 1998; Dyson, 1993; Murrell & Curtis, 1994; Rainville & McCormick, 1977; Wonsek, 1992). Unlike Australia and New Zealand, however, neither the United States nor the UK have embraced black culture now that integration of black players into all major league sports is complete. There is no African-American equivalent of the All Blacks⁷ (Kerr, 2013), for example, nor do American or British teams openly discuss and

⁷ The All Blacks are the rugby team representing the nation of New Zealand, and are one of the most globally recognized athletic organizations. They are famous for performing the Indigenous Maori dance, known as the *haka*, as both a greeting and a challenge before every match. They also have a 77% win rate in international competition, which is significantly higher than their closest competition, a fact they attribute to the *haka* (Kerr, 2013).

Although a more detailed comparison was possible, I have chosen not to do so for a few reasons, the least of which is the fact that the teams are not of the same competition level, they compete in different sports, and they compete in different countries with different histories. The All Blacks are the national rugby team of New Zealand, while the Richmond Tigers are one of eighteen Aussie Rules Football teams playing in the AFL. While these differences are quite sizable in scope, to readers less familiar with sports in

embrace Indigenous culture in the manner that the Richmond Tigers did during the 2017 season.

Aussie Rules Football is nearly synonymous with Aboriginal identity, and AFL is the second-most popular team sport among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Dockery & Gorman, 2017, 7). Aboriginal players have appeared on teams since 1904, less than a decade after the league's inception, and over 175 AFL/VFL players have been of Aboriginal or Torres Straits heritage. Aboriginal players make up a significantly higher percentage of the AFL player population than they represent in the Australian population at large (Manovic, 2018). Adam Manovic argues,

So if Aboriginals don't have innate 'magical' skills, then why are we so over-represented in the game at the top level in 2018? There are 92 players male and female who identify as Indigenous in the premier league, making up 10 per cent of the AFL's total players. Rather than having football in our DNA, it's the passionate dedication to the game Aboriginal kids have from a young age; Indigenous representation is scarce in Australia, but many role models can be found in the football leagues since the AFL has had a commitment to raise Aboriginal participation. (Manovic, 2018)

The AFL has worked diligently with Aboriginal activists and the Australian government to make football a part of the National Reconciliation Plan (Reconciliation Australia, 2014). Indigenous dedication to the game at a young age is also why the Korin Gamadji Institute and other Indigenous programming at the RFC and elsewhere in the AFL is so relevant: much of it is focused on connecting young Indigenous kids to leadership skills, training opportunities, and cultural enrichment.

Tatz argues that Aboriginal athletes in Australian Football League have not traditionally been thought of as equal players on the team; rather, they exist within the Australian social imagination as "a special black breed of gladiators and entertainers" (Tatz, 1998, 5). Certainly, the discrimination faced by Sir Doug Nicholls (Collins, 2016;

the region, the tangential similarities may seem overly important, obfuscating objective analysis. Thus, a lengthy comparison may invite casual readers to overestimate how similar the cases are.

Dickson, 2016) and other pioneering players in Aussie Rules Football demonstrates how far the AFL and the Australian popular imagination has come.

As Hallinan, Bruce, and Coram (1999) note, the 1990s not only saw the first decade of the combined Australian Football League, but also a significant increase in the number of Aboriginal players (see also Atkinson & Poulter, 1993). Starting in the 1990s, Aboriginal talent was discussed more openly in elite AFL circles (Smith, 1993; Tatz, 1995), and on a more direct level, scouting programs expanded to recruit from a broader range of the country, including remote areas like the Northern Territory, “a major nursery of black talent” (Tatz, 1995, 168) from which new recruitment programs began.

Increased and disproportionate representation in the AFL has not translated to equality in experience for Aboriginal players (McNamara, 1998; Mulcahy & McGregor, 1996; Tatz, 1987). During the 1990s, Aboriginal players faced a “gross inequality of chances, choices, and facilities” (Tatz, 1995, 297). ‘Sledging’ (players or fans taunting black players based on race) was such a significant problem in the 1990s, and caused so many national debates (Cashman, 1995; McNamara, 1998; Rowe, McKay, & Lawrence, 1997; Tatz, 1995), that the AFL passed a law, known as Racial and Religious Vilification Code or more colloquially as ‘Rule 30’ (Gardner, 1997; Winkler, 1998). Slurs and discrimination, though less frequent than in the past, are still not unheard of at AFL matches (AAP, 2013; Chadwick, 2018; Windley, 2013).

Aboriginal players have also struggled, Hallinan, Bruce, and Coram (1999) argue, because of racial stereotypes which create a sense that Aboriginal players are supernatural or particularly fast, which may lead to racism or miscoaching. Ramsey describes the way that Aboriginal players are understood within AFL culture:

There remains a school of thought that Aboriginal footballers are not the same as other players, that they possess a kind of ‘sixth sense’ that allows them a greater awareness of what’s happening around them, an ability to size up pressure situations more quickly than their fair-skinned opponents and that they have an added athleticism that makes the most difficult physical tasks seem easier. (Ramsey, 1998, 87)

Adam Manovic points out, the stereotypes of Aboriginal players continue, hurting Indigenous players' careers (Manovic, 2018). These stereotypes align with the racial stereotyping that haunts other black athletes around the world, as described as the beginning of this section.

One way that the Australian Football League has directly addressed racial inequality and the discrimination faced by Indigenous players and Aboriginal Australians around the country was to institute the Indigenous Round (Round 11; now known as the Sir Douglas Nicholls Round). All of the teams wear special guernseys⁸ (AFL, 2018), showcase Indigenous cultural performances, and celebrate the history of Aboriginal players in the AFL/VFL (AFL, 2017a). The Indigenous Round also falls during National Reconciliation Week (27 May to 2 June), when Australians around the country celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Reconciliation Australia, 2018).

Celebrating Aboriginal heritage is now a part of Australia's unique nationalist experience, but it is also a strategy by which teams can build cohesion and empathy. By celebrating ethnic identities, teams encourage understanding and shared experience, creating a stronger familial bond (Adair, 2017; Kerr, 2013; Palmer, Watson, & Ryan, 2017; Wiggins & Nauright, 2017).

Flexibility and Cohesion: the Circumplex Model

Later in this paper, I utilize my analysis of the 2017 Richmond Tigers' emotional intelligence and embrace of Aboriginal identity as source material to show that Olson's Circumplex Model (Olson, 1986) is a valuable theory for understanding the functionality and success of an athletic team. In order to use this theory as a tool for discussion, I would like to briefly consider Olson's model, with specific attention paid to aspects

⁸ All AFL teams now wear some form of Indigenous artwork on their guernsey for the Indigenous Round. However, there is no functional equivalent of the Indigenous Round, or its use of cultural symbolism, in other professional sports worldwide.

particularly relevant for the themes drawn from the content analysis of descriptions of the 2017 RFC experience.

Olson's Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems (Olson, 1986, 1990, 1993, 1996, and 2000; Olson et al., 1989) was developed in the early 1980s to examine how three interacting characteristics of the strong familial or marital unit could be oriented to predict the stability and success of the relationship: cohesion, flexibility, and communication. His Circumplex Model Map (Olson, 2000, 148, Figure 1), which provides a spatial explanation of his classification system, is provided in this paper's Appendix as Figure 1.

Olson describes cohesion (Olson, 2000, 145-147) as the shared feeling of togetherness that is experienced by a family: certainly, this concept can be easily mapped onto a sports team situation. His model has four levels of cohesion; the two central (separated and connected) are considered to be more stable than the two fringe levels (disengaged or enmeshed).

- **Disengaged** (detrimentally low cohesion): too little connection or cohesion within the group. Everyone engages in activities for their own benefit.
- **Separated** (low to moderate cohesion): identities are separate and held independent of other family members. Decisions are made jointly.
- **Connected** (moderate to high cohesion): togetherness is valued, and members choose to socialize together. There is loyalty and shared interests and friends.
- **Enmeshed** (detrimentally high cohesion): requires a high degree of loyalty, sometimes to individual detriment. Too little independence and too much consensus. Highly reactive.

Olson's model (2000, 147-149) also operates along another axis, that of group flexibility. This flexibility relates to issues of leadership and relationship rules, particularly concerning how well individuals and the group handle change in leadership and roles. This can include negotiation skills, issues of discipline, obedience, and control,

and willingness to compromise. Much of the focus is on how much stability exists within the family, and how much change can be introduced into those relationships. Olson again relies on the four-category range, with the two central (structured and flexible) being more beneficial long-term than the fringe scenarios (rigid or chaotic).

- **Rigid** (detrimentally low flexibility): highly controlled by a non-flexible authoritarian. Limited negotiations and few rule changes.
- **Structured** (low to moderate flexibility): rules are enforced, but they can be negotiated. Somewhat democratic, but very stable and secure.
- **Flexible** (moderate to high flexibility): decision-making is democratic and roles are more egalitarian. Negotiations take situations and context into account.
- **Chaotic** (very high flexibility): erratic leadership, no clear direction, and instability. Roles and rules are very unclear.

The final axis of Olson's Circumplex model is that of communication. This is the vaguest and least organized axis of his analysis: he argues that strong communication is a sign of healthy relationships, focusing on speaking and listening skills. This includes factors which resonate with emotional intelligence, such as empathy, attentiveness, and self-disclosure. He also includes tracking and problem-solving skills in this discussion (Olson, 2000, 149-150).

Olson's Circumplex Model has been applied by other researchers to a variety of familial therapy situations (Kawash, G. & Kozeluk, 1990; Kazak, 1989; Rodick, S., Henggeler, C., Hanson, 1986; Thomas, & Ozechowski, 2007). What has not yet been examined, to the best of my knowledge, is the applicability of the Circumplex Model to analyzing professional sports teams. That sports teams behave somewhat similarly to a familial unit should not be surprising: the analogy has been made in sports in a variety of countries, as well as elsewhere in Australian Rules Football and the AFL. Thus, this paper will address a gap in analysis and literature by applying Olson's Circumplex Model to a professional sports team to determine the efficacy of efforts to change the team

mindset toward leadership.

The final piece of literature which is relevant to this analysis is *Yellow and Black: A Season with Richmond* (2017), Konrad Marshall's in-depth ethnographic/journalistic memoir of the 2017 Tigers premiership win. Throughout the text, Marshall addresses many of the issues described in the above literature review: evidence of an active effort to address emotional intelligence, group cohesion, leadership flexibility, and Aboriginal identity is drawn from Marshall's descriptions of leadership meetings, pep talks, coaching sessions, team bonding sessions, and other primary source events during which group mindset was altered. Through an analysis of the content of Marshall's work (2017), supplemented by other primary sources, it is possible to see how significant changes to the organization's approach to vulnerability, empathy, authenticity, and Aboriginal identity led to a more flexible, connected pseudo-familial team that could make a dramatic turn-around in just one year.

**RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS:
TRIPLE H SESSIONS, VULNERABILITY, AND ABORIGINAL IDENTITY**

The RFC was formed at a meeting in the Royal Hotel in Richmond a suburb of Melbourne in 1885, and competed in various Aussie Rules Football leagues, collecting a total of thirteen⁹ overall titles (Richmond Football Club, 2018a). The most recent of these titles, the 2017 Premiership, was an underdog success-story: not only had the team not won a title since 1980, but the 2016 Tigers had performed abysmally. Coach Damien Hardwick felt relieved as the 2016 season came to a close, and determined that a new training program and mind-set was needed. The team's jump from thirteenth in 2016 to winning the premiers in 2017 was the largest in AFL history (Marshall, 2017, 458).

But the change took root earlier. Starting in 2010, the organization began a serious revamp of staff and players (Higgs, 2010; Pierik, 2016); this took on a more serious tone starting in 2013 with the election of a new president and new strategic plan to pursue a premiership. Unusual for a sports club in Australia, or globally, the RFC is headed by a female president, Peggy O'Neal (see Marshall, 2017, 213-220). Well respected for both law acumen and philanthropy, O'Neal won her role in 2013 in a move many felt was a sign of the team's commitment to diversity and desire for change (Walsh, 2013). Under O'Neal's tenure, the team was finally able to capture its first premiership in thirty-seven years.

Research Setting

Thus, the primary research setting is the 2017 in-depth season memoir *Yellow and Black: A Season with Richmond*, Konrad Marshall's chronicle of AFL's Tigers' premiership year. The team had made the finals from 2013-2015; Marshall was brought in to

⁹ Technically, the Richmond Football Club has won thirteen premierships: 11 VFL/AFL premierships and 2 VFA premierships. Some analysts do not consider the VFA premierships to count, however, awarding the club only 11 in total.

chronicle the 2016 season. By the middle of that season, however, it was painfully apparent that 2016 was no winning season at all.

Yet throughout [the 2016 season], before it was made public, a careful but clinical process of self-examination was taking place. Changes were made in everything from personnel to game plan to culture - changes that produced an immediate enthusiasm, despite the on-field failures. This book - which had been postponed midway through that disastrous 2016 campaign - was revived in early 2017, in what can surely be described as a "strong and bold" decision by the club. This time, despite a 13th place finish, the Board and the football department agreed to allow a book to be written and printed at the end of the 2017 season, no matter what happened on the field. (Marshall, 2017, 12)

Luckily for the reader, what happened was an exciting narrative worth the time and page count. No one expected the heart-pumping drama of winning a premiership; as such, the book retains a sense of authentic wonderment and genuine enthusiasm rarely found in sports memoirs of the similar ilk.

One of the reasons that this book is exceptionally suited for content analysis concerning many of the psycho-social factors discussed in this paper is that it was written as the season progressed, not in retrospective after the season ended (Marshall, 2017, 11). Rather than attempting to craft a narrative, this means that the text develops naturally, and the players and their relationships are shown to grow over time. One can also argue that this structure also removes some of the author's biases from the text, as he is forced to cover more material without knowing what will become relevant later in the story. Marshall is less able to 'cherry-pick' his data; that means a more substantial data set within the text for me to use in my analysis.

Marshall's experience as a journalist following the 2017 Richmond Tigers was heavily ethnographic. For the entire 2016 and 2017 seasons, Marshall participated in a wide variety of activities with the team: attending practices and games, traveling with the team, and sitting in on oppositional analysis, match reviews, and board meetings. He sat

in the coaches' box during games, and was privy to both team camaraderie and organizational decision-making (2017, 10-11). He listened to and was inspired by the coaches' speeches, felt the tension after losses, and appreciated the emotional rollercoaster of a season along with the athletes themselves. He conducted in-depth interviews and profiles of all the players and coaches.

In addition to Marshall's (2017) book, materials from the RFC's corporate side, as well as the team/players' social media were utilized to flesh out the details of the narrative. This included, but was not limited to, corporate reports,¹⁰ press releases,¹¹ and other materials published by the RFC.¹² Material was also drawn from the Australian Football Club website and media coverage,¹³ as well as other Australian and international news coverage of the AFL.¹⁴

Content Analysis Methodology

Ideally, a project of this focus would include the collection of primary source data directly from players and staff to explore the psycho-social factors discussed so far. However, in lieu of this option, I have chosen to draw extensively from the heavily-ethnographic, thoroughly-researched memoir of Konrad Marshall, and mine his work with content analysis (Hseih and Shannon, 2005) to explore themes of authenticity, trust, Aboriginal identity, and familial ties. Since Konrad's narrative was written as it was lived by the informants and Marshall himself, as opposed to afterwards as an objective analyst, *Yellow and Black* (2017) will be operationalized less as a peer-reviewed or journalistic analysis, and more as a journal of a first-hand participant.

As a fan of the team, I initially read *Yellow and Black* as a memoir;¹⁵ upon

¹⁰ Richmond Football Club, 2015 and 2017

¹¹ KGI, 2018

¹² Jellie, 2018; RoarVision, 2017a and 2017b

¹³ AFL 2017a, 2017b, & 2018; Chadwick, 2018; Collins, 2016; Phelan, 2018; Schmook, 2018

¹⁴ AAP, 2013; Higgs, 2010; Manovic, 2018; Pierik, 2016; Walsh, 2013; Windley, 2013

¹⁵ There may be some who question why more comparisons are not made to James Kerr's recent (2013) text *Legacy: What the All Blacks Can Teach Us About the Business of Life*, which focuses on

realizing the massive potential and serious qualitative dataset available within the text, I examined theories which could explain what I saw as psycho-social factors I felt were vital to the team's success. Thus, the selection of theoretical frameworks was in part driven by the language of the text; then the coding of the text as an ethnographic source was driven by the theories which I wanted to apply to this case study.

Yellow and Black was coded using a series of keywords and specific topics that relate to Mayer and Salovey's conception of emotional intelligence, other factors associated with EI, notions of Aboriginal pride, issues related to leadership uncertainty, or familial traits. Table 1, with the corresponding keywords and themes, is presented in the appendix.

After utilizing the keywords listed in Table 1 and applying them to *Yellow and Black* (2017), it became evident that there was a concerted effort by Head of Coaching Tim Livingstone, organization leadership coach Shane McCurry, and Team Coach Damien Hardwick to develop the emotional intelligence of individual players and the team as a whole, and to ensure that Aboriginal identity was celebrated. Exploration of the team's official and unofficial media confirmed these findings. Marshall also echoes a similar sentiment:

Perhaps the most interesting facet of the cultural shift at Tigerland is its deliberate and methodical nature. Stories of cultural revolution in clubland tend to follow an almost accidental plotline-always as if by luck or fate. Think of the dynastic Cats and you think of a timely alignment of stars and club leaders, with Bartel and Kelly and Johnson and Ablett brought together in a single draft (2001). Think of Sydney and you think of a solitary uncompromising leader around whom all will orbit, in the form of Stuart Maxfield, and the Bloods culture he created for all Swans since to

business lessons that can be drawn from the experiences of the All Blacks. There are some similarities in the overall themes, particularly around authenticity and empathy. However, Kerr's text is not ethnographic: it does not focus on one season, does not delve deeply into emotions or intentions, and is heavily skewed by Kerr's interests and biases. The best comparison to be made between *Yellow and Black* (Marshall, 2017) and *Legacy* (Kerr, 2013) is to state that Marshall's text is more rigorous and can actually stand up to serious academic analysis as an ethnographic text more than Kerr's text.

follow.

But with Richmond the shift was premeditated and planned. They brought in a professional mentor (Crowe), a new leadership and culture expert (McCurry) and then ramped up their mindfulness training program (Murray). Backed by key pillars of influence including Gale, Hardwick and Cotchin, the rest of the club simply fell into line. The process was not organic but organised-not fortuitous but forensic. (Marshall, 2017, 389)

Through the successful development of emotional intelligence, particularly through the team-building technique of ‘Triple H Sessions,’ the 2017 RFC was able to completely change their output from one season to the next. In addition, promoting empathy, authenticity, and appreciation through the celebration of Indigenous culture was also beneficial for building team morale and improving outcomes. In order to best demonstrate how this was accomplished, I want to draw a few, brief anecdotes, quotes, or perspectives that are pertinent to Marshall’s text (2017).

Results: The Triple H Sessions - Vulnerability, Empathy, and Authenticity

One of the single most powerful actions taken by Richmond Coach Damien Hardwick in 2017 was to institute a bonding practice known as Triple H Sessions, in which “a single player would stand in front of the group and share three personal tales: a tale of a Hero, Hardship and Highlight from his life” (Marshall, 2017, 283). Players discussed losing relatives, overcoming poverty and racism, and experiencing joyful emotions like love and fatherhood. Marshall describes how Triple H Sessions moved from

...jarring migration narratives to caring for a disabled loved one. Running defender Brandon Ellis wept as he told his teammates how he felt ashamed – “like scum” – growing up in a housing commission flat and stealing clothes from the mall. Veteran defender Bachar Houli spoke tenderly about the birth of his daughter, and how he now makes a point of kissing both his father and his mother every time he sees them.

These closed confessional sessions in front of 50 musclebound blokes often ended in a heady mixture of tears and applause and group hugging, and ultimately acted as an emulsion, uniting a group en route to a famous premiership. Ellis was one of many Tigers who said the sessions had built not a team but a "brotherhood". (Marshall, 2018)

The group would discuss these personal moments, allowing everyone to focus and reflect on the emotions of the vulnerable player in an empathic, genuine, and caring way and express that shared affect in a meaningful way.

As he explains, Coach Hardwick did not create the concept of Triple H himself; rather, it was something he drew from Jon Gordon's pop psychology *You Win in the Locker Room First* (Gordon & Smith, 2015), which was co-written with Mike Smith, the coach who led the Atlanta Falcons during one of the most striking turnarounds in NFL history. Several other teams have utilized the practice (Marshall, 2017, 288). The exercise was the perfectly executed to allow team members to experience public vulnerability in meaningful ways.

The Triple H sessions began for the 2017 Richmond Tigers during the grueling six-day training camp the team held on the Sunshine Coast in January. During this week, Coach Damien Hardwick, Team Captain Trent Cotchin, and young team favorite Brandon Ellis all shared their stories. As the season progressed, all forty-plus players and several staff and coaches took center stage and opened themselves to the experience of shared vulnerability and empathy.

The Triple H sessions were effective, Graeme Cowan (2017) argues, because they allowed the team to build a strong base of psychological safety. As the basis for authenticity, psychological safety means "being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences of self-image, status or career" (Kahn, 1990, 708). By creating a safe, comfortable environment for the young men to express difficult emotions within a support structure, they were able to experience emotions of

vulnerability, gratitude, and empathy in an authentic way, all while honing their emotional intelligence skills, particularly in terms of perceiving others' emotions, expressing empathy, and gaining self-awareness. Even from the beginning, the Triple H Sessions impacted the way players perceived vulnerability and gratitude as positive practices:

McRae says he saw how the season would unfold for [Captain] Cotchin the moment he stood up in the early Triple H sessions, and spoke with such rawness and honesty. *"You were authentic, and it just opened the door. Everyone else had their chance, but when you showed who you were and where you'd been, it was like they all could, too."*

Cotchin nods. He says he thought he had good relationships with people in the club before this season. He thought he knew what that meant. But he didn't. He says he'll never forget the moment Ben Lennon reached out to him, in the days immediately after that session, just to have a coffee.

"You don't realise the impact that sort of stuff can have on everyone, 'Lenno' said, To know that the captain has had the same thoughts as a second or third year player means everything." It's been good fun though. I'm grateful for everything we've done together. (Marshall, 2017, 477-478)

Just as the Triple H sessions were group-mandated vulnerability, they also succeeded in helping the team bond on a deeply emotional, gracious, empathetic level. Players spoke regularly of the feeling that the Triple H sessions would evoke; for example, explaining that "it was that focus and that presence-that idea that *'We're right here with you, we know you're doing it tough up there, talking about these things, but we're behind you'*" (Marshall, 2017, 289).

This kind of empathy cannot be artificially created, nor does it simply emerge from repeated exposure or shared competition. As Marshall notes, many players were very confident that the Triple H Sessions were directly responsible for the change in team chemistry and success. For example:

[Half-back Brandon] Ellis isn't sure the results on field would be the same this year without Triple H. Despite every team bonding exercise, every trip away, every Mad Monday, every interstate game, every induction and every community camp, he says it has taken these sessions for the players to truly show one another who they are, and why they are the way they are. "*We don't want to be fake,*" Ellis says. "*We want you to know, 'This is who the fuck I am'. We've taken a massive step forward this year in how much we care. We're connected now.*" (Marshall, 2017, 290).

Statements like the one made by Ellis demonstrate the intersection of many emotional intelligence factors that are significant for teamwork: authenticity, empathy, and a sense of familial bonding.

The power of a single activity to harness so many psycho-social factors of emotional intelligence is impressive. However, Coach Hardwick "didn't really know the sessions would produce such an outpouring, or be so popular, but he had an inkling they could prove important," (Marshall, 2017, 288). Hardwick himself noted that "you always bring different things to the group at different times, but this idea of 'connection' was something I delved into late last year... It seemed more relevant this season" (in Marshall, 2017, 288). Hardwick and the team, much like Marshall (2017) himself, credit the team's 2017 premiership, and the turnaround necessary to get there, to the Triple H Sessions. Others outside the organization do as well; Hardwick's powerful success at turning the team around is generally credited to the Triple H sessions, called a "legal performance-enhancing substance" and "a near-zero-cost, near-zero-technology way to build connection, trust, team cohesion and team performance" (Schenk, 2017). The efficacy of the team building practice earned its most resounding vote of confidence in 2018 however, when the team officially announced (Schmook, 2018) that they would be returning to the Sunshine Coast to repeat the training program from the previous season, including the Triple H Sessions.

Results: Other Evidence of Developing Emotional Intelligence

Beyond the Triple H Sessions themselves, there was a conscious effort to change the way team members viewed emotion, leadership, loyalty, and participation from 2016 to 2017. Players themselves discussed the changes in empathy and care from one season to the next.

Of course, all those players were at the club in 2016, and none was significantly injured. So what happened? [Team Captain Trent Cotchin explained:] *"It's hard to put it down to one thing. Upon reflection, we were kidding ourselves. Because we were focusing on the next thing and next thing and next thing, you forget about the things that matter most. We spoke about this the internal review-there was a lack of connection. In the playing group it felt OK, but you didn't see it on the field."*

After a poor loss to Melbourne on Anzac Day Eve [2017], Cotchin implored the group to demonstrate what they meant to each other. He spoke about a lack of care. Now he describes what that looks like in a game.

"Care is a willingness to enjoy the efforts of someone else, to pick them up off the deck when they've absolutely scrapped and fought tooth and nail to even just halve the footy-not necessarily win it. When we were kicking goals, I don't think there was enough energy and celebration. I suppose there were selfish actions, too, which shows a lack of care. That's where I've seen the difference this year, the synergy and cohesion within the whole group. It's easy to say now that 'It's as good as it's ever been', because we probably said the same thing last year, but I think it's genuine." (Marshall, 2017, 66)

Throughout *Yellow and Black* (2017), Marshall describes the way that happiness was associated with gratitude and reinforced as being as important as winning on the field. He points to one game when the coach wrote words on the team whiteboard to begin the motivational conversation before the Round 20 match.

The usual material is scrawled on the whiteboard in the rooms at the MCG

before the Round 20 match against Hawthorn. Play to your strengths. Celebrate. Fight. But also the words "connection", "belief", and "happiness". Wait, happiness? There it is, the change at Richmond in 2017, spelled out in one word. And [Coach] Hardwick isn't talking about the happiness in winning but the happiness in playing-the pure gratitude for the game and the joy in its application-the chance to compete and create with close mates in front of mammoth crowds. His eyes sparkle as he speaks. He seems to be without worry or fear. (Marshall, 2017, 321)

This scene demonstrates the way that empathy, authenticity, and even gratitude are tied together with emotional intelligence: being self-aware, embracing positive emotion, creating social bonds, and finding internal motivation.

Locating the Tigers' Aboriginal Identity

While Australia is not alone in featuring athletic teams which wholeheartedly embrace Indigenous identity, and while the RFC is not the sole AFL team which honors Aboriginal culture, the Tigers have done an exemplary job of embracing the empathy that can be built between all players when they celebrate together. Through a shared commitment to Australian identity and a more diverse Australian future, the team fosters a sense of authenticity, empathy, and familial bonding.

The RFC demonstrates its commitment to Aboriginal identity and social equality through its financial and social support of cultural, artistic, and educational programming oriented to show pride in Indigenous identity. The central hub of these efforts is the Korin Gamadji Institute (KGI, 2018a), the Richmond Tigers' Aboriginal social organization, which runs programming ranging from cultural performances and artistic enrichment programs to educational, leadership, and vocational training programs. Players often visit the Institute's center to give talks to the Indigenous youth gathered for leadership or athletic training (KGI, 2017) or to participate in cultural rituals as part of the team's commitment to promoting Indigenous culture to the next generation (KGI, 2016). Beyond

the team's extensive social media coverage of their various philanthropic efforts, the importance of aboriginal identity and philanthropy to the 2017 Tigers' season is evident by how much attention Marshall dedicates to explaining the charitable efforts the organization makes towards the Aboriginal community (2017, 161-163, 264-265).

The Richmond organization has been recognized internationally for its commitment to Indigenous rights, education, and cultural programming, far beyond that of other AFL teams. During the 2017 mid-season break, several Richmond players¹⁶ and coaches traveled to Indigenous player Daniel Rioli's hometown on the Tiwi Islands. They participated in rituals and spoke with village elders, connecting with Indigenous identities and heritage (RoarVision 2017a, 2017b). In 2018, for the organization's efforts through the Korin Gamadji Institute the previous year, Richmond was asked to send four delegates to New York to present at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (Phelan, 2018; Richmond Football Club, 2018b). They are the first athletic team ever asked to do so (Phelan, 2018).

The team also demonstrates its appreciation of Aboriginal identity in symbolic ways. For example, Richmond participates in the Dreamtime at the 'G match¹⁷ against Essendon, which takes place during the AFL's Indigenous Round (KGI, 2018). Since 2010(AFL, 2017b), the team has worn a guernsey decorated with Aboriginal art,¹⁸ allowing all players, not just Indigenous ones, to display national pride in Indigenous identity.

In *Yellow and Black* (2017), Marshall paints evocative pictures of rituals that artists working with the Korin Gamadji Institute performed at the 2017 Dreamtime at the 'G match, including descriptions of the dancing and the ways equipment like boomerangs

¹⁶ Jack Riewoldt, Dylan Grimes and Jayden Short and Aboriginal player Shane Edwards all travelled together and documented the trip for the fans (RoarVision 2017a and 2017b).

¹⁷ The match's title, 'Dreamtime,' directly references Australian Aboriginal religion and cultural belief. The 'G' is the nickname of the stadium, the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

¹⁸ All AFL teams now wear some form of Indigenous artwork on their guernsey for the Indigenous Round. However, there is no functional equivalent of the Indigenous Round, or its use of cultural symbolism, in other professional sports worldwide.

are used, so that the reader can also participate in the viewing along with the team.

Cultural consultant Jamie Thomas explains the metaphors present in the performance at the 2017 Dreamtime match to the team, watching:

The initial part of the dance is about honouring your ancestors, and all the people who are around us-opponents, the crowd, and people in TV-land. And it's also about honouring the earth... As the tempo of the dance builds, it's the analogy of the tiger, the thylacine, which is known to the *Bonnarang woiworrang* people of Tasmania as the Lagunta. It's stalking its prey. The beat speeds up and there's that creep, creep, creep before we pounce and attack, to devour our opposition. It's about ability, agility, and lifting yourself up for a big stage. (Marshall, 2017, 265)

This explanation to the plays is symbolically and psychologically powerful: the ritual is contextualized into their modern circumstances by, for example, explaining that dancing to honor all those who watch includes both ancestors and viewers in TV-land. The dancers' traditional symbolism (stalking prey metaphorically through dance) is translated to the players' actions (devouring opposition, a big stage).

Thomas then compares the dance to the famous Maori *haka* dance, which is similarly performed by the notable New Zealand rugby All Blacks squad at all of their games (Kerr, 2013). He explains how the dance is a gift, rather than a religious ritual, reinforcing notions of performative reciprocity as positive bonds. Thomas' emphasis on the Indigenous conceptions of gifting and sharing resonates with the organization's overall message of gratitude, self-awareness, and emotional openness.

Marshall also provides us with insight into the emotionally charged, powerful team bonding which occurred in the locker room on the night of the Dreamtime at the 'G match. He notes that Shane Edwards, as the current team's most respected Aboriginal player who had also been named to a leadership position within the team the year before (2017, 75), was often overlooked as Indigenous because of his lighter skin (Marshall 2017, 268). Marshall argues that, in previous seasons, Edwards' Aboriginal identity was

not a significant factor for the team or Edwards himself. But during the pep talk before the 2017 Dreamtime at the 'G match, Coach Damien Hardwick highlights the Aboriginal veteran Edwards for more than his personal identity, but because of his connection in a larger tradition of Aboriginal play.

Then Hardwick does something he almost never does—he singles out one player. The coach has plenty of chances to do this in any given season. He could have asked the team to lift for a player in his 200th game, for instance, or a boy on debut... He never does. But tonight, he highlights Shane Edwards, also known as Shedda, and before that as Titch. Hardwick honours him because of this game, in this round, and because Edwards is wearing the number 67 tonight in honour of the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum that acknowledged Aboriginal people as citizens of this country.

He tells the group he appreciates what Edwards brings to the football club—what he has brought for 11 years now. He points out that including this Dreamtime game, Edwards will have played 192 games for the Richmond Football Club—the most ever by an Indigenous footballer.

"I love Shane Edwards," he says, pausing and pointing to the small midfielder. *"And I want to see the love for Shane Edwards tonight, because he's part of our family. Like Bachar is. Like Lloydy is. Like Jack is. We do things for our family. We fight for them. We stand up for them. Stand up with Shane Edwards tonight."*

(Marshall, 2017, 268)

Hardwick demonstrated vulnerability and deep affection while honoring Aboriginal identity, while also setting the example for the team to think about its place in Australian national history. He utilized familial language and argued for the importance of showing emotions and vulnerability on the field by commanding the players to show their love openly for the fans to see and embrace.

Summary of Results

Eager to see a change after the disastrous 2016 season, the 2017 RFC took a new approach to team building and leadership. As this research has demonstrated, the ethnographic evidence in *Yellow and Black* (2017) and elsewhere presents the story of a self-aware team and coaching staff: aware of their need for stronger emotional awareness and intelligence; aware that a dramatic change in approach was necessary to reorient the player mindset around what being a Richmond Man meant. Beyond developing individual and group emotional intelligence, especially through empathy, vulnerability, and authenticity, the RFC's dedication to Aboriginal identity shows inclusivity and empathy necessary for premiership level team building in Australian professional sports. However, to put these findings into a useful context, I am going to apply Olson's Circumplex Model (Olson, 1986) to demonstrate how the above evidence of team mentality translates into team stability, cohesion, and flexibility.

ALL IN THE FAMILY: DISCUSSING CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE 2017 RICHMOND TIGERS

As the data from my analysis of *Yellow and Black* (2017) and other related texts demonstrate, the 2017 RFC actively chose to focus on issues of authenticity, vulnerability, empathy and shared pride. There was a concerted effort by coaching staff and the players to foster emotional intelligence among the players, successfully utilizing the benefits that strong emotional intelligence can bring to help the team transform from a disaster to a premiership-winning organization. Activities like the Triple H vulnerability exercise (Marshall, 2017, 283) and engagement with Aboriginal organizations through the club (Marshall, 2017, 161-163) helped players and staff develop their emotional intelligence skills together, improving team chemistry and dynamism.

The Triple H Sessions, in particular, demonstrate that Coach Damien Hardwick understood the need to foster empathy, bonding, trust, and psychological safety; adding this to the pre-season bonding events during training set a tone for the entirety of the season. As Marshall's narrative evolves, it becomes more apparent that the emotional connections, particularly around vulnerability, are fueling strong play and positive team outlook. Theorizing how these psycho-social emotional intelligence related factors come together and translate to success on and off the field requires a framework which explores how empathy, authenticity, and vulnerability all manifest in areas relevant to team cohesion: loyalty, leadership, independence, communication, and negotiation. These various traits of a winning team are all explored, together, though a model originally designed for analyzing families. However, what is a sports team if not a brotherhood.

The Circumplex Model and Familial Bonds

Olson's Circumplex Model (Olson, 1986), fully articulated earlier in this paper, is a tool used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges that marital couples or families can face. Many athletic organizations operate like families; using psychological

theory created to evaluate familial units to examine a professional sports team was a logical next step.

There is plenty of evidence in *Yellow and Black* (2017) to argue that the 2017 RFC, its staff, and the players themselves, considered the team to be a family. Familial terminology - particularly referring to teammates as brothers or membership on the team as a brotherhood - is common (Marshall, 2017, 132, 144, 290). Even on the corporate level, the organization views its current incarnation as a step in a genealogical lineage of Tigers, declaring that “as temporary custodians for the next generation of Tigers, we have a duty to leave the club in a better place than we found it,” (Richmond Football Club, 2017, 20).

Accepting the premise that a family-oriented psychological model can be applied to a professional sports team, the 2017 RFC presents a fascinating case example of how a change in status from one location on Olson’s Circumplex Model Map (2000, 148) (Figure 1 in Appendix) to another has a direct impact on outcomes: in this case, a premiership season. Applying the Circumplex Model requires that we examine the primary factors which determine flexibility (leadership/democracy) and cohesion (loyalty/independence) to locate the 2017 RFC on Olson’s Circumplex Model Map (2000, 148). Keywords related to familial bonds, loyalty, leadership, change, and democracy were coded throughout *Yellow and Black* (2017), and, similarly to the previous analysis, scenes of significant importance were highlighted.

It is worth noting that the Circumplex Model is particularly relevant to the RFC precisely because the unsuccessful organization had a reputation of struggling with flexibility and cohesion, just as Olson theorizes. Dr. Pippa Grange, a former AFLPA psychological services manager, “once assessed the culture at Richmond and found it to be high detail, high control and high loyalty. She encouraged Richmond to be more creative, more lateral thinking, more relationship-focused, because they were a highly task-oriented bunch. This season it seems the penny has dropped.” (Marshall, 2017, 294).

Grange's assessment would align well with Olson's view of a 'Rigidly Enmeshed' familial unit (Olson, 2000, 148): high closeness and loyalty, high-control authoritarianism, inflexibility and little change. Rigidly enmeshed families are highly organized, obedient, and dedicated, but they have no ability to adapt, and as a result, are often left behind. Obedience is born more out of respect and fear than love, as most team members feel little emotional connection to each other and instead extreme loyalty to the team as a concept. The passion misplaced, players largely played for the team rather than each other. But, as Marshall noted, something changed from 2016 to 2017, and the team would move from an embarrassing showing to a premiership season.

Flexibility through the Great Richmond Leader

The 2016 season was so bad for the organization that new staff was hired to revamp the entire team building and leadership aspects of the team. The organization brought McCurry to the coaching staff in 2016, and it is worth noting that Organizational Leadership Coach Shane McCurry specifically joined the staff because the team had struggled in 2016. McCurry stated that "*anything is possible when you get to the depths of those lows... You get that perspective in the group-we never want to get back there again-and I think it can be a great foundation*" (Marshall, 2017, 97). The goal was to move away from rigid leadership by redefining team organization to distribute leadership and encourage all of the players to see themselves as a part of the leadership process.

In the off-season, the coaching staff of RFC developed a new framework for players to emulate and model after: "The Richmond Man", who "plays to his strengths, knows his development areas, and fights on regardless of circumstances" (Marshall, 2017, 93). The Richmond Man works in conjunction with his leadership group, coaching staff, and all other leaders who are there to help him achieve success. Good leadership was not an intangible to the 2017 Richmond Tigers: as a group, they defined an ideal type during pre-season training, and labeled it the "Great Richmond Leader":

A Tiger leader plays to his strengths. A Tiger leader fights and celebrates.

He's calm and composed, regardless of circumstance. He's consistent. He's demanding of himself and others. He takes big actions in big games, turning contests not just through goals and marks but effort and intensity. He is authentic and genuine. He is a strong character but a communicator-and a listener. He has time for everyone. He is a teacher and a learner. He is approachable, caring and understanding. He sets the standard. He encourages feedback. GETS SHIT DONE! (Marshall, 2017, 96-97)

Several characteristics stand out in this definition of a Great Richmond Leader: exuding authenticity and being genuine; listening and being a strong communicator; having time for everyone; being caring and approachable. These traits directly correlate with the Triple H Session approach to team bonding that was enacted all season, a strong sense of emotional intelligence, and a more flexible style of team unit in Olson's model.

Team ideas on leadership were developed during the pre-season camp held on the Sunshine Coast; the process of enacting the changes necessary to make these new ideas a reality started then as well. Unlike in previous years, when the leadership group of the team was selected by coaching staff with little player input, 2017 began with a different, more democratic approach. Explaining the strategy of letting players vote on their leadership groups, McCurry said,

Yeah, things move quickly, but it's been a while since you were up there, and we've deliberately stretched the leadership process out this year. It was a conscious decision, because we thought it was important for you guys to see one another perform-not just at camp, but also out on the training track and in the three pre-season games. You've had a chance to see how fair dinkum you are. (Marshall, 2017, 93)

Beginning the season with the introduction of democratic selection of leadership marked an immediate departure from Olson's category of 'rigid' flexibility and a dramatic shift in organizational mindset. But the other side of Olson's equation was building the right amount of connection.

Cohesion through Empathy

Another important part of Olson's Model is the notion of cohesion. While it is crucial for a strong team bond, there must still be room for individual growth and development: dependence on the group can lead to too much obedience if the group becomes too enmeshed. But the 2017 Richmond Tigers managed to maintain a successful balance all the way through the season, from the democratic selection of leadership groups to the egalitarian celebration of winning the premiership.

[Brendan] Gale steps to the front of the room to speak. He was in tears throughout the final stages of last quarter, but has composed himself now. *"Can I be serious for one second? I'm so proud of us and you in all aspects. It takes a club to get to a Grand Final. It takes players to win premierships. To answer the fiercest questions of all, in the fiercest contest of all, my heart is just bursting with pride. I'm just so, so happy. And I think the key to all of this is unity. Unity is strength. Unity is power. And the way you guys have connected this year and opened up and built trust with each other, the way you've played for each other, and your coaches You're a unified group. And we're all behind you, aligned from the top down. We've unlocked something that teams can't compete against. And we've got massive upside, massive upside. I'm so proud."*

[Captain Trent] Cotchin, in socks, with a medal around his neck, thanks everyone in the room. *"I couldn't be more proud of the way you've come together. Embracing imperfection-I think that's what's bound us so tightly. We've talked about a journey. Mine's been 10 years long. To Dimma, all our coaches, staff, our playing group-from number one (Vlastuin) through to number 47 (Soldo)-! couldn't be more proud of the energy, effort and connection you've brought all year. It didn't just happen, you made it happen."* [Coach Damien] Hardwick refuses to drink and so the players boo him, and instead he pours a beer on his own head. (Marshall, 2017, 460-461)

The passage is one of many that is indicative of a group which has grown together,

through the expression of vulnerability and authenticity, into a very cohesive, unified family. There is an emphasis on trust, unity, embracing imperfection (vulnerability), and connection, all of which demonstrate how the lessons of emotional intelligence have permeated the team's discourse by the end of the season.

Successful Communication

Olson's Circumplex Model also argues that improving communication and striving for better communication are the marks of a stable or successful family; that argument can easily be extrapolated to apply to athletic teams, especially high-achieving teams such as the 2017 RFC.

Connections between improved communication and the proliferation of ideas regarding vulnerability, authenticity, and empathy in the clubhouse are not coincidental; in fact, those connections were professionally crafted. Richmond as an organization had been working with Ben Crowe, one of sports most famous marketers, brand managers, and mental skills mentors, for years, including as a mentor to club president Peggy O'Neal. After the failure of the 2016 season, Crowe was brought in to work with the team coach, Damien Hardwick, and the captain, Trent Cotchin (Marshall, 2017, 355). Marshall describes how Crowe emphasized authenticity and vulnerability, and managed to use these to develop the pair's communications skills.

...[the] work he is doing with key Tigers dovetails neatly into the narrative at Tigerland this year, in that Richmond has become an entire club of storytellers, led by the two bodies around which any playing group orbits-the coach and the captain, the sun and the moon of any side. Crowe works mostly one-on-one, whether catching up for quick coffee, or guiding a series of longer meetings to construct a "Life Plan" (which he did for both Hardwick and Cotchin).

The process covers four areas initially - authenticity, vulnerability, connection and storytelling - and starts by unearthing values and beliefs, behaviours and passions. *"What's their legacy going to be? What's the*

eulogy at their funeral? How do they make people feel? Do they stand for something?" Crowe says. "It takes insane courage to be so vulnerable. My job is just to organise their thinking but they've done all the hard work."

When I first interviewed Cotchin a year earlier, at the start of the 2016 season, there was little in the way of easy back and forth. The exchange felt guarded, and trained. His answers were neither dishonest nor frank. He was saying all the right things, but holding back. Interviewing Cotchin this year revealed a changed man. Crowe points out that the captain has admitted this year that he did not feel entirely comfortable with his leadership.

"He's said a few times publicly he thought he had to be this perfect person," says Crowe. "And that's not uncommon in professional athletes. It's called 'perform, perfect, repeat'." (Marshall, 2017, 347)

This example provides sufficient evidence for the argument that the organization's emphasis on vulnerability, empathy, authenticity, and emotional self-awareness specifically improved the communication skills of some of the most important team pieces, almost certainly contributing to team success on the field. Once again, the case example of the 2017 RFC lends itself to Olson's theory, this time demonstrating that self-aware communication improves group cohesion and flexibility; Olson's framework provides us with insight into how organizational emphasis on building emotional intelligence can be understood and studied.

This passage also demonstrates that Marshall is not exterior to his subject of reporting: he is providing his own testimony of interaction with players as evidence that a focus on emotional intelligence development has been successful. As a journalist, his job was to gain material from players and staff, and much of that material was emotionally relevant enough that informants would require authenticity, empathy, and vulnerability to share openly. In other words, the verisimilitude and depth of *Yellow and Black* is evidence in and of itself that Richmond team members were willing to be empathic,

vulnerable, and authentic enough to be open with their feelings and experiences.

Insights and Applications

The case example of the 2017 Richmond Tigers illustrates a possibility for applying Olson's Circumplex Model (Olson, 1986, 1990, 1993, 1996, and 2000; Olson et al., 1989) to professional sports teams rather than families or married couples. The transferability of findings between the realm of familial studies, business, professional sports coaching, and other social realms in which teamwork, cohesion, and flexibility are important. In particular, the Triple H Sessions would be easily applicable in a number of contexts, and could improve team emotional intelligence on the individual and group levels for many organizations.

There are, of course, a variety of ways that these findings can be applied in the realm of professional sports. The examples of shared emotional intelligence discussed in the previous chapter provide some insight into successful coaching, team-building, and esteem development strategies. The ways that authenticity and gratitude develop trust allow for better risk-taking; empathy and vulnerability allow for the emotional connections that help players work through slumps and overcome challenges. In addition, teams both in Australia and beyond could benefit from understanding how embracing Aboriginal pride, culture, and identity can benefit everyone on the team; other teams with significant minority memberships could also benefit from celebrating their diversity and authentic identities.

Also, this chapter has demonstrated that the Circumplex Model (Olson, 1986), designed for analyzing families and married couples, can also be applied to the analysis of sports teams. The familial nature of sports teams, from the use of familial language to the building of fraternal, paternal, and avuncular bonds, allows the application of Olson's model. The 2017 Richmond Tigers, exhibiting stability in team leadership, democratic nature, strong loyalty, and ability to grow through change, exemplify the stability and

success of the flexibility connected familial unit. Olson's Circumplex Model could be easily applied to other sports teams; it would not be surprising to see highly dysfunctional teams demonstrate behaviors of chaotic, rigid, or enmeshed families. Therapies which have been successful with dysfunctional families may be beneficial for helping sports teams improve the relationships that underlying their performances.

Finally, just as emotional intelligence development has become popular in business management theory, many of the observations drawn from the 2017 Richmond Tigers' experience can be applied in any team setting: business teams, academic departments, youth groups, etc. The experience of the 2017 RFC illuminates how growing and developing emotionally as a family can have professional, economic consequences and advantages. It is my hope that the combination of factors drawn together for analysis here - vulnerability, authenticity, empathy, gratitude, and Aboriginal pride - highlight the important combination of emotional factors that led the team to excel. Australian organizations, in particular, can hopefully benefit from this focusing on these same factors in their own development.

Limitations

This paper has limitations which I acknowledge may have impacted the findings and foci of this study. Perhaps the most glaring of these involves the data set used as the evidence for this research. I was unable to interview or interact directly with any members of the RFC; as a result, the only primary source material available were materials produced by the organization, or original quotations from other sources. *Yellow and Black* served as a significant source of material for this research; thus, any and all biases of Konrad Marshall (and his editors and publishing staff) become inherited into this study. However, as discussed earlier in this paper, the timing, tone, and content of Marshall's work was such that his biases are a part of his position as a participant in the season, and were meta-analyzed as such. In addition, I worked to compensate for this by engaging in

primary source research through social media and organizational media, adding alternative perspectives to Marshall's, and giving me the opportunity to synthesize beyond Marshall's analysis.

I also acknowledge that I myself am biased. I have loved the Tigers since I was a child. The dedication to team ideals discussed in this paper do not only apply to the players: the fans also love the team in passionate ways. It is entirely possible that part of the reason I chose the 2017 Richmond Tigers as an exemplary representation of the importance of emotion and connection in helping teams to succeed, as opposed to focusing on the All Blacks or other examples, is because of the emotional attachment I have to a team that ended a thirty-seven year drought.

Future Research

The first direction that future research could take would be to supplement or bolster this paper with interviews and discussion with members of the 2017 RFC, in order to triangulate more of the results described in this paper. I think it would be beneficial to interview the players and coaches; the premiership season is still relatively recent at the time of writing, and questions which drive directly to issues of emotional intelligence, flexibility, Aboriginal identity, and familial bonding would be beneficial for supplementing the data mined from Marshall's (2017) work. However, this kind of data collection, after the fact, is only so beneficial for continuing to work a case study which has completed its natural duration (the 2017 season). Rather, Marshall's account is an ideal study tool because it was both so ethnographically thorough and also published immediately after the season concluded, serving more as primary source material than reflection.

However, there are directions of research which are inspired by this paper that can help to illuminate the role of psycho-social factors in team success. This research would in no way have to be limited to the AFL, Aussie Rules Football, or even Australian

sports: in theory, the themes and ideas discussed in this paper's case example of the 2017 RFC could be applied to any professional sports team, or potentially even other teams at other levels and in other fields. Continuing research could be expanded to include more complex exploration of two of the main topics discussed in this paper: the role of player-player and player-staff communication, and the emotional intelligence of successful teams.

As Crombie, Lombard, and Noakes (2009) demonstrated, the success of teams can be correlated to their scores on the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) (Mayer et al., 1999) or the more subjective self-reporting Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) (Schutte et al., 1998) (see Lane et al., 2009 and Meyer & Zizzi, 2007 for reviews and comparisons). It is not possible to retroactively administer the test to the 2017 RFC, of course, but the degree to which Crombie, Lombard, and Noakes found high emotional intelligence test scores to be a significant predictor of team success leaves me confident that the Richmond Tigers likely would have scored highly. However, future research could examine emotional intelligence, including vulnerability, gratitude, and other topics, as well as the applicability of the Circumplex model to sports teams, by testing team members across the AFL at the beginning of the season, or after the regular season. It would also be interesting to test teams at the beginning and end of the same season, and see if the teams which improved their individual and shared emotional intelligence were more successful or showed improvement over time.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON TEAM BUILDING THROUGH EMOTION

Emotional intelligence, and how it affects group dynamics, has always had an impact on athletic team performance even before there was a term for the concept. Rather, it is the way that organizations operationalize information about emotional intelligence to create team-building programs and coaching strategies that is of recent academic interest. This paper has focused on some particularly relevant aspects of emotional intelligence - empathy, authenticity, and vulnerability - and has shown, through the case example of the 2017 RFC, that these psycho-social factors of emotional intelligence can be addressed to significantly improve outcomes on the field. This study has shown, in particular, that the Triple H Sessions created a positive environment of vulnerability and empathy that changed the way the Tigers competed in 2017. And, Konrad Marshall notes, there may be some longer-term effects of developing emotional intelligence among players:

Sport has a unique capacity, of course, to influence societal mores, and perhaps in that light the embrace of vulnerability by athletes can be a force for good. The timing is right. In bygone days if a man talked openly about his insecurities and bugaboos he was considered weak. Yet over the past decade, coaches of all footy codes have begun sounding less like drill sergeants and more like pastoral carers. They talk uniformly about how they want to build not just better players but better husbands and better fathers – better men in general.

This is wise. For there is an undeniably boorish edge to footy culture, from the back-slapping boys' club commentary booths to the rabidity of the grandstand – not to mention the rap sheets of the participants themselves. Not a year passes without a player or coach from the major codes cited for drink-driving or sexual assault. If vulnerability can find a way into our most testosterone-scented environs, it could help create a more empathetic athlete, reducing the damage done off of the field while championing a more evolved version of manhood, one that is free of bravado and "bubbling", pack sex and homophobia. (Marshall, 2018)

While black athletes have faced discrimination globally (as part of the larger global scourge of systemic racism), Aussie Rules Football has embraced Aboriginal identity through the Indigenous Round and various philanthropic programming across the AFL in an attempt to at least partially address the racial disparities which still affect Australia. The RFC, in particular, has gained global attention for its dedication to Aboriginal programming and philanthropy. This paper has argued that, by creating a shared sense of Australian pride, and helping to pull the 2017 team out of a downward spiral, the celebration of Aboriginal identity across all of the team and staff members contributed to organizational success.

This paper also sought to demonstrate that psychological theories that were designed to study family units can be applied successfully to the study of sports teams. Olson's Circumplex Model was chosen because of the comments made by former AFLPA Dr. Pippa Grange that "the culture at Richmond [appears] to be high detail, high control and high loyalty" (Marshall, 2017, 294): the 2016 Richmond Tigers appeared to fit into Olson's category of 'Rigidly Enmeshed' (Olson, 2000, 148), and became 'Flexibly Connected' in 2017. Understanding the process through which the 2017 Tigers transformed themselves into a highly successful 'Flexibly Connected' pseudo-familial unit was made possible by the content analysis of Marshall's (2017) descriptions of the Triple H Sessions and Aboriginal team building activities.

Although it would have been ideal to use a different methodology (one which included more direct interviewing, witnessing, and participation in real time), this paper has demonstrated that a keen qualitative reading of an in-depth sports memoir that was written as the season progresses can be an excellent alternative. Marshall's work is, at times, highly qualitative and academically rigorous; what his text lacks is the application of academic theory to his topic of study. Marshall's intent, however, was never academic. One of the successes of this paper is that I have shown how even a text not intended to be

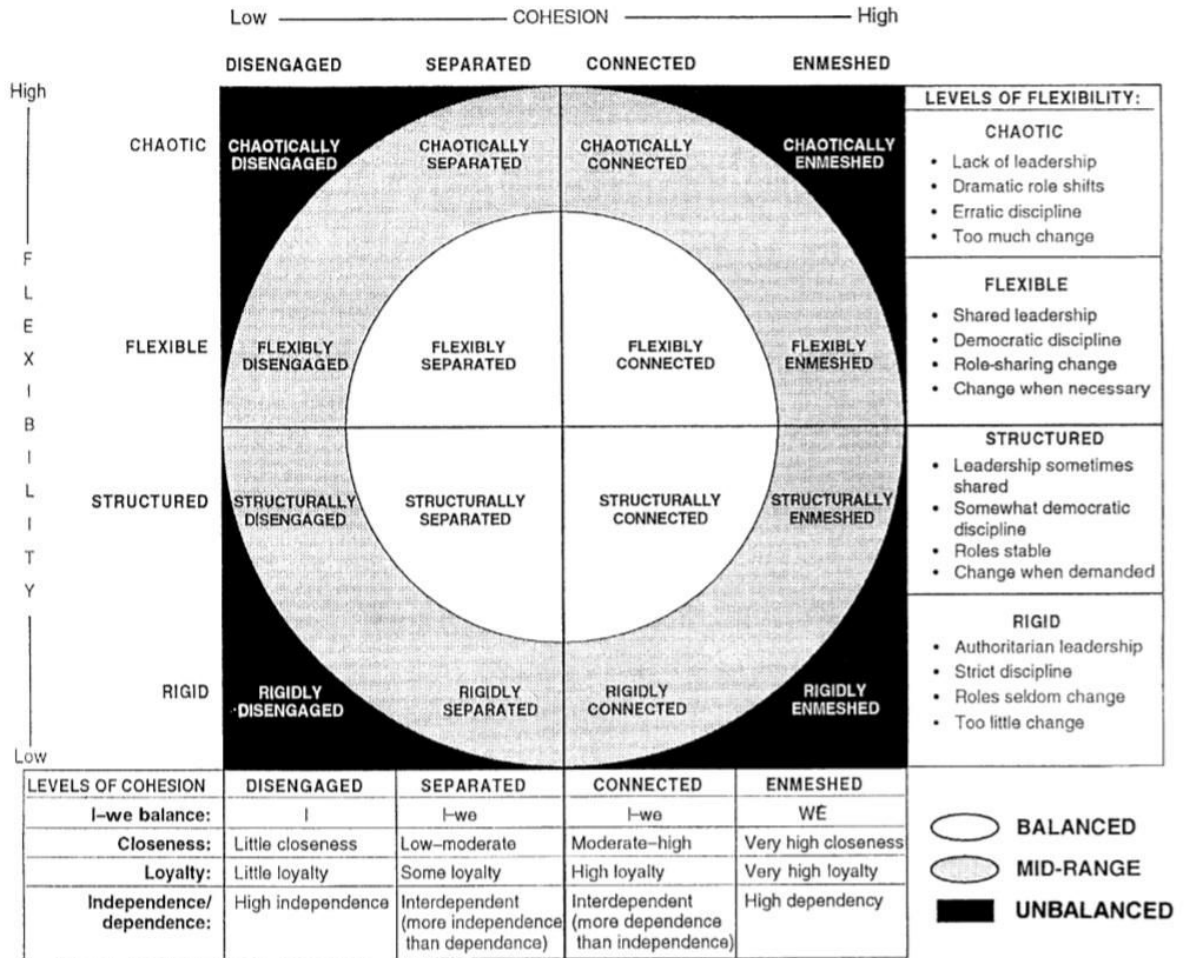
a dataset for psychological and sociological analysis could be utilized to explore how emotional intelligence, leadership, and identity operate in a high-performing sports team situation.

Finally, one of the goals of this paper was to explore how psycho-social factors, such as vulnerability and authenticity, connect emotional intelligence to team building and leadership in an athletic setting, but to do so in a way that allows me to draw conclusions that would be widely applicable outside of the realm of sports. Sports are often seen as an extension of ‘play,’ and thus not seen as the subject of rigorous, academic study. However, the multi-billion dollar professional sports leagues and industries around the globe signify the economic, political, social, and cultural impact sports can have; the lessons learned from academic analysis of professional sports do have serious significance comparable to other sociological phenomena.

The story of the 2017 RFC is one any fan can love: after a dismal 2016, the team rallied together, armed with empathy, a desire for authentic leadership, and a willingness to embrace each team member’s most difficult vulnerabilities, and triumphed to end a long-standing premiership drought. Through a theoretically-backed detailed reading of Marshall’s 2017 memoir, I have illustrated that a well-planned team-building and coaching program intentionally constructed around emotional intelligence can transform a struggling organization into a flexible, connected team capable of success.

APPENDIX

FIGURE 1: Circumplex Model Map



SOURCE: Olson, D. (2000). Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 22, 148.

TABLE 1: Content Analysis Keywords

Affect Markers	Keywords	Themes
Emotional Intelligence		
Emotion	[emotion terminology] Emotional Intelligence	[shared emotions]
Empathy	Empathy Relate	Listening Counselling
Vulnerability	Vulnerability Frustration Weakness Assistance Failure/Loss	Openness Self-deprecation Self-awareness
Gratitude	Thankful Gratitude/Gracious/Grateful Gift	Deserving Reciprocity Destiny
Authenticity	Authentic Real Legitimacy Honest Genuine	Honesty Realness Uncompromising Unique Self-confident
Aboriginal Identity		
Aboriginal Pride	Aboriginal/Aborigine Racism Prejudice Identity	Sledging Origins Pride Identity
Circumplex Model		
Leadership Styles and Changes	Leadership Authority Change Uncertainty Democracy	Democracy vs. Authoritarian Adaptability Flexibility Leadership Styles
Familial Structures	[familial terminology] Loyalty	Ancestry Lineage

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